

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

THURSDAY, 12TH MAY, 2022

[CORRECTED COPY]

CONTENTS

| | <u>Pages</u> |
|--|---------------------|
| Administration of Oath/Affirmation of Allegiance | 1327 |
| Maiden Speech – Hon. Dr. M.T. Naulumatua | 1327-1332 |
| Minutes | 1332 |
| Communications from the Speaker | 1332 |
| Presentation of Papers & Certain Documents | 1333 |
| State Lands (Amendment) Bill 2022 | 1333-1361 |
| Committee to Assess the Impact of Direct Initiatives to Farmers In the Agricultural Sector | 1362-1379,1380-1395 |
| Suspension of Standing Orders | 1379 |
| Questions | 1395-1404 |
| <u>Oral Questions</u> | |
| (1) Garbage Collection Services – Nasinu Municipal Boundary (Q/No. 121/2022) | |
| (2) Update on Child Protection Programme (Q/No. 122/2022) | |
| (3) Update on Seawall Construction – Kadavu Coastal Villages (Q/No. 123/2022) | |
| (4) Awareness on New Processes - Investment Fiji Act 2022 (Q/No. 124/2022) | |
| (5) Update on Supply of Fish to PAFCO (Q/No. 125/2022) | |
| (6) Impact of Commercial Kava Export to Australia (Q/No. 126/2022) | |
| (7) Available Facilities for Pap Smear Screening (Q/No. 127/2022) | |
| (8) Sustainability of Fiji’s Debt (Q/No. 128/2022) | |

THURSDAY, 12TH MAY, 2022

The Parliament met at 9.32 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

MR. SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Members were present, except the honourable Adi L. Qionibaravi.

ADMINISTRATION OF OATH/AFFIRMATION OF ALLEGIANCE

Honourable Dr. Mere Tuisalalo Naulumatua subscribed to the Administration of Oath/Affirmation of Allegiance and took her seat in the Chamber.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I would like to congratulate the honourable Member who has just been sworn in and I welcome the honourable Member to Parliament. I wish her well in the remainder of this parliamentary term.

Mr. Speaker congratulated the honourable Dr. M.T. Naulumatua and welcomed her to Parliament, as well as wished her well in the remainder of the parliamentary term.

MAIDEN SPEECH – HON. DR. M.T. NAULUMATUA

HON. DR. M.T. NAULUMATUA.- The honourable Prime Minister, honourable Cabinet Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition and dear honourable Members of Parliament; it gives me great pleasure to stand before you all in this august Parliament at this juncture. It may be six months away from national elections and given the way I have come into this august Parliament, some may say that I am in the middle of a perfect storm.

In my lifetime of experiences, I have learnt that God in His infinite wisdom, has designed everything for our good and to make us bring Him glory. It is, therefore, no accident when we find ourselves even under some strange circumstances.

God has a perfect plan and there are no accidents with Him. The family you were born into was no accident. The country you live in, the language you speak, the friends you make, your weaknesses, mistakes you have made and poor decisions - none of them are accidents to God. Failures with your spouse and children, things you wish you had done differently and painful experiences - none of them are accidents to God.

I come from a lineage of people of the cloth. My grandparents were *vakatawas* and a great great grandfather came all the way from England as a medical doctor, who later became a reverend in Tonga. For us, the words of God are our guide, as is provided in the Book of Isaiah 46:9-10 that says, and I quote:

- “9. Remember the former things of old: for I am God and there is no other;
10. Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things not yet done.”

Jehovah the ever faithful God we serve, knew on this day that I will stand before you all in this august Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am not here to preach but I want us all at this time in Fiji's history to reflect on the principles that our forefathers lived with, here in Fiji. Fiji has a dark history with heathenism and cannibalism. If not for the Christian Missionaries, we would still be where we were. Hence for SODELPA, as a political party, one of the founding principles we encourage strongly is to have God-fearing, honest and hardworking people to lead this great nation of ours.

Sadly, there has been a lot of upheaval in SODELPA lately. People like me have never lost sight of the bigger picture. The need to serve our people and improve their livelihoods is a burning desire that drives our days and nights.

I have come from a struggling background. My mother went on to prima three only, but she taught my siblings and I, the value hard work and honesty. When she died, she had \$10,000 in her bank account – money she had saved from the little sewing businesses and other entrepreneurial work she used to do. It was those principles that I learnt to build my business that I founded to be what it is today.

Hot Bread Kitchen this year celebrates its 40th anniversary and over the years, we have employed men and women, who have built families and sent their children to school to become very useful people of society. I have over 800 staff currently and for me, we need to be able to 'walk the talk' as leaders and when we come before our people in this august Parliament, they can say, "Yes, he or she knows what he or she is talking about."

Mr. Speaker, leaders who enter into parliamentary service must be visionary men and women, who serve our people inside and outside of Parliament. In 2014, when the transition happened from Soqosoqo Duavata ni Lewenivanua (SDL) to Social Democratic Liberal Party (SODELPA), I remained one of the founding members of the Party. At the time of Elections then, apart from the FijiFirst and National Federation Party, other parties that existed in 2006 were no longer around.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, SODELPA, therefore, was one of the handful that had the political guts to re-establish itself, and we did so by collecting the necessary signatures from around the countryside, as required by law. And for that, I will be forever grateful for the lives of our men and one woman, who gallantly went out and did this task for us, even at the expense of being prosecuted for it.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, SODELPA, true to its nature and intentions to advance the course of the indigenous Fijian people and to look after everyone, has become a part of this great nation and welcomed all other political parties to come under the umbrella of SODELPA. We had people from SVT, One FIJI, PDP, FLP, CAMV and others who joined under the SODELPA banner.

Then when people asked what happened in SODELPA, why SODELPA was always fighting, Mr. Speaker, it is because the political ideologies of all these political parties clashed. There was constant power struggle where these other new recruits into the Party tried to *coup* the control of SODELPA by ousting honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa from her leadership of the Party in 2015. In fact, they succeeded, as we all know, and took the Party to Elections in 2018 whereby they had by then managed to recruit candidates who would be loyal to their leadership.

Our people will remember, as a result, all the arguments on the use of Government grant and the many other upheavals in SODELPA where the Constitution of the Party was disregarded. It is because such 'gang mentality' had taken sprout in SOLDEPA.

Ultimately, Mr. Speaker, we all know the result of such undemocratic and conniving politics. Those same people have either left SODELPA to join the newly established Party under

the leader that tried to *coup* SODELPA, or they will join him soon.

Time will bear testament, Mr. Speaker, to nasty dirty politics that is not people-centric, but to focus on individual power struggles. It is imperative for senior citizens like me, if there is anything else I can be of use for in this august Parliament, to point out such evil intentions that our future generations must be weary of and learn from.

Mr. Speaker, those that engage in such unprincipled politics take our people's votes for granted, and they bear no allegiance to our nation and its needs, but their own selfish selves and their kind. Such people must be denounced for who they are because they are certainly not leaders, as they do not set good examples for our young people to follow. Instead, they teach our future leaders the art of stealing, of conniving, of cronyism and nepotism. And there is no end to the nasties they create in the wake of their departure.

Mind you, Mr. Speaker, those traits they will take with them wherever they go, and it is only a matter of time when we will see them squabbling again for positions in the new space they have created for themselves. Sir, SODELPA and our supporters will be the last one to laugh.

Mr. Speaker, we are now at the point where we will very shortly elect our next government. Our people must ask themselves the following questions; what is it that we want from our political leaders? What do we expect them to do for us when they enter Parliament?

Mr. Speaker, I have applied and have been accepted to be a provisional candidate for SODELPA for this coming General Elections. I do so because I want to be able to influence policies that are people-centred. I failed to make the first entry into Parliament in 2014 and again after the 2018 General Elections.

I strongly believe that the old brand of politics of race, religion and provincialism led to my voters being robbed of my representation of their interests, and that of our people who entrusted their future into the hands of those they chose to stand for parliamentary service.

Mr. Speaker, I now implore our people to be wise. They have now seen the nature of politicians we have. Some will come around asking for their votes, again, shamelessly. After disappearing from them following in 2018 I trust people will shun such politicians and likewise refuse to vote for leaders who would desert them before completing their terms in Parliament.

When politicians do not respect the will of voters and ditch their parties only after two years in Parliament, how can they assure that they will not do the same again after 2022 Elections, just because some leadership struggle does not come their way? The question to also ask is, did they ask their voters before dissenting their posts?

Mr. Speaker, we have politicians jumping around from party to party. As someone who has lived life to the full and witnessed a lot of political evolution over time, I look at such people and encourage all whom I know not to support them. Why? It is because the motives of such politicians are certainly not based on political ideologies or issues that can make a difference in the lives of our people. Such politicians follow people they believe will give them a comfortable win without too much struggle.

These are opportunists that run around chasing an easy life and they will use their money, their charm, and even their professional titles to hoodwink people. What a shame, Mr. Speaker, that in a country that has gone through so much political turmoil like ours, there are still those that are so blinded by greed that they will go to any length to hoodwink innocent struggling citizens.

For me, Mr. Speaker, political parties are like a vessel with a captain. If a vessel goes down because of bad weather, it must sink with all its crew. A captain who abandons ship minus his crew is a deserter who must never be trusted again.

In maritime tradition, it is said the captain goes down with the ship because a sea captain holds ultimate responsibility for both their ship and everyone embarked on it, and in an emergency, will either save those on board or die trying.

In certain countries, captains who abandon their ships are said to have committed a crime. For me, I believe not completing one's elected political years in Parliament is the ultimate crime, for leaders who have let down the people who entrusted their votes to them. It is sad for those who dare think that such people who have failed them in 2018 can win again this time. What new things will they, as leaders, bring to the voters to enable them to win?

Mr. Speaker, Albert Einstein said, and I quote –

“Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and over again and expecting different results.”

Mr. Speaker, leadership is about making a difference in people's lives. There is so much that remains to be done. We have people from three generations still living in squatter settlements like Qauia, Valenicina and Nadonumai, for instance. They are there by the grace of the landowners of such places, but such impoverished settlements cannot be allowed to exist forever without any genuine attempt to provide them with long-term land security, which can be achieved by way of land titles of ownership.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I implore our leaders in this august Parliament to stop the blame game. Our people do not want to listen to the rubbish that comes from this Parliament every time we have a parliamentary sitting. Hurling accusations against each other without offering solutions to grant relief for our people must stop. Our youth want jobs and reasonable rent and affordable housing. Our older folks deserve a well-resourced public hospital, not one where two mothers died of septicaemia in January and February 2020. Such deaths in this modern day and age is unacceptable.

Mr. Speaker, I have had people from all walks of life asking me for assistance, whether for employment or streetlights like those from Lami Village, or water tanks from Naivikinikini and Valenicina, or from Ballantine Memorial School where I was asked to repair teachers' quarters which had become rundown and was close to closure by the Lami Health Department, or to repair a private room at the CWM Hospital which the honourable Prime Minister then commissioned. My heart has always been burdened to move and to do what I can to assist communities in need, and I did those with my own money. I did not have to ask for donors to give me money to carry out those important community projects.

Mr. Speaker, I am well aware that a lot of these developments are business of Government to do, however, we are leaders from the community and we must also walk the talk. Parliament is not a place to come and make money, or scam money. In this august Parliament, we must plan and devise national policies that serve all of our people.

Poverty is an across-the-board issue that deprives people of their basic human rights. Whether in Parliament or outside of it, those who have pledged to become servants of the people through this august Parliament must accept that they have the responsibility to provide relief to our people in whatever capacity they can.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I, therefore, ask Government to see to it that there is some kind of criteria set for those wishing to stand for politics; that they must have the ability and the resources to conduct some level of national assistance to our people as an enabling criteria for election candidacy.

In the recent past, a political leader has said that during his time as Prime Minister, 70 percent of top civil servants came from his province and that is from his part of the nation. Now, Mr. Speaker, Sir, SODELPA Government would never allow such discriminatory policies to be practised. We will always be fair to our people and ensure an equal representation of all races and people in our various employment sectors. We owe it to ourselves and our younger people a future that promotes equity and stability, not bias, envy and unnecessary cronyism.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I founded Hot Bread Kitchen 40 years ago with the late Dr. Jimione Samisoni, Tiko Eastgate, Tony Phillips and bakers Joe Andrea from Rotuma and the Australian David Bedgood. Whilst my colleagues have passed on and some have moved on to do other things, I have ensured the business has materialised into 27 shops around Fiji with two more targeted for this year.

I implore Government to support businesses like ours and encourage them with incentives to stabilise during this challenging global environment as we try to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. We must encourage domestic market growth, which comes in handy when the global pressures that are unpredictable come down hard on us.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for Hot Bread Kitchen, we refused to send people home as a result of shop closures during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in the Western Division. What we decided to do was to get our staff on voluntary reduced hours of those who preferred to go on leave to do so, and resume when things normalised. Many of them are now back at work.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we must be human about our leadership role. We must understand the struggles of our people. In this election preparation period, we as national leaders must encourage calmness and ease. Each aspiring candidate must continuously ask ourselves, what are our intentions for going into Parliament?

We must encourage our community leaders to get people to vote, as it is their civic responsibility. It is no use complaining about your Government and resources afterwards, if you did not participate in selecting the government of your choice when you had the chance yourself.

For us as a political party, we are happy to have gone through our period of uncertainty. It allowed those who never shared the aspirations of SODELPA in the first place, and were never true to our party principles to leave us. It is better for everyone in the long run to separate the sheep from the wolves, so to speak.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I encourage those who want stable leadership and real change in Fiji to vote SODELPA in the coming Elections. Our people must be assured that SODELPA is the only party that has never changed its aspirations. That is why you will not see us engaging in any coalition without proper thought, for we do not believe that the aspirations of our indigenous people, for instance, should be watered down because it is overtaken by other competing political interests.

The Word of God in Ephesians 4:14 guides us that, and I quote:

“As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming.”

We will be true to the needs of our fellow countrymen and women and those who wish to invest in our Fiji.

On that note, Mr. Speaker, I will end by encouraging us all to do our best in this august Parliament when given the opportunity. For me, these few months I have been granted will be utilised to make meaningful contributions that provide solutions for our nation's development. I will want to present for Government's consideration the importance of allowing businesses to do what we do best without much interference by way of restrictive legislation. Should there be legislation necessary, they must be created in consultation with those it will impact.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we must be the solution, not part of the problem. *Vinaka vakalevu*, thank you and may God bless Fiji.

(Acclamation)

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Wednesday, 11th 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. I also welcome those joining us in the public gallery, and those watching the live broadcast of the proceedings.

I also extend another welcome to the third group of PL 100 – Government and Politics students from the University of the South Pacific.

On that note, I also extend warm welcome to the Years 12 and 13 students of Navesau Adventist High School. To both groups, a warm welcome to Parliament and I hope that you will enjoy the proceedings this morning.

Australian High Commission and New Zealand High Commission

Honourable Members, at this juncture, I also warmly welcome Ms. Melissa Tipping and Mr. Malcolm Patterson of the Australian High Commission, and Ms. Courtney Rose and Ms. Michelle Podmore from the New Zealand High Commission. They have been in corporation with us regarding our Parliamentary project. I welcome them and thank them for joining us this morning.

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. Fiji Public Trustee Corporation Pte Limited 2018 Annual Report (*Parliamentary Paper No. 69/2020*)
2. Fiji National University 2020 Annual Report (*Parliamentary Paper No. 44/2021*)

Standing Committee on Economic Affairs

1. Fiji Rice Pte Limited 2013-2017 Annual Reports (*Parliamentary Paper No. 255/2020*)
2. Investment Fiji 2019-2020 Annual Report (*Parliamentary Paper No. 61/2021*)

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I have been advised that there are no Committee Reports for tabling today, as well as no Ministerial Statements.

STATE LANDS (AMENDMENT) BILL 2022

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to the resolution of Parliament, yesterday, I move:

That the State Lands (Amendment) Bill 2022, be debated, voted upon and be passed.

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM-. Mr. Speaker, in the interest of time and also to allow the other Members to have more time to be able to respond to this motion, I will be very brief.

Essentially, as discussed yesterday in presenting this particular Bill to Parliament, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this seeks to regularise a long outstanding matter that is being languishing within the legal doldrums because no one could find a legal way out given on one hand, the restrictions placed by the law, and the realities on the ground. So we have people from decades living on land where it is acknowledged that they should remain there, yet there is no legal ability for them to be able to access proper title by way of lease that could be granted by the State on all persons residing on Crown land.

With those introductory remarks, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to just end there but essentially to highlight to all honourable Members of the Parliament that this would, in fact, bring about enormous levels of relief to thousands of Fijians. It would also ensure that the Lands Department is able to issue proper leases and will also increase the value of the land that they reside on. They would be able to mainstream into the financial system, be able to access loans from mainstream banks, financial institutions, including organisations like, Housing Authority, build proper homes, build resilience and at the same time, of course, ensure that the legal basis of all land titles and all land leases are done within a legal framework, which gives a lot of overall confidence to ordinary members of the public and, indeed, the economy overall. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we understand and appreciate the need to rectify the issues that have been highlighted in this Bill, but we must again, stress, our disappointments in the manner this Bill has been brought to Parliament. We know it needs to be done, but these are very sensitive and contentious issues. We could have allowed one month for the Standing Committee on Natural Resources to conduct consultation and bring the Bill back to Parliament to go through the normal process of passing legislation.

While speaking yesterday, the honourable Minister had indicated that he had held consultations with the people, but a particular and very important segment was not consulted, and these are the traditional landowners of these State lands. As I have stated, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we want to see this matter to be resolved. It has been languishing for quite some time, but anything to do with land, must not be done in haste. We have said this over and over again.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are talking about the land around the Malolo area and when we visited the villagers of Moala, they shared with us an experience where they were invited to a commissioning of a project that occurred in the land adjacent to the village, the State land, but were part of the opening as landowners. They asked themselves the question, “Why are we invited here, why are we being pampered by the developers?”, when they knew that the land was theirs initially but was currently under State land. That appears to be the situation in most parts of the country today, where the landowners are used to be part of the blessings for a project, but knowing fully well that they do not own that particular land.

We want to rectify this, Mr. Speaker, Sir. We want people to be secured in their lands, whoever is covered in this lease, we want them to be secured, but we want the traditional landowners to have a say in this, and in fact, put in place the process to identify who the owners are and give the land back to them. When we say that, we do not mean to say that they will take the land away from the tenants. We will protect the tenants, we will secure their tenancy and they will enjoy all the benefits they have been given, but the land must go back to them.

Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of land in Fiji under this arrangement, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Yesterday, we spoke about Navakai, Qeileloa, Denarau; these are all the lands that need to be used for development. We want development. Of course, we want development but do not leave out the landowners in the equation.

That is what that is happening here, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we want to be inclusive, we want to move forward. We thank the Government for the development but an important element to this is the concern, the participation, and it is the benefits that goes to the landowners. This is a way ahead for SODELPA and this is what we will do. We will encourage development, we will make it available but everyone will be on the same boat travelling together. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we will include the landowners in everything; when you leave them out there is contention and there is insecurity in our land.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are many land that come under this and include Manoko Flats, Navua, Kalabu, there are many in Fiji and we need to resolve them. There is a lot of goodwill from the landowners, there is a story told to me by the people of Yako. Their land in Waicoba, about 70 leases had expired. They wanted to do something with it. The Government prevailed upon them to renew the cane ALTA leases for the sake of the sugar industry which they did in good faith in Waicoba. However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, once the lease was given the tenants sold the land at a higher price and with very little benefit to the landowners. So, this good must be respected. Do not just come here and talk about development, enrich everyone else and leave the landowners holding an empty bag.

So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as stated...

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

MR. SPEAKER.- A Point of Order.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the amendment is to the State Lands Act, but the honourable Member is now talking about *iTaukei* land that was leased and he is, therefore, now trying to obscure. We are specifically talking about State land but he is now bringing *iTaukei* land where he said that *iTaukei* land was leased out consented to by the landowners and the tenants then sold it.

As he would also know Mr. Speaker, Sir, if you have an *iTaukei* lease you cannot sell it, you cannot subdivide it without the consent of iTLTB and the landowners. He knows that, and he is now bringing *iTaukei* land into discussions on State land; this is what we had said continuously yesterday. In the introduction, I said that this is to do with State land not *iTaukei* land and he has brought that about now, again, trying to mislead because for them, it is political order – that is what it is.

MR. SPEAKER.-Honourable Member keep to the agenda. The agenda is on State land.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was referring to that to indicate the goodwill within the landowning community, a goodwill that must be returned. The way you are going about this, you said it yesterday! There was no consultation with the traditional landowners in the area.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- We know it is State land...

(Chorus of interjections)

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

MR. SPEAKER.- Point of Order.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, again, the honourable Member in his political clamouring is misrepresenting what we said. I never mentioned about no consultation with landowners, I never said that. Please, read the *Daily Hansard*. Please do not mislead Parliament.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, if you read the *Daily Hansard*, he talked about consultation, he did not mention the local community. All we want is to be inclusive in this country. What you are doing is fine but please do it in an inclusive manner. That is all we are trying to say. You are leaving them out, you know that some of these issues are contentious. Take the time to consult us. We all want to move forward. We want to be part of this, we want to progress the country but do it in an inclusive manner that is all we are saying here.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have said it many times - you have to uplift the economic wellbeing of the *iTaukei* in this country. Anything like this that benefits them, you must take the time to include them in the dialogue. That is why we are opposing this Bill. We believe it could have been done better. Again, I say, it is something that needs to be done, the Government has brought it into

this Parliament, it is to be done but do it properly, do it in an inclusive manner so that everyone can progress together in this country.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to contribute and support Bill No. 26 of 2022 to amend the State Lands Act of 1945. This issue is one of the hottest issues in the Nadi area and numerous people who have approached us because of this situation on State land around the Nadi area, especially over the last 10 years when farmers were told to vacate their land by the Opposition.

A lot of areas in Nadi, especially suburbs like Nasau, Sonaisali and Navakai, as alluded to by the Leader of the Opposition and I thank him for highlighting those facts which indicate the Opposition's support for the Bill before the House. Sir, some of those landlords have sold their blocks for \$10,000 to \$20,000 and most of these blocks are close to the areas that they personally live in. In some instances, the landlord has migrated overseas and basically continue to sell or receive income from these sitting tenants.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Act provides that, at the time of making the application for a lease or licence under the Act, any person who makes an arrangement or agreement to permit any other person to acquire land in respect of which his or her application is being made, should have the permission or notice given by the Director of Lands of any such arrangement and cannot be given a lease under the Act without this permission.

In some instances, however, occupants of the land, as a result of dispossession of land due to political upheaval or cancellation of non-renewal of leases or licences resort to take refuge in these pieces of land and there has never been any formal work done to formalise the tenancy that they occupy till today. So the lessees who permitted such person to use the land, in this instance, however did not obtain the consent of the Director of Lands making the arrangement unlawful under the Act.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Act will ensure that no person being the holder or lessee or licensee under this Act may enter into making an arrangement or agreement to permit any other person to sell, give away or allow them to build on that piece of land. So, it is very clear and it is very imminent that this Act must be changed to accommodate all these issues. I am 110 percent sure that the Opposition will only oppose this Bill with the excuse that the Bill has come under Standing Order 51.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- It's always the case.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Always!

We, on the Government side, know and expect this as the Opposition do not have any other post to lean on. Honourable Members of this august Parliament and the people of Fiji are fed up with the Opposition for dragging on ...

(Honourable Members interject)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- ... and delaying all these necessary changes. The changes are required – it is imminent and necessary. All the Opposition does is to drag it along this Chamber to delay the formalisation of these sales.

It is very clear in the Standing Orders, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that the Standing Orders allows it. There is a provision in the Standing Orders for us to change laws, to change rules that are imminent and required immediately, and that is Standing Order 51.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, maybe I should educate the Opposition Members of what is contained in Standing Order 51. It states in Standing Order 51(1), and I quote:

“A motion requesting that Parliament consider a Bill without delay—

- (a) may be moved without notice; and
- (b) shall be moved by the member moving the Bill.”

Exactly, what the honourable Attorney-General is doing.

What is wrong with you? What is the matter? The rule needs to be changed, the laws need to be changed. Come on, be an adult, come on board and let us change it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to speak on the motion by the honourable Attorney-General, but before I do so, I would like to congratulate and thank honourable Mere Naulumatua for a wonderful statement this morning. As they say, she took the words right out of my mouth – something that we have been saying all along.

As much as I would like PAP’s other half, the honourable Members of the National Federation Party (NFP) sitting in this Parliament to take that on board, I doubt very much that that is going to happen. They have been walking around in a cul-de-sac all this time.

Mr. Speaker, my Government has implemented legislative reforms and innovative strategies for the benefit of all Fijians. These new measures were undertaken with extensive consultations.

Mr. Speaker, the Government saw a need to reform archaic legislation that hindered socio-economic development and facilitate support measures for those affected. We provide opportunities for Fijians to not only own their own homes through our First Home Purchase Programme but to also regularise informal tenants who reside on certain land and in this case, as we have heard, State land. If my Government was irresponsible, Mr. Speaker, we could have just allowed tenants to settle in informal settlements and to have an insecure future but as everyone knows, that is not my Government.

Mr. Speaker, we do things the right way by ensuring that Fijians not only have homes and formal leases, but can also access financial systems and proper services, such as electricity, clean water, footpaths and roads. In essence, this Bill ensures the very important and fundamental right of every Fijian. According to Section 35 of the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji, Government must take reasonable measures within its available resource to achieve the progressive realisation of the right of every person to access adequate housing and sanitation.

This amendment, Mr. Speaker, will allow Fijians who are currently residing on State land and have obtained informal approval from the lawfully registered lessee to formalise these arrangements. In many cases, the initial registered lessee cannot be located or simply does not have the capacity to be able to subdivide the land which was sold without consent many years prior.

Mr. Speaker, the Director of Lands, through this amendment to the State Lands Act, will have the proper authority to re-enter such land or cancel a lease for such purposes. However, there are certain clear guidelines on how to go about this before any decision can be made. That is, a Committee headed by the Permanent Secretary for Housing and Community Development must first determine any contravention to the State Lands Act and then propose a course of action.

These are proper checks and balances, Mr. Speaker, in place to ensure that there is no abuse of this authority and that each case is reviewed thoroughly before determining the best way forward for all parties involved. An important outcome of regularising land is that occupants will have security of land tenure to be able to build permanent homes. Leaseholders will be mainstreamed into the financial system and will be able to use their land titles as collateral when they approach financial institutions for bank loans and other services including insurance to rebuild their properties in the event of a national disaster.

Mr. Speaker, we also want to ensure that properties are built to quality standard. Improper leasing creates a lot of uncertainty for occupants. This is reflected in the types of houses they built which are more often than not unable to withstand the ferocity of national disasters. The best approach for any disaster, Mr. Speaker, is to be prepared by building resilient infrastructure.

A key strategy of my Government is to develop and enforce building standards for home construction that require improved resilience to cyclones and flooding as outlined in the National Development Plan. The Fijian Government is committed to growing our economy, supporting ordinary Fijians and improving their livelihoods and for greater sustainability.

Mr. Speaker, in summary this amendment to the State Lands Act will assist many Fijians who have, for years, faced uncertainty in securing proper lease titles. They will be provided with opportunity to safeguard their families' lives and their future generation. This reaffirms my Government's commitment to leaving no one behind.

Based on these remarks, Mr. Speaker, I do support the amendment to the State Lands Act.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, on that note we will take a break for morning tea.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.32 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.06 a.m.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will continue with the debate and I give the floor to the honourable Anare Jale.

HON. A. JALE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for allowing me to contribute to the debate on the amendment to the State Lands Act 1945. I do not know the history of the parcels of land in question or the Bill relates to but the only thing I know is that they were *iTaukei* land before, but now are State land.

The State took over the land for its purpose either for sugarcane planting or for something else but the intent has changed, so there are issues about the land that the *iTaukei* owners, traditional owners have, Sir, that need to be heard. That is the reason why we have been saying all along that we need consultation on important issues such as the one that we are talking about particularly land. We should hear the stakeholders. The *iTaukei* landowners are stakeholders and they need to be given the right to comment on bills that affect their rights and their livelihoods.

As I say the intent of the Act is good but the way the Act is drafted is questionable. It needs to be looked at and I will cite some of the areas of the Bill that may need to be considered so that the intent is not lost. We focus on the intent of the Bill.

Let me refer, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to Explanatory Note Paragraph 1.4. It says, “Furthermore, many of the lessees cannot be located or do not have the capacity to subdivide the land which they sold a number of years ago. By amending the Act, we will be able to regularise the occupation of these lands and allow the occupants to build permanent homes through the mainstream financial system.”

What needs to be noted here, Mr. Speaker, Sir, a situation where the lessees sold State land to illegal buyers. Both knew that the land belong to the State but they went ahead, engaged themselves in illegal dealings. I think that should be taken into account because this Act is trying to regularise or formalise illegal dealings.

The lessees and the buyers have breached the law by engaging in illegal sales. Both parties have committed offences and should be charged. We should not be going after the lessees only, we should go for the people who have been part of the dealing of this illegal sale. It is a concern that the Bill proposes to regularise the illegal dealings by formalising lease arrangement with those illegal occupants.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, what I am suggesting is that, the Government should consider vacating the land, all of them to go out because they are illegal tenants, illegal occupants, let us start fresh.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Where will they go?

HON. A. JALE.- You have to find out where they should go.

(Laughter)

HON. A. JALE.- The people of Fiji must be given the right to their land - all of them. Why should we be giving the right to the people who came there illegally, meaning illegal buyers of the land? They should be vacated and prosecuted, not the way that this Bill is proposing that the land be regularised and they will be formalised as legal tenants. I think this is wrong and we should not support it. That is the reason why I am not supporting this Bill.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank you for the opportunity to speak to this particular Bill - a Bill to amend the State Lands Act 1945. I think the Bill is trying to address something that is a big problem that we have with a lot of State lands. One is the problem of people just building illegally on State land and the other is that when people have taken leases on State land and they go into these illegal dealings and some of them sell pieces of land illegally without the consent of the Director of Lands.

A lot of these people are very poor people, we are talking here about people that have hardly anything to their name and everyone is looking for a bit of stability, a sense of security so in good faith they talk to the people that have the leases and illegally, they have these sorts of transactions. This is something that everyone who has served as Minister of Lands assume this problem occur over and over again; these illegal transactions happening.

When this comes to the notice of the Ministry of Lands now, what we do is that when the lease finishes off, their lease is taken over but the people that are residing there, the portion of the land in which their home is, is then leased to them while the rest of them if it is agricultural land, it is then given out for people that want to be farmers. It is a big problem that is perennially happening all the time, so any measure that we can have to try to address this, at the same time give powers to the Director of Lands to be able to take the land back to cancel the lease if something that will help us to stop this problem.

It is a big problem, we have a lot of problems with people using State land in a way that it is not meant for, and measures that we have in place that allow us to address this to move us forward is something that we will always support because we want to make sure at all times that State land is used in the manner that it is supposed to be used. But at the same time, the people that are living there have hardly anything to their name, we also have to look after their interests and try to make sure that we can give them some security for their lives into the future.

While there are some people have suggested that this might lead to more people building on State land illegally in this way, there will be measures that we have put in place with the work of the Committee and the work with the different Government agencies including the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources, to try to see that this is minimised as much as possible. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. T. WAQANIKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is my response to Section 16 of the State Lands (Amendment) Act. It does not make any sense, why Government is legislating a provision of the lease agreement. We all know that any occupancy, apart from what was initially consented by the Director of Lands are unlawful under lease agreement. Neither do I find that land being sold, where Director of Lands has not consented because to do so, is fraud.

Now, that being said, last month we saw the Investment Act and also the Informal Settlement Act both these laws were rushed in this august Parliament through Standing Order 51. Now, we all know that land is always secret to anyone regardless of their ethnicity, race, gender or social status. This is election's year and we will soon be hearing that we all pitching our elections pitches here. Let us all be frank about it, call it what it may, it is elections that sadly all political parties present and gone will now dangle the carrots to our voters when the need arises. I am glad that our voters are better informed, better educated and the fate of all members in this august Parliament is in their hands. That being said, I only wish that issues of land more so affordable housing were brought to this august Parliament much earlier as housing more so is a priority to any person.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, last month I had mentioned that the Housing Authority concept of providing affordable housing is not working and now we see a rush law that will somewhat or

somehow alleviate affordable housing for all our people. Do not get us wrong, we wholeheartedly support affordable decent housing for all our people but the process must be thought out properly because a lot of stakeholders will be affected. Any person squatting and hearing this Bill may be thinking that their housing issue is finally solved. Unfortunately, it will not because to benefit under this Bill:

1. An arrangement must be in place between the lessee and the occupants of the land. So, if there is no arrangement this Bill does not benefit you.
2. This arrangement is done without the consent of the Director of Lands. So, if the Director of Lands has not consented, again this Bill does not benefit you.

If there is no arrangement in place between the lessee and the squatters or the occupants of the land and the Director of Lands has not consented, the informal settlement law that we passed last month will be a whip on your back.

I also said last month that there have been unprecedented squatter settlements from Lami to Nausori for the past 15 years. When I was at SCC, we controlled squatter settlements within the Suva Municipality boundary and we controlled it well. We engaged with the squatters and we work with them, they are part and parcel of any municipality. But the ultimate understanding was, they were staying on land that they had no legal tenure and that one day the lessee or the landowner will come and reclaimed what is legally theirs.

We have political interference from Qarase's Government and also under the Bainimarama Government and our Enforcement Officers could not remove squatters from SCC land, as they were told that Government does not allow the removal, such a hypocrisy where their legal process is in place and Government usurped their roles over the laws. I say this because I had experienced it at Suva City Council.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, my concern is that, when land is subdivided and sold, will the squatters be able to afford these lots? Or will it give rise to investors or the rich and the elite to move in and buying these lots when the squatters cannot afford it. Thus deviating from the intent of this Bill. We need to have a clear legal guideline on this, hence, we are saying proper consultation with all stakeholders need to be taken into account, do not rush this like all your other laws where we find ourselves caught in the back foot of legal challenges in court.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, my second concern is subdivide the land, sold at a higher price and the squatter moves onto to another State land and looks who is abusing the system. We have squatters selling their homes not the land, \$15,000 to \$20,000 then another one moves in.

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

Honourable Waqanika is really meandering. The Bill that is before us is to do with State Land on which there are no squatters. It is to do with land where there is already somebody who has a lease and that person has then allowed other people at a price or sometimes without a price to come and build homes there. What the honourable Member is talking about is squatter land.

The difference between Squatter land and State land is that, the Squatter land is where people have just simply gone and built on that particular land without anyone's approval and without having a lease over it. That is what you call a "Squatter" and there is huge difference between the Bill that was passed by Parliament in the last sitting and what we are talking about now. Sir, the Bill that was passed the other sitting, was about where the Government has acquired a developmental lease to formalise an informal settlement.

In most cases, Mr. Speaker, Sir, most of the lands are *iTaukei* land, so we have gone out and spoken to the landowners. They have through the *iTaukei* Land Trust Board (iTTLTB) agreed to give us a development to lease and in that lease land, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are then paying the money to the landowners, on behalf of these people who were paying *Vakavanua* arrangements and we want to then subdivide the land, build roads, water, electricity and all those types of utilities.

And in instances where people do not move their house to realign, that is when we have the law that allows us to help them to move so that they can still have that land. The honourable Waqanika, is actually misleading Parliament by mixing both of them. We are not talking about that, we are talking about State land when there is a lease and somebody has gone ahead without a consent of a Director given people the right to go and leave in those lands. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. T. WAQANIKA.- Unless I am reading the Explanatory Note incorrectly. In 1.3, it says in some instances however, the occupants of the land have as a result of dispossession of land or due to political upheaval, cancellation or non-renewable of the leases and licences in order to seek refuge on other land which they were not lessees under the Act. My understanding is that, this is a State land, people have stayed on it without the two elements that I have mentioned.

So, my concern, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am addressing you, most of these so called “abandoned leases” may have annual lease rent being paid by the lessee and they allow squatters to reside on the land based on humanitarian ground. The goodwill and humanitarian ground given by the lessee to the squatters is not appreciated by this Government.

The case in point is what I have mentioned about earlier. The Suva City Council and this amendment slaps the lessee right on their face. Now, my final concern, this would encourage more informal settlements, they would move in to the State land and find loopholes.

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

The honourable Member, as a lawyer, should know that the amendments says that any land occupied prior to the enactment of this amendment, prior and not going forward, not prospective but only prior to the enactment. Please, as a lawyer do not mislead the Parliament.

HON. T. WAQANIKA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, because I cannot find the word “prior” and I will continue.

Our people need affordable housing which you were supposed to provide ages ago. The provision of affordable housing should be a key priority to any government and I have not seen affordable housing concept by the Housing Authority, it does not work. We saw their priority for the failed Fiji International Golf tournament over the much needed housing of our people. I know that because I was part of the deal when we were at Fiji TV.

Now, we know, that you have the numbers in the House and you would pass this law, but please take in to account our concerns because obviously, it has been rushed and the stakeholders’ concerns have not been addressed. Now, I have mentioned before the plight of the Solomon Islanders and many are still residing on the land that do not belong to them but they have been residing on land based on the arrangement done before the *Veitarogi Vanua* in gratitude of their hard work.

They came 157 years ago, these were the people that came as slaves to build Suva. They were brought in as slaves. SODELPA will set up a commission of inquiry and I pray that this Bill that you brought in would not affect them. We will ensure that they would be given proper legal

tenants. Now the answer to this Government and the incoming SODELPA Government, build affordable squatter tenant properties. This is the way forward for our children, our nation,...

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Keep on reading.

HON. T. WAQANIKA.- I do not read because I own property. This law, like all other laws, need to be thoroughly consulted Fijiwide. This is land. Nations go to war or people go to court because of land issues. I know it is the State land. The government comes and the government goes, do it properly and have a thorough consultation. That is all we are asking. Because we are now in the elections year, in your haste to provide affordable housing to our people, you bring in a law that will have legal implications down the line. Mr. Speaker, I do not support this Bill.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, you know there is a time limit on this agenda item. I would have thought that you would have worked out your speaking time accordingly. Do not carry on as if it is an unending debate. I give licence for time as well, but do not push your luck too far. Keep it to the essence.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I fully support the motion before Parliament. The motion is Bill No. 26 of 2022, State Lands (Amendment) Bill 2022. We are talking about 4 percent of land in Fiji, and the amendment that we are talking about here, may be 0.011 percent.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, 91 percent of lands in Fiji are *iTaukei* land that has not been touched, so do not bring this idea about *iTaukei* land, that has not been touched, please. We are young people here in Parliament, do not confuse them without thinking. The other land is a Freehold land, so we are talking about the State land. I want to start with the health perspective, and I want to come back and address the debate on some of the issues that have been brought from the other side.

The Bill allows the repossession of the lease if it has contravened the lease agreement with regards to informal sublease or informal arrangements, which is confirmed by the Committee. The Committee needs to confirm that this has not been met, the purposes of the lease on State land. It keeps the State lessee honest and strengthens the landlord or the State's ability and capability to monitor the lease.

The Bill will also help the landowner and the State to help provide surety to the informal settlers who settled there because of their arrangement with the formal lessee, with the original lessee and ensuring that the land can then be developed for their surety, so that they can have surety, they can be able to build, they will have title that can be developed, they can build a house that can withstand a cyclone, they can have water and they can have proper sanitation. I have talked about it in this Parliament, several times how the social determinants of health help in health, how important it is to have a good house, how important it is to have proper water, sanitation and hygiene, all of these contribute. This is what this amendment is helping to do.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this amendment will help in the development of the community in that area and the neighbourhood, it will also raise the value of the State land, raise the value of the titles and also raise the value of the State land. But more importantly, it will provide surety for those people who may be, do not know that was the right way to do it, who are staying on that land. We have heard this morning how the honourable Minister for Forestry had talked about how this will be very helpful in the Nadi area.

We all know that some people had sold land and at the end of the day, it has been done as a scam, or sold a lease. This is to help these people - whether it comes through Standing Order 51 or

Standing Order 55, at the end of the day the people are suffering. They need us to be able to support them to get surety, Mr. Speaker, Sir, go back again to what I had talked about earlier.

Yesterday when the honourable Attorney-General brought this Bill through Standing Order 51, I was quite amazed with the debate that came from the other side. Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is now nearly four years of our existence in this Parliament, I cannot believe that throughout these four years the same rhetoric still comes from the other side. The rhetoric about “Every land whether it is freehold or State has to go back” or “We have to find the original landowners.”

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I had said in this august Parliament before that if some of those things they are saying from the other side could be done, it would have been done by the Colonial Government. It would have been done by the late Ratu Mara, it would have been done when the Leader of PAP was Prime Minister, it would have been done by Mr. Qarase. It would have been done by them. They did not because legally they cannot.

And I think we have to remember that we must move forward and this is the way in which we could move forward. You are talking about the four percent which is State land but the 91 percent, not the land in Moala where I come from, that is still sure. We talk about the four percent State land. Who are the landlords of the State land? The State is the owner of the State land. I thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I start my intervention on this Bill, may I just take this opportunity to wish all our nurses a Happy International Nurses Day today. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to say unequivocally that the National Federation Party supports the amendment to this Bill, but we hope that the Committee that has been established under the amendment to this Act is going to do its work properly because they will need to do a lot of hard work to make sure that they are fair and perceived to be equal to everyone. So, let me make that statement very clear also.

But before I go further into my contribution to this Bill, let me just correct and reply to some of the sentiments that were echoed earlier by my learned friend the honourable Minister for Fisheries. Mr. Speaker, Sir the honourable Minister is unfortunately solely mistaken. It is the people now who are tired of this Government; they are tired of this Government not the Opposition.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- What people?

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- The people of Fiji, honourable Prime Minister, are tired of this Government and you know why? Because this Government is boring. It is boring, it is boring in every aspect of its governance. I am saying this Mr. Speaker, Sir, that they are tired of the false promises! It is the Government, not the Opposition? They are tired of all the unfulfilled promises. Well, do not worry Minister, I am going to give you a few examples.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Has anyone really been monitoring how many people follow the procedures of this Parliament? It has dwindled significantly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and you know why, because they are tired of hearing one man talking all the time and telling Fijians how they should behave.

(Laughter)

This is what we are tired of. So, they are tired of the Opposition and let me correct my honourable colleague, they are not tired of us but they are tired of you.

(Laughter)

Let me also say one other thing - he also said that farmers were told to vacate their farms and land by the Opposition and I must say, he should name who? Which opposition? Do not generalise, honourable Minister, because this is the kind of gutter level politics that has destroyed the goodwill between landlords and the tenant in the past and this Government, in its desperation to remain in power ...

(Honourable Members interject)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- ... is shamelessly adopting the same lies. Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is my reply to honourable Koroilavesau and I just want to re-assure him, "Honourable Minister, it is not us. It is you and your team."

The amendments to this Bill, let me say, Mr. Speaker, that we support it because the NFP believes that confidence comes out from security and giving people security of tenure to build their lives, their livelihoods and the livelihoods of their families are things that the National Federation Party has always supported historically. So this is one main reason why we believe that this Bill will be good for the people, particularly those who are immediately in need now.

I want to take this opportunity also to raise this point, that is, I know the honourable Attorney-General continues to talk about this Bill not being applicable to people who are in squatter settlements. But I say, Mr. Speaker, that Government should listen and pay attention also to the needs of people who are illegal settlers and are living in squatter settlements on land that belongs to the State. It is a different matter. It is paying attention to those who are settling on a legal lease, but there are also the same Fijian people who are settling on Government land but as illegal tenants. This proposal, this amendment is really taking care of those who have been settling illegally on what was a legal lease where the land otherwise would have dealt with this in a different way. What about those people with no provisions, because people are talking about equality, so how about us?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- We are only dealing with that under the status quo, you know that.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- That is fine. They should, as much as possible - why are they not rushing the same Bills through.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- We are doing that, we are not rushing

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- It is not being rushed through.

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- The Government should listen to these people.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- We are!

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Take their plight into concern and then deal with it.

Mr. Speaker, the National Federation Party has been around the country, like I said, we have been advocate of this. We have heard from the people who have been talking about this for the last 15 years. What has happened? Has Government finally restored its sight? Have you finally found your ears?

HON. DR I. WAQAINABETE.- What used to happen before?

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- The Government was here for the last 15 years, why now?

(Honourable Members interject)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- But I must say, Mr. Speaker, because this is synonymous with the false promises Government gives all the time and it is trying to please the people. Obviously, it should have done it 15 years ago. Honourable Bala went up to Sakoca in 2014, they are still waiting for him.

(Laughter)

And he has done absolutely nothing about it. So, let me say, our people, particularly those who are marginalised and are unfortunate in our society deserve to be given proper tenure and security. That is why we are supporting this Bill, the National Federation Party supports it and let me reiterate, this Government is bored and they need to go.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, just a point of clarification with respect to comments made by honourable Waqanika - true to its form they always read one part of the paragraph and they do not read the other. I think she referred to Paragraph 1.3 of the Explanatory Note in the State Lands (Amendment) Bill 2022 where it says, and I quote:

“In some instances however, occupants of the land have, as a result of dispossession of land or due to political upheaval or cancellation or non-renewal of their leases or licences, resorted to seek refuge on other land, for which they were not lessees under the Act.”

It goes on, Mr. Speaker, and I think it is wise that we actually read this out, and I quote:

“The lessees who permitted such persons to use the land in these instances however did not obtain the consent of the Director of lands making the arrangement unlawful under the Act.”

It would be wise to read the whole paragraph, honourable Member, because that is misleading the general public.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you for allowing me to contribute to the debate on the Bill before Parliament. As pointed out by honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services, once again, let me just explain that the proposed amendments relate only to State land - not freehold and not iTaukei land. It is not wise to bring about some other argument, honourable Gavoka, but I just wanted to re-emphasise that point most of the time as there seems to be some selective hearing and misrepresentation made by the Opposition Members.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the State Lands Act was actually enacted in 1945. Past Governments, and I say this quite loudly, Sir, past Governments did not have the vision and drive to solve the evolving issue surrounding State land ownership. It is this Government that is now addressing the pertinent land issues that have been affecting our people residing on State land for decades.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, political upheavals, particularly the 1987 *coup*, coupled with the expiry of 30-year ALTA leases, have contributed immensely to the displacement and dispossession of Fijians from the land they were residing in and earning their livelihoods. This has left many with no sense of ownership, Sir, and they have not been able to use their land as a form of collateral to obtain bank loans for the construction of their homes, for example. Due to those problems, occupants have not been able to secure their own individual leases.

The 2013 Constitution of the Republic of Fiji reaffirms the Fijian Government's commitment and the vision of our honourable Prime Minister of not leaving any Fijian behind, and to ensure that every Fijian has a right to shelter, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are creating an enabling environment through the amendments of the State Lands Act to empower the Director of Lands to re-enter the land and cancel the lease, only after it has been determined that the lessee had contravened the conditions of the lease. This will only happen if there was no consent obtained from the Director of Lands and subsequently, selling off or allowing occupants to settle on the land. By empowering the Director of Lands and allowing the occupants who have been victims of the head lessee's laxity in obtaining consent on behalf of the occupants, we are actually ensuring the livelihood of the occupants and their beneficiaries, so that they are secured over the long term by providing a sense of security.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the past, no Government has even thought about the plight of the occupants and their extended families who have been living under a cloud of uncertainty all of these years and have been struggling to secure ownership. This Government has now given them hope, Sir, for a better tomorrow through the support of the mainstream financial system, which enables them to access grants in relation to land surveying and First Home Owners grants, et cetera. There are so much more attached to this amendment.

Mr. Speaker, this Government has worked smart in ensuring that everything falls into place for our people in terms of having an enabling legislation and access to finance and much more, with the ultimate aim of making the lives of Fijians easier. Sir, many of the occupants who have actually been living illegally on State land will be regularised through the subdivision process and will be able to proudly own or construct their first homes, and also be able to use it as collateral for future extensions.

I am confident that the Committee responsible also, Mr. Speaker, will thoroughly investigate, they will take it into account all facts pertaining to the issuance of initial head lease and the subsequent conditions of the lease. I am also certain of the fact that all affected occupants will be given due consideration by the Committee on a case by case basis which will enable them to provide sound and informed recommendations to the Director of Lands.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also want to echo similar sentiments by the Honourable Attorney-General that the rights of all occupants including the lessee will be protected under these amendments, in fact they have never been more secure accept for under this Government.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just to conclude as a Minister responsible for Town and Country Planning also, it gives me great pleasure to see such revolutionary reforms undertaken that unlocks our true potential as we forge Fiji ahead.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank you for allowing me to contribute and I support the Bill.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to give my contribution to Bill No. 26 that is before the House. Let me breakdown the Bill – the Bill deals with the State land and the landlord is the Director of Lands.

The issue that the Bill addresses is that given that some of the lessees cannot be located they cannot subdivide the land but due to other circumstances that are alluded to by the Honourable Koya on those that come in to occupy the land through the arrangement of the lessee resulting in disposition of land, political upheaval or cancellation or non-renewal of their lease. So they have a refugee status on that particular portion of land and they have no legal standing. This particular Bill aims to address and give them a legal standing so they can access financial support, housing assistance plus other community development that they will be left behind without any proper legal standing.

A clause in the Bill amends section 16, where a Committee will be established by a regulation from the current Act and the Committee is just tasked to confirm any contravention by the lessee on the terms and conditions of the lessee.

So from that the second part of section 16 which is Amendment No. 6 is to allow and empower the Director of Lands to re-enter and regularise occupants and lessees. This gives occupants brought in by lessees to gain proper lease and standing and tenancy security.

Just for the avoidance of doubts I will refer you to Clause 2(8) of the Bill:

“For the avoidance of doubt, any occupant of land referred to under this section including the lessee shall remain on the land subject to any terms and conditions on the lease, licence or approval notice of lease granted after the enactment of the State Lands (Amendment) Act 2022.”

After we enact this Bill, then the new conditions and terms will apply to the lessee, plus the occupants. So the argument that those that have come in illegally will be displaced that is taken care of in that particular subsection.

This is just to legalise and regularise the current occupation plus the head lessee and some cannot be located because some of the sales have been done in the last 14 years. This is something that is really good for those that live in this particular area and also their access to things that the community will benefit from and also they cannot access now. I think it also targets our National Development Plan (NDP), plus the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) where no one is left behind. This particular amendment will allow those in that area, occupants and lessees, to have proper legal standards.

I support this particular Bill given that the issues that are faced by these particular people in these particular areas will be addressed and it will ensure the tenant security of those individuals, lessees plus the occupants in that particular area so that they are able to develop and also benefit from the main financial stream.

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- Oh! Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER.- Do not say, “oh”!

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- *Bula vinaka*, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Thank you very much for giving me

the opportunity to speak on Bill No. 26 of 2022 for an Act to amend the State Lands Act of 1945 likewise, Mr. Speaker, Sir, your involvement with Vanuabalavu. I would like to extend also my congratulations to Mere Tuisalalo Naulumatua also known as Mere Samisoni, Dr. Samisoni, thank you very much. Welcome back for the third time to Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, in regard to this Bill ...

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- Excuse me!

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, address the Chair. Do not carry on a conversation...

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- They are disrespecting your position, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- ... with the Opposition.

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- You have the floor.

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- Yes, Sir, Bill No. 26 of 2022 has come four years late in regard to this tenure of Parliament. It should have come in 2018. This thing here, the honourable Minister, for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport said that there is no other government that has done this. The Alliance Government took over for 17 years and there was a *coup*. Laisenia Qarase of the *Soqosoqo Duavata ni Lewenivanua* (SDL) met a *coup* in December of 2006 so they could not implement and this government has been in power for the last 16 years, this Bill has come 16 years late.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Attorney-General for introducing this Bill yesterday. Now Standing Order 51 gives us only 24 hours to discuss the Bill, saying that there is a committee up there and we were kind of surprised that the chairman is the Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of Housing and Community Development which falls under the honourable Attorney-General's portfolio as Minister for Housing and Community Development and his Permanent Secretary will be heading, even though this is land, and should have come under the permanent secretary for lands under honourable Jone Usamate's portfolio but then it has come this way. That is why most of the things that we are reading are not transparent. That is why likewise with other Members of the Opposition

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- ... you listen so you can learn!

Mr. Speaker, Sir, other Members have said that this Bill needs serious consultation because it involves land. It is not only the land as honourable Minister says, it involves Naidovi, Navo, Nasau, Solovi, Malolo Transmitter Road and it involves also Nausori area where the Manoca flats and also around Navua which were given to CSR and also FSC.

Now, these are State Freehold land and as alluded by the Members of the Opposition especially honourable Jale saying that this land has to be reverted. Once the leases are made, it has to be reverted to the true owner. This was given on trustee to the State and now that they have breached the agreement, they have done housing, they have done other businesses there and have

breached the agreement in which the land was given by the Trustee, by the iTaukei landowners, they have breached the agreement there and they should revert.

This part of the House welcomes the Bill because it benefits the people of Fiji in regard to the rental given a title. We support that but in the manner that it has come to this House of Standing Order 51 and not detailing the very basic of it, who is going to be the recipient? Maybe all these people are going to be the recipient, no one knows because it is not publicly known. The honourable Minister for Health is the public recipient. As for Standing Orders 51, soon after this, once the Right of Reply is said by the honourable Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum, this law will be passed but then it only took about two hours for us to make it as law. That is unfair.

I represent the Eastern Division of Fiji from Kadavu, Lomaiviti, Lau and Rotuma. These people have no eye here and some of their land are also State land. As you have said over there, honourable Attorney-General, 'also there are places around Fiji where there are similar situations so the idea is to regularise this'. Some other places in Fiji, they should know. We should go around all over Fiji because the iTaukei lands that were given by the iTLTB on the trustee that was given to the State, they must know in the detailed form.

Very soon you might as well watch Bau Island, they might even sell it the honourable Minister on the way they are dragging it.

MR. SPEAKER.- Just stick to the subject, forget about Bau Island.

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Standing Order 51 is not a joke. There are other places that you said honourable Minister which reflect this and this is the same principle. The honourable Premila Kumar with regards to the settlements of freehold, if this Bill has come here on the State land...

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- A Point of order, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- A Point of order!

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- ... Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Rasova has been meandering about Standing Order 51. We discussed that yesterday, that is why it was brought up yesterday. Yesterday's debate on Standing Order 51 was to discuss Standing Order 51. Today is about discussing the substantive Bill that is before you and he has been meandering all over the place and you should withdraw that statement that you made that Bau will be sold. You should stand up and withdraw it. There are many people in this august Parliament that have Bau genealogy and blood within them. That is very bad of you.

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, probably I should rephrase it, maybe Bau Landing.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- No.

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- Alright, I withdraw that, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

In regard to the settlements, she has been harping around that they have to do this with the law, they have to give the title and everything. If this has come into Standing Order 51 yesterday and for us to debate it today and become law today, I think she can do something likewise for the settlements in Fiji. Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is my contribution to the Bill 26 of 2022. I do not support the Bill in this current form.

HON. S.S. KIRPAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to support the motion for an Act to amend the State Lands Act 1945 which was tabled yesterday afternoon to this august Parliament by the honourable Attorney-General.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think most of the Opposition Members do not understand about the State land, Freehold land and iTaukei land. I think the two honourable Members who understand are not in the Parliament; honourable Mitieli Bulanauca and honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu who have been former Ministers for Lands and they are absent now from this Parliament. The person who understands about this Bill is honourable Bilitavu who knows what this Bill is all about.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is necessary to amend this Act, to allow for the informal settlements within the State land to be regularised and to stop illegal activities in the State land in future. It has been from decades that some of the agriculture lessees have sold their residential lots to individual families from their lease by way of sale and purchase agreement without the consent from the Director of Lands and this sale and purchase has been endorsed by the lawyers. The residential lots are sold without being surveyed.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have also come across that in some cases, there has been more than one lessee to a lease and these lessees share the land for farming. One of the lessee sells or gives residential lots to their family member or to an outsider from his or her share of farming portion. When one of the lessee dies then the problem emerge where the surviving lessee or the beneficiary of the deceased demands for more money or give eviction notice to those lessees. Thus, those informal settlers has no choice but to run around knocking the Department of Land's doors and other avenues.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are many cases of this nature where we have seen that the poor families are struggling to get a proper lease just because they purchase the land in an illegal manner, not known to them. This Bill will give those families a sign of relief as they can get a surveyed lot with a registered of 99 years residential lease which will enable them to mortgage their lease, to build a decent house which I think honourable Gavoka do not want those people to have a decent house. This will ease social problem and families can have decent housing with proper sanitation, road and drains, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Bill will refrain the Agriculture lessees from breaching the lease conditions and will keep their land in good husbandry manner. If the lessee want to subdivide a residential or commercial lots from their agriculture holding then they have to follow the proposed State Lands Act or else they will know the consequences on breach of lease conditions as their lease can be re-entered. This will be a way forward for proper subdivision in future and existing informal settlement will regularise in State land.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I really appreciate and wholeheartedly support the honourable Attorney-General for this amendment of State Lands Act 1945 which he brought about. I humbly request all honourable Members of this august Parliament to fully support this Bill. As honourable Tikoduadua has been saying, how can this nation trust a leader like honourable Professor Prasad who ran away from a Talkback Show? Do we need a leader like honourable Professor Prasad, who ran away from a Talkback Show...

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. S.S. KIRPAL.- ... and then he goes ...

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order.

HON. S.S. KIRPAL.- ...in coalition with a party. So, with all those words, Mr. Speaker, Sir, once again, I support this Bill. .

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also thank the honourable Attorney-General for his motion. My contribution to the motion will be very brief. When we talk about this Bill, two questions come to mind, firstly, how did this land parcels were acquired by the State; and secondly, what were the original purpose of this acquisition?

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Sir, we support development on the land and the security of tenure but wider consultation should be done, especially with the customary landowners. Land acquisition in Fiji is governed under the State Acquisition of Lands Act 1940, under the Act or types of land can be acquired for public purposes. This is what the State Acquisition of Lands Act 1940 said in Section 3 'power to acquire land', and I quote:

- “(1) Subject to other provisions of this Act, an acquiring authority may acquire lands required for any public purpose, paying such consideration or compensation as may be agreed upon or determined under the provisions of this Act.
- (2) An acquisition under this section must not proceed unless the necessity for the acquisition is such as to provide reasonable justification for the causing of any resultant hardship to a person having an interest in the lands.”

Mr. Speaker, Sir, most of the lands mentioned by the honorable Attorney-General in his motion were acquired with the purpose of planting sugarcane through the Colonial Sugar Refining Company (CSR). According to the honorable Attorney-General's submission yesterday, he mentioned, and I quote from Page 1322 of the *Daily Hansard*:

“We will be able to get proper subdivisions done and Mr. Speaker, Sir, of course, these people will get certainty. They can then go to banks, mortgage their leases and build concrete homes and of course that creates a lot more economic activity, so that is what this Act seeks to do.”

Mr. Speaker, Sir, clearly, we may have deviated from the original purpose of acquiring these land parcels. Section 8 of the Crown Lands Act (Cap 132) provides, and I quote:

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

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on behalf of the *Yavusa e tolu o Navatulevu* of the *Vanua o Nadi* and other landowners around Fiji whose land have been acquired for public purpose and are currently considered as taken. We call on the Government and the Committee that would look after these lands to also please consider reverting these land parcels to the original landowners.

Sir, we support the development of this State land but do it properly in consultation with the stakeholders.

HON. RATU T.N. NAVURELEVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, for giving me the opportunity to contribute to the motion before the House this morning. We all understand that the land in Fiji is categorised in three categories. Freehold which is privately owned, the native iTaukei land owned by the landowning unit and the State land that is owned by the Government. We all understand that there are about 18,000 leases in the State land and about four percent of the land is State land administered by the Department of Land.

In addition, all foreshore land below the main watermark, soil under Fiji waters and banks of navigable rivers and streams are State land. The State land are not sold out but some are available on leasehold basis. The State leases are granted and managed by the Department of Lands. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are concerned that such far-reaching piece of legislation are brought into the House under the Standing Orders 51, as previously alluded to by the previous speaker of the Opposition.

While we support the development, Mr. Speaker, Sir, an access to the land, but the process must be followed in a proper manner. The consultations amongst the relevant stakeholders should always be paramount when sensitive issues such as land is the subject of discussion, particularly in making an amendment that would affect relevant stakeholders.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to show my disappointment, not only my disappointment but of the Macuata Provincial Council or the Macuata Holdings, on the process in the manner how they rejected the Macuata Holding development lease, which is also called, Nayaca Subdivision, where now the Fiji National University is located. We were not consulted and they revoked the lease. There was a development lease and the subdivision was started. We have \$600,000 debt for that development, the Nayaca lease.

When we built the Macuata House, we went to the bank, the Fiji Development Bank gave a condition, "Only if you include Nayaca debt of \$600,000 into the package, then we will approve the loan," which we built the Macuata House with. Therefore, I show my disappointment that the Government should have come to the Macuata Provincial and consult us regarding this lease. We were very disappointed when we came to know that our development lease was being revoked, rejected and given to other stakeholders.

(Hon. A. Sayed-Khaiyum interjects)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. RATU T.N. NAVURELEVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to correct what I said earlier...

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

HON. RATU T.N. NAVURELEVU.- He is only talking to me, I am not taking to him, Sir.

(Laughter)

We support the development, but the processes must be undertaken and we do not find ourselves in any situation to encounter the problem in future.

MR. SPEAKER.- I stand corrected, there is one more speaker before the right of reply.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, very briefly, I do support the Bill, for four obvious reasons. Let me just correct the honourable Ratu Tevita Navurelevu. As far as his disappointment, the proper process was done for the return of Nayaca Subdivision to FNU. He was in the Provincial Office during that time. The then *Turaga na Tui Macuata*, Ratu Aisea Katonivere, together with the *Roko Tui* were consulted and they gave their approval. In fact, it was under Macuata Provincial Council, Mr. Speaker, Sir, but there was no development taking place for so many years. As a result, the then Minister for Lands, Netani Sukunaivalu, came to the Northern Division, there was a consultation and the then Tui Macuata and the then Roko Tui Macuata, gave their permission for that land, because they were not doing anything on it to be returned, so that FNU can go ahead with the development.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have said that I support this Bill for four obvious reasons. I leave the legality aspects of it to the honourable Minister for Economy and the honourable Attorney-General because I am not a lawyer. But, it is logic and common sense that leads me to support this Bill. Firstly, it is out of empathy, not sympathy.

We leaders must be concerned about what difficulties our people face. These are ordinary Fijian citizens, suffering as a result of an archaic work. Secondly, they are our own people and communities and most of them are farming communities. Out of empathy, I support this Bill. Thirdly, out of necessity. It is a necessity. We need to regularise this and we need to legalise it. Of course, it was not done in the proper way, but it is going to take ages again if we have to go as suggested by honourable Jale.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is out of necessity that we need to do this - out of 51, Government is always pragmatic. We see that there is a problem, what is the solution? Let us fix it. This is what this Government is doing, fixing it rather than delaying it. It should have been done ages ago, but it was not done.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is why it is about timing - they are always concerned about Elections! Elections! Because that is what politicians do, this is leadership. This is true leadership. There is a difference between politics and leadership. What we need in this country is true leadership in politics and that is what this is. It is out of necessity.

Three - economic benefits. We talk about diversifying the economy, there is a lot of unutilised land in Fiji that cannot be fully utilised because of this law. This is the same thing with the *iTaukei* land Mr. Speaker, Sir, when it was expiring from 1997, people had the money, they can invest, but they are holding on to that investment because this is not there. They cannot do it, because no one in his right state of mind would invest if there is no security of tenure.

As I have stated Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is logic and common-sense that we need to fix this. Economic benefits - the farmers are waiting, people will build better homes that is another industry that will benefit from this and with homes, as Minister responsible for disaster management, look at the data from previous disasters. These are the people that have their houses destroyed after every disaster. Why? Because they do not want to put the investment. This will address resilience.

We have shifted our development paradigm, not only development for the sake of development but resilience must be at the core of development. Sustainability must be at the core of development and addressing humanitarian principles. This is about human beings, this is about people. And we need to address resilience because more into resilience now means lesser expense into the future. This is an investment Mr. Speaker, Sir, I support the Bill.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank all the Members

who have spoken in favour of the Bill. I have to unfortunately, respond to some of the fairly mundane issues that have been raised by some of the Members on the floor but also some of the very misleading statements.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would just like to start off with honourable Waqanika, very slowly read the Amendment Act, if you will see Clause 2(4) says and I quote,

“Notwithstanding anything contained in any other written law or term or condition of a lease, licence or approval notice of lease, the Director of Lands may, where an arrangement or agreement has been made by a lessee in contravention of this section prior to the enactment of the State Lands (Amendment) Act 2022, re-enter the land and cancel the lease

She said she cannot see “prior to the enactment” so I am just pointing it out to her and I am glad that she is now agreeing by nodding her head, that she has now seen the “prior to the enactment” again. So, it does not open the doors as she was trying to imply and indeed scare everyone else in Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point that I would like to make is that I will start off by some of the issues she has also raised and honourable Tikoduadua, where they talked about the squatter developments and why have they not taken place and they seem to misunderstand this. As highlighted by the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Minister for Defence and honourable Minister for Lands and other that this particular amendment relates to where someone actually has a lease or had a lease and during the term of the lease decided to allocate lots of that land or parcels of that land within the parcel of lease they had to other people.

Sometimes they gave it to them for a fee or as the honourable Kirpal says, that they may ended into selling purchase agreement. The lawyers of course were also at fault and they should not have facilitated that. They should know that the person should have got a consent but of course as we know a lot of lawyers did not follow the law and so they entered into those arrangements. In other arrangements, you could have someone’s uncle who said, “Look, you have just been booted out because of 1987 from Ba, you can come and build your house here in this corner of my lot and you can stay on.” The uncle is now dead, the son or daughter is there, and their son or daughter is there and this person’s son or daughter has now occupied the land. No one has proper tenure. In some cases the people have migrated, they have disappeared, they cannot be found.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is what we need to understand, that is what this law pertains to. What they were talking about are squatters where there is Crown Land, like Navakai. Honourable Ratu Lalabalavu hit the nail on the head and honourable Kirpal made a very acute observation that both the former Minister for Lands are not here, I do not know whether it is by choice or they deliberately did that or for some reason or the other because they know what we are talking about, what we are trying to address.

The squatter issue, Sir, is where there is no lease, this is simply iTaukei land or Crown land in this case, State land is there and people have just come and built and no one stops them. One of the reasons, Sir, for example, why the Director of Lands post-1987 did not do anything about it, because they knew that many people have become what we call “IDPs” – Internally Displaced Person. They had nowhere else to go.

Honourable Gavoka, honourable Tuisawau nor honourable Saukuru does not talk about that. There are IDPs in this country who have nowhere to go. When leases, for example, were not renewed in Vanua Levu, (honourable Prof. Prasad you should know this), they all ended up as

squatters. They do not talk about that. Honourable Jale so flippantly, as a former Permanent Secretary who I thought would have a bit more empathy said, “Boot them all out.” We said, “Where will they go?” He said, “Oh, deal with it.”

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Very bad, very poor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Honourable Naulumatua talked about empathy and love, where is that?

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Missing from that side of the House.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- And they talk about the goodwill of the landowners, yes, they have leased the land, they have also made money from that land when they leased the land. These people have got nowhere to go. No one talks about that.

Today in New Zealand, 5.6 percent of the land is Native titled. In Australia after Mabo, 32 percent became Native titled and most of it is the internal desert area of Australia. Fiji is one of the settler countries where 91 percent of all the land is native titled. This Prime Minister actually did something proactive about it - they all talked about it, all of the former Prime Ministers talked about it, - he said, “we will do subdivision of iTaukei land. Make them asset and cash rich also. We are the only Government that has done that. The leader of PAP and Mr. Qarase converted iTaukei land to Freehold land.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Shame!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- When we pointed that out, they said it was the law that allowed it, so let us do it. This is also the law. They are now questioning State land. Let me read you a quote, Mr. Speaker, Sir, from the Deed of Cession, this is where it comes from:

“That the absolute proprietorship of all lands, not shown to be now alienated so as to become bona fide the property of Europeans or other foreigners (in other words Freehold land) 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 was signed by all the chiefs except, of course, there was only chief from the western division, all the others were from the Eastern and Southern Divisions. That formed the basis of land tenureship in Fiji and that was subsequently passed onto the 1970 Constitution, 1990 Constitution, 1997 Constitution and the 2013 Constitution. That was the basis of this. I know honourable Tuisawau is going to do some fancy footwork tomorrow on this, but we will take him on.

There was a case also, Ratu Epeli Kanakana case where he challenged the freehold conversion of the Suva Peninsula and we all know what happens to the Suva peninsula - Ratu Seru Cakobau gave it away as compensation to some American ship owners because someone set fire to one of the ships. He said, “You can have this, I am the Tui Viti, you can have this land.” That is how it became Freehold land. If you go to Bua, Savusavu, those lands were actually given away. Of course, some of the people converted iTaukei land to Freehold land for a few muskets – it did happen. But, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the judgment in this Court holds that the tenure, through constitutional means, still holds.

It does not mean, Mr. Speaker, Sir, at Independence in 1970, 81 percent to 83 percent of all the land in Fiji was iTaukei land, what we call 'Native title'. Today, it is 91 percent. Schedule A and Schedule B land have gone back to the landowners. Some of them are extinct *mataqali* – those *mataqali* do not exist. There is a trust fund there also, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Some of those moneys have been put to good use.

However, today, 91 percent of all the iTaukei land have Native title. The question that needs to be asked is, "What is happening with those lands?" Every single town in Fiji, except for Suva and Ba, are all on iTaukei land – Navua, Sigatoka, Nadi, Lautoka, Tavua, Rakiraki – all iTaukei land. They are getting lease moneys from that, they do not talk about that.

They do not talk about the fact that nearly 99 percent of all the hotels in Fiji are built on iTaukei land. They get lease moneys from there. Some of them are sharing the profits. Of course, some of those lease conditions should have been a lot better. When did it happen? In the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s but not when this Government was around. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is why you need to come to this Parliament with facts and intellectual honesty.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thought common sense will prevail but as we have expected, they want to turn this into an 'iTaukei versus other people' issue. They know, honourable Saukuru. You know very well that Schedule A and Schedule B have been returned. All of the land that are under State land, there is no dispute, there is no claim being made....

HON. J. SAUKURU.- A Point of Order, Mr. Speaker.

The honourable Attorney-General is misleading Parliament. I was talking about State acquisition of land. Native land were taken in for the purpose of the State. When they deviate from that, it should be returned to the original landowners, and that is what the law says.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I will come back to that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the fact is, Schedule A and Schedule B land have been returned. All State land that the Director of Lands actually deals with, there is no claim on it. There is no encumbrance on it from any Native title owner, that is why it is State land. There is no dispute about it.

They are now trying to say that there is a dispute about it. Coming to Parliament, standing here and saying, "On behalf of this landowning unit, I am making the submission", no submission has been made. No claim has been made against the Director of Lands in the past 40, 50, 80 or 100 years. The ones that had to be returned have been returned.

In respect of land that have been acquired for public purpose, that is a separate issue. Public purpose means where the public actually uses it, where there is a road, a reservoir, an airport, a hospital so that is what it relates to. There is no public road there, there is no airport, there is no hospital there, there is no reservoir there, he knows that.

HON. J. SAUKURU.- A Point of Order, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

The honourable Attorney-General should not be lying in Parliament. Then why have they not returned the land on which the Lautoka Water Catchment to the original landowners, when it has served its purpose. The Vaturu Dam is there.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Vaturu Dam is on iTaukei land, it is not State land. We are not talking about Vaturu Dam.

(Hon. J. Saukuru interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Please, don't be clutching at straws.

We are talking about lands that have already been leased to someone, where there is no dispute about it, and these people who have held the leases have subsequently gone and informally sold it. We are trying to regularise that. They are bringing everything else into it. That is the difference it is. They know about Lovu Seaside.

The point is, people like honourable Saukuru, coming from Vitogo...

HON. J. SAUKURU.- A Point of Order, Sir. Lovu Seaside is native land. Please do not mislead Parliament.

MR. SPEAKER.- You have the floor, Honourable Minister.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sir, let me finish the sentence. My point is that Lovu Seaside of course we all know is native title. My question to you, to him and to all those people, what are they doing about the development of it?

We are now going to pay them the market rental rates where we have taken out development leases over it to develop it to proper roads. What they are doing is *vakavanua* arrangements. They are not realising the full value of the iTaukei land that was my point. You will see he is now looking the other way, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Now, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point that I also wanted to make is this. One of the issues that had been raised by Honourable Rasova he talked about Permanent Secretary for Housing. If the Director of Lands is the one who is going to be issuing the cancellation and re-entry of the land, et cetera then obviously he needs to have an independent committee and obviously it is to do with housing because otherwise even the Permanent Secretary for Lands is in the Committee itself. Again you are trying to create there is some kind of underhanded dealing going on.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point that I also wanted to make was about Honourable Tikoduadua talked about Government is boring. I mean I did not know we are supposed to have disco lights and we all fancy and dancing and have shining neon lights.

The people of Fiji, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fijian public do not want lights and glamor. They want actual attraction on the ground. They want free education. They want subsidised electricity. They want water. They want roads, bridges and jetties. His leader, you know the other day, went on about, 'Oh, Walesi \$10 million, they are forcing television stations to join them', why?

MaiTV cannot even pay its licences. We have allowed them a repayment system. Do you think a television company that cannot pay its licence fees will have the ability to set up its own infrastructure tower in Lau, Rotuma and inland of Viti Levu? Have they bothered to understand what *Walesi* is about?

Walesi is about setting up infrastructure so everyone and every TV company can access and have their programmes aired everywhere in Fiji.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Exciting.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Noimalu in the interior of Naitasiri. Honourable Prime Minister will know on the horseback, those people are now getting *Walesi* television. They are watching what you are saying in Parliament, Lau, Rotuma all of those places, Mr. Speaker, Sir. These television companies have no upfront capital expenditure, no upfront capital infrastructure cost. They focus on programming.

So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the point is, they come here and try and obfuscate issues. In the same way honourable Professor Prasad and all of the others went on about and I said this before and I will say it again about honourable Prime Minister going overseas, myself going overseas. He went for medical treatment in New Zealand. Mr. Rabuka went for medical treatment overseas and when he is being replaced that has been done, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- A Point of Order, Mr. Speaker. The problem with this man the honourable Attorney-General, Mr. Speaker, is that he keeps lying. I wished the Honourable Prime Minister well. I have never said why he went overseas for medical treatment, never.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- You said it.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Never said that. All I said was

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Check the *Daily Hansard*.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.-... be transparent about the Honourable Prime Minister of this country. He is the Prime Minister. That is what I said. I never question his treatment overseas. Do not lie.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, they did say it and they said it outside Parliament also.

The point is, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is this kind of hypocrisy and small time political point-scoring that continues not just outside Parliament but inside Parliament, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the point is this that this Government as Honourable Seruiratu has highlighted before that we are empathetic, that we look at what people need.

In the same way 'Help for Homes Initiative', Mr. Speaker, Sir where we put \$125 million to help people rebuild their homes (\$110 million). We react to what people and the society need. In the same way with the two rounds of the \$360, two rounds of \$50, one round of \$90, the \$500 million injected into the economy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the point is that we have a long term prospective on growth. We provide security. We provide stability. We provide decisive leadership and that is what this Government is all about.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point that I very quickly like to mention of course is that honourable Gavoka talked about you know, let us then we will go and look at it and then we will you know do an assessment. The supermarkets before Korovuto, they have been now mortgaged to banks. So suddenly, they want to do precisely what Laisenia Qarase wanted to do, was set up this land claims tribunal. Provide uncertainty! It will completely undermine the financial system in Fiji. Nobody will know exactly what kind of security you have in your tenure even Freehold

land will be threatened. That is what they are proposing. Mr. Speaker, Sir, of course yes, that is what you are proposing. So, suddenly freehold is all right but Crown land is not.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- A Point of Order. Misleading Parliament!

MR. SPEAKER.- You have the floor.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- I said there will always be security of tenure, no matter the situation. So, please can he stop misleading Parliament please? Thank you.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, security of tenure under what conditions, when you already have a lease, for example, a Crown lease that is deposited and held as a mortgage with the bank and suddenly you are going to now come and say half way through the lease, I am going to change this – that will undermine the financial system. That is precisely my point.

So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, getting back to the point to the Bill itself, this particular amendment as highlighted previously is confined to those leases or confined to lands where leases were actually issued. People who have now residing on those lands, they will now be able to get proper lease. Prior to them getting a proper lease, the committee and as highlighted also in the amendment too, there would be various regulations that will be built around, governing the parameters of the committee, what they need to do. We have already had meetings in many of those places, Sir and that is the consultation that has taken place. Once that is done then the Director of Lands actually can then re-enter. I am not talking about physically re-entering but from a legal perspective, re-enter and then issue proper leases to all these people. The town and country planning can now come and do the roads, the drains.

Honourable Minister for Health highlighted it is actually a sanitary and hygiene issue and then these people will be able to get proper leases, Sir. And again the point is, Mr. Speaker, Sir, they have said why we have not done it in the past 16 years. Of course many of these issues we tried to resolve. Honourable Minister Koya will also tell you, the former Minister for Lands will tell you, honourable Usamate was up in the Nausori Highlands as also on other places where people have sold up, we have tried to resolve these issues. It is only after we have come against a brick wall, a legal brick wall that we have had to make this amendment otherwise it cannot be done. So, we have tried and made all attempts to do so, work within the framework but we could not and we had to have this legal amendment, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I can tell you, since we proposed this last night and tabled this, I have had so many people texting me messages saying thank you very much, we will now be able to get proper leases and build proper homes. And Mr. Speaker, Sir, we want to tell them that we will work as quickly as possible to be able to ensure that we will be able to offer them proper leases and indeed provide them some security for them. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- I thank the Attorney-General for his reply. Honourable Members, the Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

MR. SPEAKER.- There being opposition, Parliament will now vote.

Votes Cast:

Ayes – 30

Nays – 14
Not voted – 7

(Hon. R.S. Akbar voted virtually)

Motion agreed to.

[State Lands (Amendment) Bill 2022 (Bill No. 26/2020) moved under Standing Order 51 was passed and enacted by Parliament of the Republic of Fiji. (Act No. ... of 2020)]

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you, honourable Members. It has been a long session. You now deserve your lunch, so we will break for lunch and resume at 2.30 p.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.41 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.34 p.m.

**COMMITTEE TO ASSESS THE IMPACT OF DIRECT INITIATIVES
TO FARMERS IN THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR**

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to move:

That Parliament authorises the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs to assess the impact of direct initiatives to farmers in the agricultural sector, in particular the distribution of seeds and seedlings for cash crops, help in the form of materials provided to dairy farmers, provision of irrigation pumps/piping, rice planting, ploughing and harrowing of land by the Ministry of Agriculture, handling of breeder goats/sheep, and report back at the next sitting of Parliament.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.-Mr. Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the importance of Agriculture in Fiji is well-known to all of us. For at least a century, the agriculture was synonymous with the Sugar industry rightly regarded as the backbone of Fiji's economy for almost 30 years of our independent history. However, while the focus was on sugar, the other sectors were also being boosted. We had the Lakena and Dreketi Rice Scheme. Every cane belt town had a rice mill including the driest districts like Tavua and Ba. There were diversification and self-sufficiency for most rural households in terms of cash crops, for sale and self-consumption, as well as rotating crops - intercropping to maintain nutrient balance in the soil.

But, Mr. Speaker, Sir, like the time, farming practices have also dramatically changed. Unfortunately, the advisory and the expertise from the Ministry of Agriculture also withdrawn to an alarmingly low-levels and here, I mean for both Sugar and Non-sugar sectors. New approaches under the pretext of innovation, mechanisation and you name it were rolled out. At least, three decades ago, the farmers only required guidance and advice on the new ways of doing things.

Now, obviously they need help in the form of mechanisation seeds, seedlings and breed animals. More than three decades ago we had, veterinary posted in every district who could be called at odd hours to visit farms and attend to the animals in distress but this has now become a thing of the past. Mr. Speaker, Sir, one changes for the better, with time but it seems that our Agricultural sector has changed for the worst because there are no visible signs of it becoming an important factor in Fiji's economic growth and move towards some degree of self-sufficiency and a major contributor to GDP.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this brings me to the various initiatives of the Ministry of Agriculture aimed at helping the farmers. I acknowledge as I did in this Parliament before, that during COVID-19, the Ministry of Agriculture assistance, especially in the distribution of seeds, helped a lot of farmers raise the production and make their ends meet. At least, Mr. Speaker, Sir, if we do a close scrutiny of the Ministries own survey report of 2020 which reveals that Fiji is lagging far behind in terms of acquiring some semblance of self-sufficiency.

One may not need to look further than the dairy industry. In the absence of parliamentary democracy, it was basically privatised with a 10-year exclusive licence given to major business to import powered milk and bulk butter at zero duty and reconstitute it into dairy products. This is apart from processing fresh milk from our dairy farmers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one only has to look at the 2020 Agriculture Survey Summary, to note the decline of the industry, despite the exclusivity. Milk chilling plants have been constructed in the Western Division but the milk production has not increased.

Even today, almost 88 percent of milk is important and reconstituted. We believe, the famous Rewa butter is 100 percent important only to be made salty and packaged. The number of dairy farmers have swindled and the Government blames Tuberculosis (TB) and Brucellosis for the decline. That may be a factor but nothing about how it programmes to incentivise farmers and how it is not working.

All of us in this Parliament heard about the juncao grass being hailed as the perfect catalyst to boost milk output in cows. Farmers were told if they did not plant the grass, they would not qualify for any assistance. Naturally, the question comes to mind is, what has happened to the so called assistance to revive the dairy industry? Why the policy of providing replacement calves at a subsidised price to dairy farmers has not resulted in increased milk production? The answer is that, the calves will be ready as cows in three years, not immediately. What about the interim? Why then say that it will instantly produce the desired results? Is this due to lack of planning or poor knowledge of the industry? The list goes on.

Fencing materials have been provided to certain farmers, in many cases, we are told that the farmers do not need them, but other forms of assistance. Recently, a well-known dairy farmer in Tailevu, was given fencing materials for goats, and he showed us those materials, it is rusting in his yard because he does not need it, and he is a dairy farmer, not a goat or sheep farmer. This only serves the purpose of a painful example of wastage of tax payer funds.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are also issues with ploughing and harrowing of farms by the Ministry. Last weekend, we were in Navua and they provided examples of how this scheme is not working there. There are claims that this matter has been raised with the Ministry but is being swept under the carpet. We were shown farm access roads as well. These have not been maintained for many years. They are overgrown with grasses and weeds. The questions is why; whether there is no budget or any other reason?

We are also told of lack of subsidies for weedicide and fertilisers for cash crop farmers. We know cane growers have also lost subsidies on weedicides, despite needing them the most. Cash crop farmers tell us, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that previously the price of a litre of glyphosate was \$9.50, but this has risen by \$10 to \$19.50, an increase of over 100 percent. Ginger farmers have told us that more than a decade ago, the price of kilogramme of baby ginger was \$1. Just this year, it was increased to \$1.60 per kilogramme. It would be interesting to hear what the Honourable Minister says.

There are many other examples, however, the point is, in the last two decades, agricultural practices around the world has gone through huge changes. Influenced by large corporations, agriculture has become an applied science business. The most successful agriculture economies, including those close to Fiji, such as Australia and New Zealand, have applied scientific research and data driven methods to increase yields, and they are able to cut their cost and improve their competitiveness, which we have not been able to do, and, Fiji, Mr. Speaker, Sir, seems to have missed the boat.

Simultaneously, the Ministry of Agriculture has been in decline. In my view, it has lost direction and expertise. The service it provides to farmers have fallen in both quality and quantity. Like everything under this Government, it seems now to be focused on photo opportunities for the

honourable Minister and others. The honourable Minister is constantly pictured as some so called new initiative, making some grandiose announcements about new developments and new directions, just like he did in Parliament yesterday. That is fine, Mr. Speaker, Sir, but what are the results? On the ground, there is very little to show, and that is why we are asking for this inquiry. The people of Fiji need to understand the truth versus talk. Unless we know what kind of impact is coming from these initiatives, we cannot do anything to improve it or change it.

There is no use, Mr. Speaker, Sir, jumping from a digger or getting behind the wheels of a tractor for a photo opportunity. The cold hard reality is that, Government is unable to bring new practices and technology to our agriculture to make Fiji more competitive. I read a report yesterday which exactly talks about that, so it is not desperation, it is hard track. This has had a twofold impact. First, our local farmers cannot earn a decent living from supplying food locally because they cannot produce enough to cover the cost of getting their crops to the market. In many cases it is cheaper for supermarkets to import food than to buy it locally.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, you can walk into a supermarket in Fiji and find some truly odd products on sale for example coconut water imported from Sri Lanka. A single cob of corn wrapped in plastic imported from New Zealand being sold for \$6. These are products that are grown right here in Fiji. Clearly, if a supermarket is supplying them, there must be demand. And yet, we cannot get our own farmers' products reliably into the consumer market. Why? And as I said yesterday a cassava farmer with six tonnes of cassava was told in Vanua Levu that there were no storage spaces, by AMA.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, apart from the distraction we are struggling to create a robust, sustained agriculture exporting industry. I recall that it was recently announced that Fiji had for the first time exported more than \$100 million worth of non-sugar agriculture products. That is correct but Mr. Speaker, Sir, we also know that we are spending the same amount of money, about \$100 million on importing beef and sheep meat every year. Why is that in a country that can easily host and farm cattle and sheep, we are importing so much?

(Hon. Dr. M. Reddy interjects)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- You will have your opportunity ...

(Hon. Dr. M. Reddy interjects)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- You will have your opportunity my friend

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- When looked at in this light, Mr. Speaker, Sir, our non-sugar agriculture, just like sugar in the last 15 years, can only be seen as a colossal failure. We need to understand what is going on and why.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the tragedy of our agriculture industry is that nothing seems to happen unless the Minister turns up himself. He distributes some seeds here and addresses a meeting there, he supplies a tractor to some farmers here or new fencing material to farmers there and of course the army of government photographers and camera crew that go with him. And who can forget Mr. Speaker, Sir, the stray horse that the Ministry captured and handed to the people of Nadroga to pull

a plough. I would certainly like to know what has happened to that horse. I assume it has run away by now or being used as a ride to tame the others.

But this is not agriculture Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is not agriculture, this is just politics with a bit of mud attached to it. What we do not see is emerging farmers who are able to earn a living from the business of farming. We do not see major commercial investments but we have heard about it here - in agriculture we should create agricultural clusters and allow our smaller farmers to grow with them. And Mr Speaker, Sir, we should not forget our most successful agricultural industry over generations. Sugar was developed like this. First came the large agricultural investor, the CSR company, which became South Pacific Sugar Mills (SPSM) and then Fiji Sugar Corporation and in the heyday of the industry after Independence at and at least for 30 more years, farmers were successful and earned good incomes because they worked with and around the FSC.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have one or two large private sector investors in the tobacco and poultry industries. Their success has been to create a group of tobacco farmers and chicken farmers who do not need Government support. Another global development has been demand for organic foods. This is now worth about US\$100 billion dollars in the global market with huge opportunities for value-added product development. If Fiji could just supply 1 percent of that market, our economy would be transformed. There are now a few enterprising exporters no doubt who are able to export products such as raw *kava* and turmeric to meet demand in these markets. But these are just a drop in the bucket compared to what we should be doing and those exporters will tell you that it is easier to work without the Agriculture Ministry.

So Mr. Speaker, Sir, these are just a few of the directions in which our non-agriculture sector needs to go. We need to import substitute in areas like cattle and sheep, meat and vegetables. We need to attract large commercial investors to agriculture to create viable livelihoods for small farmers. We have to look at the organic food market. That is the big picture that they need to consider and that is why, Mr. Speaker, we need to understand whether the Ministry of Agriculture's initiatives are succeeding or not.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, millions of dollars of taxpayers money are being thrown into Government initiatives on seeds, seedlings, farming and fencing materials, farms, tractors, ploughing of land, et cetera. What is the effectiveness of this help? That is what we are asking through this motion. No one knows. I do not even think the Ministry of Agriculture knows. No one is able to tell us, no one has heard from the farmers who have received this help about how it has helped them in the long run because the problem we have under this Government is that it never wants to hear bad news. That is why they oppose all independent inquiries and motions that we bring. It only wants to tell everyone how much money it is spending. We hear over and over again how much is spent here, how much is spent there but whether that spending is effective or not - that is the big question. It is clear this Government is actually fearful of finding out whether it is doing anything that is producing results. This is because we suspect in the Opposition and this side of the House, it is not producing any results.

So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, let there be an inquiry through the people's representatives chaired by Government Members, majority of them would be Government Members in this House. Let the people speak and let the people hear how effective the Government's policy in this critical area has been. I urge the Government, before they vote down this motion, which they are likely to do with the kind of noise that is coming from the Minister himself (as they always do), I want to tell them, "Do not be afraid of the truth, this is part of the process of Government reviewing its own policies." He should understand what evaluation means. So do not be afraid about the truth, do not be afraid of hearing that maybe things are not as good as you are saying they are. Is it not what you always

brag about and say, ‘Government is about the truth, Government is telling the truth, Government is doing this’, but let us, Mr. Speaker, use this motion which has majority of Government Members in the Standing Committee to have an inquiry to talk to the people and evaluate, based on some of the statistics and bring that report to Parliament. It may well point out where the gaps are, where the Government needs to shift, which way it needs to put emphasis so that we can grow the agriculture sector as a whole.

Mr. Speaker, I commend the motion to Parliament and I hope that the Government will support this and have the Standing Committee inquire into the initiatives and effectiveness of those initiatives.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to this motion for debate. As usual, the honourable Opposition Member comes up with baseless motions for money-wasting ideas so that he can shilly-shally and idle away the nation’s time. Why should we task a Standing Committee with doing what any Fijian already can, which is to read the extreme facts and data that the Government publishes regularly? If honourable Professor Prasad wants to assess the impacts of the initiatives and the current overall performance of the sector, he can read that data.

Throughout the pandemic, Mr. Speaker, Sir, agriculture was a reliable and resilient sector that grew to record strength, supporting livelihoods and enhancing Fiji’s nutritional security. We crossed the \$100 million mark in agricultural export for the first time in 2020.

Yesterday the honourable Minister for Agriculture, in his Ministerial Statement, provided an update on how Government initiatives have impacted the performance of the agriculture sector over the years. Yet, honourable Professor Prasad, had the gall to call that support a juvenile attempt by the Honourable Minister.

Mr. Speaker, honourable Professor Prasad’s motion is worse than juvenile. He is arguing with facts and figures, even a child would know better. Here are the facts, Mr. Speaker. After breaking records in 2020, agricultural exports rose to a further \$123 million in 2021. Fiji had also witnessed significant growth in the export of kava, ginger and turmeric, amongst other spices in the past two years, exported mostly to the United States of America.

Mr. Spaker, the top agricultural export categories in 2021 were ginger, assorted vegetables, cassava, chicken meat and eggs. These are all positive results of what this side of Parliament has shown to the agriculture sector. Unlike honourable Members on the other side, we are all about results, not just rhetoric.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday, honourable Kuridrani made a statement saying that the contribution of agriculture to GDP has declined since 2013. What he did not tell you is that the volume of agriculture is at record high, which means production is increasing. I think that the honourable Member fails to understand the basics of the developmental pathway of any economy.

Mr. Speaker, the economic transformation and progress of most countries start with traditional primary sectors. The major contributors to most economy nowadays are fuelled by either industry or service sectors. Honourable Kuridrani is right that this is not the Fijian economy of the 1970s, 1980s and the 1990s - we are more a diverse economy. Sectors like tourism, manufacturing and financial services are growing.

Mr. Speaker, this shows that our economy is progressing and expanding. We will continue to fulfil our vision of a diversified economy - an economy that does not rely heavily on any one

sector. Therefore, we remain strong in our support to the agriculture sector, and we will continue to provide the necessary support needed to progress it further.

Before I end, Mr. Speaker, I would like to go back to the comment that honourable Tikoduadua had talked about, that we are boring. That is the term that they get from their supporters in the social pages - boring. Just because they are now married to *paapi*, it does not mean that we should know about the excitement that they receive from that end. Mr. Speaker, they talked about boring, but there are only three of them and there are 27 of us here. We have won two Elections, so we are not really boring.

Based on those remarks, Sir, I do not support the motion.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak in support of the motion. We really need to get to understand the full potential of agriculture. We all know that it is a segment of our economy that can do better and should be doing better, but for some reason, it continues to underperform. I know that the honourable Minister and the Government are hyping the fact that in quantum in dollar terms, it is increasing, but relative to the GDP it is not.

Mr. Speaker, what we see from this side of Parliament is that, we need to develop models to help grow agriculture. I must say I was quite impressed with the very comprehensive presentation from the honourable Minister for Agriculture in his Ministerial Statement yesterday, covering the whole range of products that are being produced in Fiji.

I was sitting here with the honourable Leader of the Opposition and we were asking the question - why can they not really perform to their potential or maximum? And he highlighted something that is really illuminating, Mr. Speaker, in that, the model that we use, we should follow the FSC model - the support system for every crop, whether it is coconuts, ginger, turmeric, *dalo* or whatever produce we have, we need that kind of model, that kind of support system.

In sugar, Mr. Speaker, the support system is such that for every 600 farmers, there is one overseer. I do not know what it is like today, but that used to be the case years back when I was a cane farmer. Honourable Adimaitoga can testify to that, I believe, but this is what we need. If you really want to grow agriculture, Mr. Speaker, we need to set up this kind of structure. There must be support system on the ground, in every district, to help support the farmers, as they do in the Fiji Sugar Corporation (FSC).

As you know, Mr. Speaker, as a cane farmer, the handholding by the overseer from your seedlings, the harrowing, ploughing, the fertilizer and all that is all part of the relationship with FSC, to the harvesting and transportation to the mill. That is the kind of model that we need to develop if you really want agriculture to flourish.

If I can digress a bit, I know the honourable Prime Minister has got a lot of initiatives to help with the cane crop, but let me just take us back, Mr. Speaker, to the beginning of sugar. When you look at the infrastructure they created, the railway system from Kavanagasau in Nadroga all the way to Rakiraki, the main route and then the trunks to the valleys where they lay the rail network....

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Time has changed.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Yes, it has changed, honourable Member, but the philosophy then was for the company to pick up your cane from your doorstep. That was it. And the extent of investment at that time for Colonial Sugar Refinery (CSR) to do that. I mean, in my district in

Cuvu, there is one that goes through Navovo, one goes through Yadua, one goes through Yalahuna, so really that was the undertaking by the company to pick up your cane from your doorstep. Honourable Prime Minister, if I can just suggest that we put that in place for our farmers to create new interest in cane farming.

I was a cane farmer, Mr. Speaker, I could have harvested a thousand tonnes, but my problem was that, at the end of the season, I have stand-over cane. I could not harvest them all and it cost me a lot of money. I bought a truck, I was committed to cane farming, but that element, that part of the cane equation kind of, failed and I believe with us - SODELPA, this is what we are going to do with the farmers. We will work with them to pick up their cane from their doorstep. That will generate more interest in Nadroga, in Navosa and as far as Rakiraki in Ra, Mr. Speaker.

Going back to agriculture, Mr. Speaker, that is also what we need to do - the provision of equipment. There was a headline over the last couple of days, one of the political leaders was saying that the days of knives and forks are gone. So, equipment is very important, it is key to all this. I get comments from Nadroga that after paying for a digger from Government, it takes them three months for the machine to arrive at the farm. These are all that need to be done to fully support agriculture.

Yesterday, I asked the honourable Minister about turmeric in Keiyasi, Navosa. It grows in abundance there, Mr. Speaker. Keiyasi can develop to be a township and it can be a centre for the processing of turmeric. The Nadroga Navosa Corporation has a collection centre there already been built, and I was suggesting to the honourable Minister to turn that into a processing centre for turmeric up in the highlands of Navosa, to create employment and bring the processor closer to the farmers. He said that it is commercially driven but commerce, honourable Minister, can give them incentives to motivate those companies to come and set up in Keiyasi and process turmeric from there. It is in plentiful supply, as we all know, and it is one of the best. Those are the types of steps we need to take, Mr. Speaker, to grow agriculture.

I was in a meeting with some villagers in Tailevu and they said, “Can you help with the fruits or foods in season”, because mangoes, mandarins and *duruka* only come once or twice a year and when they bring them into town, they normally set up in the verandah of some supermarkets and they get chased away. They said, “can Government do something to give us an outlet for the fruits and food in season to be sold to the consumers?” This is one area where you could look into, Sir, because there is a lot of fruits in season that only come once or twice a year.

We will certainly look into that when we set up agriculture on the basis of supporting those types of producers. Also in Tailevu, there was a comment made that they would harvest ginger but they would carry them from the farm to the pick-up points which could be quite a distance. So I said, “Okay, have you spoken with the Ministry?” They said, “Yes, they have.” So help with some sort of transportation system to help them from the farm into the collection point for the producers, honourable Minister.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Do they want the horse!

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Actually, they were asking for a horse.

(Laughter)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Now, you're laughing about the horse.

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Whether they have been supplied, is the question here, Mr. Speaker.

Anyway, to carry their produce from the farms to the collection point whether by tractor or by horse power, I ask, did he provide that. But make it happen, let us not sit here and say everything is hunky-dory, that everything is alright. There are people out there who are asking for assistance, and that is why we believe with this motion, that much more can be done. It is under-performing and that is why I am all for this Committee to help determine how we can go forward with agriculture.

I leave it there, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I hope that we are not set in our ways, that we know it all and that we would not accept something this meaningful and important to help the agriculture industry.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to address this august Parliament in response to the call by the honourable Leader of the National Federation Party on an update on farming and agriculture initiatives.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, at the outset I am at a loss to understand why the honourable Member has asked for such an update. The initiative in these areas have been well documented and well presented by the honourable Minister for Agriculture, in this august House time and again as well as through media coverage, et cetera. It looks like that honourable Professor Prasad cannot digest the success that the Ministry for Agriculture has done for the farmers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the motive of the honourable Leader of the National Federation Party has simply selfish political concerns and I must urge rather than out of any concerns for the welfare or well-being of those in the farming and in the agriculture sector. It is just another desperate and pathetic attempt to appear relevant and concerned about the farming and agriculture with Elections around the corner.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, may be it is just following the Labour Party Leader who went on in doubt about what to do next, dance to beating the drum on behalf of farmers, empty words and empty drums in a desperate Elections gimmick.

(Honourable Professor B.C. Prasad interjects)

HON. P.K. BALA.- This is my time now, honourable Professor Prasad.

Mr Speaker, Sir, honourable Gavoka spoke about the sugar industry. The cane farmers saw no hope for their families in the sugar industry until 2006. Hear me out, honourable Gavoka. I am talking about up to 2006 that because of the non-renewal of land leases (and this is what honourable Professor Prasad has not mentioned during his speech).

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it was our Prime Minister who gave hope to our farmers by providing the assistance and the farmers of this country are very well aware of it. They know it, that it was this man who gave life to the farmers of this country because I go to the farmers, I know and I am telling from my experience and we are on ground, we know what farmers want, we know what their needs are.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am happy on the other hand to use this opportunity provided by honourable Professor Prasad to highlight one of the many success stories to come out under this Government. In highlighting these success stories, let us all acknowledge and recognise this FijiFirst Government in recognising the potential in our youth and providing the much needed resources for their development.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I have reaffirmed in each of the handover ceremonies, the FijiFirst Government stands firmly behind for the youths of Fiji. The honourable Opposition Members may talk big here and on social media on their plans and wish list for our youths but we deliver and we continue to deliver for the youths of this country in real terms and in real time and to continue to make real difference in the lives of our youths.

We will continue, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to grow the Fiji Youth brand and always be at their back as we move on into the new normal of the current pandemic. We gave hope to our youths in these uncertain times. Let me also say that FijiFirst Members are on the ground more, compared to any other Government that we had.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as part of our all Government response to economic effects of COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Youth and Sports in August 2020 launched a new initiative called the Youth Farm Initiative. The initiative supports improvement of the Food Security and Livelihood. Through this new initiative, the youths are encouraged to utilise vacant land within their communities for farming. This initiative, Mr. Speaker, Sir, has strong community foundation and focusses on local level capacity building using local resources, capital, labour and the land.

It utilises the strength of existing local landowning group based networks and builds on it through providing farming implements and other materials such as seeds, fertilisers, water palms, water tanks, et cetera, to kick start this initiative. Mr. Speaker, Sir, it has been proven to be a winning formula with growing growth in the number of projects under this programme in a very short period of time.

Since August 2020 to date, the Ministry has assisted 202 Youth Clubs with around 6,000 youths to benefit who are members of this youth club. Mr. Speaker, Sir, huge response has been received from these interested youths supported with formal land consent from the landowners for youths to utilise land farming services. The total landmass consented for farming by the landowning units to be utilised by the 202 Youth Clubs is around 1,250 acres.

The Ministry of Youth and Sports Divisional Office works in close collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture to obtain soil samples for testing and advising the Youth Club on land preparation and planting of suitable crops, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The Ministry also provides training on agriculture practices in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture, Organization for Industrial, Spiritual, Cultural and Advancement (OISCA) and the Ministry of Youth and Sports trainers from these Youth Training Centres.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry provides direct funding assistance in the form of equipment higher for land preparation farming tools and equipment such as spade, fork, knives materials for greenhouse, along with the vegetable seedlings and fertilisers. With the primary purpose of strengthening food security and providing employment opportunities, the programme has enabled these youth clubs to share their harvest within their communities during the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown period to generate income with the surplus produced on a regular basis.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we support the Government's goal of development through integrated approach, the Ministry of Youth and Sport wishes to acknowledge the partners and stakeholders who have made it possible to empower and reach the untapped capabilities of these rural youth of Fiji. I acknowledge the Ministry of Agriculture for their technical assistance and support that they have continued to provide for our youths through this programme.

Also, at this juncture, acknowledge the Chinese, Japanese and Indian Governments for their continuous support towards this programme and empowering our Youths. Most of all, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I acknowledge the engine room - work done by our youths under this initiative and the important role of the land unit who have contributed to this programme.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is no need for this inquiry because we have the monitoring system in place apart from the internal audits. Full stop, no enquiries. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank you for this opportunity to provide this update and I strongly oppose the motion before us.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank honourable Members who have contributed before me but I stand to oppose the motion. . I have clearly stated during the Business Committee proceedings that we need to give the Ministry time to implement the programmes but definitely, there is always time for us to move by the honourable Members of NFP to later access the impact of direct initiatives to farmers in the agricultural sector. The effectiveness of it, whether it is succeeding or not, we will always have time because as the honourable Minister had stated in the last two days, if I remember correctly, what Government is giving to the Ministry is not expenses, it is an investment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, investments are not short term, although there are some short term gains from most of these initiatives and programmes. We need to be fair to the Ministry and to the officials, give them time because it also took time to bring the agriculture sector to where it is today. Of course, we are aware of the potentials and Government has set in place the strategic plan, the modernisation plan and allocated the results accordingly as well so that the sector performs better based on the potentials that are there and obvious.

We fully understand and agree that the agriculture sector is of importance and well known to all of us. When we look at the agriculture sector, it is important for the country, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is just basically, food and nutrition security, and let us look at the economic gains later on. Food and nutrition security is important. We have ratified the SDGs, eradication of poverty and food security, and we have stated it so many times in this august Parliament, it is not only about providing food to our people, but we must be providing them with the right food and make sure that we are conscious of the nutrition.

Even in Fiji, it will surprise most of us, one of our key challenges is the triple burden of malnutrition and of course, we have, according to one of the surveys, problems on anaemia and some food security relating issues. So, this is why if we look at the programme in detail, for example, what the honourable Member is suggesting, seeds and seedlings for cash crop. It is about food security, backyard gardening, and the other programmes that they have, that includes post disaster recoveries where the Ministry provides cuttings, seedlings, for those areas that are badly affected as a result of disasters that we have.

Of course, there are those who need seedlings for the new ventures that they are embarking into. I will use the ginger farmers for example. Again, let us also be honest with ourselves, farmers or recipients of this must also be honest. There has been a lot of instances in the Ministry of Agriculture where they are provided with seeds, when they harvest, they sell everything, and come

back to the Ministry for some more seeds for the next season. That is being irresponsible, Mr. Speaker, Sir. It is a basic economic rule, ‘the goose and the golden egg’. If you want the golden egg, let us keep the goose. We have to look after the goose in order to keep receiving the golden eggs.

Unfortunately, with the agriculture in Fiji, particularly when we deal with the smallholder farmers, most of them are not in a position to even re-invest, and that is why the programmes are so important because, firstly, they need to be self-sufficient and have extras. When they have extras then they can re-invest in the business so that they can grow and go into other financing initiatives as well.

Materials provided to dairy farmers – we are all aware of the situation in the dairy sector in Fiji, particularly by 2006, they started to pick up the new trend in Brucellosis and Tuberculosis (TB) and then when further testings were conducted, it surprised everyone, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that it has affected almost the entire geographic regions and of course, the livestock that we have as well. So, 2006, 2009 tells us that because we have been neglecting the livestock sector, it has built up slowly and then we felt the brunt when it came to 2009. Mr. Speaker, Sir, if we are honest in this august Parliament the recovery of the dairy sector. The reform was good but that is more of the processing, the involvement of CJ Patel but when it comes to production, it is going to take a while.

It is going to take a while, Mr. Speaker, Sir, because for dairy husbandry practices, the weather is the major factor now, the nutrition and the feed. There are so many things that contributes towards or further worsen the predicament that the dairy sector is in but in terms of the materials provided to dairy farmers, Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me say this. Most of what is given to the dairy sector in terms of the materials is part of the recovery from Brucellosis and Tuberculosis. Why; because most of the affected areas if we are to sustain them in the longer term, they need what they call “double fencing”. So, that the stock from one farm cannot move to the neighbouring farm.

One of the problems in Waito, in most of the dairies farms like Serea, animals are coming from one farm to the next one to the next one. To stop that and that is why a lot of assistance is going. We need to contain the animal first within the farm then we can deal with the problem and then look at other issues that we can contribute to increase production. I will not go into the detail because there are other speakers after this.

Irrigation pumps and piping, Mr. Speaker, Sir, or maybe the use of technology of course, we need mechanisation but what do we do off season. This is why climate change is also affecting agriculture in a big way and that is why they need it now. The honourable Prime Minister has just commissioned the new facility in Koronivia a few weeks back. These are the facilities that is not only needed in the research station but the farmers need it themselves Mr. Speaker, Sir so that we can be reliable and consistent in our supply so that we can meet the volumes, meet the qualities so that we can address the issues.

Ploughing and harrowing of land as I have stated, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and we are thankful that Government is assisting not only in the provision of machines but of course, in land preparation, drainage work, et cetera because if we want the small or the subsistence farmers to be upgraded to semi-commercial, commercial level farming they need some injection. They need some assistance by government and that is why we welcome such assistance but again, as I have stated, Mr. Speaker, Sir, they need to be given time so that they can do more.

Breeders, goats and sheep, it is interesting that we want to assess this now but I hope the honourable Member knows that the Fiji Fantastic which is the breed of the local sheep that we have

has been Nacocolevu since 1980 and it took about 10 good years to just perfect the breed so that it adjust to Fiji's climatic conditions and we are proud that we have that local breed.

But then the honourable Minister has talked about breeding few years back that is why we have brought in other breeds not only for sheep but for goat. The three cattle and the Swiss Brown for dairy so that we can have new stock in anticipation that when these get better, we are in a better position to roll out these programmes and address the issues.

Let us just look at the export levels over the years. We have often debated on this in this august Parliament that although contribution to GDP is less than what it used to be, the economy has taken a complete turn from where it was years ago. But when you look at the value of agriculture products, again contribution to GDP is less, but when you look at the value it keeps increasing which is good for the country and that, of course, is a clear indication that most of the programmes are already successful. I do agree with the honourable Bala - they have a monitoring and evaluation system within the Ministry of Agriculture; let the honourable Minister deal with it and bring back the reports. The Office of the Auditor-General will also assess the effectiveness of the programmes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I have stated, I know the state of the Ministry when I came in 2012. That is why we came up with the modernisation plan. That was the first initiative and that lead to the Strategic Development Plan, et cetera. When you look at funding, the honourable Kuridrani said that we are decreasing.

In 2012, Mr. Speaker, Sir, allocation to the Ministry of Agriculture was around \$37 million, if I remember correctly. Over the next few years, it went above the \$100 million and because of the economic situation that we are in - he is talking about the reduction - but it is within that context. Previously, it was around \$30 million plus so under this Government, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it has almost tripled because it has gone over the \$100 million mark.

So, the Government, to be fair to the other sectors is also providing the funds. Therefore, I do not support the motion based on the arguments that I have made. Let us allow the Ministry and Minister to carry on with the programmes that we are doing and we need to acknowledge all of them including the Minister for doing such a great work, and of course we will reap the benefits in the years to come.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I support the motion by the honourable Professor Prasad and in doing so, I would like to begin by taking Parliament back to 2019 when in reply to a Ministerial Statement by the honourable Minister for Agriculture, I said the following:

“At least the honourable Minister is seen to be doing something. We have seen reports and heard of him distributing chicks, handing out seeds of vegetables, even though many are complaining about quantity and quality.”

I also said in 2019, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that we have heard of him starting a new initiative of collecting young coconut trees that have germinated after lying on the ground for a while from trees in domestic compounds. All well and good, Mr. Speaker, but the honourable Minister and his Ministry must realise that in this depressed economic environment where people struggle to buy even the cheapest of foods like salt for cooking, they are simply unable to buy food for chicks or manure.

Many in rural areas have access to animal manure, for sure, but those in peri-urban and other places do not, so it is imperative that the honourable Minister looks into this so that this initiative does not go to waste. Also, in 2019, I continued by saying and I quote:

“We have also received complaints from people about the manner in which the distribution of assistance has been happening. These people have called our leader and our party office. We have received calls from Sigatoka in particular Nabitu that only a few farmers had been assisted and in fact there is a claim that these farmers are well acquainted with the honourable Minister and certain Agriculture Ministry officials at district level. This is the second time in a year that our office has received calls from Nabitu and the complainants are thoroughly displeased.

We hope the Honourable Minister looks into this matter. Then there have been complaints about a few advisory councillors and even one honourable Assistant Minister has been selective about which person has been assisted based on political support in the last elections.”

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Who were they? Give us their names.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- This is what I said, Mr. Speaker, on May 25th, 2019. This is precisely the point of the motion - poorly thought-out initiatives dreamt up in isolation by Ministers who are far removed from the realities on the ground, continue to be the order of the day. If the initiatives succeeds there is a big photo opportunity, if it fails however some poor Civil Servant gets the blame.

As a responsible Parliament, Mr. Speaker, we should take our role of making Minister's accountable to us, seriously. We cannot allow willy-nilly policy implementation to continue without having brought Ministers and Civil Servants to Parliament to answer for their actions in front of a Committee. I know that some will try to pull out the separation of powers argument to say that we cannot do this, and I would like to say that this is complete nonsense. Powers need to be separate precisely because they need to keep each other accountable.

Ministers are Ministers because they are Members of this Parliament first and not the other way around therefore, they are accountable to this Parliament as a first priority and this is called the Doctrine of Ministerial Responsibility for those Ministers who do not know this. Why then assess the impact of agriculture initiatives?

Mr. Speaker, over the years of this Government's leadership, the contribution of agriculture to our overall GDP is now at 8.1 percent. There is so much untapped potential here that needs to be utilised. This is why we need to assess agriculture initiatives to figure out what they are doing, how they are doing it and whether we are doing it effectively and efficiently.

The recent pandemic has shown us just how vulnerable we are as a country to external shocks. So, just imagine if we were able to export high quality agriculture products at a good enough quantity to keep the economy going, and this is why I am supporting this motion and I commend this motion to Parliament, Mr. Speaker.

But just before I take my seat, I know that the honourable Minister for Agriculture is very disruptive when we speak and he was asking me who, who, who and I would just like to remind him of an email that was sent by the owner of a bullock in April of this year and was also sent to

me and I sent it to him with no reply at all, Mr. Speaker. During the last sitting I was gesturing to him to say what happened to the email? And this is what he does (hand gesture).

Mr. Speaker, this is why I support this motion because we need to have a look at the initiatives brought in by the Ministry of Agriculture.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, again we witness an exercise in futility by the honourable Professor Prasad. We all know that this is an actual ploy by him to get some airtime. He forgot about the airtime he was getting in New Zealand so he is trying to express himself here. He is looking for some airtime so he can, as usual, pontificate and try to play hero. The truth is that he manipulates, he twists and he conveniently omits facts and, plain and simple, opines untruth in this august Parliament.

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

HON. F.S. KOYA.- That is the only reply that he can have and at the same time, what he is doing and what is most important, Sir, he is misleading the people in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Prasad refers to visiting locations such as Navua, visiting farm roads and seeing growing grass – why is he only visiting farm roads now? Is it because elections are near, honourable Prasad. Where was he when our government agencies were actually clearing the farm roads and assisting and supporting the farmers over the months and years, Mr. Speaker? This is all that he can observe from a singular visit. It is actually surprising that honourable Prasad is oblivious to the information, not only shared by the Fijian Government but agencies such as the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (UNFAO). Please, go and do your research, honourable Prasad.

The Agriculture Census undertaken by the Ministry of Agriculture, Mr. Speaker, in partnership with the UNFAO indicates (and this is important information - I wish you would read it, honourable Prasad), indicates that 190,460 agriculture household members participates in at least one agriculture activity – that is crops, livestock, fishery or forestry.

During the 2020 Agriculture Census, Mr. Speaker, a total value of crop production in Fiji was recorded at \$2.5 billion, Mr. Speaker. Temporary crops were valued at \$2.3 billion whilst a \$163.6 million were permanent crops. The permanent crops are mainly those that are exported, whilst \$2.3 million worth of crops are actually circulating within the Fijian economy as market produce or as subsistence crops, where families actually grow food for themselves.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our programmes - this government - are actually targeted towards unlocking our potential by bringing in innovative and new ideas. We have actually strengthened our programmes which have proven that our agriculture sector crossed \$100 million in exports. In fact, with kava being one of our largest exports, we have seen how Fijians have now actually diversified into niche products. For instance, a few weeks ago we saw samples of kava cookies in the market and why not, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

I hope all the farmers are listening to these outrageous claims by honourable Professor Prasad for this is nothing new. We care for our farmers and we actually support their expansions. Our very own Fijian organic and Fijian produce emblems are getting attraction both locally and internationally and I will come back to the Fijian organic branding, Sir, because he needs to be taught a lesson about organic stuff.

Our co-operatives have increased their farm mechanisation programmes either sugarcane, rice or ordinary farmers. They are actually adapting to new technologies and moving up the value chain. We have seen how our grassroots businesses step out of their comfort zones when they are given the right support and empowerment. Our farmers particularly the young ones are moving and progressing towards value adding and exports now.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Gavoka talks about models. We have actually piloted successful models through our co-operatives whereby the government, the private sector, banks and donor agencies actually partner to fund particular profit making operations. Mr. Speaker, Sir, a co-operative is producing cassava, *vudi* and *kumala* chips in Nabulini. Never before had we actually seen this but this is happening right now. Successful Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) models established and implemented, Mr. Speaker.

This week, I actually talked about how well exports of turmeric, kava and spices are actually doing in designations like the U.S including our traditional crops like *dalo* and cassava to Australia and New Zealand. This has not eventuated by just magic, Mr. Speaker, Sir but through well-crafted targeted policies and assistance by the Fijian Government and the data for all of this is freely available, honourable Professor Prasad.

Earlier this week when I was sharing vital information with this august Parliament about how the Government is mainstreaming climate change into crucial trade and economic policies, one of the honourable Members on the other side saying that it was all unnecessary information. This is why he has no idea about the impact of climate change on Fiji's agricultural sector. He means to discredit the actual research done by scientists and international organisations. However, he needs to learn that agriculture production is affected globally by increasing temperatures, change in rainfall patterns and more frequent and intense rain and weather effects.

If it were not for these government initiatives that we have put in place, Fiji's agriculture sector would have suffered to the brink of collapse. What are other reasons why we have suffered? You look at 1987, it is a small fact but it is a big trap. In 1987 we had a massive brain drain, we did not have enough veterinarians (VETs), we had none, today we have quite a few. We had to bring them back and just the last couple of points that I wanted to raise.

Let me give the honourable Professor Prasad a lesson about organics. You can come here and pontificate about organics and say, "Oh, we should be exporting more organic material out to the world." It does not happen overnight you need to get the soil tested, ensure that you certify; the certifying organisation Pacific Organic & Ethical Trade Community (POETCom) is the only certifying organisation that will allow us entry into the US into Australia. Now we are fortunate enough that the certifying authority has actually come here, learn because you pontificate about these things without learning.

Yes, we have a massive organic industry that we can turn our little organic industry into. As a matter of fact, the honourable Seruiratu will tell you our ginger coming out from some places in Fiji is 500 tonnes more powerful than other gingers in the world, but we must manage it and do it carefully so we get access into the markets.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, he has no idea about organics and you should not pontificate about it because we are supporting as many organic farmers as we can and the Ministry of Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport has the organic labelling ready for all our organic farmers. This is why we are now able to send organic turmeric out to the US. You do not listen nor do you read about it, honourable Professor Prasad.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, he should stop talking about telling the truth because he never tells the truth. This really hurts me when he says the 'silent 25'. I am not silent, she is not silent, he is not silent, we are not silent, we are unified honourable Prasad. We are unified behind one leader, we are not leaderless and we are not rudderless like you are.

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Thank you Sir for this opportunity to make my contribution in support of the motion before Parliament. Before that, Sir, I want to thank the honourable Minister for these programmes and initiatives and he is hardworking, unfortunately Sir, the result has not been impressive.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to speak on the honourable Bala's statement regarding the internal control. Sir, his Ministry of Youth and Sports is one of the 22 government agencies that failed to reach the timelines of the submissions of draft financial statements 2020.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will be brief, we understand that all these programmes and initiatives are still in progress and this motion is timely to ensure that standard process and procedures are complied with by the Ministry. We need to know whether internal control measures were in place to ensure the efficient and effective implementation of these programmes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is important that we should ensure that proper management of expenditure is fundamental to ensuring value for money in delivering services to the community. We need to have cost-effective internal controls within the purchasing and payment systems as it plays an important part in ensuring that funds are not being misused, no favouritism, avoid over expenditure and corruption. Unfortunately, Sir, if you look at the Auditor-General's Audit Report on Economic Service Sector of 2018, it highlighted some of the anomalies in procurement of goods and services by the Ministry of Agriculture which cast doubt on the Ministry's capability, transparency, accountability and integrity in the implementation of these programme and initiatives.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Auditor-General reported that instances were noted where quotations were not obtained in a timely manner. Instances were noted where procurement were made in invalid and expired quotations. Local purchase orders were raised and issued before the procurement request forms were approved. In most instances, local purchase orders were not raised for the purchase of ginger seeds, hire of trucks for cutting and land facility programmes, therefore, Sir, we have doubt that these programmes will be properly managed by the Ministry.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I go further, may I ask the honourable Minister, was there any study done before these programmes were approved and implemented? I share this, Sir, because considering the economic and social impacts of these programmes. If I was in his place as Minister, Sir, first, I would ensure that internal controls and standard processes and procedures are being complied with, construct more farm roads especially in villages and rural communities, establish collection centres for rural and maritime communities. We have noted that \$1 million has been allocated to one of these programmes, Sir. That \$1 million is enough to build 10 collection centres around the country.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Yes, it would have been better used in constructing collection centres. Construct cold storage facilities for productive farming communities, organise market outlets, provide machines such as diggers for land clearing and drainage purposes, provide subsidy to successful semi and commercial farmers like in the sugar industry. We always ask why the assistance given to sugarcane farmers cannot be given to non-sugarcane farmers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is why I said from the above, was there any study done in regards to the approval of these projects? But since it is already on the ground, the only way we need to ensure that the taxpayers' money are properly utilised is to conduct an investigation or review of these programmes as proposed in the motion. Thank you, Sir.

HON. S. NAND.- My contribution to the motion will be very brief. To start off with, like all of us on this side, we do not support the motion that has been put forward and when people on the other side compare us with our neighbours, do they understand the economies of scale. The average size of a farm in Fiji is around four hectares, the average size of a farm in Australia is about 100 hectares - the economies of scale plays a very important part.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, they have said that we are not contributing. I would like to further elaborate on honourable Seruiratu's comment about the dairy industry. The Bainimarama Government has continuously been putting money into the dairy industry. Do they understand what the dairy industry has gone through? It is not about talking to a farmer for a few minutes that you will understand what the dairy industry has been through, you need to be in the dairy industry to know what it has gone through. Every farmer has tried its level best to get the milk production up, together with direct assistance from the Government.

Year in and year out, the Fijian Government has put money into the dairy industry. It is not because our farmers are lazy, it is not because there is not enough support given to the dairy industry. It is because of the diseases that have been prevalent in the industry, that is why the production has come down and it is not because of the Fiji First Government. It occurs because of the Party leaders, Government and the other Government's before them. They have continuously failed to look at the dairy industry. They have failed to look at the testing methods, they have failed to look at the husbandry practices, they have failed to look at the support services. That is why the dairy industry is what it is today. Had they done their job that time, the dairy industry would have been flourishing now.

Without the Fiji First Government's restructure of the dairy industry, there would not have been a dairy industry. Do you people know that? The dairy industry was run to the ground, they interjected, restructured the industry and the farmers are now getting the support that they needed. We are already in the downturn where we have lost more than 50 percent of our cattle because of the diseases. But the Government, through its initiatives and livestock rehabilitation programme, they have managed to get this dairy industry up and hopefully with the continuous support we will get where we and the farmers are working very hard regarding that.

They have talked about exports. Yes, we may not be exporting vegetables, food and everything but through our markets, we have plenty of fruits and vegetables in the markets. Our citizens are getting the nutrition they deserve. We are working out the small seeding programme, seed distribution and everything else is working well. The people are getting the food, people are able to sustain themselves. Sustainable agriculture is what the Government wants. We do not want to have programmes that we are not able to sustain for a prolonged period.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we may not be exporting the fruits but look at fruits like dragon fruit and guava. There is plenty fruits supply in Fiji now. People are able to enjoy good quality fruits at a reasonable price rather than paying for the imported ones. We cannot write-off our Agriculture sector and say that the Government's initiative in the Agriculture sector is not working - it is working. The Government has continued to develop infrastructure so that farmers have access to the markets. They are able to bring their produce to the market, get a good value for them because of the good quality they are able to deliver.

Also, Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I sit down, I would like to add on that meeting 25, 26 people in a group meeting in Bua does not mean that they have met all the people and all agricultural farmers. They do not represent the total agricultural sector. If they have to do it then they should have started from the beginning of the term, met all the farmers, found out what their difficulties are, air that continuously here and not come at the last time to get some political airtime and start talking about the farmers. Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir, with that note, I do not support the motion.

MR. SPEAKER.- I thank the honourable Member for his contribution to the debate. Honourable Members for the purposes of complying with Standing Orders with respect to sitting times, I now call upon the Leader of the Government in Parliament to move a suspension motion.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

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

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

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

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, very briefly, we are still on Schedule 2 and we still have Schedule 3 pending as well, thus the request to sit beyond 4.30 p.m. in order to complete the listed item.

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

As no one wishes to take the floor, honorable Members, the Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, on that note, we will take an adjournment for afternoon tea.

The Parliament adjourned at 4.00 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 4.36 p.m.

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

**COMMITTEE TO ASSESS THE IMPACT OF DIRECT INITIATIVES
TO FARMERS IN THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR**

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, at the outset, this motion is perilous and a waste of parliamentary time. Let me first make corrections, factual errors made by honourable Professor Prasad when he introduced his motion.

Honourable Professor Prasad said that before, the Ministry of Agriculture had veterinary in every district - 12 districts. The Ministry of Agriculture never had 12 veterinarians. At the most, at one particular point in time, there were three.

(Hon. Professor B.C. Prasad interjects)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- You said that the Ministry of Agriculture before...

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- You are wrong.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- What have I wronged?

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, never ever, the Ministry of Agriculture had 12 veterinarians. Veterinarians are scarce human resource. For the first time ever, we now have four full time veterinarians with us on our payroll.

Honourable Professor Prasad said that when we were giving out fencing materials to livestock farmers, there was a criteria that if they do not plant juncao grass, they would not receive the fencing material. Absolutely wrong and incorrect! What we said was that, with the fencing material, we will also provide to them a quarter acre of planting material for juncao grass and we want them to establish that because, Mr. Speaker, Sir, during drought season, pasture is an issue. So we want them to establish a pasture which will survive during the drought period, high yielding, high in protein content and once you plant juncao grass, it is outside the paddock, it is a cut and carry pasture, it will last there for 40 years.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Professor Prasad said that we are not doing enough in terms of establishing farm roads. Over the last three years, we have established 102 kilometres of new farm roads. Never before this level of farm roads was done. There are two ways we are doing that, one is the Ministry's allocation for actual outsourcing of farm road construction that we give out to contractors, they do the farm road and secondly, over the last three years, we have acquired new machinery from development partners. So, with the machinery, with the fuel budget, we get gravel from that area, doing an Environment Management Plan and we establish farm roads. That is why we are able to speed up the establishment of the farm roads. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this year, we are looking at about 75 kilometres of farm road established within this financial year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Professor Prasad said that we should go organic. In the same breath, he argued that we should provide subsidy for chemicals. The honourable Member does not understand about organic agriculture. Why is he arguing that we must give them chemicals and

fertilizer and subsidise rate and he is saying that we should take advantage of the organic market. Sir, we are promoting organic agriculture and just this week, I had said that I was in Koro Island. In Koro, they want Koro Island to go organic, follow suit from Rotuma. Rotuma is now declared organic.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are very particular about what kind of agriculture model we have in non-sugar agriculture, we do not want to go down the path of the sugar industry. We have shied away from getting farmers subsidies and buy fertilizers and chemicals based on subsidies. Everyone knows that when we have subsidies, their optimal resource utilisation will not be done because the prices are not the market price and, therefore, the farmers are not getting the true signal of the input price. Mr. Speaker, Sir, ask any first year economics student, they will tell you that farmers or business persons must face the true input and output price to make decisions about what venture to get into because they will be doing long term number crunching for business viability.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Professor Prasad said that ginger farmers are getting a price of \$1.60, absolutely incorrect! The exporters are paying \$2 to \$2.60 per kilogramme, this is the rate paid by different exporters. In the supermarkets, he should go today and see the label there, 'ginger price' it is sold at \$2 to \$4 per kilogramme (matured ginger).

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Professor Prasad spoke about a farmer who approached him in Savusavu and said that he has one tonne of cassava and no one is buying. Sir, in Savusavu, we have a full-time operational office to collect the produce - *dalo* and cassava, from farmers in Savusavu. For cassava, you cannot collect everyday because you cannot run a freezer up and down every day. There is are collection days for cassava as follows; Monday, Wednesday and Friday. They must pull it up on Monday morning, we collect at around mid-day, process it, put it in the freezer truck and run it down. You cannot collect cassava everyday. So, cassava and *dalo* are collected from Savusavu.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, when you collect a produce, you need to dispose or sell it out. How do we know the amount of produce we will be collecting in Savusavu or Wainikoro or Lagalaga, et cetera? We will only know if they sign up a supply contract with us - we would then know what would be the volume, on what particular day and how much are they planting.

Majority of these farmers have not signed up the supply contract. What they do is, today they need some cash, they will pull out some cassava or *dalo*, walk up to Savusavu Office and say, "I need to sell it now." It is not a bank to cash in when you need cash, Mr. Speaker, Sir. We need to plan, AMA needs to plan. We have to fulfil market demands. We need to ensure that we do not take in as much as we get and run into losses, which used to happen before. That used to be the model before. No more!

Honourable Professor Prasad asked, what is wrong, why are we importing pig meat? We should be producing premium and beef cuts. Mr. Speaker, Sir, tell him to go and talk to Mr. Rabuka. In 1998, he closed the Yalavou Beef Cattle Scheme, we are now reviving that Scheme. Sir, millions of dollars of Australian aid money was spent at the Yalavou Beef Scheme. At the farm, the quarters, streetlights, electricity, water, et cetera, were there but in 1998, Mr. Rabuka closed that. He should ask Mr. Rabuka and get details why he did that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are now upgrading the road up to Yalavou Farm. We have established 10 paddocks with complete fencing, we are doing double fencing on the outside parameters as well. We have completed clearing five hectares of bush. It has big, lush trees and we need D4 to get them down to be cleared because it has been there from 1998. About 60 cattle was there, what happened

to the rest? No one knows, it was abandoned. Quarters were left empty. There is a primary school there that is run down and just a few students going to that primary school adjacent to Yalavou school because before it was full as children of the labourers and the officers were studying in that primary school. Mr. Speaker, Sir, they abandoned the entire infrastructure and walked away. When I went there three years ago, I saw a mechanical garage just lying there with parts. That is how they treated agriculture.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, none of the speakers on the other side talked about the agriculture model that we are pursuing. If you read our strategic plan, there are two critical objectives that we are pursuing. One is, we want to ensure food and nutritional security for households in Fiji. There are two key aspects of food security; availability and affordability. Of course, in urban areas, those households living in high rises, two-storey and three-storey flats and working in town, you do not expect them to plant, but it should be available and affordable.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we do not go and regulate the price of vegetables to make it affordable. We were under a lot of pressure during COVID-19 when vegetable prices had gone up, the Ministry should regulate the price. Of course, we cannot, we do not have a price control order to regulate the price of vegetables. The only way you regulate prices is, if you have price control order. Unfortunately, on the other day, honourable Professor Prasad was talking about FCCC. He does not understand the various roles of FCCC. He never talked about mergers and acquisitions, and regulated industry. He has no experience in that. I was the Chairman, I know about that and I know the amount of work that they were doing.

Back to vegetables, Mr. Speaker, Sir, vegetable prices are not regulated. They were with a lot of pressure. We said that the only sustainable way to deal with the rising price of vegetables is to boost supply - produce, expand production, increase supply, it will bring down prices. Exactly that is what happened, Mr. Speaker. All of us here have done shopping and bought vegetables from roadside stalls. All of us have seen the number of new stalls that have sprung up around roadsides, along streets, et cetera. That is the sustainable way and it is our responsibility to ensure that we do not face a situation of food inflation. The FAO Report have revealed that food inflation is rampant all around the world, but not in Fiji. It is our responsibility at the Ministry of Agriculture that we do the right investment to ensure that food prices are kept at check, at least, agricultural produce, staple food - *dalo*, cassava, rice and dhal, the rest would be add-ons and top-ups.

On food security, honourable Professor Prasad admitted that during COVID-19 when his own friend, Mr. Richard Naidu, was congratulating me for distributing seed packs when there is COVID, they asked, "Do you not understand that when people move, the virus moves?" Mr. Speaker, Sir, we took the risk to ensure that those people who were locked up during curfew hours and staying home, had a lot of free time and would utilise the free area around their house and secure their household with regard to basic vegetable farming. That is how we were able to mobilise the entire country.

Mr. Speaker, we had a long line in front of Raiwaqa Office, people coming to ask for vegetable seeds. They were laughing about us giving them small seed packs. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is for a 1 metre x 3 metre garden. How much seeds do you need? You do not need a kilogramme of seeds. These are small seed packs for home gardening.

Then, at the same time, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we had a different package for farmers called Farm Response Package. This package was for farmers who needed seeds or planting material - suckers, cuttings, et cetera, for one acre, half acre or two acres. In the special COVID-19 Budget, \$1 million was allocated to Ministry of Agriculture for this particular activity - food security, home gardening

and farm response package, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and we accounted for every dollar that was given to us and a few cents was returned to the Ministry of Economy at the end of the year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, still on food security, commercial agriculture and export agriculture - our methodology or model is to have agriculture expansion and supply based on market signal led demand-driven approach, not what other honourable Members from the other side are saying - that we should push production and supply based on subsidies. It will fail, Mr. Speaker, Sir. That is why the rice industry previously failed because the subsidies and grants went up to 65 percent self-sufficiency in the 1980s but it was based on a wrong model. The model was that rice production was based on subsidies. When the subsidies was withdrawn in the late 1980s, rice production started to fall and declined. It came to about 12 percent or 13 percent.

HON. P.K. BALA.- That was the 1980s? Who was in Government?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, over the last three years, we have got to about 21 percent and my feeling is that this year, it will be about 22 percent to 23 percent. We want to get the agriculture sector into a model which is sustainable going forward and it should be demand-driven rather than driven by grants and subsidies. Having said that, none of them argued and identified the binding constraints in Fiji's agriculture sector, not even honourable Professor Prasad.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have identified the critical binding constraints in agriculture sector and we are working on them, be it land availability, lease renewal, mechanisation, availability of planting material, technology - these are the critical binding constraints that have been bothering the agriculture sector which is slowing down the growth. I have been around to the rural areas and the deep interior and I have been talking to farmers. I told them that if they wanted to treat agriculture as a business then one thing they must do is to save and invest. That is not happening in the rural and interior agriculture sector and that is the critical binding constraint that is lacking.

Why do *mataqali* and villages with large tracts of land have a stagnant growth? It is stagnant because they are not saving and investing and therefore they are not creating surplus. If they do not create surplus, Mr. Speaker, Sir, how will they invest? What will they invest because they are not creating surplus. There is nothing to save and invest so they will sit down and say that if something is given externally then they will invest - we will give the initial leverage, the planting material and we will assist in land preparation but they will need to grow for the market. That is what it means when you want to treat agriculture or your farm as a business.

The critical attributes of a farming business is to grow for the market; create surplus; and part of it you save, spend on your household and invest. That is how every year when you invest in your farm it will grow as a business. You ask any business person. No business person, Mr. Speaker, Sir, will tell you that without savings and investments we can grow. Of course you top-up that pool of investment money that you require by borrowing.

A growing business person may not have enough of savings, they will go to the financial sector and that is exactly what we have done for the first time ever. With half a million dollars from the Government budget approved by Cabinet we have established a new programme called Commercial Farmers Equity Package. In this Commercial Farmers Equity Package if someone needs \$100,000 to buy an excavator or a tractor we assess the application, we fill up the form for FDB, take it to FDB, convince FDB to give loan \$100,000 to the farmer and we pay 20 percent of the equity contribution - \$20,000.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have given this to seven farmers this year for commercial investment. One in Lautoka has established a manufacturing plant to manufacture cassava flour and cassava starch, and he is exporting. He has started to export in a small way now and he is expanding. He has now created a new market for cassava farmers who want to grow cassava in that area. Once he further expands, he will buy all cassava from Lautoka, Ba and nearby areas.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, what we have done is used our strategic plan, looked at the key strategies and from that we redefined the model that we want to use for agriculture growth and development, identified the new programmes and said these are the programmes which will allow us to expand agriculture. Programmes like provision of planting material, land preparation, and protected agriculture. We have said that we do not want hotels to come and tell us that they are only able to get produce during the season. Where is the produce during the off-season? We have to import. We are now setting up hydroponics and greenhouses, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and providing fencing material.

Why are we importing livestock meat into the country? It is because we have got a large number of smallholder farms which are not able to go into medium or large holdings because they do not have fencing material, so we are targeting that. This time around we gave 260 farmers with beef cattle, fencing material and we said that we will monitor your farm and the successful one we will construct a stockyard.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, they are talking about impact. I have said repeatedly that if you want to talk about impact, just look at the production data. What is the production data? What is the export data? For the first time ever we were able to surpass sugar. Every time when agriculture sector's discussion was happening, non-sugar agriculture was not in the picture because they were not bringing in much export revenue. It was only sugar. For the first time ever in 2018, our exports went up to \$106 million over sugar exports \$101 million. In 2021, non-sugar agriculture exports went to \$123 million and sugar went down further.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, what we are saying is – what is your benchmark for performance? Is it in export income? Let us look at production - after feeding the entire country, the surplus was exported and the surplus started to increase. Look at key commodities like ginger – the production went up from 9,398 tonnes to 13,850. Is that not a performance indicator? *Dalo* production went up from 2019 - 51,500 to 54,000 in 2021. *Yaqona* production went up from 11,000 tonnes in 2019 to 13,000 tonnes in 2021. Is that not a performance indicator? Turmeric production went up from 1,200 tonnes in 2019 to 2300 tonnes in 2021.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, overall production of agriculture, total value of agriculture output went up from \$598 million in 2014 to \$756 million in 2020. What else do they want? This is the Fiji Bureau of Statistics data I am talking about. This is the table. What honourable Kuridrani showed yesterday, a decline in GDP was total output in the country? He does not even know the difference between total GDP and agricultural GDP. He does not know how to read this table. Read this table! Borrow it from me, spend some time with me or spend some time with your final-year economist there. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will be very brief. In fact, taking a closer look at honourable Prasad's motion, I was kind of a bit flabbergasted because he is saying that this committee should be set up to assess the impact of direct initiatives to farmers in the agriculture sector in particular distribution of seeds, seedlings for cash crops, help in the form of materials provided to dairy farmers, provision of irrigation pumps, piping, rice planting, ploughing and harrowing of land by Ministry of Agriculture, handling of breeder goats/sheep and

report back at the next sitting of Parliament. All of these to be assessed and come back in next sitting of Parliament which may be in three weeks' time. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think that confirms that this is more of a political stunt than anything else. I think honourable Professor Prasad needs to be upfront about this.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, very quickly, he quoted the World Bank IFC Report - he loves to quote them when it suits him and he condemns them when it does not suit him. He says the World Bank put up the figures with us in poverty and now he is sort of quoting from that, but actually if one reads this report in the way that it was written – and we welcome these reports because these reports does give a third party analysis on some of the shortcomings that we may have, and we all need to know that there are shortcomings and how we can improve upon them. What can we do to address them?

Of course, not all size fits all too, for example, what he did not mention and inform Parliament, in fact the World Bank and IFC always wants us to remove price control. They do not want price control on bread, everyone in this Parliament wants price control on bread. Everyone in this Parliament wants price control on wheat flour, yet World Bank does not want it. That paragraph is there on page 11, Mr. Speaker, Sir. He forgot to mention that and I am sure the honourable Naulumatua wants price control removed; it gives her the freedom to charge what price she believes the market should dictate, but they are beholden to price control because that is what has been dictated through regulatory framework.

Similarly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, he talked about how our agro logistics were 200 percent higher than other ports in Asia-Pacific. When they mention Asia-Pacific, they are talking about countries like Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, Philippines, Singapore; the throughput at those wharves are thousands of times higher than Fiji. Obviously, the volume is higher, the cost will be lower and this is one of the things that we have always been saying to the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) of the world - do not put us in Asia-Pacific, put us in the Pacific category only and only then can we compare apples with apples.

In the same way for example, they have talked about the sector analysis estimated cargo fees in inter-island shipping are double that of Papua New Guinea, a country with a population of nearly 9 million people and Philippines, a country with a population of about 65 million and we are not even 900,000. Obviously our cost in inter-island shipping will be higher. To then sort of randomly and only selectively choose these quotes from these studies, he is again not being upfront with what the analysis does put forward.

He says that while Fiji's air transport connectivity for passengers is excellent, there is significant room for improvement in the country's air freight services. We accept that and in fact there is some work currently being carried out with Fiji Airways. Honourable Members of the Opposition condemned the purchase of A350, but for the first time you have an aircraft that can carry up to 30 tonnes, so it is as big as it is on top as it is at the bottom; it can carry a lot of freight.

He failed to mention one of his former candidates in the last Elections, the CEO of Nature's Way, Brown, who was your candidate. We can tell you about some of the shenanigans that takes place there which is completely 100 percent Government funded. Government, in fact, set it up and left it to these co-operatives to run. We know what went on there.

Again, Mr. Speaker, Sir I just wanted to highlight that the honourable Prasad is very selective. There are numerous sort of positives that came out of it. In this report it says that Fiji

recorded its strongest period of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth since achieving independence in 1970 in the decade leading up to COVID-19.

This is the book that he is quoting and that is what they are saying:

1. Underpinned by rising productivity and investment, improved political stability in a booming tourism sector. Again the same report that he is quoting from.
2. The Government of Fiji has taken several steps to improve its investment legal and regulatory regime. A new investment law that includes a full range of investor rights and protection in accordance with international best practises was drafted and passed in Fiji's Parliament in June, 2021.
3. The Government of Fiji has made significant efforts to streamline the process for example, launched an online platform for registration, enabling online registration for tax identifications simplified requirements to obtain a business licence, reducing processing time from 11 to two days and eliminating the business licence and frameworks since August 2020.
4. Over the last decade access to education at all levels has significantly increased due to the introduction of subsidies in scholarships.
5. Fiji's financial system is one of the most developed in the Pacific Island countries with the Reserve Bank of Fiji creating an enabling environment for development while maintaining financial stability. If you are listening to them I think this is not happening in Fiji.
6. Fiji has high levels of access to energy.
7. Fiji has been at the forefront of climate change agenda due to the adverse effects on its economy, people and livelihoods.
8. Fiji's potential as an outsourcing hub in the Asia and Pacific region is yet to be fully tapped and could provide Fiji's economy with climate resilience and source of growth and inclusive jobs particularly for youth and women. When we talked about outsourcing they said 'Oh, pie in the sky', that is what they said.
9. Fiji is a competitive value proposition as an outsourcing destination offering relatively well educated and accent neutral English speaking workforce, a friendly service culture, sound ICT infrastructure, low labour cost and a near sure status for a large reasonable source markets such as Australia and New Zealand.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in fact tomorrow afternoon after lunch we are meeting a company from UK that is looking at creating about 2,000 to 3,000 jobs in the outsourcing services sector. But, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I digress and I come back to the fundamental issue. Honourable Sachida Nand actually tapped into this about the certainty that is required in the agricultural sector.

I go back again to leases pertaining to agricultural leases. In Fiji for years, you leased State land or leased an *iTaukei* land, for tourism it is 99 years, residential is 99 years, commercial is 99 years, industrial it is 99 years, agriculture it is 30 years. No mainstream banks lend in the agriculture sector unless the land you have is freehold.

The National Bank of Fiji which Rabuka put down the toilet, Mr. Speaker, Sir ...

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- ... is he your next party Leader - uh.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- ... used to have crop liens. I worked in Colonial and their crop lien culture went to Colonial, I do not know whether BSP is doing that.

Sir, FDB now is the only institution that lends to farmers and subsidised by Government Mr. Speaker, Sir. Agriculture has not seen the level of investment that agriculture still requires to be an active participant in the 21st century agriculture global sector. You need mechanisation. Under the Bainimarama Government and now the FijiFirst Government, the sugarcane industry is now getting cane harvesters, one third paid for by Government, two thirds are loaned from FDB.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, when you have five-acre farms, three-acre farms, four acre-farms you will not get that level of production, that volume will not be there so obviously your cost structure will be higher. These are some of the fundamental issues that affect and has affected the agriculture sector in Fiji.

Honourable Members from the other side continuously do not want to address this issue, continuously want to undermine the land tenure system Mr. Speaker, Sir, for political advantage, political gain not looking at how we can increase the productive capacity of our country and indeed specifically in this instance the agriculture sector.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point that they went on about is the dairy industry. I still have until today in my drawer in the office, a receipt for Rewa Dairy Cooperative where the CEO bought a Rolex watch from Prouds funded by Rewa Dairy. The debt stock of Rewa Dairy was so high and the farmers were actually liable for that debt, that debt has gone. They are now Class B shareholders without having to be liable for the liabilities of the company. Mr. Speaker, Sir, they only get dividends.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point that honourable Seruiratu also highlighted and honourable Dr. Reddy had touched upon, 1987 saw huge brain drain of people in the agriculture sector, veterinarians left, scientists left.

I think honourable Seruiratu mentioned a story where the Honourable Prime Minister and the honourable Seruiratu had gone to Thailand where in one of the companies is one of the top scientists that was actually someone from Fiji. He worked there and they praised him, he had moved along but he is such a good scientist. I was recently in Wagga Wagga where I met a gentleman where his father had left Fiji in 1987. He was a Groundwater Specialist, left in 1987 and Australians obviously use him to the maximum. There is a lot of brain drain issues that are taking place that affected the agriculture sector too.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point that I also wanted to make was the point pertaining to the encouragement of training through the scholarships and with TELS. We are now seeing more and more people in the agriculture sector, there are a couple of more veterinarians that have actually come in to the Agriculture sector to be able to get our people trained. If you look at the Toppers, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for a number of years we have had a proclivity in the Toppers. About 70 percent

of the places were reserved for the science area, foresters and marine scientists. All those people in the science areas that we needed to ensure that that gives increase in productivity.

Last but not the least, Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Kuridrani always talks about what will the Government do et cetera. We have what they call, Fijian chestnuts (*ivi*). We have breadfruit, in Nadroga we have got what we call *wichiwichi* (Fijian mandarin) - beautiful and very sweet. Honourable Kuridrani knows about it. Mr. Speaker, Sir, mango, jackfruit.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Yes and honourable Gavoka knows about it too.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, but we do not have *ivi* orchards, we do not have breadfruit tree orchards, we do not have *wichiwichi* orchards and we do not have mango orchards and there is nothing stopping the people from developing those orchards. There are 56 varieties of mango in Legalega.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- In Legalega - 56 varieties of mango.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- 56 varieties of mango - they will give it to you for free. People have the land, you can go and get it from them. There is a lot of opportunities. We need to take up commercial farming.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if we are serious about it there is no point, honourable Tuisawau, going on about all these external factors - it is available. The land is there, the opportunity is there and agriculture will make it available. We need to be able to think on a commercial basis.

Many of the people on the other side of the Parliament do not think on a commercial basis. We need the volume then we can have factories. We used to have a pineapple factory in the colonial days. I understand where the airport was, they used to grow pineapples and there used to be a pineapple factory in Lautoka somewhere. In Levuka too. Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, my point is that there are opportunities. We need to think on a commercial basis and people need to be able to take a long-term approach to agriculture. It does not happen overnight. So honourable Professor Prasad, I am quite surprised that you brought this motion to have an assessment of things like giving out of seeds.

When actually honourable Reddy has explained that we did this during the COVID-19 period where a lot of people stayed home, a lot of people did not have jobs, a lot of people wanted to start a small little plantation (*i teitei*) at the back of their yard which is fine. It suited the particular purpose but that does not happen now. It is not a continuous basis but hopefully it engenders a culture of growing things at your own backyard. But from a commercial perspective, obviously, we need to take a long-term view of this. We need to seriously address the issue of land tenure accessibility of long-term leases for agricultural purposes otherwise we will be still talking about the same things.

So Mr. Speaker, Sir, one last point I wanted to make is that there are many other fruits that are available. Jackfruit (*uto ni Idia*) *dawa* - all of these things. Like what the American's call 'moringa', I know that French organization does a little bit of it - *saijan*. If you went to cane farm (most people know a bit of cane farms), we always find the house, you will find a *saijan* tree, a tamarind tree, a lemongrass tree, a mango tree - these basic trees are all there but because of the inability for the Ministry of Agriculture since the 1970s to look at these crops from a commercial

perspective, “Oh, you know that is *uto ni Idia*, that is *saijan*, who wants to be interested in that.”, suddenly when the Americans have said that it is a super food, everyone wants to get in to the act. It grows wildly in Fiji.

We need to change our attitude towards agriculture. We have had turmeric in Fiji for ages. We were up in Keiyasi a few weeks ago, talking to all the landowners over there. There is wild turmeric growing. They actually go and dig it up and selling it \$1.20 or \$1.30 per kilogramme. It has been there but no one has taken a commercial approach to it. There was limitation in the way that they thought in the Ministry of Agriculture previously.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if we are serious about it, we need to expand our horizons and unfortunately, in the mode of expanding our horizons, this motion is actually a very limited horizon. In fact, it does not even have a horizon, that is why I object to this motion.

MR. SPEAKER.- I now call on the honourable Professor Prasad to speak in reply.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to thank the honourable Members who have spoken on this motion, especially my Opposition colleagues who have supported this motion. What we have heard from the Government side this afternoon, is not surprising, given their complete disrespect for any kind of bipartisanship or any kind of committee work that would look at or analyse and evaluate the Government’s performance or a particular Ministry’s performance.

Let me just remind the Government side, that I have been in Parliament for seven years since 2014 not a single motion by the Opposition on any investigation or inquiry had been accepted by the FijiFirst Party in Government. I know, once the former Member of FijiFirst Party, Dr. Neil Sharma, supported a motion because he understood the motion on health and obviously we all know what his fate was after that.

I know, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that some of the silent 25 privately, actually probably agree that this motion is a good motion but obviously they cannot and if they vote against the motion, obviously they know their fate. This is very typical of a government that thinks that it has all the ideas when the reality of the matter is that this Government is actually ...

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- ... I am talking about the motion. You astride long beyond the motion. It is a Government which does not, as I had said before, believe in bipartisanship, it does not believe in working together and it does not believe in assessing its own performance. The so called initiatives that we have heard, outlined by the honourable Minister again, apart from what he said yesterday shows that he was actually drowning himself into the details. I know the typical style of honourable Dr. Reddy and I think a lot of that he probably had learnt from the honourable Attorney-General because they are good in drowning into minor details of what they do, try and bamboozle the Parliament and hoping that they will be able to convince the Members out there about what they are doing is actually correct.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- What is the

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I listened to him very carefully when he was speaking so he should learn to listen as well. This motion was very simple. It was about the initiatives and why we need to critically examine their effectiveness. We have been hearing a lot of these issues out there, as they do as well, but obviously they think that they have their own evaluation system and they have their own mechanics to deal with it. Unfortunately, they do not, because a lot of initiatives they have been putting out have not been evaluated, a lot of promises they have made in the past, and we know the promises they made after 2014. I know the programme where they were supposed to train students in agriculture and provide them land and money to go and do business that has fallen apart. So, there are a lot of issues, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that I could go on and on with respect to how things have not worked and that is why it was very important.

There are stories about what happened in Navua, for example. There are people who were complaining about how only certain people in certain localities known to the minister, known to the agriculture staff have benefitted. So, these are all the concerns about how these initiatives are being rolled out and whether they are effective or not.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, they seem to be straying away from the real substance of the motion, honourable Usamate you cannot say, “you cannot do it in four weeks or whatever” this is a very simple motion. The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Economic Affairs they go on big motions, big reports within a month, if they do their work, they could get a very clear macro-picture of what is happening as a result of those initiative and that would be helpful.

But let me just respond to some specific issues, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think the only sensible contribution that came on the motion was from honourable Inia Seruiratu from the Government side. I think he talked about direct initiative and he made this important point. He said and I quote, “we will have time to assess that” we are saying that, that time is right now because spending is an investment but if you are spending and not evaluating and that you leave it for the next four years or five years and then you find like so many other initiatives, that initiative has not worked. The spending has been wasted, it has had no effect so I think, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is very important that policies are evaluated, initiatives are evaluated.

They go on and on about what has government done, what have they spent, yes spending is fine. You can keep talking about it but what is the impact of that spending? Then of course, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we had honourable Bala and as usual, he did not even understand the motion. He was saying this motion is about an update. He did not even understand and then when I said it is not an update, it is an inquiry then he corrected himself towards the end.

(Honourable Members interject)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- and he said and I quote, “and Mr. Speaker, Sir, ...

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- I said inquiry...

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- You corrected it towards the end....

(Laughter)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- He said, “Mr. Speaker, Sir, I talk to the farmers”, I know he is everywhere. This is what he does.

(Laughter)

He is all over the place using government resources, government vehicle, a driver, to attend weddings and funerals and temples. So, I know, but he should say that he does that at the expense of the State.

(Honourable Members interject)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. PROF B.C. PRASAD.- In fact, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am told that his driver actually gets more pay than the Director of the Ministry in which he is in because there is so much overtime.

(Honourable Members interject)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. PROF B.C. PRASAD.- So that is what they do and the other thing, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is he said “honourable Prasad does not understand the idea of leases”. He obviously has no idea...

HON. P.K. BALA.- I never mention that.

HON. PROF B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, he is talking about the production of sugarcane and he keeps talking about production going down because of the leases began expiring from 1997, 1998 and after 2000 but in 2006, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we had 3.2 million tonnes of cane being produced with 18,000 growers and over the last 15 years when they have been in-charge, the production is now down to 1.4 million to 1.5 million tonnes with 12, 000 to 13,000 farmers.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- What did your Government do if lease was a problem, if we are producing 3.2 million tonnes in 2006 and this Government came into power in 2006, you cannot keep talking about leases for the last 15 years.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Why not?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Because in 2006, it is a simple fact.

(Honourable Members interject)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Under this Government, the leases were renewed. I raised this in Parliament and the honourable Prime Minister did answer that and he said that he was going to look into it. Seagaqa Farmers were paying \$30,000 to \$40,000 in lease premiums.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I am just responding to him.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I am just responding to him. I have talked about the motion already. This is my right of reply.

(Honourable Members interject)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- This is my right of reply to what has come out from the Government side. I have talked about the motion already.

So this lie that honourable Bala keeps telling and this is what he tells, this is what he goes in little pocket meetings, in funerals, in weddings and says,....

HON. P.K. BALA.-What is your problem?

(Honourable Members interject)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- This is what is happening. He keeps lying about what has happened in the past.

Honourable Dr. Reddy, as I said, drowned himself into details. He was throwing statistics here, throwing statistics there but he ignored and the honourable Attorney-General said I did not raise the point. I was actually talking about the aggrieved business sector. That is the report that I was quoting. When I talk about the other sectors, I will say what this report says about the Government but this report

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Honourable Attorney-General, I was responding to the agriculture sector and all the binding constraints that are there. Basically, the honourable Attorney-General was side-tracking and not admitting that this report actually states very clearly the binding constraints in the agriculture sector. They talk about a number of things which I highlighted yesterday. He talked about what he did when he was in the Commerce Commission. I remember when he was the Chairman of the Commerce Commission, he recommended \$75 a bag for a fertiliser because he just had no idea, no understanding of what was going on. I mean he was basically parroting, so

(Honourable Members interject)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, as I said before, I listen to him very carefully when he was speaking, so he should listen to me.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- A Point of Order. Babu! Babu, *bhaito!*

(Laughter)

MR. SPEAKER.- Point of Order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Professor Prasad just mentioned that the Commerce Commission set fertiliser prices at \$75. The Commerce Commission does not set fertiliser prices.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I said he recommended as Chairman.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Liar, liar!

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, I want to implore on them again that they should let me talk because when they were all talking, I sat down and listened to them carefully.

Honourable Koya, in his drive and zeal to go personal, I am not going to go there, but all I want to say to him from his own experience, before the 2018 Elections, I know honourable Koya was throughout the country, even two weeks before the Elections. I had a meeting in Dreketi and two weeks later, he ended up there. He probably would have shaken thousands of hands, delivering \$1,000 cash grant and at that time, some of us were saying you know we needed an evaluation. I do not think we still have an evaluation of all the millions of dollars that were distributed for Small, Medium or Micro Enterprises.

Mr. Speaker, I do not want to hit him below the belt but after distributing all that and shaking hands, he still could not make it to Parliament. He had to wait until one of his colleague got sacked then he came here. So, that is the logic of this motion that when you are putting out initiatives, if you have an opportunity, if you have time you must look at the effectiveness of those. This was a very simple motion and in fact, it would have helped them but all they did here was to play politics. You know play to the gallery. They always claim we are playing politics but they are all politicians.

HON. GOVT. MEMBER.- That is what you are doing.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I know you are making a lot of noise because you are caught out now. That is what you do.

(Chorus of interjection)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- So, Mr. Speaker, let me also respond to the Honourable Attorney-General where he talked about research. I know I have talked about this before in Parliament. In fact, you know in the 1970s and 1980s, we had one of the best research, training and extension within the agriculture sector.

Mr. Speaker, I remember we passed a Bill for a National Research Council and we talked about how that National Research Council was going to be linked to different sectors, ministries, different sectors of the economy, conducting research, looking at evaluating policies and understanding where we are going right and where we are going wrong. Now, that has not seen the light of day.

Again, Mr. Speaker, they keep talking about leases. I mean if I heard the Honourable Attorney-General correctly he said, “All those leases under ALTA, farmers never got loan”.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, a Point of Order. I did not say what you said I said.

HON. PROF B.C. PRASAD.- You said that.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- No, you said all farmers are under Agricultural Landlord and Tenant Act (ALTA). I said that when you have short term leases, Sir, no one lends you money. I said there used to be crop lease and used to be given by NBF then Colonial Bank and now Fiji Development Bank lends farmers at subsidise rates but no one gives long-term and large loans on short term leases which is a fact. I never said ALTA.

HON. PROF B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, all farmers who had 30 years leases under ALTA and I know this because I have studied those farmers.

Apart from FDB, Bank of Baroda, Mr. Speaker, has been lending to farmers for a very long time in this country. Yes, I mean security of tenure is very important.

The other point that the Honourable Attorney-General talked about ...

(Hon. A. Sayed-Khaiyum interjected)

HON. PROF B.C. PRASAD.- No, I did not say that. Mr. Speaker, I was just correcting him that farmers did get loan. Everyone would like to have long-term leases and we have talked about it and we understood that and some of us have advocated that for years that long-term security of tenure is very important for productivity. So, that is what I want to correct, that they did get loan even with short-term leases.

The other thing, Mr. Speaker, I mean they quite shamelessly use the word, “Paapi” which means sinner. They keep talking about 1987. They keep talking about National Bank of Fiji (NBF), I mean they talked about the collapsed of the National Bank of Fiji but the guy who actually presided over the collapse of the NBF is a good friend of theirs.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Who?

HON. PROF B.C. PRASAD.- They know that. You know they send him as ambassador and now they recently appointed him as the Chairman of the Fiji Higher Education Commission (FHEC). So, let us be honest, Mr. Speaker, they are playing politics. They are thinking that if we keep talking about NBF, if we keep talking about 1987, if we keep talking about Rabuka then they forget.

Mr. Speaker, they forget that yes - 1987 happened. Nobody forgets the atrocities. Nobody forgets what happened but what happened after 1987, what happened after 1992, what happened

after 1994 Election, what happened when we had the 1997 Constitution, we also need to talk about what happened in 2000, we also need to talk about what happened in 2006 and the impact. In that Constitution, honourable Prime Minister, you also have the immunity provision for Mr. Rabuka. If you have so much hate for the guy, why did you give him the immunity?

Mr. Speaker, we are looking forward. We are putting ideas. We are thinking for the future. We are not going back 35 years. We are not forgetting what happened 35 years ago. We are not forgetting what happened 22 years ago in 2000. We have not forgotten what happened in 2006, but we have to look forward. We have to look to the future and when we bring a motion like this to Parliament, we are looking at the future. We are looking at creating a system, an environment in Parliament where Government and Opposition can work together, can agree on certain aspects of an inquiry or investigation.

When they sit in the opposition, Mr. Speaker and when we are in government, we will treat them well. We will treat them very well. We will respect them. We will work together and if they bring a motion which we feel is important, that needs our support, that we need to evaluate our policies, we will support that. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, they are not in that mode and I still urge them to think about this motion, support this. Let the Standing Committee on which they have the majority of the Members, to do that so that we create a better environment, a better understanding of how we can assist the farmers and how we can make agriculture more sustainable in this country. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER.- I thank the honourable Member for his reply. Honourable Members, the Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

MR. SPEAKER.- There being opposition, Parliament will now vote.

Votes Cast:

Ayes – 18

Nays – 27

Not voted – 6

(Hon. R.S. Akbar voted virtually)

Motion lost.

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

Garbage Collection Services - Nasinu Municipal Boundary
(Question No. 121/2022)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts, and Local Government inform Parliament who is paying the Suva City Council for its garbage collection services within the Nasinu Municipal boundary?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the short answer is, Nasinu Town Council.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, as to the second Oral Question for today, I am allowing the question to be asked tomorrow in addition to the questions listed in tomorrow's Order Paper. The honourable Minister is indisposed at the moment.

Update on Seawall Construction – Kadavu Coastal Villages
(Question No. 123/2022)

HON. S.R. RASOVA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment update Parliament on the construction of seawalls in coastal villages in Kadavu?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to thank the honourable Member for asking this question. I do not know why he has only asked for Kadavu when he should be talking about the entire country. I think they still cannot come out of that initial notion of 'this is my area, so I will only talk about my area as it is important'.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on Kadavu Island, the Ministry of Waterways has completed coastal protection works for Namuana Village - 250 metres of seawall and Tavuki District School - 300 metres of seawall, worth \$1.2 million. For the next financial year, we have earmarked nature-based seawall coastal protection works for Wailevu Village - 300 metres, with an approximate cost of \$45,000 and Namuana Village rock boulder extension - 150 metres, with an approximate cost of \$30,000. For the next financial year, Wailevu Village and Namuana Village are on our list, of course, subject to funding when we look at the next budget.

However, in addition to those two Villages, we also have requests for Nasau Village - 300 metres; Richmond High School - 410 metres; Nabukelevu Primary School - 360 metres; Nasegai Village - 400 metres; Levuka Village - 600 metres, Levuka-i-Yale Village - 280 metres; Dravuwalu Village - 160 metres; Muani Village - 300 metres; Rakiraki Village - 300 metres; and Vabea Village - 300 metres. Those accumulate to a total length of 3.4 kilometres of coastal protection works that need to be done on Kadavu Island. Thank you.

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, a supplementary question. I would like to thank the honourable Minister because in November 2020 when you did the seawall in Namuana, you promised in Wailevu and Nabukelevu that on 21st January, 2021, you were going to complete all those. Thank you for publicly saying in Parliament that you will do everything, especially in Nasau. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, that is not a supplementary question.

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I supplementary thank him.

(Laughter)

Awareness on New Processes - Investment Act 2022
(Question No. 124/2022)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport inform Parliament on the actions taken by the Ministry to create awareness on the new processes, following the enactment of the Investment Act 2021 and the Investment Fiji Act 2022?

HON. F.S. KOYA.- I thank the honourable Member for the question. Mr. Speaker, Sir, with both the Investment Act 2021 and Investment Fiji Act 2022 being passed in Parliament, commencing on 1st August, there was actually some renewed enthusiasm in regards to investments and support for both, our domestic and foreign investors. These two legislations set the foundation for Fiji in terms of attracting new investments for both, domestic and also for foreign investors. Reforms are actually engineered towards the creation of a conducive business environment and includes providing accelerated response, et cetera, to investors applying for these permits.

These investments related to legislative reforms have been an open Government strategy in their attempt towards inclusive growth. The key components, Mr. Speaker, Sir, whilst developing these legislations and accompanying regulations was actually transparency, accountability and integrity. The Technical Committee responsible was inclusive of respective governmental, statutory organisations as well as our development partners, the World Bank and the IFC.

Our awareness mechanism, Mr. Speaker, Sir, has remained consistent. It was actually targeted and tailor-made to maximise outreach to relevant audiences in the best possible way; prominence is given to digital platforms and social media channels to put up significant awareness, events and in other words, the aim of awareness raising is to provide adequate information on the new systems and processes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with the time available, three months preparation timeframe from now until the 1st August, 2022, the Ministry is actually engaging with the Registrar of Companies, digitalFIJI, all investment approval agencies, Fiji Immigration Department, Investment Fiji, all investment agents and private sector representatives. We are actually taking the change to the agencies and making them understand.

Firstly, it is about the authentication of investors through the investment registration process which will be through the Registrar of Companies and Fiji Revenue and Customs Service, the minimum investment threshold which is across all sectors - a minimum of \$300,000 whilst some specific sectors have \$500,000 or \$1.5 million or \$2 million; the reserved and restricted list also of activities and the purposes of the minimum investment threshold and the list of activities that are restricted is to provide adequate protection to our MSMEs.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the purpose of national interest also and the test criteria is to protect certain key sectors that can have a significant impact on the people of Fiji and the national interest. The foreign investor report requirements is there to maintain data and also to assist implementation and investor permit procedures also.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in terms of the Investment Fiji Act 2022, as we all know that Investment Fiji is a key agency at the helm of this particular transformation, as they transit from a regulatory role to an investment promotion agency. They finalise its marketing and promotional strategy to do targeted campaigns in key markets and also devising strategies for balancing of the resources and development of an action plan to support their path.

Moreover, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Investment Fiji continues to participate in webinars and seminars executed at both, national and international level, seizing the opportunity to create awareness and share information on the new regime.

In conclusion, throughout the tenure of this review, we have actually received enormous support and contributions from both, in-house and our development partners, and this has led to development of streamlined and coherent digitally executable legislations attuned to international best practices.

Therefore, in the coming months, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we will definitely be seeing some positive changes in the investment landscape which will result in better investment opportunities in Fiji. It is all about capitalising on the strategies for the recovery of our Fijian Economy and the commencement of the two Acts will raise investor confidence and then signal to the world that Fiji is actually open for business. I thank you for allowing me to answer the question, Sir.

HON. J. NAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, a supplementary question to the Minister: can the honourable Minister inform the House on how the new legal framework will ensure protection of the Micro, Small and Medium enterprises.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- I thank the honourable Member for the question. As mentioned earlier, a lot of work has been done in Fiji's investment. One of the key visions behind the review of the particular Act was to ensure protection of our MSMEs and we assess the current framework which was in place since 1999 and we saw the much needed amendments that were already in place by the Bainimarama Government and then the Fiji First Government to protect our MSMEs.

We have evaluated the modern market, Mr. Speaker, Sir and determined that MSMEs cannot be protected by simply carving out sectors. It was important that foreign direct investments were allowed in certain sectors as will allow for the development of the MSMEs around it. I wish to highlight, Sir, that this new investment framework is aligned to international best practices, but has been contextualised to meet the needs of the Fijian investment climate.

Whilst it can be argued that we have opened or widened the door to foreign investors, we have ensured there still remains enough protection for our local entrepreneurs. New framework is also protecting our local businesses and at the same time, we are encouraging foreign investments. We actually need more high-end foreign investments in Fiji in sectors which are actually growing, but we need further enhancement. We are also encouraging healthy competition for local businesses, enabling them to get out of their comfort zones and explore the untapped opportunities that are available.

The new regulations on reserved and restricted activities provide a minimum threshold of \$300,000 for foreign investments in Fiji and in addition, Sir, activities such as fishing, the minimum threshold now features a minimum investment of \$1.5 million and for tobacco manufacturers, \$1 million with 75 percent of locally-grown raw material.

More importantly, investment areas such as homestay, backpackers, motels, guesthouses, Air BNB, et cetera, now feature a minimum investment of a million dollars. These requirements are there to protect our locals but do not limit foreign investments. This will allow our local entrepreneurs to continue undertaking such investments as per their resources and skills.

One other strategy, Sir, for the benefit of our domestic investors is the change in dynamics of Investment Fiji. The role of Investment Fiji allows them to be focussed and a fully-fledged investment promotional agency, providing facilitation and aftercare and support to all investors - whether domestic or foreign. I am confident, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that this new framework will make an enormous impact in Fiji's investment climate and our economy overall. I thank him for the question, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister.

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I thank the Honourable Minister for his response to the question. My supplementary question is that, can the honourable Minister confirm

whether there are certain businesses that are still reserved for locals or have we opened up the market for competition?

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think I have just answered that. The reserved and restricted list is different now. There are some activities that have slightly opened up but there are restrictions on them in terms of how much is being invested. I suggest you actually read that, it is simpler in its form now.

Update on Supply of Fish to PAFCO
(Question No. 125/2022)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Fisheries update Parliament on the initiatives in place to ensure the supply of fish to PAFCO?

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to, at the outset, state that the FijiFirst Government has always supported the operations at PAFCO and will continue to do so. We support this Government commercial company as it provides employment to the people on the Island of Ovalau and Lomaiviti Province as a whole.

Majority of the 1,000 workers that are employed at PAFCO are women that work the lines to prepare cooked fish to be vacuumed packed and sent to Bumble Bee in the US for canning. It is also important to understand the elements that need to be considered when trying to secure tuna being the raw material for PAFCO.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to put things into context, PAFCO has a capacity to process 30,000 metric tonnes of albacore annually. In 2018, PAFCO was able to process 19,000 metric tonnes. This production figure is around 63 percent of PAFCO's capacity and there is a need to secure around 11,000 metric tonnes of albacore for PAFCO to reach its full capacity.

It is very important to understand that Fiji's current fleet cannot sustain PAFCO's albacore demand. To address this, the Ministry of Fisheries has put out plans to help secure raw materials for PAFCO with the support of line agencies and partners. Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fong Chun Formosa (FCF), the acquisition of Bumble Bee, in January 2020, strengthened the basic class sustainability and social responsibility efforts and puts FCF at an advantageous position for sustained growth and leadership throughout the tuna and sea food industry.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the FCF being one of the three major players in tuna has integrated into the sector, even more so now, with the acquisition which ensured continuity in terms of supply of tuna to PAFCO for processing and it is in all players' best interest to ensure ample and consistent supply. The Ministry will soon be finalising the formulation of our partnership with FCF, which is currently being vetted to better understand the legal implications.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the bottom line is we need to attract more fishing vessels to come to Fiji and unload more tuna for PAFCO and other value adding companies. These plans include holding discussion with Pacific Island States that are Parties to Nauru Agreement (PNA), in particular, with countries that have vast EEZ and have abundant supply of tuna. The Ministry is working closely with these countries to work out some arrangements and we are also working with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in these negotiations.

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is an ongoing work being carried out with our bilateral partners who are more advanced and developed when it comes to fishing fleet. Once Fiji gains access to PNA waters, we will need to have a fleet that has capacity to secure raw materials. With ongoing discussions, we are looking to secure Purse seines vessels and mother ships - that joint venture arrangement with our bilateral partners. This will help us secure tuna from outside Fiji.

Lastly, one of the best options that the Ministry of Fisheries is working on is the development of multipurpose fishing port. After clearly assessing the current annual stock and the number of fishing vessels needed to supply raw material not just to PAFCO but other processing facilities, it has been identified that Fiji needs to attract at least 250 vessels to Fiji to meet the current demand.

These vessels do not need to fish in our EEZ but we are trying to attract them to unload their catch in Fiji. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry is currently conducting ongoing discussions with the private sector and the investors to help realise this important initiative. In a nutshell, it is important to understand that the process of securing raw materials for PAFCO is a tough one.

For one the fish that we are looking for to secure is not ours. Through our fishing brokers FCF we had been able to secure 19,000 metric tonnes for our production lines. What we are trying to do now is provide a market and a fleet friendly environment to have meet the current shortfall in raw materials.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Fisheries will continue to work closely with line ministries on this and we hope to progress this work effectively.

Impact of Commercial Kava Export to Australia
(Question No. 126/2022)

HON. G. VEGNATHAN asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment inform Parliament on the impact of commercial kava export to Australia which was approved by the Australian Government in December 2021?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to thank the honourable Member for asking the question. Yes, in December 2021 the Australian Government through DFAT launched a Kava Pilot Programme. Prior to that kava was not allowed to be exported to Australia so they allowed a Pilot Programme for export of commercial kava consignments into Australia and several of our local exporters took advantage of the opportunity. It has been five months now since the opening of this pathway area. In May this year Fiji has already exported around a total of 30.4 metric tonnes of kava to Australia earning around \$3.4 million.

Considering the short duration we note that this is a substantial gain that we have made. There are a total of 146 exporters where Fiji is not the only country, there are other countries who are exporting kava, a total of 146 exporters and out of these 146, 94 exporters are from Fiji. We are basically exporting most of the requirements of the market and there are stringent requirements in terms of what needs to go on the label, the importer details, the lot codes, the country of origin, statements and required warning statements. These are the stringent requirements that kind of hampered uplift or entry of exporters to export to Australia. This year they have also allowed other variant of kava, let us say kava root chips, kava root powder, whole kava root, as well to be exported to Australia.

Despite the challenges of labelling, we have got good uptake that we have made in the first five months. Our exporters have been learning along the way and making sure that all requirements are met and there are very limited obstacles to exploring this new kava market and a massive market.

There is a large population in Australia who are from the Pacific, particularly from Fiji, who are consuming kava, they are kava lovers and we want to ensure that we take if not all, a chunk of that market and for that we need to get ready on the ground level.

It is not that we can do this in a month or three months or a year, kava is a long-term crop. Unfortunately Members on the other side do not understand this, they want to do an impact analysis for fencing material in two weeks' time. *Areh!* We are giving them fencing materials, these are capital investments. Their impact will in the livestock sector come 15 years to 20 years later. You cannot have an impact analysis on irrigation materials they are giving now. We are quite impressed with the uptake and compliance level is about 81 percent. We had so far no biosecurity issues so we want to thank our exporters for showing an interest.

We want to capture this market, if we do not do that, Vanuatu will come in, so I think we are doing extremely well on this. I want to thank the honourable Prime Minister for establishing this Vuvale Partnership which is, this opening of the kava market is a response of the Vuvale Partnership that was established between the two Prime Ministers.

Available Facilities for Pap Smear Screening
(Question No. 127/2022)

HON. T. WAQANIKA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services update Parliament on the facilities available to women for Pap Smear Screening?

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Mr. Speaker, cervical cancer screening which is pap smear as is commonly known is an essential of health screening component. With cancer screening, whilst you might be able to pick up those who have cancer, the most important thing is to be able to pick-up disease before they have cancer or the pre-cancerous conditions because if that is treated early, then that person will not have cancer.

Through awareness and health promotion activities which target the risk factor of cervical cancer, the Ministry has therefore many years and with the support of health partners, the primary care programmes and activities that address the load of cervical cancer in women and girls. There have been a number of significant actions and achievements against this deadly disease in the last decade.

First, Mr. Speaker, we are all aware that our young adolescent daughters have the ability to have the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) vaccine which was safely introduced and now routinely given to all Year 8 female students in Fiji since 2013. This vaccine is known to be able to prevent or reduce the likelihood of cancer because the virus is able to change the cells as the lady keeps on growing and make it cancerous if it continues within the woman.

Secondly, the establishment of Fiji's Cervical Cancer Screening Policy in 2015 which has guided our actions so far which we continue to review and update.

Thirdly, the procurement of the automated liquid-based ThinPrep cytology screener machine to assist a centralised pathological diagnosis at CWM Hospital.

Fourthly, strengthening of the Ministry's collaboration with other stakeholders such as Fiji Cancer Society, Medical Services Pacific, Reproductive and Family Health Association of Fiji to better co-ordinate the services provided to women and girls and also the work with multilateral partners such as WHO, UNFPA, to name are few. Endorsing a cost benefit analysis by WHO in 2011-2022 on the introduction of HPV testing which test for the HPV virus that causes cervical cancer, ThinPrep pap smear technique which uses the machine at CWM and the visuals packed with acidic gas testing in Fiji. The outcome of this analysis will form the upcoming cervical cancer policy review.

With the aim of accelerating and elimination of cervical cancer, the Ministry supports WHO's three recommended three key steps of vaccination with HPV vaccination for our adolescent daughters, screening which is either pap smear or the ThinPrep and treatment to reduce by more than 40 percent the number of new cervical cancer cases and deaths of the year 2050. With vaccination, the National HPV vaccination campaign targeting young women or young ladies between 9 and 12 in schools was introduced in 2008 as a pilot, later introduced as a routine vaccine in 2013 through the bilateral support of DFAT and now fully funded by Government.

The new introduction of the HPV vaccination programme as a primary prevention mechanism for cervical cancer caused by human papilloma virus infection was a significant development against this disease. The vaccination is available across all health facilities in all health divisions in Fiji throughout our school health vaccination programme. For screening, the campaign target for 2030 is to achieve 80 percent of the women screened using a high performance test by age 35 and again by 45.

Screening has been further strengthened as I have alluded to earlier with the ThinPrep Screening Machine at the CWM Hospital and the machine can contentiously screen more than 40,000 tests per year picking up the abnormal results for further assessment.

The introduction of the ThinPrep Screening machine has greatly improve the efficacy in screening process and accuracy in diagnosis. It has been estimated the accuracy against for thin prep versus Pap smear can even up to more than 50 percent more efficient.

The strengthening of the cervical cancer screening is also created an opportunity to screen for breast cancer. The screening process for both, cervical and breast cancer, is done by the Ministry in partnership with the Fiji Cancer Society, MSP and Reproductive Health of Fiji but the screening was affected during the COVID-19 outbreak in Fiji we have started strengthening the procurement process of nurses and commodities. We have started to skill up again the screening for all eligible women with the support of our partners.

Lastly, with the treatment, the Ministry continued to strengthen throughout the purchase and upgrade of medical equipment. There is an ongoing training for doctors and nurses who provide specialist gynaecological care for women and girls.

Cervical Cancer clinic is available in all health centres, subdivisions and Divisional Hospitals and had selected nursing stations where nurses have been trained to be able to do the Pap smear of the ThinPrep.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the Honourable Member for that question and those are the answers I have provided.

HON. T. WAQANIKA.- Can I just ask a supplementary question. Screening for Pap smear and breast is very important to the women. Honourable Minister, I understand that the free PAP

Smear testing that normally done at the Oxfam Women's Wellness Clinic is no longer in place. When can we women expect this service to be up and running? I know you have mentioned that they can go to other facilities but in particular the Women Wellness Centre the one at Brown Street, Honourable Minister.

HON. DR I. WAQAINABETE.- That Centre was throughout COVID closed because we were using it as part of the hospital and it was also part of the COVID process.

Mr. Speaker, as we speak screening is available in other areas but I have been told by my team that they are moving the team back into that centre. It will happen in the next few weeks or so. As I have alluded to earlier, it was closed throughout COVID with all the spaces in the hospital had to be allocated for COVID cases.

Sustainability of Fiji's Debt
(Question No. 128/2022)

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

Can the honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service, Communications, Housing and Community Development inform Parliament on why Fiji's debt remains sustainable and cannot be compared to the Sri Lankan crisis?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I see the three stooges now and actually they disappeared again.

Sir, in fact, at the behest of honourable Professor Prasad and his colleagues or whatever you want to call them, they are the ones who raised this issue and actually compared Fiji to Sri Lanka and said that we are in the same boat as Sri Lanka. Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the interest of time, I will be very brief but essentially to highlight and people can ask supplementary questions, if they do want to.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the difference between Fiji and Sri Lanka is a world of difference. Firstly, Sri Lanka does not have adequate foreign reserves available in their country. It has \$7 billion due in external debt repayments alone but only had \$2 billion in foreign exchange; \$7 billion to pay offshore but only \$2 billion. Fiji's external debt repayments on average is just around \$100 million annually and we have \$3 billion available in foreign reserves. That is 30 times more than what is needed for external debt repayments.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji has over 10 times more revenue available to service its debt. Our current revenues are over \$3 billion and debt servicing is just over \$350 million. For Fiji to be able to not service our debt, our revenue will have to fall to below \$300 million. Even during COVID-19, Sir, which was a one-in-a-hundred-year event, we managed to maintain revenue at around \$2 billion. This basically shows, Mr. Speaker, Sir, why Fiji has never defaulted on debt and why we will never default on debt. Sri Lanka's revenue situation is completely different. Simply, it is too low and cannot be compared to Fiji.

Thirdly, Sri Lanka's lenders stopped lending to them. Our lenders have recently been lending us five times more than what they were lending before, and continue and want to lend. They are all credible lenders, they are not some fly-by-night lenders. They are the World Bank, Asian Development Bank (ADB), Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and other domestic institutional investors. For them to want to lend more

to Fiji even during COVID-19 means they fully know, understand and appreciate the economic and financial management capacity of Government.

Fourthly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we have previously mentioned in Parliament, we have accessed \$900 million in the past two years in highly concessional debt from JICA and International Development Association (IDA), which is through the World Bank. We have long-term maturity of 40 years, 10-year grace period, net-zero interest rate and other JICA loans, Mr. Speaker, Sir, at 15-year terms with four-year grace period and near zero interest rate. Our debt repayment is spread over many years, while Sri Lanka's debt repayments or bonds had to be paid in lump sum immediately. Like the Qarase Government, it had five-year bond in 2006. It was due five years later in a lump sum. That puts immediate pressure on the fifth year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reason why they have a lot of confidence is that, we have been borrowing for capital expenditure. As highlighted in Parliament previously, we had an operating surplus, in other words, we had that much revenue that when we paid for all our everyday operational expenditure, we still had the surplus which we then directed towards capital expenditure and then borrowed more for capital expenditure. Obviously, those expenditures in capital investment will give us a debt return.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we obviously cannot be compared to Sri Lanka and I was quite flabbergasted that you have organisations, like *Fiji Times* and CFL, given this person has lost absolute credibility. Neelesh Gounder and Wadan Narsey writing up all these articles and this is what we continuously say, for their own political purposes, they are quite happy to undermine our country publically and not just domestically, but internationally, Sir.

Well, like I said, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I can go on about a lot more in details. Now, for example if you look at the interest rates that we pay or what we call the yields, the cost of debt, weighted average interest rate in January 2020, it was 6.2; January 2021, it was 5.2; January 2022, it was 4.6. Refinancing risk from 8.1 to 10.8, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and that was lower risk. Interest rate risk, Mr. Speaker, Sir, again, improving.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our foreign risk in terms of foreign debts is about 31.2 percent in respect of our total exposure. So, we are now in a very good space in that respect, Mr. Speaker, Sir and then we continuously said, please, and honourable Professor Prasad is notorious with this. Notorious with this! For short-term political gain, he gets all his mates lined up, gets all these media organisations to just berate, to make Government look bad but it is not about Government. It is about the country. It is about our people. It is about undermining confidence.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we have said continuously that I mean they want to change government, if they do come on this side, God forbid, but if they do theoretically then, Mr. Speaker, Sir, what will happen? They will have to deal with the lack of confidence that they have created in the market and they will very quickly realise they have to deal with the market and the market has a very long term memory. It does not believe just because the Government says that all is hunky-dory; banks have a long term memory, institutional investors have a long term memory, so to continuously assault the Fijian economy is just for short term political gain. The honourable Member who was sworn in knows exactly what I am talking about. She is in the private sector. There needs to be an appreciation of that. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, that brings an end to question time. We will now adjourn. Parliament will be adjourned until tomorrow at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 6.21 p.m.