

# **PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI**



## **PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES**

### **DAILY HANSARD**

**FRIDAY, 24TH SEPTEMBER, 2021**

**[CORRECTED COPY]**

# CONTENTS

	<u>Pages</u>
Minutes ... ..	2935
Communications from the Chair ... ..	2935-2936
Questions ... ..	2936-2949
<u>Oral Questions</u>	
(1) Impact of Long COVID on COVID-19 Survivors (Q/No. 229/2021)	
(2) Integrated Human Resource Development Programme (IHRDP) (Q/No. 230/2021)	
(3) Reconstruction of the Levuka Wharf (Q/No. 231/2021)	
(4) 50/50 Village Nutritional Security Programme (Q/No. 232/2021)	
(5) Fiji's Participation in Peacekeeping Programmes (Q/No. 233/2021)	
(6) Lal Singh Road Water Project (Q/No. 234/2021)	
(7) Ministry of Agriculture Annual Reports (Q/No. 235/2021)	
(8) Services of Multicultural Centres (Q/No. 236/2021)	
<u>Written Questions</u>	
(1) Reforestation of Degraded Forests Projects (Q/No. 237/2021)	
(2) Schedule A and B Land Reverted to iTLTB (Q/No. 238/2021)	
(3) Access to Clean Water (Q/No. 239/2021)	
End of Week Statements ... ..	2950-2973
(1) International Week of Deaf People 2021 and International Day of Sign Languages 2021	
(2) Standard and Efficient Reporting Requirements	
(3) Integrity and Credibility of Identification Records	
(4) Media Industry Development Act 2010	
Adjournment ... ..	2973

## **FRIDAY, 24TH SEPTEMBER, 2021**

The Parliament resumed at 9.30 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

HONOURABLE SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

### **PRESENT**

All Members were present, except the Honourable Lt. Col. P. Tikoduadua.

### **MINUTES**

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Thursday, 23rd September, 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 final Parliament sitting for the week, including those who are joining us virtually. I also welcome all those who are watching the live broadcast and the live streaming of today's final proceedings from the comfort of their homes, offices and electronic devices. Thank you all for your continued interest in the workings of your Parliament.

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

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

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Point of Order under Standing Order 62(1) where a Member has imputed improper motives against other Members, Mr. Speaker.

If I may continue, Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Honourable Prime Minister (I was not here) whilst speaking during the debate on the Climate Change Bill 2021, made sweeping aspersions and lies against the Opposition, stating that we had no right to lecture about consultations on the Climate Change Bill 2021, when we did not provide any input into the three drafts of the Bill. But nothing can be further from the truth, Mr. Speaker.

Firstly, Mr. Speaker, we have every right to lecture on everything, especially when the Government is showing worrying signs of psychoneurosis. Secondly, Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister once again, lied to this House, as he knows very well that the NFP had released public statements on all the three drafts of the Bill, that even as has been passed yesterday, falls far below any acceptable standard of robust climate protection for Fiji. And when consultations started through the parliamentary process, the NFP made a comprehensive submission to the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights.

The Honourable Prime Minister is well advised to instruct his speechwriters from not shoving lies into his mouth that makes him look silly. I can go on and on about many other things and how consultations were trashed ...

HON. SPEAKER.- You are going on and on.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- ...or we have been prevented by both, the FijiFirst and the Military Governments from making submissions, but we will leave it for another day. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, bring up a Point of Order that is relevant. That one is completely irrelevant, as far as I am concerned.

We will move on to the next Agenda item - Questions. The first Oral Question for today, I call on the Honourable Tikoduadua to ask his question. The Honourable Member is not here, but you have the floor Honourable Professor Prasad.

## QUESTIONS

### Oral Questions

#### Impact of Long COVID on COVID-19 Survivors (Question No. 229/2021)

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This question is on behalf of the Honourable Tikoduadua, who is not able to make it to Parliament this morning. The question is:

Can the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services update Parliament whether the Ministry has considered the impact of Long COVID on COVID-19 survivors?

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE (Minister for Health and Medical Services).- Mr. Speaker, I thank the Honourable Member for that question. Yes, we have considered the effects of Long COVID. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, when you look at this question, you begin to wonder about the booster shots that will come after the second jab. Do we have some plans or expectations on when we will be looking at the third jab – the booster shot?

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There was a study done in the UK where they looked at 745,000 individuals and they looked at the effect of whether they needed to have a booster dose and whether the effect of the second dose was efficient. What they saw was, the maximum protection again, is by AstraZeneca, which is the vaccine that we are receiving here in Fiji. So six months after being fully vaccinated, those who received AstraZeneca still have very high levels of protection against hospitalisation and death.

Although it may seem that the other vaccines may have dipped a little bit in terms of their protection, AstraZeneca has its own. There continues to be research and also following up in that space, so we have to see how it will hold for one year after being fully vaccinated. However, that has been discussed and we know that countries, for example, Israel, which have used Pfizer, have now offered booster doses. They have offered booster doses because they do know that to an extent, Pfizer does

reduce a little bit, as opposed to AstraZeneca. But, again, these studies are not complete because they are studies following up on patients over a long period of time.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, just a short question. Is there any post-mortem examination done on those who die from COVID-19, particularly when they are vaccinated and die? Are there any results?

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- I thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir, I just caught what the Honourable Member was saying about those who died - I talked about that yesterday.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, those who have passed on, majority of them did not have a post-mortem and the reason is very simple. For those who are positive, when you do post-mortem, you increase the risks to those who are doing the post-mortem. So, in a majority of the cases, no post-mortem was done. What was done though, as I had alluded to in the discussion yesterday, was a very thorough investigation of the patients' folders, thorough investigation of their admission, to be able to ascertain whether they died of COVID-19 or from COVID-19.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Can the Honourable Minister explain and clarify to the House why is it so difficult for people to travel to Vanua Levu? Why are you making it so hard? We have been swabbed two or three times, everything they want we have given but still they say "no".

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is not a joke. People are calling and calling and asking, what is the difficulty? It is easier to travel from Auckland to here than to travel from here to Vanua Levu.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order! Honourable Member, you have asked your question, forget about the cat calls from the other side. You have asked your question and I am going to give the floor to the Honourable Minister to answer your question.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, this question is obviously completely different from the primary question, but I want to say this and it is important information for all of us. All of us in Government led by the Honourable Minister, have worked very hard to ensure and keep COVID-19 as much as possible away from our Northern families and also those in the maritime islands.

As you may have been aware, when there were instances of COVID-19 in Vanua Levu, it was from those who had been repatriated, even though they may have been tested negative here because as we do know, the incubation period can be up to 14 days. So even in the three day interval in which a person has been watched here and then they go across to Vanua Levu, quite a few of them actually had COVID-19 in their exit test because they were well within the incubation period and, fortunately, they were in the quarantine areas.

The other important thing is that, at the moment, the fully vaccinated numbers in Vanua Levu are still picking up. Lastly, communities themselves have reached out to us to say that they want to be fully vaccinated, they want their numbers to be high, they want those going back to be fully vaccinated, before they can have them back into their islands and communities.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. We will move on to the second Oral Question for today and I give the floor to the Honourable Nath to ask his question. You have the floor.

Integrated Human Resource Development Programme (IHRDP)  
(Question No. 230/2021)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport update Parliament on how the Integrated Human Resource Development Programme (IHRDP) will contribute to rural livelihoods in the 2021-2022 financial year?

HON. F.S. KOYA (Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport).- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the Honourable Member for his question with respect to a very important programme undertaken by the Ministry of Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport. The IHRDP programme is basically to provide support in terms of both, financial and technical support to Fijians wanting to do business.

At the outset, the basic premise, Mr. Speaker, Sir, of the Programme is to assist those in peri-urban, rural and remote areas, with special emphasis on MSMEs and the likes. It is actually designed to empower our communities and address unemployment holistically and through strategic partnerships between public and private and civil society sectors in our efforts to reduce poverty.

Now, more than ever, such a programme as IHRDP needs to exist. Amidst the current triggers of the climate change and the pandemic, we need pro-growth and support policies that create positive impacts across the supply chain and creates some wealth in jobs and economic activities.

Sir, the Ministry of Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport (MCTTT) has been administering this particular programme since 2016. We funded about 26 odd projects valued at \$1.3 million all over Fiji, and through the IHRDP assistance, approximately 500 odd jobs have been directly created which has led directly to the improvement of about 2,000 odd livelihoods.

We are encouraging and guiding all the recipients and communities to formalise their business and to register as a cooperative business. The formal registration allows such groups and communities to have legal status and gets recognised for their contribution to Fijian GDP.

What it also does, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it open opportunities, such as better access to finance and other grants, and the ability to engage in contracts with other businesses having a stronger governance structure with community members.

In the 2021-2022 National Budget, we were allocated some odd \$300,000 to continue the work of MSME development. The allocation is dedicated to funding successful businesses for business proposals to purchase capital items. Its programme is aimed to fund capital expenditure and ideas such as procuring machines, et cetera, manufacturing machine to value adding, constructions of warehouses, storage facilities, et cetera, and also for equipment for diversification purposes.

Through this programme, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have also enabled equity funding with financial institutions for capital expenditure and basically what it means is, if a recipient requires additional funds for a project the IHRDP grant as equity deposit with the bank and potentially unlock access to greater financial package. In this way we are sharing and shifting the risk to the private sector.

The Expressions of Interest (EOI) is currently open, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and we encourage aspiring young Fijian entrepreneurs, particularly women and youth and persons with special needs in the peri-urban and the rural areas to apply.

Just a quick update on this year's activity, Sir, without pre-empting or compromising the process, since calling the 2021-2022 EOI, we have received about 76 odd applications at an estimated value of about \$4.2 million, so it is a fairly good uptake on the project.

The applications range from different sectors with majority of the applications received in the agro-business, manufacturing and tourism sectors, making up about 60 of the total applications. Also from the fisheries sector, there is about 12 percent. The remaining applications are from forestry, hospitality and the ICT sector.

The applications so far provide new and innovative proposals, and ideas include eco-tourism ventures in the highlands of Viti Levu, development of information technology for women seafood farmers and oyster farming in Vanua Levu, and these applications are currently undergoing an assessment process. So, you can see that there is a vast array of activities that people in Fiji are involved in and they are taking advantage of this particular Programme.

I wanted to highlight, Sir, that such proposals resonate the true potential and the promise in the peri-urban, rural and remote areas. In fact, it aptly lives up to the name of the programme itself, "Integrated Human Resources Development".

Once these applications are received, Sir, they go through the assessment process and I hope that Honourable Members in the House would listen carefully to understand the particular process or ask if they need to assist some of the people that they know. It is a grant assistance and not a handout, it never has been a handout and never will be a handout.

Through these initiatives, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is also an element of one-third cash from the recipient, so they actually have what we call "skin in the game". We are accountable and transparent, we have a duty of care to our taxpayers, ensuring that every dollar spent is spent the right way, Sir.

We have actually supported and a good example is, we have supported an enterprise in Serua that is made up of a number of *mataqali* and they have access to about 7,400 acres of land and we have co-financed a portable sawmill for them with carpentry tools and machinery valued at about \$74,000. This venture was set up to actually involve the youth, Sir, in the village to change their mindset and attitudes towards carpentry and joinery business and I am told that 50 youth in their area now have a chainsaw operator licence and portable sawmill operator licence respectively. They have been trained and they have been certified by the Ministry of Forestry.

Sir, another example is the Yacata Island Co-operative which is amongst the most remote places in Fiji. As we all know, it borders between the Eastern and Northern Divisions and they used their grant to procure a boat and engine, and a solar-powered fridge for their Co-operative, costing about \$29,000. This will support their fishing business in travelling to Taveuni for stock of their co-operative shop. The solar panel, they are very happy about it. It powers the refrigerator for storage of frozen fish which is actually exported to Suva. Sir, this will directly benefit 49 households, so you can see the positive part of this particular Programme.

It is definitely a programme for the common people and the Ministry will continue to work with these communities to reach some success in business as monitoring and evaluation also takes place, to ensure that communities manage and conserve their resources to continue to sustain their businesses and livelihoods, Sir. I hope that answers her question, thank you.

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

HON. V. LAL.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Can the Honourable Minister inform the House

how has the Ministry marketed or informed the rural communities of this Programme?

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

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Thank you, Sir. We are working with relevant Ministries and stakeholders, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to ensure that the information is circulated widely and we have conducted virtual awareness sessions also with stakeholders, such as the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs and the Ministry of Rural Development and other stakeholders.

We also have targeted awareness sessions with all the co-operatives, associations and groups. We have also been doing talkback shows on radio to promote the IHRDP and we ensured we also went on stations with the AM frequency, to allow the maritime zone to listen in. We have also published the EOIs on our social media and the Fijian Government Page, Sir.

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

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. A supplementary question to the Honourable Minister; I understand that this Programme has been going on for several years and my question is, whether there has been any review done to the past recipients and what is the success rate in percentage?

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Thank you, Sir. I do not have the numbers with me but I can assure you, yes, we continually review and monitor these particular projects and I can give him the statistics. It is a statistical question that you are asking about and I can give you the answer in writing, Sir, no problem at all. But yes, we do, do a review.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable O'Connor, you have the floor.

HON. A.D. O'CONNOR.- A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Can the Honourable Minister confirm, what is the process of selecting successful recipients?

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

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, this assistance is actually open to registered sole trader businesses, partnerships, co-operative businesses and companies. There are three phases to the assessment of their applications they all need to go through to finally qualify as a recipient. The first phase is actually a desktop assessment and evaluation of the applications. All applications are assessed against the assessment criteria that evaluates the proposals against these indicators which are the project objectives, viability, innovation and progress. All applicants need to meet the 50 percent of the assessment criteria to be shortlisted.

Once they are shortlisted, there is a second phase, it is for the site visitation where officers assess the readiness of the applicants, and then there is the third phase which includes the final shortlisting that is done. Once shortlisted, it will be submitted to the IHRDP Committee that will make the final decision on these proposals and applications. The Committee is made up of public sector and private sector representatives from the Fiji Commerce & Employers Federation, Fiji Development Bank and the Reserve Bank of Fiji, to name a few, Sir. It is a thorough process.

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

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- In the review and evaluation that you have certainly been doing in the last five years, what have been some of the shortcomings and problems that you have identified to be



addressed?

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

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Sir, there have not really been too many shortcomings but whatever shortcomings that have come about has basically been taken care of by the educational programme that we have. We continually attend to the recipients on a regular basis. Sir, that is why we do not actually have too much of the problems. They may have suffered because of the cyclones, et cetera, those completely go into a different categories, Sir, but it is mostly been because of climate change, et cetera, or they suffered because of the cyclone and we try and assist them to get back on their feet. But in terms of progress, we really have been pretty much problem free with it, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. We will move on to the third Oral Question for today and I call on the Honourable Vosanibola to ask his question. You have the floor.

Reconstruction of the Levuka Wharf  
(Question No. 231/2021)

HON. P.W VOSANIBOLA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure, Meteorological Services, Lands and Mineral Resources update Parliament on the reconstruction of the damaged Levuka Wharf?

HON. J. USAMATE (Minister for Infrastructure, Meteorological Services, Lands and Mineral Resources).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I would like to thank the Honourable Member for his question.

The Ministry for Infrastructure has the oversight of the Fiji Roads Authority which looks after around 7,600 kilometres of roads, 1,200 bridges, about 9,000 streetlights and 47 jetties. Unfortunately, none of those jetties are in Ovalau.

The two facilities that we have in Ovalau – Buresala is a private jetty and the one in Levuka itself is actually under the purview of the Fiji Ports Corporation Limited (FPCL), which comes under the Department of Public Enterprises and the relevant Minister is the Honourable Minister for Economy. I know that FPCL has been looking at this particular issue but I would suggest and recommend to the Honourable Member, for the exact plans that are in place by FPCL, that it be addressed to the relevant Minister.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Bulanauca?

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir. Speaking about wharves and jetties, particularly Wainiyabia Jetty in Lakeba which has been in the Budget. When will it be done, this year, next year the sooner the better, Mr. Speaker. Sir? I am asking this supplementary question on behalf of the Honourable Minister himself, for Nasaqalau and on your behalf too, Sir, about Tubou.

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, I am only allowing this because jetties are connected, not because it is in Lakeba. Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Currently, in Lakeba, we have the old Tubou Jetty and the one in Wainiyabia has been in the plan for some time, to be addressed. But given the status of the budget this year, there has been money set aside for some jetties to be further investigated and

detailed, including the very important ones that we have here at Natovi and that is the one that will be investigated. For the one in Wainiyabia, this year, the money that was there initially for considering the feasibility and design is not in the current financial year but probably will be considered in the next financial year.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. We will move on to the next Oral Question. I give the floor to the Honourable Bhatnagar to ask her question. You have the floor, Ma'am.

50/50 Village Nutritional Security Programme  
(Question No. 232/2021)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment update Parliament on the progress made with regards to the Ministry's 50/50 Village Nutritional Security programme?

HON. DR. M. REDDY (Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment).- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to thank the Honourable Bhatnagar for asking this question.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, food security is one of the key strategic objectives amongst the other three for the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Nutritional Security to be correct.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are five programmes that had been developed by the Ministry to deal and deliver on to and secure the households in Fiji with regard to food and nutritional security. These are the distribution of home gardening sea packages and we all know how beneficial and how successful this programme is and we are continuing with that particular programme.

The other is the Village Rice Production and Supply Programme where we are incentivising villagers to plant rice communally for their own consumption.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are continuing with this programme. Honourable Prime Minister launched this programme at Bavu Village in Nadi and we are encouraging and I had asked Honourable Gavoka sometimes back, I said to get villagers to come and register with us so that we can go and assist them. We got a separate finding for that to assist them in land preparation. We provide free planting material, the rice seeds and we will also provide their harvest at the end to harvest it and then we will provide to them all the villages a free portable rice mill.

We are encouraging and asking Honourable Bulanauca, Honourable Kuridrani whoever always talks about agriculture and I believe he is the Shadow Minister for Agriculture. Please, go, tell them that these are the programmes we have, and we are serious about it.

Every village we want to provide a portable rice mill which they will plaster it to the powerpoint single phase and mill their own rice and have it for their village consumption. We have the rice mill, we are about to give it out in settlements too.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, that programme is ongoing. There are other villages, the list that I have, there are around 50 villages that have enlisted and work is now in some more villagers have planted and others are in the progress but we have been a bit slow because of the pandemic. There were restrictions entering villages, the travel restrictions, there were curfews, et cetera, so we are going to speed up as restrictions are easing out.

We then also have this household long term food security where we are providing long-term tree crop to households. For example *saijan*, coconut and breadfruit to every household so that you know once you plant, if you can harvest it forever.

The other one is the 50/50 village settlement household poultry meat supplementation. Every year we provide a number of chicks and chicken feeds to villages and settlements so that they can raise this for their own meat supplementation. We have the 50/50 Village Nutritional Security Programme which was launched on 10th October, 2020 on the Fiji Day where on that particular day our staff, Honourable Assistant Minister Pillay and staff are at 50 village, of course, with their concern to plant 50 fruit trees around the village area for the village nutritional security.

We have done two rounds, Mr. Speaker, Sir, meaning we have covered 100 villagers. We intent to do all the villages but for the last 12 months we have been affected by the pandemic and we could not really go out so as the restrictions have missed out we are now going to go out again. Again it will be the same method. One Saturday we will say, 'Okay, we are here', these are the new 50 villages that we will choose and we will go there with the villagers and we will plant that. We just do not just give the seedlings. We plant it that day - 50 villages so we have done it, for example in Nawaka and also in Bavu. So fruit trees are: citrus, avocado, breadfruit, papaya, *kavika*, guava, mango, chestnut, passionfruit, soursop, bullock's heart, coconut, starfruit and starapple.

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

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. A supplementary question to the Honourable Minister; based on the 50/50 Programme's goal and objectives, how much have you covered so far in percentage?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, I have just said that we have made two rounds, meaning 50/50 and 100 villages. We have made two rounds as we cannot go every Saturday because for the seedlings: 50 on one round and another 50 on another round so 100 villages have been covered.

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

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- *Ni bula saka, Turaga na Speaker ...*

HON. SPEAKER.- You only have one question.

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- *Vinaka vakalevu*, Honourable Minister. I would just like to ask, without prejudice to other Provinces, Kadavu has 75 villages. Have you contacted Kadavu in regards to this?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am not sure whether any village in Kadavu has been covered, but my feeling is that, in the first round, some villages of Kadavu were covered but I will need to find out.

I want to assure the Honourable Member that as restrictions to travel to Kadavu eases out, we will do it because we will have to transport the seedlings from this side. So I want to assure the Honourable Member that we will cover Kadavu.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, we move on. I give the floor to the Honourable Tuisawau to ask his question. You have the floor, Sir.

Fiji's Participation in Peacekeeping Programmes  
(Question No. 233/2021)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Defence, National Security and Policing, Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management update Parliament on Fiji's participation in peacekeeping programmes since 2018?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU (Minister for Defence, National Security and Policing, Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management).- Mr. Speaker, I thank the Honourable Member for his question. However, before answering the question, may I take this opportunity to acknowledge the services of the former Commander, Rear Admiral Viliame Naupoto and, of course, acknowledge his dear wife as well, Lilian, for the 30 plus years of dedicated services to the Forces. I also congratulate once again the incoming Commander, Brigadier General Ro Jone Kalouniwai, and wish him well, as he takes up the role, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, may I also acknowledge all the former Peacekeepers, including your goodself for their contribution to global peace, stability and security and, of course, with good health and safety as well to those who are in the Mission fields.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, since 2018 the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) had been contributing troops to these five Mission areas. We are still continuing with the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) in Sinai, the non-UN Mission, the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) in the Golan Heights, Syria, the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), and the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO), the Mission which is spread across Syria, Israel, Lebanon, Egypt and Jordan.

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in 2019, Fiji was invited to contribute a senior officer to take on the appointment of Chief Observer Group Golan UNTSO. This is the first time Fiji is being offered a senior appointment in UNTSO, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and it was an opportune time for the RFMF to nominate a female officer in its effort to promote women in peacekeeping. The position is rotated amongst countries in the mission. Currently, Colonel Silipa Druavesi Vananalagi is on that post, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Also in 2019, Fiji was again invited to contribute a military observer to the mission in Yemen and the officer that was first deployed spent 16 months due to COVID-19 restrictions and initially it was just for a one year period but, of course, because of the COVID-19 restrictions but the RFMF is fortunate that we have been asked to send a replacement and we hope that Fiji will also be able to maintain its footprint in that mission and, of course, any other prospective missions under the United Nations Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I would like to pose supplementary question relating to the budget relating to the Peace Keeping Mission budget which have been in 2014-2015 - \$72 million up to now, it is \$50 million. The question I posed regarding the original question to the Business Committee and it was amended was the cost of the missions and how much, given that five out of the 14 missions are UN missions, which is refundable, how much is re-reimbursed? But I will put that as a Written Question later.

However, my question is related to the Annual Reports. I understand that the RFMF Annual Report has been pending for quite some time and maybe an update on that or what steps are being taken to ensure this is provided to Parliament, particularly with the new income officers and I congratulate them: the incoming Commander. Not only that but also in general, the Constitutional Officers who are

appointed to have this disciplinary forces, Sir, what steps are being taken, including the formulation of performance contract for the submission of annual reports?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, supplementary questions are supplementary questions. They are short and to the point and in connection with the original question. It is not how many pieces you are going to have in that supplementary question but I will give the floor to the Honourable Minister. You have the floor.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have already answered to the question concerning the RFMFs' Annual Reports. As I have stated two of the reports have been completed and they are on their way to Parliament and, of course, they are working on the rest of the reports from 2016. Thank you.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir A supplementary question to the Honourable Minister: Are there any payments due to soldiers during these peacekeeping missions that are supposed to be paid to them from 2018 to date?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in terms of personal emoluments, they are owed nothing. That is paid for by government but, of course, UN has its systems of payment to contributing countries and definitely there is always a backlog in payments but payment do come and, of course, the whole world was affected under Trump's Presidency, particularly in the approach to peacekeeping. Now Mr. Biden is back and, of course, that will see changes in the way the US make commitments to its global efforts in supporting peace, Mr. Speaker, Sir, therefore, it will come once it is available within the United Nations.

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

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Can the Honourable Minister explain apart from the UN contribution, how much is Fiji footing from its own money to finance these peacekeeping activities overseas?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I can provide those details and would be happy to do that later.

HON. SPEAKER.- We will move on to the sixth Oral Question for today and I call on the Honourable Pillay to ask his question.

Lal Singh Road Water Project  
(Question No. 234/2021)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure, Meteorological Services, Lands and Mineral Resources update Parliament on the Lal Singh Road Water Project in Rewa?

HON. J. USAMATE (Minister for Infrastructure, Meteorological Services, Lands and Mineral Resources).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I thank the Honourable Member for this question. The Lal Singh Road Water Project is a project that has just been completed. It costs around \$3 million and part of this project is also a component of getting ready for the new Viria Water Treatment Plant that comes in because it involves the enlarging of the main water pipeline from 375 millimetres to 600 millimetres and it runs for about 1.1 kilometres, which will allow for the greater flow of water from the new Viria Water Treatment Plant when it comes in place. A total of 2,500 households, approximately

12,500 persons, are able to benefit from this project that links from the roundabout on the south end of the Rewa Bridge, travelling up north past the Rewa Depot and into Lal Singh Road.

The project was outsourced to a local company; Flametree Development. The contract was signed on 31st March, 2020, and works was completed on 31st January, 2021. The project is now under defects liability stage.

As a result of this project, as I had mentioned before, once Viria comes on line, the water there has to go to the Raralevu Reservoir at the top where it then distributes around the Rewa Delta, Nausori Town, and so forth. So the increased capacity will allow greater volume of water to move across to feed Rewa, Nausori and the surrounding areas.

It has also allowed us to reduce the burst mains that have been occurring along the pipeline and hopefully as a result of this, we will also be able to reduce the cost of water carting that WAF has to do when there are problems with water supplies. It is also helping WAF to enhance its service delivery to the areas, and as I mentioned before, we are all looking forward to this Viria Water when it comes in, to address the volume of water that is needed, especially in the Rewa area, but will boost the supply that we have in Suva which has got a problem with demand, always outstripping supply currently.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you Honourable Minister. We will move on to the seventh Oral Question for today and I give the floor to the Honourable Kuridrani to ask his question.

Ministry of Agriculture Annual Reports  
(Question No. 235/2021)

HON. I. KURIDRANI asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment inform Parliament when will the Ministry of Agriculture Annual Reports for 2017-2018, 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 be tabled in Parliament?

HON. DR. M. REDDY (Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment).- Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I want to thank the Honourable Member for asking this question. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the following are the Annual Reports that are under the spotlight:

- 2016 Half-Yearly Report;
- 2016 - 2017;
- 2017 - 2018;
- 2018 - 2019;
- 2019 - 2020; and
- 2020 - 2021.

The 2016 Half-Yearly Report has been presented to Parliament, the 2016-2017 Annual Report is with Cabinet, 2017-2018 Annual Report is with Cabinet and 2018-2019 Annual Report is with the printers. So from the printers, it will go to Cabinet and from Cabinet to Parliament. The 2019-2020 Annual Report is done. We are waiting for the audited report from the Office of the Auditor-General (OAG) 2020 ...

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- You do not know what is Cabinet doing.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- There you go! They do not know what Cabinet is doing.

Sir, the 2020-2021 Annual Report is ready but we will have to wait for the report from the OAG. That will take time because the year just finished a couple of months ago, so we are up to the mark now.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. We will move on to the eighth Oral Question.

Services of Multicultural Centres  
(Question No. 236/2021)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts, and Local Government inform Parliament on the activities of the multicultural centres and how are they facilitating their services during this pandemic?

HON. P.D. KUMAR (Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts, and Local Government).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I also thank the Honourable Member for his question.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji has a rich and diverse cultural tradition. Culture in Fiji has been valued as a critical component of national pride. It is also seen as a source for creative expression within the culture and creative industries.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji has ratified the 2003 Convention on the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. In 2011, Fiji pledged its full support to the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage elements of all communities in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the preservation and protection of Fiji's rich and diverse cultural traditions of all ethnic groups is fundamental to its identity and development as a nation. Government recognises that our quality of life as a multicultural country can be greatly enhanced by the active promotion of rich, cultural heritage of our different communities. The multicultural centres in Fiji were established to promote activities such as performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events and many more activities that are directly associated with all cultures and traditions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the multi-ethnic cultural centres were previously administered through the Department of Multi-Ethnic Affairs. In 2011, the Department of Multi-Ethnic Affairs was disbanded and the multi-cultural centres were moved to the Department of Heritage and Arts. The main aim of these multi-cultural centres is to provide a platform for the raw talents and enhance all forms of visual, performing and creative arts. We all know, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the culture and heritage sector has enormous potential for employment creation and income generation. However, the second wave of COVID-19 had a huge impact on our cultural and creative industries.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, currently, there are five multicultural centres in Fiji. These centres are centrally located in Savusavu, Labasa, Ba, Suva and Nausori. These centres operate through annual grants provided by the Government. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the centres offer classes in musical instruments, classical dances, creative arts, *meke*, island dance, sewing, baking, floral arrangements, weaving, taekwondo and yoga. Due to the pandemic, a number of these activities were conducted virtually. More than 550 students are participating virtually in various activities offered by these centres. Mr. Speaker, Sir, all the centres are disseminating the course materials (via digital platforms) and students are given time to interact with their

tutors via zoom, *Viber* and team platforms. Students in the comfort of their homes are learning cultural dances, creative arts, yoga, social etiquettes and various other multifaceted art of living.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the multicultural centres have been running programmes for many years. A recent survey done by the Department of Heritage and Arts show positive impact of cultural activities in the communities to earn a living. For example, trained artists join the centres as tutors, students enrolled in sewing classes started their own businesses. Under creative arts students are selling tie and dye products. Basic traditional mat weaving classes have led to producing creative products and students from multicultural centres are performing at events organised by the Government, businesses or at weddings and other functions to earn a living.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry will continue to provide its support in ensuring that multicultural centres work towards bringing different cultures together and safeguarding the intangible cultural heritage elements to all our communities in Fiji.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. Honourable Members, that brings an end the Oral Questions for today. We now move on to Written Questions and I call on the Honourable Qereqeretabua to ask her question. You have the floor, Ma'am.

#### Written Questions

##### Reforestation of Degraded Forests Projects (Question No. 237/2021)

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

There are reforestation efforts by Villages in Tovulailai, Natauloa, Lawaki, Vutuna and Waitoga in Narai, Lomaiviti. There were 52,579 seedlings and each Village had a target of about 10,000 seedlings to raise for reforestation. Could the Honourable Prime Minister and Minister for Minister for iTaukei Affairs, Sugar Industry, Foreign Affairs and Forestry update Parliament on:

- (a) the output of cash incentives granted to Fijians who grow seedlings to be transplanted for planting under the Reforestation of Degraded Forests (RDF) Project; and
- (b) how many villages have received a payout, and how much have they received to raise these seedlings?

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA (Prime Minister and Minister for Minister for iTaukei Affairs, Sugar Industry, Foreign Affairs and Forestry).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will table my response at a later sitting date as permitted under Standing Order 45(3).

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. On the second Written Question, I call on the Honourable Saukuru to ask his question. You have the floor, Sir.

##### Schedule A and B Land Reverted to iTLTB (Question No. 238/2021)

HON. J. SAUKURU asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure, Meteorological Services, Lands and Mineral Resources update Parliament on the parcels of land under Schedule A and Schedule



B that were reverted to the iTLTB by the Ministry in the 2020-2021 financial year, in particular:

- (a) the name, location and description of all such parcels of land; and
- (b) the name of the extinct *tokatoka*, *mataqali* or *yavusa* whose land has been reverted and the corresponding details of the *tokatoka*, *mataqali* or *yavusa* to whom these parcels of land are being reverted?

HON. J. USAMATE (Minister for Infrastructure, Meteorological Services, Lands and Mineral Resources).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I thank the Honourable Member for his question.

His question has two parts, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and those two parts are addressed to two different Ministries. The first part about the return of the land is addressed to the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources, so that component of the question, I will tender in my response. The other bit about where they actually go to the *yavusa*, *mataqali*, et cetera, is to be addressed by iTLTB. So, I think that will need to be addressed to the Honourable Prime Minister.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will table my response to the first part of the question at a later date as permitted under Standing Order 45(3).

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. We will move on to the third Written Question for today and I give the floor to the Honourable Jale to ask his question.

Access to Clean Water  
(Question No. 239/2021)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure, Meteorological Services, Lands and Mineral Resources update Parliament on:

- (a) how many citizens and households in rural and maritime communities now have access to clean water by Division annually from 2018-2019, 2019-2020 and 2020-2021; and
- (b) how many citizens and households in rural and maritime communities will be able to access clean water by the end of the 2021-2022 financial year?

HON. J. USAMATE (Minister for Infrastructure, Meteorological Services, Lands and Mineral Resources).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will tabled my response at a later sitting date as permitted under Standing Order 45(3).

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Members, question time is now over. On that note, Honourable Members, we will take a break for morning tea and we will resume in half-an-hour.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.32 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.05 a.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, on the next Agenda item, each Member may speak for up to 10 minutes with a 10 minutes response by the Minister responsible for the subject matter of the Member's speech. No seconder is required and there will be no other debate.

I now call on the Honourable Qereqeretabua to deliver her End of Week Statement.

### END OF WEEK STATEMENTS

#### International Week of Deaf People 2021 and International Day of Sign Languages 2021

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Good morning and Happy International Deaf Week. I would also like to take this opportunity to wish the Honourable Attorney-General a very, very happy birthday.

(Acclamation)

Imagine, Sir, you are going on one of your beloved long walks but whilst enjoying the scenery, a two-vehicle accident occurs right behind you in a loud crash and one of the cars involved begins sliding towards you but you are absolutely unaware of the danger you are in because you are deaf and you have your back to the accident. Imagine not being able to hear the voices of your grandchildren, or the sirens of emergency vehicles, fire alarms, tsunami sirens because you are deaf. Imagine being sick but not being able to communicate your symptoms to a doctor, or imagine you are the victim of an assault but you and the police officers do not speak the same languages. I said "imagine" because I believe your hearing is absolutely fine, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as is mine, however, the scenarios I have just mentioned are the daily reality for many members of the deaf community in Fiji and, indeed, around the world.

Most hearing people cannot even consider the silent world that the deaf live in. This week is International Week of Deaf People and yesterday was the International Day for Sign Languages. As the theme for International Day for Sign Languages is, "We Sign for Human Rights", I will speak to the importance of communication for human rights.

Now, I have long been fascinated with sign language and deaf culture, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and only recently, got the opportunity to learn basic Fiji's sign language with the Fiji Association of the Deaf, an opportunity that I had grabbed with both hands.

At this point I want to wish all my deaf friends and their families, all interpreters, in particular the team within the Parliamentary Complex who are right now signing my speech, my sign language teachers, classmates and the Fiji Association of the Deaf a meaningful International Week for Deaf People.

Language is an essential part of developing individual and community identity and culture. It also provides a pathway that allows people to connect with others and allows all that a society has to offer, including education, health and employment.

Fiji is rich in spoken languages, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and most of us can speak one or more languages or two or more languages. There is *iTaukei*, there is Fäeag Rotūamta, Hindi, Urdu, Pigeon, Mandarin, English, Tongan, Kiribati, Samoan, as well as other languages from around the region. Add to that, the languages of people from other parts of the world who live in Fiji.

One day recently, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I overheard two ladies in an elevator in town and they were speaking this beautiful but foreign sounding language so I interrupted them and I asked them, "what

language are you speaking?” They said, “Persian”, and I went, “Wow! I would not have been able to experience that had I been deaf.”

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the World Federation of the Deaf estimates that there are 72 million deaf people in the world, of whom 80 percent live in developing countries. In developing countries like Fiji, children with hearing loss and deafness often do not receive schooling. Adults with hearing loss and deafness also have a much higher unemployment rate. Amongst those who are employed, a high percentage of people with hearing loss and deafness are in the lower grades of employment, compared with the general workforce.

Currently around 41 countries (only 41 countries) around the world have recognised sign language as an official language and in the Pacific Region, Mr. Speaker, Sir, only Papua New Guinea and New Zealand have an active legislation recognising this. There is, no doubt, that the COVID-19 pandemic has put sign language on a stage and shone a spotlight on this very special form of communication for hundreds of our citizens, members of the deaf community and their families.

While Fiji has ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which recognises and promotes the use of sign language, I believe more steps need to be taken in order to recognise the importance and, therefore, support the inclusion of Fiji’s sign language at an institutional level, and to raise awareness on the rights and needs of deaf people and deaf culture. The ultimate goal being to normalise deaf culture and offer members of the deaf community a more fair, more level playing field than what they are trying to navigate at present. Much more needs to be done by governments, not only this one but those that follow.

The 2013 Constitution of the Republic of Fiji contains the rights of persons with disabilities. The Preamble states and I quote:

“The Republic of Fiji is a sovereign democratic State founded on the values of –

- (a) common and equal citizenry and national unity; ....
- (d) equality for all and care for the less fortunate based on the values inherent in this section and in the Bill of Rights contained in Chapter 2.”

Section 26(3) of the Bill of Rights states, and I quote:

“A person must not be unfairly discriminated against, directly or indirectly on the grounds of his or her –

- (a) actual or supposed personal characteristics or circumstances, including race, culture, ethnic or social origin, colour, place of origin, sex, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression...”, and importantly, “...primary language...”

Section 15(1) and (8) states, and I quote:

“(1) Every person charged with an offence has the right to a fair trial before a court of law;

- (8) To give effect to the rights referred in subsections (6) and (7), the court or tribunal concerned must, when the interests of justice so require, provide, without cost to the person concerned, the services of an interpreter or of a person competent in sign language.”

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the words “a person competent in sign language” has been flagged by interpreters from the deaf community as worrisome, because a person competent in sign language does

not necessarily mean a professionally-trained and accredited sign language interpreter, which is what the deaf require in legal situations to name just one.

A lot can be said about the nuances of having a law and the application of the said law. While we may enact laws, the education behind it and how it is applied and socialised are equally important. While a lot has been done for more inclusivity of the deaf, more steps still need to be taken.

The Fiji Sign Language Self-Learning Uniform Video Tool, a great example. For example, it is a video dictionary for Fiji sign language and was launched by the Honourable Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts, and Local Government in December 2019. It is a great idea, fantastic work. Unfortunately, the video tool had some teething problems and had to be shelved shortly after the launch, but I understand that it is being improved and will be re-launched soon.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in this Parliament where we pass laws that affect every citizen of this country no matter what their first language is, and whether it is spoken or sign language, only English is to be spoken according to Standing Orders. I have spoken before here about why I think it is important to the fundamental rights of our people for whom English is not a first or even second language which they are able to hear their representatives in Parliament and the proceedings of this House in a language they understand well. I have spoken before about why I think it is important for Members of Parliament to be able to speak in their own mother tongues, if they wish to, and to have proceedings translated into other spoken languages leaving no one behind.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am glad that Parliament has sign language interpreters and I believe that we have the late Speaker, Dr. Jiko Luveni to thank for that. But how about we take it a step further, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and follow Aotearoa New Zealand's lead. The New Zealand Sign Language Act was passed in 2006, making New Zealand Sign Language the third official language of Aotearoa New Zealand, after English and Maori. Aotearoa is known worldwide, not only for its cultural diversity but cultural inclusivity, celebrating the languages of the people who called Aotearoa home during language week throughout the year.

Fiji Language Week or *Macawa ni Vosa Vaka-Viti* is celebrated every October. Hindi Language Week every September, Rotuman Language Week is celebrated in May and celebrating *Fäeag Rotuamta*. New Zealand Sign Language Week is celebrated every year in May and this is an opportunity for the sign language community in New Zealand to showcase their language and provide opportunities for people in New Zealand to learn New Zealand's sign language. I suggest, therefore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that Parliament seriously consider a Bill proposing to make Fiji sign language an official language of this country. But for that to happen, as I have said before, much more must be done.

Sign language interpreters are skilled professionals and there is a huge shortage of interpreters, so we need to have the resources to attract, train, accredit and retain interpreters to work in schools, universities, government offices, police force, judicial system, emergency services and hospitals. Please, give more funding to the amazing NGOs who, for decades, have been visiting schools and communities, holding hearing screenings to identify children with hearing issues. Give deaf kids more access to deaf-friendly education. In fact, why not make basic Fiji sign language a subject in our schools?

Schools that have deaf or specially-abled hostels and dormitories could also do with much more support to be able to build capacity and space. Is this not what SDG 4 is about, to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all? Empower our tertiary institutions to offer more opportunities for qualifications in sign linguistics and deaf studies. Deafness is a culture all over the world that should be respected, celebrated and learned.

As I finish, Mr. Speaker, I look forward to the day when every deaf child in Fiji can be identified

early, go through high quality education from pre-school to tertiary that is tailor-fitted to their ability, find a great job in a place where he or she is appreciated on merit and where co-workers can communicate with them fluently. I also look forward to the day when we can welcome a member of the deaf community and, indeed, any person with disability into this august House as an Honourable Member of Parliament.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member for her End of Week Statement.

Honourable Members, I now call on the Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation for her response. You have the floor, Madam.

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to respond to the End of Week Statement, as presented to the House by Honourable Qereqeretabua.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, sign language is not only crucial where equality and inclusion are concerned but serves the same purpose and importance that any language has for every single individual. Language, as we know, is a sum of all human experiences since the beginning of human kind and a specific language for the deaf community has therefore, organically developed in the same manner as any other language.

In Fiji, we are proud to highlight our own Fijian sign language which has evolved over the years and is amongst the 300 types of sign languages around the world. The existence and use of sign language in the education system is the reason behind success stories of many deaf persons across the globe and of course, here in Fiji as well. A good example, Mr. Speaker, Sir, of such a success story is of our own Krishneel Sen, who is a graduate from the University College of London and has a Masters in Human Rights. This young man communicates with Fiji sign language and success stories like his are inspiration and proof that nothing is impossible if we give support and encouragement to these members of our community.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji has a Constitution in Braille. As much as this week is about sign language, I would like to include the other disabled groups in my presentation as well and I would like to make mention of our Constitution which is in Braille and is in English, as well as *iTaukei* for our blind students and is used in our blind schools. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is a milestone achievement and we must be proud of the inclusivity of these vulnerable members of our community. Well, the issue here, Mr. Speaker, Sir, sure enough exists in how well sign language is incorporated in everyday communication and the change in Fiji has surely become most visible since the FijiFirst Government came into leadership.

Mr. Speaker, never before was sign language an indispensable part of public communication, especially from the level of national leadership to the general public. Today, the inclusion of sign language during our national news, in education institutes, our own parliamentary sittings and even national events. I can give an example, the Fiji Food Summit we had for our people, not because it is what we should have always done but it is because it is their right and here we are, as a government, as a nation, looking after the interest of our vulnerable.

At this juncture, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to mention that the Fijian Government funds various initiatives across government to assist all persons living with disabilities including those that rely on sign language for communication so that we help realise their rights. Within my Ministry, we have budgetary allocations for programmes like allowances to persons with disability which sits at about \$10.7 million, grants to organisations for persons with disability at \$300,000, economic empowerment of persons with disability at \$10,000, FNCDP grant sits close to \$500,000, the bus fare subsidy for elderly and disabled is at \$5 million.

Under the Ministry of Economy, the disability related funding includes the construction of the Western Disable Centre pegged at \$1 million. Grant to Hilton Special School for early intervention sits

at \$800,000 and at this point, I must acknowledge the commitment and passion shown by Ms. Sureni Perera. I found this lady to be so absorbed in her work and I must give credit for her. I would like to encourage all others who can provide support in terms of early interventions and in the education process to continue to do so.

We also have special scholarships for special and inclusive education under the Toppers. I am not sure of the number allocated for this financial year but there is a specific scholarship for special and inclusive education. I would like to urge people to take advantage of that scholarship, so that we breach the gap between the service that we want to provide, not only our deaf Fijians but also those who have other disability issues.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government has allocated a \$100,000 to the Ministry of Housing for housing assistance for persons living with disability, \$50,000 has been allocated for sports grant for persons with disability at the Ministry of Youth and Sports. The Ministry of Education has also been allocated a funding of \$730,000 for grant to special schools. These are the Ministry of Education's special schools and this is to help in buying assistive devices for those students in these schools.

There is also free education and free bus fare for students with disabilities just like any other students in Fiji. The Government allocated budget to help Mental Health Awareness which sits at \$65,000, materials for disabled and normal people who need that is \$55,000, crutches sits at \$10,000, the Fiji Albinism Awareness Projects also sits at \$10,000. In total, Mr. Speaker, in the 2021-2022 fiscal year budget, over \$19 million has been allocated to disability related programmes. I am sure the members of the community who need these assistance will be assisted with this, amongst various budgetary allocation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, another important thing is the support of families. It is very important that families support these members of our community with utmost respect and dignity. The Constitution allows us to have a progressive realisation of the rights of every individual. I urge the families to ensure that these individuals are provided with support and of course, we are here to support them.

The 2021 theme, Mr. Speaker, Sir, declared by World Federation of Deaf, as we signed for human rights. Yes, we must sign for human rights, highlighting how each one of us deaf and hearing people including us around the world must work hand in hand together to provide the recognition of our right to use sign languages in all areas of life. I think most of us are handicapped here because we do not use sign languages, it should start with us too. Let us learn a few sign language, the basic ones where we can acknowledge and sometimes we are guilty of not recognising that other person is not able to hear. I mean I have done that I started communicating with people and not realising that they cannot hear. I think it is a good start, if we make it for our own self.

As Fijians, we can be very proud to be signatories of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which recognises and promotes the use of sign languages. It makes clear that sign languages are equally status to spoken languages and obligates states parties to facilitate the learning of sign language and promote the linguistic identity of the deaf community.

The resolution, Mr. Speaker, Sir, establishing today acknowledges that early access to sign language and services in sign language, including quality education available in sign languages. I must take note that tertiary institutions play a very important role here in training, to ensure that we have enough people trained in this area to assist in the sign language. I said, including quality education and development of the deaf individuals, is critical to the achievement of the international agreed development goals because it recognises the importance of preserving sign language, as part of the linguistic in cultural diversity.

Even before we sign the Convention, Fiji's Bill of Rights within the 2013 Constitution recognises

this unique medium of communication. I must acknowledge the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts Policy on special and inclusive education, which gives an opportunity to learn together wherever possible.

Again, a policy designed under the leadership of the FijiFirst Government also provides sign language interpreters to schools who have students with hearing impairment. A special education grant is also given to students with learning impairment and students with hearing impairment are also included and assisted under the transportation scheme of the Ministry of Education support access for them to learning facilities.

I wish to acknowledge the work of founders and organisations for Persons with Disabilities like the Fiji Association of the Deaf, Highland Ministry, Gospel Schools for the Deaf, Frank Hilton organisation for the great work that they do with the deaf community in Fiji and of course, in partnership with other Ministries, we are proud to be able to support these stakeholders.

We will be amiss, if we do not acknowledge the employers who have employed and provided reasonable accommodation for a deaf employee and Mr. Speaker, Sir, we should note employers who are given a 300 percent tax deduction, if they employ a person with disability. This is a great initiative and must be commended for.

To conclude, the Ministry would like to acknowledge all the silent achievers who have been celebrating this week and particularly today, the Fiji Association of Deaf, Gospel School for Deaf, Highland Ministry, Frank Hilton, Persons with Disability Forum, Fiji Deaf Rugby Boys who have just started a car wash initiative at Brown Street. Fiji is proud of you boys and that is what we as Fijians need to do - support and encourage these members of our community.

I must also address the sad fact that sign language interpreters are far too often humiliated and mocked on social media platforms for the way they express themselves. This should stop. It is indeed an unfortunate show of the fact that still, we have Fijians who have not learnt the value of sign language, let alone learn to respect and treat persons with disability with respect, dignity as equals. This mentality, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is shameful and it must be changed. In fact, commenters on social media are often adults and it only makes one wonder. What exactly is the example that such people set for their children in their homes?

We cannot be proud of discriminatory and derogatory comments towards something as valuable as sign language or any disabled person. Thus the role of every Fijian is in fact, vital in ensuring equal treatment and this treatment that becomes a reality in our beloved nation must start from individual thinking and actions.

Fijians can support this uniqueness and applaud our silent heroes like the caregivers, parents, teachers, sport coaches, sign language interpreters and for those that are hard at hearing and we must make the effort to do that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I take my seat by wishing all the Members a restful weekend and, of course, to the Honourable Attorney-General, a happy birthday to you once again.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister for her response. I now give the floor for the second End of Week Statement by the Honourable Salote Radrodro. You have the floor, Madam.

#### Standard and Efficient Reporting Requirements

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank you for the opportunity to present

my End of Week Statement on Standard and Efficient Reporting Requirements.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is the second term of Parliament after the forced adoption of the 2013 Constitution after the events of 2006. The latest Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) Report, Performance Audit Review Reports, the Agricultural Census Report among others bring home the truth that things are not rosy or well in the country as regularly claimed by the Government of the Bainimarama boom. I believe that one of the major reasons among others that the truth is coming out is due to the lack of accurate and timely reporting from agencies of Government, particularly in submitting of annual reports.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is no doubt and we all agree that a good management reporting system is the foundation for a successful plan implementation in any organisation. For example, for the Government's National Development Plan for 20 years from 2017 to 2036 and a good Government Reporting System must be timely, clear, relevant, easily accessed and has the capability of running automated reports. Most importantly, there is transparency and accountability in the operations of Government.

When those criteria are met, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reporting system provides the data to identify non-performing areas and leads to the following benefits:

- (1) Increase good communications between all stakeholders;
- (2) Improves productivity, accuracy and timeliness;
- (3) Improves decision making and efficiency with all Government Ministries and Agencies;
- (4) Identifies potential problems early and when you still have time to act on them; and
- (5) On cost efficiency, this is the most tangible benefit of all as it can mean decrease cost and increase revenue.

Having the data at your fingertips allows managers to be better equipped to switch gears if necessary and respond to changing business environments faster. Simply put, Mr. Speaker, Sir, slashing budget is no longer effective unless there is data behind that decision.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, Sir, our laws recognise the importance of accurate and timely reporting. The 2013 Constitution, Financial Management Act 2004 and Financial Regulations 2010 mandates and stipulates the standard and efficient reporting requirements for the whole of Government machinery. This include, but not limited to, audit reports, periodic and annual reporting by the Permanent Secretaries or equivalent authority to their line minister and then to Parliament, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Section 152(1) of the 2013 Constitution clearly states, and I quote:

“At least once in every year, the Auditor-General shall inspect, audit and report to Parliament on -

- (a) the public accounts of the State;
- (b) the control of public money and public property of the State; and
- (c) all transactions with or concerning the public money or public property of the State.”

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we will recall that we had discussed public performance audit reports in this House, for example, on the preparedness for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals. For the 17 SDGs targets, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as set by the United Nations to improve humanity's quality of life by ending poverty, hunger, ensure good health and well-being, quality education, gender equality, clean water, et cetera, and the government is supposed to be working towards achieving these goals as captured in the National Development Plan, 5-Year and 20-Years from 2017 to 2036.



As required by law, the Auditor-General carries out their work to see how the Government is doing in achieving these SDG goals, and in this case, they had tabled a performance audit report in Parliament. The report highlighted problematic areas such as alignments of SDGs targets from the National Development Plan to Ministries and Departments' Strategic and Annual Corporate Plan for implementation purposes. Subsequently, this further trickles down to the Ministries and Departments, and it reflects their failure in not only reporting their performance in the implementation of the 17 SDGs but also to their failure in the submission of annual reports.

Another problematic area was that the SDG Taskforce were not meeting as planned, Mr. Speaker, Sir. These reported shortfalls unfortunately, clearly point to the Ministry of Economy being the lead agency responsible as stated in the National Development Plan for:

- (1) Performance Monitoring, including compliance with systems and processes for effective management of public resources;
- (2) To incorporate monitoring and evaluation assessments by institutions and all lead agencies into planning and decision-making processes.

However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we will further recall that the Minister for Economy disputed in this House the Performance Audit Report and questioned the work of the Auditor-General which actually, Mr. Speaker, Sir, informed all of us in this House and the people of Fiji how our money has been used and whether it is benefiting all of us by ending poverty, hunger, climate change, addressing decent work and economic growth, et cetera, as stated in the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the National Development Plan.

The Auditor-General was only doing his work and was saying to government, especially to the Ministry of Economy to the Minister of Economy, that yes, the government is doing your work in trying to achieve our SDG targets but these areas need improving and these are suggestions to help you correct, change and what the government is doing so that we can get value for money and Fijians enjoy the benefits for the betterment of all our communities.

One would think, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that an open transparent government would welcome this type of report and then can quickly ask, how can these challenges be addressed? How can these be fixed? But no, unfortunately, the Honourable Minister for Economy did not take too kindly to the various performance audit reports brought into this House and we ask the question, why?

May I remind the other side of the House that running government is not like your own personal business whereby you bear the profit or benefit of your own decision making or otherwise the brunt of losses. Running government business is huge, complicated, managed by not so many people, but for the whole of Fiji. Therefore, it is vital and prudent that the Government listens to criticisms as highlighted in the Performance Audit Report and take corrective action. That is part and parcel of their duty as they have very well captured in the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework in the National Development Plan 2017-2036.

Similarly, Financial Regulations 2010 is very clear on the reporting requirements, for example, Sections 68 and 69 states the following:

“68 Within 2 weeks after the end of each quarter, the Permanent Secretaries must submit to his or her Minister a Report on:

- (1) the financial operations of the Agency as compared to that of the Budget; and
- (2) the progress on the implementation of the outputs specified in their Annual Corporate Plans.

69 Each agency must prepare an annual report for submission to its Minister by 30th May of the following year.”

But again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, unfortunately, this is another problematic area whereby Ministries, Departments and Statutory Bodies have failed to submit timely Annual Reports to Parliament. The worst performing ones, for example, is the Fiji Military Forces and the Municipal Councils and looking across the House, may I ask Ministers, what year was the last one of your Annual Report presented to this House?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the National Development Plan which was launched in Bonn, it stated the theme of “Transforming Fiji” progressive and vibrant inclusive society, but unfortunately, this was not given the opportunity to be brought to this House first and also in that side event comment, they said that this is Fiji’s first ever long-term development strategy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is not true. Previous governments, right from the Alliance days and we, who worked in the Civil Service know that there were such plans as Development Plan (DP) 6, 7, 8 and 9. Those were National Development Plans, Mr. Speaker.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- They were five-year plans.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- It is a long term plan.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the Public Accounts Committee, the Parliamentary Public Accounts Committee is the top most lead agency charged with the accountability framework but unfortunately, the change in the Standing Orders in regards to the chairmanship being removed from the Opposition and given to the Government Member will surely affect the work of the Committee in their performance monitoring, including compliance with systems and processes for effective management of public resources.

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

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is an insult to the Public Accounts Committee the way the Member is saying that the Public Accounts Committee is not doing its job. We have presented so many reports, they have been debated.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- I did not say that.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- They are fond of questioning the chairmanship. They should retract that statement, Sir.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

Honourable Member, you have heard the point of order, continue with your End of Week Statement.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Ministries have not tabled timely annual reports and we would like to know even if the Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of Civil

Service have tabled any annual reports since their establishment in 2015? I would urge the Auditor-General to present an Audit Performance Report on the Civil Service Reform.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have just had the Household Income Survey Report and we know that the CEO was removed from his job but, according to the monitoring evaluation mechanism in the National Development Plan, the Fiji Bureau of Statistics is the lead agency responsible for the coordination, compilation, collation and release of Official Statistics. In this regard, to the achievement of SDG 1 – No Poverty, let us look at the recent report. Fiji’s poverty headcount raised in the report is 258,000 individuals. The poverty rate for the rural population is 62.2 percent and that was made up mostly of the *iTaukei* communities.

Mr. Speaker, may I just highlight to the House the comments made by the former CEO of Bureau of Statistics, Mr. Kemueli Naiqama, in referring to the statistical poverty. He said that and I would request that each of you on that other side of the House, put on your statistical lenses to be able to understand how to tackle poverty-related issues. We cannot pick up one or two variables like race and religion and separately from other issues, and think that one is addressing and dealing with poverty.

Poverty is a multi-dimensional and should be tackled accordingly. We have to embrace all contributing variables of poverty and collectively allow all stakeholders, whether it is government, private sector, civil organisations, religious bodies or international agencies, to identify their responsible thematic areas, provide the necessary budget allocation and intervention programmes to reduce and eliminate poverty. In this way, we can all contribute in achieving SDG1 - No Poverty, and the global theme and your favourite tagline: Transforming Fiji’ progressive and vibrant inclusive society “leaving no one behind.”

Mr. Speaker, may I just add with a last comment that if one of you gets sick, you will go to the doctor and if one of you gets a toothache, you will go to the dentist, so if one of you wants to understand statistics, consult the statisticians - the data experts. You are not experts on everything.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member for her End of Week Statement. I now call on the Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service, Communications, Housing and Community Development for his response. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will be extremely brief. The Honourable Member very interestingly so was all over the place. In fact, she was supposed to talk about the timeliness of reports being handed in, she went to Bureau of Statistics, she went to various other areas, thrown in a bit of ethnicity, usual flavour and she talked about the fact that there used to be development reports before. We pointed out to her it was only a five-year plan and she said, “that is long term”, knowing fully well that we have issued a 20-year Development Plan. This is the kind of intellectual dishonesty that is displayed because they actually have a narrative in place.

I would like to start off, Mr. Speaker, Sir, firstly, with the Financial Management Act which the Opposition vehemently opposed. She is now referring to the Financial Management Act. In the last session, we actually approved the Financial Management Act, they objected to it, in which, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we held and we made the Minister responsible for Economy and the Ministry for Economy far more responsible and far more requirements were placed on them to divulge information. There is a need now, a legal requirement, for example, under the Financial Management Act, in terms of developing medium term debt strategy, in terms of policy strategy that has to be actually tabled in Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, normally in Fiji, the tradition has been that the Executive does not announce that, they would normally do that on a yearly basis or someone cobbles something together just before Elections in a manifesto. Now, there is actually a legal requirement, there is actually a step to do so. So,

Honourable Radrodro is really off the tangent as usual, Mr. Speaker, Sir, very loquacious but actually not engaging her cerebral.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the fact of the matter is, they opposed the Financial Management Act in which we have also set up a strengthened internal audit within all the Ministries, stemming from the Ministry of Economy, again having a separate audit committee, an external audit committee. So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, no one is running Government like they are running their business. They would not even know how to run a business, Mr. Speaker, Sir, she would not! Obviously, accountability and transparency regarding allowances is not her strong point.

The other point that she did also talk about in her earnestness to actually gain political mileage, she talked about the Auditor-General's Report on the SDGs and I have highlighted this before, Mr. Speaker, Sir. That particular assessment was done even before any of the work was done. As soon as it was announced, they came in basically a bit like an ambush and anyone that follows the Audit Manual Guidelines as rolled-out by the Fiji Institute of Accountants, Honourable Gavoka would know about this.

The Fiji Institute of Accountants, you look at the audit guidelines, there are certain standards - you need to have entry interviews, you need to have exit interviews and she referred to the actual Act itself. Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I have highlighted previously, the Act itself talks about what the Auditor-General can do and cannot do - power to conduct the performance audit.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, nothing in this section entitles, quite specifically in the law not changed by us, it is there in the law, I am not reading off-the-cuff, entitles the Auditor-General to question the merit of policy objectives of the Government.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the policy objective of the Government cannot be questioned. Of course, they have the ability when monies are allocated, they have the money...

(Honourable Opposition Member interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Please.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Listen!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- ...they have the ability, Mr. Speaker, Sir, if Government says they are going to allocate funding to, for example, give people a million coconut seedlings, there must be various procedures that must be outlined. They have the ability to then come and check whether those procedures were actually adhered to or not, that is their right, that is the role of the Auditor-General, that is what he or she is supposed to do...

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Not to decide on policies.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- ...not to decide whether giving a million coconut seedlings is appropriate or not.

In the same way, the Auditor-General did not decide on the various blueprint policies that was announced by the Qarase Government or the Government; that is not their job. That is the policy decided by the Government of the day. All they need to simply come and do is say, if this much money has been

allocated for a particular purpose, was that money spent in the right manner according to the Financial Management Act, according to the various regulations and was the money disbursed appropriately? That is their job and they have the full right to do that. Not question whether a million seedlings should be given or not.

Honourable Salote Radrodro seems to be going on about that which is similar to what Honourable Prasad was also starting to do as a chair of the Public Accounts Committee. That, Mr. Speaker, Sir, what led to the current position.

(Honourable Opposition Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, the other point is, because the Honourable Salote Radrodro has raised the issue of the Public Accounts Committee, I will go into that space. As we have said on the floor of this Parliament, the Chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee or even Committee Members when they have hearings, when they have people appear before them, they do not on an hourly or daily basis give running commentaries. The Committees, Mr. Speaker, Sir, are quasi-judicial performance they perform.

When a Judge is sitting and hearing a three-day case, he does not come and give at lunch time, morning tea time a running commentary “oh, this is what happened and I think this is what it is.” That is what he was doing, that is precisely what he was doing. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have got newspaper articles, radio interviews to actually prove that.

(Honourable Opposition Member interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, she opened the door, you talk to her.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point that Honourable Salote Radrodro in rubbishing the National Development Plan said that there was no long term plan, it was done before. Never before in the history of Fiji, let me categorically state this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, did we have a 20-year Development Plan.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Hear, hear!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- When I highlighted that to the Honourable Salote Radrodro, she said “Oh, what the other ones were long too - five years.”

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also would like to bring to Parliament’s attention, as we have already said on the floor of Parliament that COVID-19 has disrupted many countries plans. It has completely changed the entire ballgame and as we, Mr. Speaker, Sir, have said that we will need to relook at our development plans which we are doing. It is not something you go and sit down, Honourable Radrodro, I know you may have done it before over a cup of tea and then decided a 20-year development plan and its cons, as Director locked up in your office. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the point of the matter is that we are actually getting technical assistance to assist us look at the National Development Plan.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point that I also wanted to highlight is that, she has gone on about

some of the institutions where the Auditor-General Reports have not come on time, it is behind time. Yes, some of those organisations were not run well. Some of the reports, if you look at what has been tabled since 2014, some of them actually go back to 2003 and 2004. They actually have to go through that particular exercise because you cannot have the financials of an organisation in 2018 if the 2004 one has not been done. It is a sequence. You have to follow that. So, that is why some of the organisations are actually playing catch-up.

Some of the reports that the Honourable Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts presented as Minister for Local Government goes back over decades. In fact, some of the organisations have also complained that the Auditor-General's Office is actually so too because they are also overwhelmed. I am not blaming them, they are also overwhelmed.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- On that aspect, I am not blaming them.

So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, but I have got numerous things to blame them for because they are not following various standards.

The last point I would like to make, as usual, Honourable Salote Radrodro cannot help herself, like the rest of her colleagues, to bring in ethnicity. She talked about when you go and see a doctor or dentist you should want a good one, that is precisely what we have always said but they want ethnicity in everything. As I have said previously in a lot of public occasions. When your child is sick, Mr. Speaker, Sir, if your child needs surgery you are not going to say I am *iTaukei*, I want an *iTaukei* doctor. You will say, I want the best doctor. I am a Madrasi and I want a Madrasi doctor. You are not going to say that. I am a Catholic, I want a Catholic doctor. You want the best person.

That is why, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the entire assessment of the Household and Income Assessment Survey that they have done is purely on ethnicity. It has some wonderful examples. How many times does a person eat in a day? How many times does a child eat in a day? What kind of transportation do they use? We should be focussed on how many doctors, nurses, engineers, foresters, sign language people we have? They do not talk about that. They only talk about ethnicity. When you want to have a National Development Plan we need to be able to look at our local capacity and our national capacity to be able to ensure that we have the deliverables.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General for his response to the End of Week Statement.

I now call on the Honourable Maharaj for the third End of Week Statement, you have the floor.

#### Integrity and Credibility of Identification Records

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I start my End of Week Statement just as a Chairperson for the Public Accounts Committee, I ask the Opposition to go away from the obsession they have with the chairmanship of the Public Accounts Committee. All this while it was the obsession of NFP, now it is creeping into SOELPA as well. If you think....

(Honourable Opposition Members interject)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- That has been explained by Honourable Attorney-General. Why did you lose the chairmanship? If you think that the PAC is not doing its job, change your membership. Why question the chairmanship of PAC? Maybe they are not performing, they are not giving the information.

(Honourable Opposition Members interject)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Do not question the chairmanship, change your own.

(Honourable Opposition Members interject)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Look at your own backyard.

(Honourable Opposition Members interject)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- It was because of you, you lost your chairmanship.

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Whip, you have an End of Week Statement, deliver it. We are all looking forward to hearing you.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The deliberation that we had in Parliament this week, whether it be the Births, Deaths and Marriage Registration (Amendment) Act 2021, the Electoral (Registration of Voters) (Amendment) (No. 2) Act 2021, Interpretation (Amendment) Act 2021, the 2019-2020 Household Income and Expenditure Survey, the \$360 Unemployment Assistance payments, the rollout of the internet data for Year 13 students and many other discussions we had, clearly demonstrated the need and importance of maintaining proper identification records and the overall need to maintain integrity and credibility in the national records and statistics.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this week, we talked a lot about the need to maintain the integrity of the voter registration and thus truly authenticating the process of free and fair elections. To truly ensure equal representation in voting and universal suffrage, one person, one vote and one value.

Today, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to focus my statement on the importance of maintaining proper identification records to assist with the targeted Government assistance programme. The Bainimarama and FijiFirst Government has rolled out numerous assistance programmes over the years to assist Fijians with initiatives, such as cash assistance to re-build homes in the aftermath of natural disasters, such as cash assistance to support the unemployed and vulnerable during the COVID-29 crisis, the distribution of food rations and household packs, provision of electricity subsidy, provision of free water, distribution of MSME grants, provision of subsidised bus fares for our elderly, transport assistance to our school students, targeting of various agriculture support programmes, our usual social protection programmes through the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation and many other relief measures provided in the recent 2021-2022 Budget and other previous Budgets.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, what we have learnt over the years is that, there are a number of challenges in terms of the identification of the target groups for assistance. We do not have a unique national identification number and also the challenges in linking records across the various government agencies through a unique identification system.

Over the years, various measures and strategies have been adopted to fill in these gaps like the introduction of the joint FNPF and FRCS cards, compulsory requirement of Tax Identification Number for various application processes like opening up of bank accounts, the compulsory registration of mobile SIM cards and now the requirement to use ones name on the birth certificate of all new applications, including those for the issuance of new identification cards. All those measures, Mr. Speaker, Sir, are

helping to improve the credibility and integrity of our record management systems. Yet it is not complete, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for many years we had challenges in rolling out assistance programmes for informal sectors. While the identification of formal sector beneficiaries have been quite easy with verifications done through FNPF and FRCS records, identification for informal sector workers have been difficult as it overlaps with people who are not working. So, when we want to target any assistance to the informal sector, it is hard to demarcate those that are not working or have never worked and those working in the informal sector.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the rollout of the \$90, \$50 and the recent \$360 cash assistance by the Ministry of Economy has greatly assisted the Government to build a good database of formal and informal sector employees. However, still there are challenges which can be resolved once a proper National ID system is developed.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, developing a proper identification system that is trusted and credible is important for socio-economic development and in enhancing the lives of Fijians. However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this should meet certain principles and best practices.

Firstly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, any identification system needs to be built on inclusivity. This includes ensuring that legal framework, requirements and procedures to register, obtain or use identification and the data that are collected and released do not enable or reinforce discrimination against any particular group or individual.

Also for many years in Fiji, Mr. Speaker, Sir, people have been able to legally use a variety of names across different platforms and processes. This casual practise of identity-jumping is probably why we have so many fake *Facebook* profiles. In formal and legal platforms, this culture of loose identity-jumping is extremely problematic and carries a real risk in terms of fraud.

However, the recent amendments to the Interpretation Act 1967 is standardising names in Fiji to address this risk. To ensure inclusivity, the standardisation exercise is also supported by the amendments to the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 1975, to allow for a streamlined process for legal name change so married women in Fiji are able to choose their formal names without much inconvenience.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is a perfect example of a system designed and tailor-made for the purpose of inclusivity. Secondly, an identification system should have a unique identity and no two people shall share the same identity. With the recent requirements, as I have already mentioned for the use of birth certificate names, all Fijians will now use only one name for formal and legal purposes. This solidifies a distinct legal identity for each person. Apart from this, we need greater interoperability for identification system or relevant offices or entities to talk to each other across Government.

The amendments to the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 1975 also supports the principle by ensuring that the Registrar informs the relevant state entities for any changes to a person's name. With our works towards a National ID system, this is a key objective for records systems across Government to be talking to each other.

Thirdly, setting up a fair and efficient identification record system, we need to ensure that costs associated with the process of registration and retrieval should be reasonable and thus not be a barrier to obtain identity credentials such as civil registration. That is why in the recent Budget, Government is providing free birth and death certificates to all Fijians. In addition, we have BDM offices all over the country to ensure easy registration access and also easy access to changing any registration details.



Government is also going to soon announce some changes to costs associated with changing of birth records.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, last but not least, privacy and data protection is also very important to avoid any improper use of personal data and to protect individual data from any cyber security. Section 24 of the Constitution guarantees the right of every Fijian to personal privacy, which includes the right of confidentiality of their personal information and communication. There is no specific privacy Act in Fiji, which makes it even more important for our systems and processes to be comprehensive and full-proof. Technology is ever evolving and everyday criminals are looking for new ways to abuse systems for their own benefit. We also must be ever-evolving with our strategies to combat these schemes, and I am encouraged by the Government's willingness to evolve with time.

With those words, I thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for this time.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member for his End of Week Statement and I now call on the Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service, Communications, Housing and Community Development for his response.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I make some comments in respect of what the Honourable Member said but it is in relation to that - on 22nd September, the Honourable Pio Tikoduadua, unfortunately he is not here, had said, "... to showcase the extremely low standards of shoddy legislative drafting (this is in respect to the Interpretation (Amendment) Bill which the Honourable Alvick Mahara referred to) being brought to us as elected lawmakers, there is a repeat of the words to provide their name in paragraph 2.3 of the Explanatory Notes."

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the drafters, who are working very hard and the young lawyers who are doing very well, were very aggrieved by this comment and they brought it to my attention. I have actually got the Explanatory Note, and I will read what it says:

"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, to provide their name as it appears on their birth certificate."

There is a reason, there is a comma there, he obviously thought there was repetition of "their name."

Please, I would urge the Honourable Members, you know you talk about how the civil servants work hard, et cetera, yet you run them down whenever you feel like it. They felt very aggrieved so I had to bring it to your attention.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I could not agree more with Honourable Maharaj but I just wanted to highlight a few points. As highlighted, Government has paid out in total \$380 million in direct cash assistance to affected Fijians in this COVID-19 period; \$205 million through the FNPF Scheme was paid directly by Government; \$182 million by FNPF; 57,700 ration packs were delivered to families. So far, Government has paid over \$4.2 million to provide ration packs, \$12 million allocated in the Budget.

Of course, we have through social welfare poverty alleviation, 137,987 Fijians are assisted with a total funding of \$145.5 million, \$55.3 million in social pension, \$36 million for Poverty Benefit Scheme affecting about 23,817 people that received vouchers, food vouchers and monthly allowances, disability allowances as highlighted by the Minister. We now have over 50,000 households, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that now get fully funded electricity bills - up to 100 kilowatts is now being paid fully by us from the 1st of August to 31st January of next year.

Similarly, 31,000 households are getting 92,500 litres of free water, Mr. Speaker, Sir. All of these schemes whether it is the coconut seedlings et cetera, we need to know that they are going to the right people. Yesterday, as I was mentioning to Honourable Seruiratu, I was talking to someone who had three *yaca*'s others. You know what "*yaca*" means, someone with a similar name. This lady actually had three other people with exactly the same name as her. When she went to apply for the passport at the passport office, they said, "why are you giving us the wrong birth date, your birth date is this." But it was actually the birth date of someone else, so this is even more critically important where the Honourable Whip spoke about identity-jumping. People have done that, people do, do that and we need to minimise that. Even if they go and get medical treatment, your medical records could actually be changed.

Under the Constitution, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Section 25 states that:

"Every person has the right of access to –

- (a) information held by any public office; and
- (b) information held by another person and required for the exercise or protection of any legal right .

Subsection (2) states that every person has the right to the correction or deletion of false or misleading information that affects that person.

We have found so many times, in so many governmental records, a person whose name, a very basic thing like being misspelt to having the wrong person, it takes decades to have that being corrected. This, Mr. Speaker, Sir, will actually help. I do not want to make a very long statement on this, but I want to put this into context, in the context of the COVID-19 world that we live in.

I also wanted to highlight, why it is so important, we recently had a case, where a Fijian born in Fiji, went overseas, acquired citizenship of another country and decided to have what we call a gender transformation. He went somewhere to Southeast Asia and had his sexual organs changed or did something hormonal thing, and came back to Fiji and wanted his birth certificate to be now registered as a "she", at birth that he is now a female. We refused that. The matter was taken to court and the court actually held in the favour of the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages, that the only thing that can be changed in your birth certificate is your name, not your mother's name, not your father's name, not the place where you were born, nor your gender.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are certain countries in the world now that if you have had a (there is another technical word for it but it escapes my mind at the moment) ...

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Gender reassignment.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- ... a gender reassignment, thank you very much, Honourable Qereqeretabua. If you have had a gender reassignment, certain countries now actually recognise that. They actually allow you to change your birth certificate, countries like Germany and a few others that escapes my mind.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is a number of issues that did not exist 10 to 15 years ago. If we want to make sure that we are giving the right identification to the right person, the authentic identification, we need to ensure that we have what we call a "truth source". You need to have what we call a "trust framework". This trust framework, at the moment the digitalFIJI team, which the Honourable Tikoduadua and everyone else ran down, are currently talking to the Australians because as you know that we want Australian tourists to come to Fiji.

As announced by the Honourable Prime Minister, in order for that to happen we need to ensure that we actually have a trust framework with them that when they say that these Australians have been fully vaccinated, and therefore they can come to Fiji, we need to know that there is a trust framework (that we trust their systems). They similarly need to know that they trust our system because if the Honourable Minister for Health says that 80 percent or 90 percent of the population is actually fully vaccinated, they can ask us the question, “well, tell us who these people are? Do the passport names match the names in the vaccination list?” This is the reason why we are saying we need to have one name. You can be known by any other name if you want to have your married name go and register it, it will be fine, everywhere else you will be known by that married name, no one is stopping you, but we need to have a legal registration of that name.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, at the moment for information, we are using the European system. It is called the European Union Digital Cards Certification (DCC). The Australians are using IKO Visual Digital Seal (IKOVDS). Their system is very heavily dependent on smartphones because their QR code will have your entire information on your phone. If I am an Australian and we have a system here, if I come to Fiji and you have the QR code system, I put my phone on the QR code at Nadi Immigration Office, the system will say whether I am vaccinated or not.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our system does not have all the information on the phone because we have said that a healthy number of our people do not have very sophisticated smartphones, some of them are very simple phones. So the ability of that phone to carry that much data is not there. We have what we call the European system so that when I scan it, it sends a message to the server, it will then send back the information. Not everything is stored on the phone. These are the kinds of mechanisms currently going on in the background.

We obviously want, what Honourable Maharaj spoke about – inter-operability - not just within Fiji but outside Fiji too. That is the new world we are going to live in, otherwise people will not allow us. When you go as Members of Parliament to other countries, if you are not on that system, they will not let you get on the plane, they will not let you get into your country. If our people want to travel for business purpose or attend sporting events like rugby, football or netball, they need to have this system in place. In order to have the system in place, we need to ensure that there is authenticity and there is integrity in our system. Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is what we call the trust framework and the trust framework can only come from a single source of registration which is critically important.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General for his response. The third End of Week Statement. We are now come to the fourth End of Week Statement and I give the floor to the Honourable Adimaitoga to deliver her End of the Week Statement. You have the floor, Ma'am.

### Media Industry Development Act 2010

HON. S. ADIMAITOGA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Members of Parliament and to the thousands of Fijians watching this on Fijian Government Facebook page.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to speak on the importance of ensuring that media organisations follow the standards set out in the Media Industry Development Act 2010, and the failure of this law to enforce the expected standards.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the media plays an important role in society. It is their job to keep Fijians informed. With this important role, they have a big responsibility. They have a duty first and foremost to tell the truth.

Many reporters do that in Fiji. They bring critical messages to our people and they support our young democracy, instead of trying to divide it but some do not. Throughout our history, we have seen what those failures can cost Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, dishonest media has played a role in every troubling event in Fiji's history. Many times in the past, irresponsible and reckless reporting has led to violence and the destruction of our economy. It must not happen again. We need honest and fair media because Fijians deserve a media that sticks to the truth and that fairly reports the facts. That has not always happened in Fiji and those mistakes cannot be repeated. The MIDA is there to ensure that the public is protected, should a journalist report in an unethical or illegal manner.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, only fools ignore history. Those who do, are doomed to repeat the worst of it. Fiji cannot afford the reckless reporting of the past. We cannot look backwards to a divided Fiji. Instead, we must learn from history.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in 2002, a member of the Senate called local journalists 'mad, crazy, looniness and stupid people' who needed to be trained, guided and directed. He also described the media as 'Satan's agents' and called them racist. People might be wondering who this Senator was. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Senator was none other than SODELPA's, Honourable Bulanauca. Today, Honourable Bulanauca seems to be supporting those, he said are Satan's agents. What does that say about him and his principles, Mr. Speaker, Sir? What does he say about SODELPA's principles? Well they have none. They are false prophets and liars.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I talked about these things and hope people understand they are being lied to by Opposition politicians and are aided and assisted by certain media organisations. In 1999, the media council was formed to stop the biased news reporting which all leaders agreed was a problem and to ensure that the media had ethics. They developed a set of media industry standards that the media agreed to, however, Mr. Speaker, Sir, complaints against the media were ignored by the Council. Why? This was because the Council was made of members of the media, they would protect each other.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the MIDA was created to educate the media and the public on ethical media practices. It was also created to hold the media to account. The MIDA adopted the Media Council's code of ethics for media workers which the media had already agreed to follow. It focuses on the fact that the media must be accurate, fair and balanced when they put out news and information. The Act also states that they must also be fair in their dealings when it comes to advertising.

The FCCC has warned media many times to stop misleading customers who want to buy advertising. Yet, it continues to happen. They tell business owners that unbelievable things like 90 percent of Fijians listen to their station or visit their website. They put out polls with skewed results and expect the nation to believe that this represents what all Fijians think. Overseas, tribunals are set up to investigate whether the claims made by media organisations are true or not. It is not enough to just report what someone said, Mr. Speaker, Sir. They must dig and find the truth and publish the facts.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, those who spread hate speech, racist lies and personally target individuals seek to use the media to spread their agenda. Too often, the media falls for it. Look at Communications Fiji Limited (CFL), they will publish anything on their website and social media that the Opposition says or anyone else who speaks against the Government. Sir, CFL will not check if what was said has any truth. They will not do research. They will post catchy headlines that often have little to no basis in truth. Why; because to them, truth is cheap. They care about comments and clicks. As a result, they are whipping their readers up to believe lies just like *Fiji Times* was, and still doing. That is not responsible...

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. S. ADIMAITOGA.- You listen! That is not responsible, that is not right.

Australia has a new law that makes newspapers and media outlets responsible for comments on their *Facebook* posts. They will not allow media outlets to turn their platforms into breeding grounds for hatred or racism, neither would we.

A responsible media organisation does research. They verify what they are told to keep their readers informed. When that is asked of them, the media and Opposition all come together and say that the media is not free. All the while, *Fiji Times* is publishing anti-Government articles on its front page almost daily. This is the biggest lie to hide the failure of the media to do any good reporting.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. S. ADIMAITOGA.- You listen!

The Media Industry Development Act 2010 sets a framework to stop biased reporting. It is important to protect children and victims of sexual abuse from having their identities published. It stops grieving families from having the identity of their deceased relative being published without consent. It promotes balanced, fair and accurate reporting. Yet, the Opposition and the media seem to be against that.

They say that MIDA restricts media. I question their motive, Mr. Speaker, Sir, do they think they are above everyone else and do not require accountability? That is wrong. The media have a responsibility to publish the truth. They also have a responsibility to maintain professional standards. Above all, they have a responsibility to maintain their integrity. The MIDA Act is there to ensure that if media breaches these requirements, they are held accountable.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to quote Dr. Shailendra Singh who is the Head of Journalism at USP and I quote, “concerns about unbalanced and unethical reporting, lack of depth and research in articles, and a poor understanding of the issues are all too request and too numerous.”

I hope you are listening Honourable Professor Prasad. Everyone already knows that Honourable Professor Prasad, Honourable Qereqeretabua and Honourable Tikoduadua do not respect or care about the truth.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. S. ADIMAITOGA.- Listen, that is the truth! Everyone knows.

HON. PROFESSOR B. PRASAD.- You are reading someone else’s speech.

HON. S. ADIMAITOGA.- I am not reading someone’s speech, you listen! Do not take my time. This is the truth and fact. Everyone knows that they are here to be cheerleaders for SODELPA. They are all too happy to settle for their craps.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. S. ADIMAITOGA.- We must ensure that the media follows ethics and reports fairly.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to end, I want to ask MIDA, what has it done about all of these? If complaints

have been made, why did they not investigate it? Are they doing anything about the current situation? Well, something should be done? We can clearly see the media trying to repeat history. We have learned hard lessons from this.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. S. ADIMAITOGA.- You listen!

We must remember the past and learn from it and ensure that MIDA strictly enforces the standards of professionalism and behaviour expected of independent media organisations. That you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member for her End of the Week Statement and I now call on the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service, Communications, Housing and Community Development for his response. You have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I think in the ruckus towards the end of Honourable Adimaitoga's statement, she made a very important statement which I really would like to respond to and that is, she questioned why has not the Media Development Authority done anything about some of the falling standards and in fact, I think there is a lapse on the part of the Authority itself and I think there are certain appointments that need to be made.

I know the Opposition and perhaps, led by couples of individuals about MIDA itself but I would urge them to read it. It is called the Media Industry Development Authority of Fiji but there are various provisions within that, that sets out the functions of the Authority, the powers of the Authority and more importantly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is about media codes, about advertising rules and also various issues about where you can lodge a complaint.

I heard some Honourable Members calling out different organisations names, they have a right to go and lodge a complaint; they can do that. This actually provides for it and they will be investigated as provided for under the law. There are certain parts about foreign ownership of media. We do not allow foreign ownership of media in Fiji like a number of other countries, that is why Rupert Murdoch actually became an American citizen so he could buy Fox Television and various other companies that are American-owned, because American laws do not allow for that, there is a media tribunal.

I think, Mr. Speaker, Sir, what Honourable Adimaitoga referred to, which I think is critically important and as we had drafted this law, we borrowed verbatim, the media code of ethics and practise; this was borrowed verbatim from the Media Council that Honourable Adimaitoga referred to. The Media Council was actually a self-regulating body prior to this. They set their own standards and they would peer review each other like the Law Society previously. That is why there are something like over 300 complaints languishing with the Law Society because they did a peer review and everyone scratched each other's backs. We know what happened after the Independent Legal Services was set up, two or three prominent lawyers who swindled trust fund monies were banned for life, as they should be, if they are found guilty. That set very high standards.

Similarly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would urge the Honourable Members to please look at this particular Act, it talks about the Media Code of Ethics and Practise, the kind of balance, what you should do, how do you address violence, children, general code of practise for advertisements where children should not be exploited, code for advertising for children specifically, there is a provision here.

I bet you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, none of the Members on the other side have actually read this. They have not read any of these practises. There is protection here in terms of the safety, how we present

children, there are, of course, about television programme classification code, what programmes do we classify, is it R13, R16, R18, we used to have R21 before. All those standards are there, unfortunately, Honourable Adimaitoga is absolutely correct; MIDA in fact, has not been very active and they need to get active.

I would like to make some general comments, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I think one of the problems in Fiji has been the lack of focus by media organisations on development economics. We have post-colonial society, our development agendas are different, we need to be able to have investigative journalism in those areas or a write-up in those areas. It was very interesting, I was just comparing the interview of the terminated Vice-Chancellor of University of the South Pacific on the *Mai TV* show and then on the same evening, there was an interview with Vijay Narayan. If you are interested in about investigative journalism, go and listen to both and look at how the questions were asked. Look at the level of input that the journalists put before hand to do their research and ask more pertinent questions.

I wish I get asked those questions. At the moment, what it is, is that, from *Fiji Times* or CFL will get statements released Honourable Prasad or Members of the Opposition, et cetera. They have issued a statement and they will say, "What is your comment on this?" They have said this, and what do you have to say to that? That is the only time they get in touch with you. They will never talk about, for example, Minister for Women has announced a new initiative, Minister has spoken about how he has got half a million dollars allocated to connecting rural communities with footpaths and water tanks, Minister for Health has done that. They will never ask you about that. These are areas of public interest about informing the public; they will not cover anything like that. They will only cover you if someone says something and then they will want your response. Of course, your response will go in the last paragraph with two lines.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reality of the matter is, that is the situation. There is no way that I would say that even coming into next year, that if you can have any reasonable form of any type of independent assessment or debate between political parties and leaders in CFL or even *Fiji Times*. You cannot expect that at all.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, what I have said in the past, there is absolutely nothing wrong and I remember I used to be a member of Transparency International when I have worked in the private sector and we had brought out a lady, she came from Canada as part of the sort of lecture series we had. The lecture was down at the Marine Studies Lecture Hall at USP, and that lady, who is Canadian, she said that there is absolutely nothing wrong in media organisations having a particular proclivity, editorial proclivity; a well-known one is Foxtel. They said they supported Donald Trump, so you know that they support Donald Trump and when you tune into Foxtel, they will have everything about supporting Donald Trump's government.

In the same way, if it is a newspaper like some of the newspapers in UK, they say, "We support this party", so everyone knows, all right, if I am reading the news from this newspaper that this is their particular proclivity. I will still read it but I know at the back of my mind, that is their agenda. There is nothing wrong with that, you can sell newspapers, you can actually have radio stations, no problem, but you need to be upfront about it.

If *Fiji Times* wants to support a particular political party, CFL, they should tell the public. You can still go ahead and you cannot therefore hide when you have a particular agenda, hide under the guise or the front of "we are independent", we are unbiased" when you actually are.

Please, there is nothing wrong with you supporting a political party or particular philosophy. I remember I had a meeting at this coffee shop after the events of 2007, after the government was appointed, and this particular expatriate *Fiji Times* journalist told me, he said, "our position was to oppose

this interim government.” I said, “Fine, that is your position. Please, state it in your editorial so people know, do not come up and try and say, ‘we are independent, we are doing an independent analysis.’” That is your editorial position, say it, nothing wrong with that but people need to know.

The last point, Mr. Speaker, I would like to make is that, it has been made out in this Parliament that tribunal, et cetera, is something unique under this law. No! Actually UK has more stringent and more active media tribunals. Please, listen to it. There has been this guy, Piers Morgan from *Good Morning*. He resigned because of the Tribunal’s findings.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the last point I wanted to make is that, Honourable Adimaitoga has raised a very important point, the recent case in Australia decided by the High Court of Australia held that any particular, ...

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Please!

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I think you people really need to give Honourable Adimaitoga some respect because I have noticed, generally whenever she speaks, you all laugh at her. I really see that. Please, do not do that.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- No!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You should not do that. Before she even starts, make comments like, “who wrote this speech”, et cetera, but there is a particular way that you do that with Honourable ...

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- It is all right to do it with you but, Mr. Speaker, Sir, because there is a kind of denigration, condescension, please, do not do that to her.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the last point I want to make is that the High Court of Australia actually held that if media organisations on their *Facebook* pages allow for, in this particular case, things like racial vilification or hate comments, those media organisations can no longer hide behind the guise of, well, it is not our comment. But their *Facebook* page or their web page has actually facilitated that and I really hope that the judiciary in Fiji picks up on the development of the laws surrounding social media. That is critically important, Mr. Speaker, Sir, because we have seen a huge shift to the right in Fiji, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and we need to, as responsible Members of Parliament, curtail that. I know their political fortunes are a mismatch to that but, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is for the benefit of the country, it is for the benefit of the future generations of this country that we need to ensure that we truly have standards with the media industry.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General for his response to the fourth End of Week Statement. There is only one comment I have got to make on the first End of Week Statement.

There was an incident of a tour in the neighbouring country where, during the course of a very long programme, the partner lent over during a motorcade and whispered something to the partner on the other side. It caused a great reaction from the crowd that was in the street - much laughter, and the



following morning what the partner had said was frontline in the papers, 'You're wilting my little cabbage'. What had happened, they had gone past the school for those who are deaf and they were all way sharp in lip-reading, they lip-read the comments and there it was.

Honourable Members, we move on.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

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

That Parliament adjourns until such date and time as will be confirmed by the Business Committee.

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

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote on the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I thank you all for your participation and contributions during the Parliamentary proceedings in the course of this Sitting week. There will be a long break between now and the next Session, and I wish you all well during that time. I hope to see you during the course of that time as well.

Honourable Members, I now declare Parliament adjourned, until such date and time as will be confirmed by the Business Committee.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.37 p.m.