

# **PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI**



## **PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES**

### **DAILY HANSARD**

**WEDNESDAY, 28TH JULY, 2021**

**[CORRECTED COPY]**

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## **WEDNESDAY, 28TH JULY, 2021**

The Parliament met at 9.55 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

HONOURABLE SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

### **PRESENT**

All Members were present, except the Honourable Ratu T.N. Navurelevu.

### **MINUTES**

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Tuesday, 27th July, 2021, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

### **COMMUNICATION FROM THE CHAIR**

#### Welcome

HON. SPEAKER.- I welcome all Honourable Members to today's sitting - those attending in person and those attending virtually. I also welcome all those watching the live proceedings on television and the internet. Thank you for your continued interest in the workings of your Parliament.

Honourable Members I will now deliver my ruling on petitions in relations to Bill No. 17 of 2021.

### **SPEAKER'S RULING**

#### Petition on Bill No. 17 of 2021

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, for your information, I had received three petitions from the Honourable Viliame Gavoka, Honourable Lynda Tabua and Honourable Jese Saukuru for the withdrawal of the iTaukei Land Trust (Budget Amendment) Bill 2021 (Bill No. 17 of 2021) that is currently before Parliament.

Honourable Gavoka's petition states, and I quote:

“We, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Fiji and the Prime Minister of Fiji to direct the Minister for Economy to withdraw Bill 17 of 2021 and end any further legislative process”.

Honourable Tabuya's petition states, and I quote:

“We, the undersigned hereby petition the Parliament of Fiji to stop the passing of this law which operates to erode the guardianship role of the iTLTB and reduces the power of the landowners to have their rights, interests and wishes protected by the iTLTB once the lease is issued”.

The petition submitted by way of a letter from Honourable Saukuru also requests for the withdrawal of Bill No. 17 of 2021.

Honourable Members, it is the established law, under Section 47(3) of the Fijian Constitution that a Bill may proceed more quickly than permitted by the Standing Orders if when the Bill was introduced, the mover requested that Parliament approve consideration of the Bill without delay and a majority of the Members of Parliament voted in support of the request. This constitutional provision is mirrored in Standing Order 51 and Standing Order 91.

Therefore, on 16th July, 2021 in accordance with Standing Order 51, Bill No. 17 of 2021 was tabled before Parliament as part of a list of Consequential Bills for the 2021-2022 National Budget. Parliament had agreed that all Consequential Bills for the 2021-2022 National Budget:

- (a) be considered by Parliament without delay;
- (b) must pass through one stage at a single sitting of Parliament;
- (c) must not be referred to a Standing Committee or other Committees of Parliament;
- (d) must be debated and voted upon by Parliament immediately after the vote on the 2021-2022 Appropriation Bill 2021; and
- (e) that the time for the debate be limited to ensure that the Consequential Bills are debated and voted upon in the sitting of Parliament beginning on Monday, 26 July, 2021.

Since Parliament agreed that all Consequential Bills in relation to the 2021-2022 National Budget must follow the process I have just read out loud, I hereby rule that Members of Parliament cannot use the submission of a petition under Standing Order 37, to withdraw Bill No. 17 of 2021 from Parliament, and frustrate a process that has already been agreed to by Parliament. This will clearly be an abuse of parliamentary process.

Honourable Members, the call for the Honourable Prime Minister and Parliament to direct the Honourable Attorney-General to withdraw or to stop the passing of Bill No. 17 of 2021 in the respective petitions, is wholly misconceived.

Under Standing Order 90, it is the member who is in charge of the Bill that may withdraw the Bill at any time before the third reading of the Bill, without the leave of Parliament.

The Standing Orders do not provide the Parliament or the Prime Minister to direct a Member of Parliament to withdraw a Bill that has been tabled by that Member of Parliament.

The Standing Orders are clear and the only way to defeat a Bill is to vote against the Bill.

I, therefore, rule that the respective petitions filed by the three Honourable Members of Parliament are out of order and will not be presented to Parliament. Any issues in relation to Bill 17 of 2021 must be raised and debated by Members of Parliament at the time of the scheduled debate.

Honourable Members, I reiterate that you must not use the Standing Orders to frustrate the constitutional law-making mandate that is given to Parliament under the Fijian Constitution, by abusing the process of petitions under Standing Order 37. This is especially when Parliament has already agreed to a process for the consideration of a Bill.

All Members are at liberty to make representations and fully debate any issues in relation to Bill No. 17 of 2021 when it is being debated in Parliament at the time allocated in the Order Paper. Thank you Honourable Members.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Point of Order, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Take your seat!

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

### **2021-2022 CONSEQUENTIAL (BUDGET AMENDMENT) BILLS 2021**

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

That the following Bills be considered by Parliament without delay, the:

- (1) Reserve Bank of Fiji (Budget Amendment) Bill 2021 (Bill No. 24/2021);
- (2) Fair Reporting of Credit (Budget Amendment) Bill 2021 (Bill No. 25/2021);
- (3) Maritime Transport (Budget Amendment) Bill 2021 (Bill No. 26/2021);
- (4) Offshore Fisheries Management (Budget Amendment) Bill 2021 (Bill No. 27/2021);
- (5) Land Transport (Budget Amendment) Bill 2021 (Bill No. 28/2021); and
- (6) Financial Management (Amendment) Bill 2021 (Bill No. 29/2021).

Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to the Standing Orders 51, I move:

That the Bills –

- (a) must pass through one stage at a single sitting of Parliament;
- (b) must not be referred to a Standing Committee or other Committees of Parliament;
- (c) must be debated and voted upon by Parliament immediately after the vote on the 2021-2022 Appropriation Bill 2021; and
- (d) that the time for the debate be limited to ensure that the Bills tabled today are debated and voted upon during this week's sitting of Parliament.

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

HON. SPEAKER.- You have the floor, Honourable Attorney-General.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Sir. Mr. Speaker, Sir, these Bills, in fact are in relation to the announcements made in the Budget itself in respect of giving the substance or the policy announcements or the changes in policies or are related in respect of improving the business environment and also to help improve the services and conditions available to the general members of the public.

I would probably like to talk about the merits of the Bill and we are taking up too much part of Parliament on Friday itself but needless to say Sir, these Bills actually go towards the heart of fulfilling the objectives of the Budget. Thank you.

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.

Honourable Radrodro, you have the floor.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I just want to raise our concerns and views in terms of the continuation of the utilisation of Standing Order 51 in terms of submission of these Consequential Bills. We take note of the ruling that you have just mentioned, Mr. Speaker, Sir, about Bill No. 17/2021 that is so much in focus during this Budget session.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we would like to raise our concern that when Bill No. 17 and a number of Consequential Bills that were tabled together with the Budget, these was not given to us in this House. We ended up collecting those Consequential Bills at the door on our way out after the Budget session. So, that is how we came to know of the Bills. It was not circulated to us in this House as in this instance, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and this is a gross abuse of the process by the Honourable Attorney-General in terms of the way he presented these Bills for discussion and debate in this House, especially the use of Standing Order 51 selectively. Had he given us those Bills on the Budget Day, we would have taken a stand and raised our concerns, especially when those Bills were presented under Standing Order 51.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, so we wish to register our concerns in which Bill No. 17 was presented to us during the Budget Day. It was not given to us in this House as should be the manner. Honourable Members of this side of the House had to collect our book together with the Consequential Bills outside when we had to exit on the night, Mr. Speaker, Sir, so we would like to register our concern. We understand these Consequential Bills, Mr. Speaker, Sir. You need it to ensure that the Budget becomes a practicality.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we want to reiterate that we be given more time. At least, we can come prepared. Even though it is given today but we have always requested Mr. Speaker, Sir, to give the Opposition side some time before the Bill is introduced. Tell us what the Bill is all about. We are not mind readers to understand what are the contents and the basic information that is contained in the Bill, Sir. So, this is my contribution regarding Standing Order 51 and the Bills that have now been introduced.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you.

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- I have a comment, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- You have the floor.

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think the point that Honourable Radrodro made is an important one. For example, in the list of Bills presented by the Honourable Attorney-General today, there is a Financial Management (Amendment) Bill. He is right, we sometimes are not sure whether this is a Consequential Bill.

A Consequential Bill in my understanding is a Bill that gives effect to the budget, the announcements in the budget and if it is not strictly a Consequential Bill, it could be the same with Bill No. 17 and the State Lands (Amendment) Bill as well (Bill No. 16). So, if it is not strictly consequential then maybe the Financial Management (Amendment) Bill should be debated later because what we have are these large number of Bills and it is quite possible that we would have very little time on Friday, if we use Wednesday and Thursday for the Committee of Supply, we are not going to have a lot of time to look at all the Bills. So, if the Bill is not strictly consequential, then it should be deferred to maybe the next sitting where we can discuss and debate that Bill properly.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Any Member wishing to take the floor?

Honourable Members, we have followed this process over a period of time during the Budget and Consequential Bills. The process has never changed and whatever the number of the Consequential Bills, it is debated on the day after Parliament goes into Committee. It has never changed, so that process is very familiar to all of you and you have been Members of Parliament for sometimes now. There being no one wishing to take the floor further, I give the floor to the Honourable Attorney-General to speak in reply to his motion. You have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I cannot understand what Honourable Radrodro is on about. I think he has really lost the plot actually given his recent comments.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reality of the matter is, even the Budget is presented by the Minister responsible, he or she essentially reads the Budget and then the Estimates are given with the Supplementary documents and any other Consequential Bills. There is no debate on that day. Essentially you just get the tabled the Bills and then you go and study it, you have one week to read the Budget Estimates, you have got one week to read the Consequential Bills, and as you have rightly pointed out, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that there are other Consequential Bills that do follow, because sometimes there may be a whole plethora of it. So, the Government is given time to be able to table those Consequential Bills.

Consequential Bills obviously, means that those Bills that give effect to whatever announcements are made in the Budget itself. A lot of them are, for example, tariff related, customs related, tax related and there may be other policy initiatives. We did announce, for example, the Financial Management Act. We did talk about it previously in Parliament too. So, I cannot understand what the Honourable Members are objecting to and there was no deviation from any of the set procedures that have been followed since 2014.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

### **RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON THE 2021-2022 APPROPRIATION BILL 2021**

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, pursuant to Standing Order 99(3), the 2021-2022 Appropriation Bill 2021 (Bill No.7 of 2021) has been read the second time and without any questions being put, the Bill and Estimates now stand referred to the Committee of Supply.

Honourable Members, before that, I call upon the Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications. You have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. After listening to the contributions from the Honourable Members of the Opposition, it became blatantly obvious that they were completely oblivious of the rationale and the need of the 2021-2022 Budget.

The lack of imagination to respond to or the humility to agree with the merits of the Budget, led to a desperate and fruitless path of politicisation, creating fear over a basic administrative matter and in the process have demeaned and then disrespected the intellect of the landowners and the general population at large and basically, a wholesale of digression of discussing anything but the Budget. In simple terms, Mr. Speaker, Sir, or they may understand it in *TikTok* terms, they lost the plot. In fact, they were completely caught off-guard in the Budget, Mr. Speaker, Sir, because they

only had doom and gloom in their minds and were therefore not expecting the bold and extraordinary measures that were announced. They were hoping that we will fail in this Budget, that we will announce major cuts in Civil Service salaries, pull back on Social Welfare and income support for the unemployed, increase taxes perhaps, and leave our businesses and our MSMEs behind. They were definitely not prepared for a people's Budget designed to put people first design, designed in fact to put Fiji first.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Opposition also could not accept the fact that we are far ahead in the game to achieve herd immunity. It is just a matter of months and we will be there soon, god willing, Mr. Speaker, Sir. That is what is hurting them as they cannot see this crisis coming to an end because they have realised that despite their current attempts to take political advantage from this pandemic, they have failed, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and with the crisis ending, they do not have much time left on their hands.

We have taken vaccination very seriously, Mr. Speaker, Sir, because the signs that the country experiences have shown that mass vaccination is the only permanent and suitable solution to this pandemic, the only permanent way to bring back living and the normal life.

We thank the Governments of Australia, New Zealand, India and now USA and all other partners who have provided us with vaccines. We will be forever grateful for their support.

We also thank the hundreds of thousands of Fijians now who have come forward to be vaccinated. The worst will be over soon, Mr. Speaker, Sir. With everyone's support, we have made tremendous progress, Mr. Speaker, Sir, with 76.7 percent of 449,934 Fijians of the target population receiving their first dose and 17.7 percent or 103,742 people receiving both doses.

We are well on track to get 80 percent of the target population vaccinated by 31st October and, of course, we cannot be complacent. As the Honourable Prime Minister has said, let us target 100 percent of the target population. We cannot lose this opportunity and we urge everyone who have got their first shot to ensure that you get the second jab when due. Those that have not had their first jab should get it in the next few days.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, again, a number of the Opposition Members were saying that we are overly dependent on vaccination. Honourable Rasova said that Government's motto is "vaccination, vaccination, vaccination". What is the alternative, Mr. Speaker, Sir? There is none and, of course, they will not offer any. If they think we should have a complete lockdown, it is not a sustainable solution as we have seen everywhere in the world. Vaccination is the only solution now, Mr. Speaker, Sir. That is why our development partners and now the bulk of it is from Australia and New Zealand are giving us the vaccines because that is the solution. That is how we will be able to get our borders open, that is how they will open up their borders to us, that is how we can get the tourists back, rebuild our economy and get people back to jobs.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if we are able to get the target population vaccinated using the vaccines provided by the Australia and New Zealand Governments, we will go back to them and they will be more confident in opening the border, of course, with protocols and safe measures in place. They will feel safe to tell their citizens to come to Fiji for a holiday and not necessarily having to do a quarantine upon their return: that is how you get the tourism numbers up, that is how we get the hotel workers back to work, that is how we open up the hotels. All the ancillary businesses that surround the tourism sector will also open.

If we just rely on lockdowns and no vaccinations, unfortunately we will forever be closed to the outside world. That is why, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Opposition wants a lockdown because they do

not want this crisis to end so that they could blame the socio-economic woes of this crisis on the Government and make this an elections issue, and that is what they seem to be focused on.

Mr. Speaker, the COVID-related death has been politicised in this debate. Honourable Tabuya, Honourable Qereqeretabua and others did not shy a scent away from politicising COVID-related deaths unashamedly, completely being inconsiderate of the lost lives and their families. Mr. Speaker, Sir, hundreds of thousands of people have unfortunately lost their lives due to the virus all over the world but we do not have Opposition Members in those countries blaming those deaths on the Prime Minister or the Government.

Australia has had over 900 COVID-related deaths. Did the Opposition blame the government there? In these countries they are all working together, Sir, to fight this crisis. It is only here that the Opposition while harping about bipartisanship, cannot even work with government on one single issue. They are too busy thinking about elections, they are too busy thinking about how they can score small political point, they are too busy thinking about how many “likes” will I get in the next one hour. Please, the Opposition should stop politicising this crisis but, of course, I think as we have seen in the past, it will fall on deaf ears.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, why I have highlighted these issues is because we are reliably informed, not from one source, but many sources, that many Opposition political parties who are Opposition Members were celebrating prior to the Budget, hoping that we will fail in the Budget. They not only wanted us to fail but they wanted Fiji to fail and succumb to the crisis because that means political points for them. Of course, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have never fallen that low. We are here for the people and we will get this country out of this crisis in a sustainable way. This Budget is just a start to that process.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, everyone needs to understand that the 2021-2022 Budget was delivered under very challenging circumstances - we have always said that. The economy was hit hard by the pandemic, estimated to have contracted by 15.7 percent in 2020. Public finances have been under pressure as tax revenues took a major blow declining by about 50 percent and unemployment levels rose making the socio-economic situation challenging.

But somehow, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Opposition, especially the Honourable Leader of Opposition (Honourable Lalabalavu), Honourable Kuridrani, Honourable Professor Prasad and many others who have been trying to portray that the current economic crisis is solely the doing of the Fijian Government and their favourite lie that we have mismanaged the economy. This, of course, Mr. Speaker, is absurd. Almost every single nation in the world has been affected and their economy is contracting with majority of the tourism depending on economies experience double digit economic contraction, Mr. Speaker, Sir - these are facts, these are available publicly yet, of course, the Opposition does not like the facts, they were still singing the same old fables, the same old story lines.

The current economic crisis and challenges, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is not something that is unique to Fiji. Every other country have suffered from this devastating once in a hundred-year economic shock. No country has been spared but again it is unfortunate that the Opposition Members have been trying to politicise the economy during one of the largest global economic crisis that we are trying to come out from, and we will come out of it soon, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Honourable Professor Prasad, we have said this so many times since 2014, despite being an economist who should understand the economic consequences of border closures for almost 17 months in a tourism dependent country, has also been trying to blame the entire effects of the crisis on the Government. They have been continuously trying to undermine the economy and some are

seen to be under the illusion that if we lock down the economy, we will be out of the economic crisis, when last year when we locked down, they were opposed to it.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if we go that path, the economy will crumble down. We will need a sustainable solution which is vaccination and gradual opening up of our international borders and indeed even within the country itself. Honourable Professor Prasad and some others seem to also imply that because the economy is slowing down pre-COVID, the current economic contraction is because of that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have never denied that the Fijian economy started to slow down in 2019 but was still growing. Yes, it was slowing down pre-COVID-19 due to the slow in global economy but that does not mean that the current contraction is due to the continuation of the slowdown. There needs to be intellectual honesty. It is very clear that the current contraction could not be avoided if your borders are closed for 17 months. Any Form 6 student can tell you that, however, had we not had the current pandemic, our economy would have been in a very different state altogether. But as I have said, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Honourable Professor Prasad, as I always have said, lacks the intellectual honesty to give the real picture, as he is very much focused on the elections and his political experience and aspiration to form government and perhaps even become Prime Minister.

But, Honourable Professor Prasad and NFP to think they can form the next government is just a dream. First, they should work on having a majority in the Opposition before they can think about having a majority to form government. They have been rejected time and again at every poll and when this level of dishonesty and greed for power, Mr. Speaker, Sir, they will never succeed.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, at this juncture, I would also like to quickly touch on the issue of printing money, as Honourable Tabuya spent a considerable amount of time talking about printing money in her response. I am also told that she, of course, made a few *TikToks* on printing money.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would be worried if the Opposition were to prepare a national budget. If they think the solution for everything is to print money, maybe this is one reason why they have never been able to come up with an alternative budget, and that is a point. Sir, NFP and SODELPA have never come up with an alternative budget even during elections.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, printing money may sound simple and attractive, but it is a much more complex issue. Firstly, I would like to remind Honourable Tabuya that the Government does not have the legal right to print money. In every country, including Fiji, this is left in the independent hands of the Central Bank - the RBF in our case. We do not interfere with the decisions of independent institutions, in particular, the monetary policy that is governed and run by the Reserve Bank of Fiji. Again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is shocking that a former Governor and the current Leader of Unity Party also preaches about this interference with the RBF and yet they talk about Central Bank independence on the other hand.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is a process called “Quantitative Easing” or monetisation of government debt, or in simple terms, what Honourable Tabuya may refer to is printing of money but if the RBF engages in this process, it can only lend to government. That means it will sit as a debt in the Government books. It does not mean that RBF prints money and distributes it to the public and gives it free to Government, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

When we present a Budget, we put out a financing plan as on Page 321 of the Budget Estimates (you have the books there), listing where we will borrow our money from. We do not decide nor tell the RBF to finance the debt, completely taking away their independence. Heaven forbid that these people are elected to Government, that is what they will do. But, of course, if the Central Bank thinks

that it is necessary, they can take that independent decision themselves to finance government debt, but as I have said, it is a complex matter and it is better to be left in the independent hands of the Central Bank. However, the Central Bank when considering such decisions have to look at many factors like, what are the implications of such a decision on its mandate and policy objectives, and they have to ensure they are acting within the legal framework, which is the RBF Act.

They need to be mindful of the impact that it will have in the Government securities, bond market, as understandably they would not want to come in and compete with market players like the banks, insurance companies and FNPF. They have to be mindful of the implications on the reserves, the liquidity, inflation and overall economy and, of course, they have to be careful not creating dependency of Government on central bank financing. These are the reasons, Mr. Speaker, Sir, why we cannot and why we should not dictate to the RBF to lend to Government as suggested by Honourable Tabuya. In fact, she is not even saying to lend, she is saying, “just simply print and give”.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on one hand, Honourable Tabuya also talks about debt and on the other hand talks about printing money, meaning borrowing more from the RBF, if she actually means borrowing. But even if she did mean borrowing, is that not a contradiction or is it plain simple, she does not understand this economic, what she may call “jargon”, but pretends to know it. Any printing of money and funding of the deficit means lending to Government. You cannot print and give free money to Government. It will mean that the paper will have no value at all.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, printing money meant no debt. Why are other countries not doing it? Why did the Ratu Mara Government not do it? Why did the Rabuka, Chaudhry or Qarase governments not print money in the manner as she understands and give it free to government?

In fact, the RBF limits how much it can lend to government. There is no free money that can be created by printing money, Mr. Speaker, Sir. So I hope that Honourable Tabuya talks to a better finance advisor to understand this, but again I know that what she does is only used to Ponzi schemes that exists in other jurisdictions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Honourable Tuisawau and Honourable Lalabalavu claimed that revenue projection and the Budget is optimistic, when I had clearly explained in the Budget Address, with a lot of details provided in the Budget Supplements that we are taking a very conservative revenue estimation strategy due to the uncertainties. We use a similar strategy for the 2020-2021 Budget and it worked well during these times of uncertainty, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

If I could explain, when we delivered the 2020-2021 Budget, it was delivered under a period of great uncertainty and thus the Budget Framework was based on a very conservative revenue projection resulting in a large projected deficit of \$2 billion dollars equivalent to 20.2 percent of the GDP. With the financial year 2020-2021 almost coming to a close in a few days' time, the fiscal deficit is likely to be around 11.5 percent of GDP, almost half of 20.2 percent budgeted net deficit, because our revenues are estimated to have over-performed and we maintained a tight control on expenditure.

With a lower projected net deficit of around 11.5 percent in 2020-2021, Government debt is estimated to be around \$7.6 billion or 79.2 percent of GDP as at July, 2021. This is almost \$700 million lower than the earlier projected debt of \$8.3 billion or 83.4 percent of GDP. If the nominal GDP is unchanged at the levels projected in the Budget, the debt to GDP ratio would have been much lower at 76.8 percent of GDP.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, similarly with the last Budget, a conservative revenue estimation strategy has also been adopted for the 2021-2022 Budget. The downside of this strategy is the projected deficit

and debt levels look higher. In this case 2021-2022 deficit projected at 16.2 percent of GDP and debt expected to rise to \$9 billion on 91.6 percent of GDP. However, it is a prudent strategy to adopt during times of uncertainty. With any over collections in revenues serving as a buffer and consequently it will lower borrowings and debt levels than planned as we saw in this financial year. It is likely that actual debt could be lower than projected if the border reopening and pick up in tourism and other sectors are much stronger than anticipated.

Again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition seemed to have the misconception that if our revenues underperform, it gives us the leeway to borrow more and increase the debt further. That is fundamentally not true. The borrowing limit and the total appropriation is kept and approved by Parliament. If revenue collections are below forecast, we will have to come back to Parliament to increase borrowings if we are going to carry on with the same levels of expenditure. It is not something that can be done automatically as the Leader of the Opposition thinks.

Further, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I had said this clearly in the Address also, the Ministry of Economy will closely monitor the fiscal performance in the months ahead, with a likely revision of the Budget in the second half of the financial year of 2021-2022 if the situation deteriorates. This would mean a tight restraint and possible major reductions in Government spending. Alternatively, if the situation improves, we get the vaccination levels up, we have some form of border opening, some tourists coming in through December and January, and the situation improves, a revision of the Budget may or may not be necessary to recalibrate the Budget framework with expenditure re-prioritisations.

Also, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Honourable Qereqeretabua and few others claim that this is the elections budget. Every time we deliver a good budget, they say it is an elections budget. Do they mean to say that we should not deliver a good budget? Are they saying that we should not be assisting the market vendors, give electricity subsidy, do not assist the minibus drivers, taxi drivers and carrier drivers, do not give the sanitary pad provisions, do not support the unemployed in the formal and the informal sector and do not help the security guards - is she saying all of that? That because we are assisting them, therefore it has become an election budget? We do not even think about the elections, we are concerned about how to assist our people now, how to get them what is right. That is precisely what we are concerned about and these people are talking about elections. One thing that I have mentioned the elections in the budget, Mr. Speaker, Sir, was about the election budgetary allocation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just like every year, the Opposition was again obsessed with Head 50 allocation under "R". Just look at Head 50. Head 50 is a Miscellaneous Appropriation Head with the Permanent Secretary for Economy being the responsible accounting officer for Head 50, not the Minister for Economy. Of the \$713 million allocated under Head 50, \$200 million is for unemployment support. I do not have a say in that. People apply, they qualify and the money is disbursed. And over \$15 million in other assistance, like, electricity subsidy, food distribution and other relief measures we announced. Over \$165 million of the \$713 million is for TELS and Toppers. Again it has got nothing to do with me; it goes to the TSLB services. Mr. Speaker, Sir, \$40 million is allocated for the Fiji Recovery Rebate Package, Fiji Airways and the tourism sector; \$20 million is allocated for the public private partnership; \$16.4 million for the elections and a further \$23 million for the Fijian Elections Office. That is what the money is there for.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, given that these allocations do not directly relate to the operations of any single Ministry, it is placed under Head 50. The Opposition seems to imply that we have placed them in Head 50 so I could control the budget, you know they make it out as if I am sitting there with all this money. It is the responsibility of the Permanent Secretary for Economy to manage this Head, Mr. Speaker, not the Minister for Economy.

Again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, allocations are put under “R” as it needs extra scrutiny and stringent monitoring. Are they saying we should not put it under “R” - \$200 million, do not have any scrutiny? It is to ensure we prudently manage Government finances and ensure the release of expenditure allocations are aligned to cash management strategies. When large amounts of money have to go out, the cash flow has to be managed and that is why it has to be put in Head 50 also.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, and again all RIEs - \$1 million and below - does not even hit my desk. The Permanent Secretary for Economy actually approves RIEs up to \$1 million. And in fact we are looking at increasing it too. It used to be about \$250,000 before, it is now \$1 million.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think it would be amiss of me not to touch on Bill No. 17 although we will be debating it on Friday, there is still a lot of drama about it, but as the Honourable Prime Minister said, we want the people of Fiji to understand the Government’s intentions and it is unfortunate that the Opposition grabbed the Bill and gave it an ethnic twist. It is an administrative matter, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and should have never been given an ethnic twist.

Honourable Gavoka claims to be a private sector champion, devoted his entire life to the private sector but his entire time-slot was about Bill No. 17; nothing about the Budget. And coming from the private sector, you would think that he would be the first person, calls himself a former banker that he would understand precisely that this is an administrative matter. If he bothered not to follow, Honourable Tabuya’s lead and read the law, read the amendments then he would again understand it is an administrative matter.

In an economic shock as significant as COVID-19, Mr. Speaker, the Government has to be innovative and creative to ensure we attract investment internally and externally by ensuring we improve the ease of doing business. For thousands of unemployed Fijians, we need to ensure that conditions attracting investment are created which in turn will result in job creation and lay the platform for private sector lead economic recovery.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, suffice to say, Bill No. 17 does not take away the right of any landowner or landowning unit to authorise the giving of lease. It does not reduce the amount of lease or the amount of rent it is expected to collect. The iTLTB CEO has clarified this. I heard over the weekend someone from the Opposition saying we have not heard from the management of the iTLTB and now when that the CEO of iTLTB has made comments, they completely ignored it because it does not fit in with their little story-line. It really is an insult to the landowners and the general population of Fiji in terms of how they are going about it. The fees even collected from consent applications does not even go to landowners.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this will ensure that there will be ease of developing land through financing; alot of covert developments will not take place. The leased land will increase in value and therefore the landowners will be able to demand a higher land lease for premiums and also for annual lease purposes. Every five years the rent gets reviewed and now under the Constitution, Mr. Speaker, Sir, you actually have market rates that needs to be paid. Landowners never got market rates before. Now, it is constitutionally mandated they get market rates. Has the Opposition spoken about that? Have they acknowledged that? No.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I must thank Honourable Bulitavu who recognised this and had the courage to not follow the deception of his colleagues and stand up for something that would actually benefit landowners. Consequential Bills No. 16 and 17 are simply to streamline processes and ensure the people who want to use financing to invest and further develop and lease *iTaukei* land can do so without going through this consent process which will not affect anyone’s rights or in any way derogate their rights.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have done a similar thing for State land that is being leased to ensure that all finances concerning leased land can be expedited by removing unnecessary processes. This is a very essential point that Opposition conveniently left out in feeding lies to the public. Another lie, of course, that the Government did not consult iTLTB - the SG's office had consultations with the iTLTB management.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, all these was undertaken by the Opposition to ensure that the good initiatives in the 2021-2022 Budget were overshadowed. All these, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to further their political careers at the expense of a country that is already facing a monumental challenge, that is COVID.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, when Honourable Bulitavu makes an extremely sensible and common sense statement and very good rationale, Honourable Gavoka flippantly says that FijiFirst should give him a ticket, completely debunking the credibility of the content of what Honourable Bulitavu said, giving it a political twist because it goes to show for them, everything is about politics, everything is about getting the upper hand. The problem is that Honourable Gavoka had a newfound courage of trying to make mockery of Honourable Bulitavu's contribution but was definitely quiet and meek and almost impertinent when it came to Honourable Bulanauca's vaccine comment, or Honourable Tabuya's defiance of him and his leadership of SODELPA; not that we are interested in the monotonous and sordid internal dynamics of SODELPA or what we colloquially say is the LM politics but it demonstrates a hollow party with a hollow Leader of Opposition, desperate to be thrown a lifeline which came for them in the form of Bill No. 17. Unfortunately for them it will be another debacle. Some may argue another *TikTok* debacle.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am sure most of us have seen the recent ANZ Report on the budget by a renowned international economist, Mr. Tom Kenny and Dr. Kishti Sen and let me quote what they have said in the ANZ Report which came out a week or so ago and it says,

“The Bainimarama Government has shown its economic credentials and delivered a strong 2021-2022 Budget that meets the national interest by protecting the health of all Fijians and setting a clear pathway towards economic recovery”.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is the ANZ Group from Sydney. Of course the Opposition are not going to listen to this. It does not suit their narrative.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, while it is unfortunate the Opposition have conveniently digressed from the many new initiatives announced in the Budget, the fact remains that this is a people-centered budget and a bold step towards our economic recovery. It is an extraordinary budget for extraordinary times. We have to ensure that the unemployed and the vulnerable are protected and provided economic support.

We will ensure that apart from income support, we will provide real financial relief to ease the burden on Fijians in these challenging times whether it be provision of sanitary pads, payment of market stall fees, provision of electricity subsidy or guarantee cane price support of \$85 per tonne. We have ensured that we support our businesses with working capital to keep them afloat as we prepare for opening of borders and business and economic recovery. We have maintained low taxes and we have streamlined business processes to help businesses grow and prosper.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just like every other crisis, this crisis will eventually come to an end. We, as a country need to work together to get out of this crisis. This is not the time to play politics and cheap politics as that. This is the time to ensure we could join hands and stand side by side to defeat this crisis and bring Fiji back to normalcy, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Sir with those few words, I would like to end my Right of Reply.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy. Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote.

Honourable Members, I will repeat what I have prematurely read earlier. Pursuant to Standing Order 99(3), the 2021-2022 Appropriation Bill 2021 (Bill No. 7 of 2021) has been read a second time and without any questions being put, the Bill and the Estimates now stand referred to the Committee of Supply.

But before we go into the Committee of Supply, we will take a break and then we will consider the Committee of Supply. I am not behaving like this because there is another event taking place today; no, no. I know exactly what is on the Members' minds. You have this important item that we have to consider. Do not keep on giving me that look and reminding me.

Honourable Members, we will suspend proceedings for morning tea.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.57 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.38 a.m.

## **COMMUNICATION FROM THE CHAIR**

### Committee of Supply

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now resolve into Committee of Supply to consider each Head in the Budget Estimates. It is envisaged that this process will be completed on Thursday evening, after which the Committee of Supply will then vote on the Schedules and Clauses of the 2021-2022 Appropriation Bill 2021.

For the information of Honourable Members, we will attempt to complete debate and votes on Heads 1 to 21 before we adjourn tonight. As you are all aware by now for the Committee stage, I will sit at the Table with the Secretary-General and Members will refer to me as “Mr. Chairman”. The mace will also be placed on the lower bracket, signifying that Parliament is in Committee.

Honourable Members, the Secretary-General will announce each Head separately. Members may then speak on that Head and you may speak more than once on each Head. Honourable Members, please take note that in some of the Heads there will be several programmes and activities listed. I remind Honourable Members that we will deal with these progressively and we will not regress to the programmes and activities that have been earlier discussed.

Honourable Members, as you may all be aware, you may also move amendments to the Estimates under the respective Heads. If a Member moves an amendment, debate will be on the Head and the amendment. At the end of the debate, the amendment will be moved, voted on first followed by the vote on the Head.

Honourable Members, for ease of process during the Committee of Supply, the amendment slips have been placed on your tables and e-copies have been emailed to all Honourable Members for reference by those Members connecting virtually. Amendments are limited to those permitted under Standing Order 100(2), being an increase, decrease or removal of the item or subhead from the Head being debated. There are Heads 1 to 50 which we need to get through, therefore, I seek your full cooperation during this crucial process.

## **RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON THE 2021-2022 APPROPRIATION BILL 2021**

### In Committee:

#### Head 1 – Office of the President

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for any comments.

There are no comments, Parliament will now vote on Head 1- Office of the President.

Question put.

Head 1 agreed to.

#### Head 2 - Office of the Prime Minister

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for comments on Head 2.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that Programme 1-1(1) - Personal Emoluments be reduced by \$754,702.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- I second the motion, Mr. Chairman.

HON. P.K. BALA.- What are you trying to prove? That was so mean.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Tabuya, you have the floor.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As I have mentioned the need for the Government to reduce expenditure, especially during this time of the COVID-19 crisis. The need to be more mindful of our spending, as we note from our overall budget, there is still a very high expenditure, and we need to reduce this and I am proposing that, that be reduced by 50 percent, so that the funds are diverted to the much needed assistance on the ground, in regards to health, as well as humanitarian assistance to our people. Therefore, I am proposing that, Mr. Chairman.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Civil servants pay, 50 percent cut?

HON. J. USAMATE.- Not to pay all the civil servants in that office?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Chairman, so the Honourable Member is basically by proposing a cut off \$750,000, is saying that we should make the civil servants working in the Prime Minister's Office redundant. This is never been part of the Government honestly to cut jobs of the existing civil servants. So she is saying we should cut \$750,000.

Mr. Speaker, SEG 1, if she does not know, is actually wages and salaries, personal emoluments. So she is saying, 'let us just cut \$750,000 from the allocation of \$1.6 million', which is essentially about half, that half of the civil servants working in the Prime Minister's Office need to go home. That is what she is saying. She is saying that we should do that across the board to all the other Heads too or is she just specifically picking on the Prime Minister's Office.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Very poor.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Chairman, in response to that, I think the Honourable Attorney-General should just pull it back a little easy and just let Members make their submissions. This is not about applying it across the board, this is about the Office of the Prime Minister as well as the Prime Minister's own salary and wages where he needs to be considerate of what is going on in the country, and as the leader of the country to ever think about the kind of expenses which have remained to be the same and is not reflected in the Budget this year. That is all I am making, not to go right across the board, please, do not make any assumption, we are still on Head No. 2.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Chair, therefore she is saying - let us forget about the other Heads, that we should make the people in the Prime Minister's Office redundant, is this SODELPA policy to make civil servants redundant?

HON. MEMBER.- It was seconded so I would assume so.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Any further comments?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- ... after they want to make redundant.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I think they need to answer the question, Mr Chair, Sir, with respect because coming to SEG 1 is a very, very big deal. SODELPA is saying that we should make those people working in the Prime Minister's Office redundant.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Well, we will move on to the next one. Honourable Tabuya, you have the floor.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman, on that note, I will withdraw that motion that I stated earlier.

Mr. Chairman, the next one (Head 2-1-1-3) is to decrease under Programme 1, Activity 1, SEG 3 (Overseas Travel: Prime Minister Allowance (\$175,000) to be removed or decreased from that particular SEG.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- I beg to second the motion..

MR. CHAIRMAN.- You have the floor, Honourable Tabuya.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Again, Mr. Chairman, this expenses is unnecessary as there is no needed overseas travel for the Prime Minister right now, and that needs to be allocated to somewhere else more useful for our people during this time of crisis. It should not even be there, in fact, if there is anything that should be under (R) or removed altogether, it is this item.

I am proposing that as we have motion that it be removed or decreased by \$175,000.

HON. MEMBER.- You're removing or decreasing?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Gavoka.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Chairman, I support that. At a time like this, travelling should be downgraded or not included at all. This brings us to the concern about this Budget, we just seem to be plugging figures into Programmes with very little thought going in its way. I fully agree with the Honourable Tabuya regarding this allocation, Mr. Chairman, remove it totally.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Of course, you will agree with her. Mr. Chairman, if I could just explain, Sir: The travel expenditure for the Prime Minister's Office, previously it was a lot bigger, as you know that we have decreased it over the past number of years, in particular given COVID. The sum of \$175,000 has been allocated. Obviously, the overseas travel for last year was also there but it was not used.

Similarly, we have \$175,000, it is a moderate sum compared to what it was previously, and we have made the allocation because we have the vaccine just in place. In the event that there is a need to travel for the Prime Minister, then we have that allocation, it is a transparent process to it. We do not then simply, for example, if you completely remove it, and assuming that we can travel by next year, there is a need for the Honourable Prime Minister to travel somewhere then we have the funds actually set aside for it. We do not have to go scrambling around and sort of trying to vire funds or deploy funds, and it is done with the right reasoning, it is not just simply plugged in, Honourable Gavoka. If you look at the budget estimates for previous years you will see that. So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is the background too.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you. Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Head 2-1-1-3 agreed to.

Head 2-1-6:

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote on Head 2. The question is that the amount of Head 2 – Office of the Prime Minister be approved.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- On Head 2-1, we have some SEGs that we want to talk on, Mr. Chairman. I want to say something on SEG 6, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- You have the floor.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman. SEG 6, we have a provision there of \$250,000 for the Fiji Mahogany Trust. Can the Prime Minister inform the House as to when we can see an Annual Report to justify this allocation of \$250,000?

We keep saying that we have the biggest mature mahogany plantation in the world yet we do not see much of it impacting on our economy. So, it really is a mystery to most of us. We would ask the Prime Minister to provide Annual Reports to enable us to understand what is happening with these very, very valuable resources that appear not to be prioritised by Fiji First to activate our economy. So, please, can we have one Annual Report on this, Honourable Prime Minister?

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Annual Report of which organisation?

HON. RATU S. MATANITOBUA.- Fiji Mahogany.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- You have the Fiji Mahogany Trust there with \$250,000. Can you, please, explain that through an Annual Report on what is happening with the Trust? Thank you.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- If I could clarify, Mr. Speaker.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- We are up to date with the Report, what are you talking about?

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- We are talking about the Annual Report.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Yes, we are up to date with the Report.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- You need to table it.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- You have to table it in Parliament.

(Laughter)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- If I could clarify, Mr. Chairman, Sir. These politicians are obviously clasp at straws. The Trust is made up of donors, it is their organisation, the Fijian Government contributes \$250,000 to them. Honourable Leawere, you go and ask them where the Annual Report is. The Fiji Hardwood Corporation Limited is a public enterprise, that is a separate organisation.

Honourable Gavoka, I do not think you know what you are talking about. The \$250,000 is government's contribution on the Trust and the Trust has their own mechanisms or ask Honourable Bulanauca, he will tell you.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Chairman, there is \$250,000 here given to Fiji Mahogany Trust by the taxpayers of Fiji. We want to know how it is being used, please, provide the report to Parliament.

HON. O. NAIQAMU.- Ask your colleague, Honourable Bulanauca, he is the former chairman. He will educate you on the funds, from Government for assisting the landowners, purely it is an administrative issue for them to make monthly or even annually. It is different from mahogany (Hardwood Corporation) where public funds is being used for mahogany development.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Can I get a reply from the Honourable Prime Minister, please?

HON. O. NAIQAMU.- Honourable Bulanauca will clearly tell you and your caucus.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- I do not think it comes under your Office, Honourable Member, it comes out of the Prime Minister's Office and the question is very simple.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Do not talk amongst yourselves, come through the Chair.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- The question is very simple. \$250,000 has been allocated by the taxpayers of this country for the work of the Fiji Mahogany Trust. Can the taxpayers of this country see how that fund is being used - that is it. I mean, what is so complex about that, Mr. Chairman?

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Mr. Chair, the Trust is up-to-date with its report. We had suspended their funds because of the non-submission, but they are up-to-date now, I do not know what Honourable Gavoka is harping about.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Chair, now we are getting some information out of the Prime Minister. It should not be like putting teeth, Mr. Chair. We just asked a question and it is a legitimate concern. Show us how this \$250,000 is being used, that is it. Now he is coming out in bits and pieces, and that is not the way to provide stewardship over taxpayers' funds, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Chair, if I could also clarify something: This \$250,000 has been allocated for the past number of years. Honourable Gavoka never had a problem with it previously. Suddenly he has an issue with it. Every year, if you see the previous Budgets, \$250,000 has been allocated and suddenly he has a problem with it. This is the kind of hypocritical position we are seeing by the Opposition.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- He has nothing to offer, that is all.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Honourable Prime Minister, just offer us the report, please, Honourable Prime Minister and we should all be all right. You know, stop taking us back. We are living today and the way we look at it, nothing has been forthcoming since 2015, so where is it? I mean we are now beginning to get information in bits and pieces. Just do it in full and an annual report would serve the purpose. Thank you.

HON. MEMBER.- You, it is only you who is living in the past.

HON. O. NAIQAMU.- Mr. Chair, I think the Honourable Member is confusing Parliament.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We will move on.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- He is confused at himself.

HON. O. NAIQAMU.- He is misleading Parliament. As I have already mentioned, his colleague will be in a better position to educate him, Honourable Bulanauca.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Chair, yes, you cannot be given money and you go and use it anywhere you want and then you say you cannot ask.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We will move on.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Chair, a point of clarification. Honourable Gavoka is saying 'where is the report'. Well, it is an independent organisation which we actually provide funding to, so in the same way for example, if you look at the Frank Hilton School, we give some funds for that organisation for early intervention. Now, we do not have the Frank Hilton School coming and giving a report to Parliament. There are organisations that Government, as a matter of policy, does fund because they have various structures in place and therefore that funding is provided to those organisations. They do not suddenly become answerable to Honourable Gavoka.

But if he want if he wants to go and get that information, he can go and get that information from the Fiji Mahogany Trust. And what Honourable Naiqamu is saying repeatedly, is to ask Honourable Bulanauca. He will tell you because he is part of the Trust. He was, I do not know whether he still is or whether he has been booted out. I am not sure. But the point of the matter is, that he will explain that to you. It is very simple.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Programme 1-2. Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Programme 1-2(6). I seek some clarifications, especially with the allocations given to the Rabi Island Council and Kioa Island Council. Can the Honourable Prime Minister clarify if these are blanket kind of grant catering for the whole islanders? Why am I raising this clarification, because most of them are citizens of their own countries, in Kiribati and Tuvalu. So, we seek clarification here what are these grants for?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you. Honourable Prime Minister, you have the floor.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- I am still trying to catch up with the programme.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Rabi Island Council -\$155,000 and Kioa Island Council - \$75,000.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- We are giving this out on a quarterly basis on submission of documents, Mr. Chairman. This is to run the Councils.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- I thank the Honourable Prime Minister for that reply but the question that I am seeking clarification on is: Has the Honourable Prime Minister been able to identify those who hold Fiji citizenship and those who do not hold Fiji citizenship? They also reside on these two Islands and they are governed by their own Island countries, like Kiribati and Tuvalu.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- The grant is given to the Councils for administration and operation and to coop the schools. So, we do not know whether they come from Tuvalu or from China or from Kiribati, it is for the Council. Can you understand that?

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- What you are saying, because you are simply lost in your explanation, because most of them hold citizenship in their own countries where they come from. But now we are giving a blanket thing here in Fiji.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Can you understand what I am trying to tell you that the money is given to the Council to run the Council.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- You have the Council (speaks in *iTaukei*).

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- (speaks in *iTaukei*) We have been included in that Council.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, I will just remind the Leader of the Opposition and the Honourable Prime Minister not to talk amongst yourselves. Come through the Chair. I think we have heard enough explanation on this item. This is to run the affairs of the Council. We will move on.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Programme 3-1.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Activity 1, SEG 9, there is a reduction in terms of IBMS upgrade \$500,000. Can we get some sort of clarification in terms of reduction in the IBMS upgrade and the progress of the IBMS upgrade?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Prime Minister, you have the floor for Programme 9-1 – IBMS Upgrade of \$500,000.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- There is a reduction of \$100,000, Mr. Chair.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Minister for Defence.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- The system is more than 20 years old, Mr. Chair and we need to upgrade it.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- The reduction has taken place because of the fact that the first phase of the work has been completed. These works are not going to be held perpetuity – the initial \$1 million - so obviously some work has already taken place and so there is another \$0.5 million worth of work to be completed. And if you see some projection than in the future, if there is going to be upgrades we will see that there have been allocations or reduction in the work undertaken.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the explanation given but the supplementary enquiry to that is on SEG 7. There is still a digitisation programme there too. Digitisation and Modernisation and that carries an amount of \$1.2 million. So, the link between the two digitisation and SEG 9 and digitisation in SEG 7. Can we just get a clarification on the link between the two different SEGs, please?

We have an explanation given on SEG 9 that is part of the work in progress. But in SEG 7 there is also digitisation and modernisation of Fiji Immigration Department System and Processes.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Prime Minister, you have the floor.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- This is just to upgrade the programmes and the Australian Government gave us \$2 million for this.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- It fits in also with the overall digitisation programme as the Honourable Prime Minister highlighted. It is the implementation of emerging technology processes which include biometric matching, advanced passenger processing and it is also about establishing bilateral information sharing and cooperative working arrangements between the Fijian Immigration Department and the Australian Department of Home Affairs. It is to modernise the ICT infrastructure software capability within the Fijian Immigration Department.

The Integrated Border Management System (IBMS) obviously is different which is separate to the digitisation and modernisation of the Department itself. So for example, establishing data record keeping processes for all future processes. At the moment, when you apply for passports et cetera there is a lot of electronic implementation in-house so we are going to have it fully electronically upgraded because a lot of the records in Fiji at the moment, because of the past, have been all manually kept. We have to digitise it all so everything becomes available through the PCs and the various digital equipment and brings us in alignment with the international travel protocols too.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Mr. Chairman, this is part of the 3 Year programme and digitisation does not mean all equipment. We will have to write documents and procedures and train staff.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Aseri Radrodro you have the floor.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- The changes that are introduced in the Fijian passport, the e-passport programmes. The difficulty faced by Fijians residing overseas is especially when they need to change their passport. There are logistical problems in terms of coming to change their passport because they cannot change their passport from their respective Fijian agencies. Is this programme also included taking into account the plight of Fijians living abroad wishing to change their passport but they could not change it from there? Can we get details of where they can go to especially in Australia or for example out of USA, or England, whether the Fijians living abroad can also change their passport from their respective places of residence they are currently staying now. Thank you Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Mr. Chairman, they can do that. They have High Commissioners and Embassies.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, I just wish to further clarify because the passport issue is an Immigration issue and that is sorted by the Consular Services in respective Missions abroad but again going back to the digitisation and modernisation of the Fiji Immigration Department system, this is a programme that you will see that the DFAT is in bracket, because we are trying to modernise, this is about border controls.

In Australia, for example, they have a Border Unit that has been established and Fiji is going along that line as well. In Fiji right now Customs is Customs, Immigration is Immigration but in terms of the sharing of information - that is the modernisation that we are having. Honourable Members you would recall that also we have already discussed in this Parliament about human trafficking laws et cetera. So, this is all part of the upgrade because we need to modernise as a hub, there are a lot of agencies involved including the Ministry of Defence as well Mr. Speaker, Sir on this. So, I just wanted to elaborate on SEG 7 allocation.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you. Honourable Members the Parliament will now vote on Head 2.

Question put

Head 2 agreed to.

Head 3 – Office of the Attorney-General

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members the floor is now open for any comments on Head 3 – Office of the Attorney-General.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- On Programme 2-1(6) on SEG 6 in terms of Domestic Air Services. Can I seek clarification on that item, please?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sorry. What would you like to know?

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Mr. Chair, on SEG 6, domestic air services subsidy, can we seek some clarifications on that item please?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- It occurs every year. What would you like to know about it?

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- What is it for? We all just want to know.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- It has always been there every year, Honourable Leawere. We subsidise domestic air travel because as you know, flying to parts of Fiji is highly uneconomical. The same way we have Government Shipping Services, same way that for example, we subsidise ships to go to low traffic destinations within Fiji, to the outer islands they do not make enough money so actually have to subsidise it. Same thing with here, if you fly to Lau and various other places, it is not worthwhile to fly to those places, so we actually call for tenders, people bid for it and then we subsidise whatever percentage of the cost we need to subsidise so people can actually fly to those places. There has been of course a reduction in the subsidies that we have given because of reduced domestic travel but we have made that allocation. It is there every year, Honourable Leawere, as you would recall from the past number of years you have been in Parliament.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you.

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- Mr. Chair, there used to be the Ono-i-Lau airstrip on that SEG. What happened to it, on SEG 7? Have they completed the Ono-i-Lau airstrip and that is why they have not included that this year. *Vinaka*.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- It was not there last year.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Member, just stick to what is here. Forget about what is not here or what you wish it to be here. That is a different matter. Stick to what is here. If you were in the Chamber, I will chase you out. That is what I have been asked to do. I cannot do that.

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote on Head 3.

Question put.

Head 3 agreed to.

Head 4 – Ministry of Economy

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The floor is now open for any comments. Head 4, Programme 1, Activity 1.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Chair, just a clarification. Programme 1-1(1), I note there is a slight increase in terms of allocations given to SEG 1 from last year. Given the announcement that was made, does it mean that this department will continue its recruitment process during the period, the Treasury Department?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sorry, Sir, if the Honourable Member could please repeat his question.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Would you repeat the question Honourable Radrodro?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- It is just a noting on the allocation that is given to the Treasury Department, Programme 1-2 (1). The allocation has an increase of \$111,000. Does that mean that recruitment will continue during the period of freeze, as has been announced in the Budget? What does this increase represent?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you. As announced, there is no increase in the numbers as far as the civil service positions are concerned. There is no increase in the number of position, except as has been announced, the Ministry of Health, the Fiji Police Force, Communication and I think there are about four positions in the Ministry of Local Government. There are new posts being created. This funding here is not an indication of any new posts, but in fact, they are existing posts that are being filled at the moment. That is why this funding is shown to be an increase compared to the previous year, even though, those positions existed last year.

What you will see overall in the other SEGs, if you look at Programme 1-3 and Programme 1-4, you will also see reductions in SEG 1 itself, because they have come to the right figures so they no longer require those positions. So there has been actually a reduction overall in respect of SEG 1 in the Ministry. If you look at the summary page, the Ministry has a reduction in the salary staff allocation, for about \$195,000, in SEG 1 and SEG 2 - \$71,000. So that is the reason.

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- Can I ask the Honourable Minister to explain the \$1.5 million under SEG 7 for Consultancy under Public Enterprises?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you, Honourable Professor Prasad. I did not recognise your voice in the first place. Honourable Minister for Economy, you have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Chairman, the Consultancy is \$750,000 not \$1.5 million.

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- It says \$1.5 million under “R”, Programme 3-1(7).

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- It says \$750,000 under “R”.

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- My apologies. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Honourable Professor Prasad, where are you?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- It Programme 3, Activity 1. The question that has been asked is ....

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Chairman , my apologies. I think the Honourable Attorney-General is correct. It is \$750.000.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you, Honourable Attorney-General, you have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sir, I think, Honourable Prasad misunderstood, there is \$1.5 million for consultancy when it is actually \$750,000. Let me clarified it now.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, the Parliament will now vote on Head 4.

Question put.

Head 4 agreed to.

#### Head 5 - Ministry of iTaukei Affairs

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for any comments?

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Programme 1-1(7) - Review of Village Guidelines. Can we have an update on that from the Honourable Minister for iTaukei Affairs, please?

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Mr. Chair, that work is in progress right now.

Question put.

Head 5 agreed to.

#### Head 6 – Ministry of Defence, National Security and Policing

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for any comments.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Chairman, on SEG 7 - \$10,000 for MSG, can that be clarified and what is the purpose of that?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you. Programme 1-1(7).

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are members of the Melanesian Spearhead Group in terms of security issues and, of course, the police. So, that is why we have that as fees for the membership fee, I would say, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Just to add also, it is to fund any annual event and the expenses relate to the officials when they meet up, especially the heads of the Police Commissioners. The conference they have now which you see. It also funds that too, apart from other Ministers.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote on Head 6.

Question put.

Head 6 agreed to.

Head 7 – Ministry of Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for any comments.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Mr. Chairman, on Programme 1-1(5) Apprentice Scheme Other Industry (\$150,000). Can I have some clarification from the Honourable Minister as to who are eligible for the scheme?

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman, the Apprentice Scheme is jointly administered by Government Shipping Services. This Scheme offers four year apprenticeship and in this department, they are encouraged to learn technical skills to carry with them into a career.

Mr. Chairman, allowances are paid to 10 Apprentices currently attached at the Government Shipping Services, that is the allocation for that.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Programme 1-3(10); how many cases are pending for that programme? Is that enough to cover other cases that are pending on the Workmen's Compensation?

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman, the amount that is reflected here is the payment for all the pending cases that we have on hand and exactly this is the amount that is needed to pay-out all the pending cases. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Aseri Radrodro, you have the floor.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Sir, just a clarification on the explanation that is given by the Minister, I note that the allocation has been increased from last year to this year by about \$46,000. So, if this is relating to all pending cases, how come the amount changes from last year to previous year to this year, the amount still varies, so if it is all pending cases, how come the amount still varies?

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman, the difference is that now the cases, whatever the cases that come in have gone to ACCF, as we all know. The Ministry has got data and based on the data, this is the amount that we will require and this is the final payment that will be made and maybe this is the last time that this allocation appears here. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you. We move on. Programme 1-4, Honourable Adi Litia Qionibaravi, you have the floor.

HON. ADIL QIONIBARAVI.- A question on Foreign Employment Services - \$330,769. Can the Honourable Minister inform the House of this budgetary allocation of \$330,769? There is an increase of \$30,769 in the current fiscal year. Can he inform the House on the effectiveness of this allocation, Sir, the Foreign Employment Services?

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman, this is purely to pay the 10 project officers' salaries, and that is what that \$330,769 has been asked for and these are the officers that are based throughout the country. Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Parliament will now vote on Head 7.

Question put.

Head 7 agreed to.

Head 8 – Ministry of Foreign Affairs

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The floor is now open for comments. Programme 1-1; Honourable Lynda Tabuya, you have the floor.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Chair, I just have a query on SEG 6. The allocation for General Trust Fund BioSafety Protocol of United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), whatever that amount is under SEG 6. This is not clear from the Budget Estimate, Mr. Chair, what that amount is and what it is for. If that could be just clarified, please, by the Honourable Minister?

HON. SPEAKER.- Activity 1, SEG 6. What item on SEG 6?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- General Trust Fund – BioSafety Protocol of UNEP. If you could just clarify that, please?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- If I could just assist in terms of the amount, the Honourable Member said it is not clear, it is clear. The amount is \$300 actually, and this is the Secretariat, the institution is linked to the United Nations Environmental Programme and the parties to the Convention have established Trust Funds to meet the cost of administering the Convention including costs and the Secretariat [General Trust Fund - Bio-safety Protocol of UNEP (\$ 300)].

This Trust Fund is used to cover travel costs of the developing country parties, in particular, the least developed or undeveloped States and other parties with economies and transition to enable them to attend the meetings and conferences convened by the Secretariat, so this is the General Trust Fund for UNEP. The amount is our contribution.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you. Honourable Leader of the Opposition, you have the floor.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Chairman, I seek some clarification on Programme 1-1(6), especially on the International Tribunal Law of the Sea (\$86,000) there. I seek some clarification on that regarding outstanding issues regarding our boundary out there in Minerva Reef, et cetera. The fees is to cover that particular outstanding work or is it just an annual sum? Thank you.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- It is an annual sum.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Minister, you have the floor - Programme 1-1-6.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Chairman, I have clarified that it is an annual sum. SEG 6 is all about the subs to all the different organisations.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We will move on. Programme 2-1. Honourable Qionibaravi, you have the floor.

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- Programme 2-1(8). An allocation of \$100,000 for Refurbishment of Overseas Mission, I am just wondering whether this amount is really necessary given the current national crisis.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- What is wrong with that?

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- Mr. Chairman, the question is whether this sum of \$100,000 is necessary given the current problem that we have in the country? Is it necessary to renew to purchase refurbishment?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Yes, Mr. Chairman, that is necessary. Those repairs and refurbishment need to be done.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Chairman, if I could also just highlight what the Honourable Prime Minister said. These properties are actually owned by us. We own properties in Canberra, Wellington, London and Brussels, so we actually have to make sure that we do maintain them because we own them. We do refurbishment. We are not going off to buy fancy curtains or anything like that but essentially, it is maintaining those properties in a state that befits the value of the property.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, just on that note about refurbishment of overseas missions. From experience, sometimes it is not you who initiates it. It is the residents of those people in the streets you living. If they see that your property is bringing down the value of that area because you have not refurbished your property they will ask you if you could refurbish. And sometimes our properties stand out like a dogs hind legs and it has not been done so we have to do that and it is an ongoing process. I thought I would just let you know that, that is the case.

Question put.

Head 8 agreed to.

#### Head 9 – Independent Bodies

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The floor is now open for comments.

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- I would like to raise a question here. We note that all allocations of independent bodies have been reduced. May we seek the Honourable Ministers explanation on the rationale behind these reductions? Does it mean a reduction in the number of staff employed? Does it mean a reduction in activities they are mandated to carry within a year? For the Office of the Auditor-General, DPP and Judiciary does this mean a reduction in the number of professionals that is auditors, lawyers, judges employed? Are they positions that were never filled and are dis-established staff on the reduction of all the budget for the independent bodies?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you, Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr .Chair, Sir. No, it does not mean in any way that the services being provided by these independent bodies will in any way diminish. In fact it is

expected to increase given the levels of investment we have made in them in the past number of years. The Auditor-General's Office, for example. The net decrease has been due to the following;

- The alignment of filled-in positions are in line with the payroll now.
- There is a reduction in travel due to closure of borders.
- No overtime is being paid - this is part of the whole of Government Policy Announcement in 2020-2021 Budget.
- There have been some minor reductions in SEGS 4 and 5 for them, about \$30,000.

In respect of the Judiciary. The reason why Judiciary has decreased is because one of their major capital works has come to an end, like for example, Nasinu Court House will be completed. There has also been the position that have already been aligned but the bulk of the reductions in Judiciary - which is about \$4.4 million - is because a lot of their capital projects are coming to an end.

In respect of Parliament there is a reduction of about \$1.5 million. The Parliament has already paid the political party grants to respective parties in this financial year to avoid any financial burden in the next financial year - about \$765,000 has been paid. So, this allocation has not been factored into the following year because it is now being paid from this year. The alignment of filled position....

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- Mr. Chair, the question I would like to ask is, there is an increase from \$4.4 million to \$23.1 million between 2021-2022 and I am just comparing that figure with the last General Election 2017-2018 or 2018-2019. What would be the explanation for the difference in the figures?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Overtime and across the board reduction to keep such expenditure under control.

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- Mr. Chairman, I could not get the explanation from the Honourable Minister, please.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Chairman, on the Fiji Elections Office, the \$23.1 million and \$14.8 million. Could you please clarify if this is the total cost of the Election?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Yes. The cost of Election are split into two. One of course is the actual preparation for the Elections and the other one is the actual election itself, the polling day, the recruitment of officers to conduct the polls et cetera, so they are quite significant. If you had come to the budget analysis session that we offered to the Opposition, you would have understood it better but I have to say this which I should have mentioned in my reply. None of you came and you did not have the courtesy to give the response but you did not know till the last minute.

The secretariat of Parliament was trying to get you but anyway the Elections Office actually had to prepare for the Elections. There are many things they have to do for example they have to acquire the transparent ballot boxes. All those sorts of things need to be done now. Preparation of the roles et cetera. They will have an interesting time in the next few months in particular with the registration given certain restrictions of COVID-19, that is why it is important that we get vaccinated. So, people can actually go and stand in queues, et cetera. This cost is for that.

This money will be given to them to prepare for the Elections because as you are already aware Honourable Tuisawau, the Elections can be held anywhere from I think it is the 07 or 09 July 2022 to the 07 or 09 January 2023. So, in the event that the Elections will be held after the end of this coming financial year, in the other words if the Elections are going to be held after 31 July 2022,

then the second-half of the funding that is required which is in Head 50 would not be paid. It will be carried over into the following financial year of 2022-2023 but this expenditure here is required in any case to prepare because the Elections will be held next year whether it is end of July or whether it is post July. It will be held in the following financial year at the latest.

That is why it has been split. So, this one is essential for them to get all the supplies, all the ballot boxes, all those types of things and then update the roll going to the registration. Should the Election be held in this coming financial year which is 2021-2022 then the money from Head 50 will be used. If the Election is going to be held after 31 July 2022 then that money that is in Head 50 would not be used and that money will go into the following financial year which is 2022-2023. I hope that explains.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Thank you

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you. Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Head 9 agreed to.

#### Head 13 – Independent Commissions

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for comments on Programme 1, Activity 1. You have the floor.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Just a point of clarification. Head 10, 11 and 12, where are they or is it just mistyping? Thank you.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Chair, Honourable Bulanauca would have noticed the same thing last year. There is no mistyping. As you know the system is such that when we allocate heads then if we remove them, if those ministries for example, do not exist, they get merged with another ministry, or another head then we simply put it in there. We are looking at getting some new systems, software systems where we can very easily realign all of these and get the numbering done but for ease of reference, that is why we have always maintained it as that particular head.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Programme 1-1, you have the floor, Honourable Tabuya.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just a question on the Accountability and Transparency Commission. Can the Honourable Minister update when that Commission will be appointed?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, once Parliament approves the actual law.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Can the Honourable Minister please give more clarity than that as to whether they are going to be bringing that before the House so that it is done now that there is allocation for it in the Budget?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I did not get the question, Mr. Chair.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Chairman, just a follow-up question to the Honourable Minister. Is there a timetable when it is going to be brought before the House so that they are actually done, as you mentioned it needs to be passed by Parliament into law?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Yes, we hope to table those bills, Mr. Chair, Sir, in the not too distant future.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Chair, just additional clarification on the Online Safety Commission where an amount of \$185,506 has been allocated, a reduction from 2020-2021 Mr. Chair. Is this allocation in terms of the work that has been carried out by the Online Safety Commission or related to salaries and wages or just more related to the activity they carry out in terms of the allocation that they are given?

Secondly, just a clarification, is there a MOU signed between the government and these independent commissions in terms of accountability and reporting timeline that they have to submit before the disbursements of these funds to the respective listings of these commissions, especially for the Online Safety Commission, Mr. Chair. Just wanted some clarification on that.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you. Honourable Minister, Online Safety Commission.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Chair, Sir. I will give you the exact amounts. The office incidental has been reduced by \$2,000; Stationery and printing reduced by \$5,000. Training has been reduced by \$12,000 and VAT, of course, has come down by \$675, which gives it a reduction, so normally salary will not be cut, et cetera.

In respect of the second question, which was accountability. By the very nature of these organisations, they have their own independent reports, they have their own audits done by external auditors and they present their reports. We do not interfere as to how they run their organisation, that is why they are under Head 13 of Independent Commissions. Similarly, we have one prior to that independent bodies, I think the word independent is at play here, we give them the money but they produce their own reports, which we obviously get to look at and their audit reports are available publicly.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you. Honourable Radrodro.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The explanation has been given. The other clarification is sought on Constitutional Offices Commission, an amount of \$20,000, it is a reduction from \$50,000 from last year's allocation. I just wonder to enquire whether these \$20,000 is enough in terms of carrying out of these activities, given, before I seek for the motion to increase these allocations.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Chairman, thank you very much. The Constitutional Offices Commission has its meeting on Level 9 in Suvavou House, so we do not have to pay for the rent or the hiring of the hall, it is for free. We have meetings and the secretariat services are provided by the Solicitor-General's Office, so we do not have to pay the staff. We have or course, reduced this expenditure, we do not expect too many advertisements to go ahead. The advertisement for vacancies is the major expenditure for the COC. Just extrapolating how many of those independent officers will become vacant that we need to advertise, there is not going to be that many in the next one year. The major ones have already been advertised. The expenditures will not be that much. The Solicitor-General's Office does not charge us for the secretarial support. We have lawyers from that Office who actually provide the secretarial support.

In terms of the actual operational cost of COC is not that much. The major operational cost of COC of course, is the advertisements for the positions. The members of the COC as you know, Leader of the Opposition and his nominees and then you have the Prime Minister and you have his nominees who sit on the Commission. So, essentially, that is how the Commission is run, so there are no other expenses required and so we obviously try to run a lean machine, we do not actually have a separate person who is appointed who sits there full time et cetera, because there is no need for it. The parameters of the COC, of course, is set out in the Constitution.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you. Honourable Adi Litia Qionibaravi, you have the floor.

HON. ADI .L. QIONIBARAVI.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have the question for the Honourable Minister on the Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission. The 2019-2020 Report, when can this be filed? We note that there has not been any constitutional redress filed by this Commission, does it have a Proceedings Commissioner?

The last question is the fact that the Chief Justice is its Chairperson, is not there a conflict of interest? The Chief Justice could be adjudicating in the constitutional redress for complainants? Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The body obviously, is independent so I do not tell them how to run the organisation, that is the reason it is under Independent Commissions. I do not go and ask them why they did not file this and why they did not file that. That is the very nature of being independent.

The Honourable Member needs to read the Constitution and the relevant Act. It does have a Proceedings Commissioner and the three Commissions of course, is Chaired by Justice Kamal Kumar, the Proceedings Commissioner and Mr. Parvesh Sharma who is the Practising Solicitor. The three Commissioners are:

- (1) Lanieta Tuimabu;
- (2) Sureni Perera; and
- (3) Nichole Daniels.

In respect of there been any conflict, we have had Judges in other positions. The Honourable Justice is the Honourable man. He is not going to obviously sit on any case and he is going to be instant. By the Human Rights Commission on which he usually sit himself. I mean you know, we have various other judges that sit on the judiciary on the bench and obviously, they can here the cases.

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- A supplementary question to the Honourable Minister. The fact that the report has not been filed, I am assuming here that his office is responsible for paying out the funds. Are there any requirements for the reports to be filed and questions to be raised with them on why the reports have not been filed? Do they not acquit their funds through the Attorney-General's Office? Therefore, the question regarding the submission of the Annual Report should be in fact raised with the Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Chair, Sir, I do not know which report the Member is talking about. If she can recall in the last Annual Report, my recollection of the Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission is actually up to speed in respect of these reports.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you, Honourable Aseri Radrodro. You have the floor.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just a follow up question on the Constitutional Offices Commission relating to the explanation that has been given and the budget allocation that has been provided to the Commission.

Just a clarification, given the process of advertising some key positions there, termed as Constitutional Offices like the Secretary-General to Parliament, Police Commissioner, Army Commander, we see that the advertisements have gone out. I think it is more than six months now so where does it leave the candidacy in terms of the people that applied. Will it go through another advertisement process because it is more than six months? People are still acting on the positions to see whether there are substantial appointments made to the respective constitutional offices positions, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

I just want some clarifications, given the reduction in the allocation and explanation that has been given that we do not anticipate any further advertisements for the positions, as advised by the Honourable Minister.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA- Mr. Chair, there will be no further advertisement. The Commission is going through the names right now and we are also getting a panel together to do the interviews which will be done soon.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Chair, I am also clarifying the question asked by the Honourable Qionibaravi. I just have the criteria here. In the 2018-2019 Annual Reports of the Fiji Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission has already been submitted to Parliament 2018-2019 and the Annual Report 2020 is in draft stage at the moment. So, they are up to 2020, please do not get any misconception.

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- The question is for 2019 and 2020, not 2018.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sorry!

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- I ask for the Annual Report for 2019 and 2020. I did not ask for 2018. We know that has been tabled in Parliament.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- So 2019 has already been submitted in Parliament, Mr. Chairman and 2020 is still in Draft.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you. Honourable Tabuya, you have the floor

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- Thank you, Sir.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Just a point of clarification from the Minister. The same Human Rights Commission has filed 2016 to 2018 and you have mentioned 2019, 2020 in the process. What about the Annual Reports for 2013 to 2015? Why have not those been filed? They are still pending. Can the Minister explain before the House? Thank you.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Again, Mr. Chairman, 2018 and 2019 have already been submitted to Parliament. 2020 is not and I will be very surprised that any organisation has already submitted the 2020 Annual Report. So, 2020 is the one pending in respect of what the Honourable Tabuya is saying 2013, et cetera my understanding is that it has already been tabled, if they have not been, I am not sure why, but I would not take your word for it, Honourable Tabuya because you have not been correct on so many different occasions just to suit your purpose. So, I suspect that they have already been tabled also.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- It is not before the House. It has not come before the House. Why not? Just answer the question.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I do not think you are correct. We cannot trust you and I would like to verify it myself.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Conversations between you two. Honourable Tuisawau, you have the floor.

HON. RO. F. TUISAWAU.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman. On the Legal Aid Commission, I noticed that there is a reduction of \$1.138 million and the actual 2019 and 2020 is \$10.3 million. So, the actuals indicate that the important work has been carried out by the Legal Aid Commission to our people. What would be the impact of this reduction in terms of service delivery to our people regarding the Legal Aid? A critical service to the people. Thank you.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Thank you for recognising that.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I do not know where the Honourable Member says the actual was \$10 million. If you look at the heading it says Revised Estimate 2020-2021, it does not say Actual. You will get the actual next year.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- I said the 2019-2020 Year

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I will explain to you as to why the reduction is taking place but it would not affect the services. The decrease in Personal Emoluments is to align the filled positions against the payroll so that the number of positions that were vacant but had not been filled, so obviously they do not necessarily see the need to fill in those positions and they are not always lawyers.

Because there is now adoption if Legal Aid had also adopted a lot of new technology, you can see a lot of the Legal Aid services now being done on mobile phone App. You can ring in, there is websites. One thing I want to highlight to the Honourable Members who do not know the things that we are doing now is trying to make government service be driven more through technology. So, you do not necessarily have to have a whole team of physical people sitting in offices delivering those services.

That is one of the reasons. There has been an increase in Operational Cost of \$4 million and decrease in Administrative Cost of \$153,000 and we have decreased the Professional Development cost by \$179,000 because they used to go and have this workshop et cetera but with COVID-19, that has been somewhat limited and that is why they cannot go off and have like a two week retreat at any hotel or whatever it is that they used to do. So that is why we have been able to bring down those costs but it no way does it negate the good work that the Legal Aid Commission is doing. It is the largest law firm in Fiji and it is now spread all over Fiji and it has been something that has really changed the lives of literally tens and thousands of Fijians.

So, they do things like they draft wills for people, people who pass away, dying intestate, in other words without a Will. They help those families, help resolve state issues and also of course, look after women on maintenance and custody battles, et cetera. So, they do all those good work but it would not be affected.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Professor Prasad, you have the floor.

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- No, Mr. Chairman, I think the issues I wanted to raise have been raised already, thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote on Head 30

Question put.

Head 13 agreed to.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, the time moves on and I had indicated that I will be dealing with this important matters but I also take your interest into account. So, we will now suspend proceedings for lunch break.

Honourable Members, the Acting Secretary-General will let you know when we will resume. We break for lunch, thank you.

The Parliament adjourned at 1.21 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 3.05 p.m.

Head 14 – Fiji Corrections Service

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for comments.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Chair, Sir, on Programme 1, Activity 1, SEG 1, can we just get a clarification on the increase in the Personal Emoluments (SEG 1) - an increase of about \$1.5 million? Does it mean that there will be new recruitments done in the Fiji Corrections Service?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- I give the floor to the Honourable Aseri Radrodro, you can ask your question again.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Mr. Chair. Programme 1-1(1), there is an increase in the allocation of about \$1.5 million, so can we just get a clarification: Does it mean that there will be more recruitments or why is this increase there?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Programme 1, Activity 1, my apologies for earlier on, Mr. Chair, Sir. No, there is no recruitment. Essentially what has happened, Honourable Member, is that we are realigning all the different positions to the right amounts that needed to be paid. We had virements taking place before, this is the actual specific amount that is required in respect of all the different staff that are already hired and the different positions that are already existing within the system, to fill in all those positions.

There has been no increase in the overall numbers in terms of the positions, that is in the Fiji Corrections Service but as I mentioned, you may recall that in the Budget Statement, we have said that we also will be extremely strict about virements. We found that previously you know, in a lot of the Heads the people used to vire from SEGs 1 and 2 to supplement expenditure in other areas but conversely, we find that in some of these other Heads, that the right amount was not reflected, we were going through a fairly long and arduous process. This takes in to account all the exact positions in allowances that need to be paid.

You will also note for all the members the FNPF has increased, across the board you will see an increase of 1 percent for employer contributions, the Government obviously is an employer too. But there has been no increase in the numbers, Honourable Members, in respect of that. It is just simply to make sure that we got the right amount allocated in the right areas. Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you. Honourable Viliame Gavoka, you have the floor.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Chairman, Corrections used to come under the Ministry of Justice. Why does it now stand alone and on its own Head, Mr. Chair, can that be explained to us?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Chairman, this has happened for quite some time, I do not know what the Honourable Member is asking for. The Minister for Justice is the responsible Minister but like, for example, the RFMF, the Police even though the line Minister may be the Minister for Defence, but they have their own Heads. They are also responsible for their own expenditures, the Heads for these organisations are also accounting from the accounting perspective and financial perspective, they are also accountable directly themselves. It is not appearing as a separate Head, it is not something new, and it has been there for some time.

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- Mr. Chairman, I would just like to seek the clarification regarding the Fiji Corrections Service, the over crowdedness, about 600 more inmates are in there and I do not see

anything of expansion, just the upgrade on the capital construction. Can you just highlight that to me, Honourable Attorney-General?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sorry, Sir, what are you saying?

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- Regarding the over crowdedness in the Corrections Services inmates and it is costing about \$52 a day per inmate. Can you just highlight if it has been addressed in this budget?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I think you are talking about prisoners in remand and people who are locked up on a permanent basis. They are two different things. Of course, we have instances for example, places like Lautoka had huge numbers in remand. But that is all being ironed out now and you would have seen that over a period of time a number of upgrades have taken place and we believe that there is enough flat in there to be able to ensure that the overcrowded issue is being addressed.

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- *Vinaka*.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote on Head 14.

Question put.

Head 14 agreed to.

Head 15 - Ministry of Justice

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The floor is now open for debate on the Ministry of Justice.

The Parliament will now vote on Head 15.

Question put.

Head 15 agreed to.

Head 16 - Ministry of Communications

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The floor is now open for debate on this Head 16-1-1.

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Chairman, a question to the Honourable Minister, please. Why do we continue to have allocation for Communications, I know the amount is in thousands again. You have already spent millions of dollars on FBC, Fiji Sun to do your propaganda, why do you need Qorvis again? Having the Ministry of Information which should be able to do Government's public relations work, why do you need Qorvis?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Sir. We see this as part of our overall strategy in terms of communication, not just domestically but obviously internationally also. As we have said previously that we are also building local capacity. We have also recruited the services of our local social media company and capacities are being built, they have been there for over a year now, I think a lot more.

Slowly, you will see a decrease as you know that for Qorvis, we used to pay an access of a million dollars at one point in time, and that has been reduced obviously now to \$800,000 but at this point in time, given that a lot of work also gets done behind the scenes internationally, we do need them to help us do that particular matter. That is why they have been retained.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Tabuya, you have the floor.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We note that under Programme 2-1(7), there is an allocation for Vaccine Passport in the amount of \$2 million. According to the Honourable Minister, global tourism has called for a vaccine passport. Can the Honourable Minister further elaborate on this new capital project and with this budgetary allocation, what is the objective of this project and the expected outcome?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you, Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Sir, it is not only about global tourism per se but obviously it is a requirement now if you look at IETA, if you look at many of the airlines in the world now, they need some form of validation - authentic identification of people who actually have been vaccinated, also when were they last tested, for example, for COVID-19, et cetera?

The company has already been engaged. It is a general company, Melbo, that also was the company providing our Digital Passport Solutions, a German Company that provides via Matrix Solutions for our passports.

In fact, the sum of money to be spent on this, approximately \$4 million; \$2 million has already been allocated from this year's Budget for the Ministry of Communications and have commenced the work as you know they are willing to do this very quickly.

The vaccine passport is clearly a document that is required so we will also be able to present to other countries that would consider sending their citizens to Fiji for holidays. For example, we simply cannot just rely on our work to say, yes, do not worry, your citizens can go to these hotels and everyone working there have in fact been vaccinated.

They will need some form of authentication and the vaccine passport itself will be able to authenticate that every single person at hotel XYZ actually has been vaccinated, it builds confidence in the countries that are willing to send their citizens to our country for holidays, and it gives confidence to the travel agents, airlines. So, for our purposes also the vaccine passport is not just for domestic use in terms of being able to satisfy the overseas partners but also for us to be able to know who has been vaccinated.

Similarly Honourable Tabuya for example, in the future wants to travel overseas there will be a requirement by countries now to know whether you have actually been vaccinated or not. So, how will you prove it? Obviously they cannot take your word Honourable Tabuya, many people cannot take your word but apart from that, there needs to be an authentication as to when did you get vaccinated? When did you get the first dose? When did you get the second dose? Which vaccine did you use? And that will actually give you easy entry into the country which you want to travel to. So, that is the reason for the vaccine passport. It is also good, the Ministry of Health and Medical Services will also be able to have a record of those events in relation to individuals and in that way we keep a good track record of it.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you Honourable Minister for that very lengthy explanation and seems like the need to include some little quips in there against me but

anyway back to this issue. We have just been through a costly exercise in the last number of years where we have seen the increase of the cost of passports into hundreds of dollars and required for travel where people have to upgrade their passports or get the new ones.

Is there a way to ensure that we could continue to use these current passports rather than having our people replace these passports again with the new vaccine passports, even if their passports are still valid, to keep the cost down for our people instead of applying for a new passport to incorporate this in the new passport that have just come out and they have spent hundreds of dollars obtaining.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Minister you have the floor

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you Mr. Chairman. Sir, the Honourable Member again has gone off on a different tangent. There is an assumption that this is a replacement of their travel passport, it is not. It is a vaccine passport and we have at no stage said that it is going to cost you any money. So, again there is wrong assumption, I know Honourable Member that you do not like lengthy explanation. *Tiktok* is only limited to a few minutes but these things actually do need elucidation. They need to be explained properly. The fact of the matter is that it has no impact on your travel passport. Travel passport is completely different to a vaccine passport.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you. Honourable Qionibaravi, you have the floor

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- Thank you Sir. Head 16-3(10) – Grant to *Walesi*. There is an increase of about \$5 million in that allocation. Can the Honourable Minister explain the need to increase this allocation?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Could you repeat your question, please?

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- It is Head 16, Programme 3, Activity 1, SEG10 – Grant to *Walesi* \$15.5 million increase of about \$5 million.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We are still on Programme 2

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- Oh! I thought we were ....

MR. CHAIRMAN.- No.

HON ADI. L. QIONIBARAVI.- My apologies.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- See that is the trouble when you start to ask four questions in one and then you ask a supplementary question. You get into trouble.

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- My apologies, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We have finished now with Programme 2, Activity 1 for the benefit of the Honourable Members we will move on to Programme 3, Activity 1. You have the floor Honourable Qionibaravi.

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- Thank you Mr. Chairman. Head 16-3-1(10) Sir, the grant to *Walesi* of \$15.5 million. Can the Honourable Minister explain the need to increase this allocation given the current pandemic?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Minister you have the floor

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you Mr. Chairman. Sir, as we know that in this pandemic connectivity of course other than physical connectivity has become critically important. All of us here are actually connecting with each other through a digital platform. Similarly, as we have seen, radio has become critically important, television of course has become critically important too, not just in terms of connecting people but for example for television, we have seen the Minister for Education talk about the digital platform that the Ministry of Education is rolling out. So, the *Walesi* platform plays a very pivotal role. There is a dedicated educational channel that is for our students, our young Fijians, so these platforms are critically important.

A part of the grant to *Walesi*, Mr. Chair, Sir, is firstly due to the completion of the Digital Switchover Project for the whole of Viti Levu area, hence the funding is there. Then we also have the implementation of the first phase of the FM Project for the deployment of four out of the seven targeted FM transmission sites. The FM frequency is actually very dilapidated, the infrastructure around it, so *Walesi* will offer a common platform which will mean all the different radio stations, Communications Fiji Limited (CFL), Fijian Broadcasting Corporation (FBC), there is one in the Western Division, they can all actually get on to the FM station, the upgrade. There are seven targetted FM station sites. The four that we are targeting are Delaikoro, Lololo, Sabeto and Nakobalevu. These four are the ones that are actually being upgraded.

Also, *Walesi* has already deployed three additional sites in Muani, Lakeba and Rotuma to increase the terrestrial coverage. Works have already started on these sites and it is expected that three infill sites will be delivered by July of 2021. Preparatory works have already started for a National Digital Switchover, so we will be very soon going to a digital switchover for all television, initially starting off with Viti Levu. They have got a new office that has been set up. A further total of eight community installations and two additional hotel installations were done from August, 2020 to date.

What is very interesting, Mr. Chair, Sir, is that *Walesi* App users have actually increased to 581, 083 users from 466,000, all in just a few months back. Their *Facebook* platform has increased from 48,000 to 60,000 and the *Instagram* users have of course almost doubled too. So, it goes to show there is a huge public uptake and what we are focused on now, Mr. Chair, Sir, as you know we did through FBC in respect of the AM frequency - we would like to thank the Japanese Government for the upgrade that they invested in FBC for the AM radio stations.

We go all the way down to the southern end of Lau, up to Rotuma in the Northwest and places up in the Northeast slightly. Most people who live in the heavily populated areas are using them and we want to ensure that the right technology is in place and *Walesi* is the common form and this of course helps the individuals there, private stations because they do not have to actually roll out the infrastructure, *Walesi* does that so we have this platform in that respect. So, that is the reason for the increase in allocation because we actually, and most definitely need to ensure that communication and digital communication remain primary in this day and age in particular.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you.

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- I actually do not know which activity it is in but the Honourable Minister had talked about the need for a national identity card for all Fijians. I am wondering which allocation in the communications ministry is it included in, whether it is coming in for next year or is it being delayed.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Sir. I did not announce the national identity card in the Budget. Yes, I did some time back but obviously for obvious reason that has been put on hold because of the more pressing matters. For example, the vaccine passport roll out is a lot more critical at this point in time than a national identity card but it does provide the building blocks for a national identity card and as we have seen, it has become critically important. For example, you know in the rollout of this unemployment benefits, as the Prime Minister highlighted in one of his statements few weeks back, we had a gentleman who applied for the \$50 for the \$50 pay-out and he got it eight times using eight different phone numbers.

One of the things that has actually happened in the past number of months, is that people who have been applying for the \$50 or the \$90, in particular, those from the informal sector, are now required as announced in the Budget to get their own TIN number, BRN, we found a lot of people were stealing identities of other people. So, these are the building blocks, so we hope to have the building blocks of developing a national ID, it does help. You ask the Honourable Minister for Natural Disaster Management - when you go out to distribute food rations or any other type of relief assistance, the Minister for Education can tell you that in terms of schools and school students, we need to know that the right relief supplies are going to the right people. There are lot of people double dipping.

If you have a country that is very vulnerable to climatic events, and we are going to provide assistance in those events, then we need to make sure that we are giving it to the right people. The only way we can do that is that if we have that national ID card. So we know it is going to the right people. There is a register of that. We can stop the double dipping and we can have better utilisation of our resources. Yes, we are there, but at this point in time there has been no funding allocated, but these types of exercises we are currently taking out, is actually helping people to build up their identity, make sure it does not get stolen and then we can have a national ID card very easily when it is really time to come.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Programme 4-1.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Chairman, I would like to ask the Honourable Minister - earlier on in the year we heard that the ITC suffered something similar to the cyber-attack and incapacitated their server systems, and one of the outcomes of that was that iTLTB, which is linked to it, were not able to give out the lease monies to landowners, because iTLTB system is attached to it. I would just like to ask Honourable Minister whether under Programme 4-1(9) that that issue would be addressed? If he would also like to elaborate that given the vulnerability of the iTLTB system attached to ITC, would iTLTB then be given the flexibility to have their own independent servers that would not be affected again if ITC does come under similar attack? Would it be covered under SEG 9 in this case?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Minister.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Definitely the cyber-attack was something that was not peculiar to Fiji. At that point in time we found that a number of countries and in fact, a number of private organisations were attacked. You would be interested to see an article recently, that companies have literally been beholden to these cyber-attacks and they essentially wait, they get into your source code and they say, "look we are going to bring the whole thing down unless you pay x number of \$100 million or \$200 million," depending on the size of the company. We did not get any such requests for any pay out, fortunately. But the problem there was that there was a particular level of vulnerability because there were some people within the governmental system who were in fact going to get into your PC, for example, we have all the

government PCs and they are linked to the network, so they can get into your system through your computers depending on what site you yourself visit.

Most of the shutdown took place as a precautionary measure. We shut it down because we did not want the different Ministries or organisations like TLTB to be actually vulnerable to any further attacks or any further breaches. The information of course, was secured from what we can see there is no leakages of such of the information. But there were couple of Ministry that we found that they had gone off and done their own thing and not had actually kept up with the standards that required of this particular Ministries. So, yes, that has been addressed in this particular instance.

We have also reached out to a number of companies. There are some you know Australia, et cetera that specialised in this. We have had the assistance of the Australian Government. They have a cyber-security assistance team and they are working very closely with ITC, in terms of identifying the problem and how we can stop this in the future.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to refer to the other component of my question which s the Honourable Minister has not covered and that is what about the server for TLTB, given that it was made vulnerable. Is that being considered for them to have their own? It is not said whether the allocation here under SEG 9 – Storage and Service System Capacity \$2,906,416. Would that be used to correct that system or within ITC or what is that allocation for those two components, please?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- It is not a question about something to correct the system, it is the software attack. It is not a physical attack. So they actually go in site to software, the spread of virus and they know how to stop the virus. That is what it's about. It does necessary mean that physically infrastructure is vulnerable, per se. So, that is the point different.

In respect of TLTB I mean TLTB always talk to ITC about this. The technical people are liaising there. There is a core relationship between TLTB and Ministry of iTaukei Affairs and MLC because of no exactly who are the people who are members of the Landowning Unit so there is verification. That is the connection to make sure that the list of individual landowners in which the Landowning Unit is up to date then you know people will passed on. They still not in the list and that is where you have the connectivity and there are always be the case. So, there is no vulnerability per se to answer your question if you have all the rights built around it.

As I have said that there are precautionary measures who were taken to shut it down in case people get into the system to try and change it. That is really an issue. So, from our perspective obviously I cannot say there is no threat. I mean this threats are constantly everywhere. There are people who do these things for ransom. People do these things for political purposes. People just do these things because they are very good, they just like to show their mates that they are trying to hacking to the system.

So, we have been talking like I said to the Australian Authorities. They are currently helping us with it, building capacity. We also have access some new servers. That was in fact provided to us and we have the right to capacity at that point in time.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, we will move on.

Question put.

Head 16 agreed to.

Head 17 – Ministry of Civil Service

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The floor is now open for comments on Head No.17-1-1.

Question put.

Head 17 agreed to.

Head 18 – Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for any comments for Programme 2(1).

HON. P.W. VOSANIBOLA.- I just seek clarification on Programme 2(1) on the reduction in Established Staff and Wage Earners. Does this mean that some of the staff will have to go? Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Minister, you have the floor

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman. No, it does not mean that we will lose staff but the agreement I think with other ministries, there are some posts that are put on freeze because they have not been filled for some time and of course, with this comes the acting allowances and other expenses that go with these posts as well. Thank you, Sir.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Just to clarify from the Civil Service perspective. If the Honourable Member for example the different programmes, you will see one of them is increase and some of the others has a slight decrease. It is again like I mentioned earlier on, it is fixing the right amount of money to the post that have already been filled. That is the reason why.

HON. P.W. VOSANIBOLA.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman. On Programme 2, SEG 7 on Community Capacity Building. May I seek the Minister clarification on this programme?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Head 18-2-2(7). Honourable Minister.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Sir. The Community Capacity Building has been here since the integrated Rural Development Framework in 2009 and of course, as the name of the votes specifies it is the capacity development of those that do join as a new member. For example, this August there will be changes in District Advisory Councillors and every now and then the *Turaga-ni-koro* and *Mata-ni-Tikina* through the various community development fund are introduced to the processes particularly knowing what is available in the various machineries of government as well. Not only in rural development. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Head 18 agreed to.

Head 19 – Republic of Fiji Military Forces

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, Head No. 19, the floor is now open for any comments. Programme 1, Activity 1. Honourable Gavoka, you have the floor.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- SEG 8, Sir. Can we be given an update on the upgrade/ renovation of RFMF, the structure, amenities and office buildings, \$250,000? Upgrade/ Renovation of RFMF quarters and barracks, \$250,000. At a time like this when we need to put money in the hands of people, why are we carrying out these projects. These are low priorities in our eyes, Mr. Chair.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Programme 1, Activity 1. Which SEG are you referring to?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- SEG 8, Sir. Renovations, upgrades.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Mr. Chair, Sir. Maintenance programmes need to be continued. I think in the Budget Debate, we have just heard from the Opposition that the RFMF facilities are currently being utilised to support CWM Hospital. So, this is why such maintenance works are so essential, Mr. Speaker, Sir, so that is why it is there. We understand the state of the facilities that we have throughout all government departments, so we need to allocate funding so that it continues.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Yes, Chair.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Tikoduadua, is that your voice?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Yes, thank you, Chair. I just need to ask the Minister, earlier on in Parliament I had asked about those officers that have retired and would have gone into the retired list and most of them in the Territorial Force. Has there been an update so far in terms of the use of those officers continuing in their service in the RFMF. I believe I asked for a number and I believe it is around 200. Is there an update in that regard, talking about the territorial force, particularly under SEG 1.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chair, can I clarify through you to the Honourable Member. Is he talking about the engagement beyond retiring age because that was an earlier question that was raised by them in Parliament? Is that what he is after, Sir?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Tikoduadua, would you clarify your question.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Yes, that is correct, Chair.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Chair. Following that question that was raised in Parliament in February, I remember correctly, by the NFP. I had received a directive from the Office of the Prime Minister and that has been conveyed to the Commander RFMF as well because as you are very well aware, Mr. Chairman, employment beyond retiring age is not new, but based on the skills and seniority and the level of the investment, particularly when it comes to senior officers level as well. But the progress out of that, Mr. Chairman, the RFMF has been directed through my Office in a letter that I have signed and it is with the Commander now about that issue.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you, Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote on Head 19 - The Republic of Fiji Military Forces.

Question put.

Head 19 agreed to.

Head 20 - Fiji Police Force

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, the floor is open for debate and comments on Programme 1-1. Honourable Lynda Tabuya, you have the floor.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you. Can I just ask on the Programme 1-1(8) on the ongoing construction works at the Police Stations as well as renovations, extensions and upgrades? And then the upgrade of the Nasese Dog Kennel, can the Honourable Minister just give an update on those capital projects? Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you. Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In as far as the Police Stations are concerned, again there is an allocation and hopefully we will be able to complete these Stations: Lautoka, Nadi and, of course, Nakasi, except for Nalawa, probably that will go into the next financial year as well, but that is progressing well because of the contracts that have been signed, we just need to complete the projects.

For the upgrade of the dog kennel at the Nasese, of course, there is funding of \$150,000 provided for the design and the build of the dog kennel at Nasese for the current financial year. In fact, the major project that has been undertaken in Nasese in the current financial year which has just been commissioned lately, was the new transport pool garage and the necessary equipment that come with it now, we should be able to do their maintenance with big fleet that the Police Force has. But they have the state of the art garage now in Nasese and I think the only major component of that capital project that we are waiting for now, is the generator backup that probably is coming from New Zealand because of the capacity involved. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Chairman, just also to add some clarity into that, just specifically for Nakasi Police Station, that is expected to be completed by 1st March next year, the actual construction site is around 51 percent completed with the total cost of \$35.9 million. The completion day for the Nadi Police Station is yet to identified, but the actual work on site is 81 percent and the Lautoka Police Station is expected to be completed by 15th December this year.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Gavoka, you have the floor.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Yes, Mr. Chair. This brings into question the approach to budgeting being taken by the Government. All these in SEG 8 will all be part in Head 50, that amounts to \$713 million. It is a dishonest way of doing budgeting at a time like this, Mr. Chair, because we should really be budgeting on a scenario basis to find the money to live through the emergency that we have today. Having all these under request really does not help us set up a way to look after our people at this time.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- You did not even give an alternative Budget. You yourself did not give an alternative budget.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- No, no, you miss the point. At a time like this we should be going on zero budgeting, not this programme budgeting. You talk about all the huge sums that are on request, it is only inflated. We need to face reality, we need to live today for the next three or four months to

support our people. I mean there are things that we need to do as a country. You are talking about 'cannot afford a lockdown'. We can afford a lockdown if you go on scenario budgeting and look at what you need to do instead of this programme budgeting. You just lack imagination, Government - same old, same old.

If you run a business you will go to zero budgeting and find money for the next three or four months, not the way you are doing it here you know with all inflated sums that you will never get used.

Mr. Chair, this is just an indication of how inflated this thing is and very dishonest in many ways.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Chair, could I just provide clarification, please?

Honourable Gavoka is obviously just wandering in the woods. He is trying to claim some form of credibility but even doing something ....

He says that this is in Head 50. What nonsense? This is Head 20. The allocation SEG 8, Head 20, Programme 1, Activity 1. How can he say it is in Head 50? What a lot of babbling and he is saying that these are obviously inflated. He cannot even justify what he is saying. These are actually based on contracts. We actually have signed contracts. We know the thing about the private sector construction industry, we have what we call 'progressive payments'. You finish one stage and you get paid and these allocations have been made. The contracts regarding Nakasi, Nadi and Lautoka Police Stations have already been signed. Works have already commenced; 51 percent completed; 81 percent completed; 65 percent completed. There are people on job sites.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Tell him, Honourable Minister.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- There are people working on job sites and these payments need to be made, we have a contractual obligation. In the same way, for example, we do works when we come to help, people have been engaged so we can improve the quality of services.

I cannot understand what he is rambling on about. It is under (R) because there are people who actually are going to assess it. So, for example, the guys from Lautoka who are building in Lautoka, one month they may come and make a claim of, say, half a million dollars saying, 'we have done XYZ. The construction implementation unit people check against what they have claimed. They check against the contract then the Permanent Secretary for Economy will then release the funds. That is why it is under (R) because they have to check all of this, because they are large amounts of money.

When the claims are made on a monthly or every two months basis, there is the amount that is actually relevant and then it is released. If it less than \$1 million, we, as Ministers do not get to see the light of day, it actually goes through all the Permanent Secretaries, that is how it works. I cannot understand what he is waffling on about.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Gavoka, you have the floor.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Chairman, the \$713 million sitting in Head 50, and all these "R" the likelihood of them being spent is very little. We can prove to this House that while we budget for a \$3 billion budget, we can only spend \$2 billion. We can show you figures over the last couple of years.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Prove!

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- We can show you figures. Your own figures we can show it to you that you do not have the capacity to spend what you have budgeted, I can prove it to you, so this is where I am coming from. At a time like this, let us sharpen the pencil, let us work on reality for the next four months. Find out exactly how much it cost to bring this country through this period instead of coming up with these inflated figures, that is totally meaningless given the challenges we face today.

I can prove to you, Honourable Dr. Reddy, that we are not spending the total budget here. If we are lucky, we are spending about \$2 million, not \$3 billion.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, just stick to what is on the programme.

HON. MEMBER.- It is only five of us.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- I support.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Ah! What is the problem?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Your own figures, we can show you your own figures

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Do not argue across the floor. If you want to raise a point, raise it through the Chairman, not the Speaker, raise it through the Chairman. You have the floor, Honourable Dr. Reddy.

(Laughter)

Do not ask for the floor again.

Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote on Head No. 20 - Fiji Police Force

Question put.

Head 20 agreed to.

#### Head 21 - Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for comments on Head 21 Programme 1, Activity 1. Honourable Kepa, you have the floor.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Mr. Chairman, this is on Programme 1-1(1) - Established Staff: Why is there a huge reduction for this allocation from \$31.6 million to \$4.8 million? What does that mean in terms of the staff that are there? Is there going to be a reduction in staff or what is happening there with this allocation?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Minister, you have the floor

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman, through you, as the Honourable Attorney-General mentioned during his Budget Address, in this financial year, we have correctly aligned the programme and activities as given below.

On the Personal Emoluments, if you look at the figure for 2021-2022, it has been re-adjusted. The salary figures mentioned in Programme 2, Activity 2 are for non-government primary schools, so what has happened is different programmes and different activities have that allocation for salaries for staff which includes the acting allowances as well. Actually the reduction in this SEG is only for headquarters staff and the rest of the amount has been in the various programmes as we go along. So, there is no reduction in salaries, there is no reduction in teaching staff, it is just that the Budget has been correctly realigned to programmes and activities.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- So, Mr. Chairman, what the Minister is saying there is that there will not be any reduction in staff there, no staff will be laid off in terms of this allocation. Is that correct, Chair?

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Chair, through you - Exactly! If the Honourable Member had been listening, there is going to be no reduction in salaries and no acting allowances will be ceased. Initially the Budget had every salary lumped up in this SEG and as I have said that, now the salaries are correctly aligned to different programmes and activities.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I think just to help Honourable Kepa, if she were to look at the summary of the Ministry of Education page, if you look at SEG 1, you will in fact see an increase in the amount. So she should not just be mono-focused and just look at one programme and one activity because if she were to look at, Programme 2, Activity 2, if she looks at Programme 3, Activity 2 and if she looked at Programme 3, Activity 3, she will see all the SEG 1s have increased.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you. We will move on.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- To ask in terms of the staff, the second question, Mr. Chair, is on the same SEG, SEG 6. Can the Minister explain why there is a reduction in the operating grants and transfers in that SEG from \$26.3 million to \$21.4 million considering that this allocation caters for the contribution to United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the National Substance Abuse Advisory Council, Fiji Higher Education Commission, Fiji Teachers Registration Authority, Commonwealth of Learning, Transport Assistance and Tertiary Scholarships and Loans Board (TSLB). Can the Honourable Minister explain that, Honourable Chair? Why this reduction?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you. Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Thank you. Chair. The Fiji Teachers Registration Authority, is an operational grant given to them and the Commonwealth of Learning, (CoL) that is our annual subscription - the number given there is FJ\$163,500 and our contribution to CoL is calculated in USD and because of the changes in the currency and the value, we have adjusted that. The transport assistance, \$17 million, there is a decrease because schools have remained closed, Mr. Chair, Sir, and we anticipate the schools to remain closed for a further time as we do not know when the Ministry of Health and Medical Services is going to give us the advisory to start that. The TSLB, that is an operational grant, that is \$1.5 million given for the board to operate. The allocation of the actual amount is under Head 50. AG, is that right?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- As the Honourable Minister highlighted, Honourable Kepa, the \$4 million essentially comes from the transport assistance reduction, because there has been no school and the schools will not there for the next few months, therefore, you do not have to allocate that much money for transportation. So the transportation assistance has been reduced by \$4.3

million, which essentially the bulk of that reduction that you see there. That is where it is coming from.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- I want to thank the Honourable Minister for that response. It is the last question on that same SEG, Mr. Chairman. The students have been out of school now for four months and when they get back to school, they will be a very different type of person and also the teachers, because of the experiences they have been through over the COVID-19. There used to be an allocation here. Mr. Chairman, and that was for student counsellors and also for school chaplains. How are they going to be able to provide the counselling that the students will need when they get back to school, because the teachers are not trained or qualified in that area? How are they going to cope with this quarter million young people going back to school at this time, whenever that is? How they are going to cope with the much needed assistance for students, because if they do not provide that, there are going to be all sorts of problems.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you. Honourable Minister you have the floor.

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As a former Education Minister, I am sure Honourable Kepa knows that our teachers are the best counsellors in the classroom, with or without training, because they have the best experiences with their students. But, on the other hand, Mr. Chairman, we have trained counsellors who are deployed in the Divisions and these counsellors have recently graduated from APTC with the assistance of DFAT and Ministry of Education. These counsellors are not teachers, we have taken them out of the classrooms and have given them specified roles to act as counsellors. So, this is a situation that we have never encountered before, Mr. Chairman, but I can assure the Honourable Member that we work very well with the Ministry of Women who have specially trained counsellors from MSP and Empower Pacific and they will assist us.

Mr. Chairman, DFAT is also on board with us to ensure that whence schools do open we have intermission packages. Teachers, during last *TC Yasa* and *TC Ana* were also trained in Divisions how to handle students when they come back. So, that will surely going to help us and counselling is an area of concern and that is the reason why we know are offering scholarships in counselling and we encourage people, who are not even teachers, to take up this scholarship to see that we can boost our counselling workshop. Mr. Chairman, I would just love to say this, parents are the best counsellors. Whilst schools remain closed, we are constantly in touch with parents and teachers so that our children are ready when schools do open and they are not neglected during this time of school closure. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you. Programme 2-1. Honourable Lynda Tabuya, you have the floor.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you Mr. Chairman. Just a query on Programme 2-1-6. If the Honourable Minister can explain that reduction in the Free Education Grant for the primary schools?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Minister.

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It obvious that schools will remain closed for some time. The Free Education Grant is to cater for schools to run efficiently and Government pays every child a certain amount of education grant which covers fees, sporting activities and all the other expenses in schools. With schools remaining closed and with the Ministry already disbursing some funds for this term which we thought will be in operation - we do not need that extra fund, that would just be surplus funds that we have. So, actually we do not need that at this time.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- If you look at Programme 2-2 you will see that the \$31 million has gone from the General Administration and has now been actually put into the Non-Government Primary Schools. Before it was stuck in administration as the Honourable Minister said earlier on, but now it has been allocated to the right programme and right activity.

So that you will see, has essentially been brought down to the Non-Government Primary Schools because most primary schools in Fiji are all non-government. I do not think there is any government primary school and may be one or two so that amount has actually come from General Administration Programme 2-1 and has been brought down to Programme 2-2 - the \$31.8 million. That is where it has gone to.

But the Honourable Minister has also made a valid point in that some of these amounts will obviously be recused in any case, because the schools are not operating.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Leawere, you have the floor.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman. On SEG 9 in terms of Purchase of Water Tanks which is about \$60,000. Can the Honourable Minister enlighten us as to how many schools will benefit from this allocation, please?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you, Honourable Minister.

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Mr. Chairman, through you these things are distributed on a needs basis, as and when schools request them. We give out these water tanks but at the same time we have our partners in DFAT who have always been good for assistance in having these tanks delivered to schools that are in need especially during cyclones and disasters. So, it is on a needs basis.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Honourable Minister.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Programme 2-2. Honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa.

HON. RO T. KEPA.- SEG 6, Mr. Chairman. The question to the Honourable Minister is on this allocation on the Free Education Grant from the Auditor-General Reports on the administration of this grant, there have been internal controlled deficiencies. Can the Honourable Minister explain how they are working on these internal controls, because almost every year it is under Auditor-General's Report and there is a big wastage in this allocation? So, can the Honourable Minister, explain how they are improving on the administration of that grant?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I was hoping that Honourable Kepa would say that this Free Education Grant by the Government is very positive and taking off a lot of burdens from our families and children. But in terms of internal control, yes, now we have revised our Full Management Handbook to ensure that there is proper management of the grant that is given and we have in the past – I would agree that the grant has been abused - and the new management handbook actually gives the signatory of the new management handbook to the Head of School, we can hold the Head of School more accountable.

Previously, we had school managements having greater control of these funds and these funds are given to schools and school managements to ensure that the conducive learning of the children is promoted. The one with the financial accountability given to the Head of School, the second we are in the process of having a grant agreement signed between the ministry, the school management and

the Head of School and of course, when we find reports of abuse of these grants come to us, the ministry centralises the grants and we take charge of the grants under the headquarters.

Of course, at times it creates a bit of inconvenient but we want to make sure that every taxpayers' dollar is accountable for. We keep on identifying schools which require further support and trainings in terms of managing these grants especially with new Head of Schools coming in. We try to prepare the Head of School to ensure that there all financial management transactions are recorded and the headquarters is always on to them.

We have a zero tolerance approach to fraud and corruption in our schools. We have sort of come down very strict on the heads of schools as well. Our internal auditors are also working with the Divisions to ensure that money that is given through the Free Education Grant is properly managed. It is a huge amount and we are putting in internal controls like I have mentioned to see that the grant is utilised for the purpose it is given.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- On Programme 3-1(5) – Sanitary Pads; can the Honourable Minister explain how that is going to be done particularly in terms of the rural remote and maritime schools?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you. Honourable Minister Programme 3-1(5).

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the information of the House. This is a new initiative by the FijiFirst Government, never been done before. So, I will bring to the House when our project paper and submission is done and will inform the House how we will be working on distributing the sanitary pads because like Honourable Kepa said, we have a lot of maritime and we have got rural schools but we have a plan in place. When it is finalised, I will bring to the House.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Programme 3, Activity 2. The Honourable Gavoka.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Chairman, can the Honourable Minister guarantee to the House that this new initiative will eventuate because FijiFirst is known for a lot of new initiatives that never saw the light of the day. So, what guarantee can you give us that this will happen? Some have just started and then disappeared, so what guarantee that do you have that this is going to happen.

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- You need me to give it to you in writing.

My apologies, I think my mic was mute. Honourable Gavoka, I am giving you my word now that this will be a very successful project which is going to benefit a lot of our primary and secondary school girls and like I said, it is a new initiative. It has just been announced last week and we are working on it. I will bring it back to the House on how we intend to disseminate these sanitary pads.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you Mr. Chairman. We are all for it but your government is known for execution issues. You got execute what you promise. We would like to see this happen. I mean you promised, did you promise laptops et cetera, at one time?

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- No, we did not.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- He did.

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- No, Honourable Gavoka.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Do not discuss things amongst yourselves, through the Chairman.

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Mr. Chairman, may I?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- You promised to bring it to the House, I look forward to that and I hope you will look forward to that too Honourable Gavoka and we will probably see what progress would be made after that. We will move on.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Chairman, through you. Can we get some details from the Honourable Minister in terms of SEG 5, the boarding school food and supplies? I know that the amount has been consistent in terms of the allocation. It is \$2.8 million. Can we get some information on the number of students that would be catered in this allocation, in the various boarding schools please? Would you be able to advise the House please?

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Through you, Mr. Chairman, unfortunately, I do not have the exact numbers of the students in our boarding schools right now with me but every child who is a boarder, the funding allocated through this, will be for the school to procure food and supplies for every border in our government boarding schools.

We have not made any term two payments because the schools were closed but you will see over the years, this Government has increased the amount of allocation for food for our children. At the same time, we encourage boarding schools to produce their own fruits and vegetables. They have their own fish ponds, they have their own livestock and poultry and this money is also used to supplement the food that they grow in their own campuses.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Programme 6, Activity 1. Just a clarification in terms of the government schools' repairs and maintenance. Where are they listed? Are they listed under the asset monitoring unit? The repairs and maintenance for government schools since now the school is on a break from COVID-19, so we just want to check where are they included in the programme for the Ministry of Education?

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Alright. I think we have stripped that. But this year the Budget includes an allocation for work to be done on government schools.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Can I assist the Minister? It is in Programme 1, Activity 1, Honourable Minister. We went through that. SEG 8, upgrade and maintenance of government schools, \$265,000, it is there. Normally that is put under General Administration, You will not see that in the actual Programme 6, Activity 1. That is the asset monitoring unit, the actual expenditure is in Programme 1-1(8).

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Mr. Chairman, SEG 7; this is under the Levuka World Heritage, \$4,000. Can the Honourable Minister just give us some clarification on what that \$4,000 will be used for?

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Through you, Mr. Chairman, this allocation is to support the cultural activities in Levuka and to promote Levuka as a heritage site. With the funds provided in the next financial year, the following activities would be supported; \$1000 for world heritage in young hand to carry out their programmes and activities; there is a joint world heritage programme with the tourism programmes which has been given a \$1,000; and the Levuka Craft Fair will also benefit from this allocation of \$800.

HON. RO T.V. KEPÄ.- How does that tie in with SEG 10 on the Rehabilitation of Levuka World Heritage Structure? How do the two connect?

HON. R.S. AKBÄR.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman. A lot of work is also done by the Ministry of Local Government in terms of heritage and this is how it ties in with the Heritage and Arts and the Local Government. Both these Departments are looking at that and I am sure the Honourable Minister for Local Government will also talk about this.

HON. RO T.V. KEPÄ.- The last question on that on SEG 7 and SEG 10. There has been some concerns from people who live in Levuka, where they have been told to maintain their properties according to the cultural heritage criteria. The question they posed was; does this come into that tying up of maintaining their properties according to the standard of the UNESCO cultural heritage criteria?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you. Honourable Minister you have the floor.

HON. R.S. AKBÄR.- Honourable KepÄ, can I please have that question again?

HON. RO T.V. KEPÄ.- Mr. Chairman, the question was from the Levuka people because they have been advised to maintain their properties according to a certain standard and criteria, which is with the cultural heritage standard. Does this allocation have anything to play in regard to the maintaining of those properties?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Minister.

HON. R.S. AKBÄR.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Like I mentioned it is maintaining heritage and looking after public buildings and properties is a collaborated effort. I am aware that the Ministry of Local Government is also part of this. As of date today, our budgetary allocation is going to play a part in that. Unfortunately, the Department of Heritage mostly oversees the work, because we do not have experts when it comes to building maintenance and that is why we partner with other organisations.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote on Head 21- Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts.

Question put.

Head 21 agreed to.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, we have now concluded voting on Heads 1 to 21. We will now adjourn the Committee of Supply until tomorrow. Honourable Members, I will now resume the Speaker's Chair in order to adjourn the House.

The House resumed:

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I thank you for your contributions to today's proceedings, which has brought us to the end of the sitting for today. We have covered Heads 1 to 21 and we will continue with the rest of the Heads tomorrow at 9.30 a.m. We adjourn and I hope you enjoy your evening.

The Parliament adjourned at 4.36 p.m.