

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

MONDAY, 20TH SEPTEMBER, 2021

[CORRECTED COPY]

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MONDAY, 20TH SEPTEMBER, 2021

The Parliament resumed at 9.53 a.m. pursuant to notice.

HONOURABLE SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

Hon. Josai Voreqe Bainimarama, Prime Minister and Minister for iTaukei Affairs, Sugar Industry, Foreign Affairs and Forestry
Hon. Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum, Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service, Communications and Housing and Community Development
Hon. Lt. Col. Inia Batikoto Seruiratu, Minister for Defence, National Security and Policing, Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management
Hon. Parveen Kumar Bala, Minister for Employment, Productivity, Industrial Relations and Youth and Sports
Hon. Rosy Sofia Akbar, Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation
Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy, Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment
Hon. Cdr. Semi Tuleca Koroilavesau, Minister for Fisheries
Hon. Faiyaz Siddiq Koya, Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport
Hon. Jone Usamate, Minister for Infrastructure, Meteorological Services, Lands and Mineral Resources
Hon. Dr. Ifereimi Waqainabete, Minister for Health and Medical Services
Hon. Premila Devi Kumar, Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts and Local Government
Hon. Alexander David O'Connor, Assistant Minister for Health and Medical Services
Hon. Veena Kumar Bhatnagar, Assistant Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation
Hon. Vijay Nath, Assistant Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Disaster Management and Meteorological Services
Hon. Alvick Avhikrit Maharaj, Assistant Minister for Employment, Productivity, Industrial Relations, Youth and Sports
Hon. Alipate Tuicolo Nagata, Assistant Minister for Employment, Productivity, Industrial Relations and Youth and Sports
Hon. Jale Sigarara, Assistant Minister for Agriculture and Maritime Development
Hon. Viam Pillay, Assistant Minister for Environment and Rural Development
Hon. George Vegnathan, Assistant Minister for Sugar Industry
Hon. Selai Adimaitoga, Assistant Minister for iTaukei Affairs
Hon. Mitieli Bulanauca
Hon. Mosese Drecala Bilitavu
Hon. Viliame Rogoibulu Gavoka
Hon. Dr. Salik Ram Govind
Hon. Anare Jale
Hon. Ro Teimumu Vuikaba Kepa
Hon. Sanjay Salend Kirpal
Hon. Inosi Kuridrani
Hon. Virendra Lal
Hon. Dr. Ratu Atonio Lalabalavu
Hon. Mikaele Rokosova Leawere
Hon. Ratu Suliano Matanitobua
Hon. Osea Naiqamu
Hon. Ratu Tevita Navurelevu
Hon. Joseph Nitya Nand

Hon. Professor Biman C. Prasad
Hon. Lenora Salusalu Qereqeretabua
Hon. Adi Litia Qionibaravi
Hon. Aseri Masivou Radrodro
Hon. Salote Vuibureta Radrodro
Hon. Simione Rokomalo Rasova
Hon. Jese Saukuru
Hon. Rohit Ritesh Sharma
Hon. Lynda Diseru Tabuya
Hon. Lt. Col. Pio Tikoduadua
Hon. Ro Filipe Tuisawau
Hon. Peceli Waqairatu Vosanibola
Hon. Tanya Waqanika
Hon. S. Nand

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Friday, 20th August, 2021, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome

HON. SPEAKER.- I welcome all Honourable Members to today's sitting of Parliament, a most warm welcome. I have not seen you in Parliament for such a long time and it is good to have a full House. I also welcome those who are not here or might be here in spirit. I also welcome those watching the live broadcast and the live streaming of today's proceedings from the comfort of their homes, offices and electronic devices. Thank you for your continued interest in the workings of your Parliament.

Responses to Written Questions

Honourable Members, at this juncture, I wish to advise that responses to the following Written Questions have been received:

- (1) Written Question No. 72/2021 by the Honourable Mikaele Leawere from the Honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity, Industrial Relations, Youth and Sports;
- (2) Written Question Nos. 137/2021, 153/2021, 172/2021 and 190/2021, by the Honourable Jese Saukuru and the Honourable Inosi Kuridrani, from the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment; and
- (3) Written Question Nos. 116/2021 and 162/2021 by the Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua and by Honourable Salote Radrodro, from the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical

Services.

The responses have been provided to the respective Honourable Members and copies uploaded on the Parliament website.

Disruption to Official Emails

Honourable Members, it was brought to my attention that there were intermittent disruptions to the official e-mails and, therefore, notification pertaining to the two Ministerial Statements could not be sent electronically until much later. However, I can assure the House that hard copies were provided to the Opposition Parties.

Claims Circulating on Social Media

Honourable Members, I will now address the issue of the claims circulating on social media, television, radio and published in the newspapers. This is an insinuation against the Office of the Speaker and the Secretariat. The actions of the Speaker and the Secretariat are in accordance with, and always are, with the Standing Orders of Parliament. The Speaker has not prevented debate on the floor of Parliament. The Speaker, with the assistance of the Secretariat, is there to facilitate the debate and ensure this is efficiently and effectively conducted within the parameters of the Standing Orders of Parliament and other parliamentary procedures and practices dictated by precedents.

As all the Members of the Business Committee are aware, including Members from both sides of the House, when Questions and Motions are submitted, the Secretariat conducts an extensive vetting process in accordance with the provisions of the Standing Orders. This also involves continuous consultations with the respective Parties represented in Parliament. The Speaker is also involved in this process. It is important to note that during the vetting process, Questions and Motions which do not meet the requirements stipulated in the Standing Orders, as well as previous decisions of the Business Committee, are ruled out of order, and therefore, would not appear on the Order Paper.

When this process is concluded, then the Questions and Motions are further put before the Business Committee for final consideration. It is also important to note that the Business Committee will have the final say in all businesses that will be dealt with in the Parliament Sittings. The Standing Orders of Parliament are the guiding rules that regulates proceedings and procedures of Parliament. In that regard, it is imperative for all Honourable Members to fully understand the provisions, and therefore, do adhere to the guiding provisions of the Standing Orders. Thank you, Honourable Members. We will move on.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND CERTAIN DOCUMENTS

HON. SPEAKER.- The following Reports were tabled by the Ministers responsible in accordance with Standing Order 38(1), and referred to the relevant Standing Committee for deliberation, in accordance with Standing Order 38(2):

Standing Committee on Economic Affairs

- (1) 2018 – 2019 Ministry of Sugar Industry Annual Report; and
- (2) 2020 Fiji Sugar Corporation Annual Report.

Standing Committee on Natural Resources

- (1) 2015 Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources Annual Report to Parliament.

I now call upon the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs to table his Report. You have the floor, Sir.

PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

Review Report - Fiji National University 2019 Annual Report – Standing Committee on Social Affairs

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to present the report of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs on the review of the Fiji National University 2019 Annual Report. This review was undertaken in accordance with Standing Order 109(2)(b), which mandates the Committee to look into issues related to health, education, social services, labour, culture and media. The Committee first met to deliberate in April and formulated questions pertaining to the Annual Report.

In order to comply with health directives and protocols on public gathering and social distancing, the Committee accepted a written response from the Fiji National University in lieu of a face-to-face hearing. Following our deliberations on its written response, we wrote to the University requesting for further clarification on other related matters. Upon receipt of all relevant information on the Committee's queries, the Committee compiled its findings and subsequently endorsed its report in August.

At this juncture, I wish to thank the Vice-Chancellor of the Fiji National University, Professor Toby Wilkinson, and his staff for their timely assistance in this review process. I also extend my gratitude to my Committee colleagues, namely: Honourable George Vegnathan (Deputy Chairperson), Honourable Alipate Nagata, Honourable Salote Radrodoro and Honourable Dr. Ratu Atonio Lalabalavu, for their contributions during the Committee's deliberations.

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

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move

A motion without notice that a debate on the content of the report is initiated at a future sitting.

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

HON. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs to table his Report. You have the floor.

Review Report - Fiji Airports 2018-2019 Annual Report - Standing Committee on Social Affairs

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to present the report of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs on the review of Fiji Airports 2018-2019 Annual Report. This review was undertaken in accordance with Standing Order 109 (2) (b), which mandates the Committee to look into issues related to health, education, social services, labour, culture and media. The Committee first met to

deliberate in April and formulated questions pertaining to the Annual Report.

In order to comply with health directives and protocols on public gathering and social distancing, the Committee accepted a written response from the Fiji Airports in lieu of a face-to-face hearing. Following our deliberations on its written response, we wrote to the Fiji Airports requesting for further clarification on other related matters. Upon receipt of all relevant information on the Committee's queries, the Committee compiled its findings and subsequently endorsed its report in August. At this juncture, I wish to thank the Chairman of Fiji Airports, Mr. Geoffrey Shaw, and the Fiji Airports Management for their timely assistance in this review process.

I also extend my gratitude to my Committee colleagues, namely: Honourable George Vegnathan (Deputy Chairperson), Honourable Alipate Nagata, Honourable Salote Radrodoro and Honourable Dr. Ratu Atonio Lalabalavu, for their contributions during the Committee's deliberations.

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

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move:

A motion without notice that a debate on the content of the Report is initiated at a future sitting.

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

HON. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

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

Review Report - Fiji National Sports Commission August 2018-July 2019 Annual Report -
Standing Committee on Social Affairs

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present the Report of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs on the annual review of the Fiji National Sports Commission for the period August 2018 to July 2019. This review was undertaken in accordance with Standing Order 109(2)(b) which mandates the Committee to look into issues related to health, education, social services, labour, culture and media. The Committee first met to deliberate in April and formulated questions pertaining to the Annual Report.

In order to comply with health directives and protocols on public gathering and social distancing, the Committee accepted a written response from the Fiji National Sports Commission in lieu of a face-to-face hearing. Following our deliberations on its written response, we wrote to the Sports Commission requesting for further clarification on other related matters. Upon receipt of all relevant information on the Committee's queries, the Committee compiled its findings and subsequently endorsed its report in August.

At this juncture, I wish to thank the Executive Chairman of the Fiji National Sports Commission, Mr Peter Mazey and his staff for their timely assistance in this review process. I also extend my gratitude to my Committee colleagues, namely: Honourable George Vegnathan (Deputy Chairperson), Honourable Alipate Nagata, Honourable Salote Radrodoro and Honourable Dr. Ratu Atonio Lalabalavu, for their contributions during the Committee's deliberations.

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

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move:

A motion without notice that a debate on the content of the Report is initiated at a future sitting.

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

HON. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the following Ministers have given notice to make Ministerial Statements under Standing Order 40:

- (1) Minister for Health and Medical Services; and
- (2) Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment.

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

Honourable Members, I now call on the Minister for Health and Medical Services to deliver his Statement. You have the floor, Sir.

Update on National COVID-19 Response and Vaccination Campaign

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- The Honourable Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Cabinet Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and Honourable Members of Parliament. Sir, I, again, also congratulate the Secretary-General to Parliament on her appointment and wish her all the best. I rise again before this august House to give a brief update on our National COVID-19 Response, our vaccination campaign and the work that we are doing with other ministries and the Government in terms of strengthening our resolve towards the new normal.

Mr. Speaker, as of last evening, we had 97.7 percent of the target population who had received their first dose of the COVID-19 vaccines and more than 63 percent are now fully vaccinated nationwide. Again, I reiterate the Honourable Prime Minister's acknowledgement of the thousands of Fijians who have stepped forward to be vaccinated. You truly are the reason why we arrived here, and we thank you.

We also encourage everyone of us - the 97.7 percent, to come forward for your second dose. The announcement last week by the Honourable Prime Minister on achieving more than 60 percent of two-dose vaccination coverage and the easing of restrictions has cemented our conviction of the vaccine's impact in reducing and ultimately halting the chain of community transmission in our communities.

As a nation, we fought a long and hard battle together since April 2020 and our achievement speaks for itself across the region and the world, and we are slowly and surely becoming one of the safest travel destinations across the earth because of our high vaccination coverage. With each jab in the arm, our nation is proving that COVID-19 vaccines have the ability to reduce a person's chance of becoming seriously ill, needing hospitalisation or dying from COVID-19.

As I have shared previously, these vaccines provide lifesaving protection from the complications of severe COVID-19 and also protection against death. Although a fully vaccinated person may still get infected, they are more likely to experience mild symptoms or asymptomatic because of the protection provided by the vaccine. Our national goal remains to protect our family, friends, workmates and colleagues from becoming seriously ill, dying from the virus, and we look forward to having as many people as possible to be fully vaccinated, which are also protecting the vulnerable, including those above 80 years, those with comorbidities, disabilities and pregnant women.

We, again, acknowledge the support of our multilateral partners, COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access (COVAX) Facility, in the provision of doses of COVID-19 vaccines for all eligible individuals in Fiji. We continue to monitor our vaccination campaign to ensure the efficiency of delivery and the usage of the vaccine, as well as its impact on our communities. With the assistance of the many arms of Government and members of our communities, our vaccination teams are trekking rugged terrains in the highlands and crossing rivers and oceans to deliver vaccine to everyone, ensuring that we leave no one behind.

We also, with the support of our health partners in the private sector, such as our general practitioners and private hospitals who we had worked with in the past for our normal vaccination programme for babies, as well as in the mass vaccination programmes, such as the Measles Vaccination Campaign in 2019 to maximise our vaccination reach and facilitate the protection of all sections of our community.

Mr. Speaker, we are building on the experience and success of Fiji's routine immunisation programme, and also ensuring that our national vaccine deployment plan with the whole of Government approach, to reach as many people as possible in the deadlines that we have in place. The use of human resources for many Ministries and agencies, vehicles, infrastructure and multiple Government mechanisms have been used in the vaccination rollout, technical support from the Ministry of Health and also our multilateral partners.

Our success to-date in the vaccination campaign and activities in the pandemic such as contact tracing patient-care cannot be possible without the tireless efforts of many more that have supported the Ministry of Health and the many civil servants that have risen to the call.

Timely response from our partners have also ensured efficient delivery of vaccines. As we steadily increase our current vaccination coverage, our wish is that all eligible Fijians is protected from

COVID-19. The majority of mortality in this pandemic can occur at home or before they reach the hospital, among the unvaccinated.

For our mob-up vaccination approach, we are identifying the pockets of unvaccinated population and conducting opportunistic vaccination to those who have missed the opportunity to do so. This process has commenced in the greater Suva-Nausori and Sigatoka- Nadi corridors, and have already picked up segments of the population, some with vulnerable category that missed out during the initial trial.

Our vaccination teams in all our subdivisions are working closely with the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, the Roko Tuis and Turaga Ni Koros and our village health workers, conducting head counts to ensure all eligible individuals in villages and settlements are counselled and vaccinated.

Mr. Speaker, let me say once again that COVID vaccines whose efficacy have been confirmed in extensive clinical trials involving thousands of people, endorsed by strict licensing authority such as WHO, and those effectiveness have proven by millions of vaccinated individuals, the world is safe and protect fully vaccinated individuals against severe illness, hospitalisations and death.

Mr. Speaker, the WHO Strategic Advisory Group of Experts has concluded that initially Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine was suitable for children aged 12 years and over, and that WHO had recommended that to be used since June 2021. It was also recommended that children aged 12 years to 15 years and high risk with severe COVID-19 may be offered this vaccine.

Mr. Speaker, the moderna vaccine is also being approved as safe and effective, and meet the Australian Therapeutic Goods Administration. Absolutely, no shortcuts have been taken in granting approval of these vaccines for children and their use were monitored daily for safety.

Mr. Speaker, we have seen how relentless the COVID-19 virus can be with the deaths of our children, the youngest being two months old, and we also have noted that our largely affected population of COVID-19, a review of a disease outbreak has revealed that Fiji as to-date, we have recorded 8,000 children who have had COVID-19. The significant difference in the observed incidence rate of COVID-19 among the young population require further investigation, however, it is a clear indication of the risk that lies.

Mr. Speaker, while death is an unfortunate outcome of COVID-19, we sympathise with those who had lost their loved ones to the pandemic. There continues to be speculation that grows on our classification guidelines for COVID-19 positive patients.

The classification of all COVID-19 positive deaths so far has been according to the WHO classification guidelines. The Ministry had established a panel of clinicians, who assess the medical history of individuals who acquire the COVID-19 infection and subsequently succumbed, and establish the most possible diagnosis according to the classification guideline. This panel consists of senior specialist doctors, medical consultants, specialist pathologists, who methodically review the patient's clinical history, examination findings and medical investigation results, as well as conduct interviews of relatives and carers before making a determination on the cause of death.

Mr. Speaker, we also understand that there is a disease that has been looked into just as a sequel of COVID-19 which is long COVID. It is a syndrome whose spectrum of science and symptoms are evolving, and which every medical practitioner continues to learn everyday to recognise and treat. Over the last few months, our clinical teams have been liaising with external experts, have an ongoing dialogue and sharing information on this evolving clinical entity. It goes without saying that science continues to develop, and we will learn more about this disease. The more we manage and treat this disease, we will also change and improve.

Meanwhile, our team of clinical experts have been consulting with expert counterparts involved with the WHO, and put together an adopted guidance on the diagnosis and treatment of COVID-19 in the recently-approved ninth edition of a Clinical Management Guidelines for Adults with COVID-19 to be used in all health facilities throughout the country.

Mr. Speaker, it is important to note that everyone who is tested positive to COVID-19 are reflected on the clinical care pathways and also in terms of the database that we have, so as to ensure that they are followed up appropriately when they do have symptoms that may be, because of long COVID.

Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister last Thursday, announced the achieving of the 60 percent two-dose vaccine and the announcement has been a relief for many individuals and communities. However, we, in the Ministry of Health, will continue working with our partners and the civil servants who are with us in the coming weeks, to continue to vaccinate those in communities that have not yet been fully vaccinated.

Mr. Speaker, we also understand that the local borders within Viti Levu have been opened and movement through the local borders to the Northern and Eastern Divisions remain highly controlled, and we are calling on all Fijians in the North and around our maritime areas to, please, come forward and be fully vaccinated, for those who have not been fully vaccinated. We know that in the Northern Division, those fully vaccinated is sitting at about 50 percent, but we would also like the Northern Division and many islands in the maritime areas, to be able to raise their fully-vaccinated numbers, similar to what we are seeing right across the country.

In preparations for the opening of international borders and the influx of visitors into the country, we have recently established our Border Health Protection Unit under the Ministry's Health Protection Division, and play a leading role in supervising our Border Health Protection Programmes. This Unit, under the guidance and leadership of a senior and well-trained Medical Officer, will consolidate and strengthen infectious diseases' surveillance, monitoring, laboratory testing and quarantine services conducted by various Units and Departments in the Ministry, working in tandem with other border control services and agencies.

This Unit, Mr. Speaker, is something that has been comprehensive in its working over the last 1½ years of COVID and its rudimentary framework has been there from before, including the International Health Regulations (IHR). However, moving forward, we would like to see this as a more complex Unit, actually taking on those responsibilities.

Through its collaborations with local and international border health agencies, the Unit will further boost our ability to protect our population from the threat of transnational infectious diseases and global health emergencies which also include, the COVID-19 variants that have not yet been to Fiji.

In addition, the Ministry is revamping its Disease Surveillance Network to focus on other disease entities with potential outbreak abilities, in addition to COVID-19. This is also important, as we approach the cyclone season in Fiji and the ever-pressing threat of climate-sensitive diseases, if they get propagated in our communities during these climatic upheavals.

The silver lining of this rather devastating COVID-19 outbreak is the enhancement of our laboratory testing capacity for infectious diseases in Fiji. From the single machine capacity in March 2020, we now have seven health facilities in the public and private sector, testing for COVID-19 antigen capacity and to test for other communicable diseases, and we have seen the increase in the numbers. We have also increased the number of our laboratory scientists, to be able to meet this demand, but they have really been one of our important frontline workers.

You may remember, Mr. Speaker, that the Fiji Centre for Disease Control (FCDC) is predominately run by our laboratory scientists under the guidance of Dr. Aalisha Sahukhan, the Head of Health Protection. Their role is so important throughout this pandemic and as I have alluded to, we have also employed a few during the last year to be able to support their work:

- to build up understanding and adherence to COVID-safe measures and healthy living habits;
- the means to continue to work hand-in-hand with health partners, enforcement agencies and communities through our outreach programmes to develop and enhance a buy-in; and
- the commitment of our communities, not only to this time of COVID, but also beyond towards establishing health-promoting communities through initiatives that are currently in schools and strengthening it in the community and also working with the island communities, island councils and workplaces.

Honourable Speaker, I have alluded in Parliament before that despite COVID-19, we continue to provide our response in other areas and which is normative to the Ministry of Health, such as NCDs. During this outbreak, the NCD Management became also of importance as our capacity in the system was challenged by COVID-19.

Nevertheless, national folks remain entirely not only on the control of COVID-19 but also meeting on normative work. Understanding the people living with chronic non-communicable diseases are most at risk, allowed the Ministry to plan strategically with the most effective means to ensure that services to all our NCD patients continue unhindered.

I would now like to talk a little bit about some of the areas in which we have been doing with NCD work. While, there is guidance on Oral Health Services during COVID-19, this was circulated to all Oral Care Health workers and supported by the Academia - the Fiji Dental Council and the Fiji Oral Health Workers Association.

We have also highlighted the need during this pandemic of the use of virtual platforms to ensure both the safety of our staff and the preservation of the safety of NCD known cases. We use the Tele-Health 165 line which provides consultation with medicine supplies for people needing emergency retrieval: Adult Medical and Cardiac Clinic - Line 1; Diabetes Care - Line 3; Mental Health Care - Line 4; Specialist Children's Clinic - Line 5; Specialist Surgical Clinic - Line 6; Specialist Obstetrics and Gynaecological Clinic - Line 7; Cancer Clinic and Support Services - Line 8; and Specialist Ophthalmology Clinic - Line 9.

If in the provision of these Tele-Health services there was a need for prescription, this could also be organised virtually and they were asked to attend to a pharmacy or a Ministry of Health facility in which the prescription was sent over to, so that they can be able to pick their medicines. In some instances, the Fiji Pharmaceutical and Biomedical Medical Services (FPBS) using its resources, would actually take the medicines home to patients who actually need those prescription medicines. We ensured that a list of all our SOPD patients are developed well in advance with contact details and phone contacts to facilitate, not only the distribution of necessary supplies of medications, but also ensure that we will reach them quickly as soon as the vaccines arrive.

The Ministry engaged institutions and organisations to virtual modes where accesses of wellness and NCD and work with the Ministry of Youth and Sports, the Fiji Sports Commission, youth leaders and ambassadors, to empower them as champions in their community.

Mr. Speaker, development of communication materials around NCDs were aired on the airwaves and published in the dailies which also include the visual media coverage and the *MyKana App* in

nutrition and mental health, through customised training programmes to the virtual mode to enable continued capacity building for frontline workers.

Mr. Speaker, we also launched the World Suicide Prevention Day virtually on 10th September and mental health month with the theme of creating hope through action and mental health in their unequal world, conducted face to face diet and nutrition counselling for NCD ward patients in line with COVID-19 protocols, and developed and disseminated Home Meal Plans with relevant IEC materials to all our SOD patients.

The repositioning of seed pack to all dieticians and also working with the Ministry of Agriculture and also with our health facilities, including continuing advocacy for the *MyKana App* from social media platforms to encourage home gardening and eating healthy proportionate meals.

We have established the means for people living with Rheumatic Heart Disease to obtain oral Penicillin V tablets during the lockdown periods coordinated by FPBS and the procurement of targeted oral PenV tablets.

Mr. Speaker, as I have alluded to earlier, we have also realised that there was a need to continue to increase and strengthen the work around mental health and I have talked about it in Parliament before but certainly, we have the mechanisms to be able to offer mental health services to our staff, and also to the patients that we look after. And during this Mental Health month, as we reflect on it, I would like to ask that we continue to support and encourage one another. And certainly the lifting of the restriction that happened after we reached the 60 percent has, in my reflection, people have talked to me and said that this has actually made them realise that we are really on the way up and away from the darkness of the pandemic, and we see a light at the end of the tunnel.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Minister for his Ministerial Statement. I now give the floor to the designated speaker for the Leader of the Opposition, the Honourable Salote Radrodro. You have the floor, Madam.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the Honourable Minister for that Statement on the COVID-19 coverage and also on the proposed children's vaccination rollout. Mr. Speaker, Sir, due to time constraint, I will first make recommendations to the Honourable Minister. I had also alluded to this in his previous statement which he had made in regards to the update on COVID-19.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, what the Minister needs to do is to table in this House a plan, now that we are going to be looking at the rollout of the vaccination programmes in schools. That needs to be tabled, Mr. Speaker, Sir, because now we are moving on to children, parents are very concerned. Still some parents have not really accepted the vaccination and there is a great need for the communities to be continuously informed, educated and raise in the level of awareness on the vaccination rollout, particularly for children.

I caught in the news that this is linked to the opening of schools and parents are concerned with regards to the protocols of the COVID-19 vaccination. On social distancing, do the schools have the capacity to practise that in the classrooms? In regards to the wearing of masks, is this going to be mandatory to all the schools? Who is going to be providing the children with masks? These are the questions, particularly, the parents are asking, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and that denotes or demands that at least a plan be presented in this House by the Honourable Minister.

How long will the rollout implementation going to take? I also caught in the media, and I ask, is it really going to be starting today? As I caught in the mainstream media, there are schools that have been listed where the rollout programme is going to be carried out and the question parents are asking is that,

have these parents been informed to be able to make well-informed decisions about their children being vaccinated?

These are important questions because already we have this policy by the Government that there is “No jab, No job”, “No jab, No benefits for our senior citizens”. So Honourable Minister for Health, is there going to be a policy?

The Honourable Minister for Education on “No jab, No school” for our children, these are the questions that the people are asking and that is why it is pertinent and vital that a plan be presented in this House to well-inform the parents, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is the first recommendation.

The second recommendation is the requirement for the Minister for Health ...

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- ... to present a report. I had already mentioned this in my previous response to the Minister for Health’s Ministerial Statement last month.

We know that the former CEO for Bureau of Statistics had been sacked just because he provided that statistic. Likewise, the Honourable Minister for Health should provide that statistics in a report to be able to have well informed policy directions from the Ministry. Also, who knows, the Household Income Expenditure Survey Report may have useful information that could drive policy directions in the Ministry to be able to effectively address COVID-19.

Thirdly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the third recommendation is for the Ministry to continue in a more aggressive campaign on COVID-19, particularly in the vernacular. Have you ever presented any information leaflet in the vernacular to this House in regards to informing our local communities? Those are the three important recommendations that the Honourable Minister for Health must take into account. I will also mention again, in the last response, I had raised that question about our school children, and he has failed to come out very clearly in regards to the vaccination of our school children, Mr. Speaker, Sir. If those three recommendations are taken on board by the Honourable Minister so that they are then directed to the relevant Committee for further scrutiny.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Radrodro for her contribution to the debate. I now give the floor to the designated speaker for the National Federation Party, the Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to respond to the Ministerial Statement by the Honourable Minister for Health. It is most unhanded that the Honourable Minister is only now informing this House about vaccination plans for children when it has already started to be rolled out for 15 year olds to 17 year olds before we arrived into the House this morning.

At MGM Primary School, apparently there were lines already awaiting Ministry staff to be on time and this kind of incompetence must end, especially when the Government is proposing and doing things supposedly in the best interest of our children. Even that this is debateable right now, what with COVID-19 now being framed around new phrases like, “endemic”, “breakthrough infections”, “long COVID” and of course, “booster shots”.

Oddly enough, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we no longer hear that famous line, “out of an abundance of caution” from this Ministry. Parents have been told that their prior and informed consent is essential.

That was an assurance publicly given to adults as well, next minute, the Honourable Prime Minister comes charging in with the “No Vax, No Job”, mockery. Is it any wonder that there are a couple of legal cases going to court to challenge these draconian rules? Is it any wonder that people like Dr. Hawea are whisked away under darkness just because of a different point of view?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry must pull up its socks. There has been virtually nil consultation between schools, parents and guardians as primary stakeholders on this event. No longer can this manner of bulldozing be accepted as normal. After all these time from since COVID-19 arrived on our shore, bringing the second wave via Fiji Airways on 10th April, we have had a total of 967 COVID-19 related deaths. Yet, the public has no idea about how many adverse events or injuries are happening from this COVID-19 vaccinations in a fully publicly available database, similar to the US’s vaccine adverse event reporting system database.

Is this requirement not set out in the Ministry’s 2013 National Medicinal Products Policy? Does that policy not say on page 48, and I quote:

“An Adverse Medicine Reaction Monitoring System, including suitable adverse medicine reporting procedures as part of the service of the MIU will be explored by the FPBSC in collaboration with the National Medicines and Therapeutics Committee. In establishing such a service, the experience of other countries will be carefully considered.”

The Ministry, Mr. Speaker, Sir, has made minimal effort to inform individuals with serious underlying medical conditions under the forced “No Jab, No Job” that they can apply for vaccination exemption if endorsed by their doctor. Has it done so for children? In hindsight now it seems to be more about numbers and less about do no harm. I would urge the Honourable Minister to tread very cautiously with the rollout for vaccination for children. Prior and informed consent for parents and guardians must be paramount.

The Honourable Minister should also be working hard to encourage the medical profession to be doing more Fijian-made research into COVID-19 and the lessons learnt, particularly in regards to natural immunity and vaccine hazardency and whether demographics like ethnicity, food, cultural and religious motivations, education levels and poverty are a factor. Maybe then, the Honourable Minister for Health will be told he is right by the Minister of Economy when medical scientific research and demographic factors around COVID-19 are studied.

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

Honourable Members, on that note, we will suspend our proceedings for a break. As you know, there is another Ministerial Statement to follow.

You are all aware that today is the beginning of vaccinations for children, therefore, I invite all Honourable Members to join in the launch which will be officiated by the Honourable Prime Minister, and that Parliament will resume when the bell is rung. The venue will be the Big Committee Room.

Honourable Members, we adjourn and we resume when the bell is rung.

The Parliament adjourned at 10. 47 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.50 a.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will continue with this agenda item and I now call on the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment to deliver his Ministerial Statement.

Fiji Agriculture Census 2020 vs 2019-2020 HIES

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Leader of the Opposition and Honourable Members greetings to you all.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to thank you for allowing me to speak on this topic – Fiji Agriculture Census 2020 versus 2019-2020 HIES – Issues of Methodology and Policy Relevance for Farming Households. I rise this morning to deliver a statement to this august House on the 2020 Fiji Agriculture Census co-ordinated by the Ministry of Agriculture.

The Census Report is in four volumes. I will not attempt to provide to this House the full findings of the survey as it is just impossible to do so in 20 minutes, rather I intend to provide why the census was done, how different it is from the previous ones and the methodology adopted and why the previous census cannot be used to make inferences on the population of farmers and how our attempts to use the 2019-2020 HIES data to help farmers failed because of the limitations and methodology of the 2019-2020 HIES Survey.

I will provide key defining features of Fiji's Agriculture Sector as revealed by this census and some of the critical questions that various stakeholders can get answers for from this 2020 Agriculture Census Survey. I will extend my analysis to the recent 2019-2020 HIES Report and how it failed to support the Ministry of Agriculture's effort to improve farmers' livelihood.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Agriculture Census enables the compilation of data at the community level and ensures that the issues affecting farmers, farming households, communities and agricultural operations are included when policy decisions are made on the matters that affect them and their livelihood. These issues regarding the social occasion to the sectors, regions, villages, production, supply, procurement marketing and exports can be made using this data, only if it is collected and reported at the lowest level, that is household in the villagers and settlements.

It supports and enhances the quality of evidence-based policy making, guides and develops the agriculture statistics in Fiji and addresses unprecedented data demand to monitor national targets and Sustainable Development Goals. We can make sound policies that can be used for resource allocation, improvement of farmers' livelihood, expansion of agriculture output in the interest of all stakeholders involved in the agriculture sector, as well as in the national interest.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, taking into account the above we noted the previous surveys had some very serious methodological weakness which does not allow us to draw such policy pronouncements as alluded to above. Conducted every ten years, there have been four other agriculture census undertaken before the 2020 Agriculture Census. The previous ones were held in 1968, 1978, 1991 and 2009. All census that I have highlighted were conducted using a sampling methodology. In 1968, a sample size of 17,000 was used. In 1978, a sample size of 2,797 was used. In 1991, a sample size of 9,607 was used and the 2009 one, a sample size of 9,342 was used.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we, at the Ministry, noted that this approach to sample farms did not assist us in making policies the way we wanted. The approach undertaken could not answer several queries that we had, for example:

- How many dairy farmers do we have in Fiji?
- How many *dalo* farmers do we have in Fiji?
- Which area is *dalo* productivity much higher than the other areas so that we can focus on this area and improve or raise the productivity?
- Which area should be promoted for certain crops based on the farm-level productivity?
- How many female-headed farm households do we have and what type of support and assistance do they need?
- What is the farm size and does it have any causal relationship with farm productivity or mechanisation?
- How can poverty-stricken households be lifted out of poverty via government's agricultural support? What was the crop and livestock damage caused by a cyclone in that particular area?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, only if we have data on those areas not through a sample of farming households but all. So, these kinds of detail and finer policy questions cannot be addressed by obtaining data from just a small sample farm households. It was also decided to expand the scope of the coverage to consider other sub-sectors like forestry, fisheries, for the first time ever, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

We could have opted for the easier way out and ticked the box like previous agriculture census would have collected data on a sample of farms, because we have to do this agriculture census every 10-years. We need to tick the box that we have done it, we could have collected data from a sample of farms and drawn up productivity at the national level. We could have done a sample survey and ticked that the fifth agriculture census after 10-years is done, instead we decided to do a national population survey of agriculture farm households in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is for this reason that the 2020 Agriculture Census is a first where the Ministry conducted a full enumeration of Fiji's agriculture sector right up to the urban boundary, should there be agriculture activity happening there.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the 2020 Agriculture Census recorded a total of 70,991 agriculture households compared to the 65,000 households that were recorded in 2009. The total agriculture households accounted for 99.1 percent, so Mr. Speaker, Sir, of all those surveyed in this survey, 99.1 percent were indeed agriculture households and some of them were not agriculture households.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, of the 2017 Population and Housing Census, 191,910 households are there in Fiji, total households in Fiji, of that 37 percent are agricultural households. Mr. Speaker, Sir, implemented from 10th to 29th February, so that is the enumeration period. Agriculture census operation engaged 340 government officials from all agriculture line ministries and 430 external enumerators.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the 2020 Agriculture Census findings were released in four volumes. The first highlights the general tables and descriptive analysis. The second volume on enumeration in areas and data district profiles. The third volume was a special release on gender analysis, based on census finding. The fourth volume focused on administrative processes and guide implementation of the census and the details of methodology.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we now have set a firm foundation for the 2020 Agriculture Census. Having done this massive exercise, we then decided that we should have targeted policy interventions to address critical national issues. We wanted to use other recent surveys, synchronised or mapping it with our farm household level data in particular the HIES. For that we wanted to ensure that the methodology is solid and credible.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we as policy makers, when we release any data to the public or make any statement that will ultimately affect people's choices and their livelihood, we must provide details of how we collected the data with full disclosure of the research methodology.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if you look at the 2020 Agriculture Census Report, the entire volume four is on methodology – 183 pages, so that anyone who would want to know how this data was collected, full details about the methodology, the questionnaire et cetera, they will pick up the volume four, go over it and they will get details on the methodology.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we wanted to use the HIES data and map it with our agriculture census. Unfortunately, when we looked at the methodology, we found that there were only two pages written about methodology. We had no idea how the data was collected, just a two page methodology.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the cardinal rule in any research is, you must provide a detailed methodology so that any person wanting to check the data should be able to replicate the methodology and get the same data.

(Honourable Opposition Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am afraid the HIES Report failed this test of full methodology disclosure. The recent 2019-2020 HIES failed this test of full methodology disclosure.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me now talk about enumeration and reference period. The Agriculture Census used a three-week enumeration period. Enumeration period is a period that we go down and collect data, so we get a snapshot of the key variable under study. That time was 10th February, 2020 to 29th February, 2020, and for three weeks, we went down to collect the data.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, from day one of the survey, we were mindful that we must capture the farmers at a particular point in time, whether we should be talking about the same reference period. The reference period is the period for which we are collecting the data. The enumeration period is when we are going to the farmers to collect the data.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, unfortunately, when we looked at the HIES, it used up a 12 month enumeration period, so the HIES was undertaken from February 2019 to February 2020 - I have got 12 months of enumeration period. How on earth can you compare data of households that were interviewed in February 2019 and those households that were interviewed in February 2020?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, their reference period are very different because February 2019, their reference period is 12 months before.

(Honourable Opposition Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- So, February 2018 and then February 2020, their reference period comes to 2019. How on earth can you lump this data which has data collected in two different reference period?

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Two different reference period. You were defending this methodology.

(Honourable Opposition Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, a lot can change over 12 months, different prices and different consumption bundles due to production and supply pattern.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the HIES Report is flawed because data for two different reference period are lumped together. February 2019, one year before, data is lumped with February 2020, so two different data periods are lumped together. Sir, let me drop another bomb.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, *TC Sarai* made landfall on 24th December, 2019.

(Honourable Opposition Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, *TC Tino* made landfall on 18th January, 2020. So, how can you include these households from 24th December, 2019 to 20th February, 2020 with February, 2019 households? You have *TC Sarai* (Category 2 cyclone) and *TC Tino* made landfall in the later part of the survey. You cannot add households in these two different period, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

(Honourable Opposition Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, ask any statistician and they will tell you that you have to avoid any outliers or shocks in the survey period because all other households were not subject to the same shock. The Bureau of Statistics makes no mention of how they have addressed these issues which, again, affects the ability to place all households in one pool.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I could have assisted them by saying, “Look, these are two different reference periods, you calculate the poverty for these two different periods, collect the data, show the poverty estimates for two different periods, and then you can lump it and leave it to the readers.” They did not do that, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, why can they not do that? I can tell you why they could not do that. I will tell you! They marked it up with the low sample size, and I will come to that.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am afraid, the Bureau has failed this test for not addressing shocks and outliers.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, that takes me to the sample size issue. Agriculture Census collected data on all farm households so that robust policy decisions can be made. When you go down to Kadavu, et cetera, we want to know what happened to those farmers in the village in Dogotuki. Sir, we know we have the data and we know how we need to assist.

However, in contrast, the 2019-2020 Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) used a sample of 6,000 to infer on 191,910 households. The normal rule in statistics is that, the size of the sample should be a function of how homogenous the study variable is in population. In this case, the study variable is households' income and expenditure.

Any one of us who has travelled widely in Fiji will say that households throughout Fiji are very heterogeneous. So such a low sample size of 3.1 percent is well below a reasonable threshold for fair representation of the population. In fact, the 2002 HIES had a sample size of 3.3 percent household number of 5,245. For the 2013-2014 HIES, the sample size was 6,020.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, knowing that Fiji's household population is quite heterogeneous, household numbers have increased from the previous HIES period. Then why would the Bureau keep the sample around the same? Mr. Speaker, Sir, the answer is simple – it was a 'tick in the box' exercise.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me now go to the design. It has failed. The design has serious problems, Sir. There are 23 stratum areas. Each stratum has, on an average, 10 households. Ask anyone with statistics and econometrics background, they will tell you that you cannot infer without a certain degree of reliability, whether it is 5 percent level of significance or 2.5 percent level of significance, the attributes around, let us say, 319 households with the data from 10 households. No way! I will tell you why.

Firstly, for statistical analysis, it requires variability in the data. Mr. Speaker, Sir, if you collect 10 households in this area to do any statistical analysis, there should be variability in that data from the 10 households. Otherwise, you cannot do statistical analysis, you cannot invert in statistical terms, you cannot invert the metrics.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, so ask any statistician, they will tell you that without variation, you cannot do statistical analysis. It will be static. Then, what you have is, in cross-sectional data, there are certain variables that do not vary at all. In a particular point in time with 10 households, where would the prices vary?

Any statistician or any econometrician will tell you that cross-sectional data prices do not vary because you are collecting data for a point in time. How can you then say that you can do a statistical analysis with 10 households? No! And if you look at their advisor, Professor Wadan Narsey, and read his report, he admits in one of his previous reports that he was finding it difficult to do statistical analysis because of the low sample in the previous HIES.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am shocked to read that some of the economists at USP and the University of Fiji have argued otherwise and said that 6,000 sample size can be used to infer reliably on 191,910 households.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do not blame them because they have not done primary research. They have always used secondary data – data collected by others. In fact, what Professor Wadan Narsey....

(Honourable Professor B.C. Prasad interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- It pains him! It pains him!

(Honourable Opposition Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, primary research is a different ballgame. Who defined the research problem? The Fiji Bureau of Statistics. Who stated the hypothesis? The Fiji Bureau of Statistics. Who designed the questionnaire? The Fiji Bureau of Statistics. Who established the methodology? The Fiji Bureau of Statistics. Who collected the data? The Fiji Bureau of Statistics. Who did the analysis? The consultants. They take it, they get the money, publish it and they get the academic advancement. Mr. Speaker, Sir, they are always after someone else collecting data, someone else investment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if you go and survey in any economics department, 95 percent of the academics will work with secondary data from Bureau of Statistics and Reserve Bank of Fiji. They are now, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this friend of mine, Mr. Goundar, called me, “Dr, when can we get this data?” Ask him. Thereafter, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we collect it and they have no input under methodology. No idea and they want data. They will publish it and gain academic achievements.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, now let me go onto the Agriculture Census and HIES policy making dilemma. We now have detailed data on all farmer households in Fiji. If we had Household Income Poverty Data for rural household, we could have synchronised it. Let us say that the Household Income Poverty Data shows that in Dogotuki Village, if households are in poverty, I would have gone and channel agriculture resources to those areas to raise those households out of poverty. Where is the poverty data? There is no data. For our data, we have collected the division, province, district, village and settlement.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Read it!

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, if you look at their data, it is only at rural urban. What did you do? Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is a total waste.

We can ask targeted questions, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the 2020 Census but when we want to do targeted assistance to farmers in a particular area because their productivity is low, we do not want to know ethnicity. We do not need ethnicity. We are going to assist whoever needs a particular support on this.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reason why people are poor in the rural, interior and maritime islands is because people like Honourable Nawaikula has always talked about ethnicity. Honourable Nawaikula, my apologies.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, when I first joined the Ministry of Agriculture, one of the first things I asked was, where is the desegregated farm level household data? The reply I got was, “We do not have any of the census on desegregated farm level household data.”

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have now got desegregated farm level household data and come 10 years' time, what you can do is longitudinal study. I do not think they understand longitudinal study. If we find that in Kadavu these household agriculture productivity is low 10 years down the line, we can pull the data up and compare what is the productivity now.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if we had the same kind of data for poverty, so 10 years down the line, we are going to identify those households and identify whether they have been lifted out of poverty or not.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, what do we do with this data that we have here? There is no desegregated data by households. We spend so much taxpayers' money. So, 10 years down the line, I want to know whether in Dogotuki village, the poverty level was like this five years ago than what is now. How do I know? There is no data. What is the use of doing this kind of survey, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the agriculture census was undertaken with a budget of \$4.5 million per household was \$62. The HIES was conducted at a budget of \$2.5 million per household, it is \$416 - 6.6 times more. What a waste, Mr. Speaker, Sir, when you cannot do any policy inferences at the village and at the settlement levels.

Article 1 - Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2002-2003. Mr. Speaker, Sir, unfortunately this HIES study is, one, a tick in the box, two, a field day for consultants who have made money, who take the data, publish journal articles ...

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- ... and get their own academic advancement. But it has no input in terms of making sharper and specific policy intervention so that we can assist the very people that they are talking about.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister for his Statement. I now give the floor to the designated speaker for the Leader of the Opposition, the Honourable Inosi Kuridrani. You have the floor.

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I respond to the Ministerial Statement by the Honourable Minister, I would just like to take this opportunity to thank a youth group in the province of Nadroga, Navosa, who call themselves the "Hakwa Gang". It comprises of about 33 youths from the province that reside locally and abroad. They have been reviving the old age traditional *solesolevaki* approach to suit the context of the digital era in bringing much needed help to our elderly and families facing crisis. They have so far collected \$12,000 in three of their virtual concerts and have assisted more than 300 families. *Vinaka vakalevu, Hakwa Gang, tu vata, tu qata.*

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also like to thank the Honourable Minister for Agriculture for approving the construction of the seawall that has been finally approved and hopefully, it will be constructed in the near future. Thank you, Honourable Minister.

However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is very sad and very poor of the Honourable Minister to admit in this House that he does not understand how this report was prepared. He admitted it and I recall his statements previously where he claimed that he does not understand the methodology in preparing this report. I recall his Ministerial Speech in 2018 where he stated, and I quote, "Sir, reliable and timely agriculture data provides farmers, producers, consumers, buyers, exporters and governments the information that is required to make well-informed decisions in business and policies."

However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the Census Report, Volume 4, question 5, which he has been talking about, it reads, what is the household member's ethnicity? It is recommended that the question is answered through observation by the enumerators but maybe asked directly if respondents feel comfortable about answering the question. It will be answered by selecting one of the ethnicity categories given below:

- (1) iTaukei;
- (2) Indo-Fijian;
- (3) Chinese;
- (4) Rotuman; and
- (5) Other Pacific Islanders.

In question 6 it reads, what is the household member's religious denomination:

- (1) Methodist;
- (2) Catholic;
- (3) AOG;
- (4) Hindu;
- (5) Muslim; and
- (6) SDA?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this raw data that was collected by enumerators does not appear in any of the volumes he is talking about from Volume 1 to Volume 4. He is lying in this House that these data are not collected. This is approved, it has been collected and is this the same measure that the Attorney-General mentioned when he spoke about the HIES a few days ago, harping that the ethnicity data was not collected and it appeared in the recent report?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these people have been lying all this time. If this is a measure to indicate the level of integrity and good governance by this Government, we have doubts and heading for a big, big disaster.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg the Government to, please, do the right thing. You know very well that ethnicity is very important in developing policies for our people. I ask the Honourable Minister, how many *iTaukei* people are in commercial farming? He would not know, so how can he design a policy to meet the target groups - that is the problem. They are trying to hide the facts of development that are supposed to be

HON. MEMBER.- Discrimination!

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Yes, probably discrimination. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg the Government, please, be honest with your job.

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

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. If I had a little bit more time, I would have really exposed the honourable joker that we had in Parliament today. I say this because he completely missed the point. Agriculture census, this is Household Expenditure Survey, how can he compare a census data with a survey data? A complete joker and then to make it embarrassing for himself, he went on a despicable, shameful attack on his former colleagues, saying that they have not done primary surveys - completely bogus. He should be ashamed of attacking his colleagues completely, he should be ashamed. He has completely, Mr. Speaker, Sir, missed the point. I am sure people who would read his

presentation today or are listening to him will actually find how shameful and ridiculous his claims have been in his Ministerial Statement.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me tell him, for a long time back, this man has surrendered his academic credentials to his political masters and what he has done today, is to discredit, not only his own colleagues, experts, he does not know the difference between census and survey. He talked about methodology, all the experts have said the methodology is sound, the sample size is sound. In fact, in Australia and New Zealand, they do Household Income Expenditure Surveys, and their sample size is about 1 percent. Fiji Bureau of Statistics' sample of 3 percent is a very credible sample in a survey, and this man does not know the difference between census and survey, I have to really laugh. What is happening here?

At least the Honourable Attorney-General was a bit professional in terms of his press conference attacking the methodology and the sample size, one could understand that. But the real reason, Mr. Speaker, Sir, why they are discrediting this survey is because it looks politically bad on them.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- All their claims of unprecedented growth - Bainimarama Boom, how they have looked after everyone has been thrown back at them through the Household Income Expenditure Poverty Rate.

Since 2008 and 2009 Survey Report, they have not been able to reduce poverty in this country, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Now, politically, it looks so bad to them because all their claims, lies about unprecedented growth, how well they have done is all being exposed now. But the most dangerous thing that they have set in train is by discrediting this report and the hardworking people who have years of experience. Fiji Bureau of Statistics is the best in the Pacific. You compare all the national statistical offices and look at what Fiji Bureau of Statistics has done.

Now, by discrediting this report, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and the figure, what they have done is, they have poured cold water on all the official statistics. Now, Sir, we can say this with some certainty that this Government has been cooking official data. They are discrediting this data because they were not able to cook this and manipulate this. This is the reason why they are so desperate to discredit this survey.

What I would say to them, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this pathetic attempt by the Honourable Minister for Agriculture; I can only go back and laugh somewhere in my own quietness. The man does not know the difference between census and a survey and comes here and compares a survey and a census. You should be ashamed of yourself.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- Completely shame on him, Mr. Speaker, Sir!

Honourable Minister for Economy, please, tell him in your quiet time that he needs to understand the difference between census and a survey.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Professor Prasad for his contribution to the debate. Honourable Members, that ends that agenda item and we will move on.

ELECTORAL (REGISTRATION OF VOTERS) (AMENDMENT) (NO. 2) BILL 2021

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

That the -

- (a) Electoral (Registration of Voters) (Amendment) (No. 2) Bill 2021 (Bill No. 32/2021) be considered by Parliament without delay;
- (b) Bill must pass through one stage at a single sitting of Parliament;
- (c) Bill must not be referred to a Standing Committee or other Committee of Parliament;
- (d) Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament on Wednesday, 22nd September, 2021 and that one hour be given to debate the Bill, with the Right of Reply given to me as the Member moving this motion.

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

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I intend to be brief but essentially, this particular amendment seeks to ensure that the constitutional provisions ensuring that we have a registered voter actually voting in the Elections, and that there be equality of votes between every single voter is, in fact, put in phrase in practical terms. That is what I would like to say at this point in time, Sir, given that it is under Standing Order 51 and that we debate this particular amendment on Wednesday, 22nd September, 2021.

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

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Mr. Speaker, we are objecting to the motion. The motion is being tabled under Standing Order 51 and every time the Government tables a motion under Standing Order 51, it is asking that the scrutiny or participation of the public in the law-making process is to be denied and that is what they are asking here. This is not a simple amendment, Mr. Speaker, Sir. This amendment goes back to the litigation that we have against me personally and it is to amend the electoral registration of voters.

We all know what happened. What happened in that case is that the decision was made by the Chief Justice that the Supervisor of Elections acted unlawfully and wrongly - period. That is how he interpreted the law and we should respect the independence of the powers, we should respect the decision. This is another way of appealing that decision.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- In the Court process, when you are not happy with a decision, you appeal it. They cannot appeal it. They should respect it. They should respect the integrity of that decision because it was not the Chief Justice. The Chief Justice only interprets the law. They are the ones who made the law. They are the ones who passed the latest amendment in June and that was tested in that judgment and they were found wanting, they should respect that.

I think the Honourable Attorney-General is lying when he says, "This is to put into effect the Constitutional provision for fair voting." Voting has been fair all this time and if that is the case, why did not you not make this amendment much earlier on? All that the Chief Justice said was, you do not have

to be using your name in the birth certificate for an election to be fair, and that is Common Law. It is done here, it is done in Australia, it is done in New Zealand and it is done in the United Kingdom. So it is wrong and the Government must be honest in its intention to say that it is not happy with the decision of the Chief Justice. That is what they are doing. This is a criticism against the Judiciary. This is a criticism against a body that you are not allowed to do and they are trying to do it in a back-door kind of way.

Coming back to the procedure, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is of public importance, it needs to go through the public which means that it has to go through the proper Parliamentary Committee process so that politicians, NFP and members of the public can come in and put their views. It is so important. We do not have the mandate to decide this by ourselves, it has to be out in the open. It is a political thing. It deals with the public under Registration of Voters, their voices should be heard. That is the reason why we are opposing this motion coming in through Standing Order 51.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Nawaikula for his contribution. Honourable Lynda Tabuya, you have the floor.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to also oppose the motion before the House and add to what my colleague, Honourable Nawaikula has already contributed. This particular proposed amendment, Mr. Speaker, really at the end of the day, can affect a very huge number of our population which are our married women who use their husband's names and have been using that in their voter registration and to vote in the last two elections.

Mr. Speaker, this is being rushed. It should go back for consultation. This should be taken out to the public to consult and to give their views on this - not only are they taking away the right of a married woman to use her married name to register and to vote, which is what she has been using in the form of her ID and all other IDs, it will also cost those that need to change their names, if they choose not to use their name of the birth certificate, Mr. Speaker. They have to go through a deed poll change, a legal change in their names in order to use their married name.

Mr. Speaker, that costs money - yes, you have to go to a lawyer and have almost up to \$500 to pay for a deed poll change and this is what this Government is not considering when they are bringing about this change. This, Mr. Speaker, will just continue to discriminate our voters, so it makes it harder to vote next year especially our women in the rural areas. What is the access from the SoE, what is the access for women in the rural areas to ensure that they are informed of this?

You need to consult and get their views on this but they are not doing this, Mr. Speaker. They are trying to bring this into the House once again, rushed under SO 51 and that is why we oppose this motion before the House. The Standing Committee should take it up for consultation and get the views from those who are mostly affected and they would be, Mr. Speaker, a very big portion of our population, which are our married women.

HON. SPEAKER.- I give the floor to the Honourable Viliame Gavoka. You have the floor.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I agree with my colleagues that this is a very important Bill and it needs to be taken through the normal process of lawmaking. Standing Order 51 is being overdone. Just last week we celebrated democracy day and I noticed from your statement, Mr. Speaker, that this Parliament has passed some 274 laws. Of the 274 laws, Mr. Speaker, a vast majority came through this way and someone had characterised the way we do business here as legislation by ambush. We arrive on Monday like this, not knowing that this Bill was coming into the House and we debate the pathway now and it becomes law on Wednesday. This is legislation by ambush. We cannot say that we are proud of our Parliament ...

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- ... we have passed 274 laws and the vast majority came by way of ambush. At least ...

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- ... let us turn our back to the celebration for democracy last week and set a new pathway for how we make laws in this Parliament. Can you imagine that? In seven years, we have passed 274 laws - all through ambush. All through ambush!

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- In jurisdictions overseas you have at least two months' notice that a Bill is coming and then you go into the first reading, the second reading and the third reading. Over here we should be ashamed of ourselves that we are making laws in this manner, in this country. Mr. Speaker, we hope that you can change the way you do things. Let us not say 274 laws and be proud of it because really we should be ashamed of the way we make legislations in this country.

Mr. Speaker, this is very, very important and there is already chatter in the community on what will happen to married women. What will they do now? So, there could have been some dialogue on this. This is a huge issue, Mr. Speaker and we have to change. We cannot be proud of the way we are doing things and we should stop these legislations by ambush in this House, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member for his contribution to the debate. Honourable Professor Prasad, you have the floor.

HON. PROFESSOR. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The genesis of this Bill in my view is really to correct the incompetence of certain constitutional office holders who rushed into getting rid of Honourable Nawaikula out of the House. Of course, the judiciary had other views and he is back in the House.

Now, let me say this also, Mr. Speaker, and I think Honourable Gavoka is right, this is lawmaking by ambush and he quoted lawyer Richard Naidu. Mr. Speaker, this is a Government which governs through ambush, not only lawmaking, if you look at the behaviour in policy and in lawmaking, it is all about we can rush through, we can trample over, we can continue to do what we want to do; that is fine, Mr. Speaker. But, let me say this, of course Government's response to what the judiciary says about certain constitutional provisions, certain laws and there is always a need to come back to Parliament to change certain laws.

That is understandable, Mr. Speaker, but in this particular case there are a lot of implications. The Supervisor of Elections has already got the provisional rollout, I am not sure how many people will need to go re-register and provide all this. These are questions that we need to take time and consider and let people make the submissions. So, rushing this Bill in fact I would say that we should leave the changes to some of the electoral laws and all that, until after the election, it is too close to the election to be changing these laws.

Mr. Speaker, let me remind the Honourable Attorney-General, I know he knows and that is why he is laughing. The whole genesis of the electoral law, political parties law - they were all done not by Parliament, not by an elected legislature, it was done by the interim government and laws kept changing right up to the day before the elections in 2014. After 2014, they continued to change the laws because

every time they were shown the faults in the law, instead of going back to the people and having a much more conceded view about what the changes should be, they are rushing it again.

We have accepted Standing Order 51 on many occasions, Mr. Speaker, because we have understood that there was an urgency and we participated in it and we also voted for some of the legislations, the Bills that they brought into Parliament. So it is not as if we stand here in the Opposition, ready to oppose anything that comes from the Government; we do not. We have, in the past, supported Government Bills on important matters. But this one, Mr. Speaker, they need to take it back, they need to leave it until after the election next year because this is going to create unnecessary confusion, unnecessary requirement for people to go back and re-register or provide all this and it is unnecessary.

Please, take this back and leave it until after the next election.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Professor Prasad for his contribution. I give the floor to the Honourable Usamate, you have the floor.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will just defer to the right of reply from the Honourable Attorney-General.

HON. SPEAKER.- Are there any further Honourable Members wishing to take the floor? There being none. I give the floor to the Honourable Attorney-General for his right of reply.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. It is very entertaining listening to the other side. In the usual capricious manner, you have Honourable Nawaikula and Honourable Tabuya jumping the gun; Honourable Nawaikula, Honourable Waqanika and Honourable Tabuya (we need to also know they are three lawyers on the other side) that laws are actually made by Parliament.

Courts make certain decisions, they interpret the law and it is not something peculiar to this Government. Since the history of lawmaking in the Common Law countries, when courts interpret particular matters and laws, if the Parliament, the legislature believe that there needs to be able to be a reason to address any lacuna in the law, any short-comings in the law or the law actually may be out of date, the legislature actually makes those changes.

There are many laws, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Some may call it very trite provisions. Honourable Kepa, I remember specifically talking about this. We used to have a Workmen's Compensation Act. It was acceptable for decades, in fact, a century. Now we change to the Worker's Compensation Act because it is not only man who work. There are many laws like this that have been amended.

In the previous Companies Act that was repealed when we brought in the new Companies Act had been amended literally, dozens and dozens of time since its inception post-Independence. Does that in any way mean incompetence of those governments? Time has changed. Technology changes.

In this particular case, it was the Court of Disputed Returns. The Court of Disputed Returns given the law, given the submissions that we are on record on saying was not actually full submissions made to the court and the Court of Disputed Returns as we all know, Mr. Speaker, Sir, does not have the luxury of sitting for weeks or months. It has only 21 days since the time the matter has brought to its attention. Therefore, the Counsel failed to bring to the attention to the court of what would be the consequences of accepting Common Law principles of adopting common names. These Common Law principles, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in many jurisdictions came from the last century. You know "aka" - also known as.

Since then, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are living in the 21st century. There is identity theft. There is money laundering, human trafficking, terrorism, all countries, Mr. Speaker, Sir, are moving towards

ensuring there is authentication of the identity of individuals living in their countries. Otherwise you have people travelling, having passports, having voter registrations under different names, different aliases. We never used to have in the banks, those of you who are old enough to know and most of the people in SODELPA are old enough to know this.

You could simply go and open a bank account a few decades ago. Now you have KYC, "Know Your Customer" identity, point system. If you do not have certain identities, they will not open bank accounts. The Voter Identification Card in Fiji, Mr. Speaker, Sir, since 2014 is now used as an authentic form of identification by the banks that have to comply with various laws including the Financial Transactions Reporting Act which has to comply with international standards, otherwise Fiji would get black listed by other trading banks internationally. This is why it is critically important to ensure that we have authentication of your identification; critically important. And here we are getting the smorgasbord of opinions for political reasons, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reality of the matter is that, Honourable Tabuya again jumped the gun, brought in women's issues but she forgets to look at the various amendments we have made. She has not read it in full. This is why, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the introduction of this, I have refrained from going into the details of it because I thought the Opposition, who will have three hours to look at these three Bills will be able to study the Bills, come back to us on Wednesday and perhaps, make more intelligent comments but they have failed to do so. She said married women should have the right to use their husbands' name, of course. The law does not stop that.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have given women the option. If she looks at the amendments under the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act, if you look at the existing law, it says only the father of the child can register the son and daughter; only the father. We made an amendment that it should be the mother or father. We have also said she went on about the deed poll.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- She should read the amendment. We have removed the requirement of getting a deed poll done. You no longer have to go to expensive lawyers to get a deed poll done. You simply go to the Births Registration Office. If so, for example, a woman who is married now and decides to adopt her husband's name, all she simply has to do is go to the BDM office, I want to change my name. They will register it, birth certificate will be given. Very simple.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, you see you are caught out. Mr. Speaker, Sir, she has the option. If you married a Mr. Prasad, you want to become Mrs Prasad, your choice. If you want to retain your name as Tabuya, you can retain your name as Tabuya, your choice. No one is forcing you and now you do not have to do a deed poll. You simply just go to the BDM office, we have dozens now throughout the country where you can go and register your new name, should you wish to do so.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- And the point, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I do not know what you are worried about.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- The point, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the existing law at the moment is, that there are a lot of irregularities. So, because there is no opportunity to do that, there are many women when they get married under the current regulations, if they want a passport, they can go to the passport office and they will say, this is my birth certificate, this is my marriage certificate, I want my passport to be under Mrs. Kepa. They can do that. That was the previous way of doing it but Mrs. Kepa would not be captured in the BDM.

Currently, when someone dies and the police have to issue a death certificate, they do not go by the name that someone gives them. They have to look at the birth certificate name to give a death certificate. All we are simply trying to do, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is to ensure that we have the right name for the right person and that name, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is known throughout all your official records. If in the meantime Honourable Tabuya wants to change her name to Mrs. Lynda Prasad. She has the opportunity to go and do that. She can simply go, no deed poll, and register at BDM and now as provided under the amendment, the BDM Registrar is compelled to inform all the other agencies that we had a Honourable Lynda Tabuya who came in, she is now going to be Honourable Lynda Prasad. If, however, Honourable Lynda Prasad five years later, for example, wants to become Honourable Lynda Maharaj.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- She can become Honourable Lynda Maharaj, she can go and change her name. We have also allowed under the law that if a husband wants to adopt the name of his wife, they can do that. They can do that. So, all of these are there, absolutely, there is an opportunity there but of course, they will become another drama. But Mr. Speaker, Sir, so all the amendments are here.

So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is not challenging the Court's decision. The Court said, as the law was drafted and unfortunately, the Counsel did not bring to the attention of what would happen, that you do not literal interpretation have to have the birth certificate. No chaos will be created Honourable Prasad because if you look at the electoral card, they are always updating it, it never expires.

The Supervisor of Election is on record issuing a very lengthy and comprehensive statement which your newspaper, *The Fiji Times* did not publish until five days later. In that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, he quite comprehensively said that when we issue a new card, you need to then register under your BRN. If, however, somehow or the other you have failed to do that, that registered name will continue on the voter list.

Last point, I would like to make, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for them to also ponder upon. Someone, one of their esteemed lawyer colleague said, "Oh, if a person registers three times, we will know that they are voting three times because they will have the ink on the finger." We have seen in so many jurisdictions, I can go and register under four different names and then I can ask for postal ballot for three of my names. No one inks you, you make a simple application to the Supervisor of Elections, you say, "My name is on the voter list, Ram Dulare, I want to vote because that day I am driving my bus." He does not go and check whether he is driving a bus on that day or not, they simply take your word for it. I can be under Ram Dulare, I can be under Honourable Tabuya or whatever it is; I have different names. And then I get my postal ballot and I will vote, I will send my votes. On the day itself, I can go and vote under my actual name and get the ink.

Honourable Gavoka always talks about, “Oh, this Government only won by a hundred votes or thousand votes.” We know that elections have turned, in some of the constituencies on 10 votes, on 12 votes. If the shoe was on the other foot, if they are saying do not do it until the next elections, it is also to protect you. What if some of the FijiFirst supporters go and register five times each, and then you lose the election by 500 votes. You will come complaining, you will say, “Oh this voter list has got no integrity.” Do not think politically. Think from a system process perspective and integrity of the electoral role. The voter list must have integrity, therefore, we must reduce and eliminate any opportunity for ambiguity. That is the rationale behind this.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, at this point, we will suspend proceedings for a break for lunch and we will resume at 2.30 p.m. We have two more Bills, therefore, we will consider those after lunch.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.59 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.42 p.m.

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

INTERPRETATION (AMENDMENT) BILL 2021

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

That the -

- (a) Interpretation (Amendment) Bill 2021 (Bill No. 34/2021) be considered by Parliament without delay;
- (b) Bill must pass through one stage at a single sitting in the Parliament;
- (c) Bill must not be referred to a Standing Committee or other Committee of Parliament;
- (d) Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament on Wednesday, 22nd September, 2021 and that one hour be given to debate the Bill, with the Right of Reply given to me as the Member moving the motion.

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

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is the second of the trifecta, if you like, of Bills that are being presented to Parliament that actually relate to the same subject matter and that is to ensure that we have proper registration of names and we ensure that we establish authentication of identification.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this particular Bill essentially defines the birth certificate. To date, surprisingly the laws are so archaic, there is in fact, no definition of a birth certificate. So, in the Interpretation Act itself, we are defining what a birth certificate is.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it also says that if anyone is required to give their name for official purposes, whether I am getting married, whether I am applying for fishing licence or I am getting a LTA licence or I am going to FNPF or I am going for FRCS, I must give my birth certificate name essentially, that is what it says. Thirdly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other issue, of course, is to deal with the matter of those people who have become Fijian citizens by naturalisation.

There are a lot of hoteliers, for example, in Fiji who have become citizens of Fiji and how do we establish what is their proper name? Traditionally, what they have taken, whatever name is on the passport. But what we are requiring now is that the Department of Immigration that issues the certificate must ensure that they cite the birth certificate name itself too. Of course, sometimes we have people whose birth certificates are in a foreign language, to make sure that there is a proper deciphering of the names through third party validation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is also a transitional provision, essentially what the transitional provision is, for example, if my name is Josefa Valenitabua and my name is registered as Jo Vale (because everyone calls me Jo Vale) and that is the name that I have in my driving licence, it does not mean that by the coming of this particular provision, that therefore my licence is null and void; there is a transitional provision.

If my licence expires in two years' time then when I go to re-register or re-apply for my licence, only then I have to produce my BRN number because we have allowed for that. Suddenly people do not want licences and all those permits, et cetera, to end overnight just because this law has come into place. What we are saying is that if that name has been registered and you are legally using that name for your LTA driving licence or the fisheries licence which was done on an annual basis or three-year basis, that continues. It is not deemed to be invalid and when it expires, then, you apply under the new name. Of course, there are certain things that once you register, there is no expiry.

So if I am registered under the Vola ni Kawa Bula (VKB), my name does not get removed, that will stay there forever, whatever name I am registered under. So there are all those provisions that have been taken into account because we do not want to create any sort of conundrum as a result of this. This is essentially to ensure that we get people who have registered under names, in the transitional provision that is not really their name or not their birth name, they can continue with their names until that particular licence or whatever expires but when it is renewed, it is under the BRN name. So these are the provisions of this particular provision, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General. Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion. At the end of the debate, we will have the right of reply from the mover. Is there anyone wishing to take the floor? Honourable Niko Nawaikula, you have the floor.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Mr. Speaker, I thank you and before I continue with my contribution to the motion, let me just first congratulate Mrs. Emberson for her appointment and we are all proud of you on getting that confirmation to the your position now.

Mr. Speaker, this so-called trifecta of laws or amendments all go back to the case against me which was totally unnecessary, which was simply a personal attack by the Honourable Minister against me.

HON. MEMBER.- You are personalising things.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Yes, and using the SoE and now here we have a national solution to something that is clearly personal to him. Why should you engage the Parliament? Why should you engage the whole process of this to resolve or make good what you did which the Chief Justice said was totally wrong and unlawful, and brought great embarrassment to your office, Mr. Speaker? I was also embarrassed by the fact that first you told me, "get out" and then you have to welcome me back, all because of their unlawful and wrongful action as per what the Chief Justice said. The proper thing for him to do is to sack the Supervisor of Elections, and this is not the first time the Supervisor of Elections has been doing his bidding personally and wrong, wrong, wrong.

There are about three cases that the Courts have stated that the Supervisor of Elections has been wrong but he is still sitting there, he should be out, and first I call upon him, "Please, get out". Get someone useful, someone who knows the law because that is what the Chief Justice said, "you in your position, you should know what the law is." You interpreted this wrongly by questioning the termination of my position here (in Parliament) and he acted unlawfully.

The right thing for the Honourable Minister to do was to sack him, instead of bringing all these three amendments that we have to engage here, standing up here and waste our time debating then another day on Wednesday, and in the process denying the right of the public to participate in the lawmaking process. It is not simple, there is a difficulty here, Mr. Speaker, if I can just refer you to the Explanatory Notes. It says, "the births, deaths and marriage registration seeks to amend Section 11 of the Act to permit the mother of a child born alive or still born in Fiji to register the child and to give her equal status as that of the father of the child". It is not as simple as that: What will be the impact of this to the VKB, what

will be the impact of this to the culture of the *iTaukei* which is reflected in the maintenance of that registered in the VKB?

In most cases they have to go through the patrilineal line and if not there has to be an agreement. All those will come out if rightfully as the law requires, this amendment is to be referred to a Parliamentary Committee so that the input of the experts, the input of those affected, the input of the stakeholders are brought in and clearly thought out instead of it or this House giving it one hour now and one hour on Wednesday. That is totally not enough and for that reason we are opposing this motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- The floor is still open, and is there anyone wishing to take the floor? There being no one wishing to take the floor, I give the floor to the Honourable Attorney-General.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. It is really quite entertaining to have Honourable Nawaikula actually back in Parliament, and frankly, I think he is really elevating himself because he thinks that we all sat around and wanted him out of Parliament. Actually we do not because you are good entertainment value, apart from that, is that you make the Opposition look completely incompetent, it is good to have people like you around.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, firstly he is got the law wrong. He said, "I should have sacked him". They talk about the rule of law but they do not understand who appoints the Supervisor of Elections. You cannot simply go around sacking someone who you do not appoint in the first place.

(Honourable Opposition Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, again this is the incompetence that he is demonstrating which is good for us because the Supervisor of Elections is actually appointed by the Constitutional Offices Commission. He is now talking about the Government Statistician who is appointed by someone else, not the Constitutional Offices Commission. Such fundamental knowledge is not within them.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, firstly, he thinks that we sit there and concoct just to get him out, it does not matter whether he is here or not there, it does not make a difference. The other point is that he has not declared that he is actually suing the Supervisor of Elections and the Honourable Attorney-General from this action. So he is making this case here now. He has filed a writ, suing the Supervisor of Elections and myself but he does not have the professionalism to stand up here and say, "Look, I am saying this but I am also suing you people", he is not informing the public of Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point about the VKB, again, this is what I call the ethnicisation of every single issue. The registration of a person's birth is different to the registration in the VKB. It is such a fundamental legal difference and he is saying now, Honourable Tabuya you should be objecting to what he said. He is now saying just because the mother can now also register the birth therefore no longer the patrilineal lineage assessment of whether a person belongs in VKB should continue or not. The VKB has got a different form of registration. You should know that. You should tell him that but you sit there mute when he has just completely misled Parliament. Registration of a birth is separate to registration on the VKB. Honourable Lalabalavu knows this, eEveryone in this House knows this. Please, Honourable Nawaikula, brush up on your knowledge of the law.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, again he is trying to create this ruckus, trying to make the people feel somehow or the other the VKB is under attack just because they have changed the law. Now women can register their sons and daughters therefore VKB is under threat. Honourable Qionibaravi you know that too, but

they sit there mute not correcting him because they believe in the politics of fear. They believe in the politics of creating ethnic division. This is what it fundamentally boils down to. So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is nothing sinister about this. We are just clarifying the law and that is what we are doing.

Question put.

Motion is agreed to.

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

BIRTHS, DEATHS AND MARRIAGES REGISTRATION (AMENDMENT) BILL 2021

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

That the -

- (a) Birth, Deaths and Marriage Registration (Amendment) Bill 2021 (Bill No. /2021), be considered by Parliament without delay;
- (b) Bill must pass through one stage at a single sitting of Parliament;
- (c) Bill must not be referred to a Standing Committee or other Committee of Parliament; and
- (d) Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament on Wednesday, 22nd September, 2021, and that one hour be given to debate the Bill, with the Right of Reply given to me as the Member moving this motion.

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

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Many of the matters that we have discussed previously in fact is covered under this particular Bill. Essentially, we have the ability of now both the parents to register the child. It also includes if the baby is born alive or stillborn, that now gives the opportunity to the mother to register, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are also brining in this fairly archaic law into alignment as we know that we had changed the Marriage Act where a person becomes an adult at the age of 18 years. They can also vote at the age of 18 years but in this particular Act which is still very old, you could not change your name unless you are 21 years. So, that has now been aligned so if you are 18 years now you can of course go and change your name. The other point as I mentioned to Honourable Tabuya, that you no longer need to change your name by deed poll which is a very cumbersome and expensive process. You simply now just go to the BDM office and you can change your name. The moment you change your name and that is registered and shown in your new birth certificate, the Registrar of BDM is now legally obliged to inform everyone else that so and so has now changed their name to XYZ or whatever the case may be.

So, in that way all the agencies are aware that this person who was known as Joe Vatubua is now known as Joe Valebasoga. That gets notified to the police and all the different agencies, FRCS, FNPF. In that way we have uniformity across the board. Currently during the good old deed poll days, a lot of people actually went and did a deed poll in front of a lawyer and just kept the deed poll in their drawer. They did not actually go and even notify the Registrar. So, they were operating with two names and the law actually allowed for that. This essentially just tidies it up, Mr. Speaker, Sir from that perspective.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion. At the end of the debate, we will have the Right of Reply from the mover. Anyone wishing to take the floor?

Honourable Nawaikula, you have the floor.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as a matter of principle, we have to oppose all these amendments. Simple as they seem, we disagree with them. It is not as simple as that and we still feel that the stakeholders and all those people should give their bit and exercise their right. If I can just refer back to the case that we took against him, there was another serious error that was exposed in the Courts.

The Office of the Attorney-General was acting for the Speaker and also for the Supervisor of Elections. Institutions that are supposedly independent and the implication of that is all these independent offices are subject to the Office of the Attorney-General who gives advice and acts for them.

I think, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is the situation now where the Office of the Attorney-General is advising the Office of the Speaker and there are serious situations in relation to Bills where the drafters are not Parliamentary Counsel or Parliamentary Draftsman but are sitting there in the Attorney-General's Office. That takes away the independence or the apparent look, not only is it supposed to be independent but they are also supposed to look independent. There must be clear bipartisan and it was said, during the Court case that two independent institutional offices were also represented by the Office of the Attorney-General, so we are opposing this.

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

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to just give it another try if we can do a better job with our Bills. The ruling as per the Standing Order is that we can submit our questions and motions two days before the actual sitting or the tabling of that in Parliament. It has changed to now two weeks for us to submit our motions and questions. Can I just give it one more shot, can the Government also give us two weeks' notice on the Bills they want to table in this Parliament?

Let us be fair. You look at the Order Paper today, Consideration of Bills. No mention of what it is. Surely, we deserve respect, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we should be given the opportunity to study these Bills. As I said this morning, this must be the only Parliament in Fiji where Parliamentarians come on Monday and they do not know what Bills are before them during the sitting. It must be the only one in the world.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, you spoke this morning about some comments made about Parliament and I did not realise that today, there is headlines in the *Fiji Times* about someone commenting on how this Parliament runs. That should be the reason for us to pause and ask ourselves, how are we managing our Parliament? What would be difficult, if we know two weeks in advance when we submit our motions and questions the Bills also that will be tabled? Please, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I know that sometimes it is like having dialogue with the deaf with FijiFirst, but fair is fair. The people are watching and what is expressed today and what has been expressed lately is that they are not happy with the way our Parliament is being run.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, like I said, we are proud that we have passed 274 laws, but given the number of Sittings we have about five or six times a year, do the maths, those are lot of laws for a Parliament that hardly sits. We deserve better. Here, we were shocked last week when the Household and Income Expenditure Survey came and showing us how bad the poverty situation is. This party had submitted a motion for a Committee to look into poverty in Fiji and it was rejected so, let us do it the proper way.

Let us always remember what happened last week - the numbers that we have now about the poverty in this country was a bombshell. It can create problems, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Let us always the

Arab Spring, Tunisia thought that everything was fine, they were the darling of the World Bank and IMF and everyone else, but something triggered. A young man trying to sell his fruits to feed his family, got slapped by a police woman because he was in the wrong place and he doused himself with gasoline and immediately the whole of Tunisia erupted, because the Tunisian leadership did not know that poverty was rampant in the country.

Fiji has got to be careful. We were hiding all these things but it came out last week. Parliament has a big role to play here, Mr. Speaker, Sir. We should have listened to SODELPA to set up a Committee to look into poverty. We did not and we now have this and no matter what you say, you cannot take away the findings of that Household Income and Expenditure Survey. It is now established and for us, that will be the base on which we formulate our policies. One more time, please instruct the Government, Bills must be brought in two weeks before in the same way you expect us to bring our motions and questions to Parliament.

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

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I, too oppose the motion before the House and I support my colleagues who have spoken before me. The Explanatory Notes, just having a look at this, and this is the Interpretation Act which applies to all the laws in Fiji. So, here it says that Clause 2 of the Bill also amends Section 2 of the Act to require those who are authorised or required by any written law to provide their name as it appears on their birth certificate. So they have to provide their name as it appears on the birth certificate. It also states in that Bill in Clause 2 that any agency or approving authority of any kind which receives applications or submissions to only accept the name on an applicant if the name is as it appears on the applicant's birth certificate.

Now Mr. Speaker, Sir, once again, it calls into question all the forms of ID that are now being used by married women who have their married name on these forms of identification, like their passport or their Joint TIN card, if they have used their married name in their FNPF registration.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wonder if the Honourable Attorney-General has thought about this issue. What about citizens or Fijians who were born overseas? How do they change their birth certificate to fulfil this requirement? If they are born overseas, they have their birth certificate registered overseas and now they have a different name or married name, then how do they change their birth certificate name? It would be much more difficult for them to do so, if the law allows them or not to do so for the purpose of their registration.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the requirement that is being given would discriminate those. He is referring to Fijians born in Fiji, it is easy for them to access that. That is why this needs more consultation. You need to consult not just women but also children who are born overseas, which affect my children, it is the same. So if they can think about married women who are born overseas (a lot have been naturalised now in Fiji). They have chosen to call Fiji their home then how do they fulfil this requirement? If it means they have to provide their birth certificate at every occasion, why can they not stick to their current forms of ID which is their passport and the like, and their voter ID to use their married name, how can they show their birth certificate when their married name is different. So, you are discriminating married women from using their current form of ID, why fix what is not broken?

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- It affects Honourable Premila Kumar, it affects Honourable Kepa, it affects Honourable Qionibaravi. Why have them discriminated not use their married name? That is the

point we have been making.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to force them to provide only their birth certificate for the purposes of identification in applying for a loan for example, Mr. and Mrs. Prasad go to the bank. She has to show her birth certificate, that is not fair. Why make her give that extra step to take. You need to consult this law more. Allow married women to use their married name in any form of identification. That is the point. You have got to consult more on this Mr. Speaker, Sir, and this is the Interpretation Act that it applies across the board. It says here that when you apply to any authority or agency, come on, let this be consulted more and talk to the married women, talk to the children of married women, talk to all of them. That is why we oppose this motion before the House, give it more time to be consulted.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is why we oppose the motion before the House.

HON. SPEAKER.- Anyone else wishing to take the floor on this motion? Honourable Members, I give the floor to the Honourable Attorney-General to speak in reply.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Honourable Tabuya, we have already been down this path. Unfortunately, for her, she had decided she is going to turn this into women's rights issue. But in fact, Mr. Speaker, Sir, she has got it all wrong because what these amendments do, is give women more freedom, more liberty, more choices, more options, more opportunities to register. Unfortunately for her, it is backfired on her.

As I have said, Mr. Speaker, Sir, a married woman can change her name and now it is very simple. All she has to go and do is register at the BDM. From there, everything shall flow, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

(Honourable Opposition Member interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I know that the law is not necessarily a hard ground for the Opposition, but let me just explain it again. At the moment, if I am a married woman and I have now become Mrs. Prasad and I want to go and change my name, I can for example go to the passports office, I show them my birth certificate, I show them my marriage certificate and I get my passport under Mrs. Prasad. Now, I may have got a licence before I got married and maybe my surname was Tabuya so my licence would be still Tabuya. So, if I want to now go and change my licence to Prasad, I have to go running off to LTA and go and change it there. If I was obviously a taxpayer before that, I have to go running off to FRCS and become Prasad there. I have to go running off to FNPF and become Prasad there.

What it does now is, in fact, makes it very easy. If I want to become a Prasad, I simply go to BDM, there is now a registration form that is under this new law, that will come through by simply changing my name and then the BDM will notify everyone that this person who was known as Tabuya as a surname is now become a Prasad. They will all make a note of it and of course, you may have a police record too, the police will also note that now Prasad who used to be known as Tabuya and maybe three convictions are there. So, they will know that, that Tabuya is actually the Prasad now.

So all of that is made very easy. Similarly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is why, because there is no mechanism for married women, now it has made it very easy because on their passport there may be a Prasad, in the LTA there may still be a Tabuya, so this is what we are trying to ensure does not happen. And again, I said that there is transitional provision. Transitional provision is that, if I am at the moment, Tabuya with LTA, I will continue as a Tabuya at LTA until my licence comes to an end next year, say for example, and then when I go to renew it, I have to give my now new registered name of Prasad. A

bank is not a government agency. She said if we go to the bank for a loan. If you actually borrow money from the bank, you are an existing customer of the bank. If you are an existing customer of the bank, the bank would have gone through its KYC process. For them to open an account in the first place, they would have asked you for all these different IDs, so you see that is quite trite and silly for her to actually even suggest that. So we have again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, given women the option to make it very simply for them.

We have also said that we are not forcing anyone to change their name. It is their choice, Mr. Speaker, Sir. We have also said that now women can also register the birth of their child. It does not affect anyone else in that respect. It does not affect the father. We did not say we will take the right away from the father and give it to the mother. We said both of them have the right. We have situations where women who are single mothers and some of them do not for privacy matters, not want to reveal the name of the father. I can take you to BDM now. There are many births that are registered where the father's name is blank because they do not want the father's name, so we have catered for all of that, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, she talked about the people who are naturalised Fijians. Again, we have catered for that. That those people, we have to ensure that we get their BRN or equivalent from overseas and they will be registered under that name. Of course, once they become a citizen, they have the right to go and change their name again if they want to under the Change of Registration Name Form. It is already there in the amendment, so I cannot know what she is on about.

The last point I wanted to make, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Honourable the capricious Nawaikula has in fact, said that, "oh, your office is compromised, Sir". I take exception to that. He has not told this Parliament, in previous parliaments under previous Constitutions, the Solicitor-General's Office has always provided advice to the Speaker, Supervisor of Elections and the Office of the Attorney-General.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I cannot understand why he is now trying to represent to Parliament and the Fijian people as if this is something very unique, an aberration; it is not. That is how things have been done. In fact, the Solicitor-General rejected taking up the case of the Supervisor of Elections previously. All these arguments by these Honourable Members from the other side are quite actually misplaced and indeed, I am very being polite by saying that.

One last point, Sir, Honourable Gavoka said when the figures hit us last week, Honourable Professor Prasad is on record commenting on this in February. These figures actually came out in February 2021, SODELPA did not make a comment, NFP did. Here is a release by good old *Fiji Times* by Felix Chaudhry, NFP Leader Honourable Professor Prasad during a break for Parliament, there is a photo of him there (must have been a very nice photo, right angle) the revelation that close to 30 percent of Fiji's population are living in poverty proves the so-called Bainimarama Boom as a massive failure, said NFP Leader Professor Prasad; he made that comment in February.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- No, no you are right for the first time. Mr. Speaker, Sir, Honourable Gavoka is making sound as if that is a revelation. When these figures came out, we said "All right, these figures are there" we had some issues with it, this is a new way that we are measuring poverty, they have not mentioned that, we had income expenditure before, now we have consumption based expenditure and the reason why we accepted the results, although we knew there were some skewering of it was because this is the first time their enumerators actually had to go out and do a survey based on consumption basis. It was never been done before and you have to get the base right with a few percent here and there.

However, if I were to compare the statistics of the previous HIES studies, it would show although it was based on income-based, a higher rate of poverty. He knows that in the income expenditure, but we have said that it should not compare income with consumption-based, we have said that and we are on record. The difference was that last week unbeknownst to everyone, there was an ethnic and religious demarcation done; that was the problem. As far as the overall figure was concerned, we accepted it and that came out in February. There is a question later today and I will come back to that and explain to you, wait for the next half an hour.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General for his Right of Reply. Honourable Members, before we go to the vote, there were other speakers who wanted to participate in this but I was looking around for them and did not see any of them, so I did not raise them. Unfortunately, they are not here but they are on virtual. I thought everyone was sitting in Parliament, so that is my mistake and I apologise to them. I shall be much more awake next time.

Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Members, we will move on to the next agenda item.

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

Laboratory Technician – Levuka Hospital
(Question No. 191/2021)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services inform Parliament why there is no laboratory technician at the Levuka Hospital for at least two months?

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE (Minister for Health and Medical Services).- Mr. Speaker, I thank the Honourable Member for that question.

Mr. Speaker, the Laboratory Scientist in Levuka Hospital lives alone while her family is in Suva. For nearly four months, she was there performing her functions alone while her husband and her younger children were here and she asked to be able to come and take some leave which we agreed to, because there was a lesser need for her services at that time and we have provided a means by which to mitigate the need for emergency blood services by having HemoCue available on sites for full blood count and bring the specimens to Suva.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua, your supplementary question.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have been led to understand just recently that a replacement has arrived in Levuka and the Minister might like to confirm that. My supplementary question is, why was the Ministry only able to provide the replacement Laboratory Technician to Levuka after NFP gave notice of my question in the House?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I did not hear properly what she said. But I said in my answer that this lady was away from her family for four months. She had asked for leave to be able to come and see her young children which she did after assessments were done to ensure that there was safety and there were means by which blood tests could be sent across. As you know, freight services continued, they could bring the blood services across to check it here in Suva.

Mr. Speaker, just on that note before I sit, this morning the Honourable Member said that the Ministry of Health was incompetent and I take it very personal that she calls the staff and the Ministry as incompetent. She should not do that.

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

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Four months long is incompetent. What were you doing in those four months? Why was there not a replacement? Someone can die, totally incompetent.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- What is your question?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Why did you not have someone there within those four months?

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- She was there for four months.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Fours months she was away. Someone should have replaced her during that time.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order! You can ask any question in Parliament through the Honourable Speaker, not one side of the House to another without the Speaker. Honourable Tuisawau, you have the floor.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Can the Honourable Minister, please, advise the House on steps taken in terms of human resource planning and planning for training to ensure that such incidences can be avoided in THE future in terms of Laboratory Technician training to be also looking at other trainings involved within medical personnel including scholarships.

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

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In this morning's Ministerial Address I discussed that during the period of the last one year six months we have employed more than 12 contract new positions of Laboratory Technicians at least ten to twelve, not including those that DFAT has appointed on project positions. Some of them are currently in Kadavu and they are returning, as we speak. These are recruitments that are able to be done during these difficult and challenging times with the appropriation that is given to us, the Ministry of Health, as you are also aware that the budget has increased and we have been able to do this.

Also in addition is the fact that the laboratory scientists are a great bunch of professionals that are very much needed during this time. They are not only used in the clinical laboratories in the hospital but also in the public health laboratories in the Fiji CDC in terms of the tests for COVID-19 and the many platforms that are being used. Sir, as a group, they are a human resource commodity that are in high demand and therefore as I have alluded to, this lady had to take time to come over for her leave. We have steps in place to ensure that the safety of the blood results in the Lomaiviti Province, especially Ovalau, was provided for.

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

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

HON. SPEAKER.- You have the floor.

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise under Standing Order 44(16) which states, and I quote, "A question must not be asked seeking information that is readily accessible in public forums". Let me outline the basis of the Point of Order: Oral Question No. 192/2021 under Honourable Alexander O'Connor's name precisely falls in this category and Standing Order 44(16), for one whole week, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there has been comprehensive media coverage on the 2019-2020 Household Expenditure and Survey Report.

The Honourable Minister for Economy himself gave a half-an-hour press conference last week rubbishing the report. It is done then and less than 24 hours later his Acting Permanent Secretary released a statement terminating the CEO of Bureau of Statistics and that they were escorted out of office. We are reliably told by personnel that they were the Minister's own protection people. The question has been filed under the name of the Assistant Minister for whom the report is invaluable in my view in terms of delivery of health and medical care during times of economic and depressed climate in our nation.

I know the Minister wants another opportunity, I would actually advise him to give a Ministerial Statement rather than finding, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this devious way of having a question asked so that we, in the Opposition, do not have the opportunity to respond. But the approval of this question, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to be on the Order Paper for all intents and purposes more than a week beyond the line of 06 September, not a few days as allowed in my view weeks of double standards. This is a complete departure from Standing Order 44(16) and Standing Order 125(2) that states that any determination by the Speaker must not discriminate against or oppressed minority parties.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, you remember that you actually ruled out while vetting Parliamentary business submitted by the NFP a question submitted on the necessity of police to arrest Lautoka-based doctor, transport him to Suva, detained him for 48 hours then transport him back to Lautoka

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, keep to your Point of Order, do not deviate.

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- I am explaining my Point of Order, Mr. Speaker, Sir,

HON. SPEAKER.- Do not deviate. Keep to your Point of Order and stick to that.

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- I am not deviating, I am just explaining to you why the Point of Order

HON. SPEAKER.- You are, you are, you are.

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am making a point why the Standing Order makes sense and let me say, Mr. Speaker, again that the rules must be applied fairly and as I said, if the Honourable Attorney-General wants to have another go at what he said during the press conference, he should give a Ministerial Statement and not get this question in a devious way so that he is able to talk about it again and we in the Opposition will not have the opportunity. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I look forward to your ruling.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Members, this was decided at the Meeting by the Committee, you were not there. It was decided by the Business Committee and it went into the Order

Paper, that is it, it is as simple as that. You take your seat, I have not finished. When the Speaker is speaking, you take your seat, whoever you are.

The Business Committee makes the decision, it is not the Speaker who makes the decision in the Business Committee. Where there is a parity of vote, whatever is proposed there it is defeated. That is what a lot of people are thinking, that the Speaker has the final say, no, not at all. There is a parity of vote, it is defeated, simple, straightforward. The Business Committee had agreed to this, we went through this just a couple of days ago. So it stays on. Honourable O' Connor, you have the floor.

Update on 2021-2020 Household and Income Expenditure Survey (HIES)
(Question No. 192/2021)

HON. A.D. O'CONNOR asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Attorney-General and the Minister for Economy, Civil Service, Communications, Housing and Community Development inform Parliament why were the 2019-2020 Household and Income Expenditure Survey results released in August this year flawed?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM (Minister for Economy, Civil Service, Communications, Housing and Community Development).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. It depends on the level of comprehension, Honourable Gavoka.

I would like to say, before I answer, I feel it is our incumbent duty to protect the Office of the Speaker, because the claims made by the NFP, in particular, SODELPA actually has not deteriorated to that level. We have seen in the past a number of occasions, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that the proceedings of the Business Committee is then flaunted within hours within the media, and we know which media organisations pick it up, but it is the decorum, that lack of finesse and the parliamentary behaviour that is required, even during the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, Honourable Lalabalavu knows this. And I know, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there were people who have been in Parliament before, they never did such a thing. They never went out and winched about what happened in the Business Committee Meeting.

For the NFP, every single thing is reduced to politics, even the Office of the Speaker. Again, he has made an attempt to do that and cast aspersions on your Office and your goodself, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I take exception at that. Again, I say that, at least, the Honourable Lalabalavu is a permanent Member, as the Leader of Opposition, and his other Members, the Whip, the Honourable Prime Minister is a permanent Member, including myself and two other Members, the Leader of the Government and the Honourable Alvick, Honourable Prasad has shown enormous disrespect to the Business Committee by continuously not showing up and sending Honourable Qereqeretabua in his place.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- A Point of Order, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, if he is going to send people to represent him in the Business Committee, if they are not competent enough to pick up on those issues I am highlighting, that is their problem. The Fijian public need to know this, nearly every Business Committee Meeting, we have to correct their wording, we have to correct the wording, we have to correct the way they frame the questions, we have to correct their grammar, continuously, and we facilitate that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, getting to the actual question itself, and just one point, sometimes Ministers make enormous public announcements, the Honourable Prime Minister gives national statements, the Minister for Health in particular with the vaccine and COVID-19. Despite that information being made publicly available, they still come and question us. Now the rationale he is using is because I have given a media statement, therefore, I should not be questioned.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, why are they asking questions when information from this side have also been made available? There needs to be a single standard not double standards.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I highlighted previously, the Household and Income Expenditure Survey (HIES) in fact came out in February of this year. This is the report and Members of the Opposition, in particular, NFP. The SODELPA was obviously asleep or probably fighting amongst themselves at that point in time, they did not make any comment. The NFP made a comment, he talked about the Bainimarama boom is not there, et cetera, it is all here, that is fine.

As I highlighted previously, we accepted it, there were certain flaws with it in terms of some of the ways that it was derived, but we said let us roll with it because the first time it is being carried out under consumption expenditure-based methodology (one of the methodologies) as opposed to income expenditure. For those people on the other side who may not understand the difference, income expenditure is basically the amount of money you have in your pocket, that is as simple as I could put. Consumption is basically what resources do you have access to, to live.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if I live in a village, I have access to the fishing places and I can catch a fish every second day, there is a huge difference between a person who has that, has access to land, grow his or her own plantation as opposed to someone who is living as a squatter or top of a sewage pipe in somewhere between Suva and Nausori. They do not have to have that. So, there is a point of difference.

It also factors in, for example, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and subsidies you may get for electricity, you may get for water, et cetera, that gets factored into consumption expenditure because it is not direct income for you, but it is helping you to live. Same thing with, if your children are getting their school fees paid, it is not coming out of your pocket, but it is an expenditure that has actually been met. That is the difference.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I said earlier on also, that in the HIES that were carried out under the income-based methodology, in 2002 to 2003, the poverty rate was 35 percent. In 2008 to 2009, it was 31 percent, in 2013 and 2014 it was 28 percent. These are under the income expenditure methodology. In 2019 to 2020, when we adopted the consumption base, it had 29.9 percent. We accepted that. It was there, SODELPA did not comment, NFP commented. It is no bombshell, Honourable Gavoka.

What was the bombshell, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for us, was the fact that the Bureau of Statistics decided to do an ethnic breakdown. The SODELPA's obsession with ethnicity, of course, it fits in with their whole political philosophy. Let me point out why it is flawed, because the 2017 Census did not have ethnic desegregated basis on ethnic basis of the population; it did not. Let me point out why it was not, and I quote directly from the former Government Statistician from Vatulele, Mr. Epeli Waqavonovono. He said and let me quote:

“There was no reliable collection of data on ethnicity in the 2017 Census. As a result, no data on ethnicity could be accurately aggregated or released as part of the 2017 Census. There was a question on ethnicity posed in the census questionnaire, however, during a review of the data and methods of collection, we uncovered a number of anomalies in the way data on ethnicity was collected that severely compromised the objectivity and completeness of the data set on ethnicity. It was found that many enumerators failed to verbally ask for the respondent's ethnic background. Instead, the data was collected based on the enumerators observed assumption of the respondent's ethnicity. Many enumerators also assumed that the entire household's ethnicity based on one household member, failing to account for households with

multiple ethnicities. It was also reported by enumerators that many respondents refused to disclose their ethnic backgrounds.”

Fortunately, we have not seen these issues in the collection of any other data sets as part of the 2017 Census. So, if you cannot rely on the census’ ethnic breakdown, how will you, if you suddenly now want to go and assess poverty on the basis of ethnicity and then went one step ahead on religion, how will you choose your sample size? How will you do that because you do not have a base to refer it to? Your base should tell you, “alright, 70 percent of the population are Eskimos, 25 percent of the population are Inuits and the balance are Chinese” because I want to mention ethnic groups that you all do not get or know enough thing about. Assuming if that is what the census said, then when you go and get your sample size based on ethnicity, then you would have a good reflection. But it did not do that. That was the problem.

Honourable Reddy is correct when he highlighted earlier this morning that if you look at the survey methodology, it has only got two pages; page two and page three. Over here, if you can see, it shows where the sample sizes were taken from. A lot of the areas in the interior of Viti Levu and interior of Vanua Levu.

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- Sample size.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- They were the sample were taken from; the samples were taken from these red areas. And over the page, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the second page talks about the divisions, so they created a central/eastern urban, central rural, eastern rural, northern urban, northern rural, western urban and western rural. I can go to a western rural place and maybe I might go to an area where there is lot of cane growing, so what is the proclivity to get a sample of what ethnic background. I may go to the interior of Viti Levu, if my sample size from there is a very large number, then obviously the proclivity is that I will get *iTaukei* people. This is the problem we have in terms of the methodology.

There is a philosophical issue also and the philosophical issue, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that we do not want to see poverty, we do not want to see needs on the basis of ethnicity, on the basis of religion and this is precisely what has happened. This survey that could have been put to good use and there are many other positive things that came out in terms of data that we could have looked at, but no one from the Opposition, maybe NFP did not say that, but I think they may have said in one of the statements, at least from SODELPA or the other political parties outside this Parliament focussed on those other issues. What percentage of children are eating two meals a day, three meals a day? What percentage of children go home by bus from school? All those important data is now just pushed to the side, not assessed but Honourable Gavoka, all the other Members are now obsessed with ethnicity, even though it demonstrates that it was flawed in assessing it, they still are obsessed with it because they think this is a smoking gun. Smoking gun!

Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is fundamentally why this particular report, February Report – no ethnic categorisation. Suddenly August – September – ethnic categorisation. The method of ascertaining that is flawed and of course, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we know that when you start homogenising people you also create injustices within that group. Affirmative action after Rabuka’s *coup*, affirmative action under Qarase - who were the people who benefitted from it? Not the ordinary *iTaukei* people, it was the well-connected *iTaukei* people. They are the ones who got access to it. Who bought all the Class A shares? So the problem is, once you start getting into the space of ethnic categorisation, you actually miss out on the injustices that actually exist within that particular group and that is socio-economic stratification. The way that I look at it very simply.

Let us talk about ethnicity, if you have an *iTaukei* person whose lost both his or her legs in a wheelchair and you have an Indo-Fijian with the same situation disabled, do their have more in common

with each other than someone who is able? If a person cannot speak, do they have more in common with each other than the person who cannot speak irrespective of their ethnic group? It is a needs basis. That is the reason, Mr. Speaker, Sir, why this particular survey was actually flawed. I can go on because we have actually said quite a bit about this, but that is my initial response.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Lynda Tabua, you have the floor.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, Honourable Minister for that explanation although it sounded *déjà vu* because it is exactly what he said in his press conference last Thursday. So he is just repeating himself.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Speaker, in March 2018 in the *Daily Hansard*, a question is posed to the Honourable Attorney-General exactly on this from the Honourable Kepa asking about the data on ethnicity in the same census (2017) and then the Honourable Professor Prasad said and I quote: “Madam Speaker, it includes the data on ethnicity, I think if the Bureau of Statistics is collecting the data, why do you not release the data?”

The answer from the Honourable Attorney-General was, and I quote, “No such data was collected, he needs to understand that. There has been no aggregation of data based on ethnicity under the census none whatsoever. There was no collation of data.”

Honourable Attorney-General, the question is, do you not think there is a difference between no such data being collected than actually unreliable data? Is there not a difference between the two and in fact you have mislead the Parliament in 2018, in the very same place in the *Daily Hansard* right here in Parliament? You stated no such data was collected whereas now he is coming here and stating that unreliable data was collected. Is there not a difference and why did you not explain back then what you are explaining now?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, thank you for your supplementary question. The thing is, do not make a statement, ask your supplementary question. Most of you start making statements instead of asking supplementary questions, just stick to the supplementary question. Honourable Attorney-General, you have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is very simple. We did say that there was officially no data collected. There is absolutely no data collected officially. There was no sanction to collect data on the basis of ethnicity. The Bureau of Statistics went ahead and did some of their own and even the data they did collect, when we asked them about it, I have just read out the quote from Epeli Waqavonovono; that is precisely what he said. So there was no concrete collection of data from their perspective, it was unreliable.

How can you talk about something that is unreliable when it is completely flawed? And even if you look at Honourable Kuridrani, he was saying that all our statistics are flawed, please keep it. You are mixing up the agriculture survey or census with ours (HIES), but even with what he was saying, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the categorisation it has, it assumes homogeneous ethnicities.

I know some people on SODELPA you have people with mix marriages. What about their categorization? Are we going to go on a patrilineal lineage because your father is of a particular ethnic group and therefore you will be known or categorized in that ethnic group or because your mother is in that ethnic group you will be in that ethnic group? We are living in a sophisticated society. We are not

living back in the 1800s or 1900s. We have people from Namatakula who are now living in Australia married to Australians. How are you going to classify their children?

There are people from the other side I know about their ethnicity or the background and I can talk about that too. You will see it is not as simple as that but because it is a political agenda they will keep on highlighting that. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Bulanauca? This will be a last supplementary question on this question.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, ethnicity is a fact of life. We need to deal with figures accordingly so that even the qualify recognise statisticians defend the methodology and information collected in that 2019-2020 Household Income and Expenditure Survey is the Honourable Minister they are all wrong and he alone is right? Do you believe what he is saying? Do you know they know they are qualified people – do you believe in them?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Attorney-General.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sir, I have no idea what the Honourable Members is asking.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Do you understand my question?

HON. SPEAKER.- You ask the question and do not make a statement.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Well, Mr. Speaker, Sir, all these Bureau Statisticians are highly qualified to support the methodology in information. Is the Honourable Minister saying that they are all wrong because they are qualified? He alone is correct? We do not believe in him and we believe in the qualified people.

HON. A. SAYED-PKHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we also have economists and people who have worked in the statistics office in the Ministry of Economy also. In fact two or three of the key staff actually were former employees of the Bureau of Statistics. So, it is not just about me and this is the problem with you; you are obsessed with one person. Look at the statement. Look at the methodology of it. How can you describe your methodology of selecting based on ethnicity based on just two pages? You are not interested. You are not even listening to me, but for you it is all a political game - essentially that is what it is.

HON. SPEAKER.- We will move on to the next Oral Question for today. I give the floor to the Honourable Jale to ask his question.

Assistance to Maritime Provinces
(Question No. 193/2021)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport update Parliament on the assistance provided to people in maritime provinces who depend on tourists to purchase their handicrafts?

HON. F.S. KOYA (Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport).- Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me first remind the Honourable Member that the FijiFirst Government's Policy is actually targeted at equality beyond geographical boundaries for the benefit of all Fijians. In fact, the policies are actually

focused towards creating great economic impact for the most vulnerable and that is irrespective, absolutely irrespective of religion, gender and ethnicity, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have continued to work hard to create opportunities for Fijians to support and supplement their income, be it in a primary resource sector role such as agriculture and fisheries. Government has also formed strategic partnership with Vodafone to support Micro and Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) to graduate to e-commerce platform. This has actually increased their customer base from domestic to the large global distributions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with respect to the tourism sectors while we may not be realising the benefits of tourism as we did with pre-COVID-19, we have ensured that we have provided some form of opportunity to benefit not only tourism operators on the mainland but our maritime islands as well. Last year we actually pioneered the Blue Lane Initiative through the Fijian COVID-19 safe Economic Recovery Framework to allow a safe restart for Fijians growing Blue Tourism Industry and we welcomed about 133 yachts and there was about 600 of our passengers in crew.

While we actually started this in port Denarau, we extended it to Savusavu to share the socio-economic benefits in the Northern Division. Mr. Speaker, Sir, our findings in our 2020 Yacht Survey show that whilst these yachts spent money on fuel and marine dockage and other essentials repairs, they also generated income for the local communities through purchase of souvenirs and yacht provisioning services and supermarket shopping and also for recreational activities.

While the sales of handicrafts may no longer be the primary source of income, it is through this particular pathways like the Blue Lanes it is allowed for substitute income for these maritime communities. Also, Sir, under the leadership of our Honourable Prime Minister the government has been supporting maritime based businesses even before the COVID-19 pandemics and we continue to support them in the post COVID-19 era and the assistance we provide to our maritime residents with the opportunity to generate income from their primary trades and also alternative livelihood programmes. Sir, we have had targeted income generating programmes such as the IHRVP which I mentioned before and then we have got the MSME Concessional Loans and that have offered much needed support to our MSMEs not only to survive, to improve their livelihoods.

So, when we talk about MSMEs we do not just talk about the mainland. There are a lot of MSMEs that actually exist also in America et cetera. For example, Sir, in 2015 the IHRDP assisted women in Vanuabalavu with two separate projects and this was the Daku District Women' Project and the Tuvuca Women's Project. These projects supported a total of about 60 odd women with the establishment of business centre and that function has a collection for a centre of handicrafts, et cetera, and a training centre and also a manufacturing site for weaving. So, the Tuvuca women were assisted with a fibreglass boat and an outboard engine Sir, which allowed them to diversify into the fishing sector and the total assistance given to them was about \$76,000.

At one point in time these women were able to generate income of about \$500 a month. Another community income generated project was provided in 2017 to Cicia for organic virgin coconut oil, ginger project and the total cost was about \$69,000. This kind of assistance allowed them to procure electronic sprayers, VCO filters, coconut pressers, goat fencing and generators, seedlings and hardware materials. The project has actually directly assisted Mr. Speaker, Sir, 320 people and further direct assistance to about 80 individuals. We have got about 100 odd crafters under our Fijian Made by Fijian Campaign and through this we are actually allowing or providing greater market access for them Sir.

These are just some examples Mr. Speaker, Sir, of our assistance to those in the maritime zone. There are many other projects in the pipeline as we continue to outreach and to support business ideas and livelihoods. The Franchise Scheme that we have actually links all the regions together Sir and the

links to these regions would not be serviced if the government had not provided subsidies through the Franchise Scheme. We have got commercial operators who also operate in the uneconomical routes so, they actually have a chain that exists. Vessel operators within the government franchise scheme as far as Vanuabalavu and Northern Lau route Lakeba and upper southern Lau, Kabara, Ogea and Ono-i-Lau and the lower Southern Lau.

Sir, as you can see we will continue to capitalise on the incentives provided for in the budget. So, whether it is regulatory relief such as fishing licencing or income generation programmes. We will continue to provide as much support as we can. Thank you very much. Sir, I hope that answers your question.

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

HON. A. JALE.- A supplementary question, I would just like to ask the Honourable Minister, is there anything in particular for Kabara people who have already lost all their sources of income, because their *tanoa* and all those things that they need to market to Suva, has all been stopped because there is no one buying that?

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

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. All the services, as I had said, all the initiatives et cetera that have been made available to any other citizen in Fiji are equally available to the people of Kabara. If there is a short fall somewhere, I welcome the Honourable Member to please write to me and let me know and I will tell them to get in touch with them as quickly as possible if they do need further support.

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

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I would like to ask the Honourable Minister, how many handicraft makers or those dependent on the streets for their livelihood have received \$360 recently given by the Government for three months? Thank you.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, he is a senior Member of Parliament, the \$360 question is not with the Ministry of Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport, it is with the Ministry of Economy. He should be asking that question to the Honourable Minister for Economy.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Radrodro.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Just a supplementary question to the Honourable Minister. To allow those in the maritime islands to access concessional loans at the FDB, what sort of process and strategies have you put in place to allow them to access these loans from their respective residences apart from coming down to Suva?

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

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, if he is asking how they actually access or can access the FBD loan etcetera, there are phones, internet and they have equal access just like every other citizen around the country. If there are some difficulties, we do assist through the Ministry and in the maritime islands if anyone wants to apply, we do assist by getting the FBD involved and making sure that they get in touch with them. If you do have any specific people who have not been able to, I would be glad to assist, all you need to do is just let us know. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, for the purposes of complying with Standing Orders, in respect to sitting times, I now call upon the Leader of Government in Parliament to move a Suspension Motion.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

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

That under Standing Order 6 that so much of Standing Order 23(1) is suspended so as to allow the House to sit beyond 4.30 p.m. today to complete the remaining items as listed in today's Order Paper.

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

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

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are on the last Item on the Agenda as listed on today's Order paper, which is on Questions, thus the request to sit beyond 4.30 p.m. in order to complete it.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is open for debate on this motion. Is there anyone wishing to take the floor? No one wishing to take the floor. Honourable Leader of Government in Parliament, do you have anything further to add.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, on that note, we will take a break and Parliament will resume in half an hour.

The Parliament adjourned at 4.10 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 4.45 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- We will continue from where we left off and I give the floor to the Honourable Alipate Nagata to ask the fourth Oral Question for today. You have the floor.

Utilisation of Funds for Water and Sanitation
(Question No. 194/2021)

HON. A.T. NAGATA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Defence, National Security and Policing, Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management inform Parliament how the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development intends to utilise the allocated sum of \$500,000 for Water and Sanitation in the current budget for this financial year?

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

From the beginning, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the Honourable Prime Minister for his continued commitment to the development and improvement of services in the rural areas of Fiji, particularly in terms of utilities and the provision of its necessary services. I wish to again acknowledge the Honourable Prime Minister for his continued commitment from day one.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we all know that water is important, it is a basic need and there are policy documents that guide the work being undertaken in the Ministry as well, and I wish to acknowledge the Permanent Secretary, Mr. Kolitagane and his team in the Ministry of Rural Development, particularly the Research and Development team for presenting facts and justification to the Ministry of Economy and thus led to the allocation of this provision in the 2021-2022 National Budget for the continued improvement of water and sanitation in rural Fiji.

Again, we are guided by the Constitution sections 35 and 36, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and of course here with me is an interesting report by WHO and UNICEF (these are joint monitoring programme for water supply and sanitation globally and then coming down to the region for Fiji specifically). We also have interesting information and of course, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am quoting from findings of the 2017 census report. Although, we acknowledge that there has been recent reports made recently but again, highlighting key areas, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Let me say that in the census report that I was referring to, about 35 percent of the rural households are connected to metered tap water, while 10 percent rely on high-risk water source and this was the argument and the justifications that was made to the Ministry of Economy.

A few major reasons, Mr. Speaker, Sir, one is high risk water source and the other one is the high risk sanitation. There is a strong link between the two, Mr. Speaker, Sir because the availability of water in large quantities is a precondition for adequate sanitation and of course, in realising this work, government provided this entitlement and this investment by the FijiFirst Government gives rural Fijians the right of access to clean and safe water in adequate quantities and access to adequate sanitation facilities as stated in the Constitution, that I have referred to earlier.

High risk water source – this is categorised in terms of high exposure. We have a lot of open source gravity-fed water systems in Fiji and unfortunately, most of these are untreated water, Mr. Speaker, Sir. We all know that. Even in my own village, we drink directly from the source to the pipe system into the village and the risk of water-borne diseases, particularly the Leptospirosis, Typhoid, and Dengue Fever and Diarrhoea (LTDD). We have that information with the Ministry of Health and we work

together and of course, this will also lead to the identification of the key priority areas for the allocation of this funding.

For the high-risk sanitation facilities, Mr. Speaker, Sir, again, related. Water and particularly flush to pit latrine, pit latrine with slabs, pit latrine without slabs, open pit shed toilets and water-sealed toilets as well. There has been a new design that will be used for this project once water is improved. The report that we have, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will just quickly highlight from the census of 2017, it talks about areas in Namosi, Lomaiviti, Naitasiri, Kadavu, Ra and Bua, and with high risk sanitation projects, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the highly vulnerable provinces are Ba, Nadroga, Navosa, Macuata, Tailevu, Cakaudrove and Ra and this does not refer to any specific ethnic groups but all the settlements and villages and the communities within these respective communities or geographical areas.

In terms of high risk water, that will be the focus – Namosi, Lomaiviti, Naitasiri, Kadavu, Ra and Bua and of course, with high-risk sanitation projects we have Ba, Nadroga, Navosa, Macuata, Tailevu, Cakaudrove and Ra. The identification and the allocation might be subject to further consultations too particularly, with the Ministry for Health with LTDD vulnerable areas, Mr. Speaker, Sir. So, that very briefly is the explanation in these allocation but let me assure this august House that the Ministry again is prioritising water and sanitation as one of its main development priorities. For the coming years, continuing from the projects previously and of course again, thankful to the Honourable Prime Minister, ensuring that no one is left behind, people in the rural areas deserve good clean drinking water and this is undertaken by the Ministry, let alone the work that is also being undertaken by Water Authority under the Ministry of Infrastructure and Meteorological Services.

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

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the Honourable Minister for his response. As the former Commissioner Northern, he would know the plight of the people in Daku in Kia Island who constantly have to go to Labasa to travel by boat to get their water supply. Mr. Speaker, they continue to ask for Government assistance, they continue to face the same plight. Can he answer if this allocation in this budget for help for the people of Daku who since the famine in the last few months, they have really struggled to get drinking water.

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

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I must also say that there is also a separate allocation in the Ministry for emergency water, particularly during this dry period that is when we utilise that funding. For the Western Division, we are cutting water to Vatulele, Malolo and even some villages in Yasawa and of course, likewise in the Northern Division as well. So, the four Divisional Commissioners know their hotspot areas if I may say, when it comes to prolong dry periods.

There are unfortunately, some places that are quite difficult in terms of finding alternative sources and particularly for the islands probably desalination plants but we have to bring in the right technologies for that. So, we are working with all stakeholders, Mr. Speaker, Sir, if I may also say for example that is one community just here in Tailevu, the *Tikina* of Namara, you would be surprised that the *Tikina* of Namara is there but there is no water source, no river and no whatever, so we are trying to find from somewhere in the *Tikina* of Vugalei, if there can be a water source so that we can provide for. There is underground water but then high levels of contamination, a lot of metallic - parts of Lomaivuna. So all these data is available with all stakeholders and we will continue to find permanent long-term solutions but of course, Daku, Commissioner Northern and the team are working on that and if we can find an alternative long-term solutions, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we will be glad to allocate funds for it.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I am worried about your source coming from Vugalei. There might be some opinion by the Honourable Prime Minister regarding that.

We move on to the fifth oral question for today. I give the floor to the Honourable Adi Litia Qionibaravi to ask Question No. 195 of 2021.

Transfer of Indigenous Ecological Knowledge and Environmental Management
(Question No. 195/2021)

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Prime Minister and Minister for iTaukei Affairs, Sugar Industry, Foreign Affairs and Forestry inform Parliament on the Ministry's programme and initiatives to encourage the learning and transfer of indigenous ecological knowledge and environmental management?

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA (Minister for iTaukei Affairs, Sugar Industry, Foreign Affairs and Forestry).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise to respond to the question from the Honourable Adi Litia Qionibaravi.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Adi Litia Qionibaravi knows the transfer of indigenous ecological knowledge is a complex process that requires deep collaboration with other communities but it is worth the effort because it protects heritage with those entrusted by history with carrying its legacy forward and, of course, it informs my Government's campaign to address biodiversity crisis that faces the planet.

Section 40 of the Fijian Constitution, Mr. Speaker, says that every person has the right to a clean and healthy environment which, of course, includes the right to have the natural world protected for the benefit of present and future generations through legislative and other measures, and Fiji is meeting that constitutional mandate by leading by example in working with nature and not against it.

Mr. Speaker, we recognise that solutions to protecting the natural world do not always come in steel and concrete, they come from nature itself and we recognise that we are not the first generation to wrestle with this challenge. Often the answers to the most difficult questions we face can come from tapping Indigenous Ecological Knowledge (IEK). This knowledge, Mr. Speaker, can benefit every community in Fiji and that is why we are wielding it through a whole of Government effort. Upholding the aims of the Fijian Constitution is not the duty of a single Ministry, it is the mandate of every arm of Government.

Mr. Speaker, look for examples at our COVID-19 response. It is led by the Ministry of Health and Medical Services but every Ministry is enlisted in this national effort and that is why we are succeeding. While the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs is primarily responsible for documenting IEK, this is also a Government wide programme, indeed it is a society wide programme built through partnerships with NGOs and the private sector. So I will not confine my response today to the Ministry's work and instead we will speak more broadly about how IEK fits with our larger commitment to keep Fiji's environment pristine.

Mr. Speaker, resource owners play a vital role in the use of IEK for environment management. That is why we have set up a National iTaukei Resource Owners Committee. A sub-committee of the National Environment Council under the Environment Management Act and carriage of that Act, of course, first with the Ministry of Environment, that is why the Council's budget allocation is with the Ministry of Environment. That is intentional because resource owners and the traditional ecological knowledge can have a country wide impact on ecological conservation to the Ministry of Environment.

In this way, indigenous knowledge and practices can be mainstreamed, learnt, transferred and adopted. Indeed that knowledge, Mr. Speaker, can have a global impact because we are a leading nation. The world watches what Fiji is doing and when we pioneer innovative solutions we serve more than Fiji, we create an example that serves the planet.

Mr. Speaker, it was my Government that published the Climate Change Glossary in the *iTaukei* language - the first vernacular climate change glossary, the value of glossary that lies in more than labelling the climate threats upon us, it allows us to translate ancient wisdom to meet modern challenge and that, Mr. Speaker, is what we are doing.

At the policy level, Fiji ratified the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) (for the Convention) in 2010.

My Government recognised that we need to harness indigenous ecological knowledge or traditional knowledge to address broader development issues such as environmental management. Fragments of work had existed but we had to bring them together through a systematic arrangement, the Convention provided this umbrella. The seven year window between 2003 and 2010 proved our intervention's importance in leveraging other mechanisms to address Fiji's National Development.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Convention provided a pathway to connect the intangible and the tangible. The government recognised that IEK under traditional knowledge would flow into the public domain and be easily accessed and used by policy makers, including government ministries. This would further our work to address climate change, manage disaster risk reduction and protect biological diversity.

The Paris Agreement and Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction and the Convention Biological Diversity all recognise, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the role of traditional knowledge. So we must build this body of information and make it accessible so that it can be used to further sustainable and resilient development.

At the programme level, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs implements the Cultural Mapping Programmes, what we call the CMP, which identifies the knowledge systems and processes and mitigate their loss through recording.

The programme records traditional knowledge, including IEK, and the Ministry has shared snippets of it with the owners' approval. The first phase of the CMP which is the data collection from the 14 provinces has been completed. Currently, data has been verified and cleaned and will be stored in the Traditional Knowledge and Expression of Culture database. The database will be a depository of knowledge and information and will morph into a registry. This is a critical component of the Traditional Knowledge and Expression of Culture (TKEC) Bill which will be put to Parliament soon.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions are very specific areas of intellectual property law. The Ministry of iTaukei Affairs is currently working with the Attorney-General's Chambers on the TKEC Bill, specific law that covers traditional knowledge. As already mentioned by the Attorney-General when we were debating the Intellectual Property Laws: that were the Patents Act 2021, Trade Marks Act 2021 and the Designs Act 2021, we intend to introduce the TKEC Bill in Parliament soon but we are trying our best to get it right first.

The TKEC Bill provides for the registration, the ownership and protection of traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expression. To provide the protection, we must first be able to identify which design, art work and traditional knowledge belong to which subset of the iTaukei community. This is not an easy task, Mr. Speaker, Sir, nor should it be easy if we want to get it right. The iTaukei people have interacted and shared traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions and designs across

our long history. Much of the iTaukei culture and history is oral. At times, the lack of a written record makes it unclear who owns what and where a particular design originates. We are doing our best and we are making progress.

There is a great potential for overlaps depending on how the extended different sub-committees have historically interacted. The Ministry of iTaukei Affairs has over the years undertaken a nationwide exercise on cultural mapping to be able to transcribe, file and compile an accurate record of iTaukei traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expression.

The exercise, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is yet to be finalised. After the cultural mapping exercise, registry will be set up under the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs to protect traditional knowledge and cultural expression. Until the cultural mapping exercise is complete and the registry is set up, the Bill, even if implemented now, will not be effective. Owners and designers of traditional knowledge and cultural expression will first need to be established before action can be taken against unlawfully using the traditional cultural knowledge or traditional cultural expression. But once it is set up, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it will provide a legal recourse for traditional communities to claim against a person, a company or an institution they feel is misusing their designs, traditional totems or traditional knowledge.

Apart from the CMP, the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs undertakes the special revival programme and the cultural awareness programme. The Ministry visited villages and communities to revive and document traditional practices, including IEK.

In the recent past, the Ministry visited Dakuibeqa in Beqa, Nabutautau in Navosa, Natauloa in Nairai, Muanaicake in Fulaga, Namatakula in Nadroga, Toge in Ba, Navutulevu in Serua, Nataleira in Dawasamu and Visoto in Ovalau to document some of these practices. Knowledge is drawn from living human treasures and is documented and stored for future use, if not transmitted.

The iTaukei Affairs Board continues to use its conservation platform to promote best practices that will allow the communities to sustainably manage their natural resources now and for future generations. A conservation officer is now stationed in its provincial council office to assist the Yaubula communities at the provincial, *tikina* and village levels. Some concrete outcomes include waste management, best practices at village levels, identifying traditional taboo sites primary for the preservation of the marine and forest reserve. The gazetting of Kiuva Marine Reserves, for instance, and establishing Vatu-i-Ra Conservation Park.

The iTaukei Land Trust Board, Mr. Speaker, Sir, has also used IEK in its lease programmes, cost-sharing benefits are included in its conservation lease to protect the interest of landowners. A good example is the Sovi Basin Conservation Lease, iTLTB leases 24,000 hectares to the National Trust of Fiji to protect and preserve the environment. It is the biggest lease of its kind in the Pacific.

The Land Owning Units receive a good rental income through this arrangement. The iTLTB also works closely with the Fiji Museum under the iTaukei Lands Trust Act and the preservation of objects of Archaeological and Paleontological Interest Act to protect heritage sites which is done to protect the heritage sites. From an IEK perspective, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it recognises the need to protect iTaukei cultural heritage.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, education is an important tool in transferring this IEK to environment management. The Ministry of iTaukei Affairs collaborates with the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts and cultural stakeholders to strengthen the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage through the development of the National Intangible Cultural Heritage Framework. The National Intangible Cultural Heritage workshop underlying the importance of protection and safeguarding of intangible

cultural heritage and dissemination of information for sustainable practice at the national level through relevant projects.

Earlier this year, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry conducted an awareness workshop in Suva. The purpose was to raise awareness with the cultural institutions and Government and Non-Government Organisations on the 2003 safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage status in Fiji. Also the Ministry of Education conducts safeguarding of ICH with minority communities, an example is the Department of Heritage and Arts awareness workshop with the Rotuma, Rabi and Kioa communities. The Department provides the programme to encourage indigenous ecological knowledge of these communities to transfer indigenous knowledge, sustainable practise through oral traditions, singing, showcasing their traditional dance sessions at the community level encourages important transfer ecological knowledge.

The Fiji National Museum, Mr. Speaker, Sir, has an educational programme, virtual museum and the National Museum Library with rich cultural history. That is very educational that encourages the transfer of this knowledge through cultural heritage and publications, reports and research publications, archaeological reports and heritage impact assessment.

The National Trust of Fiji, with its programme also encourages in terms of encouraging the work of protection and safeguarding of an environment and the Fiji Arts Council also provides workshops and programmes that promote, safeguard and protect traditional art and craft, performing arts, creative and little arts.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as a country with vast stretches of coastline and many maritime communities, the ocean is our oyster. It is a source of food, culture and connection between our people and this initiative fits in with a larger agenda to build a sustainable blue economy across Fiji. The Ministry of Fisheries has been engaging with NGOs and local communities to promote the sustainable use of our fisheries. Many traditional and customary rules and norms and Indigenous Environmental Knowledge (IEK) govern how our communities use national resources sustainably. They include the use of taboos by chiefs and other elders, for example, to restrict fishing periods to allow for spawning to take place as well as an ecosystem understanding in resource management reflected in ridge to reef or water shed-based land tenure. In Fiji, there are numerous examples of where informal systems contribute to the sustainable management of natural resource including their conservation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in summary, at the policy and programme levels, the transfer of IEK and environment management goes through a robust process that is SDG proof. My Government is steadfast in our commitment to environmental management and protection. We have enforced laws on our books to punish those who illegally pillage the natural world. In line with this commitment, we will promote and enhance the use of internationally recognised little regimes such as IEK and our traditional knowledge. This also acknowledges the owners of IEK which is the *iTaukei* and Rotuman communities. Mr. Speaker, Sir, on that note I understand that the National Environment Council intends to set up a National Rotuman Resource Owners Sub-Committee at its next meeting. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the TKEC Bill will further strengthen our work and we will introduce it in Parliament.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Prime Minister. Honourable Adi Litia Qionibaravi, you have the floor.

HON. ADIL QIONIBARAVI.- Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir. I thank the Prime Minister for an all-encompassing response to the question. My supplementary question is to request the Honourable Prime Minister to inform the House on the progress that the Traditional Resource Owners Committee have achieved in some ways or other in working with the other communities who have their own IEK? For all these reasons, we all stand to benefit from each other, but I would like to know whether some

progress have been made and what achievements have been made today, just on working together with other communities who also have their own IEK?

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

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is part of the work of the Committee to have that done.

HON. SPEAKER.- We will move on to the next oral question for today. I give the floor to the Honourable Vijay Nath to ask Question 196/2021. You have the floor.

COVID-19 Vaccines by General Practitioners
(Question No. 196/2021)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services inform Parliament if there are plans to allow Private General Practitioners to administer COVID-19 vaccines to members of the public?

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE (Minister for Health and Medical Services).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker and I thank the Honourable Member for that question.

Currently, Mr. Speaker, the General Practitioners do not administer COVID-19 vaccines, nevertheless the National Taskforce for COVID-19 which has the body of experts in our country including the multilateral partners such as WHO and ANZ Medical Assistance Scheme (MAT) who have now returned to Australia and New Zealand and link in and meet with them. I discussed this and they have actually made recommendations that has been put forward to the health executive committee.

Given that the expanded programme of immunisation is actually being given by General Practitioners and that the Government is also working with General Practitioners in terms of the 17 General Practitioners that we now have in place, looking after those who need to be seen for general outpatient services, we believe that this will happen in due course. But certainly we need to ensure that the recommendations of the National Taskforce are taken into consideration.

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

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Speaker, I thank the Honourable Minister for his response. Just a supplementary question, is this plan to involve General Practitioners part of a preparation by the country for a third wave of COVID-19 which is now happening in other countries like India? Is it going to be part of the plan for a third wave of COVID-19?

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

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Mr. Speaker, the discussion on this question is around the utilisation of the General Practitioners. General Practitioners had been part and parcel of our response. They have a representative who is based in Suva, who is part of the National Taskforce Committee, who regularly meets with our team and actually takes the advice that has been given back to the General Practitioners fraternity in terms of the practice which includes also the clinical pathways that we have in place, the protocols that we have in place, this is shared widely with the general practitioners. The most important thing at the moment that we all are geared towards is to

ensure that the majority of our population are vaccinated. The challenges that other countries have at the moment is because of the large cohort or groups of their population that have not been vaccinated and we must push the ethos of fully vaccinated Fijians, all of us in this august House.

HON. SPEAKER.- We will move on. Honourable Viliame Gavoka, you have the floor.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, five countries in the world have decided to live with COVID-19; Denmark, Singapore, South Africa, Thailand and Chile. Would this be an indication that treatment can be through private doctors? Would this be heading towards living with COVID-19 in Fiji, that is, it is like any other ailment that you can go to a private doctor or to a hospital? The way I look at it is living with COVID-19.

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

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Mr. Speaker, our Chief Medical Advisor about two weeks ago in a statement shared that we need to understand that COVID-19 will become endemic. It will be something that we will have to understand as part and parcel of our lives just like we have regular flu shots that happened overseas.

We have begun with the vaccination programme. As we all know, today the Honourable Prime Minister launched the vaccination for children between 15 years to 17 years. Soon, as he also announced this morning, there will be vaccination for our children with Pfizer through the support of New Zealand for those who are 12 years to 14 years and therefore as I have just said, it is likely that the expanded programme with immunisation will include COVID-19 vaccination as part and parcel of our movement forward in the new normal.

HON. SPEAKER.- We will move on to the seventh Oral Question for today. I call on the Honourable Salote Radrodoro to ask her question. You have the floor, Madam.

Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanism
(Question No. 197/2021)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation update Parliament on the monitoring and evaluation mechanisms in place to monitor the impact of the Ministry's Elimination of Violence Against Women Programmes?

HON. R.S. AKBAR (Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation).- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to answer the question before the House. Before I move on to answer the question, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to congratulate our Secretary-General, Mrs. Jeanette Emberson for this milestone achievement in her career. Mrs. Jeanette Emberson joins other women leaders in the rank of leadership positions around the country and I wish her all the best in her Parliamentary roles.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in 2019, 10 Fijian women lost their lives due to intimate partner violence. In 2020, four Fijian women lost their lives the same way, COVID-19 related lockdowns also saw a hike in domestic violence reports over the past year continuing till now. These includes physical, emotional and sexual violence. We believe that violence against women and girls is everyone responsibility.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Elimination of Violence Against Women Programmes have been developed in alignment with Conventions on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) 1979 and the Beijing Platform for Action (BPA) as outlined in Section 5.18 of the National

Gender Policy and detailed in the Women's Action Plan of 2020, 2010 to 2019 and, of course, the current 2021 to 2025 Strategic Direction. The Women's Plan of Action lists elimination of violence against women and girls as one of the three strategic priority areas.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I address the question on monitoring and evaluation, I wish to firstly share what the Government through the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation is doing in relation to gender-based violence. Fiji requires a coordinated effort and partnership with various Government Ministries, Departments, Non-Government Organisations (NGO), community in particular working to address the issue of violence against women and children through public awareness and training. In the same way, the monitoring and evaluation of the Elimination of Violence Against Women and Girls Programme is undertaken in partnership with various stakeholders to gauge the impact of work we are doing in terms of eliminating violence against our women and girls.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the stakeholder partnerships are also used to implement our programmes and this includes the development of Fiji's first ever national action plan to prevent violence against women and girls which I have spoken about in this Parliament in the last month – the implementation of the Fiji National Development Service Protocols for responding to cases of gender violence, the review of the 2009 Domestic Violence legislation, coordination work of gender-based violence in emergency working groups during emergencies and this was strengthened after *TC Winston* and has been very active in gender-based violence response work particularly during COVID-19 pandemic, *TC Yasa* and *TC Ana* in the Northern and the Eastern Divisions. We hope to continue with this work as the cyclone season is approaching once again.

The administration and management of the National Domestic Violence toll-free helpline. If I could mention the toll-free helpline once again is 1560. For victims of domestic violence, please feel free to call this number. This helpline is with the Women's Crisis Centre and we get weekly updates and of course the Centre is providing services to those victims of domestic violence. Of course, we have the child helpline – 1325. Children who are victims of domestic violence can also use this toll-free numbers to access the services.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry commits to achieving results in this area of concern through its annual costed operation plan providing innovative approaches and key strategies to progress the work to prevent violence against our women and girls. These plans identifies available opportunities to overcome challenges in regards to programming on eliminating violence against women and girls and provides insights on some of the key outcomes of our programmes from designing and managing, implementing, monitoring and evaluation across a whole range of different types of violence against women and girls programme.

Although there are some exceptions, a few violence against women and girls programmes have incorporated global systems to monitor and evaluate its impact yet the current evidence base I must say, is pretty weak. This is due to many factors such as the difficulty of obtaining reliable data, the complexity and context specifics of violence interventions and the social dynamics surrounding these issues. Violence Against Women and Girls Programme takes place in a very complex environment of social change processes and a variety of tools and approaches are necessary for assessing evidence results and ultimately the impact of our programmes. We have learned a lot. Learning through training and awareness is the most important outcome of monitoring and evaluation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, some specific monitoring and evaluation mechanisms include devaluation of the zero tolerance violence-free communities, the internal evaluation of the domestic violence helpline and provision of monthly data report, the training follow up and lessons learnt and experiences of our trainees, the pre and post training evaluation for example gender based violence training and awareness to provide an immediate response on the impact of the training and awareness attended.

In 2018 a Monitoring and Evaluation Unit of the National Women's Machinery was established and that is now being strengthened to monitor the operations and programmes of our department in alignment with set targets including gender based violence targets. We have quarterly reports on progress and of course, we are trying to up our social media communication campaigns on messages and issues around this topic.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is important to understand that impact and change may only be visible in the long term because violence against women and girls is intimately linked to deeply entrenched social values, beliefs, attitudes, behaviours and practices of the past and as a result, can be difficult to address. There may be many barriers that need to be overcome before impact is evident. However we have seen an increase in reporting and I say this is an outcome of creating awareness of our programme - giving women the confidence to report and of course gender sensitizing our Police Department. Women can feel free to call on the number and report. We continue with our training within our Police Force.

Despite the challenges, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is never less critical to measure long term impacts. Having said what I have just mentioned the increase in reporting over the years is a perfect indicator that programmes have a good impact in long terms of encouraging our victims and bystanders to break the silence and seek justice recognising violence as a crime as it should be.

For example, between August 2020 to June 2021 a total of 2,933 genuine calls were intercepted on the domestic violence helpline. Of course I cannot give you a breakdown of the ethnicity data here, Mr. Speaker, Sir, because violence affects everyone. It cuts across all homes. It cuts across all social denominators. It does not spare rich or poor. It does not see religion. It does not see culture. It does not see where you live. Anyone and everyone can be a victim of domestic violence.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, of the total calls 54 percent were from the Central Division, 39 percent from the Western Division, five percent from the Northern Division, 1 percent from the Eastern Division and 1 percent from unknown locations; 78 percent of callers were women and 22 percent were men. Of the total calls 38 percent was from survivors and 62 percent from bystanders. Of the total calls, 52 percent were domestic violence related, 72 percent were from survivors and 28 percent from bystanders.

Mr. Speaker, we also gather from the domestic violence helpline statistics that post COVID lockdowns have had increased instances of domestic violence with the trend being the same last year and of course jumping from 149 in August 2020 to 817 calls in May 2021. The calls per year have increased over the past four fiscal years which falls in 2017 being 952; in 2018-2019 - 927 and in 2019-2020 - 2,332; of course the numbers are escalating. Statistics from Police in relation to domestic violence were also shared in this august House by our former Minister in her response to Honourable Salote Radrodoro's question last year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to move forward what is needed is the understanding that addressing violence against women and girls requires a holistic approach when seeking to transform social norms. It is necessary to work at both, individual and collective levels addressing values, beliefs, attitudes, behaviours and practices an integrated way. Change occurs at different levels at different paces, change is influenced by multiple factors and change is reversible. As a result long term engagement and short support strategies are needed to ensure sustainability and positive transformation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is with this that the Ministry will continue to work with our development partners, our NGOs, government ministries to develop and use relevant monitoring and evaluation framework to capture the impact of our evaluation programmes to make the change needed in Fiji and to make visible, the end of violence against women. We say it is everyone's responsibilities, everyone's business.

The Ministry is working and involving all stakeholders to ensure that they also have a role in the soon to be finalised Fiji's National Action Plan. The National Action Plan will actually explain using data and evidence, what the root cause of violence is. Of course we know what the root cause of violence is and we have been trying to find a solution all these years, but we hope that the National Action Plan will give us data and evidence of the root cause of violence against all women and girls in Fiji and what additional contributing factors make the violence more likely to happen again.

This plan will have a thorough monitoring and evaluation framework to assess the impact of our National Action Plan and once this rolls out, I will be happy to share more details in this august House.

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

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir. I thank the Honourable Minister for that response which captures the fact that you have alluded to that the problem is still increasing and if you are aware of the Performance Audit Report by the Auditor-General, it made 42 recommendations on all the agencies on how the Ministry could better coordinate the activities to eliminate violence against women and children. So, the question is what priority and commitment has the Ministry given in regards to implementing or addressing the 42 recommendations in the Performance Audit by the Auditor-General on coordination of actions on elimination of violence against women?

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. The Honourable Minister you have the floor.

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir, all that I can say is that elimination of violence against women and girls is one of the three strategic priority areas which the Ministry will work with.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. We will move on to the eighth Oral Question for today and I call on the Honourable Bhatnagar to ask her question. You have the floor, Madam.

Complaints Against the Police Force
(Question No. 198/2021)

HON. V.K. BHATNAGAR asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Defence, National Security and Policing, Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management update Parliament what the Fiji Police Force will do to address complaints against Police and Police Services?

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

However, let me first thank and acknowledge the Constitutional Offices Commission for the conclusion of the selection process and the re-appointment of Brigadier-General Sitiveni Qiliho as the Commissioner of Police. I take this opportunity to congratulate him and thank him and the Fiji Police Force for the excellent work that they have been doing and particularly for COVID-19.

I know that the lifting of some of the restrictions last week brought a lot of relief to the serving members, not only to them but their families as well Mr. Speaker, Sir, but at the same time, it poses some high level of threat as well, particularly in the crime scene and the work that needs to be undertaken in

that regard. I wish to acknowledge the Commissioner for his re-appointment and of course his dedicated team at the Headquarters and men and women of the Fiji Police Force.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is an issue that the FPF does not take lightly. I wish to assure this august House that the Commissioner has taken that stance from the very beginning and it is interesting and good to note the decrease – I refer to the last quarter of the 2020 period where there was a decrease of 12 percent on complaints against the FPF.

As the question clearly states, it is mainly on two areas when it comes to the conduct and the indiscipline within the Forces. One is the complaint against the Police and the other one is for the services that they provide if members of the public are not satisfied with the response or some of the actions undertaken by the FPF. Again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I have stated, this is something that the FPF takes seriously, and again let me assure the Members of this august House and the general public, that no one in the FPF is above the law and any indiscipline offense committed by any police officer is dealt with under the law and in accordance with the existing systems and processes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the FPF structure has an Internal Affairs Department that conducts in-house investigations against any police officer who offends or breaches any regulations or legislation, and all procedures regarding any indiscipline is thoroughly investigated by the institution and dealt with accordingly. This is also listed in the Performance Indicators of the FPF and they have a target to reduce the complaints against the services and the Police by 10 percent. They have set themselves that target of reducing it by 10 percent. I again, acknowledge them for the great work they are doing. So, we have the Internal Affairs Department that deals with it and of course, the complaints not only come through the FPF, but through other means as well, including the Office of the Prime Minister, the Attorney-General and other agencies and this is passed onto the Department to deal with it, according to the systems and processes that they have in place, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

May I also assure the Honourable Members of this august House that a new Command Centre was just commissioned last week in Totogo. Most of the work in the Central Business District and key strategic locations are all monitored from the new Command Centre. I hope that the Members of the House committees would have an opportunity to look at the state of the art facility that is now available, and thankful to the Australian and New Zealand Government for providing us that assistance.

The intention now, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is to mirror that set up in the various Divisional Headquarters including the Headquarters of the PSRU. I think that is the immediate priority for now so that it will improve communications and, of course, service delivery, particularly the response time when we have a lot of information available in which headquarters can predict, headquarters can also pre-empt and of course, be more proactive in responding to some of the incidences that may occur according to the images that are available in the new command centre.

Equally important again, is the provision of good communication as we all understand. Without good communication and information, it is hard to command and therefore, the Fiji Police Force continues to make improvements in this area, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

I also wish to assure this august House that in terms of managing stress within the Police Force and the related implications on members of the Fiji Police Force, particularly with the environment that they are exposed in, the Fiji Police Force has now recruited qualified psychologists that are part of the force to look at the management of stress level and other key aspects in relation to the police work.

That very briefly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is how the Fiji Police Force is responding to the complaints against the services and the police, and I again, let me assure this august House or this Parliament that the Fiji Police Force does not condone indiscipline by its members and, of course, we will continue to uphold

the rule of law and will investigate all cases of indiscipline and equally bring all police offenders through the normal processes and the justice system in place, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister.

Honourable Members, that brings an end to the Oral Questions for today. The only Written Question for today, I call on the Honourable Kepa to ask her question. You have the floor, Madam.

Written Question

Progress on the Upgrade of the Naboro Landfill
(Question No. 199/2021)

HON. RO T.V. KEPa asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment update Parliament on the progress in the implementation of the Naboro Landfill upgrade, in particular:

- (a) Progress made in 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 on the construction of Stage 2 of the landfill; and
- (b) Progress made in 2020-2021 for Stage 2, Cell 3 of the landfill and plans for completion of this stage in the 2021-2022 financial year?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- (Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment).- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will table my response at a later sitting date, as permitted under Standing Order 45 (3). Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister for his reply.

Honourable Members, that brings us to the end of today's sitting and I thank you for your attendance and cooperation for today's proceedings. The hour is late, we will adjourn until tomorrow morning at 9.30.

The Parliament adjourned at 5.49 p.m.