

[VERBATIM REPORT]

STANDING COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE, LAW AND HUMAN RIGHTS PUBLIC HEARING

BILLS

Investment Fiji Bill 2022 (Bill No. 05/2022)



SUBMITTEE: Residents of Dagau, Labasa.

**VENUE: Mr. Mohammed Gulab's Residence,
Dagau, Labasa.**

DATE: Friday, 18th February, 2022.

**VERBATIM REPORT OF THE PUBLIC HEARING OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE
ON JUSTICE, LAW AND HUMAN RIGHTS HELD AT MR. MOHAMMED GULAB'S
RESIDENCE, DAGAU, LABASA, ON FRIDAY, 18TH FEBRUARY, 2022, AT 3.27 P.M.**

Present

- | | | | |
|----|--------------------------|---|--------------------|
| 1. | Hon. A.A. Maharaj | - | Chairman |
| 2. | Hon. R.R. Sharma | - | Deputy Chairperson |
| 3. | Hon. Dr. S.R. Govind | - | Government Member |
| 4. | Hon. Ratu S. Matanitobua | - | Opposition Member |
| 5. | Hon. M.D. Bulitavu | - | Opposition Member |

Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts

- | | | | |
|----|--------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|
| 1. | Mr. Collin Sowani Yabaki | - | Director Heritage and Arts |
| 2. | Mr. Veniki Nalio | - | Senior Policy and Convention Officer |

Interviewee/Submittee: Resident of Dagau, Labasa.

In Attendance:

1. Mr. Urman Ali
 2. Mr. Basant
 3. Mr. Janesh
 4. Mr. Abdul Rahoot
 5. Mr. Jitendra Lal
 6. Mr. Ram Chandar
 7. Mr. Ravinesh
 8. Mr. Amrit Prasad
 9. Mr. Ganeshwar Lal
 10. Mr. Afroz Dean
 11. Mr. Naz Bequm
 12. Mr. Sepeti Tukoi
 13. Mr. M Razak
 14. Mr. Artar Ali
 15. Mr. Pradip Chand
 16. Mr. Dewan Chand
 17. Mr. Yusuf Hussein
 18. Mr. Ritesh Dayal
 19. Mr. Biren Kumar
 20. Mr. Diwan Chand
 21. Mr. Mohammed Janob
 22. Mr. Mohammed Adam
 23. Ms. Saireen Nisha
 24. Ms. Parma Wati
 25. Ms. Shamidan
 26. Ms. Samsul Nisha
 27. Ms. Hasiman Bi
-

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Good afternoon everyone. I shall call the meeting to order now. Before we proceed, we will request Mr. Mohammed Gulab to lead us with the word of prayer.

(Prayer in Hindi - Mr. Mohammed Gulab)

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you, Sir, for leading us with the word of prayer. Before we start, I would like to apologise for coming in a bit late. I was at Dreketi having some Ministry's commitment which I could not leave but thank you so much for waiting.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights, I would like to welcome each and every one of you who is present here this afternoon to attend the public consultation on the two Bills that is before the Committee, the Heritage Bill 2021, Bill No. 3 of 2021 and Investment Fiji Bill 2022, Bill No. 5 of 2022.

What I was told by certain people here that there are certain other issues that members and the general public would like to discuss, we will leave that until the end of this session. Once we are done with this formal meeting, then we can discuss whatever issues you are facing and I shall relate that to the relevant agencies and ministries. But for this particular meeting, we will be basically concentrating on these two Bills that are before us.

(Introduction of Committee Members)

Without any further delay, I will take you through the Bills. First, I will explain the two Bills in English because English is the formal and recognised language in Parliament, so I, as the Chairman, will be speaking in English. Then honourable Rohit Sharma will translate the Bills in *Hindi* and honourable Mosese Bulitavu will be translating the Bills in *i Taukei* language as well.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Part 3 – Accounts and Finance

Funding, financial reporting and audit of accounts is very important under accountability and transparency. Again, every year, they come with an annual report and that is going to be tabled before Parliament.

Part 4 – Directions by the Minister

Government is going to make the policy which is going to be passed on to the Board and that will show the direction on which particular area Investment Fiji needs to promote Fiji as an investment site. For example, if tomorrow Government decides that we do not have pharmaceutical investors in Fiji because we do not produce medicine in Fiji, they will give a direction to Investment Fiji that we need to promote pharmaceutical industry in Fiji. We can get both, local and foreign investors to come and invest in the pharmaceutical sector and there are a lot of places in Vanua Levu known as tax free zones. Those are some of the initiatives that Government is going to do.

Those investors who are coming can come and invest in other places, apart from Suva and Lautoka. So if we are able to get investors to come and invest in Seaqaqa, that will create jobs which will benefit the people of Seaqaqa. So that is basically what this Bill is all about and how we are going to give directions to Investment Fiji on where to go.

Basically in a nutshell, this is what the two Bills are all about. I now give time to honourable Rohit Sharma to translate everything in *Hindi*, before we switch to honourable Mosese Bulitavu to translate in *i Taukei* language as well. Thank you, very much.

(Explanation on the Investment Fiji Bill 2022 in Hindi – Hon. R.R. Sharma and Heritage Bill 2021 by Hon. Dr. S.R. Govind)

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you for translating the Bills in *Hindi*. Do we need it to be translated in *i Taukei* as well?

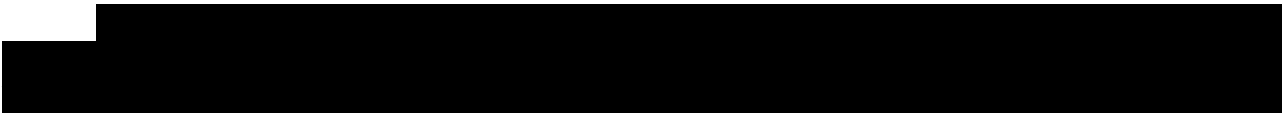
RESIDENTS OF DAGAU.- No.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you very much. I think you must have understood what the Bills are all about. As we have stated earlier, this is a Parliamentary process whereby we need to go out and collect submissions before any Bill is passed in Parliament. So whichever Bill that is referred to us, we, as a Committee, go around and collect submissions and then we present our report back to Parliament.

Now, I would like to open the floor for anyone who has any specific question with regards to the two Bills. Any clarification you would like to seek with regards to the two Bills, this is the time to do so. Thank you.

(Question asked by Mr. R. Dayal in Hindi and responded to by Hon. R.R. Sharma in Hindi)

MR. P. CHANDRA.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am Prakash Chandra, I am also an Advisory Councillor in the Solove area.



Also, regarding the Investment Fiji Bill 2022, first of all, I would like to give a brief history of the Seaqaqa settlement. People settle here before cane farming came to Seaqaqa. In 1975, the Government led by the late Ratu Mara stepped in and brought cane farming to Seaqaqa and that was one of the largest investment been done by the European Union and the Australian Government.

Sir, people from other areas came and settled in Seaqaqa. We managed to produce 80,000 tonnes of cane at that time but later on, it was declined because we had the two *coups*. The price of cane declined and people moved out from Seaqaqa because they had no interest.

Later on when this Government came in, again, with a lot of help to cane farming, such as fertiliser subsidy, cane planting grant, et cetera, people took interest again, so they came back and planted cane. But one thing I would like to tell share this evening, that we do not have any other factories or any other employment for our children. When we put them for education up to Form 7 or tertiary level, they move out from their parents and stay in Labasa Town or move to Suva or to Nausori and look for better jobs.

As you have said, we need investment here. We have the potential here, like cane farming is coming up, we can plant other crops but the thing is that, we do not have the market and no other assistance regarding factories to process those things. Lately, I have been talking with the Department of Agriculture Officials in Seaqaqa. They have planted turmeric and ginger in the area. They said that they do not have any market for turmeric or ginger, so people find it difficult to sell those commodities, so if the Government can step in.

There is a factory - a private company, which has not started. The owner bought machines for turmeric processing - washing, drying, cutting and he wants to send his products overseas. However, he might buy turmeric at a low price from farmers, so we want the Government to step in.

We can also plant chillies, tomatoes and other crops. If the market is flooded, we do not get enough money to sell it here. We cannot sell it in Seaqaqa. We take it to Labasa Market and it is a very expensive process. So my request to the Government is to encourage the farmers to plant turmeric and ginger and the factory to be run by the Government. They have to buy at a good price so the people will have interest in doing farming and staying back in Seaqaqa. Thank you.

(Response in Hindi – Hon. R.R. Sharma)

(Question asked by Mr. M. Gulab in Hindi)

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you much very, Sir, on the Investment Fiji Bill 2022. What Mr. Gulab was stating is that, they have heard that the Fiji Government is going to build an international airport. Just a plan to do so but at this point in time, we do understand that there are some delays because of COVID-19 but definitely Government did plan that. It is in our 5 Year and 20 Year

Development Plan that we need to have international port of entries in Vanua Levu, not just air but sea as well, so that we can reduce freight and investment can come to Vanua Levu as well.

The other issue that Mr. Gulab did mention is about electricity in this particular area. That is not directly related to the Bill and I will respond to that once we conclude this meeting. We will move forward.

MR. M. ADAM.- Thank you, Sir. Regarding the Investment Fiji Bill 2022, since many people here in Seaqaqa are cane farmers, we have heard that the Government is planning to have a mini mill in Seaqaqa. We would like to ask whether it will happen.

If a mini mill is in Seaqaqa, that will ease a lot of farmers' problems. For example, we send our sugarcane to Labasa which is costing almost \$16 to \$20 per tonne. So if a mini mill is built in Seaqaqa, that will reduce the cost to the farmers.

[REDACTED]

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you, Sir. Once again, in regards to the mini mill, I will try to explain that after this session. It is not directly related but indirectly related about the Government's plans, et cetera, which we will discuss after this session.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

(Question in Hindi by Mr. M. Gulab)

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- For our viewers, Mr. Gulab had explained that he used to work in the Department of Forestry 60 years ago, there was forest reserve somewhere around Batiri and Nararo. When they used to visit those places, they felt that there were houses there. He was just wondering where those people have gone to.

Those houses do not exist now but they constructed the site with stones all around, the boundary and trees were really huge. Some have been cut and some are still there. He was just wondering because during that time, Dagau did not exist and those other places. Where did those people get their food from, water source, light, et cetera? He was trying to say that, that is also a unique place.

(Translation in Hindi by Hon. R.R. Sharma)

(Vote of Thanks – Hon. M.D. Bulitavu)

The Committee adjourned at 4.21 p.m.