

# PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



## PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

### DAILY HANSARD

**FRIDAY, 13<sup>TH</sup> MAY, 2022**

[CORRECTED COPY]

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**FRIDAY, 13TH MAY, 2022**

The Parliament met at 9.37 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

MR. SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

**PRESENT**

All Members were present, except the honourable V.R. Gavoka, honourable Adi L. Qionibaravi, honourable Prof. B.C. Prasad and honourable L.S. Qereqeretabua.

**MINUTES**

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Thursday, 12th May, 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.

**COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE SPEAKER**

Welcome

I welcome all honourable Members to today's sitting of Parliament. I also welcome those joining us in the public gallery, and those watching the live broadcast of the proceedings.

Honourable Members, I also warmly welcome the final group of PL100 - Government and Politics students from the University of the South Pacific. You are most welcome to Parliament, and similarly, with the other groups that came before you who visited Parliament in the last four days, I hope that you enjoy today's proceedings. Thank you for your continued interest in the workings of your Parliament.

Girmit Photo Exhibition and Displays

Honourable Members at this juncture I wish to inform all Honourable Members that in the Parliament foyer is a Girmit photo exhibition and displays to commemorate the 143<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the arrival of the *Girmityas* in Fiji. This is an initiative of the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts. I encourage all Honourable Members to take some time today to peruse the information being displayed.

**PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND CERTAIN DOCUMENTS**

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

Standing Committee on Social Affairs

1. Housing Authority – 2016 Annual Report (*Parliamentary Paper No. 37/2018*);
2. Housing Authority – 2017 Annual Report (*Parliamentary Paper No. 80/2019*); and
3. Public Rental Board – 2018 Annual Report (*Parliamentary Paper No. 38/2020*).

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence

Fiji Police Force August 2018-July 2019 Annual Report (*Parliamentary Paper No. 134/2019*)

**QUESTIONS**Oral Questions

Update on Child Protection Programme  
(Question No. 122/2022)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation update Parliament on the Child Protection Programme, which has an allocation of \$50,000 in the Revised 2021-2022 Budget?

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for the question. The Fijian Government is obliged to protect the rights of our children as per our commitment to the Convention on the Rights of Children. Children in this context are those between the ages of 0 to 18. Fiji's proportion of the population between zero to 18 is approximately made of 34 percent or 300,000 children.

The care and protection budget of \$300,000 in the Revised Budget will enable Government to facilitate advocacy and outreach programmes on the prevention of child abuse and neglect which is done annually. Secondly, the allocation will also allow the Ministry to facilitate wide and inclusive consultations on two national policies on children, namely; the National Child Protection Strategic Framework and the National Child Safeguarding Policy. Work progress in this area include; consultations with faith-based organisations, Civil Society Organisations and Government agencies at national level. The Ministry will be formalising its submission and finalisation of the policy within the fourth quarter of this financial year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in relation to the National Child Safeguarding Policy, the Ministry continues to meet with relevant Government agencies to consult widely on the framework. Once the policy is endorsed, every Government agency engaged in activities that involves contact with children will be required to adopt the National Child Safeguarding Policy or to develop their own safeguarding policy aligned to the National Child Safeguarding Policy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry as per its legal mandate under the existing legislation related to child protection also requires the State to provide for the needs of children as and when child placements are being facilitated by Ministry Officials. These would include meeting expenses of travel, meals and accommodation accordingly. Today, the Ministry works with a total of 11 residential care homes and children across the country which has a total of 156 children. Existing legislations that guide the work of welfare officers in the frontline of child protection include; the Adoption of Infants Act (Cap 58), the Child Welfare Act 2010 and the Juveniles Act (Cap 56).

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would also like to inform this august Parliament that the Government investment for child protection is not limited to this \$50,000 annual year alone, there are other budgetary allocations that serve to resource the service platform.

In the last four years, the Government has provided a total investment of \$45.6 million towards child protection initiatives and Government which includes social protection, institutional grants as well as the child protection programmes. This equates to an average of \$11.4 million annually in the past four years.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I conclude by saying that the child protection allocation in the Revised Budget is an enabling allocation for the welfare officers to facilitate according to the requirements to meet the best interests and protection of our children who come to our service terrains across the four national Divisions. This, of course, is part of the bigger allocation towards child protection resourcing that Government invests annually.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, I thank the honourable Minister for that statement on child protection. My question is on child beggars and also on the mental health of children, particularly in regards to the effect or the kind of trauma that children went through during the COVID-19 pandemic. What kind of programmes and how much of this allocation is going to be allocated for those two specific programmes that I have mentioned in regards to mental health and also child beggars as these are rising problems right now with our children?

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for the question. I will answer your first question. When it comes to child welfare and when it comes to education, mental health and looking after the aspects of our children, I think parental responsibility is paramount, given the fact that we have children begging on our streets. I would like to pose a question to all of us; where does the responsibility lie? Children, when they are in school, they are looked after by the teachers - the education system. When they are at home and during after school hours, I strongly believe that they should be at the responsibility of their parents.

My Ministry has profiled child beggars and the sad part is that, most of these children are on the streets at the knowledge of their parents. The parents know that their children are selling pies and coconuts and begging. It is not only dangerous for the child but they can be prey to other activities, like drugs, et cetera. So, I would first and foremost urge all the parents across the country to be aware of where their children are.

We look after your children when they are in school. Schools have counselling services. After COVID-19 and even during COVID-19, there were services provided by various counselling agencies that the Ministry of Education engages, my Ministry engages and, of course, the Ministry of Health.

In cases of mental health, we are not going to go out on the streets looking for children. If parents have issues and if they need assistance, all the three Ministries work together to provide services. On a daily basis, my Ministry has parents and children come in and we provide them with assistance. Some of them even come to us for food. We understand that times are hard but getting your children to beg is not a solution. It is an adult responsibility.

If all adults carry out their responsibilities well, I am sure we will not have any child beggars. We come across children begging, knocking on the windows in heavy traffic areas, this is a danger to their lives. What if someone does not stop at the traffic light when the child is knocking on the window? So, late hours, there is no excuse for any child to be on the street begging. It is the responsibility of the parents.

The Ministry of Health has mental awareness programmes, they have assistance available, support available in terms of mental and Ministry of Education has counselling services available. We have engaged Empower Pacific, Medical Services Pacific – services are there but the parent has to actually bring the child to us. We do not expect the children to come to us directly. It is parental responsibility. So, if you have a problem, please, seek assistance from us.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- I thank the honourable Minister for her response. In terms of young teenagers who are roaming the streets at night. During normalisation of life and the opening of nightclubs, we see young teenagers roaming around at night. What sort of assistance can be given to parents and guardians in terms of workshops or other programmes that can be put together because some parents and guardians really need help in terms of bringing up their children post-COVID? How can they be assisted?

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Mr. Speaker, again the question is about teenagers roaming the streets at night. Yes, we admit it is very dangerous but we need to look at the factors that push them out. As I have mentioned in my earlier response, if the parents provide proper disciplinary guidelines to their children when they are growing up, that is one thing. Yes, if they need help I have just said that there are thousand services available and if you do know that there are certain communities that need assistance, we are ready to send our officers for assistance.

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would just like to ask the honourable Minister, what is her Ministry doing about children that are mothers? There is a whole lot of them out there. What is your Ministry doing about them?

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, the question should be related to the initial question.

Delay in Re-Opening of Govind Park  
(Question No. 129/2022)

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts, and Local Government inform Parliament of the reasons for the delay in the re-opening of Govind Park, Ba?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for his question. Govind Park is well known to many soccer fans locally and internationally. Govind Park has hosted many soccer events catering more than 13,000 spectators. Unfortunately, the strong winds of *TC Winston* in February 2016 did not spare the 40 year old pavilion. The two pavilions; A and B sustained substantial damage as the strong winds tore apart the pavilion structures and the roof.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ba Town Council engaged a consultant to carry out a preliminary assessment of the pavilions. The damage assessment report revealed that the steel and timber pavilion structures were in a very poor condition and it will not be able to hold spectators during sports event.

The report further provided that the pavilions are to be prohibited from any usage or public seating. Based on the Report, Ba Town Council had no other option but to consult the Ministry of Local Government and Ministry of Infrastructure to assist in the preparation and advertisement of a public tender to reconstruct Govind Park. On 22 January, 2018, Ba Town Council signed a contract with the contractor to carry out the re-development of Govind Park.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is worth noting that from the years 2016 to 2020, the Government has invested approximately \$4.9 million towards this project. The funding has been used to pay for the

assessment report, demolition of the two existing pavilions, rebuilding of the fence and the construction of the new pavilion and associated structures. The pavilion structure has been completed in accordance to the scope of work. The specifics include a 9,000 seating capacity pavilion, two restroom, four change room, one conference room, two dormitories, a corporate box, two media rooms and two kiosk outlets.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the COVID-19 pandemic had a huge impact on the project completion. Due to the COVID-19 restriction for the safety of Fijians and to contain the spread of the virus, the construction work was stopped.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are some works that remain pending and must be completed to get the stadium ready for local and international sporting events. This is Phase II which includes installation of the EFL transformer, floodlights, ground upgrade, drainage work, ticket booth and transport management study. The contractor also needs to fix the defects picked up by the Project Manager and CIU in the first phase for example, the cupboard sink bench counter, sink for the two big kiosks were not done, incomplete tiling work, incomplete painting work, non-compliance, disabled toilets' specification, plastering work and some works done but not as per the scope hence, all these need to be rectified.

The Ministry of Local Government, Construction and Implementation Unit and Ba Town Council are coordinating the implementation of the second phase including the addressing of the defects that were found by the Project Manager. The Ba Town Council with a team of Special Administrators are targeting to reopen Govind Park early next year which is 2023. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Benefits of Bus Fare Programme – Social Welfare Recipients  
(Question No. 130/2022)

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

Given that the revised budget provided an increase in allocation of \$6 million under the Bus Fare Programme, can the honourable Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation update Parliament on how Social Welfare recipients will benefit from this programme?

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for the question.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government's Bus Fare Scheme was initially introduced in 2011 (11 years ago) by the Bainimarama Government with the total beneficiaries of 22,928. The scheme was designed as a 50 percent concession targeted at older persons aged 60 plus and persons living with disabilities.

In 2018, consistent with the Fijian Government's commitment to digital transformation and modernising the transport industry the Bus Fare Scheme transition to the E-Ticketing platform with a \$40 monthly top-up. With effect from May 2022, the Ministry has also revised its payments' schedule to make quarterly payment of \$75.

In 2018 to-date, the Government had allocated more than \$36 million towards this great initiative. Due to COVID-19, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and the COVID-19 movement restrictions, Government saw it prudent to reduce the top-up to \$20 and as least as \$10.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the FijiFirst Government's rationale on this programme is essentially aimed at promoting a culture of appreciation for our elders and the recognition of the rights and empowerment of persons living with disability. The appreciation of our elders for their contribution to Fiji's development as a nation is very much a conscious choice, recognising the rights of persons living with disability and empowering them is rather a conscious choice of the FijiFirst Government.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, today the Bus Fare Programme assists 41,457 Fijians comprising 38,980 older persons aged 60 plus and 2,527 persons living with disabilities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, over the last five years the FijiFirst Government has provided \$35.2 million towards ensuring that our elders and persons living with disabilities are not left behind. Some have argued that the cost of living has increased and therefore the support for the elderly and persons living with disabilities need to increase. I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that the FijiFirst Government will certainly do all it can to support all Fijians in it. Our ability to assist of course depends on the strength of our economy right now and the prudence in which we manage our finances as a nation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as for the revised budget of March 2022 Government has increased its allocation to \$6 million for the Bus Fare Scheme. This will allow every entitled citizen to receive a \$25 top-up monthly. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is made possible with the strengthening of our economy, as we have managed to contain the COVID-19 virus, opened up our borders as early as possible and allowed our tourism sector to grow.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to also advise the august House that in recognition of a more efficient and less administrative service. Government will administer the next three months' top-up as a batch payment.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fiji First Government will continue to ensure that every older person and person living with disability will age and live with dignity. Before I take my seat, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to acknowledge all the citizens, all the school children and all organisations that have organised their own events, muftis, concerts, character parades, literature reviews and competitions, et cetera to commemorate the 147<sup>th</sup> year of the arrival of indentured labourers in Fiji.

As a proud descendant of the *Girmitiyas*, I wish to take this time to say to my fellow Fijians, that we must always hold their sacrifices, struggles and contributions of our *Girmitiyas* close to our heart. Their sweat, blood and tears are engraved in our history and we must honour that because they were indeed a massive part of building the Fiji we know. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I pay my utmost respect to all our *Girmitiya* ancestors.

Progress of Rehabilitation - Laucala District School  
(Question No. 131/2022)

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts, and Local Government update Parliament on the progress of rehabilitation of Laucala District School?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Laucala District School is a primary school situated on Qamea Island. The Laucala District School was established in 1947. Today, only 44 students are enrolled in this school. This school services Dreketi Village which is one of the four villages on the island and the other villages are being served by three other schools. The school was initially located on the island of Laucala and it was relocated to Qamea Island after Laucala Island was purchased by



a multimillionaire from America. The *Tui Cakau* at that time, Ratu Sir Penaia Kanatabatu Ganilau, then gave villages a portion of land to relocate the school.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the school sustained damages when there was a landslide in Qamea Island due to continuous downpour and tropical depression in December 2016. The landslide caused massive damages to the houses, buildings structures of the Laucala District school and completely destroyed the nursing station.

The multiple mudslides also caused extensive damage to the community of Dreketi, Togo, Kocoma, in the Tikina of Laucala and Wainikeli. During the time of the disaster, 1 x 4 classrooms, Head of School's quarters and the school water tank sustained damaged while the three other teachers' quarters were deemed unsafe to be occupied.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, after the disaster, a collaborative approach was taken by the Government where relief supplies such as tents, shelter kits, first-aid and wash kits were all supplied to all the four villages. Given the nature of the landslide, it was necessary to carry out a geotech study which was done by the Mineral Resources Department (MRD). The detailed damage assessment report revealed that the long-term solution to Dreketi Village was relocation, however, the two relocation sites suggested by the village were also not suitable.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the report by the MRD concluded that one of the proposed relocated site behind the village at the ridge was not enough to cater for the village, school and the nursing station. Therefore, this site could not be considered for relocation. The second site was on the west of the village towards the Solove Creek, passed the nursing station but these two were not suitable because the area is prone to flooding and landslides.

Based on the report and considering the safety of students and non-availability of a suitable site, the Ministry provided two alternatives and, in my view, they were two very good alternatives:

1. To relocate the students to Kocoma Village School which is 5 kilometres from Laucala District School. The Kocoma Village School had 80 students roll at that time.
2. The Ministry would have provided RSL tickets to a boat service provider to transport students or could have given a boat and engine to the school for the transportation of students from Laucala District School, which takes only 10 minutes to 15 minutes boat ride to Kocoma Village School.

However, the school management and the community insisted that they wanted the children to study in the village. Laucala District School students could have attended another school, which was seven kilometres away, and this is Vuanicau Primary School, and it takes approximately 30 minutes by boat. Again, in both the situation, we would have provided RSL boat fares and boat with an engine. Currently, the school is using a church and a makeshift shed for classes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have been informed that school management identified a place one kilometre away from the current location, where they want to build the school with the help of some donors who have shown interest to support and build the school, but they need to solve the land lease issue.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, even if the land issue is resolved, the Ministry will ensure that necessary geo-tech study is also taken on the site so that whatever we build can last longer, and again it is a matter of putting a permanent structure and we want this permanent structure to last many years and

not that in the next cyclone or by next flood, the structure goes down. So geo-tech study is very important and based on the geo-tech study, we need to engage the architect who can design the building to withstand some of the findings that come out in the geo-tech study.

We have also noted, as I had mentioned earlier, the decline in the student roll which indicates that it is not viable to invest in building another school, especially, when there are other alternatives available which my Ministry is willing to support.

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, a supplementary question; do you have any percentage of the schools that have been fully restored that were damaged by the cyclone?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is not a supplementary question, it is a complete new question so if you want the statistics, I need lead time. You may like to bring this question in the next Parliament Sitting.

Update on the Teachers' *Talanoa* Platform  
(Question No. 132/2022)

HON. R.R. SHARMA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts, and Local Government update Parliament on the Teachers' *Talanoa* Platform which was launched on 8th September, 2021?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry launched the Teacher's *Talanoa* Platform last year in September to serve a professional group of 13,000 teachers. We find that often, it is very difficult to communicate with all 13,000 teachers because they are all over the place in the different parts of the country. Therefore, this Teacher's *Talanoa* Platform was the most ideal way of connecting with the teachers.

This online platform was created by the Ministry to allow teachers to communicate with one another and with the Ministry. This platform allows teachers to share their ideas, views and vision which will help the Ministry to transform education for the future of our children. We felt that as educators, teachers have a critical role to play in shaping the lives of our children, therefore, they should have a say in what the Ministry does. It is, therefore, important that the teachers get a chance to have their say on the curriculum, they should have their say on the resources that we provide or the changes that are being introduced in the school.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is envisaged that the Teachers *Talanoa* Platform will strengthen our partnership with the teachers. This platform has created a dynamic information eco-system in which teachers come together to engage in thought provoking discussions, innovative ideas, best classroom practices and student behaviour after COVID-19 pandemic.

This platform was developed in-house by our team in the Ministry using Moodle which is an open source software and has no licence and costs. The Teachers *Talanoa* Platform is for three groups of teachers that is Primary, Secondary and Early Childhood Education (ECE). The reason for setting up separate groups were to facilitate discussions in a more focused manner relevant to the teacher and the team at the Ministry that looks after three levels of education.

Since the inception of Teachers *Talanoa* Platform, the level of engagement from the teachers have increased which is very encouraging. The Teachers *Talanoa* Platform is set up in such a manner that all Heads of Sections in the Ministry is automatically part of the forum and receive first-hand

information on all the discussions that take place. For regular monitoring, the Manager E-Learning constantly goes to the discussion forum and informs the relevant Heads of Sections if any intervention or response is required, including the Permanent Secretary.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, examples of some of the discussions that have been going on in the Teachers *Talanoa* Platform are:

1. Game base learning;
2. Financial management in schools;
3. Challenges faced by teachers in remote schools;
4. Years 12 and Year 13 tablets for e-learning;
5. Psycho-socio imbalance;
6. Upgrading teachers' qualification;
7. Student behaviour;
8. Teachers' welfare;
9. Building better student teacher relationship;
10. Digital learning; and
11. Outcome-based curriculum and assessment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it gives us a lot of confidence that our teachers are not only sharing good practices but they are also engaged in pertinent discussions such as the future for education in the post COVID-19 period. Apart from those discussions, Headquarters has also shared information on this platform, such as:

1. Videos on new classroom practice;
2. Curriculum revision for feedback;
3. Learning and development opportunities;
4. School circulars and information; and
5. School plans including teacher transfer posting to bring spouses together.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Teachers *Talanoa* Platform is set up in such a way that all discussions that takes place on the platform also get emailed to all the teachers, hence, they never miss out on the discussions. Teachers can read the discussions at their leisure and then log into the Teachers *Talanoa* Platform to contribute to the discussions, if they wish.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a very good example that I can share is the recent initiative to expedite teacher transfers to bring spouses closer within the teaching district so that families are not separated. Through this platform, teachers provided the relevant information which assisted the Ministry to handle teacher transfer by using data-driven process. Through this process, the Ministry managed to bring 156 teacher families together and we continue to bring families together as vacancies arise.

HON. M.R. LEAWARE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to commend the Ministry of Education for that initiative. It is very good but in terms of connectivity, what measures are there for rural and maritime schools or teachers regarding this Platform? What will the Ministry do, if there is a problem, especially in the rural and maritime areas?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think in this Parliament we have discussed many times about connectivity. That connectivity has improved over the years and more than 92 and if I recall 95 percent of the schools are already connected and just last year, I remember the honourable Attorney-General going to the rural area because we managed to connect the schools to internet as well.

Sir, do note that the internet cost is also met by the Free Education Grant that the Ministry provides. Now, we do understand that we cannot provide the service to all 100 percent schools because of the infrastructure issues but then they can always call the Ministry and the Ministry also sends information, for example, we talked about the circulars for learning opportunities. Some of the courses that are available abroad we package that and we send it to the schools as well, so there are two modes through which we communicate.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- I thank the Honourable Minister for her response. In terms of my earlier question on young teenagers, kids roaming the streets at night, could you bring this up at the Teachers Talanoa Platform and maybe they might have some solutions to this as it could be happening elsewhere in Fiji and not only Suva?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- I think we all need to understand what the honourable Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation just mentioned. When it comes to a child, it is everyone's responsibility. I think teachers are doing their bit in the school and for that reason, we have also introduced the citizenship education that I was talking about - moral and civic education that has been introduced from Year 1 to Year 3, notifying the teachers, yes, they are very much aware of the current situation and we can have this discussion on the platform. But if children are roaming the streets during school hours, then obviously the Fiji Police Force and other stakeholders step in to help the Ministry.

Anything that happens in the school is the responsibility of teachers but when the school ends and when the students go home, that becomes the responsibility of the parents. I hope you all understand that you cannot push the parental responsibility on the State, you should not do that.

Implications of Breteau Index of Mosquitoes - Dengue Fever  
(Question No. 133/2022)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services update Parliament on the Breteau Index of mosquito and its implications in the transmission of dengue fever in Fiji?

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Mr. Speaker the mosquito that causes dengue fever is from a species called *Aedes aegypti* specifically for dengue fever. The Breteau Index is one of the indices that we use to actually see whether a community has the likelihood of transmission of dengue or is going to have the likelihood of transmission of dengue.

What it is, Sir, is the number of positive containers. As we know that these dengue fever (*Aedes aegypti*) mosquitoes only reside in containers, any manmade container whether it be an old bath tub, tyre or container. These are places where the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito will be incubating and growing. These containers or the number of containers infested with the larvae times a 100 percent over the total number of containers so when it is more than 20, there is a high risk of disease transmission.

Mr. Speaker, from February to April this year, a total of 22 subdivisions and municipal councils carried out larvae surveys in their respective jurisdictions where a total of 2,473 households were inspected. During this larvae survey, awareness on mosquito breeding sites were carried out and persons harbouring immature stages of mosquitoes at their premises were given notices for mere presence of mosquitoes and prosecuted.

During the routine surveys we noted that the Breteau Index for Nausori Sub-Division had crossed the threshold of 21 and Taveuni had a Breteau Index of 18 which indicated the high risk of

viral disease transmission on Dengue Fever. The teams were alerted and immediate clean-up campaign of mosquito breeding containers from 23 sampling sites, together with perifocal spraying, was recommended for immediate removal of adult gravid mosquitoes.

There were also similar services done in Nausori and Ba, and they had a team each, so they were at a high-risk status and also the clean-up campaigns were done. Because the said indices and the early warning systems for Fiji were indicative of high mosquito prevalence, the Ministry through its Environmental Health Unit, had implemented clean-up campaigns. To-date, apart from the clean-up campaigns that is present, there is a further 12 proposals that have caught us at the moment with a budget of about \$76,000 in which our teams are going through.

Mr. Speaker, at this juncture, you must have remembered that two years ago, I had discussed the Wolbachia Project that we had in place. This is where a bacteria known as *Wolbachia*, infects the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito. This *Aedes aegypti* mosquito which has the *Wolbachia* is then unable to transmit dengue, *Zika* or *Chikungunya* virus. We have actually launched this in 178 sites along the Suva-Nausori corridor, and also between Nadi-Lautoka. This, we know, will help contribute towards the lessening of the dengue transmission data that we have.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, it is so important that we participate in the clean-up campaigns. The mosquitoes are known to fly up to 400 metres in a day, so when we go out to communities we tell them that the clean-up campaign has to involve everyone in the community, because if one household does not do a clean-up campaign, the *Aedes aegypti* can incubate in the containers in that household and fly within the 200 metres to 400 metres, and then cause Dengue Fever in another household. Therefore, I, urge everyone and the public who are listening in that when clean-up campaigns are being done in their community that everyone must participate. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, a supplementary question to the honourable Minister; does the Ministry have sufficient supply of dengue kits available now?

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Mr. Speaker, off the top of my head I would remember but I know that we have had sufficient supply of dengue kits, but if there are places and in particular, if you know of a place that does not have a dengue kit, please, let me know.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker, to the honourable Minister; what sort of connection is there between Dengue Fever and Rheumatic Heart Disease (RHD)?

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Mr. Speaker, there is no direct connection between RHD and Dengue Fever. Before I sit down, I must say that throughout floods and cyclones, initially after that there will be a lot of mosquitoes, often called 'nuisance mosquitoes', within the first two weeks. Often those nuisance mosquitoes may not necessarily be the ones causing Dengue Fever because the Dengue Fever mosquitoes will come within the next two to four weeks. The honourable Vosanibola will know that.

We get called straight after a flood that there is plenty mosquitoes. It is important during that time to do the clean-ups and also alert us and also the spraying will only be effective if a clean-up campaign has been done because if there is still a lot of rubbish around and the spraying is done, it will not be sufficient to be able to extenuate the larvae or the adult mosquitoes that are in that area.

Changes to Fiji's Border Entry Conditions  
(Question No. 134/2022)

HON. S. NAND asked the Government, upon notice:

In the Revised 2021-2022 Budget, the Government announced changes to Fiji's border entry conditions. Can the honourable Minister update Parliament on how this has eased international travel?

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you for giving me the floor to respond to the question by the honourable Member. Like every other country, every other tourist destination for the past odd two years, we have given our all to reopening our borders as safely as we could. For service driven economies like Fiji, it was actually a matter of necessity and we did so, and now we are on a good course towards our economic recovery by equally valuing our health and economic objectives with the right balance to actually mitigate the risk.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the revised 2021-2022 Budget, we announced important measures that actually met health reasoning and aided in our competitiveness as a tourism destination. We removed the need to stay three nights at a careFIJI commitment hotel and strengthened our in-country rampant antigen testing. We also removed the travel partner classification system and this meant Fiji was open to fully vaccinated travellers from anywhere in the world.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these changes were only possible because we actually closely monitored and considered the health risks and mapped them with the best mitigating measures. We established the Fiji entry test portal to allow travellers in any part of the world to actually pre-book their in-country COVID-19 test before coming to Fiji. To support our in-country testing system, we worked closely with the Ministry of Health and Medical Services to establish a private sector wide network of testing facilities. Today we have over 55 town and cities testing centres and over 170 CFC hotels and resorts as testing facilities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, earlier this month we actually further eased our entry requirements in favour of not only tourists but also for our returning Fijians. We widened our vaccination requirement for entry into Fiji from 18 years and above to 16 years and above and we did so considering that more children globally were being granted access to vaccines. This gave us the flexibility to drop the requirement for vaccinated travellers to produce a pre-arrival negative COVID-19 test prior to entry into Fiji, again, a move that actually reduces cost and lends greater convenience to those travelling to the country.

In terms of impact in numbers, this international travel has definitely become hassle free, easier and unrestrictive and we can see this in our tourism numbers. Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the first quarter of 2022, we have had a total of 48,906 international visitors compared to just over 4,223 in the same quarter last year. If we look at numbers since our December border reopening in 2021, Fiji has actually welcomed over 72,132 visitors. What these figures tell us is that we are on track to regaining a portion of our market share and already capturing approximately 30 percent to 35 percent of the 2019 numbers. Now, that we are in our peak season, we expect these numbers to grow. We are already seeing near pre-COVID levels of occupancy across some of our major brands and some have actually recorded high sales and profit. The average occupancy recorded in the last week of April 2022 was 4 percent more than the 2019 level.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just the day before yesterday, we held the first in-person Fijian Tourism Expo two years - it was hosted in Denarau. Room occupancies were near pre-pandemic levels and people were moving to and from, restaurants were busy and beaches were filled with families, et cetera. We had 91 odd international buyers and media from over 10 countries as far as Italy and Spain back in Fiji and ready to take us to the world. If that is not something we should be grateful for, Sir, then I am not sure what is.

Our national carrier too, Fiji Airways also earlier this week announced direct flights to Adelaide from July and this, of course, will bring in more South Australians to Fiji. It would be remiss of me to not mention this, Sir, I want to take this opportunity also to thank the frontliners for their commitment and courage during this particular containment period that we had – the health workers, tourism workers who serviced the quarantine hotels, transport drivers who drove COVID-19 positive Fijians to and from their quarantine hotels to their homes, all of their collective efforts has brought our industry to where we are able to proudly announce to the world that Fiji is open for happiness.

Reports from all the tourism operators are that the corporate group travel also has recovered sooner than expected and we have back-to-back corporate groups from Australia and hundreds are arriving for five to six-day itineraries and during their stay they are actually engaging in local tour attractions and operators including local villagers, handicraft, restaurants, hire of local serenaders and cover bands so the spread of the tourism benefits, Mr. Speaker, is for real in real dollar terms.

I am aware of an Australian corporate group that is visiting a village in Sigatoka Valley today, Sir and they will be donating a substantial amount towards the village church. Almost \$5,000 and that has been organised by one of our local tour operators so that is what we mean by spreading the benefits of tourism as a result of the safe re-opening of our borders.

The fact that these corporations are actually bringing their employees and suppliers in large numbers to Fiji, Mr. Speaker, is a testament to their faith and confidence in Fiji being a safe destination and these endorsements, Mr. Speaker, are actually priceless and these are the endorsements that will continue to propel our industry towards a gradual recovery, however, we must again remain alert and be cautious to ensure that our safe protocols are adhered to at all times. I hope that answers her question, Sir.

Government Plans to Improve Water Supply - Namara, Tailevu  
(Question No. 135/2022)

HON. RATU J.A.R. SENILOLI asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Minister for Infrastructure, Meteorological Services, Lands and Mineral Resources update Parliament on plans to improve water supply to Namara District in Tailevu?

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Ratu Jone Seniloli for his question. The district of Namara is one of the three red zones in terms of water in Tailevu. The other two being Vugalei and Verata. The *tikina* of Namara consists of a number of villages: Naisausau, Nakorolevu, Matamaivere, Tubalevu, Naikawaga and Nakalawaca. These villages of *Tikina* Namara are located outside the extents of WAF'S reticulated system that ends at Kasavu - 71.1 kilometres to the South and Nailega Village - 11.6 kilometres to the North.

The area has an approximate population of around 2,000 people and it has schools, nursing stations and located by the coastline. These villages have faced difficulties with access to drinking water as suitable surface water sources in the immediate area are non-existent in terms of rivers and streams.

Currently, most of the homes there have been using rainwater harvesting. I think there is one borehole at Tubalevu but the others, the WAF has been providing rainwater tanks, as part of the rainwater harvesting programme and when there are problems, when they still have problems, the WAF has been providing water carting for the villages and the communities every two weeks and when things get really bad, the Commissioner Central has his emergency water programme that also helps in carting water to schools, health and the community.

But into the future, Mr. Speaker, Sir and based on the review of the options available, there are some things that government is doing at the moment. Apart from the work that is being done by WAF with its rural area services, there is also an inter-agency committee in existence, run by the Commissioner Central that includes agencies such as the WAF, the Water and Sewerage Department of the Ministry of Infrastructure and also the Mineral Resources Department that looks at boreholes.

In the short term, we will continue to focus assistance through WAF, through the provision of water carts and also for the fortnightly rural water carting schedule as well as the provision of assistance through the Rainwater Harvesting Programme. To date we have 53 tanks with 5,000-litre capacity have been delivered to the Namara District. In the medium term, it is recommended that since there is a lack of service water sources in the immediate area of the *Tikina* Namara, that we continue to look at groundwater services and this needs to be addressed by the Mineral Resources Department.

As I had mentioned before, the Tubalevu Village borehole is the one that is working, it is producing good amount of water, there is a possibility of other sources being investigated there. There is another borehole at Naikawaga that also has water but is not fit for human consumption but can be used in other ways. In the long term, the extension of the Viria Water Supply System shall be the long term plan for this area.

There is a good potential for the expansion of the Viria System, it will be dependent on the successful commissioning and operation of the Viria System to bring that water all the way from Viria, hopefully, down to Namara.

Update on National Climate Finance Strategy  
(Question No. 136/2022)

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

Can the honourable Attorney-General, Minister for Economy, Civil Service, Communications, Housing and Community Development update Parliament on the recently launched National Climate Finance Strategy?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the honourable Member for the question. On 3<sup>rd</sup> May, the Fijian Government launched the Fiji Climate Finance Strategy at the Fiji National University, immediately after the announcement of the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Monash University and Fiji National University.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fiji National Climate Finance Strategy (NCFS) serves two vital roles. Firstly, it fulfils the requirements of our recently enacted Climate Change Act, to develop and implement a National Climate Finance Strategy. Secondly, it is a comprehensive blueprint that details the priority policies, interventions, targets and projects across 12 sectors that require climate finance and keep us on track to meeting our ambition and making our islands a case study in carbon neutrality and sustainable and resilient development.

The NCFS integrates the policies, targets and projects for Fiji's development and climate strategies and prioritises them based on the numerous consultations. These strategies include the National Development Plan (NDP), National Adaptation Plan, climate vulnerability, low emission development strategy and NDC Investment Plan, NDC Implementation Roadmap and from line Ministries strategic plans.



Further to this Sir, it means three crucial adaptation topic that are often overlooked and chronically under supported: gender and social inclusion, relocation and human health. This strategy also includes concept notes for 24 mitigation and adaptation projects that come under various programmes that are priorities for immediate funding and implementation.

Implementation phase Mr. Speaker, Sir, has already started and key projects and programmes being developed from the identified policies, interventions, targets and projects with a strategy. These include:

- Promoting electric bus transport in Fiji which will pilot electric buses and multiple passenger routes and build local technical capacity to operate and maintain electric buses. The first one will start off at Valelevu where we are actually building a suburban bus transit route and a station there with the electric charging stations will be there.
- Climate resilient homes which will have innovative constructing processes and materials that reduce home construction costs and provide solar for low cost housing and flats in Fiji.
- Smart agriculture will provide a guarantee for Fiji Development Bank to de-risk farmers while also improving the financial access to smart agriculture technologies that support low emissions and climate resilient and cultural practices as we are seeing in Bureta in Ovalau where we had that first Agro-photovoltaic Project, which is blended finance project funded through FDB, the Green Climate Fund and the Korean assistance.
- Bonds which would seek to raise up to US\$50 million for investments to deliver sustainable blue economy and create jobs and protect Fiji's ocean helping those people in the maritime areas, on coastal areas to get into sustainable fishing practices and various other practices in mariculture and agriculture.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the National Climate Finance Strategy, of course, can be downloaded from the Fiji Climate Change portal accessible to all Fijians.

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, a supplementary question to the honourable Minister; can he explain how much money Fiji will need to meet its climate goals considering the estimated cash inflows?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, could the honourable Member, please repeat the question, I could not hear the whole of it.

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, can the Minister explain how much money Fiji will need to meet its climate goals with the estimated financial inflows?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Member may recall that we had the World Bank carry out an assessment. In respect of climate resilience to build resilience in our infrastructure. At that time they had estimated about FJ\$9 billion and that include things like the seawall in Namatakula that has been stopped by his intervention into it; and we hope to have that resolved and various other projects, Sir, to build infrastructure whether it is for example, fixing up roads that are right next to the sea, whether it is building retaining walls, whether there are bridges, Irish crossings, et cetera, to build that resilience.

Of course, this Climate Finance Strategy, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is a lot more broader and this is more to do in terms of mitigation also like electric buses they are not adaptation, they are actually mitigation. So this is more about the Climate Finance Strategy, how will we get the finance, Sir.

We already have a relocation trust fund, Mr. Speaker, Sir, where there are funds. We have 42 to 43 villages that are being identified to be moved to higher ground, 65 percent of the Fijian

population lives within five kilometres of a shoreline. So obviously these things will have a huge impact and we have said this continuously, Sir, and unfortunately, in fact I thought about this last night and I was thinking about what NFP was saying yesterday too.

On several occasions since in particular after *TC Winston*, we have invited the honourable Members from the other side to come to the Situation Room at the Ministry of Economy to see the rebuild programme to do with schools, for example, and nursing stations. Unfortunately, not a single one of them has turned up to see the enormous task behind it and how it is done, how tenders are called and how matters are prioritised. Again, I am making them an offer, 'Please turn up, you tell us, we will make the arrangement'.

HON. MEMBER.- Too late.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have said since 2016 honourable Member, you should know this. Honourable Kuridrani, if he is genuine about this, we can explain to him very slowly how the process works. Thank you.

#### Written Question

#### Update on Lease Funds Held in Trust by iTLTB (Question No. 137/2022)

HON. J. SAUKURU 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 lease funds held in trust by the iTaukei Land Trust Board for *mataqali* members below 18 years, in particular –

- (a) how many were beneficiaries since 2018; and
- (b) the total funds held in trust for these beneficiaries annually since 2018?

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will table my response at a later sitting date as permitted under Standing Order 45(3).

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, question time is now over.

Honourable Members, I am feeling generous this morning so before we take the next item, I will give you an adjournment of 20 minutes. We will deal with the next Agenda Item at 11.10 a.m. We adjourn.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.49 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.11 a.m.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, before we move on to the next Agenda Item, I would just like to point out to honourable Tikoduadua that your supplementary question was in order but when I am pushing for time, someone has to take the cut. You being one of my former officers, you have to take it.

### END OF WEEK STATEMENTS

Honourable Members, with regards to End of Week Statements, each Member may speak for up to 10 minutes with a 10 minute response given by the Minister or Ministers responsible for the subject matter of the Member's speech. No seconder is required and there will be no other debate.

#### Jetties and Waiting Facilities for Maritime Travellers

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank you for this opportunity to speak on my End of the Week Statement on jetties and passenger shelters in regards to the maritime and inter-island travellers and also in the process, to highlight the need for the Government to put in more concerted effort and action for the construction of new jetties and passenger shelters and also for the renovation and proper maintenance of existing ones, to ensure the wellbeing and safety of our interisland and maritime travellers and that, indeed, no one is left behind.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am speaking on this issue, as I am very much aware of the problems faced by the maritime and inter-island travellers, as I am also one of them and have experienced the same risks, dangers and frustration that one has to go through during that time. Sir, we on this side of the House, continue to highlight the need to improve the infrastructure on our jetties and passenger shelters.

From 2015, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I, for one, have continued to raise those issues. Having said that, we acknowledge that the work has been undertaken by the Government but, unfortunately, despite the huge budgetary allocation given to the Fiji Roads Authority (FRA) that has the mandate on this work, we note that the budgetary allocations specifically for jetties and passenger shelters have been very minimal.

Let us look at some budgetary allocations for the Natovi, Nabouwalu and Lomaloma Jetties. For Natovi Jetty new ramp in 2015, \$238,360 was allocated but no actual work was carried out. For Nabouwalu Jetty in 2015, \$2, 526,613 was given but only \$1.2 million was used in the actual work. For Nabouwalu Jetty in 2016, \$710,000 was allocated but no work was carried out. For Natovi Jetty in 2016, \$1,096,330 was allocated but no work was carried out. For Nabouwalu Jetty in 2017-2018, \$2,752,294 was allocated but no work was carried out. For Natovi Waiting Shed in 2017-2018, \$550,459 was allocated but no work was carried out. Likewise for Lomaloma Jetty in 2017-2018, \$22,936 was allocated but no work was carried out. As a matter of interest, those figures were extracted from their respective annual reports.

We must note, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that for a waiting shed, it will cost about \$250,000 and I got that from one of the mainstream media reports. We must note the heavy use of Natovi and Nabouwalu Jetties and these posed subsequent safety issues that travellers face on a daily basis. For example, on a daily basis, the Natovi and Nabouwalu Jetties can only accommodate one vessel berthing to undertake all their operational activities within the time.

Boats now have 24 hours turnaround, as we know, Parliament approved the additional routes that was given to the shipping services providers, and right now Goundar Shipping and *MV Ohana*

have two turnaround trips, Natovi to Nabouwalu daily and furthermore, there are Goundar Shipping trips between Nabouwalu and Ellington and between Natovi and Levuka. Therefore, as alluded to by the honourable Minister Kumar in one of her interviews with the media, she said that almost 1,000 passengers go through Natovi and Nabouwalu. I can believe that, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

In addition to that, there are also heavy vehicles, particularly, the logging vehicles, the pine trucks, the buses and the transport trucks that transport goods across the islands on a daily basis. I believe there will be about 100 or more heavy vehicles and small passenger cars. So, that scenario helps us to appreciate the heavy usage of Natovi and Nabouwalu Jetties, and yet, there has not been really any major improvement in the infrastructure with regards to jetties and passenger shelters to be able to accommodate the heavy use on the facilities right now, because those jetties and passenger shelter designs and the capacity, were designed years ago, may be decades ago, and it does not have that capacity to accommodate the heavy usage right now.

There is still a great need for improved lights around the jetty and the passenger shelters, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The Government had promised in 2017 that there will be a new passenger shelter at Natovi but, unfortunately, right now that has not been done and the Government side is well aware of that, as they also continue to travel between Natovi and Nabouwalu.

Also in regards to the public facilities like the toilets, there is only one for the women and one for men in both Natovi and Nabouwalu and unfortunately, the one at Natovi can remain closed from about 11.00 p.m. to the early hours of the morning.

Also Mr. Speaker, Sir, the facilities are not disabled persons friendly. We acknowledge the increased trips provided by the shipping service providers and also the franchise which has benefited the travelling public. The main issue that I would like to highlight that the government has been slow in the provision of corresponding services in the construction of new jetties and passenger shelters, the renovation and maintenance of the existing ones, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Moving on to the maritime islands, for those of us that have travelled to small islands that do not have jetties where we have to offload to small fibre-boats, the risk is huge, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and it is sad when we see senior citizens particularly women and nursing mothers with their children having to have some kind of skills to be able to offload safely on those moving fibreglass boats.

On the Lomaloma Jetty, it was promised in this Parliament that it will be permanently repaired in 2015. Somehow, it has not been done until to date and also there is still no passenger shelter constructed there and you will recall Mr. Speaker, Sir, that I also raised in this Parliament about the Lakeba passenger shelter which still has not also been constructed.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in conclusion, I would like to echo the words of the honourable Seruiratu in his contribution yesterday with regards to the debate on the State Land Bill that the government is pragmatic and always fixing problems when they see it, it is common sense and logic and also out of necessity that it must be done and it is also done with empathy.

I plead to the honourable Members to honour those words, particularly the Minister for Infrastructure to ensure that those works are carried out for the jetties and passenger shelters to ensure the safety and well-being of our travelling public and also for the government just to stop playing lip service, to stop talking and do some real action and repair, maintain the existing jetties. Construct new ones, for example, in Karoko as promised in 2019 that it is still in the pipeline and it is still in the pipeline.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir. I thank the honourable Member for her End of Week Statement. I think, firstly, the Government pays the utmost important to the travelling public, not just to the travelling public in urban areas but also those that go out into our rural maritime areas. By way of background, initially jetties and landings were constructed in our islands to enhance inter-island trade and development. They were initially designed to accommodate small boats that brave our waters to deliver supplies to the islands and also to trade produce and products to the mainland.

Over the years with the increase in trade and economic activities, the size of the boat has increased. The service of our maritime islands have increased, which have required jetty upgrades to accommodate bigger boats such as the Roll-on-Roll-Off vessels that were not used initially when those jetties were put in place.

There has been, as the honourable Member has said, an increase in the frequency of shipping services bringing more passengers in their islands and this regards there is always a high demand for public conveniences and waiting facilities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is a total of 28 jetties in the list of FRA assets of which 24 are operational with four remaining either beyond repair or not safe for public use. After inspection carried out by FRA Engineers we found that of these 28 jetties all of them needed maintenance and nine jetties needed an upgrade.

So, recommended works were recommended for safe berthing of commercial vessels and safe access for pedestrians and the jetty services have a wide range of users - passengers, vehicles, police, Customs, Navy, Fishing Vessels, Government supply ships so, through this period FRA has been maintaining our jetties nationwide. In the past seven years a total of \$25.6 million was allocated for jetty routine maintenance and rehabilitation works.

The honourable Members talked about why some funds were sometimes put into the budget not used? I just want to tell you that from the year 2016 the amount of money that FRA had for projects had to be withdrawn to deal with the emergency responses that we had for cyclones and flooding. In 2016 they had to take out \$28.4 million from existing projects and move it to those things.

In 2016 to 2017 \$35.5 million from projects planned were taken out for emergency response; 2017 to 2018 another \$35 million; 2018-2019 another \$22.7 million; 2019-2020 another \$11.7 million; 2020 to 2021 another \$24.8 million and 2021 to 2022 another \$26.8 million. Over this period there has been a total of \$185 million that we had targeted for projects but because a cyclone or flood happened in this country, we had to put some of those projects aside and take that fund and use it for something that was critical at that point in time. There is always a focus on doing this but we always hope that disasters do not happen so that we can continue to provide services. The commitment is there but the circumstances that we find ourselves in are that such funds have to be used for something else at that particular point in time.

Mr. Speaker, for our waiting facilities while responding to the oral question by the honourable Aseri Radrodoro on a similar subject this week, I have highlighted the current works and the future planned works by Government. I wish to reiterate that currently for the three main jetties in the North namely; Nabouwalu, Savusavu and Taveuni, have proper waiting sheds with electricity, water supply, waiting area and public convenience facilities. The waiting shed facilities are currently maintained by the respective tenants and vendors who also sell tea and food parcels in the areas.

With Natovi-Nabouwalu as the busiest route between Viti Levu and Vanua Levu at the moment, FRA has now facilitated a request received from the Savusavu Town Council which looks

after Savusavu and Nabouwalu to maintain the daily operation for the waiting shed areas in the three jetties. FRA hopes to finalise this agreement soon with the Savusavu Town Council so that they can maintain the standard of service throughout. There are issues also like in the market that we have in Nabouwalu - the issue of vandalism so hopefully through that partnership these issues will be addressed also in the waiting shed area and especially with the public convenience facilities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to further improve our jetties in waiting facilities upgrading of our outer island jetties have been programmed under FRA. This will allow better movement of cargo and people and this includes plans for the Koro Island - Roll-on Roll-off (Ro-Ro) type jetty; Makogai - Ro-Ro type jetty; Moala - Ro-Ro type jetty; Nabukeru Yasawa-i-Rara - pedestrian jetty; Vanuabalavu or Lomaloma, Lau - Ro-Ro type jetty; and Vunisea - Ro-Ro type Jetty.

The planned improvement on these jetties, Mr. Speaker, Sir, includes essential public convenience facilities such as parking where necessary, waiting shelter with restrooms and stakeholder offices. The physical construction is expected to commence within the next two years and it will take five years to complete the programme. Also in the Nabouwalu new township development, there will be a passenger terminal building.

As you know, there is a great development of a township going on in Nabouwalu at the moment – this is something that has been close to the honourable Prime Minister's heart, and it is something that he has been pushing for. There is a lot of work and all the different agencies are working together to develop the township and also, we hope to have a passenger terminal building that will house a waiting area, an ablution block, office space for the Fiji Police Force, kiosks and parking area. Overall, we are hoping that with the partnership of the DCCP, Ministry of Economy, FRA and all the other agencies, we will make Nabouwalu a climate-resilient town.

As I have mentioned before, the two jetties that we are looking to upgrade initially now are Natovi Jetty and Nabouwalu Jetty because of the high volume of traffic, as well as in Savusavu. So with all those things, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are still challenges. I travel on these boats myself - I visit facilities there and there has been some gradual improvement over the years.

Mr. Speaker, FRA is working slowly in partnership with those whom we can work together to continue to upgrade. We put things in the Budget and we hope that disaster does not strike because when disasters do strike, funds have to be moved to other areas. As I have mentioned before, the total amount of money that we have to take out from the existing project (this is just for FRA) over the past years from 2016 has been \$185 million. That is why now also, when you are talking about the Climate Financing Strategy, there is emphasis on more resilient infrastructure which is more expensive.

When things are more expensive, that means it takes more time to build them and it absorbs more resources. That means that you will not be able to do as many as quickly as possible, but in the long term, it is of benefit to us because we save maintenance and repair costs in the future. That is the vision of Government, Mr. Speaker, Sir, keep focussing on more resilient infrastructure. I want to tell all the people in the maritime areas, you will find difficulties at the moment, but we have also experienced those. Please, be rest assured that this Government is focussed on making sure that we will make your travelling experience as pleasing as possible.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, before we move on to the next speaker, I would just like to acknowledge the presence in the House of two visitors from Canada and Australia. They are Riyaz and Frank Dean, former Fiji citizens who are visiting. You are most welcome.

### Dispossession of iTaukei Land to the State

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to discuss the topic of land and the State, in particular the issue of historical dispossession of indigenous Fijians or iTaukei land to the State or Crown. There has been increasing grievances on the sale of Native land from landowning units from the Colonial days to now, and many remain unresolved. The iTaukei understand that most valuable lands in Fiji are owned privately and by the State, and are seeking the return of these lands where they see that there has been dispossession, in the sense that the original acquisition of such lands has been unfair, unjustified and without equitable compensation. I again raise, in particular, the case of the people of Suva now residing at a small hill outside of the Suva City called Suvavou Village. Suvasuva is a mark of ownership, yet it is a name we use today without knowing the owners of those land.

Within the bounds of these land, Mr. Speaker, Sir, was the residence of the three *yavusa* and 10 *mataqali*. The *Mataqali* of Suva today can still identify the boundaries of their land. They began to lose their land due to no fault of theirs, but the action of a shop at Nukulau catching fire during the July American Independence Celebrations of the American Consul on the island. The Consul claimed recompense for natives taking away his trade goods while his house was burning.

The Americans demanded that Ratu Seru Cakobau as the most visible chief of these lands, to pay compensation or feel the brunt of offshore naval bombardments. Ratu Cakobau, after a champagne breakfast on board a boat at Levuka, sold 200,000 acres of land in Fiji to an Australian company called the Polynesian Company.

The then British Council objected that Ratu Seru Cakobau did not own those lands; amongst them were the lands in Natewa, Ra, Beqa, Waimanu, Navua. After the Cession, the Crown disallowed the sale and returned all land sold by Ratu Cakobau, except the Suva block.

The first Governor, Sir Arthur Gordon, with instruction to set up the capital of Fiji found land to be expensive in the capital of Levuka with no room for extension on the hilly terrain. In the meantime, there were some purchases of land warrants when the Polynesian Company had settled in Suva, and the Colonial Secretary at that time, while recognising that the settlers had no claim of rights to the land, sold those land to them as Crown grants out of grace of the Crown.

The Crown did not own the land to give and in breach of its obligations to the natives of Suva gave some freehold titles to some white settlers on the land. The Crown was also compromised by its conflict of interest in wanting lands to setup its capital by taking over disallowed claimed lands and required the people of Suva to vacate their lands on the made-up excuse that they had agreed to surrender all their rights and interests to the Suva Peninsula. On being asked to move, the Tui Suva refused and asked to move his people to Samabula. The Crown refused and came up with a story that a Ra Provincial clerk and the Native Land Commissioner had entered into an agreement with a *kai* Suva in 1882 to move to where they live today.

That agreement was never found despite a number of searches over the years and a pay voucher was manufactured as being rent for Suva land. On legal advice, that land still belonged to the *kai* Suva, the amount was termed “annuity” without any reference to land value. How much is being paid today and does it relate to current value? That is the question despite the sale to the Polynesian company being invalid, the Crown relied on plans drawn up by the company to call 300 acres of land which is to be reserved land for which rent and later annuity was paid by the Crown.

Later the Crown claimed that the annuity was for the *kai* Suva to quit all their land on the peninsula from Tamavua to the sea rather than just reserve it. The Tui Suva and his people from after

Cession of 10<sup>th</sup> October, 1874 had been seeking justice for the land claims over the years and over a number of generations till today. From the executive to the courts, their pursuits of justice have not been fulfilled and we need to see this being fulfilled and this will be part of the strategy of the new government as we take over.

The executives have not been able to settle it because today they rely on the judgement adopted by Justice Inoke sitting at the High Court in Lautoka. Justice Inoke's judgment saying that chiefs had reserved powers to sell land and once land was sold by chiefs, the natural title was extinguished and applauded by the honourable Attorney-General. This shows bias against iTaukei land claims. The judgement has been appealed but cannot be proceeded with because the transcripts of the hearing before Justice Pathik and relied on by Justice Inoke could not be certified before writing the judgement. The Tui Suva, Ratu Epeli Kanakana and some claimants who had launched the case in 1999 are now dead. They went to their graves without getting justice from the FijiFirst Government.

The Parliament of Australia passed the Native Title Act that an extinguished title must be compensated and land in the hand of the Crown must be returned to the Aborigines. This honourable House represents Fiji. In this House resides the repository of justice in our lands that we may move forward, not only for the living but for those who will be born. The FijiFirst Party promises a fair and just society but has it done justice to the people of Suvavou? The Suva land claims must be settled, claims filed in court or on appeal can be settled at any time before or even after judgement. We do not have to look far for precedence.

In New Zealand there are a number Tribal Claim Settlement Acts which starts with the recitement of historical errors that has been done by the Crown on the tribe, the State inheriting the obligations of the Crown then apologises to the Crown and sets out monetary recompense or benefits for land which could not be returned to the tribe, and some land in the State which could be returned. This can be done for Suva. Obviously in Suva freeholds, public roads and land on which public facilities cannot be returned and for these, monetary compensation by budgetary provisions can be done.

There were talks with the Indian Embassy being built on the botanical land. When the botanical ground was initially established, the Director of Lands could not show any right to those land. It had to rely on what they called "strict interpretation of the Deed of Cession". Going back into history, Ratu Seru Cakobau on being explained by the interpreter, Wilkinson on 8<sup>th</sup> October, 1874 that they were ceding all land in Fiji to the Crown and their successors, told other chiefs that they could only seek their *lewa* or sovereign power but not the *qele* or land as this belonged to the *mataqali*. This was explained to the Queen's representative so the land on the Suva Peninsula was not ceded to the Crown and its successor, the Republic of Fiji.

The high courts of North America, Australia and New Zealand jurisdictions now hold that radical title only taken, once take by the Crown but beneficial ownership remained with the native peoples. Therefore, my contention is that Suva land is still owned by the Suva people and any taking by the Crown and its predecessor, the State, must be lawful. Land loss to the Suva people was widespread and severe. A study by a sociologist shows that the alienation of Suva's people from their ancestral land deprived them of economic, spiritual, cultural autonomy, generations of Suva families have suffered and incalculable loss.

A Suva land settlement agreement or Bill which I would be proposing and pursuing would address historical grievances which include having to bear the brunt of the burning of the house on Nukulau, which they know nothing about; the burden of settlers to whom they never sold their lands



to; the discrimination; the disallowance of the sale by Cakobau; and the discrimination of the Crown in favouring settlers.

The natives of Suva have become, by law, the equal of an English man bearing the burden of having the capital of this country residents on their lands at the time when the country had no money to purchase their lands, taking lots from lands in Suva to raise funds for the fledgling colony. Suva lands were rented from *kai* Suva where no such lease agreement existed and resorting to unlawful interpretation of the Deed of Cession contrary to the law that these must be understood as the ceding chiefs understood then and having rent changed to annuity and the inability of the executives and the court to give justice to the *kai* Suva.

There are other issues regarding their mangroves fisheries, spoilers of their fisheries and other issues regarding sewerage and pollutions by current occupants of the Suva peninsula. If Suva Land Settlement Agreement is settled then the *kai* Suva can move forward in a positive relationship with government and the people of Fiji to rebuild, restore and thrive again. Today, the *kai* Suva has the highest migration statistics because the land given to them is not enough and it is traumatising to look across Suva Harbour at the land of their fathers now reach a new splendour as the capital of Fiji. Most prefer to live out of sight of their lands.

The Government has spoken ill of past Governments in this House but these past ills committed on the *kai* Suva has not been mentioned. In this House we call ourselves 'honourable', shame on us as we do not honour the native owners of Suva lands. Where is our sense of justice? Where is the sense of fairness? Today we continue the unlawful taking of Suva lands by Government's actions in dishing out State leases.

What is the situation with the State land in Raiwai? This was originally awarded to a Chinese investor but resold due to problems here including links to organised crime in China. This land is basically reclaimed land on mangrove wetlands. Then we have the current development in Nasese on reclaimed mangrove areas for high-end residential residence. In this whole process, the Government has totally ignored the people of Suva, shameful and sad state of affairs. Why should we push the knife giver? Why should we have a country where courts have championed protection of human rights bill on lands stolen by the Crown with a fictitious agreement?

With regards to the botanical gardens, this as the Indian Government has stated that it is no longer interested. So why has there been no process to revert this to the people of Suvavou under section 8 of the State Lands Act which state – 'when any native land has been acquired by the crown for public purposes under the provision of the Crown Acquisition of Lands Act, any other written law, where it is no longer required for such purposes, the Minister after consultation with Cabinet may order, declare such land to be native land, et cetera'.

Since the FijiFirst *coup* of 2006 - Which State lands have been declared Native land under section 8? Hardly or nil. They have gone to sleep or more likely they do not want to see the *iTaukei* really progress in terms of real development and a greater share of the economic pie. They have done peanuts for the *iTaukei* and formulated laws which are anti-*iTaukei*. I pay tribute to Mr. Niko Nawaikula today, a victim of political manipulation where he is tried for being the indigenous Fijian. I am best rest-assured that the battle will continue.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, a Point of Order.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, just stick to your End of Week Statement.

HON. V. NATH.- Do not beat around the bush!

MR. SPEAKER.- That is your End of the Week Statement.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- That is what I am doing.

MR. SPEAKER.- It has got nothing to do with Mr. Nawaikula's case so stick to that.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Sir. I was just going to say that, Sir.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- This FijiFirst Government seems to have not acted on Section 8 because they have been nullified by their own imposed 2013 Constitution where in Section 22 it states – any *iTaukei* land acquired by the State for a public purpose after the commencement of this Constitution or under any written law shall revert to the customary owners if the land is no longer required by the State. Why only land acquired after the commencement of this Constitution in 2013? What about acquisitions before 2013? Which lands are these?

Virtually none as most State leases are 99 years and therefore under the Constitution any lands to be returned under section 8 of the State Lands Act will only be returned in the year 2112 which is a farce and insulting.

My reading of Section 22 of the Constitution is that it is designed to permanently block all *iTaukei* land claims on State land. However, justified or credible that claim is and under *iTaukei* Land Trust Act section 18 says, and I quote:

“18.-(1) If the Governor-General (President) is satisfied that the land belonging to any *mataqali* is insufficient for use, maintenance or support of its members it shall be lawful for the Governor-General (President) by proclamation to set aside such Crown land or land acquired for or on behalf of Fijians (*iTaukei*) by purchase, (et cetera) [as in his opinion may be required for the use, maintenance or] for the support of *mataqali* ...”

Has any such land been set aside by Government? I doubt it because as he said, this has been progressed by past governments and disrupted by the FijiFirst Government. Some lands identified for section 8 purposes including those in Naitasiri, Sabeto, Lauwaki, et cetera, and we can give you the list. That is why I am asking: is this Government really serious about *iTaukei* economic development? I do not think so.

They have mentioned millions of dollars spent in provinces but what about the projects that they are supposed to complete in terms of the *iTaukei* land development? We note that they have promised \$10 million a year for the *iTaukei* Development Fund but from 2014-2015 budget to 2021, this \$10 million should have resulted in \$70 million but in Year 1 to 2 they have failed to approve a single development project and \$20 million was lost.

In the third year, only \$503,000 was approved and, again, the balance were at a loss, et cetera.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, you have exceeded your time.

HON. RO. F. TUISAWAU.- The *iTaukei* Development Fund has not been used, Suva land claims settlement is long overdue and there should be enough of this injustice.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is a legal matter and this is why I would like to take the honourable Member. He focussed only on one or two legal issues, he already knows that there is a case that was decided by the High Court which is, *Ratu Epeli Kanakana and others and Native Land Trust Board vs Attorney-General and Native Lands Commission*.

This matter has been decided by the High Court of Fiji but I would like to take the honourable Member back to the Deed of Cession that they all think was a great thing. They all think the 1970 Constitution was a great thing, they all think the 1990 Constitution was a great thing, they all think the 1997 Constitution was a great thing and I will take them back to that and what actually prevails legally speaking.

Under clause 4 of the Deed of Cession (this is the original script of the Deed of Cession), I will read the one that is a bit more legible. It says under clause 4:

“That the absolute proprietorship (listen carefully honourable Tuisawau) of all lands not shown to be now alienated so as to become bona fide the property of Europeans or other foreigners or not now in the actual use or occupation of some chief or tribe or not actually required for the probable future support and maintenance of some chief or tribe shall be and is hereby declared to be vested in Her Said Majesty her heirs and successors.”

This is the legal foundation of the three types of tenure or land systems in Fiji. The first:

- Alienated to Europeans or other foreigners which is freehold;
- Native title; and
- Whatever is left is Crown land or State land.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, then fast-tracking on a legal basis, they all think this is a wonderful thing when we became independent in 1970, and we all think Prince Charles was wonderful for coming to Fiji giving us the order through the Court of Balmoral and the 1970 Constitution which is here says:

“Whereas on 10<sup>th</sup> October 1874 Cakobau styled *Tui Viti* and *Vunivalu* and other high chiefs signified their loyalty to Her Most Gracious Majesty Queen Victoria and their dedication to God and to the rule of law by the solemn agreement known as the Deed of Cession made and concluded by them of the one part and Sir Hercules George Robert Robinson representative of Her Majesty of the other part: And Whereas in November 1879 the chiefs of Rotuma similarly signified adherence to such principles by the Deed of Rotuma Cession.”

Mr. Speaker, Sir, what this legally does and this is why there was no such provision specifically in the Constitution sets out that the land system that was set up in the Deed of Cession thereby continues. Honourable Tuisawau said this Government has not done anything. He does not talk about what the other governments did not do.

The 1997 Constitution does not or did not likewise for the 1990 Constitution does not or did not specifically prohibit (I should say) the alienation of *iTaukei* land. This is why, when we talk about it in the floor of this Parliament, how? By using the State Lands Act, the SVT Government and the SDL Government permanently alienated *iTaukei* land into freehold land.

The law, Mr. Speaker, Sir, allowed only the alienation of *iTaukei* land to State land. It did not allow the alienation of *iTaukei* land to freehold land but they know that, what they do is a clandestine approach to this, they converted *iTaukei* land to State land and immediately the *iTaukei* land that was converted to State land was immediately transferred to freehold title; he does not talk about that. He says, “FijiFirst Government is anti-*Taukei*”, what a preposterous thing to say, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, a Point of Order.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, you have a Point of Order?

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Yes, Sir. The honourable Member is speaking of the subject because I am talking about the Suvavou land claims. It has nothing to do with ....

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- He is mixing up the issue with the land in Denarau, that is nothing to do with it, the settlement is what is being proposed, it is nothing to do with what you are talking about. You have not done any settlement, which is what I am saying.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Attorney-General, you have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, his interjection demonstrates his lack of honesty. He has been intellectually dishonest, he has been selective. He knows what I am saying is correct, but he wants to evade that. He is only focussing on one particular area and I will come to that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, but I am showing and answering in response to what he claims that the FijiFirst has not done anything.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is the only Constitution ...

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- ... in the history of Fiji ...

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.-... that says, “the ownership of all *iTaukei* land shall remain with the customary owners of that land and *iTaukei* land shall not be permanently alienated” whether by sale, whether by grant, transfer or exchange.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is precisely that none of these Constitutions allowed for that particular prohibition. In fact, Mr. Speaker, Sir, under these former Constitutions, *iTaukei* land was permanently alienated. He is talking about Section 27, on a completely different note for public purposes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, he went on to talk about section 8 of the State Lands Act which has been in place since 1945. He did not talk about how the previous Governments could have used section 8; the Alliance government, the Rabuka five years of decree-led governance...

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Listen!

... the SVT Government and the SDL Government he had influence on those governments. He was part of the George Speight group.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Point of Order, Sir. He should not mislead the House with lies, if he is saying that provide the evidence and withdraw that statement.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, he was part of their think tank, he knows that. He went to the GCC meeting with him. Yes, you did, you know that.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, he is making false accusations. If he is saying that, then you were part of the bomb making group.

(Laughter)

I mean did you make the bomb or not? Just tell us! Why are you saying I am part of that group? On the same note, I do not have the evidence, you do not have the evidence so do not bring it up.

MR. SPEAKER.- You have had your say, take the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I obviously hit a very raw nerve. I have got people who can testify to your presence.

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me digress. Honourable Tuisawau, section 8 of the State Lands Act says and I quote:

“... where any iTaukei Land which has been acquired by the State for public purpose under the provisions of the State Acquisition of Lands Act 1940 or any other written law is no longer required for such purpose, the Minister may, after consultation with Cabinet, may, by order, declare such land to be iTaukei land and such declaration shall be recorded in the name of the unit from which it was acquired in the Register of iTaukei Lands kept under the provisions of section 8 of the iTaukei Lands Act.”

Since 1945, all those governments had the opportunity to do that, what he is saying that we should have done.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Section 28(2) of the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji 2013 says that the law “shall revert”, in other words, it must and that is what he is saying. He does not understand the difference. One, they have the option, this one, you actually have to do so. Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Tuisawau went on about the *Kanakana* case. The *Kanakana* case I have here where the court quite lucidly went on to describe specifically what had happened and what the legal implications were of those three types of land systems I had mentioned as stated in the Deed of Cession.

Honourable Tuisawau is correct, Ratu Seru Cakobau gave away the land. If he were to actually be genuine about it, the Fijian Administrator who worked in Fiji for a number of years, Peter France (Sir, you may know him). He worked at the then Lands Commission and he was also a staff

of the then Ministry of Fijian Affairs. Very clearly, he gives a historical account of how the Native Lands Commission went around Fiji establishing ownership of land and the entire process that was involved in that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, so therefore the honourable Member, in the interest of time, I would like to highlight to him, he knows that the land tenure was set in place by the Deed of Cession. He also knows, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the independence, the total *iTaukei* land or native title at that time was about 81 percent to 83 percent. Today, 91 percent of all the land in Fiji is *iTaukei* land.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a no minor feat. The Constitution itself under Section 28 provides for the maintenance of that percentage of land ownership, if anything, it can be increased. This is why and he fails to address Parliament on this, the previous governments had started the Land Buy Back Scheme. Why are they buying back land? Because they know that the titles of the land are preserved. So, in order to get land that has already gone into freehold, you actually just simply cannot convert it, you have to buy it back to be able to preserve the titles of the land that had been put in place.

We also know, Sir, which he fails to mention and honourable Saukuru knows this, Schedule A and Schedule B were also returned. In some instances, the actual *mataqali* went extinct. In other cases, they could not establish who the actual owners of the land were. As a result of the return of Schedules A and B, as a result of some of the Buy Back Schemes, we today have 91 percent of all the land in Fiji is *iTaukei* land.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, he compared New Zealand, as I mentioned yesterday, only 5.6 percent of the land in New Zealand is actually native titled. The rest of it is freehold or Crown grant. In Australia, they did not recognise the Aborigines as human beings until 1966 or 1967. They were counted as part of flora and fauna. Only Mabo which then said, the land was not *terra nullius* in other words, the land was not empty. This is why they kept on classifying them as non-human beings because they said, we can take every piece of land. Mabo established that, he does not talk about that. There is no way that you can compare the New Zealand and Australian experience to the Fijian experience. They also know that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Member and again, like most of the Members from the other side have come to this Parliament with no clean hands and it is only for political motivation. His leader who is going to join very soon, only a few years ago said *iTaukei* land should be converted to Crown grant - 50 percent. That is what he said, Rabuka said that and we know he is going to join him. So he should relook at what he is stating over here for his own political purpose. Stop trying to create uncertainty in our economy and stop trying to create political mischief just for your own short term political gain!

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, before we go on to the next End of the Week Statement, I just want to inform Parliament that the response to Written Question No. 137/2022 by honourable Saukuru has been handed in by the honourable Prime Minister and you will be informed of that and it can be uploaded on the Parliament website. I commend that response and I urge all other Ministers who have Written Questions to get it in promptly.

#### Contribution of *Girmitiyas* in Fiji

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Prime Minister, honourable Ministers and honourable Members, before I start, I would like to show my respect to all the *Girmitiyas*, whose souls are resting in heaven. Shall their soul rest in peace. A number of months before 14<sup>th</sup> May, 1879, a group of British Indians were deceitfully enticed by the British to board *Leonidas* to come to the land of milk and honey, known as Fiji. These people came to be called *Girmitiyas*, a word that

came out from the word “*gimit*”. These British Indians could not say ‘agreement’ referring to an agreement to work, they said *gimit*, therefore, became known as “*Gimitiyas*”.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, estimate shows that about 1.2 million British Indians were exported to 19 colonies in those times. Over 61,000 British Indians were imported by Fiji from 1869 to 1916. Moreover than a century, Indians now recognised as *Gimitiyas*, worked day-in-day-out to build and contribute to the development of Fiji. Though at that point in time, they were treated as slaves, they left no stone unturned and gave their 100 percent to ensure that the sugar cane industry flourishes in Fiji, which later became the backbone of Fiji’s economy.

When they came in, they also had issues with food as supplies they were carrying in ships lasted only for a few days. Some of the ships they came in did not even have space to sit. So one can only imagine without proper meal and water, how they would have survived the journey from India to Fiji. Whilst, 61,000 *Gimitiyas* made it to Fiji, not all were fortunate to complete their journey. Fighting against disease outbreak and no proper hygiene and no medical supplies, their bodies were thrown overboard. While those who made it through, came to learn that their struggle on the ship was just the beginning. Ladies were raped by the British and Australians, most ladies did not conceive as they had to work the same amount as their husbands and pregnancy was an inconvenience, which they tried avoiding most of the time. You know what that led to.

At the end of the five years, *gimit*, could pay their way back, of course, they could not do so. The condition was, to do another five years and they would pay their passage back. The British left our shores giving the independence to our beloved Fiji. The dynamics of *gimit* system that imposed political and social separation, the electoral system were set in stone by the British Colonial System. The trickery prevailed in the Alliance Party. Parties like the NFP at that point in time, not the NFP that is in Parliament today, were streaks ahead as far as national building and called for common and equal citizenry and opened franchise without ethnic demarcation while independence was granted under British divide and rule system. There were changes for the better being brought about in the new independence of Fiji.

However, in 1987, one man rose only to be the reason for the downfall of our nation. I will come back to it, as to how one man, one selfish man, one self-centred person, one egoistic person, for his ambition for the throne thrashed the work and efforts of the *Gimitiyas* that helped Fiji to be potentially in par with countries such as New Zealand and Singapore.

When *Gimitiyas* first placed their foot in Fiji, majority places in Fiji were nothing else but jungle. What we see in Fiji today is certainly resulted from the foundation laid by *Gimitiyas*. Were *Gimitiyas* recognised for the contribution towards nation building? Government came and went, no one recognised the contributions of *Gimitiyas* in Fiji. It was not until 2006, when the honourable Prime Minister started a movement, when for the first time, the descendants of *Gimitiyas* were given the equal rights and recognised as Fijian, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

For the first time, after all these number of years what *Gimitiyas* dreamed about finally third or fourth generation saw it eventuating under the Bainimarama Government. Do I need to tell what the Bainimarama Government and how the FijiFirst Government has been doing in recognising the hard work and the contribution of *Gimitiyas*? Maybe, yes, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I need to emphasise:

1. Bainimarama Government gave us all the 2013 Constitution.
2. Equal citizenry, we are all call Fijian now; and the honourable Prof. Biman Prasad from NFP has difficulty calling us Fijian until to date.

3. One person, one vote, we no longer have to stand in separate lines to cast our vote. No longer have we had to stand in line categorised as Fijians, Indians and Others. One vote, one value.
4. No longer the government form consist of father's name and in bracket, it is written if Indian.
5. The right to education through Free Education Programme from Year 1 to Year 13.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I can stand here for hours reading out what FijiFirst Government has done for the Fijians.

(Honourable Members interject)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we realise the hardship the *Girmitiyas* went through in building the roads, clearing the land for farming, making railways to cut sugarcane. Can we imagine how hard it would have been for them to do all that without any machine? Mr. Speaker, Sir, the recognition that the FijiFirst Government gave to the *Girmitiyas* should have been done 50 years ago. As I said, FijiFirst is a movement, the foundation was laid in 2006. The FijiFirst movement is here to stay and will continue to recognise the *Girmitiyas* and their contributions.

(Honourable Members interject)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, ever since *Girmitiyas* step into Fiji, their struggle started. First, at the hand of the British who brought them to Fiji and their descendants, they continued to suffer at the hands of the people like Rabuka. Every bit of effort was pursued at the foot of one person and his supporters when Rabuka carried out the 1987 *coup*.

(Honourable Members interject)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- The *coup* that took Fiji into dark days, when the self-respect and dignity was totally destroyed, when ladies were raped in front of their families.

(Honourable Members interject)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- A Point of Order.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, a Point of Order.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- The topic is "Contribution of *Girmitiyas*" but he is touching on a totally different issues without substantiating and he has gone off the topic. Please let us focus on the positive, the positive is the contribution of the *Girmitiyas*. If you are happy about it, you can outline it. Thank you. It is a great contribution.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, do not carry on a conversation with the other side. If you want to speak, come through the Speaker. That is the format. Do not argue with the other side.



HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the *coup* that took Fiji into dark days when the self-respect and dignity was totally destroyed, ladies were raped in front of their families and this is the fact. Husbands had to literally hide their wives and daughters in *dalo* and cassava plantation just to safeguard them from rapists. This is a fact, Mr. Speaker.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Some parents were beaten up whole night but would not tell the whereabouts of their daughters. Ladies were made to stay naked in the cell during 1987 coup. Males were made to remove their pants and undergarments and sit on hot mill mud and tarsealled roads. People were made to empty water from one 44 gallon drum to another using teaspoon. Torture, rape and bloodshed became a routine after the 1987 coup and was repeated in 2002.

Since 1987, Rabuka justified his actions on the basis of ethnic difference. *Girmityas* nor their descendants did not come here to take the land from iTaukei people - not then and not now, Mr. Speaker. We are here as human beings, exploited by the Colonial system and are citizens of Fiji. We are Fijians. We have no other home. We do not associate any other country as our home other than Fiji. This is totally against what the leaders of 1987 and 2000 *coups* have been preaching that *Girmityas* and their descendants are here to snatch the land from iTaukei landowners. This is so wrong, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, SODELPA, PAP and other parties are still preaching this.

Land is well protected in the 2013 Constitution. The descendants of *Girmityas* were treated as slaves, tortured then left Fiji in 1987 which was the start of the downfall of Fiji's economy. Apart from some elite Fijians no one else benefitted from 2000 and 1987 coup. They could have started a fair share of lease money distribution but they never did for iTaukei landowners because again only some elites benefitted from it. Such discrimination and nepotism against our iTaukei brothers and sisters even forced them to leave Fiji, thus leading to further brain drain in our country.

Mr. Speaker, a hypocritical statement was made by the People's Alliance Leader when he mentioned.....

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Point of Order. He has gone out of topic. He is now talking about the landowners. He should talk about the *Girmityas*.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- It definitely shows that the truth hurts and some people are in real pain on that side.

Mr. Speaker, a hypocritical statement was made by the People's Alliance Leader when he mentioned that no one was forced to leave the country and that he was grateful to those countries that received those who fled Fiji after suffering from the 1987 *coup*. No-one wanted to leave Fiji. All those who left Fiji, left Fiji unwillingly. They were forced out because of violence, discrimination and blatant racism. What he did cannot be forgotten. No explanation from him is enough to justify his doing, Mr. Speaker.

To add to this insult, honourable Professor Prasad said that we, the FijiFirst Members of Parliament are instilling fear upon Fijians on what transpired in 1987. I must tell him it is not us, it is the suffering and torture back in 1987 and 2000 that has embedded fear in the people's heart. The honourable Professor Prasad, the National Federation Party and supporters of the NFP should be ashamed that they hold Rabuka's hand. Rabuka destroyed Fiji. He destroyed SVT. He destroyed SODELPA. He is on the verge of destroying NFP and now his eyes are on Fiji again, Mr. Speaker.

Everything that FijiFirst has achieved he wants to bring it down to ruins and NFP supports him. What a shame!

Mr. Speaker, Sir, highlighting the significant contribution made by the *Girmityas* to Fiji's economy and society, it is encouraging to see the descendant's continuous input towards the country progress and prosperity. This is especially important at the present moment as the international community is looking at how Fiji and its people move forward to build a better and stronger Fiji. We dedicate ourselves towards the decisive leadership to keep this spirit alive.

It can truly be said that because of the *Girmitya*'s sacrifices, we are where we are today. To conclude I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge *Girmityas* who are suffering as individuals or collectively, despite the toils and tears, exploitation, beatings, suicide, sexual exploitation, humiliation, inhumane treatment that laid the economic foundation of our modern State of Fiji. I salute the *Girmityas* for their contribution. I convey my well-wishes to everyone as we remember the *Girmityas* this week.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to respond to honourable Maharaj's End of Week Statement. He has shared a lot of information which I support. The hard work, sacrifices and struggles of the *Girmityas* contributed to building the Fiji of today. Despite the struggles, they survived and thrived to become an integral part of Fijian society, living side by side with their fellow Fijians who kindly accepted them in their midst. It was in the brutal fields, nothing short of the killing fields of war when we look at infant mortality, suicide rates and overall deaths due to violence or disease that the foundation of modern Fiji were laid. However, to escape the horrors of their life and to progress, *Girmityas* focussed on education, something they believed and invested in. Short term leases would end one day with no guarantee of renewal.

The Colonial regime and CSR could do anything – jobs which were at the mercy of the company or other Europeans could be taken away at will but education, Mr. Speaker, was something that could never be taken from the *Girmityas*. It was that one thing that would remain in their possession. It was this simple truth that drove the *Girmityas* through unimaginable sacrifice and struggles to establish schools. This includes early leaders like Badri Maharaj, who during the indenture period, spearheaded the early education revolution for *Girmityas* and their descendants and even used his own funds to establish the then Wairuku Indian School in 1898 in Rakiraki which is now known as Wairuku Primary School. The alumni from this school was none other than the pioneering iTaukei leader and statesman, Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna. Mr. Speaker, Sir, today there are 180 schools, a university and a nursing institute setup by the descendants of *Girmityas*.

As we celebrate the Gimit legacy, it is important for all of us to remember that the fight for education was also a fight for a better life for all citizens of Fiji including the iTaukei and the *Girmityas* under the British Colonial rule. Mr. Speaker, Sir, even in education, the British divided us by saying, "schools needed to be setup based on ethnicity." They, of course, divided us even in sports. We must not forget that this journey to the united Fiji of today which was based on love and ethnic harmony had its share of opponents, vile people who could not tolerate the progress our nation was making, because they could not see beyond their bigotry and racial hate. In fact, their hatred ran so deep that it spilled into violence.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am referring to the brutal and racially motivated *coups* of 1987 and 2000. It was a cruel reflection of the pain and suffering of *Girmityas* during the 37 dark years of the Gimit period. One could say that the 1987 and 2000 *coups* was a second Gimit with *Girmitya* descendants relegated to a status below that of non-citizens. It was during this period that racism and provincialism was institutionalised and these racial tensions, discrimination and double-standards made life very

difficult once again. The 2000 *coup* that followed saw further brutality and the loss of their fundamental human rights - freedom of thought, action, assembly and religion.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the trauma of the 1987 *coup* and the establishment of a regime that brutally oppressed *Girmitiya* descendants created a generational trauma. Their wounded psyche, the tears shed, the families broken, the individuals brutalised in the name of race and religion or both, they will never get back the lives they built in the land that they loved and still love.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the perpetrators of these coups cannot say sorry and wash their hands off the evil deeds. The goal of a fundamentalist ethno-nationalist State not only directly targeted the descendants of the *Girmitiyas* in Fiji but it also caused severe harm to our nation as a whole. Many of the *Girmitiya* descendants lost their ties to the land on which they were born. Families are still fractured due to the forced exodus of many of the *girmitiya* descendants. The economic and social cost that resulted are borne by all Fijians to this day. No amount of apologetic tokenism and self-proclamations of change by perpetrators like Sitiveni Rabuka, who took Fiji 50 years back in a single day, will provide restorative justice for the *Girmitiya* legacy and the lives of their descendants in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, restorative justice for the descendants of *girmitiyas* has only come about by the visionary leadership of our Prime Minister, honourable Voreqe Bainimarama. It was his honest vision that has done more for restorative justice for the *girmitiya* legacy. Visionary in seeing an equitable and united Fiji for all Fijians and that makes the coup of 2006 different, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The true identity of all Fijians came with the 2013 Constitution that allows everyone who is born in Fiji to earn the right to be a Fijian regardless of race, religion, colour, gender or socioeconomic status and this is the Fiji of today. It takes someone like our Prime Minister to protect every citizen and give us all a fair and equal treatment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is restorative justice at work in providing the rightful place for the *girmitiya* legacy and their descendants on a footing of equity and inclusivity. Since last week, we have paid tribute to the *girmitiyas* at various events on the occasion of 143<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the arrival of the first indentured labourers. We highlighted the struggles of *girmitiyas* and how it was reflected once again through the coup of May, 87. Everyone knows what followed. It devastated our economy. It fuelled racial and religious hatred and Indo-Fijians were discriminated in all walks of life.

Honourable Alvick Maharaj just highlighted this and so did the honourable Attorney-General a few days ago. We also highlighted that the descendants of *girmitiyas* continued the good work of their fore-parents in building a modern and progressive Fiji together with all other Fijians including the indigenous people of Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the purpose of mentioning these facts was to ensure that this important part of our history is not forgotten as this is part of Fiji's rich history and our current and future generations should know about this. Those who were born in 1987 are 35 years old. They do not know what happened in this country and why Fiji is the way it is today.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Rabuka denied that his 1987 coup forced the *girit* descendants to leave the country. Instead he shamelessly said that his coup facilitated their departure to greener pastures. None left Fiji for India and some have now returned to Fiji. People left Fiji because of instability and insecurity caused by him. The only reason why people are coming back to this country was because of the stability and security provided by FijiFirst Government under the leadership of our Prime Minister. What an insult and disrespect to those who were marginalised, discriminated against, beaten up and raped during 1987? And when we talk about rape, you just say, "ooh, ahh." That means you do not even know that this happened in this country. You do not even know what the history of this country was.

Can we trust him? Has he changed? I do not think so. There is no remorse shown by him with such utterances. Now, to remedy that, he will declare public holiday to mark *Girmit* Day. What a hypocrite, Mr. Speaker, Sir! May 14<sup>th</sup> was not only the arrival of first indentured labourers but also the day he committed the *coup* of 1987. Every *girmit* celebration should always remind the descendants of *girmitya* the atrocities of the 1987 *coup*.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Rabuka had the audacity to say that Indo-Fijians were safer under his Soqosoqo Vakavulewa ni Taukei (SVT) Government. During the SVT Government, as claimed by Rabuka, he gave civil servant jobs to the people of Cakaudrove just so he could get their votes. What he actually did was take jobs away from capable and qualified people by institutionalising race and provincialism in the Civil Service.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also echo the words of honourable Attorney-General that honourable Professor Prasad has always been silent on the sufferings of Indo-Fijians brought upon them by the actions of Rabuka through this *coup* of 1987.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Point of Order, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- A Point of Order.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have been sitting here for the last 30 minutes, both interventions by honourable Maharaj and the honourable Minister, if they do not realise he is creating and inciting ethnic tensions today.

I want to say one thing also, the honourable Minister is misleading Parliament about the honourable Professor Prasad not taking any interest in the Indo-Fijian cooperation of Fiji, that is a lie and she should withdraw the statement.

But I must add also Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are many goodwill people in Fiji today.

HON. J. USAMATE.- What is your Point of Order?

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- And I am saying this on the ethnic part the tone is not good.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- The Opposition believes that I should be sanitising the history and presenting it the way they want to hear it, but that is the history and we have to accept the history. Let me remind honourable Professor Prasad on what Rabuka said and, of course, the Opposition and I quote:

“The Hindus and Muslims are pagans who must be converted to Christianity. It will be a big challenge for us to convert all Indians, those who do not choose to become Christians can continue to live here but they will probably find that it is a difficult place to live in and we are trying to make this place perfect for the Fijian people meaning iTaukeis and if it is not perfect for others, then that is too bad and they will have to go.”

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a comment by Mahendra Chaudhary caught my eyes this week which needs to be corrected. He has manipulated the remarks I made. Firstly, he completely ignored that I had shared my own story which was probably the case with many Indo-Fijians. I said that I had no family connection in India and it is a fact.

My grandfather came from a place called Basti, I do not even know where Basti is. The connection is simply as a tourist or a visitor, that is how I feel when I go to India. I never said that we have no cultural, economic, or spiritual ties, there is a huge difference between having cultural and spiritual ties and having family ties and you all understand that. You all understand the difference between that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we understand that Mr. Chaudhry's experience is different, perhaps like me, others too might not have connections like Chaudhry had with the State of Haryana in India after the 2000 *coup*. *Girmityas* had done a lot to develop Fiji that we see today, their sacrifice and struggles laid the foundations for Fiji's economy. Their legacy has been continued by their descendants to the present day, the sugar industry which has been the mainstay of our economy for over 100 years has been the contributor to our foreign exchange. It is still a source of livelihood for thousands of Fijians.

Today we pay homage to the *Girmityas* and the foundational contribution to Fiji's past, present and future descendants for whom Fiji is home like all other Fijians live and seek to live in peace, security, justice, compassion and under the rule of law.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to once again share my story. My grandfather came from a place called Basti in India and this is my great grandfather and my grandfather. He was a small boy when he came, ever since he came to Fiji, he worked in the sugarcane plantation then they started a small business and that is how we build our life.

Then, of course, the *coups* of 1987 destroyed my family. My family were separated, my brothers and sisters migrated because of instability, insecurity and they left. But when I go to India, I have been there many times, I love the country, I enjoyed the food, I buy clothes, I buy Bollywood movies, I do everything just like a tourist does but that is not home. My home is Fiji and that is where I belong.

#### Wage Rates in Fiji

HON. S. NAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank you for giving me the opportunity and the privilege to deliver my Statement on wage rates in Fiji. Sir, I wish to thank the honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations and Youth and Sports and his team for the tremendous work done to ensure that the National Minimum Wage and the sectoral-base minimum wage rates are reviewed in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the payment of wages according to the minimum stipulated rates are very crucial to ensure that the workers are given the social justice process by implementation of the minimum terms and conditions of employment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in Section 33(1) of the 2013 Constitution stipulates 'the State must take reasonable measures within its available resources to achieve the progressive realisation of the rights of every person to work and to adjust minimum wage'. Our Government has continued to implement the changes (it is important to be in par with the news. So if you read the news, if you know the report, if you were in Parliament during Budget day you would know so you need to understand, do not sleep in Parliament, wake up and listen to the deliberations, continue to implement the changes to review minimum wages and terms and conditions of employment of all workers in Fiji. This is to ensure that no one is left behind in this process.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the 2013 Constitution further stipulates 'that every person must have the right to fair employment practices including humane treatment and proper working conditions'. This is embedded within the Employment Relations Act 2007 to ensure workers are given fair and just

working conditions in all sectors of our economy. The process of ensuring fair working conditions is done through employer, employee consultation with the intervention of Ministry of Employment in cases where workers and employers have disagreements. This is done through fair process and good faith approach.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, under the great leadership and vision of our Prime Minister and the FijiFirst Government, the FijiFirst Government has made sure to fulfil all commitments made to the people.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the current progressive minimum wage increase in four tranches will not only improve lives of all Fijian workers but also their families to enjoy a decent livelihood. The progressive wage increase will enable families to comfortably meet their daily needs and prepare for the welfare of the children in the near future.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the increase in national minimum wage will also assimilate consumer spending, help business to maximise their profits and grow the economy. A modest increase would improve the work of productivity and build the morale of workers and also reduce employee turnover and absenteeism. It will also boost the overall of our economy by generating an increase of consumers' participation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, studies and research have found that employee morale and work ethics increase when employees believe that they are paid fair wages. Economists (not the one that we have here) economists have also linked higher wages to better physical and mental health and reduce decisions for the team leading to higher productivity.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the primary argument advanced in favour of raising the minimum wage is that the higher earnings would improve the overall standard of living for the minimum wage earners by providing them with more appropriate income level to handle the cost of living increases.

HON. MEMBER.- Oh, it is too late!

HON. S. NAND.- No, we have been progressively doing it. No other Governments including that of the father of coups and the coup culture in Fiji who now claims to be messiah of all Fijians have ever implemented minimum wage rate in Fiji. It is the Fiji First Government and the Bainimarama Government that had the courage to implement minimum wage in Fiji.

It is a great insult to the workers of Fiji that the de-facto leader of PAPI and the leader of NFP dares to question why the Fiji First government is revising the minimum wage rate. In his political mileage smokescreen he has forgotten that the workers need a just wage to sustain themselves and their families. Shame on him for questioning the increase.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, once again, I would like to thank the honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity, Industrial Relations and his team for the marvellous work done in increasing the minimum wage.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I sit down, honourable Prasad was quoted saying that the *Girmitiyas* would be turning in their graves. For once, I agree with his statement. Yes, the *Girmitiyas* would be turning in their graves and their descendants who have departed would be turning in the graves due to the honourable Professor Prasad and NFP colluding with the person who caused so much suffering to the *Girmitiya* descendants.

My father, I am talking about the personal suffering. My father suffered in the hands of Rabuka and his thugs. He was forced to do press-ups on the road just because he was five minutes

away from home and he had to go to the hospital because of that. In the second coup in 2000, he passed away. I have personally suffered because of his culture that this person has started.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Very poor.

HON. S. NAND.- I know of numerous other accounts of people being thrashed by Rabuka's thugs just like what was done to the *Girmitiyas* there is no difference. Yet, Rabuka has the sick audacity of saying that he has done the favour to the Indo-Fijians. Shame on him and more shame on honourable Prasad and NFP for partnering with him. He and NFP have wilfully ignored what Rabuka did.

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. S. NAND.- He and NFP have wilfully ignored what Rabuka did and continues to do by taunting us through his false and wild comments. Shame on him and more so shame on honourable Prasad who in is blind and egoistic quest to gain political mileage has compromised all the values, principles.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, you were talking about wage rates in Fiji and you were going well but now you are starting to stray. Stick to your End of the Week Statements.

HON. S. NAND.- It is just that the suffering was unbearable for us and the *Girmitiyas*. Once again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the honourable Minister and his team for a great work done in revising the minimum wage in Fiji.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will be very humble and simple today. I rise to respond to the Statement given by the honourable Nand on the wage rates in Fiji. The compliance and enforcement of minimum terms and conditions, together with the enforcement of the minimum wage rates in Fiji is one of the key responsibilities of my Ministry, which is undertaken through the various sectors of the economy by the labour standard officers. As a measure of the priority given to fair wages, even in times of crisis, such as the war in Ukraine and the continued effects of COVID-19 pandemic, the Internal Labour Organisation continues to maintain that we must ensure not only fair wages, but also decent wages. This is the principle which this Government is invoking to ensure that we provide the best to all our Fijians, despite the global challenges we face today.

In setting the National Minimum Wage, we must ensure that vulnerable workers are provided with decent wage. It has not been an easy balancing act, so that to set the minimum wages, do not discourage productivity and competition for employers. This required a well balanced approach adopted by the FijiFirst Government for a fair and just wages for all workers covered under the National Minimum Wages, and sector based minimum wages. This also required that all stakeholders come to the table during the National Minimum Wage Rate consultation. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this was not followed by the major stakeholders, in particular, the political parties and trade unions, apart from a lone representation by one political party.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, consultation participation means representation of your interest and those who you claim to lead. The failure of the trade unions to attend the National Minimum Wage consultation, which I have earlier outlined in this Parliament, now that we are back on the National Minimum Wage topic, it is timely that the National Minimum Wage matter be put to rest by the so called politicians from that side. In doing so, they have clearly demonstrated their lack of interest and advocacy on behalf of the workers of Fiji. So, they have no right now to come to this Parliament or to go out in public and claim to represent the interest. Where were they when this Government provided them with an opportunity to contribute to the review of the National Minimum Wage?

Instead, they chose to spit fire from the sidelines and come here under the Parliamentary Privilege and make big empty statements on the National Minimum Wage and its process.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, yesterday, honourable Professor Prasad made a personal attack that I attend funerals and weddings with the hidden agenda of campaigning. These personal attacks on me, only one thing I can understand of honourable Professor Prasad, is a complete failure of leadership and integrity on the part of honourable Professor Prasad and an inability to deal with issues. As a community worker and now as an MP and Minister, I have had a lifetime of attending these events for the right reasons, and I will continue to do so, for the right reasons, that is to serve the people. This leadership role based on community services in a humble and a material role has been my way of contributing to the society. In fact, Mr. Speaker, Sir, he forgot, I also attended his brother's funeral. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will be within their joys and in times of their sorrows and you will find me with them in my Ministerial shoes or in flip-flops.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, now let me turn to the good deals of the FijiFirst Government. The new National Minimum Wage that is being implemented for the good of the workers of Fiji as we speak and we do not short-changed them or short-sell them like some others do.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the ILO recommendation on the minimum wage fixing states that minimum wage rate should be adjusted from time to time to take account of change in the cost of living and other economic conditions and that is exactly what the FijiFirst Government has done.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fijian Government completed the review of the National Minimum Wage and also the 10 sector based minimum wages that is being implemented in four stages. Mr. Speaker, Sir, since the first ever National Minimum Wage was conducted in 2013 and 2014 and since then, under the Fiji First Government, we have ensured the gradual rise in the minimum wage rates in Fiji.

Let us not forget that, Mr Speaker, Sir. The National Minimum Wage was implemented under the profound leadership of our honourable Prime Minister. He had the courage to deliver his promise to the people of Fiji and more so, to the thousands of workers who have directly benefited from more to take home pay and more FNPF contributions in their accounts with an increase of minimum wage.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the roll-out of the National Minimum Wage will ensure a more gradual increase that will enable all stakeholders to meet their obligations. By the end of the implementations, real wages under the National Minimum Wage will rise on the calculation based on a worker who is employed for 48 hours per week from \$128.64 per week to \$192 in January 2023.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, according to the International Labour Organisation, the proper application of labour legislation including the implementation of wages, rates depends on an effective labour system. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the FijiFirst Government is committed to sustaining the system, to ensure that the labour law applies equally to the employers and workers in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the primary intent of the Employment Relation Act 2007 is to empower both the workers and employers on their rights and responsibilities during an employment engagement. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the minimum social protection afforded to our workers are to keep with their needs and the policies that are implemented to promote good, faith employment relation and ensure that best business and management factors are implemented in workplaces to improve productivity in a sustainable manner.



Mr. Speaker, Sir, this of course, also includes review of wages rates to ensure decent wages for our workers while balancing the employers ability to pay. This is part of the Balancing Act, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that has led to the implementation of a sustainable and a fair national minimum wage under the FijiFirst Government.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the implementation of the National Minimum Wage is a high priority area, the Labour Standard Services of my Ministry will ensure its correct implementation as part of an outreach conducting proactive labour inspection. The Labour Standard Services of my ministry from August 2016 until 2020 has conducted over 18,000 proactive labour inspection to ensure compliance with minimum terms and conditions of employment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on Finance, earlier this week, the honourable Professor Prasad made a lot of noise on the appointment of the Public Accounts Committee chairmanship. He was talking about the practice, the norm and the rule but he should also tell, Mr. Speaker, Sir, under which rule he was nominated as Chairman.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am reliably told that he presented a *tabua* to the then Leader of the Opposition and in return, he was offered Chairmanship. Mr. Speaker Sir, this is the truth and this man can do anything for power.

(Honourable Members interject)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

## ADJOURNMENT

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

That Parliament adjourns until the next sitting date, as will be determined in due course.

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

Question.

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER.- Before we adjourn, Honourable Members, I want to thank you all for your participation and contribution during the Parliamentary proceedings in the course of this week.

At this juncture, I wish to inform all Honourable Members that the Commonwealth Women's Parliamentary Fiji Group will be having their "Women's MPs Mentoring Workshop on Aspiring Women Politicians" on Wednesday, 18<sup>th</sup> May, 2022 at the Suva Civic Centre, Nadi Civic Centre and the Labasa Civic Centre.

I thank our honourable Women Members of Parliament for their efforts in advocating for women's participation in politics and leadership. This initiative will, undoubtedly, inspire women from all works of life towards becoming future parliamentarians and more importantly, making a contribution to our national efforts in achieving Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG5) Target 5.5 on ensuring women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic and public life.

Honourable Members, before we adjourn, I would just like to apologise to the House for my departure from etiquette earlier today. As you have noticed, when I came to take my seat, I had to slide across and there is a projection here and it disturbed me, so I sat down automatically.

Honourable Members, I now declare Parliament adjourned until the next sitting date which will be determined in due course.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.54 p.m.