

# PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



## PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

### DAILY HANSARD

**WEDNESDAY, 9<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY, 2022**

[CORRECTED COPY]

# CONTENTS

	<u>Pages</u>
Minutes ... ..	493
Communication from the Speaker ... ..	493
Presentation of Reports of Committees ... ..	493-495
(1) 2020 Annual Report of the OAG – Assessing the OAG – SAI Performance Measurement Framework	
Review Report – FNSC August 2018-July 2019 Annual Report ... ..	496-504
Government Guarantee – Fiji Development Bank ... ..	505-538
Consolidated Review Report – Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport 2015-2017 Annual Reports ... ..	538-542,544-562
Suspension of Standing Orders ... ..	543
Consolidated Review Report – FFIU 2019 & 2020 Annual Reports ... ..	562-567
Review Report – Ministry of Youth and Sports 2018-2019 Annual Report ... ..	568-574
Review Report – Ministry of Women, Children & Poverty Alleviation 2017-2018 Annual Report ... ..	574-580
Questions ... ..	581-594
<u>Oral Questions</u>	
(1) Financial Relief - TC Cody (Q/No. 21/2022)	
(2) Recovery Strategies – Inshore Fisheries Sector (Q/No. 22/2022)	
(3) CT Scan Facility & Special Asthma Station (Q/No. 23/2022)	
(4) Newest Trends – Domestic Violence Helpline (Q/No. 24/2022)	
(5) Administration of Gazetted Villages (Q/No. 25/2022)	
(6) Ease of Doing Business Report (Q/No. 26/2022)	
(7) Livestock Farmers – Fencing Kits (Q/No. 27/2022)	
(8) Fiji’s Financial System (Q/No. 28/2022)	
<u>Written Questions</u>	
(1) OHS Compliance - Primary and Secondary Schools (Q/No. 29/2022)	
(2) Serua Landing and Lomaloma Jetty – Progress of (Q/No. 30/2022)	
(3) (Q/No. 31/2022-Withdrawn)	
Liquor (Amendment) Bill 2022 ... ..	594-595
Tobacco Control (Amendment) Bill 2022 ... ..	595-596
Fiji National University (Amendment) Bill 2022 ... ..	596-597
Commission of Inquiry (Amendment) Bill 2022 ... ..	597-602

## **WEDNESDAY, 9TH FEBRUARY, 2022**

The Parliament met at 9.34 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

MR. SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

### **PRESENT**

All Members were present, except the honourable Prime Minister and Minister for iTaukei Affairs, Sugar Industry, Foreign Affairs and Forestry and honourable Adi L. Qionibaravi.

### **MINUTES**

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Tuesday, 8<sup>th</sup> February, 2022, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

### **COMMUNICATION FROM THE SPEAKER**

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

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

#### 2020 Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor-General Assessing the Office of the Auditor-General - SAI Performance Measurement Framework

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, at the outset, I am pleased to present the Committee review report on the 2020 Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor-General (OAG) and Assessing the office of the Auditor-General - Supreme Audit Institution (SAI) performance management framework (PMF).

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee reviewed and consolidated the two above-mentioned reports. This consolidated report provides the details of the review that was carried out by the Committee.

The OAG is established under the Section 151 of the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji and the Audit Act 1969 further specifies the powers of the Auditor-General to audit the whole of the Government financial statements and the report of all entities of the Government. It also empowers the Auditor-General to conduct performance audit of Government entities to assure the Parliament that the entities are achieving their objectives effectively, economically and in compliance with all

relevant legislations. However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Office of the Auditor-General does not have the mandate to scrutinise or question the policies of the Government as per the Audit Act.

The Auditor-General is responsible on behalf of Parliament to audit the accounts of all Government agencies, State Owned Entities, Statutory Authorities, Municipal and Provincial Councils, except for their own Office and those entities that may be exempted by law.

The Auditor-General carried out the audit in accordance with the relevant provisions of the standards on auditing issued by the Fiji Institute of Accountants or other relevant standards considered appropriate. Moreover, Section 152 of the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji 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, SAI plays a critical role in strengthening governance, accountability and transparency. As such, the Office of the Auditor-General is expected to promote transparency and accountability through good governance of its own affairs in an ethical manner in order to fulfil its mandate. To assist in this crucial role, it is important that OAG led by example and be a model organisation.

The decision to undergo the SAI PMF assessment was made by the Auditor-General in order to provide an independent assessment of the current operations and audit practises of Fiji’s OAG against the international standards, specifically the International Standards for Supreme Audit Institutions (ISSAI) and other established international good practises for public auditing. For the OAG’s independence and legal framework, the work to update and modernise Fiji’s audit legislations- the Audit Act 1969 commenced before the SAI PMF assessment, was initiated.

The review was carried out by a legal consultant and funded by SAI and it had already considered three key issues for improvement identified from the assessment. The OAG has submitted the result of the reviewed Audit Act 1969 to Ministry of Economy for submission to Cabinet. In terms of financial independence, the office now receives a one-line budget, a separate bank account and accounting/payroll providing the Auditor-General some financial independence.

For information, the OAG now prepares its annual financial statements using *International Financial Reporting Standards* (IFRS) for Small and Medium sized Entities as financial reporting framework. It is important to note that the OAG is funded through an annual appropriation by Parliament. This enables the OAG to fulfil its audit mandate on public sector entities that includes financial audit, performance audit and follow-up audit. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee, after carrying out a thorough review of the OAG 2020 - Annual Report and the Supreme Audit Institution Performance Management Framework, the Committee in bipartisan approach agreed on the following recommendations:

1. The OAG to amend their strategic plan to ensure that its audit mandate is not disrupted due to unforeseen circumstances and events like COVID-19 pandemic.
2. Proper training plan to be developed to be in line with the audit training needs of the staff so that they are able to better improve their performance and productivity.

3. The Office of the Auditor-General should liaise with Ministries and Departments to allow for prompt facilitation of payments of outstanding audit arrears especially from municipal councils and provincial councils.
4. The Office of the Auditor-General needs to specifically identify strategies and work to improve on its current PEFA rating of C+ before the next assessment period.
5. That the PASAI should conduct more regular reviews of the Office of the Auditor-General in the future which would allow the office to be on par with International Auditing Standards.
6. The Office of the Auditor-General should consider exploring the use of technological infrastructure to assist in the conduct of their online audits in future.
7. The Office of the Auditor-General should take note of the areas of improvement and implement improvements before the next PASAI review commences.
8. The Office of the Auditor-General should follow-up with the line Minister on the review of the Audit Act 1969 to modernise and suit the current environment of doing business.
9. The Office of the Auditor-General to conduct a comprehensive exit meeting to allow Ministries and Departments to rectify pertinent audit issues before tabling of audit report to Parliament.

At this juncture, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also wish to extend my appreciation to all honourable Members of the Committee who were part of the successful compilation of this bipartisan report namely honourable Joseph Nand (Deputy Chairperson), honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa, honourable Virendra Lal and honourable Aseri Radrodro.

On behalf of the Committee, I also acknowledge the Secretariat team for the Standing Committee on Public Accounts for their timely support throughout the scrutiny process that was undertaken, its compilation and finalisation of this detailed Report.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with those words, I commend this Report to Parliament.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

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

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

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, before we go to the next agenda item, I have agreed to make a rearrangement of the agenda, so we will take what was on the agenda as the first one later on in the proceedings today.

**REVIEW REPORT – FIJI NATIONAL SPORTS COMMISSION  
AUGUST 2018 - JULY 2019 ANNUAL REPORT**

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move:

That Parliament debates the Review of the Fiji National Sports Commission August 2018 – July 2019 Annual Report which was tabled on 20<sup>th</sup> September, 2021.

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

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the activities of the Fiji National Sports Commission (FNSC) are twofold. First, the Sports Commission is responsible for guiding and enhancing the delivery of sports programmes in Fiji through a coordinated approach at all levels of participation by Government statutory bodies and the community. Second, it is responsible for ensuring the development of sports in Fiji. The Sports Commission was established under the Fiji National Sports Commission Act of 2013.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to achieve those objectives, the FNSC partners closely with the Ministry of Youth and Sports in particular, it's Sports Unit. The Sports Unit within the Ministry oversees the National Policy and Regulation, while the Sports Commission investigates its development and is the lead implementer of the Policy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the FNSC Executive Management informed the Committee that it will be reviewing its 2019–2023 Strategic Plan, relooking at the current situation and working more in partnerships for sustainability. Its programmes continue to be redesigned to meet deliverables that are effective in the transformation of communities and individuals from grassroot level to elite. Seed funding at the initial stage of such Sports Commission will allow other stakeholders to buy in to gaining access and funding of projects that will be available to the community at all levels. Furthermore, the Urban Youth Sport Development Partnerships Programme has been successful in using sports to raise awareness and assist in the development of young people.

In response to the national concern to reduce Non- Communicable Disease (NCD) in the country, FNSC has partnered with Diabetes Fiji to use sports as a platform to educate, collect data and create awareness at the Diabetes Awareness Event, for youths and all Fijians.

Generally, the Committee is satisfied with the operations of the FNSC in 2018-2019 and in particular, the extensive work undertaken by the Commission to engage a wide segment of the Fijian population in its sporting programmes and activities.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on this motion.

HON. T. WAQANIKA.- I would like to commend the Committee for their review of the Auditor-General's Report. I have three issues that I would like to speak on.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, first they have highlighted in the Auditor-General's Report the challenges of data collection of the migration of youth from the urban to the rural and more so now. I note in the Auditor-General's Report that the Commission is working on that, they are going to work with the NGOs. Now given that we have the *turaga ni koro* who are paid for by Government, the Commission should look at working with them to get information back, and I am sure that, that information will be readily available. Also, in terms of costs, it will reduce costs and also duplicity of expenses for the Commission.

The second one, Sir, was the grant. We all know that the FNSC gives out grant to sporting bodies. Just this week, I read on the Government *Facebook* Page the Charitable Trust that had been deregistered by the Registrar and one of the sporting bodies that has been deregistered is the Fiji Netball Association (FNA). We know that netball is one of the main sports in our nation, second to rugby. We have a lot of our women and men as well, who participate in this sport, including our youth.

Given what I have been told, the lodgment of the audited accounts of the FNA was lodged with the FNSC. Now, under the law there is a requirement that you lodge with the relevant government body. Perhaps, to ensure that there is efficiency within the FNSC because they are giving out grants, that prior to giving out grants they must ensure that all regulatory requirements of all these sporting associations is met, and this is just similar to us lawyers, that prior to us getting our Practising Certificate, we have to ensure that we have a Certificate of Compliance from the tax authority and from the FNPF. So, when a grant is requested to the FNSC, they ensure that, that Association has fulfilled all the regulatory requirements before a grant is issued. I believe that works better as well, but also for efficiency.

The other issue, Mr. Speaker, Sir, was on Board appointments. I always highlight about gender issues and it is important that we have gender balance, but I note for this audited Report, there were five Board members who had been appointed from 2013 until present. So until present is when the audited Reports were released. I do not know whether those five Board members who were appointed in 2013 are still the Board members of the FNSC.

I believe, in our nation we have so many people, so many talents and depths of knowledge, it is always good to have a rotation after a term or, at least, two terms. And I pray that the five Board members who were appointed from 2013 are still not holding positions until today, because there is a pool of people in our nation that we can always pull from to sit on these Board appointments. That is my contribution to this Report.

HON. RATU S. MATANITOBUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank you for the opportunity to speak on the motion. If I may begin by commending the Chairman and honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs on their reviewing the activities of the Fiji National Sports Commission and their report, covering the period 2018 to 2019. The principle activity of the Commission is to guide and enhance the delivery of sports programme through a coordinated approach at all levels for the development of sports in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the impact of COVID-19 and the economic downturn we are going through, has had a terrible effect on the development of sports in our nation. The third wave, where 117 lives have been lost so far, and the limitation on sports activities remain a tragedy, although most restrictions have been lifted last Sunday by the honourable Acting Prime Minister.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we remain concerned about the grants to sporting bodies that were returned in the third and fourth quarter last year.

Nevertheless, I must commend the Commission for its activities and achievements in the period under review, 2018-2019 financial year. It performed above its target in most areas and for this, I commend the Commission.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I now turn to the Committee's recommendations. With regards to the budgetary allocation to the Commission, I wholeheartedly agree that their allocation be increased, when this pandemic is finally contained.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the same vein, I urge the Government that the Commission should be able to provide funding for the construction and maintenance of grounds, courts and related facilities. We must grow sports and the lack of sports facilities has always been an obstacle to sports development.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I, therefore, urge the Government to relook at the budgetary grant to the Commission, to assist them to deliver better services and enable the execution of its sports programmes and activities.

Sir, I also agree that during this time of restricted activities, the Commission should also consult with the national sporting bodies, as the Committee has recommended. This consultation should become part of its work all the time.

On that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I commend the Report and the recommendation to the House. I thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this motion.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of the motion in the debate of the 2018-2019 Annual Report for the Fiji National Sports Commission.

At the outset, Mr. Speaker, I just like to mention that our youth population is about 32 per cent of the total population. The Ministry responsible for the FNCS is the Ministry of Youth and Sports.

This Ministry is one of those Ministries that is given a very small portion of the National Budget. Out of that National Budget that is given to the Ministry, about \$12 million is given as grant to the FNCS, considering that sports is a very big agent for the development and empowerment of our youth and also a recognisable income generating avenue for our people, particularly our youth, in the very different sports that is supported by the FNCS.

Mr. Speaker, having said that, I will just make mention of the importance of sporting infrastructure, like the construction of playing fields or the *rara* in our urban residential communities and also in the maritime and rural communities. I believe the FNCS do undertake Sports Development Programmes in the various communities, particularly with their outreach programmes to the rural population, but they can only be really successful in this aspect of their work if there is proper infrastructure in place in regards to the *rara* or playing fields.

I will recall that in my maiden speech in 2015, I had highlighted the need for sporting fields or *rara* in the residential areas, like Caubati, Wainivula, Kinoya and along the Suva/Nasinu corridor, and even Nasinu/Nausori corridor. Those are density populated communities with our youth, and there is a big demand for proper sporting infrastructure to be established in those areas.

Also, there is a great demand for the establishment of *rara* in the various schools in the rural and maritime areas because part of FNCS's activities is their outreach to schools and it would really help them in their work if the Government increase their \$12 million grant to, at least, \$15 million, so that they are able to look after the proper establishment of playing fields in the various communities. For example, even for the Kadavu sports infrastructure development, about \$500,000 is being funded by the FNCS and that highlights the cost that could be very high in the establishment of these playing fields only with the Government support, particularly in regards to its grant contribution to the FNCS. Then only the FNCS will be able to do a good job or to be able to improve and develop the lives in the sporting aspect of our rural population, particularly with our youth.

Another important aspect that is highlighted in the Report is the need for the Commission to strengthen its partnership with various ministries like the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Education so that they could work together and in partnership to be able to contribute in the development and improvement of the sporting infrastructures in our various communities to allow or to help the Commission in really making an impact in improving the lives of our youths through sports in our various communities.

So, I call on the Government, I know the Minister for Economy is not here and he is always highlighting the fact that I bring up the budget and, yes, Mr. Speaker, it is important that the Government allocates sufficient funding to these type of organisations that really look at the empowerment and development of our youths through sports.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very happy to be the cause of some de-stressing laughs this morning. Mr. Speaker, I commend the Committee for the Report and also I would like to congratulate them and also the Commission for the way they have been able to drive through with the programmes that they have been able to do and their coordination component in these challenging times.

If we look at the motives and the reasoning for the Commission. There are four important things:

1. Guide sports in the country;
2. Enhance it;
3. Coordinate it; and
4. Develop it.

And throughout this COVID-19 pandemic sports all around the world has struggled and we all know that some of our favourite games we have not been able to watch and it is not limited to Fiji. It is all around the world and I have been watching with interest because just like the many of us here, I am an avid fan and I have also realised that in my readings that the support that has gone into sports for major sponsors, development of infrastructure all around the world has also in a way struggled.

And so I must congratulate the Commission and also the Ministry of Youth and Sports in the way that they have been able to do the programmes that they are able to do before COVID-19. The many sports facilities that we have available and the maintenance that happens. For example to ensure that our major sports facilities here in the Laucala Bay Complex are of a magnificent look and in terms of the ability to be able to use it. During the midst of the COVID-19 we were able to use these facilities as a surge facility. We were able to use it because it met our criteria. It was not a hospital but it met our criteria. It was clean enough, it was spacious enough, it was ventilatory enough for us to be able to use it. And we used both, all the sports facilities that were in the Laucala Bay Complex.

So, I thank the Commission and I also thank the Ministry for Sports for the magnificent structure that we have in place and I know for sure that they have their own strategy, they have their plan in place, now that the economy is going through its recovery. Mr. Speaker, Sir, coordination as part of what the Commission is supposed to do is very important and we have partnered very well with the Commission. This is so important in this day and age.

Again, I encourage all sports committees, all clubs to ensure that they work through that process because health and prevention of sports injuries and rehabilitation is a very important

component. Most of those that are playing sports as we all know are young Fijians and they have a whole life ahead of them.

We want to ensure as the Ministry of Health that they enjoy their sports, that they are able to earn an income if they can but more importantly that they can help live a long and fulfilling life after sports. That is why our coordination with the Commission has been very important. Before COVID-19 and also through COVID-19 with the COVID-19 safe sports measures that are in place and also the other measures around injuries.

To give you an example, Mr. Speaker, Sir, our doctors and our health professionals not only in the private sector but also in the public sector have been working with the Fiji Rugby Union and some of our doctors have sat the important exams to be able to be certified by World Rugby, so some of the test matches that have happened before COVID-19 actually had some of our doctors there on the sidelines having met that criteria and that is also very important.

It is important to be able to minimise injuries to the neck so that we reduce those who have significant injuries to make them disabled and that is one of the important roles of the Commission in coordinating and the health, and the prevention of disability and also the notification of injuries that can be picked up early and the health protection that is there, available on the ground even before and the advocacy that happens before it.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the Commission for their work despite the challenging times. I thank the line ministry and also I thank the honourable Members of Parliament who are Members of the Committee for the Report that is before us and I support it. Thank you Sir.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the motion on the Annual Report of the Fiji National Sports Commission. I note the principal activity. As noted, to guide and enhance the delivery of sports programmes in Fiji through a coordinated approach at all levels of participation by Government, statutory bodies, communities, et cetera, and I note in the NDP that there was the intention to host the Pacific Games 2023 and the Commonwealth Games 2026, so I am not sure how far that has gone regarding that situation given the COVID-19 and other challenges we are facing.

Of particular interest Sir, is one of the findings and recommendations there that the Commission assist individual sporting bodies to improve their financial resources and technical expertise to boost their performance. Funding provided for overseas trainers, bring short-term experts to come to Fiji has greatly assisted in bringing not just athletes to better results but also provide the training for their coaches.

I would like to speak in particular on the overseas coaches. We have seen consistently that overseas coaches have been appointed for some of our sporting bodies in particular netball and from the rugby side, I have been president of Fiji Rugby Union at one stage and also currently patron of one of our local rugby unions – the Rewa Rugby Union and in terms of overseas coaches, there have been concerns expressed regarding the appointment and engagement of overseas coaches and there is substantial funding from the Commission in this regard.

I question the Commission if there is any framework for the development of local coaches up to the level of the overseas coaches. I am not questioning the appointment of some of these coaches but I am just wondering whether there is a framework within for succession planning and there have been various coaches who have been mentored within Fiji Rugby Union through the various World Cups. We have had a local coach some years back but since then the trend has been to engage

overseas coaches. Even though some coaches have been mentored but they have not graduated up to the level as national coach.

Again, I believe there is a role there for the Commission to assess the situation. What are the reasons for this and what are the reasons for our local coaches not reaching that national coach level. It could be because of the accredited training or they have not reached the level required maybe level three or four. I am requesting the Commission to please oversee this and have better scrutiny of this in terms of assisting, graduating our local coaches, having a succession plan and framework in place so that there are clear timelines that at some stage there will be a local coach for our national rugby teams both 15s and 7s and that can only happen I suppose if the Minister can oversee this in their work plan and have some timelines on that.

In terms of local sporting organisations, Sir. For example in rugby we have our bigger provincial unions such Suva, Nadroga, et cetera, but there are other rugby unions at the lower level and they face huge challenges. For example Tailevu North, Northland Tailevu and Rewa at that level. Tailevu is at the higher level facing huge challenges and I believe that there is a role here for the Commission in assessing the challenges they face. For example, in my experience for the last 20 years or so years as an administrator at this level, at a particular rugby union - the Rewa Rugby Union which comes from B-Division to A-Division and goes up and down. So, one of the issues we face, firstly it is ground availability and I believe the Ministry is working on some of that even though it is late on Naluwai and Kadavu. I believe that there is funding there but there needs to be more funding for that.

At the moment, most of the grounds that we are using is owned by schools. I acknowledge the role of our schools in that. Tailevu has used Nakelo. We are using Burebasaga District School and a few other schools. In Naitasiri North, they are using Naluwai. There is a huge problem in that not only that but also in the administration of these unions and sports bodies mostly which are based in the rural areas, it is very difficult to get sponsors because sponsors go for big names and mileage. So, there is huge sponsorship for our Nadroga maybe Suva teams and even some of our clubs such as Police and Army but for us it is quite difficult for these unions and that sponsorship is required for the day to day preparation of the teams in terms of, as you know, Sir, it is quite demanding now, the programmes they follow off-season and also in the preparation for the competition.

Not only that but also in terms of facilities, rugby is very demanding physically, so they need to be well-prepared and each provisional union needs to have a high performance centre or weights centre. Again, the Commission could come in and assist by doing a needs assessment of all the issues I have raised and even with the setting up of these higher performance facilities at the provincial level. They could assist in terms of funding and maybe other assistance such as when you are importing for example weights, some assistance in that regard or concessions.

Those, Sir, are some of the issues I thought I would raise. It is not only for us but also for the maritime provinces. For example, we have not had the island zone, Lau, Lomaiviti, a few others, Gau, et cetera, for competition for a while because of the challenges that I have raised. I hope that the Sports Commission, though they seem to be focusing at the national leads, at that level, maybe they need to come down, do an assessment of needs at the provincial level, particularly with the rural communities and create programmes from that in order to assist.

HON. G. VEGNATHAN.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fiji National Sports Commission is responsible for guiding and enhancing sports programmes in Fiji and ensuring the implementation. This is done through strategic and structured partnership with the relevant government statutory agencies and communities in general so as to develop sports in the country.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, during our deliberation on the Fiji National Sports Commission August 2018 - July 2019 Annual Report, some interesting findings were made which I would like to expound on.

First, the Committee noted the assiduous work of the Sports Commission in helping our athletes and sport teams participate at international sporting events. I commend the Sports Commission for all the work done in helping lift the world ranking of our athletes and sports teams. The Sports Commission works at facilitating funding to enable our national teams to attend these world ranking events, together with Government assistance, of course.

I also note that a number of our sports have shown improvement, but other sports have very much become professional, and our individual athletes have shown their ability to become world class athletes, as seen with Rugby Union, Rugby League, Football and Golf. Funding provided for overseas trainers to come to Fiji as short term experts has greatly assisted, not just athletes to achieve better results, but has also provided training opportunities for our coaches. As honourable Tuisawau has mentioned, our coaches probably need more training and perhaps they may be given the opportunity to be trained under some coaches overseas, maybe that will improve their ranking and enable them to become better and high grade coaches.

Furthermore, scholarships provided have enabled athletes to improve their ranking by competing and training with overseas athletes and coaches. The international coaching grant, for example, has enabled teams to advance their ranking and the results are evident in improved ranking for rugby, football, yachting and surfing.

Another noteworthy achievement of the Sports Commission has been the formulation of its strategic plan for 2019 to 2024, following extensive consultation with relevant stakeholders. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I commend the Commission for the many different sporting activities created for the benefit of our Fijians.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to comment on the Fiji National Sports Commission 2018-2019 Annual Report and thank the Chairman and members of the Committee. Concerns have been raised in regards to the urban-rural migration of youths, that the Fiji National Sports Commission needs to work closely with the *turaga ni koro* and the village elders. I wish to state that that is happening. We are working very closely with the *turaga ni koro* and the village elders in that regard.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other concern that was raised was on the registration of the National Sporting Organisation. It is standard practice that all boxes need to be ticked before registration is accepted and if they fulfil all the requirements they are registered. So, I do not see any issue in that regard.

The other issue that was raised was on the appointment of board members. Mr. Speaker, Sir, all the board members of the Fiji National Sports Commission are appointed on merit and upon expiry, their term can be renewed. So, it is not an issue of whether they have been there for three or four years, if they are doing a good job, they can continue being board members. And here I would like to thank the members of the Fiji National Sports Commission for their hard work.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other concern was raised on the capital development. I would like to say this to the honourable Salote Radrodro that it is not the job of the Fiji National Sports Commission to go around the country and build multipurpose courts or sports grounds; it is the Ministry of Youth and Sports and CIU Unit.

Let me also say this, I really like what the honourable Attorney-General said the other day about the Opposition Members that when they come into this honourable House to debate, they need to do some search, research and homework so that they are aware of what is happening in and around them.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have constructed multi-purpose courts around the country, volleyball courts and the sports field as well.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there has been also some talks on the local coaches. We all want local coaches and we hope that a day will come when we will have local national coaches.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the report noted that the principal activity of the Fiji Sports Commission is to guide and enhance the delivery of the sports programme in Fiji through a coordinated approach at all levels of participation by Government statutory bodies and the community to ensure the development of sports in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, based on the above, the Fiji Sports Commission has through its 2019-2023 Working Plan has relooked at is operating towards greater income generation beyond its current funding model.

These plans of course, Mr. Speaker, Sir, have been greatly impacted by the current pandemic and measures taken in its control. However, we remain confident that the Fiji Sports Commission will continue to work on this plan in the coming months towards sports under the new normal post-COVID.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Sports Commission Programmes had been redesigned as per it is mandate to facilitate sports in communities and individuals from the grass root levels to elite. One such example is the community sports association and we remain positive that we will continue to enable this change. It is an area, Mr. Speaker, that the Ministry will work closely with Fiji Sports Commission so that we can get this programme to fulfil its aims of providing seed funding to grow community sports.

The key priority area that the Fiji Sports Commission will continue to work on is partnership and funding towards specific programmes especially in the communities for women, children and inclusive development programmes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in making this contribution, it is important that we make the point that sports has shown pathways to better life outcomes even during the darkest days of this pandemic. None better than the achievements of our gold and bronze winning performance by the men and women's sides in the 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these highlights have been matched by local sports at all levels and have continued to brighten the day for ordinary Fijians.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the FijiFirst Government has made youth and sports front and centre of its keys priority areas and through this debate and given the current circumstances, it gives us hope when we know that sports and our youths are shining lights no matter what goes on in the world. They will continue to shine brightly as we all strive toward greater achievements among our youths and in sports.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, at this juncture I would also like to mention that now the sporting organisations, religious organisations or anyone for that matter can organise indoor and outdoor

sporting events with spectators at 80 per cent capacity and also all sports council facilities are now open for hire with 50 per cent reduction on the hiring charges.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there has been some talks on the funding to the Fiji National Sports Commission. For the information of this honourable House, government funding to the Fiji National Sports Commission over the last three years, that is from 2017-2020 has been around the tune of \$30 million.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the funding allowed the Commission to continue supporting the national sporting organisations in the following areas:

1. Overseas sports tours;
2. Hosting of international tournaments;
3. Sports scholarships;
4. Engagement of sports coaches and training;
5. Disability sports grant; and
6. Short-term sports programme.

MR. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs to speak in reply.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would just like to thank the honourable Ministers and honourable Members for speaking on the motion.

MR. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote to note the content of the Report.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you, honourable Members. On that note we will suspend proceedings for a break and Parliament will resume in half an hour.

The Parliament resumed at 10.33 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.07 a.m.

### **GOVERNMENT GUARANTEE – FIJI DEVELOPMENT BANK**

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir , for the purpose of Section 145 of the Fijian Constitution and pursuant to Standing Order 131, I move:

That Parliament approves that -

- (a) the Fijian Government guarantee Fiji Development Bank (FDB) borrowings for the next 12 month period. From 1<sup>st</sup> March, 2022 to 28<sup>th</sup> February, 2023 through the issuance of short and long-term bonds promissory notes, term deposits, any RBF financing facility and other short term borrowings;
- (b) the Government guarantee the sum of \$200 million for the guarantee period; and
- (c) a guarantee fee of 0.075 per cent be applied on a cumulative utilised guarantee credit.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU:- I beg to second the motion.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we all know and we have talked about Fiji Development Bank (FDB) in the past couple of days, the Bank was established under the Fiji Development Bank Act 1966 and opened for business on 1st July, 1967.

Pursuant to section 5 of the Act, the function of the Bank is to facilitate and stimulate the promotion and development of natural resources, transportation and other industries and enterprises in Fiji, and in the discharge of these functions, the Bank shall give special consideration priority to the economic development of the rural and agricultural sectors of the economy of Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Bank is currently under the supervision of the Reserve Bank of Fiji (RBF) effective from 21<sup>st</sup> November, 2019 and as agreed, provided the six monthly reporting to the honourable Minister for Economy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on section 16(3) of the Act states, and I quote:

“The repayment of any sums borrowed under the provisions of this section and the payment of the interest thereon may be guaranteed by the Government.”

As required under section 62(1) of the Financial Management Act 2004, the Government may guarantee the financial liability of any entity in respect of a loan or otherwise, but only if the guarantee is approved by Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the 2022 Government guarantee request from the Bank will:

1. Enable continued facilitation of the Fijian Government’s policy by lending to essential sectors of the economy, particularly resource-based sectors including; agriculture, mining and quarrying, manufacturing, transport, communications and storage and small and micro enterprises, in wholesale, retail and hotels, sustainable energy from fossils to renewable sources and professional and business services which will assist the disadvantaged of the community to earn a decent livelihood.
2. It will ensure that the Bank lend to the resource-based sector that will assist in the development of the agriculture sector and in the long run, assist the development of the Fijian economy.

3. Ensure that the Bank's borrowings are guaranteed by the Fijian Government, therefore, reducing the perceived risk associated with such borrowings, because they do go out to the open market. This will make the Bank's and instruments more attractive to investors, and should reduce the cost of borrowings for the Bank. I think a lot of people may not understand this, but once the Government guarantees, the ability to go out to the market to give the investors that level of assurance, so they do not necessarily demand for high interest rates.
4. Ensure the guarantee of the Bank's proposed term deposits which will build investor confidence, and will thus have the Bank to manage its own liquidity position as well.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as required, I wish to inform Parliament of the Bank's lending portfolio. As at 3<sup>rd</sup> June, 2021, the Bank recorded a cumulative loan portfolio of \$618.8 million, in other words, 4,590 loan accounts, compared to \$541.9 million in the 2020 financial year. The gross loan for the financial year 2021 is attributed to 45.76 per cent or \$283.2 million of the focussed sector, while 54.24 per cent of the non-focussed sector or \$335.6 million was, in fact, the position of the Bank.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as of June 2021, in the Agriculture Sector, for example, there were 3,007 loans which accounted for 65.51 per cent of total loan numbers. In terms of the dollar value, the dollar value was \$101.26 million, which accounted for 16.36 per cent of the dollar value that was overall lent by the Bank.

Manufacturing, for example, had 49 loan accounts which is about 1.07 per cent of the total loan accounts. The total money lent in this sector was \$46.42 million, which is about 7.5 per cent of the total value of loans lent out.

Mining and Quarrying, there were four loan accounts with a total value of \$90,000. The value of it is \$710,000 and the value of the percentage of loan is 0.11 per cent. There are numerous others but I have just, sort of, listed those and I could answer any other any other queries that may be on it.

Just by way of general reference, in the non-focussed sector, the number of loans was 738, which accounted for 16.1 per cent of the total loan numbers. In terms of the dollar value of the monies lent in this sector, it was \$335.63 million, which accounted for 54.24 per cent of the total monies lent.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Bank continues to hold on to the highest market shares with the lending in the Agriculture Sector at 50.61 per cent in this financial year. The Bank continues to dominate the sugarcane farmers' portfolio at 90.7 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in terms of the breakdown of the new approvals in the Agriculture Sector during this financial year, in 2021 the number of new loans given out was 645, percentage was 71.7 per cent, the total dollar value of \$17.25 million and the percentage of money lent was 26.22 per cent. Just by reference, in 2020, the number of new loans in the Agriculture Sector was 596, percentage was 61.7 per cent with the total value of \$16.62 million.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, between the periods of August 2021 to December 2021, the Bank assisted 4,258 Fijians under the Disaster Rehabilitation Containment Facility Credit Guarantee Scheme with total loans valued at \$58.7 million, of which \$19.5 million was given to micro enterprises; \$16.2 million to small enterprises; \$13.3 million to medium enterprises; and \$9.7 million to large enterprises under the Scheme. As we know, the RBF lends at 0.25 per cent and the Bank can lend at no more than 3.99 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, under this Scheme, we pay the interest rate for the borrowers for the first two years on their behalf, and there is no principal repayment that they have to do for the first two years. So, essentially, if you borrow money now and if it is approved then, in the next two years you do not make any repayments to help you get back on your feet.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Bank's consolidated profit for the 2021 financial year amounted to \$1 million, a decline by 13 per cent when compared to the \$1.1 million profit achieved in the previous financial year.

The total asset base stood at \$607.5 million as at financial year 2021, an increase by 12 per cent when compared to the \$540.6 million in the 2020 financial year.

Our total liabilities also increased to \$433 million, an increase by 18 per cent when compared to \$367 million in the 2020 financial year.

With the increase in total assets and total liabilities, the total share and equity also increased by 1 per cent to \$174.6 million in the 2021 financial year.

As at the end of financial year 2021, the Bank had total cash and cash equivalent of \$75.4 million, an increase by 19 per cent when compared to the 2020 financial year. The increase was attributed to the net increase of \$11.9 million in cash during the financial year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Bank's total forecasted outlay for the guaranteed period amounts to \$262.3 million, and I have got the table that actually does give the breakdown on that. Given that the inflow forecasted is \$62.3 million, the Bank requires an additional \$200 million to finance the total outlay of \$262.3 million. The additional \$200 million will be raised with the issuance of bonds, promissory notes, term deposits, any RBF financing facility and other short-term borrowings.

The Bank also plans to repackage its SME loans to assist eligible businesses by offering low interest rates, as rice farmers in the North are also being assisted either to start or expand their farming operations, or to invest in improving efficiency through mechanisation. Of course, this is not only restricted to rice farmers, but many of the farmers in the Northern Division.

This guarantee will ensure that the Bank assist its 8,000 plus customers, while allowing the Bank flexibility to optimise its borrowings mix to reduce its cost of borrowing and achieve an optimum maturity profile structure.

The Bank's total outstanding liabilities guaranteed by the Fijian Government as at 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2021 amounts to \$344.2 million. This comprises 39 per cent or \$134.6 million in bonds, 30 per cent of \$102.1 million in term deposits and 31 per cent or \$107.6 million in RBF financing facilities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the amount of loans we have guaranteed is as follows:

- 2017 - \$330 million;
- 2018 - \$160 million;
- 2019 - \$160 million;
- 2020 - \$160 million; and
- 2021 - \$250 million.

The Bank's current average lending rate and cost of borrowing as at 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2021 are 5.84 per cent and 2.16 per cent respectively. Additionally, the Bank also accommodates and delivers

a variety of the Fijian Government socio-economic and lending policies and, therefore, requests that it continues to be assisted by the provision of the Fijian Government guarantee.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, overall, what are the implications for Government? As at 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2021, the total Government guaranteed debt overall stood at \$1.1 billion or 10.8 per cent of GDP. Accessing the \$200 million guarantee will increase the total Government guarantee exposure to \$1.3 billion or 12.7 per cent of GDP.

In the event of a default by the Bank, which it has not done, the Fijian Government will be liable for the guaranteed borrowings of the Bank. The Bank has never had to call on the Fijian Government guarantee, as mentioned, to honour its guarantee and the guarantee fee continues to be paid out promptly upon the utilisation of the guarantees.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to also take an opportunity to commend the Bank and the staff in particular in the COVID-19 Recovery Credit Guarantee Scheme, a success. Despite the country battling the second wave of COVID-19, staff worked either remotely or reported to the office and their commitment also made them, in fact, the largest lender of funds under this particular facility.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the following provide the summary of the Bank's achievement in the first six months as at 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2021 of the Bank's 2022 financial year:

1. The Bank achieved 96.23 per cent of its projected net total income.
2. The Bank's total loan portfolio stood at \$658.1 million, recording a growth of 6.34 per cent by value in comparison to the end of the financial year, 2021.
3. The number of customers has increased from 8,533 when compared to 4,590 customers in June 2021, so it has grown by 85 per cent in numbers the customer base.

A total of approximately \$93.6 million has been disbursed in loans and this includes around \$60 million disbursed under the COVID-19 Credit Guarantee Scheme. Total applications received was 14,650 valued at \$253.7 million and 99 per cent applications, interestingly, was received digitally. Total applications approved out of the 14,000 was 4,498, valued at \$59.6 million and all the funds were disbursed digitally.

Total applications declined was 10,152 which was 69 per cent of the total applications received and valued at \$194.1 million. Existing FDB customers stood at \$15.7 million. New customers to FDB was \$43.9 million. So, the new customers of \$43.9 million were completely new to FDB, they saw FDB as an alternative to meeting their financial requirements and of course took advantage of the fact that FDB has been extremely efficient in the delivery of this service and indeed very expeditious in their responses.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, 90 per cent of loans approved was towards the MSMEs, loans of up to \$20,000, valued at \$36.4 million. SIR, 10 per cent of loans approved were towards the large and medium enterprises which are loans of up to \$100,000 valued at \$23.2 million. The Bank, of course, has this new project and vision which is getting closer to the customers.

The full digitisation of the COVID-19 scheme application process actually changed the way the Bank operated. Before it was very paper-heavy, now it is very little, meaning little paper is used.

On the launch of the Rice Mobility Package, loan applications on fully digital platform. Partnership with Vodafone and Digicel, as mentioned yesterday, the distributions were through MPaiSA and MyCash. Of course, Mr. Speaker, Sir, FDB has now commenced providing e-bank

statements from January 2022, so this helps customers to be actually aware of the total exposure to the Bank.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, those are the introductory comments I would like to make in respect of this motion.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, this side of the House does not agree to the motion. Let me start by saying this. It is a very serious matter to consider that, given the desperate situation that Fiji is in now, almost at neck level in relation to debts and liabilities, and here we are being asked, again, to agree to another \$200 million guarantee.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Guarantee, not loan.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I know. It is a guarantee. It is a commitment. It is a contingent liability. He does not do accounting. He does not finish his professorship. So, it is a very, very big undertaking to push us further into the deep and that being said, Mr. Speaker, already we have \$7.1 billion in debt level, \$5 million of those directly the responsibility of FijiFirst Government. They started with \$2.5 million and they added another \$5 million to that and as stated by the honourable Acting Prime Minister guarantee is \$1.1 billion. Now they are here to ask us again to add on to that with the \$200 million. So, it is a very serious undertaking. They are asking the people of Fiji under this motion to commit themselves too.

Mr. Speaker, having said that you know this side of the House, we are seriously concerned at the manner in which this motion has found itself into the House. It is almost here without notice. It is a very, very big undertaking and we need information as I said to make a mature judgement. So, we are primarily concerned in the manner that they have now abused, I can say they abuse this House by bringing this motion here without notice and without the necessary information for us to make a mature judgement and we are entitled to ask questions. We are suspicious, you know it begs so many questions. In my view and he can reply to that this is being done to finance the election campaign, to buy votes through FDB, MSMEs and agriculture.

So, to the public expect some handouts and even you know the situation they are giving cash handout. How do you acquire cash? So, I am telling the public up there, receive it, take this money but do not vote for them. Having said that let me just remind them, what have you done to grow the economy. They have not done anything to grow the economy but now they are doing this so voters out there, receive whatever handouts that comes from the Government but do not vote FijiFirst. So, coming back to this, Mr. Speaker, there are two things, to me it is an abuse of process, abuse of this House to be bringing in this motion and the second point is that we simply do not afford. We cannot afford to guarantee this money.

Mr. Speaker, we understand section 16 (1) of the Fiji Development Bank (Act) allows them to come here and ask for guarantee. We also know that Section 145 of the Constitution entitles them to come here and supply to us information. Section 145 says there are four things that they could do instead of coming directly here to ask us to approve. What they could have done is to ask for information and then make recommendation to this House on things like the extent of the total indebtedness, the use to be made in relation to the loan and the purpose of guarantee and repayment. And the right thing to do considering that is for the Government to seek advice from chartered accountants so that we can make an objective assessment and bring it here. We are entitled to do that but they are not doing that.

The honourable Attorney-General has spent about 15 minutes trying to justify and convince us to vote for this. We do not need that. We need professional advice. Section 145 allows them to

do that, so in his right of reply can we ask him to answer to us, why is he not utilising that because that allows for transparency, that allows for mature judgment, that allows for us to make a decision in relation to a very big undertaking as this.

If I may go now to the affordability of this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have stated that we simply cannot afford to be guaranteeing any further sum other than what we have done already and I have stated that the debt level of the Government is simply too much. Within the year, we had a total loan of \$720 million, nearly \$1 billion and that is made up of the following:

- \$200 million to refinance global bond;
- Another \$220 million from ADB;
- Another \$50 million from ADB;
- \$40 million from International Development Association (IDA);
- \$145 million from IDA and IBRD; and
- \$55 million from JICA.

Only in this year \$720 million in debt and that is nearly \$1 billion and as already stated by the honourable Attorney-General add to that \$1.1 billion in guarantee.

We simply cannot afford and we ask him to answer to us whether we are in a position we can afford to be doing this and not only that Mr. Speaker, if you look at the situation with FDB and I am holding here which I am sure he has too, the Fijian Government Annual Debt Report and I think it is stated there that a guarantee to FDB is considered as a high risk. So, let us also demand from him an explanation whether that is correct or not. The honourable Minister for Agriculture is asking me, what you mean high risk. Well let me read this to him ...

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- No, you said I think.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- If you go to page four under the heading Risk Profiles of Publicly Guaranteed Liabilities then you have a section there of Tier Low, Medium and High. Tier 3 is High and FDB is listed under three and the explanation that is given for that why it is considered as high risk is as follows and I quote:

“The aviation and travel industry together with general administration sectors have been the hardest hit during the pandemic. FDB and Housing Authority have been providing loan repayment holidays to their affected customers and are undertaking loan provisions to account for the increased likelihood of payment defaults due to COVID-19 crisis.”

So, let the honourable Attorney-General answer us also in relation to that, whether that is correct or FDB is not considered as a risk institution to be giving a guarantee to. So, basically and then Mr. Speaker, and this is not the first time, so we have to ask the Government why? Why continuing to guarantee?

The FDB has been here before even during this term or session of Parliament and they were here previously in 2019 on 14<sup>th</sup> February we had a similar motion on this, same thing. Same points that he has raised now was stated there at that time and also further to that, even last year we can consider that because it was during COVID-19 pandemic but taking all into account, Mr. Speaker, Sir, FDB has been coming to this House and asking for guarantee, after guarantee after guarantee.

In 2017, it came here for approval of \$190.6 million. In 2018 - \$200 million, in 2019 - \$291.9 million, in 2020 - \$307.8 million, in 2021 - \$308.8 million and now \$200 million. We have to ask

ourselves, why? We cannot be doing this, they are expected to look after their own and the worrying thing now is that, we fear. This may also be an avenue for Government to finance Fiji Airways, so we are entitled to ask these questions because of the nature that they have brought this in, the process they have brought this motion in and the lack of information. For those reasons, we cannot support this motion.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I speak on the motion, I wanted to respond to the Acting Prime Minister's defence on the attack on two respected journalists, Anish Chand and Vijay Narayan yesterday. In his defence, he challenged them to declare which side of politics they support or individuals or a political party.

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

MR. SPEAKER.- Point of Order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sir, I did not challenge anyone. The challenge is going between other people amongst your side. What I did say, is that if a particular media organisation has a particular political proclivity (and they have the right to do that) they should declare that. That is what I said and I did give an example, so I did say that the *Fiji Times* has and wants to support Rabuka and NFP, there is nothing wrong with that. All they have to do is state in the Editorial, "we actually support Rabuka and NFP policies" and whatever it is, like other good media organisations do so. Do not hide behind the facade of being independent. This is very simple. The honourable Member is now going on about it because I hit a wrong nerve, that is the problem; that is what it is.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I accept that but let me ask him the same question, whether he can say the same to FBC and *Fiji Sun* and in particular FBC, funded by the taxpayers, *Fiji Sun* partly funded by the taxpayers through exclusive advertising and if you look at the *Fiji Times* and *Fijivillage*, there is more government news, more coverage of what these guys say from the other side than you will ever see in FBC or *Fiji Sun* and all you see is attack on the Opposition. In fact, I would say that FBC and *Fiji Sun* should declare whether they have this political affiliation with the FijiFirst Party and with the Acting Prime Minister and others in the Party. He should be honest and say that, Mr. Speaker, and I challenge them too to do that.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, just before you carry on, we are going to go round and round and round about newspapers about radio programmes supporting one side or the other. It will never end, let me tell you that. Tell this side of the House and that side of the House, it will keep on going. We have got an important agenda item to discuss here, so stick to the agenda item.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- It was an important point I wanted to make, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- You have made it.

(Inaudible interjection)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Well, you tell yourself Acting Prime Minister. Respect the Speaker, he just made a ruling. You always tell us to respect the Speaker, you respect the Speaker.

Let me begin by endorsing what honourable Nawaikula said, the process. All the figures that the Acting Prime Minister was giving, I could not hear all of them and these are important figures from 2021 that we do not have in any publication. He is bringing it in a motion and giving us all those statistics which we do not have.

A good and transparent government what they would have done, with the motion, with an appropriate notice provided us with all those statistics and data for 2021. The points we are making and then he will turn around and said “oh, your figures are wrong” this is what they do because we do not have access to those kind of figures. Mr. Speaker, Sir, my question is, is this guarantee really to uplift the economy and help the ordinary people, especially the agricultural sector and small businesses? That is the first question.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, because the 2019 FDB Annual Report as I said yesterday or the day before yesterday, a different picture of what we are being told. Let me just quote some of the 2019 figures and try and relate that to what the honourable Acting Prime Minister gave. In 2019 the bank approved a total of 1,595 loans, valued at \$187.5 million, of this 1,313 loans valued at \$87.48 million were approved in the focus sector. This reflects 82.32 per cent of loan approvals in number but was only 46.63 per cent in value.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there were 282 loans approved in the non-focus sector, valued at \$100.11 million. This reflects 17.68 per cent of loan approvals in number but 53.37 per cent in value. If I heard the honourable Acting Prime Minister correctly, in 2021 the non-focus sector value stands at 54.2 per cent. So, is \$87 million focus sector more than two years ago? The majority market share of agriculture loans that we are asked to believe. Because if it was, FDB would still be operating branches in other areas, small municipality, mostly linked to the agriculture sector, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as well as to the sugar industry.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in 2021 Parliament approved \$250 million in guarantees to FDB for one year until the end of this month. The first was the guarantee of \$170 million on 26th May and the second was a further \$80 million on 22nd October, 2021. A day dedicated to the election of the new President. You know, you remember, Mr. Speaker, Sir. We approved two further guarantees to FDB and Fiji Airways respectively and both, Mr. Speaker, Sir, were additional guarantees.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this motion means that FDB will be guaranteed \$450 million and I think the honourable Minister quoted \$340.42 million. So, we have to check the correct one - for two years from February 2021 to February 2023.

The motion itself, Mr. Speaker, Sir is also unclear as I said before, if we had all these information that we just heard, we would be in a better position to make the assessment. He listed the sectors that it is going and my question is, some of the guarantee, is it also going to entities like Fiji Airways? Was \$20 million from last October’s guarantee of \$80 million used to lend to Fiji Airways. How much of last year’s guarantee has been utilised and what it is break down of loan portfolio? I think we heard some of it.

As honourable Nawaikula pointed out, I mean contingent liabilities, okay FDB may not have called on its guarantees but we have had situations here where the Government had to and when we look at our total debt situation and we look at \$1.3 billion contingent liabilities now, it is an important point, important concern and honourable Nawaikula was right in raising that.

The other question we want to ask is what is the portfolio of bad loans held by the Bank? For example, we were told by the honourable Acting Prime Minister yesterday or on Monday that Pullman Resort which was built on borrowed funds from FDB and HFC has been sold after being mortgaged. So, I want to ask the honourable Minister for Economy to reveal what is the sale price? Is it \$56 million? What is the total debt owed to FDB? Further, has the sale amount been settled in full or not? If not, why not? Because we are informed that initially a 10 per cent deposit was provided and the buyer is making settlement through partial payments. Who is the buyer?

Recently, the news media reported it was some Jay Nand Singh from the United States of America. We want to know whether he is the same person who is Fiji's Honorary Consulate to San Francisco for the last six years.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, earlier I asked about bad loan portfolio for transparency. Our perusal of FDB Annual Reports revealed one interesting defaulter. It is a firm called Vuksich & Borich, a New Zealand based firm engaged by the Government for Momi Bay development by the Bainimarama Government. On 18<sup>th</sup> June, 2010, the Momi Bay Development Decree was enacted for the development.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Act, get it right.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- You unilaterally made it an Act. At that time it was a Decree. I am talking about 2010. You cannot get a simple point, at that time it was a Decree, now it is an Act.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Parliament passed it.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I shudder to think that the honourable Attorney-General cannot understand a simple point, I am talking about 2010, at that time it was a Decree. It was done by a Decree.

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

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- The honourable Member is trying to create a ruckus. He knows that this very Parliament in the last session of Parliament when he was an MP, we passed the law that says, Decrees are referred to, irrespective, whether it was done by Rabuka's VAT Decree, whatever, it is now called an Act of Parliament. So he needs to refer to it as an Act. He is only doing it deliberately. This is the kind of mischievous man he is. Very poor.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think the honourable Acting Prime Minister is losing it. All I said that it was done in 2010 by a Decree, it may be an Act now. So, what is the big problem there? A deed was signed by all parties at that time, developer, contractor, government and FDB. What concerns us is that, until now the loan given to the firm has not been paid. I am told it is over \$33 million. Incredibly the loan was granted by the then government.

The project has been completed a long time ago, but we found out FDB's request for payment is being ignored by the Government. If that is the case, why is the Government not paying FDB? Why are they forcing them to borrow through these guarantees? The question is, if Government is not honouring its commitment of \$33 million guarantee, how is it expected to honour guarantees to hundreds of millions of dollars in contingent liabilities to the Bank?

As honourable Nawaikula said, we should expect a very tough time in the next two or three years, Mr. Speaker, Sir. We keep hearing that we had unprecedented growth in the last seven years.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Nine.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Unprecedented growth. When the average growth from 2010 to 2020 was just 3.3 per cent, a modest growth, and he could not pay \$33 million during that boom. These are the questions....

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Get your facts right.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Well, give the facts, that is what I am telling you. When they bring these kinds of motions, it would have been nice if they produced together with the motion all the statistics, all the data and what is happening. We do not want to know the details of the contract, but we want to know whether it has been paid, and if not, then why. These are the questions that need honest and straight answers, and not the kind of drama that we see sometimes from the honourable Minister with his point of orders.

Mr. Speaker, I kind of agree with honourable Nawaikula. This is a Government, if you look at their track record, the interim Government or the Bainimarama Government before the 2014 Election and what they did before 2018 Election, they went on and spending spree, they used FDB and other organisations to put out these handouts just before the Election, to convince the people. In fact, Mr. Speaker, I will tell you a little story. Two weeks before the Election, I went to my village and had a meeting. Then a week-and-a-half later, I heard that honourable Koya was there and this was during Election campaign and about 200 people around that area got \$1,000 each. This was before the Election.

What we have seen as the effect of that, Mr. Speaker, is that spending is free, that they went on in 2017 and 2018 through borrowing and through this kind of guarantees, and then what we saw in 2019, the ADB Report talks about it that because of reduced public spending, our economy actually contracted. It did not grow but actually contracted, because of what they did and it was simply to win Election and to fool the people of this country. But let me tell you, Mr. Speaker, people may be gullible but people are not fools. People are not stupid. They actually understand now what this Government was all about.

As honourable Nawaikula said, people actually know. People are telling us that this time, this Government is not going to buy their votes through handouts. They are telling us, and I am sure they are telling them too as well and they know that.

So, Mr. Speaker, it is obvious that Government has come up with this without having a clear idea and a clear understanding of where the flash points are in the economy, where are the constraints, where they need to intervene, where the funding ought to go, and all they are trying to do is repeat the same trick in an election year that they undertook in 2018. The same trick!

You can see they attack on Mr. Rabuka, they also attack me. The same old trick, Mr. Speaker, coupled with this idea of “we are looking after the people” and the promise that they will keep doing this. As I have said, every government wants to win the next election, that is understandable.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Every party.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Every party, that is understood, but in a democracy, the governing party must always think, Mr. Speaker. As I have said yesterday, some of the good things that they have done, if they want to leave a legacy, they must ensure that they do the right thing by the Opposition too. That is what they should do.

The honourable Minister for Health is saying, “You will never have a legacy”, but this man is going to leave the worst legacy ever in the health system of the country. All the Ministers that I have seen, starting from honourable Akbar and the others, he is a medical doctor but the worst Minister for Health in the history of this country. He lied about angiogram, he lied about the medicine and he is saying, “No, we are not going to leave our legacy.” I mean, this is the kind of comment we are getting. But, anyway, I will leave that for another day, Mr. Speaker. Let me come back to the point.

HON. MEMBER.- Point of Order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I am sorry, I did not see you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, just stick to what is been debated. Do not go around all over the place. You are doing alright. What is your Point of Order?

HON. J. USAMATE.- My Point of Order, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have a very clear motion in the House to be debated and I think we are getting this new disease that is now prevalent in the House where people are losing their marbles. Let us focus on this motion, let us not go here, it is not yet election time. We are not talking about elections, let us focus on this motion, let us get on with it. We have got a long agenda today.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Hogwash!

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am glad he did not go to Rwanda and Solomon Islands, but let me come back to the point.

This kind of motions, guarantee by Parliament, is not a small thing. It is not a joke. It is a serious issue. I would give them this advice. In the future, when you bring a motion for a guarantee, please, do a two-pager of the details and the statistics up to that point so that we, in Parliament, can have a very clear view of where the Government is coming from. That is what we are asking. We will understand their motivation and the reason why they want to do it.

Mr. Speaker, without all these good principles of accountability and transparency and information, it is very difficult to support this kind of motion. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the motion on the Fiji Development Bank (FDB) Guarantee. Honourable Members from this side of the House had raised pertinent issues regarding this, in particular there have been issues raised about FDB loans, the portfolios and maybe bad or good loans.

The issue regarding Pullman, that is public knowledge regarding the new buyer. That was reported in the media on 17<sup>th</sup> November, 2021. The new owner is Paradigm Group of Companies Chief Executive Officer, Mr. Ganendra Mangal Singh, also known as Jay Singh. He sealed the deal in October, a close source confirmed. This is a major boost for tourism and there are some background on him.

He was recognised by the United States Government as Fiji's Honorary Consul in San Francisco in 2015. He was born in Fiji and migrated to the United States. He has built a real estate portfolio, he had a humble beginnings, et cetera. So, that was what that was reported in the media.

As I had queried yesterday and also by honourable Professor Prasad, as to what extent of the debt has been repaid which Fiji Development Bank (FDB) and Home Finance Company had provided? So, that is an information which, we on this side of the House, would have liked to be provided with today. I had raised our concerns regarding the lack of information prior to this.

The Government Guarantees in general, we note are usually taken by lenders to mobilise and leverage commercial financing by mitigating risks, and that is understood. It does not require a guarantor to pay any cash outflow and it is contingent liabilities. The fact that lenders can still accept a guarantee from the Fiji Government shows that they have assessed their own risk assessment and

that Fiji Government is a credible guarantor and is able to service the loan, in the event of default by the customer. That is the understanding.

The Guarantee given by the Government for the purposes of FDB would be beneficial to the extent that the capital raised by FDB through the various means mentioned are invested in activities that stimulate growth in the economy, and ensure that it continues to service the focussed sectors more than the non-focussed as already raised.

I also pointed that out yesterday in the FDB Annual Report which we had highlighted that the focussed sector accounts comprise nearly 80 per cent of FDB portfolio but 43.35 per cent in value. While the non-focussed, 20.45 per cent of portfolio but 56.65 per cent in value. Again, that is from 2020.

The honourable Attorney-General had shared with us today the updated information up to 2021 and we register our concern regarding this issue. If we look at Standing Order 131- Government guarantees and loans, there are some directions there on Government guarantees and loans. The Government must provide necessary information to show the extent of the total indebtedness of the Government by way of principal and accumulated interest. In SO 121(2)(b), it states, “the use made or to be made of the proceeds”, he has explained that. In part (c), “if a loan, the provisions made for servicing or repayment of the loan and the progress made in the repayment of it”, from my perspective, Sir, this part has not been provided. So, whether this is a valid motion regarding that Standard Order is questionable.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- It is not a loan, guarantee.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Yes, that comes under guarantees and loans.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- It says, “if a loan...”.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- That is why we are raising our concern regarding that particular issue on the lack of information and the need for us to properly assess the Motion in front of us.

Honourable Nawaikula had raised some pertinent issues regarding contingent liabilities. In the Fijian Government Annual Debt Report 2021, that is clearly explained there. He has mentioned the risk assessment and, again, we repeat that FDB is listed there as high risk, together with other organisations such as Fiji Sugar Corporation (FSC) limited.

The issue I would like to emphasise from that Annual Debt Report, Sir, is under that contingent liabilities table that is on the Appendix, the amount of contingent liabilities and the guarantees which we had provided for the various organisations. For FDB, that had been increasing since 2017 up to now. So, 190.6 up to last year - 308 and now, we are looking at the amount in front of us which is 200. In the last few years, it amounts to about \$1.3 billion. That is the question we are raising today and not only that, but also the viability of such guarantees.

I also note, if you look at the FDB finances, the net profit from 2010 was \$2.36 million, then 2011 and it increased in 2013 - \$4.13 million, 2014 - \$4.89 million, 2015 - \$6.14 million, 2016 - \$7.31 million, 2017 - \$8.51 million and then started deteriorating from there. From 2018, 2019 and 2020, it was \$1.14 million. The latest figures have been provided by the honourable Attorney-General, according to those lines.

I reiterate that we would like to see more details, not only the past guarantors and how that had been utilised - the FDB bank loans, non-performing portfolios and in particular, more details on

the utilisation of the past guarantors and SME loans which have been emphasised today as the main component to be utilised for this particular guarantor.

The issue which we had raised on the current economic situation, again, that is clearly specified. We note the huge debt, I suppose, uncontrollable debt situation and this, again, is clearly articulated in the ADB Report. Let me share some of those in terms of Fiji's per capita income that has deteriorated from 2016 - \$5,280, 2017 - \$53,030, from there 2019 - \$5,800, 2020 - \$4,720 and 2021 projection - \$4,492.

Other issues raised, there is emphasis on the progress in fiscal management but Fiji's debt sustainability has deteriorated since 2015. Fiji's fiscal buffers are limited because of its economic size, Fiji's gross domestic saving is low averaging 20.7 per cent of GDP during 2014 – 2018. Again, that was emphasised yesterday by honourable Prasad and below the savings of that group of nations.

Fiji is one of the few countries with domestic capital market but net portfolio invested average is only 0.6 per cent of GDP during 2019. I have mentioned the debt sustainability. There are other issues there in terms of FDI, we discussed that yesterday. Overall, what we are emphasising is Government prudence in spending and we have not heard today regarding this overall debt situation and Government income and expenditure on how Government will control its expenditure in terms of the limited deteriorating income it has been receiving.

That again, is an issue which the honourable Attorney-General probably in his reply will touch particularly on that in terms of controlling Government expenditure in the next 12 months I suppose because the election is coming up and it is very highly likely based on the service which have been done, they will not be here. Who will answer for the economic mess that we are in? That is the fundamental question because it looks like that we in the Opposition will be picking up the mess, we will be fixing the broken pieces of what they have created, not only the debt but all sorts of other issues in terms of governance, good governance et cetera.

The sad thing about this is they are the architects of their own demise. Why? It is because they created the 2013 Constitution in terms of election methodology to have one star but now it is biting them back. They do not have one star who will be able to gain 100,000 votes or more and which one of them will get that because as I see it, none of them will get that and they will not be here to answer for this mess. They need someone who will get 100,000 votes but they cannot.

Sir, our concern is this mismanagement of our economy which will be handled by us, that is why we are raising our concern. We will need to deal with the debt situation because by all indications based on the polling which has been done by independent sources none of them will get 100,000 votes and they will be all going out and please in your last few months, just try to do some cost cutting measures of the expenditure, so that you can assist us when we come in, we come in at least with some solid foundation there. We are coming and taking over the Government but now all indications are that when we come in, everything will be broken in pieces which we will have to fix. Thank you.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as indicated by my colleagues we are very concerned with the way it was brought into Parliament. We have always supported the Fiji Development Bank but we want it to be done properly and because of that we will not be supporting this motion. As honourable Professor Prasad has said you could have given us an overview of what is to be presented today, a couple of days ago to enable us to study this thing but as always it came yesterday afternoon and here we are trying to debate something of this magnitude.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, my concern with FDB is the mix between the focus segment and the non-focus segment. As indicated by the honourable Ro Tuisawau even though the number of loans are higher on the focus group, the quantum is high on the non-focus segment. This is what our team have indicated to us on one of the points, how can the Government satisfy itself to ensure that there will not be many bad loans issued by the Bank that the Bank cannot recover these loans.

Now, when a big borrower falls, Mr. Speaker, that is frightening for the institution. We were told over the last few days that Pullman has managed to secure a buyer, so what it means is that for some time the Pullman Resort loan was not performing. It would have been frozen, normally in the banks it is called the non-performing loans and you freeze the interest on those loans, so it would be useful to know how much interest was not collected on the loan to Pullman.

Mr. Speaker, FDB is a small bank relative to the other banks in Fiji, the lenders in Fiji. It is always wise for FDB to try and be part of a syndicate in the way they lend. That way if there is three or four lenders, the risk is reduced. I notice with Pullman the syndicate was between FDB and HFC. Both of these are local banks, so it is frightening for these two local banks to be exposed to the kind of loan that the Pullman required. If Pullman had failed, Mr. Speaker, the write-off could have been huge for FDB and it could have cost the Bank, it could have even affected the viability or the future of the Bank.

I say this, Mr. Speaker because I had years with City Bank of New York, they had an operation in Fiji and we lent to what is today the Warwick. Remember in those days it was called Noah Coral Gardens. That was before the days of RBF, it used to be Central Monetary Authority of Fiji (CMA) and they allowed us to borrow from Singapore and lend locally. It used to be called the Singapore Dawn at that time, you may remember that, Mr. Speaker, Sir. There came a time when the company that was building Noah Coral Gardens collapsed in Australia. This was during the 1970s, the implosion at that time. And so you remember the hotel just sat there, half-finished and the bank lost a lot of money but this is City Bank of New York, it was able to wear that.

Eventually the Hyatt came in, they had a buyer. Was it Gordon Oliver? He was able to put together a consortium of buyers and then Hyatt became the Hyatt and now it is the Warwick. What I am saying here is that City Bank could wear it at that time because of its size. I am worried about the FDB wearing a failure of that magnitude. That is why, Mr. Speaker, I would always caution FDB whenever it lends to projects like this that it must do so in a syndicated manner. Get others to be part of it. As I said, it is good that HFC was part of it so they could share the risk.

On HFC, Mr. Speaker, some years ago I raised the question about Vatulele Island Resort. I was not allowed to bring it up as a question in the House, I was told that it was a private matter but then Vatulele was also dormant for quite some time. When a resort is dormant, you can imagine what is happening with the loan. And all these years, I am now happy that Vatulele has found a buyer but again, was it a local institution that lent money to Vatulele. That is my concern because if it is HFC, it is a local bank, so, Mr. Speaker, I would prevail upon FDB that when it lends to the non-focus sector, it must do so in a syndicated manner because the size of the lending is huge and I know there are some big projects that have borrowed from FDB. So, Mr. Speaker, I would use that as a caution and if the Bank can take note of that.

But going forward, Mr. Speaker, on the focus sector - agriculture. On a development basis, what is the Bank doing about developing the cassava industry, cassava association? Two years ago, the honourable Minister for Agriculture told us that there is a market for a special kind of cassava that was in demand in Australia to the tune of \$38 million a month. He told us the demand for this special kind of cassava was by the fast food chains and they would make chips out of it and currently they are importing the cassava from Puerto Rico into Australia. He told us that Fiji had this potential

to grow this kind of cassava and export to Australia. It may have been \$34 million or \$38 million but he gave us a figure that was quite significant at the time and very promising. So, I ask the question, where is it today? Why could not FDB lend money into something like that which would be something of a truly developmental nature?

Mr. Speaker, today I had a conference with the Fiji Cassava Association. FDB should look into funding the setting up of the Fiji cassava Association. It is a new export crop. We are supporting the sugar industry, I think when it comes to about development, and FDB must look into the Fiji Cassava Association. That, of course, Mr. Speaker, is on the focus group and that should be the role of the FDB. And I would like to ask the honourable Minister, what happened to that promise you gave us two years ago, that there is a new market for cassava. He is a very persuasive speaker, you know he is an economist, he comes up with all these wonderful figures. I was sitting here and said wow. This is what we have been waiting for but we have been waiting for two years. Where is it honourable Minister please?

And just before I sit down, Mr. Speaker, I was in Naqali in Naitasiri and they said to me, *Naita*, still in Nadroga - *Naita*. Can you ask the Minister? He told us not to use paraquat anymore but what he gave us is useless compared to paraquat. He said we prefer paraquat. I said look, I know there is a chemical things here but they said what he gave us to replace paraquat is totally useless. We are talking about FDB and agriculture, can I ask the honourable Minister to get his act together and go visit the people of Naqali. Again, they have just gone through this flood thing, go and see them, and let them show you that what you sent to replace paraquat, is totally useless.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think I have made my point there, the difference between the focussed segment of the Bank and the non-focussed, and that we must be careful on what we lend on a scale like we did in Pullman and I think there are other projects in here that can only be mitigated by syndication.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to make my contribution to the motion which is before the House. I think I have been quiet for the last two days.

On the motion that is before the House, I would support a similar motion that was in the Fiji Airways motion. I think the public perception was that money is given by Government to those who are seeking guarantees but there is a big difference between guarantee and a loan. In this one, there is no direct funding that is given it is just an assurance by the Government to the financial institution. So, in a guarantee situation, it helps to reduce the funding cost of banks thus curbing the panic through the financial markets and system.

That has a trickle-down effect too on the interest rates of the banks. Here I stand as a farmer and also a person who really lives in Macuata with Fiji Development Bank having its banks in Labasa, Savusavu, Nabouwalu, Taveuni and also in Seaqaqa. These are all farming communities with cane farmers and also *dalo* and *yaqona* farmers, those that invest in logging and all in Fiji Pine; all these are mostly indigenous entrepreneurs.

If you talk about Macuata and Bua Pine Owners Group they do pine cutting. Most of the *yavusa* and *mataqali* own trucks through loans with Fiji Development Bank. Through loans with Fiji Development Bank, they are able to secure tenders through Fiji Pine when they do cutting of pine from Seaqaqa to the Wairiki Wharf. These are some of the business that run in the rural areas that depend on the Fiji Development Bank loans.

Also on the SMEs, let me talk about the Northern Development Programme. Most of those who are participants in the Northern Development Programmes are also clients of Fiji Development

Bank; majority of them. We talk about fishermen, parcel sellers, market vendors and all other SMEs in the rural areas that help in the economic spin, they are clients of Fiji Development Bank. They normally secure this kind of loans through FDB where no other commercial institution will accept these applications.

Fiji Development Bank is naturally tailored for those in the rural areas who want to venture into business. We talk about the Northern economy and how it is developed. The big clients of Fiji Development Bank in Labasa. We talked about Valebasoga Tropik Board, Vunimoli Sawmillers; the big contractors, Bula Earthworks and other Fiji Roads Authority subcontractors who do big projects in Vanua Levu and all hardware companies who do frequent engagements with the rebuilding of schools and homes of those in the rural areas. They are all clients of Fiji Development Bank.

On another smaller scale, if you go down to the villages, most villagers, you talk about loans for trucks, trucks that transport children to school through LTA – RSL. Most of those trucks that are owned by *mataqali* or a group in a village are by way of Fiji Development Bank loan. So when we look at this guarantee in a holistic manner, the role that this bank plays which is very important in the development of our community and how economy grows in the rural area.

When we talk about climate change through green financing and how those projects that FDB has accredited to get all these investors so that they can partner through FDB in the various mitigating and adaptation projects in the rural community. We talk about bad roads and other effects of climate change but we need climate resilient projects through the funding that is available at FDB and the accreditation. That is why there needs to be Members of Parliament as leaders who support these kinds of guarantees because it supports an enabling institution that enables all Fijians in the grassroots level, especially indigenous entrepreneurs who are moving into real estate businesses in towns and cities.

Last week in Nadi, one *Yavusa* Nakovalevu and others in Vanua Levu went through FDB, they now own real estate in town and some of them are government rented. Some even are rented by other businesses in town but once these medium enterprises *mataqali*, *tikina* or *yavusa* companies are financed by FDB, they play a very important role too in the development of their community especially housing projects. Some set aside education funds, scholarship funds through Unit Trust and Fijian Holdings for the future generation. These are some of the trickle down effects on investment with Fiji Development Bank which plays a very important role in elevating the economic status for all Fijians and especially the indigenous community in the rural areas in moving into business.

Many FDB loans through various ventures in the villages, they are able to build their churches, schools, playgrounds and sports grounds for their villages. Generally looking at the development of the rural community and how the bank has somehow contributed and pushed their plans financially to be able to fulfil what we all see as part of the United Nations SDG goals on how to improve the livelihood so that no one is left behind. Sir, those are few of the things that I would share on why this guarantee must be supported.

Given that it supports a very important institution, Fiji Development Bank. The debt side alone is not something that we must use to go against the guarantee. If this side of the House comes to become Government, we will seek guarantees too to help this institution because the important role that this particular institution plays to support the various programmes that are there in the budget and also how it affects and it has benefited many Fijians which are benefiting through the various programmes that are there.

MR. SPEAKER.- I thank the honourable Member for his contribution to the debate. On that note, we will adjourn for lunch and resume at 2.30 p.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.28. p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.43 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will continue with the debate.

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I touch on a few comments regarding the motion at hand, listening and observing the debates in the House this morning, I believe that most of the honourable Members sitting on the other side of the House do not understand the meaning of a guarantee.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, give me a minute to explain to them what is the meaning of a guarantee.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- A guarantee is an undertaking by a person or an organisation or a Government in this case, to pay the loan which is considered as bad debt, to the bank if the customer does not have the ability to pay back the loan. The word, 'if' is right. If the loan is recovered, then it is okay.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Listen, listen, please!

But the amount of Government guarantee that was approved in this House for the past three years until last year shows this - in 2018 - \$291 million; 2019 - \$307 million; and in 2021 - \$308 million. Those were approved for the purpose of guarantee and to pay back a bad debt with FDB.

If you look at the FDB annual accounts, arrears to portfolio from 2017 was 14.3 per cent of the total bank portfolio; 2018 - 14.98 per cent and 2019 - 16 per cent. These are arrears to loan portfolio, not yet to become considered as a bad debt and the Bank failed to provide to us the bad debt to loan portfolio percentage.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to tell this House that there is too much of Governments guarantee offered to FDB because these areas to portfolio may only have certain percentage that falls as a bad debt. That is where they will pay from the Governments guarantee.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- No!

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Yes.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Government guarantee is for the for the promissory notes and the bonds, not individual....

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- But it will finally pay back bad loans and that is guarantee.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- It will later pay bad debts.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Then what is a guarantee? That is an undertaking.

On Monday, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I explained to this House that Government guarantee being approved to FDB does not reflect on the FDB's share market, especially on resource-based sector - agriculture. In 2018, agriculture holds a share market of 58 per cent; in 2019 - 53 per cent and in 2020 - 52 per cent. There is no significant growth, but the amount of guarantee that has been given to FDB is quite high and does not reflect on the performance of FDB.

Forestry and Logging was 18 per cent in 2018, 15 per cent in 2019 and 16 per cent in 2020. Fisheries - 25 per cent in 2018, 33 per cent in 2019 and reduced to 26 per cent in 2020. Manufacturing - 9 per cent in 2018, 9 per cent in 2019 and 8 per cent in 2020. So this is where, I believe, the guarantee that we are approving here has to be reflected in here because according to the Fiji Development Bank Act is to assist in the development of our economy through providing financial assistance to the agriculture sector, industrial sector and commercial sector. But it does not reflect on the market share of the FDB and I warn this Government, please, do not push the FDB to be a zombie, like the FSC.

You know what happened to FSC? We poured funds to FSC - millions and millions, but they failed to analyse FSC's performance and that is why FSC is now technically insolvent. There is no control, no feedback, no follow up and no evaluation, that is why it is insolvent.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- It is not insolvent, do not lie.

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Technically insolvent. It is on life support.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do not understand why we are still approving guarantee to FDB when FDB, as I have already said, is not performing well. Although it is good, but it is not good enough to have an impact on our economy. Look at FDB's autonomous situation in our economy. They should be the leading financial institution in agriculture, commercial and industrial development because they are receiving guarantee. We gave them the guarantee so that they can lend in high risk areas. That is the purpose. So, no, we have been telling this House that we are having a narrow-based economy, but we have the potential to expand our economy, but they are not doing their job. So, stop the guarantee.

To the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, the honourable Minister for Trade, the honourable Minister for Forestry and the honourable Minister of Fisheries, stop, please, make use of the guarantees that have been given over the years. It is quite a shame that only a certain percentage is given to the Bank in market share. I do not support, like my colleague had said, we do not support this Government guarantee.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute briefly to support the motion that has been moved by the honourable Acting Prime Minister and Minister for Economy. Right at the outset, for the purposes of honourable Kuridrani, the motion actually reads, 'pursuant to Standing Order 131 that Parliament approve that the Government guarantee the Fiji Development Bank borrowings for the 12 month period from 1<sup>st</sup> March, 2022 to 28<sup>th</sup> February, 2023, which is the guarantee period, through the issuance of short-term and long-term bonds, promissory notes, term

deposits, any RBF financing facility and other short-term borrowings.’ It is actually quite simple if you read it. We are not flying in there blind, honourable Member.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fiji Development Bank (FDB), as we all know, has been in existence for about 50 years and remains as the only national development financial institution in Fiji. It is our job to support that particular institution.

The Bank has supported economic development in providing financial solutions for the development of our key sectors, and this has been industry, commerce and agriculture, and it has done so. As alluded to earlier on in the week, Sir, the Bank has actually become a dynamic financial service provider for the development of the Fijian economy, especially focussing on our MSMEs and expanding our economic base.

It is well known, Sir, that the FDB has collaborated also, despite what the Honourable Kuridrani may think. It has collaborated with our Ministry and other Government institution on initiatives on numerous occasions, to enable access to finance for MSMEs with promising business proposals.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, once again, I think this needs to be said, They need to be reminded that this guarantee of \$200 million is not a grant or a loan given by the Government to FDB. It is actually providing a guarantee. No money is actually going from the Fijian Government to accounts of the FDB under this particular motion. It is actually quite simple to understand and hope this is clear and it is understood. Some may say, yes, we do know but they continue to make statements that say the contrary.

We do not want any misrepresentation of facts here, Mr. Speaker, Sir. We do not want any misinformation. People of Fiji need to know the truth. Sometimes, the Opposition discusses these matters and they continue pursuing this misinformation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just yesterday, they could not even get their facts correct when it was right in front of them. Yesterday, they claimed that there were only 42 cooperatives. But little reading would have told you that those were 42 new ones, and that was information being passed on to the general public in Fiji. They should be ashamed of themselves, Sir. This is a public document that was sitting there right in front of them that said 42 cooperatives and they ran off without even looking or researching, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

I have said this yesterday and I will repeat, that we have over 400 cooperatives in Fiji. A lot of them get assisted by this very institution that they are actually downplaying right now. Today is no difference, Sir. Again, they are shooting off with unverified and cheap comments without any basis.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Professor Prasad also claims that the FDB and the Government does nothing for the sugarcane farmers.

HON. PROF B.C. PRASAD.- I never said that.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Just wait, just wait. Listen!

Let me remind him, once again, Sir, the FDB provided \$20 million worth of support to our sugarcane farmers. That is not some small feat, Sir, and this is all to sugarcane farmer cooperatives for mechanisation and that is for the purchase of harvesters. They continue to do so by saying, no to what is on the table, Sir.

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

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

HON. PROF B.C. PRASAD.- When the *Daily Hansard* comes out tomorrow, he should look at it. I have not once said that the FDB has not done anything for the sugar industry, so the honourable Minister should stop lying and misrepresenting what I said. I never said that.

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

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. May be the Pied Piper got to him, so he has changed his tune.

I hope all the cane farmers around .....

HON. PROF B.C. PRASAD.- You're lying!

HON. F.S. KOYA.- I am not lying about anything. I hope the cane farmers in Fiji are actually listening because he is standing here right now, singing the tunes of the Pied Piper, and the founders of NFP must be turning in their grave, Sir.

(Hon. Professor B.C. Prasad interjects)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- I am serious. The late A.D. Patel and S.M. Koya must be turning in their grave with the comments that you actually made. Shame on you! Shame on you! You come here and you sing the tune of the sugarcane farmers and you want to deny this - the very institution that helps them.

(Hon. Professor B.C. Prasad interjects)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- I am not kidding, Sir. One of those founders happens to be my father, he must be turning in his grave, Sir. This particular Party lost its principles. The very fact that they are partnering with a man that brought this country to its knees, will tell you what the problem is, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

(Hon. Professor B.C. Prasad interjects)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- You are very disingenuous, honourable Professor Prasad.

And then he has got a twin brother, sitting here right in front of us, honourable Nawaikula. He tells the farmers, "Take the money and the loan and do not pay it back", or whatever he said earlier on.

(Hon. Member interjects)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Sorry, my apologies. He said, "Take the money and do not vote for them."

Once again, Mr. Speaker, you have to question the character of this gentleman if he is actually telling the truth. First of all, he suddenly decides on his own that maybe we are going to use this money to dish out to voters. We do not do that. We do not do such things at all, quite ridiculous if you ask me. We do not intend to turn the FDB into one NBF, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Most definitely not.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Nawaikula also said the Fijian Government had guaranteed FDB loans of \$1.2 billion this morning. In fact Sir, the outstanding guarantees to FDB is only \$344 million.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Point of Order, Mr. Speaker. He should get his facts correct. That is the national guarantee, not only for FDB.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- They are actually lying.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Get your facts right.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- You talked about the total contingent liability.

(Honourable Members interject)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Of course you will support him. You are his twin brother.

(Laughter)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Withdraw that.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, twins separated at birth.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I now wish to outline the reasons why I actually support this motion and it is not rocket science. All the guarantees provided by the Government to FDB have never ever been called upon, never been called upon. That means the Government has never had to bail out FDB, never. Therefore, it gives me as a citizen, the utmost confidence to support this particular motion Mr. Speaker.

Even during the pandemic when the FDB like all financial institution in Fiji and all the rest of the world were adversely affected, businesses and individuals had actually struggled to pay their loans which meant that FDB customers were also defaulted and asked for extensions of loans but that simply means that FDB's profits would be affected. Again, FDB has an unqualified financial account status which was debated and passed on Monday, just on Monday, signalling a strong governance practice which has been led by the board and the management.

Previous guarantees provided to FDB, Mr. Speaker, allowed them to go out and borrow at a lower rate and ultimately lend below market rates for the benefit of our MSMEs and co-operatives and I will keep saying co-operatives because that is what they were harping on about yesterday particularly in their economic recovery efforts, Mr. Speaker. This will also provide opportunities for

FDB to focus into areas that commercial banks do not wish to invest in such as greenfield and climate financing ventures.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it also allows them to assist farmers to shift from semi-commercial to commercial farming and therefore realising our own very huge potential with respect to Fijian grown and Fijian products to meet the demands of our local markets and also the tourism market and export markets.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Opposition continues on their rhetoric that the FDB is not focusing on core sectors. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think the Opposition just fails to or refuses to understand the agriculture sector in Fiji, they are smallholder farmers which means the value of loans taken will be smaller than the non-focused industry. The non-focus will then obviously show a smaller number of loan takers but a higher value, Sir.

As a very simple example Mr. Speaker, Sir, so that the Opposition colleagues can understand. Under the rights assistance programme for example, FDB may give \$10,000 loans to 1,000 rice farmers which equates to \$1 million whilst the real estate or a tourism developer may take one loan worth a million dollars. This was explained earlier on by the Acting Prime Minister.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Opposition definitely does not know how this financial sector works and by providing loans to the non-focus sector at a higher rate, FDB is actually able to cross-subsidise the loan for the agriculture sector and MSMEs. So essentially, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Opposition is saying that FDB should not provide loans to the commercial sectors which enables to provide cheaper loans to farmers or small shop operators and the people of Fiji need to listen to this, Sir.

The Opposition basically wants the farmers and MSMEs to be deprived of getting loans at better interest rates. They do not want our farmers to grow their businesses. They will stand here and say you are not helping agriculture, you are not helping MSMEs, we are but what you are doing is not helping these very farmers and these very MSMEs. I would also like highlight some issues that were brought up regarding the Pullman loan by FDB. It has nothing to do with the guarantee, Mr. Speaker, Sir, absolutely nothing to do with it. Honourable Tuisawau was just bringing up hogwash really at the end of the day, not relative to this particular motion. There are certain issues that remain confidential between a bank and its customer. You cannot go and willy-nilly ask any question you want with respect to these people.

(Inaudible interjection)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- I am not ignorant of anything. It is a private entity that is actually buying these particular properties. Besides if there is anything that they need and it is a matter public record, like feel free to go get it or write to the relevant Minister, they will give you the information.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the one hand the Opposition says not to do anything for MSMEs, co-operatives and agriculture. The very next minute they tell the Government not to guarantee FDB loans and be enabling. It is an enabling tool for MSMEs. The only person on other side who maybe actually really understands it was honourable Bulitavu this morning. He seems to understand what the realities on the ground are and the rest of the Opposition is still in Lalala and very delusional about what is actually happening. Maybe, just maybe because they are in such a mess, they should listen to him a whole lot more. Obviously it will not suit their narrative or their agenda at the moment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I had a figure mentioned that the Government had provided a guarantee to the tune of \$1.2 billion. I am not sure where they actually got that particular amount from. Before I finish, I would like to respond to some claims made by honourable Gavoka that the FijiFirst

Government is not doing enough for cassava farmers. Well, maybe just a phone call away, honourable Gavoka you should have asked me. I would have told you. I met them already, we are way ahead of you. Very simple, instead of coming here and crying about it. It was very easy.

I met the Tavioka Growers Association (TGA) last week, honourable Gavoka, and we will be working with the FDB by the way and ministries, the Ministry of Agriculture to work up whatever we can do to assist them. So, it is work that is already being done. So please, it would be good that you asked honourable Gavoka. Mr. Speaker, Sir, based on the reasons that I have just mentioned, I wish to reiterate my support for the motion and request that the entire House take note and support the motion.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise in support of the motion on the floor. As Minister for Agriculture, I feel saddened to note how they are running down FDB - the only development bank and how they are refusing to support Government's support to the FDB which will eventually support the growth and development of the Fijian economy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the growth and development of the agriculture sector is synonymous with the FDB. Just yesterday, I think, we talked about how commercial banks have shy away from lending to the agriculture sector. If you look at the overall loan portfolio of commercial banks going to the agriculture sector, it is 1 per cent. Why? Because it is a commercial bank, whose only motive is to maximise profit.

They see the agriculture sector as too risky, and Fiji's agriculture sector is very complicated/complex because of various aspects of the agriculture sector, in particular the land tenure system, the natural disasters that are happening in the country, the smallholder system that we have, the subsistence farmers that we have who are transiting into small and medium commercial farm, so because of these, we need to have a bank which tailor makes its product to address and assist us in transiting and migrating this subsistence smallholder farmers into medium and large farms. To do that, financial support is critical.

Now if you look at any production function, one of the factor of production is finance. Traditionally the production function was defined as a function of output as a function of land, labour but then financial capital is very critical now. Who will provide the financial capital if FDB does not, commercial banks, they do not want to then they will come to Government and treat the Ministry of Agriculture like a bank.

The Ministry of Agriculture is not a bank, we have continuously said to them that we are here to provide technical support, to provide our technical staff, provide all the advice that is needed, secure assistance in securing the market, we want them to do farming, that is not our core business, we cannot finance them but we can have a development bank which raises funds on their own by lending to the high interest sector and using that to lend to farmers on a very low interest rate. That is exactly what they have done.

If you look at the FDB loans portfolio, majority is to the agriculture sector and what all they need is a guarantee so that they can borrow and then provide that pool of money to the smallholder farmers who we were wanting to migrate into small and large. Just this week I showed that agriculture now is transforming, the sector is transforming and is now becoming one of the top export earners amongst the others. And we also demonstrated that over the last 18 months during the pandemic, it is the agriculture Sector that has held the fort. People started to move back to agriculture. They realised that this is one sector that is in our control.

Yesterday Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Gavoka stood up and said FDB should support cassava farmers. *Areh!* Last week FDB approved a loan of \$254,000 to a processor who collects cassava from farmers, processes it into cassava flour and exports. There you go! Why only Cassava Growers Association?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these are the kind of people who we need to support because they are creating a market and also opening up new export markets and bringing in foreign currency into the country. Mr. Speaker, Sir, they do not understand. We need foreign currency. How do we pay for the cotton and medicines we import? Come on, look, let us get to the basic, if you want a lecture on the basics, we are happy to do that. I mean some Cassava Growers Association or Dalo Growers Association, if they want a loan, they should come to FDB. FDB cannot go and look for them where they are and this processor who collects the cassava from various farmers, provides a market to them. They came to us, we said look let us go to FDB and part of a Commercial Farmers Equity Programme, they have secured a loan of \$250,000 and they are now exporting. They are now exporting flour. They are processing flour.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, cassava is one of the easiest crop to grow, least cost, grows in any kind of soil type and it is something that is also widely consumed in Fiji. We want to promote cassava, we spoke to one of the two major flour companies in Fiji, we have done research at Koronivia Research Station, we noted that we can mix 30 per cent cassava maximum and we can have a good flour product which we can then market, so that our people can buy that and create a new market for these farmers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I urge the honourable Members on the other side to leave party politics aside and support this motion on the floor.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will try to be brief in my contribution to the motion. Let me start by saying that I was indeed shocked and even appalled by the contribution from the other side of the House, given the very robust debate that we had on Monday on the 2019 Annual Report for FDB.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, every honourable Member of this august House and even in the debate on Monday acknowledged the importance of FDB and the role that it plays and particularly to the ordinary Fijians that we want to support. No one denied that, Mr. Speaker, Sir. But come today there is a change in position again which confirms one thing to me; they are not good for national leadership.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Absolutely!

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- I say that again, they are not good for national leadership.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, according to Nelson Mandela when you keep changing your principles and your change your positions based on the audience and the political climate, you are not good for national leadership and that exactly is what the Opposition is portraying to us today. Sad to say! They could have done better, support the guarantee but these are the things that needs to be done. We acknowledged the contributions that were made on Monday. As I have stated, to me it is shocking and appalling.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on Monday, this is what the honourable Professor Prasad stated, but imagine if FDB had focused where their priority should have been. If the Government had focussed on the agriculture sector, if it had not destroyed the sugar industry, if we were still producing three million

tonnes of cane, if we were still having the dairy industry that we used to have and he continues, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

(Inaudible interjection)

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Yes, he did say that, but that is why the existence of FDB is so important and that is why this guarantee as well, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is so important. They keep changing positions. But this is exactly why I stated that they are not good for national leadership because they are just focusing on elections, elections and elections. This Government is about the long-term benefit that it will bring to the country. If we win again in the next elections, so be it. But this is important for the country and this is important for the economy.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Absolutely, absolutely.

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Any politician with the right mind should support this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, because we need FDB to function.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me say this, this is not the first guarantee for FDB by any Government. We have been providing the guarantee for FDB since its existence and 2022 is not an exception year, Mr. Speaker, Sir, because that is the responsibility of Government. There are people employed in FDB, there are clients of FDB and we have the very people that we want to assist the ordinary Fijians.

We talked about the primary industries and there was a lot of focus the other day on the non-focus sector and the focus sectors. But how can we provide this assistance when we do not want to provide the guarantee. What will happen tomorrow? This is the short sightedness on the other side of the House. Let us be strategic and take our responsibilities seriously because this is an institution that we badly need to function and function well.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me go to the sugar industry. According to honourable Professor Prasad, if it had not destroyed the sugar industry. A few weeks back, I was listening to an interview by Mr. Satish Rai, I think this gentleman lives in Australia, and he was interviewing the late Professor Brij Lal. The topic was “Internal Displacement in Fiji”. When did this internal displacement start, Mr. Speaker, Sir? The late 1990s.

In 1997, the 30 years ALTA leases were expiring. The late Professor Brij Lal was being interviewed by Mr. Satish Rai under the *Spice of Life* programme by Michelle Schuelke. The topic was, Internal Displacement in Fiji. As I have stated, Mr. Speaker, it started in the late 1990s - 1997. This is the comment by the late Professor Brij Lal, “The sugar industry is in the doldrums.” For few reasons:

1. The uncertainty of renewal of leases is one problem;
2. The imminent expiry of preferential access to the EU; and
3. The collapsing infrastructure of mills.

So those problems were there in the late 1990s.

Now, he keeps on blaming this Government for all the problems in the sugar industry. This is what the late Professor Brij Lal stated, and I quote:

“The industry with which our people were associated over a century was on the decline. Unfortunately, our leaders did not have the foresight to encourage diversification to face this eventuality. What were they doing?”

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- What have you done?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- We have done a lot.

Look at the state of the mills, look at the efficiency of the mills now, look at CBUL. They were busy with the Constitution from 1995 to 1997. This was one of the priorities that should have been sorted out then, because it affects ordinary Fijians, Mr. Speaker, Sir. It hurts, eh?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, FDB is doing a wonderful job and we should thank the new CEO, Mr. Saud Minam, and of course, those who have served in FDB and have brought it to its current state, and most importantly under the new CEO. We see hope in the way forward. It is promising, although we know that we are in this challenging economic environment, but it is not only Fiji, the whole world is affected. But the directions give us hope and that is why we support this guarantee.

Last Saturday, Mr. Speaker, Sir, he just released an article about one of the major programmes that they have launched already. In fact they have started with the first project in December last year, it is called the “Agriculture Value Chain Financing” method. I think the honourable Minister for Agriculture did mention it yesterday.

We have heard it so many times in this august House. Agriculture in Fiji for so long have merely focussed on production and we neglected the whole value chain, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and this is exactly where Mr. Saud Minam and his team are taking agriculture and of course the country in terms of its economic development.

As I have stated, they have started in December last year with the rice mobility package and they also have intentions to target ginger, dairy and of course maybe into cassava as well. That is why we need this guarantee, Mr. Speaker, Sir. It is so important and most importantly, let me remind the other side of the House. If we deny this guarantee to Fijians, we are denying the right to access the finance and therefore have sustained and improved livelihoods. That is what will happen.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let us get out of this election thing. We have a responsibility and I hope that we will live up to that expectation and support this guarantee. As I have stated again, it is not new. We have been doing this every year but not only because its election year, let us not support this guarantee. So, I urge the other side of the House it is not too late to support this motion that we have before this august House.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think this side of the House has been able to elucidate quite well why we need to support this particular motion. I share the honourable Minister’s feeling that some of the comments that I have heard from the other side are quite appalling. I think it does not reflect on the fact that we in this House need to think about what is best for our country. We have seen a lot of pontificating. We have seen a lot focus on the elections. We must remember that we are here to do what is best for this country.

I think the comments from honourable Minister Koya, honourable Minister Reddy and honourable Minister Seruiratu have pointed to the fact that this is a critical organisation. Some of the things that we are talking about guarantees and all of these things, remember this is a guarantee. Also remember that Fiji Development Bank is not like any other bank. People do not deposit money into Fiji Development Bank and it works in an environment which is far more risky.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Tell them!

HON. J. USAMATE.- So to have this Government guarantee allows them to source money through promissory notes and whatever that they issue, that people are willing to give them money because they know Fiji Development Bank works in a risky business. If Fiji Development Bank cannot deliver it then Government will pay for it. Remember that! But why is this absolutely important because this is the only bank that is delving into that sector because it is risky. It is a risky business and as leaders we need banks to give money into that sector. If the commercial banks are not going to do it, who is going to do it? For the betterment of this country, who? Fiji Development Bank is the only one.

We, as national leaders must support Fiji Development Bank. We have been talking about diversification. We have been talking about the need to bring the small person up from a micro entrepreneur to a small entrepreneur to become a medium entrepreneurship. We are talking about subsistence farmers becoming semi-commercial and commercial - they need money. They need capital and this is the only place that they can go too. If you do not support this guarantee, you do not support those farmers. If you do not support this, you are not supporting the micro entrepreneur who needs money to become a small entrepreneur and then needs more money to become a medium entrepreneur. You are not supporting those people.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. J. USAMATE.- Be a leader. Forget the elections; elections will come. Some of us will be here, some of us will not be here but after those elections, you want to be able to say on that day, “I supported the farmers and the small businessmen of this country and if I am elected or not, I did the right thing for my country.” Be a man, be a woman, do the right thing.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for this opportunity to make a contribution to the motion before the House. I must say at the outset that I fully support the motion and I thank the Chairman and the honourable Members on both sides of the House who were part of this Committee.

I stand as a Minister for Health today to say that we should support the Fiji Development Bank (FDB). It needs ennobling functions in supporting the social determinants of health. On Monday, we had our two new colleagues to this honourable House. Honourable Ratu Jone Seniloli talked about his interest which is in the rural dwellers. We want the rural dwellers to be strong financially and this is an institution that will support them by enabling them, by us guaranteeing by the State by this Parliament agreeing to it that the Government agreeing to guarantee, and allow us - the small shareholders, the farmers to be able to upgrade themselves.

I know that many of us here would know of stories where FDB has been the financier in their development. I know for sure that at some stage in our growth as a family, my parents used the FDB and I am probably here because of that support through the FDB.

The FDB has allowed many young people to become doctors and nurses. Many people have come from rural areas and become engineers and lawyers and many of us sitting inside this august House on both sides have actually achieved what we have achieved through the support of the FDB. That is the first and primary reason why I support it because it has ennobled many, many people.

Again, for my province in Lau, many have come into Viti Levu, they go up to Waibau, Lomaivuna, where they have been farming. Honourable Jale knows specifically this issue, that FDB

is an ennobling institution for many migrant communities into Viti Levu and Vanua Levu. Why should we not support it now?

It has allowed us to be here today, it has allowed many to be able to go to the university. It is a means by which we can improve the social determinants of health, both in the rural areas and in the peri-urban areas.

On 1<sup>st</sup> July 1967 when FDB was established, the board of directors then and I believe that most of them are not here today, made strategic decisions based on the ambitions of the FDB then. The Board of Directors now and the CEO will make their decisions based on what the pertaining environment is and their ambition remains the same, to support the development of the nation.

We want the rural dwellers to have cars, we want the rural dwellers to be able to take their children to better schools, we want the rural dwellers to be able to send their children overseas and this is an institution that can support them. Why are we not supporting it now? That is my question.

I think it is very hypocritical of all of us in this august House, who have benefited in some way from the FDB to now turn our back on FDB. It is very hypocritical. Why? Because Elections is around the corner. Why? Because it sounds good to our voters. We should not, and as I have said before, as the Minister for Health, I want to see mechanisms by which the social determinants of health are improved and this is an ennobling institution to support the social determinants of health. That is why I fully support the FDB and the motion before the House.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank all the honourable Members who have spoken, in particular those who have spoken in favour of this motion. Sir, there is quite a lot to respond to, but I think a lot of it, in fact, has already been done so by the honourable Ministers and the speakers from this side of Parliament.

It would appear if you were to analyse what the Opposition were saying, firstly, they seem to be driven by election imperatives, that is one issue. The second argument they had, was because we have been giving guarantees to FDB year-in-year-out, therefore we should stop giving them guarantees. The third argument is that, because the overall debt in the country is high (according to them), therefore, we should not give any more guarantees because it builds up contingent liability.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, of course, there is a lot of inconsistency in what they have been saying, comparing Monday to Tuesday to Wednesday. If I could just address to all them really quickly Sir.

Honourable Nawaikula said that we could have had a mature discussion if we give you all the information. He is the last person who should be talking about mature discussion.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I informed the Business Committee when we had the meeting last week that there will be an FDB Guarantee and the Members of the Opposition were there. It is on them if they did not go back and tell their Members.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point I would like to make, the form in which we have presented this motion, we have adhered to the Standing Orders as we have done in the past. We gave our 48 hours notification of this particular motion on Monday, that is why it is being presented today, so it is not any 'Quick Draw McGraw' sort of situation here.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if I could just address FDB's internal operational matters, this FDB saga recently started off with honourable Aseri Radrodro when Saud Minam, who is an international banker, ANZ Manager was appointed. He condemned his ethnicity, religion and usual of that. I

thought it was an extremely shameful approach and this is, unfortunately, underlying premise and arguments of SODELPA and some of the other people outside this Parliament. They do not look at the credentials of the person and what he or she can bring to the organisation and how well the organisation can do.

The other point I also like to make, Mr. Speaker, Sir, they highlighted about the person who has bought Pullman. They said he is an honorary counsel. Honourable Professor Prasad as usual, he watches too many 'C' grade Bollywood and Hollywood movies, conspiratorial theories. Of course, tenders were called and the Board then chose on the basis of the tender and the best price they can get. Every single impairment, bad debt, et cetera, is presented in the FDB reports, in the audited accounts, and you can get access to the information.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point I would like to make regarding the issue that was raised about Marriott, the outstanding monies that honourable Professor Prasad talks about. This is the deal that was done under the previous Government with Vuksich & Borich. That agreement was not done properly. It is a legal issue and as far as Government is concerned, someone did the deal. I will tell you why there was a deal, Sir.

The deal was, honourable Gavoka talked about syndicated loans. There was actually a syndicated loan. The main finances of the Marriott were FNPF and FDB. Here was a much touted foreign investor bringing in money but the bulk of the money was actually provided by the Fijian people through FNPF and through FDB.

What was even more amazing was that, the syndicated loan, the line share was actually provided by FNPF and not FDB. I think FDB exposure from memory was about \$60 million to \$70 million. A few hundred million was FNPF, or if not more. But the manager of the syndicated loan was the former CEO of FDB. And as it was revealed subsequently, the former Manager of FDB, in fact, had business interest in the development of Marriott. In that environment was that contract done. That is why, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this information is actually available and available publicly also.

If you look at the particular Act and the rationale that was given as to why we actually had to do the Act, similarly with Natadola where FNPF participated with an undischarged bankrupt from Europe. Yet, he was hailed as some great tourism developer. If, in fact, if that law was not put in place in Natadola (honourable Jale was involved in that Board then), FNPF would have lost over billion dollars just in Natadola. Those laws had to be put in place to rescue FNPF and FDB at that point in time.

That is history, they do not tell that. This is what we call obscurantism. They are trying to basically duck and weave in the process trying to come up with all these narratives that actually do not make sense, nor were they half-baked truths.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point that I would also like to make is the issue about FDB and what is the focus of FDB. This law was put in place in the 1960s. The Fijian economy had substantially changed since then. We had a nascent tourism industry, honourable Gavoka knows this. In the 1960s, we only had about two or three major hotels and that was it. The Fijian and Korolevu, may be they were the two major ones, and then it grew.

Of course, some of them benefit from it. Organisations like Foods Pacific, George Patel and them, they got money to actually set up their factory, starting in the manufacturing industry. None from the Opposition have spoken about this. I spoke about the BPO outsourcing, 3,000 jobs in two

years, 100,000 jobs in 10 years, but none of them have spoken about it. Should FDB not participate in that the space, if the need arises without necessarily neglecting agriculture?

Honourable Seruiratu actually highlighted a major point and also honourable Koya about the agriculture sector itself. We have been saying in this space that agriculture leases were only given for 30 years. So that is why it is high risk, you cannot really use the land as collateral. That is why commercial banks do not lend in that space, so FDB steps in. That is what it has been happening and these are systematic issues. They do not want to address it. Honourable Nawaikula also knows exactly what Honourable Seruiratu is talking about the non-renewal of leases in the 1990s when he was part of iTLTB, together with Mr. Qarikau. These are the historical factual basis.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have the figures here. Today, in the sugarcane industry, 43 per cent of sugarcane farmers produce less than 100 tonnes. Sir, 75 per cent produced below 150 tonnes, that is it. You multiply that by \$85 a tonne, take out the expenses and that is how much money they make in a year. That is with the guaranteed price, imagine if they had the world market prices, they will be getting \$60 a tonne. That is the state of affairs of the sugarcane industry. And we have an aging population, et cetera. We are trying to get mechanical harvestation being done.

The reason why most cane farmers still are cane farmers because if they have the sugarcane lease, if they stop planting sugarcane, the lease will be taken away. Where will they go? They are going to live in some squatter area between Nausori and Suva? That is precisely what happened when 50 per cent of the leases were not renewed in Vanua Levu. That is why they are still hanging on. So, they become a lot more vulnerable to politicians who want to use them as political fodder. “I will do this, I will do that”, and they are extremely vulnerable. We are trying to get them to diversify. This is the hard core reality, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point I also want to make was that and I will get to the debt issue. Even if you look at FDB in the past, Sir, as honourable Seruiratu said, since its inception, FDB has always got Government guarantee. Honourable Kuridrani is absolutely on the wrong path. He thinks when there is a loan default by an individual customer, as honourable Usamate pointed out, does not mean the guarantee will be called upon, because FDB does make some profit too.

When they lend, say to George Patel, they may charge him 12.5 per cent interest but when they lend to a farmer in Wainunu Bay to plant his dalo, he may be charged 3.5 per cent. That is what you call cross subsidisation. If the Wainunu Bay farmer goes belly-up, in other words, he cannot pay his loan, it does not mean they come running to the Government and say we want the guarantee. Even when Ampol went belly-up, this is the great supermarket chain that is going to be set up; even when FDB facilitated \$20 million to help the elites by Class A shares in Fijian Holdings, the guarantee was not called upon.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Gavoka should know this because we have had discussions on this. It was only the elites who actually got the loan. Maybe for everyone but who got the loan, he did not get the loan. That is the reality and what really is quite mindboggling is that they do not want to discuss these issues and they tried only to go back to a particular period in time not wanting to address the legacy issues because you cannot address a fundamental economic sector or position in the economy without going back in time and why we are where we are today because of what. Honourable Biman Prasad like a petulant imbecile actually just stops as long as it suits his new master, the narrative must start from there. That is what happens.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point I would like to make, there has been a lot of talk about the cassava farmers and other people.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Your excessive interventions goes to show you are on the weak ground. The ginger farmers, in the last eight months has received nearly \$1 million in loans. Honourable Radrodro note this, a lot of them are from Naitasiri. There is a new package being put in place for ginger farmers in the next season. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point that I also wanted to make was in respect of the debt situation. It is critically important because they harped on about it.

I just wanted to by way of contextualisation because the global pandemic has affected the entire globe, the debt to GDP ratio of a country like Fiji. Maldives, which is tourism based sector, debt to GDP ratio in 2019 was 78.3 per cent. In 2021, it was 137.2 per cent. Bahamas, the debt to GDP ratio was 59.7 per cent in 2019 and 102.5 per cent in 2021. Saint Lucia - the debt to GDP ratio was 61.4 per cent, 95.6 per cent. Mauritius - 84.6 per cent in 2019 and 101 per cent in 2021. Just to give an example of a large country Japan - 235.4 per cent in 2019, now 256.9 per cent. Closer to home, New Zealand, - 32 per cent debt to GDP ratio in 2019, now it is 52 per cent. Seychelles - 57.7 per cent in 2019, now it is 81.9 per cent. Australia – 46.6 per cent debt to GDP ratio in 2019, now 62.1 per cent. There is a whole list of other countries.

My point being by way of contextualising it is that Fiji is not the only country and if you look at the debt situation in Fiji, prior to COVID-19 we were on a downward trajectory. They do not mention that at all. This is what you call intellectual dishonestly. We have been on a downward trajectory and we were sitting, Mr. Speaker, Sir, at 46 per cent and 49 per cent when *TC Winston* came along and then as a result of COVID-19 we shot through the roof. Obviously not of our making but the point that I would like to make, Mr. Speaker, Sir is this.

At the end of 2006, the debt to GDP ratio was 53.3 per cent. It rose to 56.2 per cent in 2010. Following this, Mr. Speaker, Sir the debt to GDP ratio was on a steady downward path, declining to 43.5 per cent in 2016-2017. This was a decline of close to 13 per centage points in just six years then of course with *TC Winston* and many other natural disasters and with additional borrowing our debt to GDP ratio rose to 48.4 per cent in 2018-2019, still below 50 per cent. Mr. Speaker, Sir, so pre-COVID-19 even though the nominal value of our debt had increased from \$2.8 billion in 2016 to \$5.7 billion at the end of 2018-2019, the debt to GDP ratio declined from 53.3 per cent to 48 per cent under the Bainimarama Government and the FijiFirst Government, Sir.

So, why did the debt to GDP decline? Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is very simple because our nominal GDP grew much faster, so if the value of a GDP goes up then obviously the debt to GDP will come down. This is the result of the nine years of consecutive growth. They go on about the three per cent. They go on oh only three per cent. No, but it is the fact. They go on about the fact that oh it is only three per cent but that is a direct result of it. Our GDP, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the nominal value grew from \$5.3 billion to \$11.8 billion in the same period. That is a phenomenal rate of growth, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, then of course we had COVID-19. Tax revenue fell by 50 per centage on average every month. We lost almost \$1.4 billion in 12 months in tax revenues. So, in two years we lost \$2.8 billion in tax revenue. That is a fact. During the same period we had other new non-inflows like budget support grants and divestment receipts, however, to maintain public expenditure, Sir, at around \$3.7 billion which includes \$500 million provided in unemployment benefit and other support measures Government had to borrow \$2 billion in the last two financial years. Now this is where the Opposition is saying that we should not have borrowed. They are saying you should not have not borrowed. I think someone at the back said *dinau* and all this.

So, basically if we had not borrowed and our revenues had shot down and our GDP had gone down, that means we should cut expenditure by \$2 billion, that is what they are saying. Do not

borrow, cut expenditure by \$2 billion, live within your means they say. Alright that would have been disastrous. Well if it is not a bad idea, alright let us see where will they have cut? Would they have cut civil servants pay?

Honourable Prasad had prompted that, the *Fiji Times* article 10 per cent. I think Narube said cut it by 30 per cent. We decided not to cut it and guess what the civil service pay bill is, we pay the civil servants over a billion dollars in salary every year. That is the cost of running a civil service wages alone. Social Welfare for Poverty Alleviation - \$145 million, Free Education – directly \$60 million, TELS and Toppers - \$150 million, Unemployment Support - \$500 million, Police Budget - \$184 million, Ministry of Health - \$403 million, Education - \$442 million, Sugar - \$ 72 million.

Would they cut the elections budget, we do not have elections? Electricity subsidy, food rations, access to GPs, market vendors fees. Is that what they are saying that we should cut? We would like the ordinary Fijian people to understand what the Opposition is saying. The logic this afternoon they have said to us is that we will not guarantee the FDB loan because you should have cut back on the expenditure and cutting back on expenditure, Sir, we would like the Fijian people to know that this is what we would have cut on to save \$2 billion. It is precisely what they are saying because they have not at any stage, at any time given any alternative. No visible alternative. None whatsoever, Mr. Speaker, Sir and they talk about continuity.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the things that this portrays, in fact yesterday or today when some of the Members of the Opposition were speaking someone text me. They said thank God they were not in Government, can you imagine how they would run Government in the COVID-19 times because of the indecisive leadership. We heard someone saying no vaccination, someone is saying vaccination, someone is saying lockdown, someone is saying do not lock down. This is the kind of inconsistency and indecisiveness.

SODELPA is shattered in itself internally. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is what would have happened, we like the ordinary people to understand what the Opposition is saying. We would like all those people who have now received loans for micro, small, medium enterprises and large enterprises that the loans they have got, we are giving them financing for their working capital to pay wages, electricity rates et cetera to continue with their business, these people do not want you to have that. That is what they are saying, it is precisely what they are saying. They do not want that cassava processor, the ginger farmers to get their loans that is precisely what they are saying, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, they have talked about ministers should get the pay-cut, they have already got a pay-cut, you all have got a 20 per cent, even if you cut your pay even more, you still get about a million dollars. You are not going to make a dent in the \$2 billion that you are proposing to cut. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the fact of the matter is this, if we had not injected those funds, with tourism in the decline, firstly we would not have been able to provide those services. Secondly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, our foreign reserves would have been shattered by borrowing more from offshore, we are allowing more foreign exchange to actually come into the country, so our foreign exchange is buoyed. As a result of that also, Mr. Speaker, Sir, our liquidity is buoyed.

So, we are not scrambling around for money when the economies is now is going to grow. They are saying, “Oh, how can you have this projected growth rates?” Any imbecile, any person of fundamental knowledge of economy would say yes, we are starting off with a lower base. Yes our GDP value has gone down, we have already said that. So, when you are going to grow from that it will be much higher rate of grown, anyone knows that. So, tourism if you are shut down for two years and suddenly you get 30,000 tourist average every month, that is growth, that is opening up the economy, more people are getting employed, more boat from Denarau will go out, more will sell their vegetables, that is what the growth is about and they are questioning it. ANZ is saying 20 to

25 per cent growth. Westpac is saying 11 per cent of growth. ADB is saying they are about the same, our macro-economic committee is saying 10 per cent. Why are there so many variants? It is because people do not know because this is a one in a hundred-year event and nobody had been able to predict that and so we, Mr. Speaker, Sir, have been prudent in the way about not just managing the finances but also in terms of our planning and in terms of ensuring that the economy still keeps on turning over.

With the \$360, it not only provided people with some form of relief but it put money into the system. That is what you call managing the economy is about, not about some short-term political gaffe. Mr. Speaker, Sir, if we had not done what we had also done, it would have meant the Fijian dollar would have had to be devalued. As it is, the commodity prices in the world is rising, I highlighted that yesterday. The world fuel price is going up, wheat price is going up, freight cost is going up, if our dollar was devaluated Sir, the cost of things would have been even through the roof by now even more so. So, again Mr. Speaker, Sir, we need to understand that this is the situation that we were in, this is the situation that we are in and we need to be able to deal with it and we have got a plan regarding it and to now say because of this, therefore we are not going to give our support to the FDB guarantee is completely short-sightedness. It is in fact quite irresponsible, almost negligible, it is actually negligent to do that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have already highlighted, one other point that I would like to make which seems to be also lost on the Opposition, the recent loans that we have acquired Sir, the interest rates, JICA - 0.01 per cent, IDA - 0.75 per cent loans, Sir. So, when you have a long- term loan of 40 years, 10-year grace period with interest rate at 0.01 per cent and 0.75 per cent and inflation is much higher than that, you actually end up having nearly 60 per cent of the loan as a grant. That is what happens. In fact they are telling you gently, we are giving you a grant. They do not call it a grant, they call it a loan because they want you to still have some skin in the game. So, we say we charge you 0.01 per cent, they do not understand that. They say, “Oh, debt but what is the cost of the debt? What is the cost of the debt?”

This is the cost of the debt, this is why we like the re-classification in the World Bank and ADB so that we can get cheaper loans. So the loans that we acquire now to build infrastructure and make sure our economy progresses in the future, they do not have to pay much at all. That is the reality. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to now thank all the members in fact who supported this particular motion. We like to also wish FDB all the best and the team and management for putting this together for us.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

## **CONSOLIDATED REVIEW REPORT- MINISTRY OF INFRASTRUCTURE AND TRANSPORT 2015-2017 ANNUAL REPORTS**

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move:

That Parliament debates the Review of the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport 2016/2017 Consolidated and 2015 Annual Reports which was tabled on 21<sup>st</sup> September 2021.

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

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport is responsible for policy formulation, planning, design, regulatory coordination and implementation of programmes and projects and services relating to public works, meteorology, transportation and utilities which are part of the Government infrastructure sector in Fiji. In addition, the then Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport is also responsible for policy and legislative oversight as well as administrative and regulatory functions of various Government Commercial Statutory Authorities and Government Commercial Companies under the portfolio of the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport.

The Committee upon being referred the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport 2015 and January 2016 to July 2017 Annual Reports requested for written responses from the Ministry of Infrastructure and Meteorological Services and the Department of Transport within Ministry of Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport. Upon receipt of the written responses, the Committee was enlightened on the following:

1. How the Department of Transport under the Ministry of Commerce Trade Tourism and Transport monitor and evaluate the performance and the implementation of policies of the various statutory authorities under its ambit; and
2. Ministry of Infrastructure and Meteorological Services' future plans and initiatives.

The Department of Transport monitors and evaluates the performance of the statutory authorities through the Operational Level Agreement and also the Services Level Agreement.

In relation to performance excellence and service delivery, the Department for the first time applied and was recognized with the Achievement in Excellence Award during the Fiji Business Excellence Awards in 2015.

We note that the Ministry has been consistent in the achievement of its outputs as articulated in its Annual Corporate Plan for the past three years, recording an average overall achievement of 80 per cent per annum. This is a commendable benchmark for the 2016 and 2017 financial year.

We commend the team of committed and motivated staff at the Ministry and anticipate further improvements to its operations over the coming years.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I take this opportunity to contribute on the motion that is before the House on the Consolidated Report for the Ministry of Infrastructure for the years 2016 and 2017 and also the Annual Report for 2015. In this instance, I would like to thank the Committee for their deliberations as noted to the House this afternoon by the honourable Chairperson.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I make a few remarks about the Report itself, I just want to take this opportunity to make a few comments. I want to comment first on the remarks that was made before lunch by the honourable Minister for Infrastructure. One he made before lunch today and the other one, he made yesterday. I know I was not here because I was watching him on television.

In his interjection earlier on today, he said that the honourable Professor Prasad and the Opposition had contracted a new disease of losing their marbles. I just want to remind my friend,

the honourable Minister for Infrastructure that the deteriorating quality of infrastructure under his charge is making people lose their marbles. After trying to negotiate through the pothole hill roads or when the vehicle falls into these craters, these potholes resemble moon craters, that really is causing people to lose their marbles.

Also people lose their marbles by carting heavy loads of water or spending hours looking for clean and safe water due to the Minister's failure to keep a check and balance on Water Authority of Fiji, whose Chair lives mostly in Australia and lectures us about science. This is the state of decay being endured by the people and yet he feels fit to remark that we are losing our marbles when in fact, the people are losing their marbles because of that.

I also want to comment on the honourable Minister's comment yesterday when he spoke about the Boards; the Boards belonging to Government. Boards of Government Commercial Companies and Commercial Statutory Authorities where he has told the House that these Boards do not get influenced by political interventions.

I will just remind my friend (he is not here, he is gone) just to ask honourable Bala, he will give him the whole episode because what I am going to say to the honourable Minister, we have just come off together from a funeral from one of our common relative from Nasaqalau and there they say "*kakua ni ko dai*" - do not lie, *bahut jhooth yaar*, honourable Minister. *Kua ni lasu*, do not lie. That is the reality. You know, the honourable Attorney-General knows, honourable Bala knows, political interference occurs all the time in the leadership of Boards that govern Government Commercial Authorities. Look at what happened to MWH as part of FRA when they were given *persona non grata*.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- So, that is what I am saying, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that ...

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.-... to tell the House that he does not get or the Board does not get influenced by political leadership when his Ministry....

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- It is a whole lot of hogwash, completely hogwash.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- No, no, definitely I am telling you.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Maybe you did it.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- That is the reality, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

I am just going to go very briefly on the report because the Committee, and I want to thank them. All they did was that they asked us to note the report, obviously it is the years from 2015, 2016 and 2017. They commented mostly on the Auditor-General's Report of the Ministry throughout those years. As reflected in the statement, the independent auditors reports for those years done by the Auditor-General for the Ministry. I just want to highlight a few things that the Committee noted and I want to share that with you.

The very first one, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is the issue about the Trade and Manufacturing Account commonly known as "TMA". I know the honourable Minister will know this, it has been a historic issue and it continues to be raised. In the report it says that the Ministry of Infrastructure has 17 TMA accounts. They have been struggling through this and unfortunately up until 2019 the same issues continued throughout.

I am thinking and I am saying also that not much has been done about that so it is pointless trying to pull up public servants to manage these accounts all the time when a decision really should have been reached to make it better. So, I am calling on the Ministry today to look at that, to manage the TMA accounts because, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are talking about millions of dollars on many occasions that have not been accounted for.

The Government is talking about transparency, good governance and all that but all of these still do exist and they need to change. It is capacity building, I think the way things are set up right now gives a lot of flexibility to the Minister and the Ministry to look within their own establishments and find capacity to deal with things like this because you are talking about taxpayers' funds.

So, I hope, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that the honourable Minister will consider that, so that when reports of 2020 and beyond, particularly from now going forward, TMAs will not be featured as areas of concerns by the Auditor-General when they audit these accounts. That is the first issue from the report that I would like to talk about.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the other recommendations, and I think this is actually quite a very good recommendation from the Committee. The Committee noted that there was within the Ministry of Infrastructure an appointment of the Principal Engineer Regulatory position which, according to this Report, the Ministry has been told to drop this appointment by the Ministry of Economy. That is what the Report says.

I do not quite follow this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, because we have been told that under the restructure of the Public Service, the Ministers have these powers, they are given their budget for personal emoluments and resources, so they get to decide the establishment of their own Ministries. The Report also says that some of the portfolios within the Ministry get to do this responsibility but they are not dedicated engineers to look after it. These same engineers, Mr. Speaker, Sir, get to do a lot of important work for the Ministry, particularly in coordinating tasks and activities with regards to roads and also to water. Those are the two main ones, and also rural electrification.

I made this reference, Mr. Speaker, Sir, because, in the same Report, one of the last recommendations or things that was noted by the Committee and I refer you to page 18 of the Report, Recommendation 3.6: "The Committee notes that schools in remote and maritime areas are without access to running water." We note that a total of 35 schools in Lau, Lomaiviti, Tailevu, Macuata, Bua, Cakaudrove, Ba and Nadroga Provinces do not have access to running water.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the Job Description of these engineers that I was talking about, these would be the kind of things that an engineer would be doing. I recognise that FRA continues to be

reformed, the Water Authority of Fiji has a long way to go about reforming itself, so you need this guide at the Ministry to be able to coordinate this, even though these other two institutions are looking after it themselves. It is kind of surprising that you continue to hear about this because, obviously water is an essential need and our children do not get clean water. Because this Report was in 2019, I hope that something had already been done about it. So, I would like to ask the honourable Minister if he has actually done something about it.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is one of the few issues noted by the Committee and they have made their recommendations on what needs to be done. I know other speakers are going to talk about others, but I want to end my intervention today on a very, very important observation that was made by the Committee.

On page 16, paragraph 3.4, the title being “The implementation of key policies by the Ministry of Infrastructure and Meteorological Services”. Then it goes on to say, “Liquid Trade Wastewater Policy. The Water Authority of Fiji is responsible for the implementation of this policy. Below is the update from the Water Authority of Fiji for trade waste.” Then it goes on to further say, “Total permits issued - 660 businesses. Commercial customers’ compliance - 25.5 per cent.”

The Report also notes that the biggest offenders in this are the restaurants, who dump waste into drains and then that go into the system and they go out into the sea, polluting the environment. This to me is essential to note, because once you go on about climate change and looking after our environment, these are essential things to do. Very essential. Then to say that only 25.5 per cent of these business comply, meaning 75 per cent do not. So, some greater commitment needs to be done to make sure that these companies actually do comply, Mr. Speaker.

Industrial customers’ compliance slightly better - 64.5 per cent, but still that is a shortfall of almost 40 per cent. Mr. Speaker, the honourable Reddy is here so he is looking after waterways. There are many waterways around our industrial areas and around these commercial centres that definitely need a lot of work.

So, I am asking the honourable Minister for Infrastructure and the Ministers concerned that I have raised these issues which the Committee had raised, and are going to look into this. Those are matters that affect our people. You will never hear people stop winching about roads and water because these are two essential services that people used everyday and with the commitments that have been made through the reforms (and I know that well) but up until now, people just do not quite seem to understand that this amount of money that was given is not translating. Perhaps, something is wrong - the establishment, the attitude that needs to be changed.

We keep hearing about the change with management of boards, Chief Executive Officers and everything else, but bottom line we are still driving over craters and water is not coming to our taps and in the rural areas, communities still have no water. And I would just like to ask this afternoon the Government, particularly to the honourable Minister concerned to look at these issues and resolve them so that they do not come up again and, of course, our people do not have to suffer through all these issues that I have noted here today.

**MR. SPEAKER.**- I thank the honourable Member for his contribution to the debate.

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

### **SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS**

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move under Standing Order 6:

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

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

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, very briefly under Schedule 1, we still have four items, including the current motion that are yet to be debated and, of course, Schedule 2, the eight Oral Questions and the three Written Questions, thus the request to sit beyond 4.30 p.m. today in order to have them completed.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on this motion. Is there anyone wishing to take the floor at this time?

Since no one wishing to take the floor, Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, on that note, we will suspend proceedings for afternoon tea.

The Parliament adjourned at 4.24 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 4.57 p.m.

### **RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON THE CONSOLIDATED REVIEW REPORT – MINISTRY OF INFRASTRUCTURE AND TRANSPORT 2015-2017 ANNUAL REPORTS**

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I start, let me just ask the honourable Premilar Kumar to look into a petition here from the market vendors in regards to the Suva Market. It will be coming your way soon, honourable Minister.

Also, Mr. Speaker, if I can just touch on the situation in Wailotua. We know that dialogue has occurred a number of times on what needs to be done because every time it floods, Wailotua is the first village to suffer in that part of Wainibuka. But what struck was that, water comes in very quickly to drown out the village and they have to run to the hills - to the higher grounds. I just ask if they could be provided with a boat to help them move around when the water level rises.

We know that every time it rains, Wailotua is flooded. I believe a boat with the outboard motor will help them, as we know that climate change is going to bring a lot more flooding. Speaking with my colleague from Ba, honourable Viam Pillay, Ba has been flooded three times over the last couple of days. So, it is climate change, I just need to have the equipment to help our people move around during the flooding.

I think we all saw a case in Rakiraki where the firefighters and the police were transporting a dead body over a half-sawn water tank. They were wading into the flooded water and there was no boat. It was a water tank that they cut in half to transport someone to hospital, a pregnant woman and also a dead body. Where you are going to have flood, Wailotua is one, so a boat would be suitable as the equipment during the flooding. Also the evacuation centre if it can be ...

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, just stick to what is out there.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- It is all part of infrastructure, Mr. Speaker. On infrastructure, we all know that it is in a deplorable state, we all know that and let me just focus on the roads. The 80 per cent of the vehicles on the roads in Fiji are low. Cars - sedans, they are not SUVs, they are not trucks and they suffer very badly from the conditions of the road.

Two items that I would like to see improved immediately are the road humps, they are not suitable for low cars, they are of various sizes, we should try and create humps in uniformed manner. We have all been overseas, we know the humps are not what we have in Fiji. If you hit the humps in the wrong angle, it can virtually remove the axel or whatever of your car. I would ask that we immediately focus on the humps. A good example is in Korovisilou right in front of Ratu Latianara Memorial School. There is a hump there that is very gentle, that should be the standard throughout Fiji and I tell you what, for SODELPA that will be our first focus.

We are not going to build all these massive kind of infrastructure while we miss out on items like humps. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I can say today is that 90 per cent of the humps in Fiji are not painted. I believe everyone agrees with me. If you are driving at night, it is just too bad, the bottom part of your car.

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

MR. SPEAKER.- Point of Order!

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am talking about infrastructure here.

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

HON. J. USAMATE.- Point of Order, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Nowhere in this Report does it talk about humps. Secondly, the honourable Member mentioned the figure of 90 per cent, does he have an actual survey to attest to that kind of figure that you are saying here in our national Parliament. Those two issues are my points of order.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, I am a motorist, I drive a lot and I can tell you, out of every ten, you come across one will be painted and badly painted. That is contributing to the deplorable state of the infrastructure and I am talking today and I know that the vast majority of motorists in this country agree with me because not everyone drives a truck or SUV. They all drive low cars like mine unlike the honourable Ministers, you drive around in your SUVs.

Mr. Speaker, they should immediately improve on the humps. Let us be proud of our standard, please some humps you hit it at any angle, some humps you can hit it straight, because if you hit it straight it takes your whatever under your car. It should not have that, we have all been to Australia and New Zealand and we know how they build their humps, so please do them quickly. If not, we know that change is coming but our first year in office, we will focus on the humps all over Fiji and I tell you what, as I said the motorists today agree with me with what I am saying.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the potholes, I just drove back from Sigatoka over the weekend and at the Outrigger Hotel, it was alright when I came down, one day later it had broken up into many areas. I can guarantee you this, when we come into office there will be no pothole...

(Laughter)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- ...that is left unattended for one day, one day, one day.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Somebody dug a hole across my village, seven or eight months ago, no one has buried it.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Who dug it?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- That is immaterial.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Somebody connected the water...

(Laughter)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.-... Mr. Speaker, are they saying go to Navuevu, it is adjacent to my village.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Who dug the hole?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Somebody connected the water from this side to that side and it has been eight months, no one has done anything about it. The honourable Acting Prime Minister is now telling us...

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order.

HON.V.R. GAVOKA.- ...reminds us the attitude of FijiFirst. If there is a hole in the road, it is too bad.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- I mean the Prime Minister is saying that. It has been eight months. Mr. Speaker, this is a worry if the Deputy Prime Minister believes in that. If you have the hole too bad.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, we are now in 2021 and I see our road people using crowbars on the road, surely there must machinery that can be used to fix the potholes, not the crowbars. Crowbars are 1940 and 1950, I mean this is 2021. What we will do in SODELPA, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is re-equate FRA and have trucks patrolling up and down so that whenever there is hole, there is a temporary fix right away and then to be confirmed with the permanent paste. That is SODELPA policy. No hole will be left...

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.-...uncovered at night.

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- There you are. The people of Fiji are watching, complaining about the potholes and it is hilarious to the FijiFirst.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- The people of Fiji are watching FijiFirst laughing at the potholes situation in this country. You are laughing.

HON. P.K. BALA.- We are laughing at you.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- I am talking about potholes, the safety and the comfort of our people in Fiji and FijiFirst led by the honourable Acting Prime Minister...

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.-... is laughing at this issue. I am sure what they are saying today, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is shame on you FijiFirst. Shame on you.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, little things like road signage. You get lost in this country, simple things like road signage, you do not even have it. When the Minister for Infrastructure, when he gets going with his MBA speech like everything is so perfect in this world. You do not even have road signage.

Mr. Speaker, SODELPA is right, it is time for change, you guys you need to go. Yesterday we were all here and then I got this text from the village of Malomalo, ‘Please, ask the Minister for Infrastructure, we have been asking for water since 2015, nothing has happened’. What happened here, Mr. Speaker, is that, the water to Natadola passes through Malomalo Village, it passes through their land but it only goes to the hotel, it does not go to the village. So, we ask the question, if you build a business or a complex or something like that in the rural areas and you connect it to the water and all those stuff, do you deny the villagers that service? Is that a FijiFirst policy? Similar case in Momi, water to Marriot, people of Bavu said can we have a bit of that water and they were told no, do not spoil the water to the hotel, you might affect the water to the hotel.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Who paid for that infrastructure?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, it will be the policy of SODELPA that when we develop something in the rural areas, the local villages will also benefit. Here they are, the villagers, going to the well and they see this pipe running through and this is the area where they spent \$45 million for the rich and famous to come and play golf and yet people are throwing their buckets in the well to pull out their water. This is the reality of life in Fiji.

They are so full of themselves that they do not see this, Mr. Speaker. I always remember when I talk about tourism and the development and the connections to the local communities, a conference I attended in Kuala Lumpur, tourism – big one and Prime Minister Mahathir was the keynote speaker. He said we will do all these for tourism, bring up your comforts and appointment and all that stuff but at the same time, you do not want the Malays to be swatting mosquitoes while everyone is enjoying the air-conditioned rooms. Well, this is what is happening in Fiji. You are building for the tourist people, we are neglecting our very own people.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would just ask the Government to redirect its effort, do the small things properly. The finishing in this country on infrastructure is quite shocking. If you go onto any road in Fiji and you see where the bridge joins with the road, where the road ends and there is a bridge, it is a hump, you got to be careful, you got to hit it slowly. The finishing is very poor. We are spending so much money, they hype about the infrastructure spending they have done but the quality of the work, the finishing is very poor. This is my plea to the FijiFirst Government, do it properly, finishing properly and when you develop an area in the rural areas, be inclusive, include the villages and settlements in whatever you bring into the area - water, electricity and what not.

HON. RO T.V. KEPÄ.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know when the previous speaker before me talked about Wailotua, the flooding, the boat, the engine, Korovisilou and potholes, I looked over at honourable Attorney-General, he was like half asleep but then when the honourable Member spoke about his village, I saw him suddenly jump up. I was thinking maybe he has some vested interest in that particular part of the country and then when you started talking about the crowbar and then I saw him laughing his head off, so, I am wondering if there is a crowbar under his table over there, Mr. Speaker. I know you have an interest there, honourable Attorney-General.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on this Report, I am just looking also at the report that was formulated by the Standing Committee on Social and I thank them for this Report, Mr. Speaker. I am going to be just dealing very briefly on some of the issues that were brought up by honourable Tikoduadua and this is to do with page 14 of the Report which states with some concern, the removal of the Principal Engineer Regulatory position from the Ministry of Infrastructure.

This position, Mr. Speaker, was removed not by the relevant line Minister or Ministry of Infrastructure but by the Ministry of Economy in 2020-2021 financial year. This post is a professional post in the Department and the importance of this post was also highlighted to the Minister of Economy during their budget discussions and they were asked to please reinstate that particular position but I believe to this day it is still vacant.

In this particular Report, Mr. Speaker, it says on page No.15 some of the core responsibilities of this Principal Engineer Regulatory. Some of it, Mr. Speaker, includes the following that he should:

1. Actively manage, monitor and assess staff performance to enable business continuity, and delivery of quality outcomes aligned with individual and business objectives.
2. Research, develop, implement and monitor policies, regulations and guidelines aligned with national and strategic plans.
3. Assessment of Water Supply Management Plans for approval and monitoring of the implementation of rural water and sanitation projects.
4. Performance Monitoring of WAF's capital projects, expenditure and inspection WAF's water and sewerage facilities.
5. Coordinate stakeholders' consultation and forums on water and sanitation policies and guidelines and provide technical advice to stakeholders on water and sanitation issues.
6. Actively contribute to the Ministry and corporate requirements, including planning, budgeting and human resource activities.

So, there was a whole range of things that this particular engineer has to do, Mr. Speaker.

This Report further notes that the Director for Water and Sewerage has managed the responsibilities of the role with the assistance of the technical staff. However, without the Principal Engineer Regulatory post being vacant, it becomes very difficult besides trying to do their jobs, this one is vacant. So, this a professional post, Mr. Speaker, that requires degree qualification and experience at the level of Deputy Director.

Most of the responsibilities are now carried out by other staff members but we know that when other staff members whose core function is elsewhere and their job description says something else, then there is no one directly responsible so big cracks, Mr. Speaker start happening and big things fall through those cracks.

The removal of the post has affected work on the coordination of research on low cost and user friendly water treatment technologies and development of pilot project proposals and

implementation, development of policy guidelines, code of practice and monitoring compliance, donors and stakeholders contributions and coordination.

One of the major roles of the post is the monitoring of the Annual Work Programmes of WAF. Budget and expenditure, as well as the inspection of the capital projects. The senior officers are able to analyse but they fall short on the inspection of urban capital projects. Sir, if they falling short on the urban can we imagine the inspection of the rural. So, in this regard, Mr. Speaker, they are unable to carry out inspection of rural water and sanitation capital projects under WAF and other implementing agencies.

The recommendation, Mr. Speaker, is that they recognise the Ministry's need for the position of Principal Engineer Regulatory to be filled and recommend that further discussions be undertaken with the Ministry of Economy to ensure that this position is filled at all times. In this regard, Mr. Speaker, because that position is vacant, we have been having water cuts in Rewa and ongoing low pressure and no water in taps, *vakaturuturu* they call it in the village. Honourable Minister *vakaturuturu* until morning affecting workers and school children and this has lasted between the three to four months. This is the real story in the village, honourable Minister.

In Rewa there is an old line they call it the *laini makawa* and this *laini makawa* comes from Kalabu to Naililili and to some other villages. The new line with the key near the Josaia Church affects villages downstream and these villages, Mr. Speaker, Sir, are the ones that I am addressing here. They are the villages of Lomanikoro, Nasigatoka, Nabua, Nasilai, Drekena, Nadoi, Vunuku, Tavuya, Narocivo, Nukui and villages in Vutia which are Muana-i-cake and Muana-i-ra. Also affected are villages in the *Tikina* of Burebasaga, Noco, Dreketi and Toga and because we are all in the same delta area Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think the areas of Tokatoka would be affected as well.

Another issue that we have Mr. Speaker, Sir, is the water meter disconnections. They are saying that there is no prior warning, just a sudden disconnection. So, please honourable Minister can you have a look at that also.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, this is on water bills, living in Suva and other urban areas, our water bills arrive regularly so we do not have any problems with water bills but it is in the villages that your water bill could arrive maybe six months or one or two years later and in that regard the bill is quite high, maybe \$3,000 or \$4,000. And trying to pay it off in instalments and you do not get a receipt for it, there is no update, it becomes very difficult.

When the villagers used to talk about this in the *Bose Vakoro*, I could not believe that anyone would get a water bill for \$3,000 or \$4,000 because water bills in Suva are not that much but then when I started getting my water bill and it was very high, I would just bring it to the attention of the honourable Minister if they could find a better way of informing the villagers as to what state their water bill is in so that they do not get these cuts and then it becomes very difficult. They have water in the river, rain is falling regularly now but when there is no water in the tap and then you have this huge bill, some of them do not know how to cope with that because it comes all of a sudden.

So, I would just ask the honourable Minister if he could have a look at that and see how they could work with the Provincial Office because that is where most of the water bills are sent and work more closely with the *Turaga ni Koro*. We know that these bills have to be paid but just that they are paid on time then they do not have a disconnection and our people do not go and starting cutting the pipes because they need water which is a basic need. I will just ask the Minister if he could look into that. I stand in support of the motion.

HON. A. JALE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, my contribution is going to be very short. I would like to thank the Committee for this Report on the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport. I do understand there has been a change of assignments of Ministers and the roles have changed.

I acknowledge the big work that you Ministers are doing, sometimes you cop a lot of complaints, sometimes very less ‘thank you’. I am sure that you do not get much ‘thank you’ but there are a lot of problems, a lot of complaints about the roads. I remember the time I was appointed the Secretary for Public Service, and I met a former Secretary for Public Service, Winston Thompson, in town. He told me, “Anare, do you know that the role of Secretary of Public Service is just like one sitting at the end of a sewer line?” I came to know about it later. It is like someone sitting at the end of the sewer line and I am sure that you Ministers are feeling the same way now.

I will now talk about Report that talks about the audit that was undertaken but I will be talking about water. I think it is so essential for living. I must commend the Agriculture Census Report. I think some of us had had a read of that report. Very interesting statistics have come through about the availability of water around Fiji. There are some who are very fortunate because they have natural sources, some depend on rain. When they do not have rain, they do not have water. So I think that report need to be looked at because it is a very good platform for us to plan things for the people.

The Water Authority pipeline in Vanuabalavu is connecting a lot villages but for years, two villages that are connected to that pipeline have not been getting water- Narociva and Namalata. When they were not getting water, what the villagers of Narociva did, they came to the Department of the Mineral Resources. They came to ask them if they could dig or drill a borehole at the village. They managed to find a source of water there.

So what happened, they wanted to connect the water from the borehole to the pipeline that had already been laid by WAF. Then the commotion came about. These two did not agree. WAF did not allow them to use to the line. These two departments, as you know, are under the same Ministry. I am asking the Government, these are the things that the people need in terms services. It is you and us. Try to help the people and see that proper service is given to the people.

The hurdles as I have already communicated to you, I am just putting this across because some of you have more role. There are a lot of roles and departments that come under your side. I am pointing this out to the Minister responsible. I took up this problem with the Minister responsible, I am not too sure where the situation is right now. I am asking and I am pleading to you - see that the people are not made to run around for services. Our problem is something that you need to sort out - it is not the people.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will be short too. Thank you for allowing me this time to contribute to this Committee report on Infrastructure and Transport, in particular, the recommendations on the Acts that are now with Solicitor-General. The WAF Act needs to be dealt with quickly so that the people within the water department can be more efficient and effective in the way that they do their processes and systems in dealing with the water supply to the population of Fiji.

It is important that legal people do their work quickly. I think it has been there for a long time. I do not know what is holding up the delay. It has been drafted properly, amendments made, et cetera, but I want to emphasise here that it is important to get the amendments ready and come to Parliament for whatever Regulations that is required to be improved and approved. It is important that the Water Supply Development Plan is there because water is essential to everyone. Land development is also ongoing and as people want to build their houses, they need water, so it is very

essential. At the moment, we are experiencing stoppages, low pressure, et cetera. It is probably because of lack of sources or supply to the reservoir. So, it is important to plan well ahead before the developers come in as developments need to be approved with the provision of water sources upfront.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the recommendation to review the Maritime Act and 34 Regulations, again, the delay is with the Solicitor General's Office. It is important to get this Act and Regulations approved so that professionals within the Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Authority of Fiji can do their work more efficiently and effectively.

While still on that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is also important to look at the jetty in Vanuabalavu, which still needs repair. Also, the shifting of the jetty from Tubou to Wainiyabia is important as it will also improve the facilities out there at the Natovi and Nabouwalu waiting area. Why can we not enlarge three or four lane in Nabouwalu and have two boat berthing places because of the density of traffic of boats going to Nabouwalu and Natovi? It is important to improve all those as we go along.

Just touching on the roads, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I appreciate that the roads have been improved in some places, better gravelled, better drainage, some are even tarsealed with roads that have been established there by previous governments and I thank the improvements that have been made. That is what the Government should do to continue improving whatever is there and build new ones as well.

A lot more roads need to be improved also both, in the urban and rural areas. I wish to bring into focus the road at Navakasiga, Bua. The honourable Minister knows these roads very well - the road to Wainunu in Bua and also Kubulau. I am stating this now and I would withdraw my written question that is later to be asked, and I will just follow up with the letter to the honourable Minister with regards to those roads in Navakasiga, Wainunu and Kubulau Road.

On bridges, the bridge on that road which is over water, it is important to build bridges particularly in Wainimala, Sawanikula to Nakorovou. There are two or three villages and settlements up there with a school and nursing station. Also, the Nabilodra Bridge in Namuavoivoi to the Wainunu side, so I will follow it up with a letter later on.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is important to build those bridges in particular a bridge in Nanivuda and Nakavika in Seaqaqa. There was a clip in the radio yesterday about some girls crossing a flooded river which is very risky. We need a bridge there from Nanivuda to Nakavika. You must make sure that you build bridges so that we do not forget some Fijians and it is important that no one is left behind.

There is a need to widen roads, Mr. Speaker, Sir. There are lots of queues and congestion in between Suva, Nausori and Lami. Why can you not build another road between Princes Road and Ratu Mara Road? The plan is already there, so you can do it slowly every year. Why can we not open up Viti Levu and Vanua Levu with roads? If you open up land for sugarcane and agriculture. You will find a lot of water resources there to help the people all along, Mr. Speaker. It is important to open the up the road from Nadi, Lautoka to Suva and link all the other towns around Viti Levu to provide the necessary infrastructure, not only for roads but for tourism as well, water, agriculture, forestry, et cetera.

With that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I already mentioned, I withdraw my Written Question No. 31/2022, as I will write direct to the honourable Minister. Thank you, Sir.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will be very brief since most of the issues have been covered by previous speakers.

My contribution will just like to highlight that in regards to the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport which FRA comes under, I believe FRA is one of those that gets the bulk of our national budget. They are always looking at about over \$600 million in a budgetary year.

We have also heard a robust debate in the House in regards to economic growth, particularly when we raise the issue on the report by ADB in regards to (maybe I can say) deteriorating the economic growth.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, ordinary citizens in regards to economic growth, their greatest measure or maybe their only measure is equated to public service delivery. The level of public service delivery, that equates or tells any ordinary citizen about economic growth.

Mr. Speaker, as mentioned by my previous colleagues in regards to our roads, the only issue I would like to highlight to raise here is the increase in accidents and the increased death rate. The other speakers have highlighted on pot holes, et cetera

Road accidents may be recent but, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is good that the Government takes note of that because the conditions of our roads could be a contributing factor.

The other issue is on road congestion, the traffic jam as highlighted by honourable Bulanauca. These are the important issues which according to ordinary citizens on the streets, they are concerned about this and that the level of Government service delivery in that regard tells them simply that is the economic growth that we are faced with right now.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on water supply, we know that the greater Suva area and even beyond, are continuously faced with intermittent water cuts and also out there in the rural area. For example, in Nabouwalu whenever it rains, there are water cuts but interestingly enough, that does not reflect in the rate that we pay for our water bills.

Also, I would like to acknowledge the Bula ko Lau Group that have reached out and supplied drinking water bottles to all our maritime islands, particularly to the schools, as we endeavour the opening of schools.

Still on rural water supply, I know I have brought this up in the House before in regards to the Yacata Island water supply. Everything is connected. There is a borehole, the pipes are being laid but the problem is the solar pump that has not been working for a quite number of years now, Mr. Speaker. I kindly request the honourable Minister if that could be looked into.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in regards to jetties, I know the Lomaloma Jetty has been mentioned but I would like to enlighten us that this Jetty was damaged way back in 2015, I had brought this up in the House and that resulted in a temporary repair. At that time, there was a different Minister then, the honourable Tikoduadua. After that it was promised in the House that it will be looked into for permanent repair, unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, Sir, up until now, nothing has been done. The honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services visited Vanuabalavu recently, so can attest to that, and the dangers that is involved, particularly in regards to the berthing of big boats like the *Lomaiviti Princess*.

On passenger shelters, I know I have been bringing this up but until now, there is still not much improvement, even though honourable Usamate has always said in the House that this will be

looked into. Until now, nothing much has really moved in regards to the provision of the passenger shelters and jetties, particularly in rural maritime communities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, he kept on saying this morning that we should hang our head in shame because of whatever we said but, honourable Usamate as the Minister responsible, should hang his head in shame for not measuring up to his commitment and to the promises he had made in regards to providing those services to the people, because no matter what you say that tantamounts to economic growth that you said has grown, but according to the service delivery, you have not measured up to that and that is how ordinary people are going to look at your economic growth.

HON. RATU T. NAVURELEVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the Standing Committee on Social Affairs for the completion of this Report. Before I continue, my contribution will be very short due to the fact that the Report has been outstanding since 2015, and that we have so many agenda in the Order Paper.

Before I continue, I think we have requested continuously in this House to the Government, to the honourable Prime Minister and the honourable Attorney-General, if he can give directive to Departments and Ministries to provide their annual report on time so that we can deliberate on the report a year after.

I note that one of the recommendations of the Committee is to work in strengthening the internal control and ensure that proper monitoring process is put in place. This was highlighted via the qualified opinion by the Office of the Auditor-General, only audited Financial Statement of the Ministry for the financial year ending 31<sup>st</sup> July, 2017.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, internal controls are the mechanisms, rules and the procedures implemented by the organisation to ensure the integrity of finance and accounting information promote accountability and prevents fraud. Internal controls are intended to prevent errors and irregularities, identify problems and ensure that corrective action is taken. So the need to strengthen internal controls in an organisation is very important.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other recommendation that I wish to highlight is the need for Water Authority of Fiji (WAF) (as alluded to by previous speakers) and the Ministry of Infrastructure to ensure that water tanks are installed in all remote maritime schools, rainwater harvesting and storage whilst awaiting alternative arrangement by WAF and donors.

Noting the information in the Report, as has been alluded to in this House before me, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that a total of 35 schools in Lau, Lomaiviti, Tailevu, Macuata, Bua, Cakaudrove, Ba and Nadroga province do not have access to running water. Data collection verification in schools will be carried out and relevant recommendations will be provided to implementing agencies including Water Authority of Fiji, donors and NGOs.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it has been after five years since we are debating on this Report and I hope the Ministry had delivered on this recommendation and all 35 schools now have access to running water whether through tanks, taps or other feasible means of drinking water. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to speak on a few issues I think is relevant to be brought up, it is relevant with this Report and I think it has to be highlighted in this House because it needs immediate action.

The roads. I travelled from Namuka to Labasa on Monday and noticed that the road was in a very poor condition with poor drainage and a lot of potholes. The portion of the road at Qelemumumu which was recently upgraded last year has started deteriorating because it was in the last stage of

been tarsealed and was left in that condition. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I raised this issue in this House during the last sitting for the honourable Minister to follow up and give directive for tarsealing. When coming across Labasa Town, there are potholes here and there. I think the honourable Attorney-General will agree with me because he was in the Northern Division last week.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the road to Nadogo, Vagani and Valovoni which I have highlighted in this House needs to be upgraded to provide road access to farmers to transport their produce to the market. One can understand that by having good access road, it will contribute dearly to the growth of our economy. More than 100 farmers in that interior of Vanua Levu desperately need good access roads.

Rural Water Supply - in the last several years villages are still waiting for the Vuci section for survey. There is a need for improvement for water system starting from the water catchment and to the village. The pipe system was installed 20 to 30 years ago. It needs to be improved to provide clean drinking water.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, electrification. The electricity grid line now installed from Wainikoro along Lagalaga, Nakelikoso and Nubu village and to Navukebuli village. Today the villages are waiting for contractors to do wiring and install power to their homes. Since the grid is only 10 to 15 kilometres away from the *tikina* of Namuka and Dogotuki, I request if it can be extended to those two *tikina*. Though we are provided with solar power, the solar power has been installed by the Ministry of Energy and has not been maintained for several years now and most are not working. I request the honourable Minister to consider these issues which are the needs of the vulnerable people in the rural areas.

Lastly to conclude, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would rather say no matter how fancy and how clever the honourable Attorney-General and speakers from the other side, trying to lecture us in this august House, the reality of our economy, its status is outside and that is what our people see, the poor road condition, unhealthy condition of our health facilities, very poor conditions of government quarters and the huge staff turnover. With all those words, Mr. Speaker, I recommend the Report before this august House. *Vinaka*.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, first of all I just want to say ‘thank you’ to honourable Gavoka for lightening the mood this afternoon with the potholes and the humps, Sir. I got a text message that said, “Bill’s got the hump over humps.” I could not stop laughing but it was unjust, honourable Gavoka.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the motion for debate on this particular Report and I thank the Standing Committee for the Report. The Standing Committee is thanked for reviewing the Report for the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport and my contribution today is specifically the Department of Transport and Government Shipping Services who, in April 2020, as part of the Government’s reform became part of the Ministry of Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we all know transport is critical to providing essential services, improving trade, tourism and access to domestic and international markets and the Department of Transport as stated in the Report is essential in these services and it provides policy and planning and advice for both the land and maritime transport sectors. So, with this responsibility the Department actually coordinates and monitors the Land Transport Authority and the Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this role has also included being a policy and a planning advisor of Government Shipping Services. So, one important aspect of the Report and its recommendations focus on the plans to protect the interest of consumers as beneficiaries of shipping services and it was

citing the review of the Maritime Transport Act and its 34 regulations and basically ask that it be expeditiously completed in consultation with the relevant stakeholders.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we can reassure this House that this process has already begun. First, in consultation with MSAF and some amendments have already been tabled before this House such as moving the administrative decision making powers in relation to maritime licences from the Ministry to MSAF and Mr. Speaker, Sir, this will actually minimise waiting time for all applications for maritime licenses and it will also improve organisation in terms of agility and support, in employee growth and development for personnel involved in the process and give way for technical expertise deliberations, resulting in better services delivered by MSAF to the people of Fiji.

We have also increased the duration of the coastal trade licensing and sea route licensing terms from 5 years to 20 years. This allows consistency with respect to the level of shipping services in Fiji and provides more security to licensed ship operators who have heavily invested in providing these important services. This can also be used as collateral to investment. These reforms will continue, Mr. Speaker, and coordination with the relevant agencies and the industry stakeholders will continue for the betterment of the shipping industry and maritime islands that we serve.

Furthermore, the Report alluded to whether there were plans to protect the interest of consumers as beneficiaries of shipping services. Last night I spoke on the services that were being delivered by the Government Shipping Franchise Scheme and GSS measures to ensuring the passengers and cargo are moved efficiently to our maritime islands.

We cannot overemphasise that the safety of passengers and cargo is actually paramount at all times. Mr. Speaker, Sir, in protecting the interest of consumers in the industry, it is only thorough that this Government and the consumer interest have been prioritised and it is being prioritised through the maritime travellers rights. The development of the Maritime Travellers Rights builds on Section 34(1) of the 2013 Constitution.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry has established a technical working group consisting of MSAF, the Consumer Council of Fiji, FCCC, Fiji Navy, Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development, Fiji Ports Corporation Limited and Office of the Solicitor-General and MCTTT and we have conducted and will continue to conduct nationwide consultations on maritime travellers' rights. It is an ongoing process Sir.

Mr. Speaker, we have actually completed consultations in the Western Division and I have received comprehensive feedbacks from our stakeholders including government officials who travel a lot to the maritime islands to address their grievances and also incorporate their rights in Maritime Travellers Rights Policy and Regulations. COVID-19, of course, has put a stop to us travelling around the country and we will resume as soon as we can.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Report had alluded to the protection of seafarers and amendments of the Maritime Transport Act. It is only through the FijiFirst Government that we are able to conduct nationwide consultations for the incorporation of the Maritime Labour Conventions into our domestic laws. MCTTT and Ministry of Employment are working closely to ensure the adoption of this very important Convention to ensuring that all seafarer's rights are protected. With those few words, I thank you for the opportunity and I support the recommendations of the Committee.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker and thank you for the opportunity to talk to this particular paper. I commend the motion to the House for the Report on the Review of the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport 2016 – 2017 Consolidated and 2015 Annual Report. Before

I talk to the Report proper, I think of all the comments that have been made today from the other side, only the first comment referred to the Report. All of the other comments were responding to things that are related to FRA or Water Authority of Fiji.

This report is about the Ministry of Infrastructure and what happens in the Ministry of Infrastructure. There is a distinct difference between Ministry of Infrastructure, Water Authority and FRA. The Minister gives policy oversight on these entities, so the kinds of issues that have been brought up here ideally would have been discussed when we talked about FRA and Water Authority of Fiji. It is very important for you to realise that.

In this Parliament, we need to focus our attention on the thing at hand. When there is an opportunity to talk about Water Authority of Fiji then give it, let us discuss it there. Only the first speaker talked the things that are in this Report and every person, they just talked about roads and water, they only talked about issues in their area. I do not know why you are doing, is it because everyone is listening. These issues are important, let me address, I need to make that distinction.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. J. USAMATE.- I think one of the incompetence that I see from the other side, is that when we are supposed discuss this Report, you do not talk about this Report, you talk about things that are of interest to you only in your so-called constituency. We need to learn as leaders to focus on the issue at hand.

The issues in this Report are about the issues in the Ministry. A lot of very important things were discussed in this Report about the Ministry and only the former Minister there, honourable Pio Tikoduadua talked about those issues. All of you talked about operational issues for the things that matter to you. We need to be able to focus our attention on these things.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. J. USAMATE.- This is not a debate on the Water Authority of Fiji Annual Report, nor is it a debate on Fiji Roads Authority. It is important to make the distinction.

Honourable Gavoka made his assertion about 90 per cent of the roads are not up to par or the humps are not painted and that is based on his driving from Sigatoka to Suva and back to Sigatoka. So, driving along that route, according to him 90 per cent of the humps are not painted. I just want to say that the humps that we have in Fiji, they are normally painted along with the routine maintenance. When you have the routine maintenance of that road then the humps are painted. They are not painted all the time. We have thousands of kilometres of roads, FRA cannot come to your hump every now and then and make sure that it is painted. It needs to establish a routine maintenance programme and implement that program over time because we have thousands of kilometres, 6,000 kilometres of roads so do not expect FRA every time, your particular hump is not paid for them to just come and paint your hump. They have to have a routine maintenance programme to make sure they cover all 6,000 kilometres throughout the year.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- You do not have the system that works.

HON. J. USAMATE.- There is a system.

(Laughter)

We are not talking only about the roads from Sigatoka to Suva; 6,000 kilometres. Sorry, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- Do not carry out a conversation between you two.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. J. USAMATE.- Secondly, honourable Gavoka talked about a road, a hole that was dug on the road in his village. The question that we ask is, who dug the hole?

(Laughter)

And we know that it was not WAF or FRA.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. J. USAMATE.- The honourable Member also raised the issue of water in Malomalo. There is actually water that goes by Malomalo towards InterContinental Hotel. This is the same sort of issue that exists at Momi where the infrastructure was done by FNPF to bring water to the hotels. I agree with that particular issue, there were some plans initially to divert some of that water back in 2016 to 2017. Now, WAF is looking into completing that particular exercise, in particular for Malomalo. But at the same time, in the space that we have from Deuba to Sigatoka, WAF has plans to try to address the water situation all along that area. Some of it will require the transfer of assets from FNPF to WAF.

Once you have transferred the existing assets to make sure that you can reticulate the water with sufficient pressure to all the settlements and villages, they have to build some tanks, some reservoirs to push the water in to have adequate pressure so that it can push out to all of these areas. So it is not just a matter of plugging the pipeline there and fixing all the pipes.

There are other things that the water engineers have to do; they put in the valves, they put in all other stuff and then you need to put in tanks. The honourable Member is shaking his head but that is the reality. Obviously, these hotels are a bit worried about pulling the water out. So that is the issue for Malomalo and that is also the same issue that the honourable Members has brought up for the Momi area. The same sort of thing is in play and that is what WAF is working on.

There was a lot of talk here about water and electricity. I must just remind this House that when we are talking about electricity, poles and et cetera, just remember something, there is one government that has made sure it is not left the rural people behind. Remember, Monasavu electricity was done in the 1970s. Everyone here was born in the 1970s?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Yes, most of them.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Sir, 1970s it was done and the people that supplied the source of that electricity, none of them got electricity until this Government came in.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. J. USAMATE.- Remember that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is a fact, it is not supposition, it is not hypothetical, it is a fact. If there is one government under one leader who has made sure that he can provide infrastructure to all the people in the rural areas it has been this Prime Minister and the Bainimarama Government and in the FijiFirst Government.

There are also complaints made about the Sigatoka Bridge. Those bridges were not done by us but we have spent a lot of effort in fixing those bridges up. Whether you are talking about Sigatoka Bridge, Rewa Bridge, Moto Bridge, all of these, there has been a lot of work done by FRA.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. J. USAMATE.- We built the Moto Bridge, we rebuilt it because it was washed away.

HON.V.R. GAVOKA.- Unbelievable!

HON. J. USAMATE.- I do not know whether I misheard the honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa but I think when she was talking about water in the Rewa area, it seemed to me that she was suggesting because we do not have that Principal Regulatory Engineer, that was the reason that we did not have water into the Rewa Delta.

Let me say this again, the provision of water into the Rewa Delta is not a function of the Ministry of Infrastructure. It is the role carried out by the Water Authority of Fiji. Water Authority of Fiji is the implementation arm of the Ministry to make sure that water gets to you. Let me also tell the honourable Member, I have walked down that pipeline from Narere to make sure where it terminates in the Rewa Delta. I have gone also across the creek to make sure that that was done, I have walked along and I made sure that the water came back on at that particular time. But remember this, the Ministry of Infrastructure has policy, regulation oversight. Actual doing anything about water, it is Water Authority of Fiji. We tell them what to do, they have to do it. If that engineer position was there or not, we expect Water Authority of Fiji to do it. I, as the Minister would give them that particular instruction. So I think it is important to make that particular distinction.

There are issues about rural water. Water Authority of Fiji has some responsibilities for making sure that we get water into our rural areas. Also some of the work is done by the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development, and where necessary, boreholes is also looked at by the Department of Mineral Resources. I noticed my senior old boy has started reading all if his written questions about the things that he had asked. Lomaloma Jetty, which he is talking about, I can assure this House at the moment it is under design stage. The Jetty is being designed and hopefully with the financial situation allowing, we should be able to put it into the budget in the very near future. Also the roads that he is talking about, for Naivaka Road, Naivaka Road, there is already a pilot. I have driven along that road and I have reached Naivaka Village, early last year or the year before. I cannot remember, but soon that road will be designed so it can become an all-weather type of road.

The other ones that he talked about, the re-building of Nabilodra Bridge - FRA has already got it planned for doing that. Waisa, Natokalau and Kubulau Roads, all of those roads are actually part of the Fiji Pine Logging Access Roads and we are not part of the FRA maintenance programme. However, FRA is working with the Commissioner Northern, land owning units and Fiji Pine to make sure that this road gets vested to Government, and once FRA has it, then they can look into the

maintenance. Sir, FRA, of course will need 60 per cent written consent from the land owning units, so perhaps the honourable Member can help in trying to get that consent.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, now to get to the issues that we were supposed to cover which are the things that are in this particular Report. I appreciate the work of this particular Committee because the issues that are here, and as I am sitting here, I am not the only person who has served in this Ministry, honourable Bala has served and honourable Pio Tikoduadua. If you look at the 2015 Report, you will see that honourable Tikoduadua was Minister there at that time. But this issue of TMAs and the variances is something that a number of Ministers have tried to address.

We have had a big problem back in 2009 where there was a bit of funny business that went on in the Ministry, and in fact, there is still a court case going on where people were fraudulent in terms of ordering materials. Some people are now in the prison because of that but the case is still ongoing. As a result of that, it still has this issue about the TMAs. So it is a legacy issue. It is 12 years, our finance people at the Ministry are telling us that they have measures in place and they are working together with the Ministry of Economy. Perhaps some of these issues might have to be written off because the records are no longer there in some particular cases, especially for the TMAs. Some of the issues such as VAT receivable balances, I think that particular issue has been sorted out. And all of these things have arisen from the FICAC cases that came at that particular point in time.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, rather than deal with each of the individual issues that are here, if I just go straight to the recommendations of this Report. The first one, to prevent the recurrence of such audit issues, the Committee recommends that the Ministry continue to strengthen its internal controls and ensure proper monitoring processes are put in place. I agree entirely with this recommendation. This is something that ever since we walked into the Ministry we have been pushing. Internal controls have to be continuously strengthened. I am glad to see the changes that have been put in place since that particular time. All the Ministers, when we walk into a Ministry, I think one of the things we require from them is no qualified opinions. The audit should be unqualified and this is the challenge for us especially for these TMA accounts.

We have been looking at strengthening the compliance. We have changed out some of the authorities in the past. The financial system, the storeman and individual people could get into that system. Now, we have changed - who has the authority to do what on the computer system.

You know you always have a challenge in any organisation. If you want to do things fast, you delegate responsibility and authority down. You get speed out of that. The problem with that is when you delegate, you also have a higher risk of people doing the wrong thing, which is what happened in this case. So what we have done since then, we have had to centralise some of the authorities to make sure that some of the funny business that went on, that we can put a stop to that kind of funny business.

The second recommendation that we have, in relation to the issue that the honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa talked about the position of the Principal Engineer Regulatory. Yes, the position is no longer there but the responsibilities of that position are still being implemented. When you have a function that needs to be done, you can do it by having a person in that position or you can find other ways of getting that function done.

What the Ministry has done over time, the responsibilities that the honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa talked about, those responsibilities are being done by the team in coordination with the Director for Water and Sewerage and with the technical people that he has. That also gives them an opportunity to upskill their own competencies and their abilities.

The other recommendation that we have here is that that the Ministry vigorously pursue with WAF to ensure that the relevant clauses of the Water Authority of Fiji Act and bylaws are provided to the Solicitor-General's Office for amendment. This is to strengthen some of the things that were happening in the area of water and sanitation.

I can inform the House that Water Authority of Fiji has been working on this. They have been prepared the relevant amendments to the Act and Water Supply Bylaws and these are being submitted to the Solicitor-General. So work is progressing on changing the laws, changing the regulations so we can have better control on some of the issues that were brought up in this particular audit.

The next recommendation was that the Ministry ensure that the National Water Resources Management and Sanitation Policy is complete. The Department of Water and Sewerage has been working with an ADB Consultant and we have finalised this National Water Resources Management and Sanitation Policy with the assistance of a technical working group. It is with the Solicitor-General's Office. The work is progressing on completing that policy and taking it to Cabinet so that it becomes formalised.

The next recommendation, that the Ministry assist the Department of Water and Sewerage in updating and upgrading its IT system in order to redevelop its current National Water and Sanitation database. That work has been working. We have been updating the database and working with ITC. The Ministry has also written to Digital Fiji for assistance on the re-development of the database and the data collection tool to be used in the field. Digital Fiji has met with the Department and has informed us that they will assist with the re-development in the future.

With the issue of water to the schools, this is something that the Ministry has been working together with WAF, Ministry of Education and NGOs. So, we work with the school committees, we help them out, we send the technical teams from WAF and where necessary, the Department of Mineral Resources will also go and provide boreholes where they do not have access to surface water.

So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, once again I thank the Committee for its Report. It has given us a good report and focus to continue look at improving what we are doing. As the honourable Acting Prime Ministers said, audits are good because they remind us about things that we need to improve.

Our focus is always continual improvement for water to make sure that we can give 100 per cent access to all Fijians of safe and clean water, address our issues on safe wastewater and sanitation and also our plans for enhancing the roads that we have across Fiji.

A lot of talk about potholes. When you have a pothole situation, we have a plan with the Fiji Roads of Authority to try to fix all the roads within a passage of four to six years. I am talking about 6,000 kilometres of road. When you want to rebuild and remake roads, it is very expensive. So, you will have some money set aside for rebuilding and remaking certain numbers of kilometres of roads but at the same time when potholes do happen, you have to fix the potholes on a temporary measure. At the same time you are focussing on rebuilding the whole road and that is what FRA will continue to do in the interest of providing service to all the people of our country. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Just very quickly from policy perspective, the honourable Minister has very aptly highlighted the challenges faced by, for example, FRA's 6,000 kilometres, et cetera, even though the Report was on the Ministry as he highlighted. But the point I would like to make, Sir, is that, there are number of legal issues involved so it is a policy with constraint

Honourable Gavoka highlighted the issue about someone digging up a hole on the road. There is actually a trench across the road. People are doing that wilfully at a very negligent basis. So, someone has got a house on this side, the brother has built a house in the other side of the road, they just decide to connect their water, they will just dig the road up, that is what they do. That is precisely what happened in Sila and Nayevuyevu.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- No, in Siga too there is a hole, in Nayevuyevu too. The same thing exactly happened in Nayevuyevu. The point is, if you were going to say, “well go and fill up the hole, FRA’s job”, that means you are encouraging this people to destroy and damage public infrastructure. In the same way, if someone has got a power pole, we can say, “well they will just go and connect to the electricity, let us allow it to happen”. We cannot and, in fact, we have talked about how we need to bring about laws to ensure that people do not go and wilfully damage public infrastructure. There is a particular process to be followed and that will actually add additional cost to Government and, of course, the public itself.

The other issue that I would like to also raise, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that from a budget perspective, if we drive around the Kings Road, you will see so on the highway all these bridges being replaced. All the way from Tavua up to Tailevu North, and also Moto. In Moto, the road used to be up here, you go all the way down to the crossing, then you go back up. Today, the bridge is at the same level as the road. But we were in Maranitawa with honourable Bala and honourable Viam Pillay. Maranitawa area is actually like an island and they said, “We asked the Alliance Government, we asked the SVT Government, we asked the Labour Government, the SDL Government and all the other Governments, to please just give us a few culverts because the culvert is this narrow but the actual small river is this wide. So, every time it rains it actually floods. The very fundamental issues like that need to be addressed.

Before COVID-19, they identified about 400 bridges, crossings, et cetera, that needed to be redone or replaced completely. We were in the Northern Division, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Wailevu West Coast Road - Dawara, St. Paul’s Primary School and Wailevu East Primary School we went to, Sir, I remember quite specifically in St. Paul’s Primary School, they were saying, “Thank you very much for actually replacing the crossing altogether. It is a lot higher, it is better and now the trucks can come to us. We can go quite easily to Savusavu.”

We were in Baulevu where they had the break-in at the temple. One complaint was about roads but the reason why the machinery could not get to that part of Baulevu was because there was a very old bridge built probably in the colonial times. Now, that entire bridge is being replaced - a new concrete bridge altogether, so the machinery also will be able to get across.

Honourable Bulanauca said, “Let us build a new road from Nausori to Suva” to stop the traffic. You see, this is such a simple term approach to things. We talked about how we are going to now have suburban bus terminals, to allow people who live in Davuilevu, for example, to be able to come across very easily to the main road and catch buses. Public transportation is the way to go, that is why we have got four-lane roads. That is the solution.

He also wants us to build a road from Suva to Nadi across Viti Levu which is going to be an enormous cost, yet the same time they talk about debt. That will actually cost literally billions of dollars. There was an initial study done. Admittedly, Sir, they reckon the travelling time will take about an hour and half if you go through ACS area all the way down through to Nadi. But, Sir, it is going to cost billions of dollars because you have to cut through mountains and hills. So, you see,

we have to put these things into perspective. There is no point standing here and saying it, when you do not actually have the financial capacity to be able to deal with that, Sir.

I just wanted to put that into perspective about the fact that we have all these issues that we need to address upon policy and financial perspective. Road signages, before we used to have all these villages. You would have some company that will have their big signage and then at the bottom will be the name of the village. Today, every single village on the Coral Coast, along Kings Road had got a big sign that tells you what the name of the village is. So I do not what honourable Gavoka is raising about road signage. Thank you, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- I thank the honourable acting Prime Minister. I now give the floor to the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs to speak in reply.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do not have any further comments.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote to note the content of the Report.

Question put.

Motion agreed.

### **CONSOLIDATED REVIEW REPORT - FIJI FINANCIAL INTELLIGENCE UNIT 2019 & 2020 ANNUAL REPORTS**

HON.V. NATH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move:

That Parliament debates the Consolidated Review Report of the Fiji Financial Intelligence Unit 2019 and 2020 Annual Reports which was tabled on 21<sup>st</sup> September, 2021.

HON. V.K. BHATNAGAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

HON.V. NATH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee tabled its findings on the Fiji Intelligence Unit (FIU) 2019 and 2020 Annual report in September 2021. While 2019 had been business as usual for the Unit, 2020 was a unique year for FIU as it was for the rest of us – as this was when Fiji was crippled by the first wave of COVID-19.

As we are aware, FIU is one of the leading agencies in Fiji that is responsible for preventing and detecting money laundering and terrorists financing activities. The Committee commends the team of FIU for continuing its work, despite the challenges presented by COVID-19 pandemic since 2020.

The Committee noted the substantial increase in Financial Transaction Reports from 1,741,473 in 2016 to 2,487,186 in 2020. Due to the impact of COVID-19 on travel, Border Control Reports reduced by 77 per cent in 2020 from 2019. During its deliberation, it was noted that FIU launched its first Case Management System, an online central database for all suspicious transaction reports and analysis in 2019.

The Committee was pleased to note that FIU continued to strengthen its engagement with designated non-financial businesses and professions, as well as other industry stakeholders and enforcement authorities. Further to this, the Committee was made aware that FIU was currently in

the process of designing tailor-made guidelines for the various stakeholders they work with.

The Committee believes that FIU need to explore further options to forge a stronger commitment with law enforcement agencies in terms of receiving regular feedbacks on cases referred by FIU, as regular feedbacks would enable FIU to continuously enhance its service delivery.

Furthermore, the Committee commended the FIU for finalising its 2020-2024 Strategic Plan, which focuses on Financial Intelligence, Preventative Measures, Technology Driven Processes, Partnership and People, as this strengthens its commitment towards SDGs 16 and 17.

COVID-19 alone also bought cyber threat as more people were turning towards virtual world. The Committee recommended the FIU to engage in vigorous awareness through online platforms, such as hosting webinars and virtual talk shows to educate and inform the general public on the various threats, possible fraudulent activities and scams. Thank you, Sir.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will be very short. I was always fascinated by the work of the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU). I served in the Economic Affairs Standing Committee for some years and I always look forward to their reports to get to understand what they do. They carry out some very important, mostly surveillance on transactions that can lead to crime across the borders, especially in financial areas.

I just noticed here in Recommendation No. 2 that the Fiji Law Society (FLS) has encouraged 42 of their employees to attend training with FIU to understand the implications of the transactions that are handled by the lawyers.

Essentially, Mr. Speaker, Sir, you need to track the movement of huge sums of money into Fiji, to understand where it is coming from, that it is not drug-related or crime-related and the lawyers, because of their Trust Accounts, are normally recipients of this. Some of them do not always realise that the money is dirty.

When I was in the Committee, I noticed that the lawyers were not fully conversant with the requirements of the FIU, so I am happy to see that happening now, that there is training. The FLS is encouraging its people to understand what FIU is and what is required of them so that the lawyers do not have dirty monies sitting in their Trust Account, which is good.

However, I do not see here anything with the Real Estate because we also spoke about the real estate people. They are also conduit for dirty money. Someone can buy a property in Fiji and it is the real estate to bring in that money and it could be dirty money. The real estate people also have to be trained to understand the roles relating to FIU. I hope if that could be included and added to the recommendation that what the lawyers have undertaken to understand FIU should also be with the real estate community.

That, Mr. Speaker, is my contribution, but otherwise it is an agency of Government that we can all be proud of. They are doing a very good job, they hire some very highly qualified people. The police who are seconded there are experts in forensic accounting and all that, and is always delightful listening to them when we scrutinise their report.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the real estate issue, I just wish that they would take note of that, but otherwise I thank the Committee for this Report on the FIU.

HON. V.K. BHATNAGAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as a member of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, I rise to make a short contribution to the motion on the floor. Definitely, I agree

with the honourable Gavoka that it is always a pleasure to have Mr. Buksh and his presentations are just amazing and very informative.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the core role of the FIU as an intelligence agency is to receive, analyse and disseminate financial intelligence to relevant law enforcement agencies and I must say, this is because of the dynamic leadership of Director, Mr. Razim Buksh, the Unit has grown from strength to strength in carrying out its mandate with utmost robustness and passion and I applaud the Unit for the great work they carry out.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, FIU administers data mining and data monitoring systems to generate meaningful intelligence that is shared with its law enforcement partners both in Fiji and internationally. The FIU currently has over 20 million financial transaction records in its database. This information is extremely useful in profiling suspects, identifying and monitoring flow of funds, tracing syndicates and conducting related financial surveillance. Through this enhanced network of information and information sharing, the Unit has helped enforcement agencies to successfully convict perpetrators. The profiling and targeting of key individuals in complex criminal activities through the collaboration and partnership of law enforcement agencies shows how we can disrupt international criminal networks in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the FIU is empowered under the FTR Act to enter into bilateral MOUs with foreign counterparts and foreign law enforcement agencies to exchange information, relevant to the prevention, investigation and prosecution of offences related to money laundering and other serious criminal activities and this has led to bilateral MOUs with the 163 FIUs internationally including their Chinese counterparts, China Anti-Money Laundering, Monitoring and Analysis Centre.

The FIU has also engaged in local MOUs with agencies such as Post Fiji and as stated by Director Buksh, these are important steps in protecting Fiji from money laundering. The MOU with Post Fiji will assist the FIU to assess what are the excess, additional information such as money order transactions and postal service data when conducting intelligence analysis on case by case basis to ensure the safety and security of all Fiji residents.

I understand the FIU has signed similar MOUs with 12 other agencies and stakeholders. I hope we will see more local MOUs with FIU to ensure the core aim of the FIU to collate financial intelligence and provide this to law enforcement agencies for their investigation and prosecution of financial crimes and the tracing and for future of proceeds of these crimes is fulfilled.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, 2020 brought its own unique challenges to the organisation as we were hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. As most people started working from home and perhaps spending more time on the internet, there is a great shift in our everyday lives as we now, more than ever before rely on internet even to purchase food. The online scams are harsh reality of this new era of technology and it is rather unfortunate that hardworking individuals are being scam almost every day.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as recommended by our Committee, we encourage FIU to continue to engage in vigorous awareness sessions through social media platforms, webinars, virtual talk shows and awareness campaigns to ensure that people do not fall victims to horrible online scams and that all Fijians understand the risk and the scope of fraudulent rate activities and scams. The FIU also contributes to the Sustainable Development Goal No. 16 – peace, justice and strong institutions. In particular target number 16.4 which aims to significantly reduce illicit financial and arms law, strengthening the recovery and return of stolen assets and combat all forms of organised crimes by 2030. With these words, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I once again commend FIU for the great work they carry out and I wish them well for the year ahead. Thank you.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- I rise to contribute to the motion on FIU. I thank the Chairman and the Committee for the Report before us. Before I go onto that, I would like to emphasise and stress the assertion made by the other side of the House on FDB that we threaten its existence, no we do not. That was the kind of reasoning also they expressed on Fiji Airways when we debated the guarantee for them. So, what we are concerned about is the prudent financial management of this nation, debt management and proper economic management and that has been provided in various reports including the ADB Report.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- FDB.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Not FDB but ADB Report which confirms what we have been saying on debt and all those issues which we have been emphasising. So that is the reason why we are raising the concerns about further guarantees for FDB or any other institution. We support the existence of these institutions, FDB and Fiji Airways, but to be managed in a prudent way and that is why we have been raising some of the financials from the reports, including the purchase of the Fiji Airways aircraft.

On the FIU Report, it is very interesting if some of you have the opportunity to read through it, please I encourage you to. I do commend the FIU and the management about the thoroughness of their reports and activities. One of the interesting parts of it is the Electronic Funds Transfer Reports and this is related to the inward remittance. Let me highlight that on page 65. We received 1.86 million transactions, Electronic Funds Transfer Reports in 2019, 74 per cent was from the money remittance service providers and 85 per cent of that is inward remittance.

Again, let me just say this for your interest and also for the listeners, on page 76, in terms of inward - the international remittance transactions, were conducted from the following 10 countries: Australia, United States of America, New Zealand, United Kingdom, Canada, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Cook Islands and Tuvalu. If you look at the graph or pie chart there, 36 per cent is from Australia followed by 23 per cent from the United States of America, followed by New Zealand, United Kingdom, Canada Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, et cetera. So, it is quite interesting when you look at the inward remittances dominated by Australia, United States of America and New Zealand.

On the ADB Report, again they emphasised that. Let me read it out ‘personal remittance inflows have been stable averaging 5.1 per cent of GDP during 2014-2019. Such inflows surged by 11 per cent in 2020 driven by higher than usual payments from Fijians living abroad to family members in the country struggling with the economic downturn’. And in the latest Reserve Bank of Fiji Economic Review January 2022, they also emphasised that.

In the external sector inward personal remittances grew by 14.6 per cent in 2021 to reach a new record of \$842.2 million, which is very substantial. Of the total cash transfers received, \$498.5 million were remitted via money transfer operations, \$187.2 million through mobile money platforms and \$156.5 million through commercial banks. Again, I emphasise it is a major income for the nation in terms of our economy, which we are happy about but the question which I raise is, what are some of the reasons for the increase in this?

Of course, more of our people are sending money and that also indicates that a lot of our people are moving out for better opportunities. I ask the question, why are they moving out? Are they seeking a better opportunity, of course? The other question is, are the local conditions under the FijiFirst Government conducive for our people to remain in Fiji? That is the fundamental question we have been asking when we are looking at this kind of data and, of course, this also indicates significant brain drain since the coup of 2006 up to now.

And that is, Sir, one of the fundamental questions we need to ask ourselves and I am trying to emphasise here whether the FijiFirst Government since 2006 *coup* up to now whether they have properly analysed our human resources whether we have a proper human resource plan in terms of the overall needs of our nation taking into account this kind of figures and the brain drain and the outward movement on migration of our mainly qualified people. This includes our various technical professions. What kind of study has been done to determine the outward movement and what actions have been taken to address this by the FijiFirst Government or are they ignorant of it? For example, let me take the cases of the nurses.

The nursing association have raised this issue about the resignation of nurses claiming stress, fatigue, lack of compensation et cetera. The President of the Fiji Nursing Association claims most of the nurses were sick and tired, others were leaving ...

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, just stick to the Report.

HON. V. NATH.- Yes, stick to the Report.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Yes, I am trying to explain, Sir, the inward remittances and linking it to outward labour movement which is linked to exactly what I am saying. The dissatisfaction of our local labour force. Sir, I had raised this as a motion in terms of an enquiry into the health sector workforce regarding the issues which they have raised. Not only that but still on FRCS on the monitoring of income or financial transactions. I had noted in terms of foreign investors, that is also raised in the Report and under the foreign investment regulations, there are reserved activities and restricted activities.

Under that I am questioning how, does FIU monitor those foreigners who are coming in on various types of visas engaging in the various activities under these categories and the movement of their funds. This needs to be clearly looked into because some of them coming under those various visas and they end up a citizens as we note with a lot of new businesses which are been set up now. So, they have become citizens but we need to be clear on how they came in. Those are some the issues I thought I had to raise on the FIU. Again, I thank the Committee on the Report before us and I commend it to the House.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Sir. I will really brief, Sir. Just to note that FIU does play a very critical role. They do a lot of coordination behind the scenes with the organisations like the FRCS. There is lot of intelligence gathering and in fact there is a lot tax evasion that does take place.

The other point that I would like to also make, Mr. Speaker, Sir, very quickly, the FIU in fact has been meeting with the Real Estate Agencies Licencing Board too together with the law society members. There is compliance under the FTRA Act, Transaction Reporting Act. In fact, a number of members of the law society's trust account, it is just that they are not aware that this money is not clean, some of them actually are aware of it and there is certain obligations that they need to fulfil. One important issue that is also emerging Sir which is a matter on interest is cryptocurrency. I mean, these are the kind of things that are actually creeping into the system and the FIU can also help us with that type of information.

Recently, you would have seen, Sir, it was advertised, I think it is on social media that Nananu-i-Cake was being set up as a cryptocurrency haven which is, of course, false and as we all know that crypto currency, in fact, is utilised by a lot of people who engage in illegal activities, for example, proceeds from drugs, prostitution and various other transnational crimes. The former Whip of SODELPA in fact was promoting crypto currency and said that Fiji should actually move

completely into crypto currency. Unfortunately, obviously these are the sort of things that are coming into the system, the law needs to stay ahead of the game and FIU can help us in that respect.

Sir, I would also like to just very quickly inform honourable Tuisawau that the biggest brain drain that this country actually saw was in 1987; two *coups* in 1987. There was no assessment done then, in fact, that was a biggest brain drain; in 2000 a very violent removals of government. A lot of violence based on ethnicity, outright ethnicity was carried out and of course Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji at that time post 1987 for a couple of years had the dual citizenship before that. That was also revoked.

The Bainimarama Government actually brought back multiple citizenship holding for former Fijians and that is where we have seen a number of Fijians actually come back, some of them have set up businesses, they brought in money too. Where they are talking about Pullman, these are people who brought money from offshore and they are former Fijians, Sir.

The reason why we are getting a bit more money being sent home, Sir, is honourable Minister Bala's Ministry under the Pacific Labour Scheme. We are seeing nearly every month or every two months a lot of Fijians are going across to work in places like Australia where they have now opened up their market in terms of the labour force market not only for fruit picking which is traditionally the only thing they used to do. New Zealand, at one stage, used to hire people from Fiji to work in slaughter houses for export to the Middle-East but now, Australia is opening up in various other areas, so we see a lot of Fijians who are going across and working.

There are Fijians who are working as security personnel in countries like well just until recently Afghanistan of course the Middle-East, some are working as nurses. This is why you will see that money is coming back. Those in the British Army, they are sending money back through this money wallets which is a lot easier for them. It does not necessarily indicate a brain drain per se because on the other flip-side we are getting a lot of people who are also coming back, Sir. So, I just wanted to clarify that with the honourable Member.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the FIU of course is housed in the Reserve Bank of Fiji and we would like to acknowledge the assistance that the RBF actually does provide to FIU. They fully fund FIU and FIU is part of the Anti-Money Laundering Council which is made up of various agencies, including the Ministry of Justice.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs to speak in reply.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, you might remember when honourable Gavoka was member of this Committee, I can be corrected on that, we did rope in Real Estate Agents Licensing Board (REALB) for presentation but this time while writing the Report, due to COVID-19 and we were doing virtually so we could not get all these agencies again. It is a valid point. We did have discussions with REALB and definitely FIU in the near future will put them together.

I have no further comments to make.

MR. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote to note the content of the Report.

Question put

Motion agreed to.

**REVIEW REPORT – MINISTRY OF YOUTH AND SPORTS 2018–2019 ANNUAL REPORT**

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move:

That Parliament debates the Review of the Ministry of Youth and Sports 2018–2019 Annual Report which was tabled on 21st September, 2021.

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

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the core responsibility of the Ministry of Youth and Sports is to establish a policy environment that provides strategic support systems, initiatives for personal development, character building, sports policy implementation, and community based youth led programmes.

The Ministry of Youth and Sports has put in place opportunities for our youth to be empowered and be self-sustainable through its mobile and specific skills, empowerment and capacity building training programmes. These programmes within the Ministry fill a vital gap and are for those youth who are not able to enroll in formal education.

The Ministry of Youth and Sports, through the implementation of Youth Empowerment and Livelihood programmes has provided encouragement and support to youth through initiatives centered on development either through the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills, volunteer and work attachments and formal or informal employment.

Furthermore, the Ministry continues to offer trainings to youth through its five Youth Training Centres around the country along with the community based mobile skills training in rural and urban communities. The trainings often run in coordination with other Ministries, particularly the Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Fisheries and the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs to ensure the prudent and effective use of resources.

Additionally, the Ministry conducts regular monitoring of youth groups before and after training to ensure skills and knowledge obtained are put to practice and various youth groups are also assisted through funding support either directly through the Ministry or through donor funding to start their income generation projects.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to conclude, given Fiji's young population, the Ministry carries the responsibility of harnessing and channeling the untapped raw potential of Fiji's young people and releasing them into productive areas of society where they can make a difference. And this is made possible through the provision of trainings to develop both soft and hard skills, encouraging networking, mentoring, providing opportunities to build leadership skills through local level implementation and promoting entrepreneurship and innovation.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion.

HON. RATU S. MATANITOBUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise with your indulgence to contribute to the motion before the House on the Ministry of Youth and Sports Annual Report for 2018 – 2019.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, at the outset, may I thank the Chairman and the members of the Committee for their Report. Nevertheless, it is now three years since the period under review. It is most satisfactory, Sir, that ministries are submitting their reports late to this august House. As my colleague the honourable Rasova said yesterday, it is a breach of the Financial Management Act and

an affront to taxpayers who fund the activities of the Government, that Ministries submit their reports after one or two years to the people's House that approves their budget on time annually every July.

Sir, I will focus my contribution on the work of the Ministry in the empowerment of youth, as I have already contributed. This morning on the topic of sports development on the motion regarding the Fiji National Sports Commission, it is clear, Sir, that the sports development responsibility of the Ministry is carried out primarily by the Sports Commission, Boxing Commission and Sports Council.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, making reference to the Youth Training Programme by the Ministry of Youth and Sports, I wish to raise two points:

Firstly, if the Honourable Minister for Youth and Sports to inform this House on the status of the implementation of the National Youth Development Plan. Secondly, the status of the aligning and upgrading of youth training programme using the achievements of Tutu Youth Centre in Cakaudrove as a benchmark.

Once we are able to get answers on these two important matters, I think we can create a meaningful discussion the future development in Fiji. The youth, Mr. Speaker, Sir, are an integral component of our society. They are affected by all the legislations, policies and programmes of the Government. Whilst, the majority of youth are not employed in the formal sector, they contribute to Government revenue directly and indirectly via taxes, fees, levies, fines, duties, tariffs and et cetera.

I am encouraged by the many youth groups who are now undertaking youth farming on a collective and *solesolevaki* basis all over Fiji, earning a living and contributing to their *vanua*. More importantly, Sir, it is the youth who will inherit the legacy left behind by the Government and therefore the voice of the youth matters, they must be heard and the Government must learn to listen to them.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the three main consequences of this Government's poorly planned and implemented policies and programmes for our youth are:

1. Poverty and high unemployment (youth have a higher unemployment rate than the general population);
2. High public debt that the youth will inherit and have to repay (most recently the Asian Development Bank raised its concern in the report on the decision to downgrade Fiji from C grade to B grade) ; and
3. Environmental exploitation

This, in turn, is worsened by the high cost of living, inflation, over-regulation, excessive fees and charges, over-taxing, rampant destruction of our flora, fauna, natural resources and environment. The overarching mood of the youths specifically and the nation generally is that of resignation and migration. It appears that their only hope is to travel overseas to work as seasonal workers into Australia and New Zealand. In this regard, Fiji has been on the United States of America list for the seasonal worker programme but Government has not facilitated this.

Many youth have lost their sense of belonging and ownership. This is the lowest sense of patriotic citizenship since our nationhood and the blame for this squarely lies on the Government and its leadership. The British Statesman, Sir Winston Churchill said and I quote: "It is easy to deceive the youth because they believe in hope."

Mr. Speaker, Sir, realising the maxim in full measure, the policies and programme floated in the Manifesto of the FijiFirst Party in 2014 and 2018 sought to raise the hope of our youth leading them to vote them but in turn the FijiFirst Government not only failed but betrayed the youth of Fiji for their own goods. Today, those manifesto promises are proven hollow and are mocked by the youth as the ultimate *vesumona*.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, last March we debated the Auditor-General's Report on Government Departments including the Ministry for 2016, the Public Accounts Committee noted that the Ministry had issues with monitoring the various grants given to the youth groups.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of this is uncertain and unaccounted issuance of tools, farm implementation and allocation of leases or lands, plant machineries, fitting and equipment to those youth graduating from the Fiji College of Agriculture, Navuso Agriculture School and those trained and inducted under the National Youth Training Scheme and has deterred many capable youth from joining and befitting from such initiatives because at the end of the day, it all boils down whether there is enough funding to cater for them to establish and start a new life. I see the honourable Minister has been giving out farm implements once again. He is on the campaign trail for 2022. Will the same issues arise in the Auditor-General's Report for 2021 and 2022?

Sir, the Ministry undertook to establish Standard Operating Procedures and to review its youth grant programme and I am hopeful this has been implemented by the Ministry. Sir, the youth of today need jobs that is the best solution. While the Ministry's Annual Report is very eye-catching with a lot of photos, the reality is that despite promising to empower youth to establish their own businesses to become self-employed in small and micro-businesses, the truth is very few youths from the thousands trained have successfully set up businesses. The Ministry seems to be carrying out a lot of activities in the rural areas with workshops and trainings but the same vocational training is offered at FNU.

While more youths are trained in the short courses, the question is how many can enter formal employment with these qualifications. How many are supported to start their own businesses? I would like the honourable Minister to answer this question in his response please. Another ongoing issue, Sir, with the Ministry is the failure to develop sporting facilities around the two major islands and in the rural and maritime areas as pledged by the FijiFirst Party in its election manifesto in 2014.

I note the Ministry's Annual Report for 2018-2019 on page 51 states once again that the construction of 100 rural sporting venues were delayed due to failure to appoint a consultant to assess the 10 grounds and changing requirement from the Ministry of Infrastructure I wonder what excuse the honourable Minister will offer today for the continuing delays. Instead the Government wasted millions of dollars on the Natadola Golf extravaganza and the Super Rugby matches. Mr. Speaker, the youth have now become delusional with the broken promises and the reality on the ground of poverty for which there is no relief because of the national debt. It is also useful, Sir, to note that the Auditor-General's Report noted year-in and year-out, the same mistake and failures of internal controls and monitoring in not only this Ministry but across the board.

The truth, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that the public service reforms have failed. Short-term contracts have failed to ensure job security and confidence. The removal of public service examinations and training, in fact the removal of the whole Public Service Commission machinery and its replacement with a department of only a few staff compound the failure. Parts of the Public Service Commission functions are now all hived into the super Ministry of Economy. It is any wonder then that we have confusion, malaise and fear in the public service.

In the Ministry of Youth and Sports where youth officers were laid off their jobs and their positions were re-advertised with another name but the same job description and reduced salaries. I think I have put it out in my earlier speech to the Minister, Sir. This kind of unfair, vindictive and unjust governance does the people of Fiji no favours.

I note with sadness that the same issue will come up again when it comes to the performance of the Government ministries and I urge all people not to be caught up in the hype and fear mongering of the coming election and to choose wisely for their future generation. And I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. T. WAQANIKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, my contribution will not be that lengthy. My honourable colleagues have made their substantive contributions including the honourable Members from the other side of the House. Thank you to the Committee for this Report. I guess one of the things that the Ministry could look at improving is their communications because I saw on today's Facebook page. They have followed through with an apology, they posted the condolence message to a former rugby player who is well and truly still alive which is Radovi from Lomanikoro, Rewa, mistaking him for Mosese Taga but I am glad that your Ministry, honourable Bala has retracted and they have apologised.

While speaking on the issue, financial literacy is very important and I agree youth empowerment is very important looking at the ages between 18 years to 35 years. And when they set up their businesses financial literacy is very important to ensure that the survival of a youth's business especially when all the funding and all the grant is given, survives. We know what it is like in our rural areas and we know the challenges they face and most of the challenges are regulatory requirements. I am sure that the Ministry will be working or are working with the relevant authorities to ensure that training goes into these youth workshops so that they understand that there are legal regulatory requirements that they need to fulfil.

Just the other issue, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the late former Speaker and the former minister, Doctor Jiko Luveni had started, I believe the Women's Expo and that was quite successful. I used to enjoy going to those expos and perhaps this is something that the Ministry can look at, more so now since the COVID-19 protocols have relaxed, have a youth expo. If there is one thing that this COVID-19 has taught us, it is the talent that came out from our people when they started doing their own businesses. We saw this, Mr. Speaker and perhaps that is something that the Ministry can look at, having a youth expo, getting our youths together and so they can showcase what they have been taught or what they have.

Just the other issue, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I noticed the issue of trainings done by the Ministry and I commend the trainings that are conducted. I trust and hope that these trainings are accredited because we all recall, it was mentioned today or in the past two days, that there were some vocational trainings that were closed down, were under FNU because there was no accreditation.

It is important that when taxpayers money go into these workshops, at the end of the day, that person comes and knows that this training is very useful and this is the training that I can go and empower others because at the end of the day we do not want a business concept, in the *iTaukei* context *duri ga me davo*. It has to survive. There has to be sustainability and I am sure that we all agree on that. I speak from the experience, not as a youthful one, although I look youthful because I have my own business, so it is important that we empower everybody mainly our youths. If anyone has gone through a very challenging time during these two years, our youth in our nation. I commend the Committee for this Report. Thank you very much Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. At the outset let me inform this honourable House that I have found out who had dug the hole but I am not going to reveal the name.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just on the points that has been raised by my honourable friend on the National Youth Development Plan which I will cover in my response. Tutu comes under Ministry for Agriculture, funding is allocated by Ministry of Agriculture. In terms of youth expo, we are not in the business of changing name because at the moment we have the National Youth Summit whereby we get all the youths across the country for this summit.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, now I wish to contribute on the Review of the Ministry of Youth and Sports Annual Report 2018-2019. The Ministry of Youth and Sports has put in place opportunities for our youth to be empowered and self-sustainable through a whole range of a specific programmes aimed at empowerment and capacity building. These programmes Mr. Speaker, Sir, through the Ministry of Youth and Sports fill a vital gap and addresses youth who have not made it in the formal education sector.

To complement these, the Ministry of Youth and Sports remains committed to the youth and sports development through the establishment of a conducive policy environment that provides support systems, initiatives for personal development, character building, sports policy implementation and community-based youth-led programmes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Report for example outlines that in the specific skills training which was highlighted by the previous speaker at the five youth training centres and you will note in the Report that 145 youths graduated.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is the success rate in the non-formal training sector. The Ministry of Youth and Sports engages in all Government approaches by co-operating with a number of line ministries and, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this was raised earlier in the morning that we need to work with the relevant ministries which we have been doing.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Report for example outlines the collaboration with the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs in planning and implementing its youth development programmes. An example of its collaboration is the implementation of Traditional Leadership Programme to youth in rural village by the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs.

In recent times, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as proactive measures for the food security through utilisation of community, land holdings, youth clubs and groups had benefitted from the Ministry of Youth and Sports outreach programme of funding agriculture enterprises through the provision of equipment and other relevant materials.

Again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the process has included co-operation with the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs. In the very successful Duke of Edinburgh Scheme where we had a record number of graduates in the past week, we have a very healthy collaboration with the Ministry of Education.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the success of Ministry of Youth and Sports is through our youth and through our sports. As a policy and public guardian, we are rightfully proud of our achievement in taking our programmes across the length and breadth of Fiji. This has been at the core of our activities to ensure balance and an even spread of activities, Mr. Speaker, Sir. This also means that we plan in a proactive manner towards the high achievements. As part of our monitoring, evaluation and learning process, we were at the outset Mr. Speaker, Sir, through forums like the National Youth Summit better engage with our youths and to be able to listen to what they felt was needed for them and gear our programmes in an inclusive and consultative fashion.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this process of engagement has resulted in more Ministry of Youth and Sports programmes and reaching out to more Fijians. This began with the registration of the youth clubs which as at an end 2021, we have registered 801 youth clubs with the involvement of almost 25,000 youths.

Of this, 194 clubs benefitted from the Youth Farm initiative with almost 5,600 youths participating in this programme. In other words, Mr. Speaker, Sir, now 5,600 youths are engaged in farming and employment has been created. I am so sad, I never expected from my good friend when he said that by us giving the equipment, we are campaigning! This is a direct insult to the youths of this country by the Opposition. Here, there is a Government who is so concerned about the youths of this country reaching out to the unreached youths, providing them the requirements and here comes the Opposition saying that we are campaigning. I want to put it on record, it is a direct insult to the youths of this country by the Opposition.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have been reaching out to the unreached youths across the country, not only in Ba. Let me make it very clear to the honourable Member and let the people of Ba also hear from the Opposition that they are claiming that only these equipment are given in Ba. I want them to hear as well.

Furthermore, we are going to assist five youth clubs with boats and I thank the Chinese Embassy for providing us with five boats. Here, Mr. Speaker, Sir, 160 youths will benefit out of this assistance. This is going to create employment. Mr. Speaker, Sir, in line with the Parliamentary Committee Report for more income generation projects which was highlighted by the earlier speakers. Projects in this sector, the Ministry has set-up a piggery and poultry farm.

This has again benefitted almost 120 youths. In addition, the Ministry has continued to expand its community outreach training of empowerment and mobile skills to more Fiji youths. Between 2020 and 2021, we have conducted 88 such trainings benefitting almost 3,500 youths. This was also raised by the earlier speaker in terms of training. As noted in the parliamentary report for 2018 and 2019, the Ministry of Youth and Sport has implemented the principle of gender equality so as to ensure all matters are considered with regards to the impact and benefit on both men and women equally.

The gender breakdown of the staff composition at the Ministry of Youth and Sports in 2018 and 2019 financial year showed equal numbers of men and women in managerial positions. In addition, Mr. Speaker, Sir, all our programmes are audited in-house to encourage Gender equality with special measures in place such as intake into the training programme.

Mr. Speaker Sir, I would like to thank you and the Chairman and members of the Committee for this Report.

MR. SPEAKER.- I now call upon on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social affairs to speak in reply.

HON. V. PILLAY.- I would like to thank the honourable Minister for providing all the clarification and also the honourable members who have spoken on the motion.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the Parliament will now vote to note the content of the report.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER.- take the next agenda item, I just want to make a correction. This morning I was a bit premature and erred in my announcement that there were no Bills today. We have Bills today but we will take that after we take the Questions. It means you and I have to be here a little while longer but we will be together, so there is no problem.

### **REVIEW REPORT – MINISTRY OF WOMEN, CHILDREN AND POVERTY ALLEVIATION 2017–2018 ANNUAL REPORT**

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move:

That Parliament debates the Review of the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation 2017 - 2018 Annual Report which was tabled on 21<sup>st</sup> September, 2021.

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

HON. V. PILLAY.- Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation is the government agency that administers services and programmes which are aligned to the care and protection of children, provision of income support to families to address poverty, provide policy intervention for older persons, provide policy intervention for persons with disabilities and ensure gender equality and empowerment of women.

As legislated under the Department of Social Welfare, the Ministry is responsible for the safeguard and protection of children in Fiji and has been working in partnership with Faith-Based Organisations and Civil Society Organisations over the years to provide a network of services and safe homes for women and children who have been victims of violence and abuse.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a new approach adopted by the Ministry in addressing violence against women and children is the development of the Fiji National Action Plan to Prevent Violence against Women and Girls. The Ministry has taken a whole of Government, whole of population, evidence-based, measurable inclusive and funded five-year plan with an emphasis on stopping violence before it starts.

The National Action Plan is envisioned to include key settings for prevention, an explanation on why violence against women happened in Fiji, key strategies to prevent violence against women, stakeholders' roles and responsibilities, costed implementation plan and the national communication strategy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, within the period under review, the Ministry successfully undertook development projects that benefitted eligible individuals. One such initiative was the Formal Sector Employment and Livelihood project where a number of interventions were undertaken for income generation, such as, bee keeping, sewing skills and fuel projects.

Moreover, the Disability Unit within the Ministry was established in 2017 with the aim to address disability in Fiji and develop a more inclusive society, create advocacy on the needs of

persons living with disabilities, provide assistance to the National Council for Persons with Disabilities, and link the disability provider organisations to relevant service providers such as Government and NGOs.

The Committee is satisfied with the performance of the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation in the 2017-2018 financial year.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to make a contribution on the Annual Report by the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation of 2017–2018 and I acknowledge the efforts by the Ministry in all its Social Welfare programmes particularly during this hardship period brought about by COVID-19.

In a nutshell, one of the nagging issues that we still have is the increasing of beggars in the streets and I know it is an ongoing issue and particularly this time when we are faced by more hardship on how the Ministry is addressing this problem. I am happy that the honourable Minister is now back in the Ministry because she was there from previous term of Parliament. Also, whether the house that was being put up by the Ministry (I am not too sure whether it also includes beggars or just the homeless people).

That was a good initiative but how it has been used to its full potential in having to look after the homeless that we see continue to improve particularly if you finish from here and just take drive around the main CBD, you will see the numbers of our people that are taken into the streets and actually spending the night there. Having said that, I acknowledge the different faith groups that do reach out to this sector of our population in having to feed them and also reach out in regards to counselling services, Mr. Speaker. Sir.

I also knowledge the Barefoot College, it has been one of the projects that I continue to vigorously pursue. Like I said, I am happy that the honourable Minister for Women is back because it has been one of those projects. I recently caught on the mainstream media that maybe it is almost 80 per cent to completion and we look forward to the completion of Barefoot College, particularly in regards to the development and empowerment of our women who will be trained to be solar engineers. We really look forward to that as I would perceive that there would be more solar lighting in our rural areas and the maritime now that we have this specific facility that is going to be training women solar engineers, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have said in this House that it is a national crisis on the violence against women and girls or women and children. We recognise that as we have heard from the honourable Chairman of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs that there is a National Action Plan to prevent violence against women and children that is being developed and I know that this was supposed to be completed I think in 2020 but I am sure the honourable Minister will also be contributing. I request that if she could give us a progress report of where we are in regards to this National Action Plan.

I say that because previously with the previous Minister, when this paper was brought into the House in one of the Ministerial Statements that was given, it was sounding like this is the panacea to eliminating violence against women and children. And I had always said and requested that the plan must always go in line or together with the resources so that the plans could be implemented effectively.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we continue to note increasing of violence against women and children. I know there was this recent case of a young woman that was killed in the toilet facility in the botanical

garden area and we continue to hear about missing children. So it is very concerning and, again, I look forward to the contribution from the honourable Minister responsible in regards to this National Action Plan to prevent Violence Against Women and Children.

Particularly, Mr. Speaker, we would like to hear the kind of resources that is going to be pumped into the Ministry to be able to implement this National Action Plan. Otherwise as I have always said that plans will always remain on the shelves if they are not resourced adequately to be able to be implemented and make that impact in the prevention of Violence Against Women and Children. And again I will end with request, a plea from this side of the House that now we have a new Minister even though this is her second time around that the Government do consider a Commission of Inquiry into the elimination of Violence Against Women and Children, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

HON. G. VEGNATHAN.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sir, I wish to speak on the noteworthy achievements of the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation in the 2017-2018 financial year.

Firstly, one of the widely successful programmes implemented by the Ministry is the Zero Tolerance Violence Free Community National Programme. Through this Programme communities that were in remote locations or difficult to reach were visited by Ministry staff and communities were made aware of the need to become actively involved in ending Violence Against Women and Girls (Children) in reporting incidents.

Mr. Speaker, stakeholders were able to reach rural communities with the message and communities were able access the health and social services and information provided by stakeholders due to the socio-economic nature of the Zero Tolerance Violence Free Community Implementation Plan. This includes access to information on gender-based violence, access to justice, information to empower people to report cases of gender-based violence to relevant authority and share information.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in relation to advancing gender equality, I note that the various programmes of the Ministry through its Department of Social Welfare, Department of Women and Poverty Monitoring Unit are administered equally to both and women and men. These programmes are available to all those who meet the necessary requirements and there is no discrimination based on the gender of the recipients.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry has made several advancements in eliminating violence against women and children in particular in respect of progressing the implementation of the Fiji National Gender Policy in coordination with relevant ministries including the elimination of violence against women and children. As part of this initiative in the course of the year, identified focal points officers attended training on gender-based violence with the objective of having and understanding the issues and mapping way forward for implementation on various departments. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank you for this opportunity to speak on the motion. Thank you.

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to respond to the Standing Committee on Social Affairs Review of the Ministry of the Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation Annual Report 2017-2018. Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I go on, let me answer some of the issues brought by honourable Radrodro. One was in terms of the beggars, the Beggars Taskforce and what are we doing to ensure that we try to assist them.

Beggars have been on the streets of the capital, cities and towns for as long as we know and every effort has been made to assist them in terms of trying to engage them in livelihood projects because that is one of the reasons given by the profiled beggars and we gave those who are regular beggars and those that turn up once a while.

We also found out that most of these beggars have serious mental issues who have been neglected by their families. Some are disabled, early in the morning the family members would bring them and put them on the streets on wheel chairs or on the ground in front of shops and some of them are able-bodied but they find it easy to live off the streets. There are a lot of reasons there but at this Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation we look at them through very sympathetic and very empathetic eyes.

We have profiled beggars and, yes, honourable Radrodro you are right, we had a Good Samaritan Inn, that is what we called it that was established in 2016 or 2017 and this was looked after by a church. We used to provide a grant to the church and then we used to provide monthly allowances to the beggars for the church to keep them in the Inn that we had built. Unfortunately, due to audit issues that has been closed and I have asked my Director Social Welfare to see how best we can sort that out so that, that home is functional again.

We had a very interesting project but I think when there were audit issues, the Department of Social Welfare or the Ministry simply gave up the place. But we have closed to 100-plus beggars on our roads, some sleep on the streets, very well known to us, and one of the areas where they continue is Flagstaff. We have some in the West, that is Lautoka, Lautoka has more and a few in Labasa. The efforts are still underway to ensure that we sort out a life for those that are suffering from mental illness. Our teams take them for medical but unfortunately when they come out from there, there is no family member who wants to take them up, so it is a challenge for us.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, three recommendations were made by the Committee. One was in terms of the implementation of Zero Tolerance Violence Free Community National Programme. If you recall, when you drive by certain communities there is a board there. Unfortunately, some of the boards have been neglected but there used to be a seal of approval from the Ministry with the Police and the community put up on that board which said 'This Community is Violence Free Community'. These communities would go through a rigorous programme of awareness, what to do, how to handle things within the community and then the board would be there.

Unfortunately, some of the issues we had was, some of the men from the village will actually take the women to the board and bash them up there. Total resistant to the programme. That is something that we need to accept. Fiji is known to have the highest rates of domestic violence in the Pacific and this sort of is attributed to the deep patriarchal views that men are stronger than women or men have a right to beat the women because the women belongs to them. We are trying to break that culture and it is not easy to do that.

Most of us while growing up we have seen violence in our homes. We cannot deny that fact. Violence exists everywhere, so it takes the whole of community approach. It takes whole of national approach to curb or cut down on violence. We will continue to engage with communities, faith-based organisations, the Police Department and other NGOs to ensure that we find a solution to that. In that line, the Ministry in the last four years has worked to strengthen its partnership with civil society organisations, NGOs, faith-based organisations and this is in line with our work to strengthen our coordination and advocacy role. Ours is the advocacy role and Government's policy advisor on gender equality and women's empowerment. This also includes working in close partnership with development partners whose core deliverables are in the area of gender-based violence.

Honourable Members, we should understand that gender-based violence, the greatest impact is on children. We must work on this to ensure that our children do not grow up knowing that violence is okay. It is not okay. I will give you one example of the resistance we receive. Recently, there was a case and when my welfare officers went to address that case, the man turned around and said to them, 'do you want this case to be another one like Volivoli case' and we all know what happened in Volivoli. The man hacked his family watched by the 11-year-old child, who was hiding under the bed. Sir, that is the attitude that we have, we need to change the attitude.

Countering domestic violence will need a whole change in mindset, equality as long as there is gender imparity, as long as we are fighting for gender equality, it is going to be there but it should not be there. Somehow we have it in our mindset that is alright, men are up here, women are there, there is always going to be gender gaps but it is not alright and that is why we have embarked on a National Action Plan and this National Action Plan will actually try to find out solutions to domestic violence.

So, this is a whole of Government and whole of community consultations. We are currently engaged in that to develop the national action plan to prevent violence against all women and girls. We are expected to have a finalised plan by June this year and of course when you talk about resources this will be effected in the next financial budget. So, these consultations are carried out in 13 sectors and settings and this is to gather first-hand information about what these people think is the cause of violence and how we can resolve that. So, the settings include faith-based organisations, sports sector, education, traditional institutions in the four divisions around the country and we also have the media with us as well and our partners the police and the judiciary and everybody and anybody who can give us solution to fighting domestic violence.

As of September, 2021, 23 consultations have occurred, 20 in person and 3 virtually and of course we have 721 females and we have also talked with male partners because there is no solution to domestic violence without having men on the table. It is not a women's issue, men have to come on board and we have done that and of course 47 per cent of the target population has been consulted, 804 individuals have participated and also we have the National Online Survey going on, so people are free to go online do the survey and give their feedback.

In the second phase of the roll out of the National Service Delivery Protocol for responding to cases of gender-based violence, the Ministry will work with stakeholders to conduct awareness and key agencies that area signatories to our protocol. These agencies proceed to conduct capacity building and awareness programmes for various communities nationwide in addition to implementing their roles as the service delivery protocol. In addition, the development of referral pathways from national to sub-national level provides a platform for extensive dialogue and validation of community entry points for access. So, we are trying to encourage as many groups and individuals to participate in our national consultations before we draft the National Action Plan.

The important roles that are part of these service delivery protocols include the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, the Fiji Police Force, iTaukei Affairs Board amongst the others. Also under the coordination mechanism of the Ministry, various working groups such as gender-based violence and emergency working group, service delivery protocol working group and the National Action Plan secretariat continues their network to consult, strategise and carry out activities. Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is the attitude we have when we talk about gender violence.

As a country, we want to stop violence but here we have men who have no respect. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee has also recommended that the Fiji National Action Plan to prevent violence against women and girls be developed and implemented urgently. The smooth and timely

progress of the finalisation of the National Action Plan against all women and girls is not an exception in the light of the impact of COVID-19. There is a critical need to feed the development of National Action Plan from the findings of the whole of Government, whole of population consultations targeting 2,500 diverse men, women and youth in the four Divisions in the 13 settings. This has not been possible, as the nation moved into restrictions of movements and other protocols. Consultations that were scheduled to be completed in October 2021 covering the 13 settings was not achievable given the circumstance. To address this, the Ministry with the NEC Secretariat and Technical Working Group came up with virtual consultations and an online mode of survey.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we will continue to work with the stakeholders and ensure that the National Action Plan (now the new date for that is around June) and it will be a thorough plan, realistic and achievable as we work to recognise Fiji as a second in the world after Australia to have such a plan, also bearing in mind the timelines. We note that the Committee's recommendation the needs for the development of a database of sex workers in Fiji and the recommendation that the Ministry strengthens its partnership with various NGOs and CSOs and Government agencies to provide information.

The Ministry is currently undertaking the Fiji Country Gender Assessment that aims to provide a comprehensive overview of gender issues in various sectors and critical areas including health, economy, violence against women and girls, gender and environment and women in leadership with decision-making. It is intended that the Fiji Gender and our Country Gender Assessment will also highlight achievements as well as identify the remaining challenge to deepen our collective efforts to achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all our women and girls.

The Fiji Country Gender Assessment is another project of the Ministry that is being developed and implemented on a strong partnership with NGOs and CSOs in collaboration with the lead Government Ministry. The Country Gender Assessment also enables the Ministry to identify data sources on the status of key issues and its impact on various specifications.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the last recommendation by the Committee was on Barefoot College. As a way of background, Barefoot College is being constructed by the Fiji Government. Initially, it was meant to be a regional project, but the project fell out with the other Pacific region and it is totally funded by the Fijian Government. The main aim is to improve on the socio-economic empowerment of women, where we will train women who will be known as "solar grandmothers" and these women have gone to India and have trained at the Barefoot College there, however, we need to continue with the training.

I visited the construction site last week and I am pleased to advise the House with the \$4.6 million that the Government has invested, and the project is currently underway. We hope for it to be completed in the later part of this year and then we will equip it and of course we will invite women to come. It includes the training facility, accommodation and of course the houses for the course coordinator.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am happy to lead this Ministry and I would like to thank all our donor partners, our NGOs, CSOs and everyone else who has contributed to the success of the Ministry. I know there is work to be done and hopefully we are able to complete our capital projects this year.

MR. SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs to speak in reply.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do not have any further comments to make.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, on that note, we will take a 15-minute break, after which we will deal with the next agenda item which is Questions and then the last item which is the Bills.

The Parliament adjourned at 7.49 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 8.05 p.m.

## QUESTIONS

### Oral Questions

Financial Relief – *TC Cody*  
(Question No. 21/2022)

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service, Communications, Housing and Community Development inform Parliament of any financial relief to be provided to businesses that suffered losses as a result of flooding caused by *TC Cody*?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I would like to thank the honourable Member for this question. Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is no specific relief package that has been set aside for those businesses that have been affected by the flooding caused by *TC Cody*. There are, of course, various facilities that are currently available for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises that those businesses could apply for under the scheme that was announced last year in the

Mr. Speaker, Sir, however, for those people who are in the business of agriculture have provided assistance. Of course, we got the Fast Deploying Cash for Farmers Programme where the Government will provide \$250 cash or cyclone affected farming households for land preparation, cultivation. About 20,000 households will be assisted. Also those who are in bilateral quarantine arrangement in other words those farms that are actually exporting, they have also given been given packages valued of \$176. So those are the businesses that actually have been provided with some form of assistance following *TC Cody*.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- I have a supplementary question, Mr. Speaker, Sir. We received some information that the people who were in the evacuation centres from Saturday night, three parts of the West and Sigatoka have yet to receive rations from Government despite being there 72 hours to 96 hours. This is simply a humanitarian request, we just want to know what Government is doing about it at this stage?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sir, this is obviously a completely unrelated question. It is about the distribution of ration for those in the evacuation centres. Ration is provided to those in the evacuation centres after 48 hours or so. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am not sure of the specifics of which evacuation centres people were not given rations. That will be more appropriately directed to the Ministry of Natural Disaster Management.

Recovery Strategies – Inshore Fisheries Sector  
(Question No. 22/2022)

HON. V. LAL asked the Government upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Fisheries inform Parliament on the commercial recovery strategies for the inshore fisheries sector?

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are in the midst of global COVID-19 pandemic which has caused drastic effects on the growth of our national economy. An

estimated 120,000 Fijians or one-third of the Fijian workforce lost their jobs or had their working hours cut as a result of this COVID-19. In such scenarios, it is natural to assume that these people will resort to and depend on our natural resources as means of food security and livelihood. The Fiji Inshore Fisheries are of significant to economic value, to our 850 coastal communities in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Fisheries aims to grow Fiji's fishery sector during and after this COVID-19 pandemic period, which is in line with our national target of building a more resilient blue economy for Fiji post-COVID-19. Our Ministry officials have been providing technical advice and assistance to fishers in our coastal and maritime communities in terms of food security and economic development. This is to alleviate their fishing standard from subsistence to semi-commercial level. We also provide sustainable and effective fishing techniques and post-harvest training to add more value to fishery products.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as part of its economic recovery plan, the Ministry of Fisheries will assist our coastal and maritime communities through the provision of a more reliable inshore licence system through enhancing and fast tracking of its applications procedure as stipulated under Fisheries Act Cap. 158. This will assist our local fishers to obtain their fishing licence faster with an ultimate aim of sustaining their families and where possible, alleviating their fishing standard from subsistence to commercial level. This will also assist them to do their fishing business legally and reduce the economic loss through illegal and unreported unregulated fishing within our fisheries water.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have been and we will continue to assist our inshore communities through the deployment of FADs around the *qoliqoli* or customary fishing areas. These FADs are technically designed and strategically placed in oceans where water columns to attract pelagic fish. This pelagic species are commonly tuna and tuna-like species of, which are very high market value. This will assist our fishermen through the reduction of their fishing operating cost and increasing their economic yields. We are also engaging the Agriculture Marketing Authority, another enterprise that trades fish to visit our maritime islands purchasing fish and other fishery products from their doorsteps. This will help generate the needed income to communities and boost livelihood.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we will continue to assist our fishers and coastal communities to sustainably manage their fishery resources for their food security, livelihood and economic development.

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, supplementary question to the honourable Minister for Fisheries. Can you update us in regard to inshore fisheries with the *qoliqoli* owners? How true is it that they are going to issue the *Qoliqoli* licence?

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I thank the honourable Member for the question. Although this is a different question altogether, there is an exercise going on at the moment where fisheries will bring in a paper on tier components of fisheries permit and conclusively where licence would be issued and this document will be brought to Parliament for endorsement.

CT Scan Facility & Special Asthma Station  
(Question No. 23/2022)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services update Parliament on the status of the Computed Tomography (CT) Scan Facility and the special asthma station at the Lautoka Hospital?

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker and I thank the honourable Member for that question. Sir, as we speak the CT Scanner in Lautoka does not work. It is actually 10 years old and it is due for replacement. It was bought in 2011 at \$1.5 million and just before the onset of the first wave it had malfunctioned and unfortunately it could not be repaired. We have since then done our due diligence in working with our partners.

We are procuring a CT scanner through Japan Aid and a grant through Japan which is in total \$10 million, there is a \$1.5 million investment. It weighs about 2.5 tonnes, it is a 128 helical slicer, the one that we have had in Lautoka before is one, so it is much, much faster. It can do three dimensional figures, including looking at the visual organ in the three dimension. As we speak throughout the last few weeks and months the biomedical technicians have been liaising with the manufacturers or the company in which we are going to procure it in terms of the base and what needs to be done in the room.

The second question is, yes, the asthma station is working which brings me to something that I think it is important for all of us to know that in December, 2017 there was a fire at the hospital in the operating theatre recovery and downstairs is the x-ray department and so, this then had gone through its repairs and as I speak that has been completed, the new operating theatre, new post anaesthetic recovery unit, up at the top and also the big renovations that have happened at the x-ray department below including adjacent to where the new CT scanner will sit.

Recently there has been installed a large general x-ray machine which is ceiling-mounted both in Lautoka and Suva before the beginning of this year and the asthma station had to be moved out as part of our fever screening during the midst of the COVID-19, so it was moved out and the emergency department was being used as the COVID-19 intensive care unit.

Now that all the repairs have been completed and also the surge by the Omicron has reduced, we have been able to move the fever stations back into the emergency department at Lautoka Hospital. The COVID-19 intensive care unit has gone into the newly used post-anaesthetic recovery unit and the asthma stations remain but in terms of the management of patients with asthma, we encourage them to use spacers and the puffers for those with mild asthma and nebulisation for those with severe disease. *Vinaka.*

Newest Trends – Domestic Violence Helpline  
(Question No. 24/2022)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation update Parliament on some of the newest trends in terms of the calls received on the Domestic Violence Helpline?

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for the question. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the National Domestic Violence 24-hour toll free helpline is a project established by the Fijian Government through the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation and of course together with that we have our Child Helpline as well.

If you recall domestic violence not only affects women and families but the greatest impact with the children as well. So, either of the lines could be used by those seeking assistance in terms of children and women. This is a project in partnership with the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, the telecom companies mainly Telecom Fiji Limited, Vodafone and Digicel. It started in 2017 where we got the initial funding of \$200,000 per year for the operation and this has continued since then.

The Helpline Mr. Speaker, Sir, provides services for all women and girls and like I said children and anyone with concerns about domestic violence in Fiji. This is in line with our motto “Making domestic violence everyone’s business”.

You do not have to be a victim, you could be a bystander and you can report cases on these lines. To contact the Helpline Centre based in Suva, we have helpline workers who will answer phone calls from women and anybody else who is going to report domestic violence and this could be victims, survivors and bystanders.

You call the Helpline with no cost incurred, access accurate domestic violence information, access essential services which includes counselling, post-rape care support, safety and security access to justice and other services. The Helpline, Mr. Speaker, Sir, also reaches out to every women in need of help and protection whereby their calls are responded to. It is a platform for networking amongst organisations and to provide linkages to support systems and facilitate provision of timely, appropriate and quality services for survivors.

The Helpline also ensures that there are counsellors and referrals are made for anyone who seeks the assistance of the Government and we will make sure anyone who is accessing or addressing issues is trained to best practice standards. In addition to that Mr. Speaker, Sir, please allow me to inform the House that we are in the process of opening a safe-house and this year’s budget has been allocated where we will assist any survivor or a victim who needs overnight shelter or shelter for a couple of days while their cases are addressed and this safe-house is located in Lautoka.

Mr. Speaker, Sir the National Domestic Violence Helpline, that is 1,560 until November, 2021 has answered 9,452 cumulative genuine calls since the Helpline was launched on 8<sup>th</sup> March, 2017. From 2017, the Helpline noted a continuous increase in calls received at the Helpline with 57 per cent of calls related to domestic violence. In the 2020-2021 fiscal year, the Helpline recorded a total of 3,612 calls, the highest since the establishment of the helpline, of these calls 51 per cent were domestic violence related.

Again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the beginning of the first wave of COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown in March, 2020, the Helpline noted the following trends for April compared to March of the same year.

1. There was an increase of 334 per cent calls to the Helpline,
2. Increase of 190 per cent domestic violence related calls both survivors and bystanders
3. An increase of 213 per cent calls from survivors.

The second wave of COVID-19 and lockdown in April, 2021 shows the following trend for May compared to April, 2021. There was an increase of 233 per cent of calls. There was an increase in 267 per cent domestic violence related calls and an increase of 292 calls from survivors.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, some of us may see these increases as shocking but I would say that these increases in domestic violence calls and cases is a confidence in our system, that women are now more willing to come forward knowing that they will access justice and help.

The Fijian Government will ensure that we continue to monitor our Government initiative, unafraid of whatever challenges that will inevitably present themselves. We are in this for a long hold and piece by piece we will pull back the balance that will see women, girls and children in Fiji no longer living lives of terror and fear and no longer subject to control and retribution.

The Government will be there to support the survivors, the vulnerable, the battered women and abused children. We will be there to hold perpetrators to account and speak out against anyone who has any inkling that any violence against women and children is either acceptable or justifiable in any circumstances. No violence at any one time against our women, girls and children is acceptable and we will hold perpetrators to account. I thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Administration of Gazetted Villages  
(Question No. 25/2022)

HON. M.R. LEAWARE asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Prime Minister and Minister for iTaukei Affairs, Sugar Industry, Foreign Affairs and Forestry update Parliament on the arrangements in place for the administration of gazetted villages under the iTaukei Affairs Act 1944?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, when I looked at this question, I did ask honourable Leaware yesterday, “what specifically do you want?”, because if you look at the question itself, Sir, it talks about what are the arrangements in place for the administration of gazetted villages.

The arrangements in place, Mr. Speaker, Sir, of course are under the Itaukei Affairs Act. Under the Act, there are numerous pieces of regulations. So they start off with the iTaukei Affairs Provincial Council Regulation, the iTaukei Affairs Tikina and Village Council Regulations, iTaukei Affairs Board Regulations, iTaukei Affairs Declaration of iTaukei Settlements as iTaukei Villages (Bylaws of 2010), and, of course, iTaukei Affairs Boundaries Regulation that go back to 1966.

Then you have the different Provincial Councils and difference Provinces that have their own Public Health By-laws that were put in place, most of them in 1969. So all of those are there and that is what actually administers it. He said to me that we have not updated them and it is time for review.

The latest one, Mr. Speaker, Sir, which obviously has been an issue which I like to highlight, specifically to go to the villages themselves, the village confirmation gazetting, of course, Mr. Speaker, Sir, has been going on since 1894. Currently, they have 1,171 registered villages and out of those villages, 1,151 have been demarcated with 657 villages gazetted. Mr. Speaker, 494 villages were approved by the Board for gazetting at its last meeting on 31<sup>st</sup> November, 2021, just a few months back, with the remaining 20 awaiting the consents of the Land Owning Units.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, perhaps, Honourable Member was concerned about the number of informal settlements and how they actually become villages. If I could just read out to him and this is a regulation put in place in 2010. As we know a lot of these settlements are now becoming quite large, and I quote:

“The Board shall have the power to register iTaukei settlements to be a village. When assessing an iTaukei settlement’s suitability for registration as a village, the Board must ensure that the:

- a) Proposed site must be on iTaukei land within the land boundary of its parent Yavusa;
- b) Proposed village must be sited on iTaukei land and where majority of the members of the Land Owning Unit of the land concerned has agreed to surrender in the traditional manner, ownership rights to such land which would, after the registration be owned communally by the new village;

- c) inhabitants of the village are from the *yavusa* and have recognised and accepted a leader of the new village;
- d) new village when registered will be the new village of the inhabitants and will be accepted for such purpose for all official transactions including the *Vola ni Kawabula* (VKB) which shall go through the processes as required by written law. The new village will also be registered as such by the *iTaukei* Lands Commission;
- e) site has been certified by the health authorities to be posing no threat to the health of the inhabitants and that it has a reliable source of fresh water;
- f) site has been certified by the Director of Disaster Management Office as safe from natural hazards such as flooding, landslide or erosions;
- g) request for registration must be made in writing with the endorsement and support of the relevant *tikina* and provincial councils;
- h) the boundaries on the proposed village has been demarcated by the *iTaukei* Lands Commission.”

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is obviously a growing issue as we have seen many villages that become large. What is also critically important, Sir, is that a lot of these, as we know that the law was amended under the Bainimarama Government that those people who live in villages and are under the VKB and have the right to have access to the land, can now withdraw their FNPF funds. So they can withdraw up to 50 per cent to build their home in the village. Before it was not allowed for them to be able to access those funds, so now they can take out that money to build their homes.

It is critically important that those settlements that want to be classified as villages go through this process so they can also take out the money from FNPF and build their own homes because the theory behind it, of course, and it is obviously in practise that if you are a member of the VKB in that particular *yavusa*, no one can take away the land from you because you communally have ownership of the land. That is one of the recent regulations put in place in 2010 to be able to facilitate that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do not know how many Members in the Opposition have actually read this particular set of regulations. It is very extensive, of course, some of it goes back to 1960s, but if you look at it, you have for example, each province has its own village by-laws; all of them go back to 1969. The Namosi Province Public Health Village ByLaws 1969, Nadroga-Navosa everywhere else has it.

There are certain provisions now Mr. Speaker, Sir, in these regulations that perhaps is no longer applicable to those villages that already have access to water and sanitation. They did not have access to previously, they talked about latrines, if you go to a lot of villages, I am not saying no village has latrines anymore. There are obviously some villages with latrines but a number of villages do not have latrines.

Obviously, that is not applicable to that, there are various issues, for example, cleaning of villages. It says that each occupier of a house shall be responsible for cleaning an area within a radius of 1.9 metres around his or her dwelling house, kitchen, dining house, if any and latrine for keeping such area free from refuse, rubbish and offensive matter and receptacles wherein mosquitoes may breed.

Provincial Councils shall take such responsible services and maybe necessary to ensure that taking of similar of measure in the remaining area of each village provided that if the area of responsibility one of the occupier extends into the area of responsibility of another occupier, each occupier should be responsible for cleaning that half of the common area nearest to his/her building. In practical terms, some of it may not necessarily happen. This is up to obviously the different

provinces to decide, but in terms of relevance, some of it may no longer be relevant because different villages have access to utilities now, they did not have access to previously.

Ease of Doing Business Report  
(Question No. 26/2022)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport inform Parliament why the World Bank has discontinued the annual Ease of Doing Business Report and what impact will it have on our business-related reforms?

HON. F.S.KOYA.- I thank the honourable Member for the question, Mr. Speaker, Sir. A very pertinent question especially when this is something that the Opposition and I am referring to honourable Professor Prasad who like to actually flaunt this report in our faces quite frequently.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in September, 2021 the World Bank Group issued a statement on the discontinuation of Doing Business Report. The World Bank noted in their statement that trust in the research is actually vital. If I could just read the line with respect of the statement and I quote:

“After data the irregularities on Doing Business in 2018 and 2020 were reported internally in June 2020 World Bank Management pause the next Doing Business Report and undertook a serious of reviews and audits in its methodology. In addition because internal reports raised ethical matters including the conduct or former board officials as well as current and or former bank staff, management reported the allegations to the banks appropriate internal accountability mechanisms.”

After reviewing all the information available to date on Doing Business including the findings of past reviews, audits and reports, the bank released today on behalf of the Board of Executive Directors that had it taken the decision to discontinue the Doing Business Report.

Mr. Speaker, Sir this particular issue and on how it was flawed was raised time and time again in this House, we (the honourable Minister for Economy and the Ministry of Commerce, Trade, Tourism) are continuously raised this with World Bank just to tell them how the process was flawed. And today it does not exist anymore.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji as one of the 192 country surveys raised this matter of data irregularities. The data biasness which was significantly affecting the results of the survey with the World Bank Group. It was pointed out with respect to Fiji that the survey respondents were people who benefitted from providing incorrect information. They benefitted from providing false information on the reforms that were evident and were made public.

The respondents to their survey chosen by the World Bank was narrow and excluded the relevant agencies that were being evaluated. So if it was matter of relating to the registering of companies, the Registrar General was excluded, Mr. Speaker, Sir, even for the provision of neutral statistics. The World Bank Survey Team actually gravitated towards critics of Government who had a vested interest in labelling Fiji a hard place to do business.

The Doing Business Survey was a disservice, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to Small Island Developing States (SIDS). Countries that were committed to reforms (just like us) and once the SIDS, like Fiji started identifying gaps in the data and the report to ensure that reforms reported were adequately captured, the World Bank Doing Business Team no longer could hide behind their so-called

objectivity. We had started discussions, Mr. Speaker, Sir, directly with the World Bank Group and we are working also with the reform team at the World Bank, more specifically with indicator-based technical teams.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, because the Doing Business Report became so important, it became evident that the reforms that were done were not actually being reflected adequately. Cabinet gave a mandate to the Ministry to ensure that the 2025 Doing Business Report, Fiji be ranked in the top 50. Cabinet remained adamant, Sir, that the reforms must not only be done for mere ranking, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Reforms are there to make things happen easier and faster and they are there to modernise the way Government works and they are to ensure that we remain competitive in the global arena for investments.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in 2019 major reforms were implemented in terms of starting a business and the ease of starting a business process. Relevant agencies that were led by MCTTT provided data and all the relevant information and evidence to the World Bank to support the objective of the reform in a survey. Then the survey was filled by the selected private sector mainly the so-called agents of investors. There were people who benefited from delays, and guess what, the reforms did not get acknowledged at all. It is indeed sad that one of the policies of the survey was that it gave precedence to information submitted by agents over the submissions made by the relevant agencies, even when the data and evidence was provided by these agencies.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, some of these reforms included the:

- launch of bizFiji portal for doing business in Fiji;
- elimination of business licences;
- streamlining of starting a business process and risk based approach with respect to low risk businesses having to have six months to obtain the necessary licences;
- reduction in time taken for processing by approval agencies, such as NFA and FNPF;
- digitalisation of application processes for registrar of companies and Fiji Revenue and Customs Service;
- fast-track process for construction permit for industrial, commercial projects through Building Permits Evaluation Committee;
- elimination of stamp duty requirement while registering properties; getting electricity reduction and done by EFL;
- refund of capital contribution for commercial and industrial customers;
- the establishment of personal property security's registry;
- taxpayer online portal; and
- investment facilitation taskforce.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry with the support of the investment related agencies continued reforms in 2020-2021. Memorandums were submitted for the survey inclusive of both reforms and data correction. The Ministry had also insisted on meetings with three critical indicator assessment teams and provided them direct submission, whilst also filling out these particular surveys.

In February 2021, we received a reform memo from the World Bank Group Doing Business Team informing Fiji's reforms in three indicators namely: starting a business; getting construction permits; and getting credit, will be acknowledged in the 2021 Doing Business Report. Something no other government has ever achieved. So the Opposition wants to verify this, you can go over the Doing Business Reports. This would have meant at least a 10-ranking improvement for Fiji. It definitely would have shut down the arguments that were presented earlier by honourable Professor Prasad specifically. Unfortunately, the World Bank Group decided to discontinue the Report, instead

to sort out these issues. So, for the first time, accedes would have been recognised amongst the top 10 or 20 reformers.

I want to tell the House that our reform journey quite categorically state this, our reform journey continues with extra vigour and strength. We are working with some of the best technical advisors from Singapore and again also from the World Bank and IFC. The Fijian Government will continue to roll out reforms that will benefit our people. In a matter of months, we will roll out the launching of online starting a business platform on the bizFiji portal and for MSMEs we are working on the registration platform that is simple and easy, and we are working with the Ministry of Justice and World Bank on the insolvency legal framework for MSMEs, construction permit processes will also be brought online by the end of 2023.

Complementary to these reforms, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry is also spearheading investment related legislative and regulatory reforms where we have seen the establishment of a new Investment Act and review of the Investment Fiji Act. This will also contribute towards modernising the Fijian business climate.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, when it comes to providing the best for Fijian business, the FijiFirst Government will do so. No Doing Business Report will undermine the vision of the Government and we are paving the way for Fiji's economic recovery and we will achieve what we are actually setting out to do.

Livestock Farmers – Fencing Kits  
(Question No. 27/2022)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment update Parliament on how many livestock farmers have received the fencing kits as announced in December 2021?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to thank the honourable Member for asking this question.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as alluded to earlier on a number of times what we want to do also earlier this week. What we want to do is, we want to expand livestock production, one to serve the demand from within. For example, as highlighted earlier on, 99 per cent of lamb meat is imported. So, we are promoting sheep raising as well as goat which we see as to some degree a perfect substitute. We got the land, weather condition and the skill-sets that are required by famers to raise this livestock.

Also beef cattle, there is substantial amount of demand, also demand from the region. We are looking at expanding this but to expand this, Mr. Speaker, we need to migrate farmers (the small holder subsistence farmers) by providing them with fencing material. It is not possible to tether these animals when they are larger in umber than five or six. So we have decided that we will establish these small holder farmers, subsistence farmers and assist them so that we can have large commercial farmers.

With that in mind, this year we are assisting one of the largest number of farmers with fencing material. This year we are targeting 567 farmers to be receiving fencing material. With regard to livestock type:

- Beef farmers – 259;
- Sheep farmers – 139; and

- Goat farmers – 196.

With respect to Divisions:

- Northern – 229;
- Western – 256;
- Central – 72; and
- Eastern – 10.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this will go a long way in establishing more commercially-oriented farmers.

As you know, not only we will be saving a lot of money and also we will be expanding farmers and there is a lot of implication on household welfare, livelihood, national income growth and reduction in the money that goes out of the country in terms of import substitution.

These livestock that are held by farmers are also treated as cash reserve. So, any particular point in time they need some cash, they are able to pull out one or two livestock and liquidate it. It is very important. Of course, there is the cultural aspect as well which also plays a very important role in livestock rearing by farmers in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for beef cattle farmers, our officers now are getting these farmers to sign an agreement. We do not want to just keep the fencing material and get away from there and then later we find that these farms did not survive. So, there are certain conditions they need adhere to so that these farms do survive and are commercial in nature. We are in the process of getting this delivered, probably in the next four weeks' time, it will be delivered in the Western and Central Divisions as well.

Fiji's Financial System  
(Question No. 28/2022)

HON. R.R. SHARMA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service, Communications, Housing and Community Development update Parliament on the soundness of Fiji's financial system?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I was not going to labour this particular question in terms of my answer but I think, given the type of misunderstanding and ignorance shown by the other side, I think I will have to give the full detail on this.

Sir, the Parliament should be aware that the financial system is made up of a number of sectors including, the:

1. Banking sector or banking industry consisting of licenced banks, credit institutions and the Fiji Development Bank.
2. Superannuation industry which in Fiji is the Fiji National Provident Fund as the lone player but considered the largest single financial institution in Fiji.
3. Insurance industry consisting of licensed insurance companies, intermediaries which includes agents and brokers.

4. Capital markets industry consisting of the South Pacific Stock Exchange, manage investment scheme, Unit Trust, stock brokers and licensed investment advising their representatives.
5. Foreign exchange industry consisting of licensed foreign exchange dealers or money transfer operators.
6. Credit information reporting industry consisting of the licenced credit information reporting agency PT Limited and all its registered members.
7. Payments systems industry of western legislation which was recently passed by Parliament and ongoing work is being undertaken to implement the relevant regulatory framework.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, all of the sectors we have just mentioned are supervised by the Reserve Bank of Fiji under the various laws that the Central Bank administers. In terms of size as at December 2021, the Fijian Financial System continues to be dominated by the banking industry making up 48.2 per cent of the total assets of the financial system of \$25.4 billion followed by the Fiji National Provident Fund at 33.4 per cent. The insurance industry at 8.7 per cent with other sectors combined except for the payment system industry consisting of less than 10 per cent.

It is therefore important, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that the soundness of the Fijian Financial System relies significantly on the safety and sustainability of the three sectors that make up more than 90 per cent of the financial system, that is the banking industry, the superannuation industry and the insurance industry with the banking superannuation industries consisting of entities that are considered systematically important financial institutions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I delve into some key assessments supporting the soundness of the Fijian financial system, we wish to highlight that the maintenance of a safe and sound financial system is directly linked to the RBF's objectives under section 4(c) of the Reserve Bank of Fiji which is to promote a sound financial structure. One of the two core mandates of the Central Bank which is to maintain financial stability.

What is financial stability? The RBF defines it as the "the ability of the financial system to adequately fulfil its key economic functions of efficient allocation of financial resources and effective mitigation of risks through the provision of a well-functioning structure at all times."

Mr. Speaker, Sir the big picture, our economy has been through what we can only describe as roughest patch in our history, subsequently given the direct relationship it has with the real sector. Mr. Speaker, Sir, our financial system has faced its fair share of shocks which we expect will continue to be managed in the years to come. In however seeking to effectively mitigate the impact of COVID-19 pandemic and ensuring continued prudent operations with relevant strategies for a sustained way forward, we can confirm that the Fijian financial system remains safe and sound and financial stability continues to be enjoyed in Fiji at this point in time.

The regulatory framework they provide for the supervision of the financial system continues to ensure that public trust and confidence in the financial system is well placed so that all licensed entities, Mr. Speaker, Sir, continue to deliver the service effectively meeting stakeholder expectations. Licensed institutions are all able to meet regulatory requirements even during trying times such as now, riding on the strength of the balance sheets and risk management practises.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, now that we are in the third year of the pandemic, we see that this level of resilience and preparedness has served the financial institutions and consequently general public as well, further strengthening the overall stability of the financial system.

This is critical at this time as the nation looks to regain lost economic ground, efforts of which the financial system will be a key player. Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we had stated earlier, the different sectors of the financial system particularly the systematically important ones have performed well before during and now in the later stage of the pandemic.

We expect them to continue to do so going forward. Licensed banks and credit institutions remain well capitalised and have continued to adequately perform their core functions of funds intermediation. As at 31st December, 2021, capital adequacy as a key soundness indicator for the banking industry stood at 20.9 per cent against the minimum requirement of 12 per cent for banks, and 29.1 per cent for credit institutions against the minimum requirement of 15 per cent.

Credit risk, however, has been on an increasing trend as expected due to the impact of COVID-19 with the ratio on non-performing loans to total loans increasing from 3 per cent in December, 2019 (before the pandemic) to 7 per cent in December 2021 for banks and respectively for credit institutions from 14.5 per cent to 13.2 per cent.

We are talking about people defaulting on their loans and not being able to pay at all. The elevated level of credit risk continues to be mitigated by provisions that has been set aside as well as capital adequacy buffers to ensure that any materialising of credit risk is minimised.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, relief has also been provided on a case by case basis to those who were either directly or indirectly impacted by COVID-19 pandemic through loan repayment holidays which as at the end of December 2021 stood at 13.8 per cent of the industry's total loan book value of \$997.800 million. For comparison at its peak, loans on repayment holidays stood at \$2.8 billion. With the downward trend, a reflection of the initiation economic recovery as loan customers are able to again secure income sources to pay for their loans.

However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it should be noted that repayment holiday assistance is expected to conclude by the end of March 2022. The banking system continues to be fully liquid with interest rates now at relatively low levels. As the economy recovers, the current low interest rate environment is expected to spur demand for credit and subsequently the effective allocation of financial resources with appropriate controls, thus underscoring financial stability in the medium to long term.

Sir, FNPF remains solvent and continues to meet its legislated objectives, with the Fund able to announce a similar level of actuarial assessed return to its members even in the midst of the pandemic. Liquidity is at a level that supports the Fund's ability to continue to meet its obligations to members and indeed pensioners, while investment returns are positive.

Sir, FNPF sustainability has continued to be confirmed with its meeting of the legislated solvency requirement, even during the institution's extensive efforts to provide relief assistance to members in the aftermath of natural disasters and during the pandemic.

The insurance industry has remained operationally resilient even during the pandemic reporting more than adequate levels of solvency surplus. Solvency requirements under the Insurance Act 1998 were met more than 17.9 times by the life insurance sector and more than 4.8 times by the general insurance sector as at September 2021.

Gross premiums earned by the industry has continued to grow indicative of the continued business placed with licensee insurance. All licensed insurance companies were in profitable, supporting the capacity to pay claims as they fall due. All other sectors in the financial system have effectively remained operational, rising to the call to serve Fijians especially during the pandemic.

In the process, Mr. Speaker, Sir, a significant trend was observed in all financial institutions taking serious efforts to move to technological platforms as a means of business continuity during COVID-19. By strategically implementing digital solutions such as automation, mobile solution and remote network security systems, licensed financial institutions have tried to be better positioned to handle a wide array of working conditions whether the office, in the field or indeed working from home.

The credit reporting industries making progress to fill the gap and ensuring fair reporting of credit supports the effort by lending institutions to ensure quality credit is provided, which in turn support the soundness of the financial system. A number of entities have registered with their licence, Credit Information Reporting Agency PTE. Limited and we expect more credit information to be reported and shared in the next 12 months. Ongoing work is being undertaken by relevant agencies of Government, and the private sector to finalise the legislative framework for the regulation of payment systems in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is another significant development for financial stability as a rapid involvement of FINTEC and e-Commerce has overhaul the structure of our financial system. We therefore expect the widening of the RBF supervisory ambit to capture mobile network and payment system operators to ensure a safe environment for Fijians to undertake financial transactions online and through mobile phones.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we wish to reiterate that the Fijian financial system remains sound and stable. In the face of the most significant economic shock that Fiji has encountered, our licensed financial institutions have proven to be resilient and have continued to operate in a prudent manner. Our financial system has remained relevant, operationally strong and innovative as appropriate. Going forward we expect the financial system to play a key role in our economic recovery.

Notwithstanding, Mr. Speaker, Sir, what I have just said, risk to financial stability remains. This can be initiated by the failure of one institution or a group of licensed entities. Supervision in an institutional level and surveillance at the system level is on-going by the RBF. Closer monitoring of these risks will continue and corrective measures will be implemented as deemed suitable.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, lastly monetary policy and financial stability are very much interlinked. By ensuring that monetary policy objectives of foreign reserves and inflation are intact, the RBF was able to implement a commendation monetary policy which has resulted in a reduction in interest rates in the markets. As we all know, Sir, interest rate is a fixed cost and any chances of any businesses surviving is higher when the interest rates are low.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is the first major crisis where interest rate has not risen to double digit but as actually but has actually fallen, thereby assisting private businesses to survive which in turn has helped in ensuring that financial institutions remains sound. I would like to acknowledge the work done by the Governor of the RBF and his team, the Permanent Secretary for Economy and also our Head of Treasury and all the other team members that have actually ensured that behind the scene, a lot of work has been done to ensure that our financial system remains very sound.

Written Questions

OHS Compliance - Primary and Secondary Schools  
(Question No. 29/2022)

HON. S.R. RASOVA asked the Government upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts, and Local Government update Parliament on the status of OHS compliance in all primary and secondary schools in the rural and maritime areas –

- (a) listed with classification (Government or community owned) and Division; and
- (b) plans of compliance if the school has some defects.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will table the response at a later sitting date as permitted under Standing Order 45(3).

Serua Landing and Lomaloma Jetty – Progress of  
(Question No. 30/2022)

HON. M.R. LEAWARE asked the Government upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Infrastructure, Meteorological Services, Lands and Mineral Resources update Parliament on the progress of construction, rehabilitation and repair of the Serua landing and the Lomaloma jetty?

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to table my response.

(Response handed to the Secretary-General)

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the third Written Questions has been withdrawn, so that is the end of the questions. We will now move to the next Agenda item.

(Question No. 30/2022 withdrawn)

**LIQUOR (AMENDMENT) BILL 2022**

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

- (a) Liquor (Amendment) Bill 2022 (Bill No. 01/2022) be considered by Parliament without delay;
- (b) Bill must pass through one stage at a single sitting of Parliament ;
- (c) Bill must not be referred to a Standing Committee or other Committee of Parliament;
- (d) Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament tomorrow, Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> February, 2022 but that one hour be given to debate the Bill with the Right of Reply given to me as the Member moving this motion.

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the interest of time, I will not be very long because we will be debating this Bill tomorrow. Essentially, what this Bill seeks to do is to

firstly, extend the ability of the licence to be issued to up to five years as we have done with some of the other laws, like we did with the hotels.

There were also some hotel operators who had a liquor licence in 2020, but they did not use it, or because there was no one staying at their hotel, or last year they did not apply for hotel liquor licence because there was no one coming to the hotel. So this year when they have come to renew their liquor licence, the law actually says, “you must now make a fresh application” because once you have not renewed your licence, you have to go through the entire process of making a fresh application.

We want to obviously assist, in particular the smaller, locally owned businesses that may have a couple of *bure* in the Yasawa or wherever else. We do not expect them to go and pay for liquor license for the past couple of years just for them to now actually get a renewal of that licence because that is how the law is limited at the moment. So that is what we are trying to do. In simple terms, that is what this particular amendment seeks to do.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion. At the end of the debate, we will have the Right of Reply from the mover. Anyone wishing to take the floor? There being no one wishing to take the floor, I call on the honourable Acting Prime Minister.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have no further comments.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

### **TOBACCO CONTROL (AMENDMENT) BILL 2022**

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

- (a) Tobacco Control (Amendment) Bill 2022 (Bill No. 02/2022) be considered by Parliament without delay;
- (b) Bill must pass through one stage at a single sitting of Parliament;
- (c) Bill must not be referred to a Standing Committee or other Committee of Parliament;
- (d) Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament tomorrow, Thursday 10th February, 2022 but that one hour be given to debate the Bill with the Right of Reply given to me as the Member moving this motion.

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, similar situation with this amendment, there are people, for example, who did not apply for the *suki* licence that they used to sell in the market for years and other tobacco products. This is essentially to assist them. It is also being able to now give them licence of up to five years.

We also had a situation where a particular company was given the licence to start manufacturing tobacco in Fiji as a competition to the only manufacturer at the moment. They paid a fee of \$250,000. Obviously because of COVID, they were not able to commence manufacturing and

there are other people, for example, Mr. Speaker, Sir, on a yearly basis they come and get their renewal.

Every January there is a mad rush. So, this is to assist all those people who are small time business operators and depend on this on their livelihoods to provide assistance to them and these are the amendments being made to make their life a lot easier, to be able to put in place the Minister responsible for this is the Minister for Health the regulations in place so those who actually may have paid their fees but not in fact used those fees because they did not operate to provide them some form of relief.

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you, honourable Member, the floor is now open for debate on the motion. At the end of the debate we will have the right of reply from the mover. Anyone wishing to take the floor?

I call on the Acting Prime Minister and Attorney-General to speak in reply.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Sir, I have no further comments.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

### **FIJI NATIONAL UNIVERSITY (AMENDMENT) BILL 2022**

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

- (a) Fiji National University (Amendment) Bill, 2022 (Bill No. 03/2022) be considered by Parliament without delay;
- (b) Bill must pass through one stage as a single sitting of Parliament;
- (c) Bill must not be referred to a Standing Committee or other Committee of Parliament;
- (d) Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament tomorrow, Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> February, 2022, but that one hour be given to debate the Bill with the Right of Reply given to me as the Member moving this motion.

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

MR. SPEAKER.- I now call upon the honourable Acting Prime Minister and Attorney-General to speak on his motion

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, essentially this Bill seeks to remove the Permanent Secretary of Education from the FNU Council.

Currently the Permanent Secretary for Education is the ex-officio member. We have, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in terms of good governance as we will find as we are talking about Water Authority of Fiji, there is no one from the Ministry of Infrastructure that sits on the board because we need to have the boards accountable and also there could enormous conflicts as we have seen in the past.

If there are financial decisions being made by the Council of which the line Permanent Secretary is also a Council member or a board member and there is going to be an inquiry then how

could we expect the Permanent Secretary of that line Ministry to be independent when that Permanent Secretary has to do the work for the Minister?

So, we will see, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in all of the boards wherever possible we have always removed the Government officials from the boards and, of course, there are some that are still there but in particular for this academic institution, we need to ensure that there is independence. The policy decision as highlighted is made by the Ministry regarding the education sector overall. FNU should play a facilitating role and of course FNU needs to be independent in order to ensure that there is academic excellence that needs to prevail in our national university.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion. At the end of the debate we will have the Right of Reply from the mover. Anyone wishing to take the floor? There being no one wishing to take the floor, I call on the honourable Acting Prime Minister if he has anything further to say.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have nothing further.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

### **COMMISSIONS OF INQUIRY (AMENDMENT) BILL 2022**

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

- (a) The Commissions of Inquiry (Amendment) Bill 2022 (Bill No. 04/2022) be considered by Parliament without delay;
- (b) The Bill must pass through one stage at a single sitting of Parliament;
- (c) The Bill must not be referred to a standing committee or other Committee of Parliament; and
- (d) The Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament on Thursday, 10th February 2022, but that 1 hour be given to debate the Bill, with the right of reply given to me as the Member moving the motion.

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as you know that the Commission of Inquiry in recent times has been used, this is the second time it has been used. The first time it was done was round about in 2007 when the then former President His Excellency, Ratu Josefa Uluivuda had appointed a Commission of Inquiry into the magistracy where there were enormous allegations of corruption in the magistracy.

We had one magistrate actually who was proven, had an agent in Nadi Market where he would charge particular rates, dangerous driving, careless driving, rape et cetera, you had to pay a particular fee then you could get various leniencies that were built into it.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Act however is quite old (1946), the Act has not been amended except for in 1961, 1982 and 1997 which dealt however with the provisions relating to the appointment of fresh Commissioners and Oath of Commissioners.

The offence provision, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in fact are fairly archaic. What this particular provision does is seeks to in fact bring the offence provisions, the actual offence itself is not being changed but in fact the penalties have been increased to bring it into modern day times and that is what this particular provision is about, Sir.

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

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is disgraceful, truly disgraceful.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Why?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Here we are after 9pm, after a long day we are given these Bills to be debated tomorrow for one hour. I do not have any problems with the Tobacco and the other Bills but this one here, you would need lawyers to look into this. Who on this side of the House would understand the implications of what is here. This is a disgrace!

We are talking about a law that has been there since 1946. What were we doing the whole of this week? This is disgraceful. If this is the way we treat our Parliament, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is a sorry state of affairs, the attitude that FijiFirst brings to this Parliament. This is totally unacceptable. That is the only word I can use - disgraceful. As I have said in the past, in other governments - there was this Legislative Committee in the Party to bring the Bills to Parliament. When did the Acting Prime Minister decide to bring all of these - we are not a kindergarten here. We are a Parliament of Fiji. You are treating us like kindergartens here.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. V.R.GAVOKA.- It is disgraceful. Shame on you for treating your Parliament like this. We know that you do not have the numbers but shame on you if this is the way you treat a Parliament.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, just as honourable Gavoka has said, it is nearly half past nine in the evening. When we broke for the 15-minute break, I recall that you apologised and said that you erred and did not tell us in the morning that there were Bills. I would like to ask why it took you so long to tell us about these Bills and I agree with honourable Gavoka - this is unreasonable and I would like to say, Mr. Speaker, that if Government paid its bills as fast as they introduced Bills in this House, maybe we would have working angiograms at CWM. And if the Government worked as fast as they introduced Bills in giving out services to the people, we would have services being given to the people.

But, Mr. Speaker, Sir, what is going on in this Parliament? This is the people's Parliament and it is being ambushed for the umpteenth time by the Attorney-General who time and time again is treating democracy like a façade riding roughshod over our Parliament processes. So, as honourable Gavoka said that we do not have any problems with the Bills *per se* but the manner in which they have been brought in, expected for us to go and have a read of them tonight and be ready for four debates tomorrow - bringing Standing Order 51 as a reason to pass these Bills this quickly, I am sorry, Mr. Speaker, this is just an abuse of Parliamentary process.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- I just wanted to join my colleagues in raising our concerns and objections to the continuous abuse of process by using Standing Order 51. I mean, to be given these four Bills at this time of the night to be debated tomorrow morning, I am sure majority of the members of the Government side of the side do not even know the contents of these Bills. The reality will be

this, tomorrow, they will not be contributing to this Bill. That is the reality because they do not know the contents of these Bills. So we need time, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I have already alluded to in the previous sessions regarding the continuous abuse of Standing Order 51. At least, we have always requested for Government to give us advanced notice; three or at least 5 days for us to have a view and have a consultation regarding the contents of this Bill. These Bills are not simple adjustments or amendments. We have all known what happened to the Bills that have been presented under Standing Order 51 in the past.

The False Information Act was presented under Standing Order 51 and what happened! When it was passed here, the implementation of the Bill was bizarre. Then we had Bill No. 17, after it was passed in this House, then the relevant ministries and departments went about to all the villages for consultation.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- This is why, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we continue to raise the need for the Government to have respect for this House; give us enough time to have a read through these Bill. As an indication, Sir, as I have already alluded to, majority of these Members on the Government side will not even know how to debate on this Bill tomorrow. Given this time, I strongly object and am concerned regarding the use of Standing Order 51 on these four Bills.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Thank you, I will be very brief Mr. Speaker, Sir. Just to correct what honourable Radrodro said, yes we are aware of what is in the Bills, so please do not assume that we are not.

Secondly, Sir, honourable Gavoka pointed out that he has no issue with the first three Bills, it is only the fourth one which is the one about the Commission of Inquiry. In reality Sir, you can read this in five minutes and digest it and make submissions on it. It is nothing except ....

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- It's a disgrace.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- It is not a disgrace.

It is really just amending the punishment and that is it. It is as simple as that. It does not require 10 lawyers to decipher it. You got two lawyers on the other side of the House that could do this in ten minutes. Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is nothing disgraceful about it at all and we are totally within the law to actually do this.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Opposition loves bending the term around "abuse of process". Abuse of process means that when you actually have a process and you do not follow it. There is a process under SO51, clearly laid out, so no one is abusing the process. They need to understand the fundamental wordings of these processes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Standing Orders are the processes of the House. Honourable Qereqeretaua has got it wrong again, honourable Gavoka said he did not have problems with the first three Bills, he only had problems with the fourth Bill. So, obviously, he recognises the fact that the first three Bills in fact, are urgent. In particular, the first two Bills (Tobacco and Liquor Licence), they want us to send this to the Committee, that will take another month. In the meantime, the *suki* seller, the hotel who wants to operate and wants to start having his liquor licence will not be able to do so. That is the problem. It is not sitting on it.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is not sitting on it. There are numerous laws, this pandemic has actually thrown a real curler at us. We never had this before. Like we are saying, that this is probably now, if you look at the glass half full, this is the opportunity now to change these laws. Why should we get the *suki* seller or that person selling cigarettes to come year in year out to change this? He is shaking his head, he does not care about the people in Lautoka Market. This is the problem, they want to go on about process but they do not care about ordinary Fijians; that is your problem. You are too infatuated by your own self, your own self-importance, that is what you are infatuated about; your own self-importance.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- And you have not been able to manage your time. You are saying, “oh it is so late”, who are the people who have been standing up on the other side on all these reports waffling on the same subject matter for hours on hand? Your Whip has been useless in respect of not being able to manage your time.

HON. RO. F. TUISAWAU.- Can I raise a Point of Order?

MR. SPEAKER.- What is the Point of Order?

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- What specifically he has said, “your Whip has been useless” and I object to that, that is unparliamentary language and very offensive and a slur on my character. From Monday to today, I have been organising things and helping them, is that they repay me?

Today, they have brought this at the last minute, I was not even notified of it until tonight and we could not organise it, so how can he say that I have been useless, when I have been helping them from my first day as Whip up to this moment, but they are ones who are useless. They are inefficient because they have just brought this in now and we need to fix that. Secondly, this is why we must remove this Government because of the uselessness of the Standing Order. This Standing Order have been abused and useless and they need to be removed for us to fix it.

MR. SPEAKER.- I do not think you have been useless, honourable Whip. The thing is, what you got to do, you got to organise your side for tomorrow. The four Bills will be debated tomorrow. So I expect organisation from this side and the other side, that is all I expect. If you have to burn the midnight oil tonight, you have to burn the midnight oil tonight. We have all burnt the midnight oil in our times, many times. This calls for burning of the midnight oil.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sir, the reason I made that, I did not say he himself personally was but in his ability to organise, that was useless. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the point I was trying to make, earlier on when honourable Ro Tuisawau I had mentioned to him yesterday I think it was and I said “look why not rationalise the number of speakers, you need to organise yourselves.” He said, “no, no its election time, they can speak as much as they like.” This was the reaction, he knows he said that, that is what I am talking about, Sir.

(Laughter)

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point I would like to point out ....

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Point of Order, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, he misunderstood what I said. What I meant was when we debate we need to debate clearly so that the public knows everything because if we cut it short especially on the Auditor-General's Report, the public will not know the truth. They are hiding the truth that is why they want to shorten the debates. But we did not know about this one until now. If we had known then we would have organised better. So, please withdraw the term "useless" change it to "useful".

(Laughter)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sir, he did mention it is election time, you accept that, I know you cannot deny that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just for honourable Gavoka's point he said, "We need lawyers." As I mentioned in my introduction, nothing in this amendment regarding the Commissions of Inquiry has changed, no new offence has been introduced, no new wording has been introduced except the penalties. So the penalties in fact have increased, that is all. So you do not need a lawyer to tell you whether something is gone up from \$200 to \$1,000 because the wording and the offence remains exactly the same. There is no amendment to the provision itself.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Aseri Radrodro who is trying salvage his reputation now just mislead Parliament...

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- He said that ....

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Come on!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- No, it is not come on, it is a fact.

He said that we did consultations after, Bill No. 17 is no longer in existence, my friend, it is Act No. 22. There was no consultations done afterwards. It was because the Ministry went out to clear up the misinformation that all of you spread.

(Chorus of interjection)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- No, no, no!

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- All of you spread.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- That misinformation was led by the former Whip who is no longer in SODELPA but that is the misinformation that they had to go and correct. Honourable Minister for Rural Maritime, Development will also verify that, that is what was done and if it was so terrible as you made it out to be, tell me who has lost their land, that is what you are saying. Since the implementation of the law which *iTaukei* landowning unit has lost their land? Which *iTaukei* landowning unit has leased land without any consent? No one, that is what you are saying and nothing like that has happened.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Stop campaigning.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am not campaigning, it is factual. He is campaigning. Sir, I would urge all honourable Members to please look at it with their fresh minds so that we can debate this Bill tomorrow.

MR. SPEAKER.-. Honourable Members, the Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we have had a long day, but our start tomorrow is the same, there is no extension of starting time, so I expect everyone here tomorrow to debate these Bills and complete the Agenda items for tomorrow. I thank you for your cooperation, forbearance and your humour. We adjourn till tomorrow at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 9.36 p.m.