

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

WEDNESDAY, 27TH JULY, 2022

[CORRECTED COPY]

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WEDNESDAY, 27TH JULY, 2022

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

MR. SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Members were present, except the honourable Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation; the honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity, Industrial Relations and Youth and Sports; and honourable Adi L. Qionibaravi.

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Tuesday, 26th July, 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. Those attending in person and those attending virtually. I also welcome those joining us in the gallery and all those watching the live proceedings on television and the internet. Thank you all for your continued interest in the workings of your Parliament.

Committee of Supply – Voting Process

Honourable Members, during the Committee of Supply later today, please, take note that the Business Committee had unanimously approved for the voting to be done by acclamation. This is to ensure efficiency and ease of process during the Committee of Supply stage. Thank you, honourable Members.

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON THE 2022-2023 APPROPRIATION BILL 2022

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now call upon the Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service, Communications, Housing and Community Development to give his Right of Reply.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank you for this opportunity.

Sir, I must admit this morning at 4 o'clock when I was trying to cobble together my thoughts for this response, I was very much at a loss to know where to start off from because there have been so many issues that have been raised by the Opposition, so many matters that have actually been left out by them

which was actually specifically pertinent to the Budget. There were so many issues that were raised that were completely irrelevant to the Budget and there was so much distortion of history itself.

I think, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is that lack of moral compass quoting from the *Bible*, yet saying and doing things that are completely contrary to what the *Bible* teaches. Talking about the present, based on a distorted historical analysis which then perpetuates into today's contemporary Fiji.

Sir, the lack of basic economic analysis by the Opposition stems from a couple of philosophical problems. One of them, as clearly demonstrated by honourable Kuridrani when honourable Bulitavu was commenting on the Budget which he thought was a positive response, he actually stood up and objected to honourable Bulitavu saying positive things about the Budget.

I know that he did not do the same when honourable Mere Naulumatua said some positive things. I note he did not do that when honourable Aseri Radrodro said some positive things, he targeted honourable Bulitavu. But, Mr. Speaker, Sir, what it also goes to show is that the Opposition have come to this Chamber with the view that anything that is presented by Government, and in this particular instance in the Budget, must be opposed, irrespective of whether the policy that has been announced is good or not. They have to oppose it.

In the same way, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I found this very disconcerting but it again demonstrates the mindset of the Opposition. Honourable Kuridrani, who I will be referring to a few instances in today's speech said that the reason why the Opposition did not make a statement on two Members of Parliament who have been convicted by an independent judiciary is because he believes the judiciary is not independent. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is the same mindset that existed in the previous governments.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to warn the Fijian public that if FijiFirst is not in Government, the alternative government will be made up of people who will systematically ...

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- ... undermine all independent institutions.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- We saw that happen in the Governments prior to 2006, in particular after 1987.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have had members of the Opposition.

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, a Point of Order?

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

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- It is irrelevant.

MR. SPEAKER.- It is very irregular when there is a Right of Reply being made for you to raise a Point of Order. What is your Point of Order?

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- What he is talking about is irrelevant to the Point of Order I made yesterday. My Point of Order yesterday was that, the honourable Bulitavu was breaching the protocol of this Parliament and irrelevant.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, take a seat. You made your Point of Order yesterday and I told you that a debate was going on. We are debating the contents of the Budget, that is what we were doing and he has every right to say that. The other honourable Members have every right to say what they say. That was what was happening.

Honourable Attorney-General, you have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. As I was saying and honourable Kuridrani, again, has dug himself in a hole, there is no such protocol.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, every single independent institution will be under threat by any other political party that comes into Government. I wish to inform people who work at FICAC, Judicial, DPP's Office, Fiji Police Force and Auditor-General's Office; all of their professionalism will be under threat by people such as them. God forbid if they ever gain power!

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point that I wanted to make also is that, the analysis that were taken by the honourable Members, most of it was in fact, very much personalised. Most of it was not on the Budget itself.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the point that I also wanted to raise was that, the sense of indignation that was made or demonstrated by honourable Members of the Opposition was very much constricted and restricted because their sense of who should have empathy or who we should have empathy for, who we should assist is only for a selected group of people; whether it is a group of elites or a group of people in one particular ethnic group, that essentially was what their premise was on fundamentally.

Whereas the difference between a leader like honourable Bainimarama and this party is that, we assist people on a needs basis. People who need assistance will get it, it is not based on provincialism, it is not based on *tikina*, it is not based on ethnicity, whether you are Hindu, Muslim, *iTaukei* or Indo Fijian, Rotuman or whatever it is, you are assisted on the basis that you need that assistance. You are connected to electricity as a result of you not having electricity. You are given water as a result of not having water.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Hear, hear!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have on numerous occasions by honourable Members of the other side come to see me at lunch time or morning tea time, asking me to do certain things for them or people who they want to assist. When I said to them (and they know who they are) I cannot do this because the law does not allow me to do so. They said, "*Areh*, you the Attorney-General, do it". What it demonstrates, Sir, is that, if they were to ever hold such positions, they would abuse their positions.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- It is a fundamental issue. We have seen that happen in previous Governments; it happened. People threw their weight around. We had right from after 1987, ministers writing on a back of A4 paper saying, "give this person a loan", and they would get a loan at NBF.

We have seen previously, Mr. Speaker Sir, people writing on the back of papers to say, “Give this person a licence” or “give this person this”; bugger the law, but let us do it.

We have seen, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Elections Office have just recently issued notices to NFP and PAP about how they breached the law (fundamental breaches), how they have actually lied about certain things, Sir, about how they have used their *Facebook* page to spread misinformation albeit was done four years ago but is currently on their page.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Shame, shame!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- That, Mr. Speaker, Sir, encapsures.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- We know where it is coming from.

HON. S. ADIMAITOGA.- Listen!

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, that encapsures the thinking and the outlook towards governance by honourable Members of the Opposition.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Very poor!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- It is a fundamental issue.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- You know where it is coming from.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

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

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

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Attorney-General should have some sense ...

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- What is your Point of Order?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- ... because he is the Minister of Elections, he is the Minister responsible for the Election’s Office, he complains to the Supervisor of Elections, the Supervisor of Elections sends a notice to us, sends a response to us - we have the right. He is judging what the Supervisor of Elections is saying. We know where it is coming from.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- What is your Point of Order?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- This is a video from 2018. He is saying that the law should be applied retrospectively. That is what he is saying.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- What is your Point of Order?

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, you say you have the right, he has got the right as well.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- This is a name issue he is bringing in.

MR. SPEAKER.- He has got the right. You have the floor, Attorney-General.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sir, this so classically demonstrates the point I was making earlier on. He says that I am the Minister of Elections

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I know where it is coming from.

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, he forgets that under the Fijian Constitution that the Electoral Commission and the Fijian Elections Office are independent bodies. He forgets to mention the fact that the video in question is on their *Facebook* page and does have lies on it, I will leave it there. He knows where it is coming from.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point that I want to make, it is the sense of justice that we must talk about. You can have what we call “form over substance”, what is preferable obviously is substance over form. You can stand up and pontificate about justice, you can stand up and pontificate about governance and all of that but in your very actions, when your very thinking actually is contradicting to that, that means you are a hypocrite.

Many people in this country left after 1987 not because of economic reasons, they left because they felt there was no justice. They felt that if they were to apply for a job, they will not get it on merit, they felt that if they were to try and get a license, they will not get it because, Mr. Speaker, Sir, they do not feel a sense of justice - whether it is on provincial basis, whether it is on ethnic basis, whether it is on religious basis, whether it is the basis of cronyism, they left as a result of that.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- They are leaving now as well.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the difference is that people now feel that there is a sense of justice.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- People now know that people will be treated equally, people now know that when they apply for jobs there is a thing, for example, in the Civil Service called OMRS. People now know that just because the honourable Prime Minister is from Tailevu, it does not mean all civil servants will be coming from Tailevu.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- As the man who he supports said recently in Cakaudrove, “When I was a Prime Minister, 70 percent of the top civil servants were from Cakaudrove”.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sir, the point is that, these are the fundamental, philosophical differences and way of thinking between this side of the Chamber and that side of the Chamber. Importantly, Sir, it also demonstrates that their analysis is imbibed, it is drowned in that way of thinking.

It was very interesting that honourable Gavoka, for the first time in the past eight years, gave a relatively comprehensive take on taxation and obviously we know where that comes from - the people from FRCS who were obviously helping him, former staff who may have left under dubious reasons. What is really interesting is this, like most of the people from the other side, there is no rationality in the policy. He said for one of the things he will do, firstly, is that he will increase taxation for Corporates, will go up to 28 percent, then all foreign companies will all go up to 33 percent.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we would like everyone in this country to know, all businesses, large, small, micro, medium or whatever, you will pay 28 percent tax. Those who are even exempt will pay tax, and we also want all foreign companies to know that they will now pay 33 percent tax. Many of the resorts in Fiji, our own island resorts in particular are owned by foreigners. So we want them to know, we want their staff to know that they will all pay 33 percent Corporate Tax, and let us see what will happen after that. Let us see the level of confidence in investing and reinvesting in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point he said is that he was going to get Water Authority of Fiji (WAF) and other industries to pay resource tax to landowners. Sir, WAF is funded by the Government so the Government will be funding this tax, it is not a private entity. The entire operations and capital expenditure of WAF is funded by Government. Of course, WAF is not in Lau, so how will the Lauan people benefit from this? There may be more resources used in one particular province than in some other province. Will they get the larger chunk of the tax? What will happen to those people who do not actually have those industries in their provinces, will they get the tax? Will the people who have more resources being used by these entities say, “Hey, you give us the bulk of it.” Guess, what it is going to do? It is going to lead to provincial differences. They have a formula but they fail to actually tell us what the formula is.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, what we do is we tax people across the board, we exempt people across the board, and those tax revenues are then driven and given to people who need them most. A lot of taxation is derived from Suva and the Western Division, but we use that money to cut a road in Tawake, Udu Point and give people water in Lau; that is the way it should be. The point of the matter is this, by trying to do this along these lines will actually be contrary to what we are saying.

The other point that I wanted to also make, as I was this morning thinking, I came up with this thought and I said, the present is actually informed by the past. If we do not understand the past in our present, then our future will be ill-informed, and therefore unstable and even turbulent. I will repeat this, Sir, the present is informed by the past and if we do not understand the past in our present, then our future will be ill-informed and therefore, unstable, even turbulent, and that is precisely the problem with the Opposition. They do not want to actually get a true representation of the past. The entire thesis of the Opposition, the political narrative of the Opposition, in particular, those who argue

on the basis of ethnicity as demonstrated clearly by honourable Waqanika, honourable Tuisawau, et cetera, they have a wrong analysis of what happened in Fiji.

HON. T. WAQANIKA.- That's a lie.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Let me be frank about this, the two protagonists that have been portrayed in the political landscape in Fiji, prior pre-Independence and post-Independence is this supposed ethnic tension and ethnic threats by Indo-Fijians taking over Fiji. That is a fundamental premise, if you read all their literature.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Honourable Gavoka, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is the same weak leader of SODELPA who justified outside this Chamber honourable Bulanauca's racist comments saying that the honourable Prime Minister was a murderer, saying that the honourable Prime Minister was racist, saying that I was a terrorist on the basis, honourable Gavoka said, "he said it because he feels very passionate about indigenous rights."

It is the same way that Mr. Qarase justified Mrs. Caucau's comments in Parliament when she said and I quote, "Indo-Fijians are like paragrass". The same philosophy. He has justified, stop saying "please" because you are a weak leader, you are not based on principles and values unlike this man, Sir. I will now get back to my point regarding history.

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

MR. SPEAKER.- Point of Order.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- The honourable Attorney-General is generalising as usual...

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

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- ... and misleading because he is labelling all of us as racists. That is his perspective ...

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- You are racist.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- ... and he is a racist himself. Let me read this out.

MR. SPEAKER.- No, no, what is your Point of Order.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- He is misleading here.

MR. SPEAKER.- You have made your Point of Order.

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

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- That is his perspective, it has nothing to do with us. We are entitled to form our own perspective of how we develop. His perspective is his own, it has nothing to do with us. You develop your own perspective, we do ours.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, you have all had your say very precisely on the floor of this Parliament. I heard it, everyone heard it, now he is replying to what you have said. That is his right. If he generalises, he generalises. You have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sir, I did not generalise. I said those people who have said that, that is where they are coming from.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the historical basis of this country because they always talk about land, we have given land and, therefore, you have got to do this, otherwise there will be turbulence.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, everyone knows, read facts, books, charter of the land; read this. Academically written, historically researched, factually basis ...

(Honourable Opposition Member interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You have not read it, that is your problem.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the point is that *iTaukei* land was alienated in this country not by Indo-Fijians but by the European settlers; everyone knows that. It was alienated by the Colonial Government. We are one of the very few countries, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the colonised period where there was no resistance to European control, British control. It is a fact that some chiefs gave away land to impress European settlers. It is a fact that some chiefs exchanged land for some muskets, for some guns, or even for some food. That is a fact.

Those land were alienated then, not a single millimetre of land has been ever alienated legally or illegally by Indo-Fijians in this country. Yet, Mr. Speaker, Sir, they are seen as a threat. That is a fact. That is how it is portrayed.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Stop misleading.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I want to quote and this is when they wanted to have the right to vote and there was a J.J. Ragg (we all know the Ragg family), he urged one of the chiefs, Tui Tailevu, and I quote:

“We must endeavour to permeate the whole of the Fijian race (meaning *iTaukei*) with a fixed idea that the granting of the franchise and equal status to the Indians in Fiji would mean the ultimate loss of all their lands and rights and later their final extinction from the phase of the earth”.

That philosophy, Mr. Speaker, Sir, was engrained very deeply and it resonates in today's Fiji also. It resonates in the justification of 1987 *coup*. It resonates in the justification of the removal of the Chaudhary Government in 2000; that is a fact. So, if we are to look into the future to build a strong economy and a strong nation, we must rid ourselves, exercise ourselves, get rid of all these ghosts from the past. It is a fact, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Till today in colloquial language in Fiji, if you say to someone, “you are a *kai colo*”, it is a negative term, but there is a place called Colo. There were people from Colo who resisted British control and today, it is a bit imbibed in our culture that if you call anyone *kai colo*, it is a negative term. The people from Colo, there were 70 to 80 people killed. There was no standing British Army, they brought in *iTaukei* people from the Eastern Division of Fiji and formed what they called the first native constabulary.

There were people from Ra who were exiled to Kadavu because they resisted British control. That is not taught in our history. That is not understood. That is why, for example, when Ratu Sukuna did all the provincials, land stuff, Navosa was put together with Nadroga. Navosa was split up into other provinces - that is the reality. Do not romanticise the past, do not put a narrative that is not true.

We, till today, have people in Ba, Nadi complaining about the way the land was alienated, different *i tokatoka* and *mataqali* because of political considerations at that point in time. Please, let us not romanticise because if you do not romanticise, if you talk about the facts, then you can actually have a better future. We can make the right decisions, Sir.

Let us not forget the fact what honourable Seruiratu talked about. When the people in Monasavu gave up their land for electricity (Monasavu Dam), how much were they paid? They did not even get electricity. This man gave them electricity - let us understand that.

When they did the Fiji Hardwood Corporation, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the mahogany plantations in the 1950s and 1960s, the *iTaukei* people were paid peppercorn rent - one shilling, two shillings. We fixed it up, in fact, he fixed it up. So these are the realities that they need to understand. Let us shed ourselves of all these nonsense, fabricated narrative about the past. Only then we will have true analysis.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point that I wanted to make also is (I have said this so many times), please read people like Simone Durutalo. He is one of my heroes actually. Please read.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Ooh yes. Great man! You would learn, your world will broaden. Read people like William Sutherland. They have a historical narrative of Fiji that was and in fact, the power and economic dynamics that helped develop this colony and what perpetuates till today into our present.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point that I also wanted to make is that, honourable Bulanauca (this is the same man), and I need to say this again, in 2000 when the Chaudhry Government was slowly being dismantled on an hourly basis, he was standing outside Civic Centre (there is a video of it at the USP Library) and said, "The executive, the judiciary are ruled by the *kai Idia*, Hindu *tevoro*."

HON. MEMBERS.- Oh!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Shame on you!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- He did that, it is there, he knows that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do not want him to start standing up and repenting, I know he is not going to do that but my point is this, when you have people with that mindset and the leader of his party defending him, it goes to demonstrate ...

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Point of Order. Is this relevant, Mr. Speaker? It is not relevant. Let us move on, please. Let us talk relevance, it is in the past.

MR. SPEAKER.- You have the floor, honourable Attorney-General.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Sir. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I only raised these issues because they raised it. If they had not, I would not have. But ...

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- A Point of Order on clarification, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I already mentioned and explained that in this House, nothing is said in a vacuum.

MR. SPEAKER.- You have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- So he is justifying what he said, nothing is said in a vacuum. So in other words, *kai Idia*, Hindus are *tevoro*. *Tevoro*, for those people who do not know, means the devil.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Point of Order, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Sir, to clarify further, I think the honourable Minister for Economy does not understand what I meant by that.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- No, he understands.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Let me explain it.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- We understand what you want to say.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- When people say that Native land is to become nationalised and land use across the board without the landowners' consent, that hurts the *iTaukei*. That is what I said; nothing is said in a vacuum. When people say things like that, they will say things appropriately, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sir, the honourable Member compels me to respond to him. The government at that point in time under that Constitution could not have taken away land without the consent of the landowners - the land laws were still in place. It is not justified, Sir.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Again, thank you very much. This brings me to the point that the comments made by the other side was based on conjecture – everything was based on conjecture. What if this was there, or the idea is there? They are saying this, that means it means this. Right from honourable Professor Prasad, the other day making comments outside saying, “Oh, because Fiji Airways is now going to manage AFL, that means ATS will be affected.” What has it got to do with ATS? “ATS is a union-based company, therefore they will get affected” – all conjecture, trying to build this kind of cathartic moment, like some big conspiracy, that is the word. Some conspiracy is going to take place.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point that I wanted to also make was about, this way of thinking gets leaders to start thinking in a dichotomous manner. Everything is like us and them, basically.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- What does that mean?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You should know, you are a smart man.

(Laughter)

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I remember once I used the word ‘eschatology’ and you went, “Oh!”

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- I don’t know.

(Laughter)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I remember about three years ago, the honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity, Industrial Relations and Youth and Sports was here too but unfortunately he is not here with us because of personal reasons, and we were all standing up and talking about how Roy Krishna, the football player, had been given some international recognition and we all congratulated him.

Honourable Leawere stood up and said, “We must not forget about the rugby players.” *Areh*, how can we, talking about and celebrating Roy Krishna’s achievement have anything to do with rugby players? We will praise rugby players when rugby players will achieve that, we praise them all the time. But you see, there is this thing – if you are going to praise Roy Krishna, who is a football player and is Indo-Fijian, we must cover the other side too.

The honourable Prime Minister congratulates people, sports players, we do not suddenly say, “Oh, you must then congratulate the other group too.” This is their way of thinking, what it means is that, you cannot have nationhood.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to quote a very simple quote from one of the founders of National Federation Party (NFP), the late Mr. A.D. Patel and he said this in the 1960s; “Won’t it be better if we thought less of our race and more of our nationality.”

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- A very simple quote by the late Mr. A.D. Patel! The unfortunate thing, of course, now is, today’s NFP leadership does not really believe in that because you joined a person who actually thinks along ethnic lines.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those thousands of Fijians who helped us shape the 2022-2023 Budget. Indeed, Sir, I would like to thank all those who helped us shape the other four Budgets prior to this.

Honourable Qereqeretabua, the other day, made a very flippant comment. Most of her comments are quite flippant, Sir, based on sort of sarcasm.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Are you attacking the women?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I am not attacking you, I am attacking all of you, I will take you first. Are you a woman? Is honourable Bulanauca a woman? Is honourable Gavoka a woman? Get your facts right!

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Qereqeretabua said, “Oh, we are going to do another review in six months. We have done this review so many times.” Sir, it demonstrates that under our Prime Minister, the Government is actually responsive and agile enough to changing circumstances. We

are not rigid. The world is volatile. No one expected a pandemic. The moment pandemic started, the moment we had our first cases, we did a revision of the Budget because we knew what it would mean.

If we had figures based from 1920 budget which had projected to have “x” number of tourists because no one expected the borders to close and even though the pandemic came and the borders were closed, our figures would have meant nothing, so we had to revise it. In the same way we have to revise this Budget. If tomorrow, God forbid, the war spreads in Europe and changes the circumstance altogether, are we going to say, “This is the Budget, so let us stick to it.” No. You have to respond to it. That level of agility was precisely what saved us from going down the path of many other countries, Sir. We responded to it with agility.

We knew, therefore, our foreign reserves will get depleted, we do not have tourists coming in so what do we do? We changed our borrowing methodology. We changed the people we borrow from. We need to build our foreign reserves, otherwise we will not have foreign reserves. We will not be able to buy fuel, medicine, other imported items, we did not have that problem. Other countries, debt is a different issue, Mr, Speaker, Sir, but you need to have the level of foreign reserves in particular when you are largely an importing country to be able to buy those things. They do not tell you that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank all those thousands of Fijians who helped us. Given that I have the latitude of time, I would like to also thank all the staff too. I want to specifically mention the people in Tawake and Loa Villages. We went to those two villages and we were received with a lot of enthusiasm. I would like to also to thank the women entrepreneurs who participated, the farmers, the private sector people, civil society groups, Fijian youths, et cetera, that provided suggestions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to also thank the staff at the Ministry of Economy, FRCS and also the staff at the Solicitor-General’s Office. What is really interesting (honourable Radrodro you should make a note of this) is that, most of these people are below the age of 40. Most of them would not be holding these positions if it was not for Open Merit Recruitment and Selection (OMRS). These are young, committed, bright, energetic and qualified Fijian civil servants. From the bottom of my heart, I really wish to thank them, Sir, because the way the Opposition speak, they do not realise the hours that are put through this, the troubleshooting that we do, and the punching of holes we do before we present the Budget finally. .

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank:

- The Permanent Secretary for Economy, Mr. Shiri Gounder, below the age of 40 from a good province of Nadroga. I have to control myself, I do not want to get into provincialism.
- Mr. Mark Dixon, Chief Executive Officer of Fiji Revenue and Customs Services (FRCS), those of you who may want to know, he is an expatriate but a very good one too, doing a good job.
- Mr. Nemia Dawai, Head of Treasury from Ministry of Economy.
- Mr. Isoa Talemaibau, Head of Budget and Planning.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- From Tailevu.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Went to a wrong school though.

- Mr Sivendra Nath, Chief of Staff for FRCS.

- Mr. Kamal Gounder, Manager Infrastructure Sector.
- Ms. Kelera Ravono, Manager Social Sector.
- Ms. Mere Cakaunitabua, Principal Analyst Economic Services.
- Ms. Kiman Mala, Manager General Administration Sector.
- Mr. Sundhia Ben, Manager Fiscal Policy.
- Mr. Tui Sikivou, Manager Macro-Economic Policy.
- Mr. Nitesh Chand, Manager International Co-operation.
- Mrs. Sisilia Nalaide, Manager Debt.

These are the Senior Management Team, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and very quickly I would like to mention the others and I wish to do this:

Budget and Planning Office

- Ms. Poonam Singh;
- Mr. Sandip Kumar;
- Mr. Anikay Singh;
- Ms. Ashlin Singh;
- Mr. Shaneel Prasad;
- Ms. Ledua Vakaloloma;
- Ms. Freeda Fremlin;
- Mr. Laurie Singh;
- Ms. Namrata Singh;
- Ms. Miriama Ketedromo;
- Ms. Rezitty Restivan;
- Ms. Alumeci Rokobiau;
- Ms. Malvina Singh;
- Mr. Ankeet Prasad;
- Mr. Alipate Kete;
- Ms. Pranita Raj;
- Mr. Aporosa Tuiwalesi
- Mr. Anare; and
- Ms. Joyti Prasad.

Fiscal Policy Research Analysis Division

- Ms. Kavita Ram;
- Ms. Asenaca Lewaravu;
- Mr. Vinay Singh;
- Ms. Elenoa Voceduadua;
- Ms. Ashmita Chand;
- Mr. Shalend Kumar;
- Ms. Adi Josivini Coral;
- Ms. Safia Hassan;
- Mr. Shamal Chand;
- Ms. Vasemaca Waqabaca;
- Ms. Salaivalu Bola;
- Mr. Jese Nabalarua; and
- Mr. Samisoni Toko.

Treasury Team

- Ms. Asenaca Mae;

- Mr. David T. Filswilco;
- Ms. Zarah Ithiel;
- Ms. Akeneta Temo;
- Ms. Zainaa Khan;
- Ms. Ema Rokowaqa;
- Ms. Letila Tuiyalani;
- Ms. Atinvi Chand;
- Mr. Shavnil Kumar; and
- Mr. Vinay Krishna.

Fiji Revenue & Customs Service (FRCS)

- Ms. Shelini Kumar;
- Ms. Momina Begg;
- Ms. Talei Katonibau;
- Ms. Tima Rayawa;
- Mr. Rahul Gounder;
- Mr. Rohit Singh;
- Mr. Krishneel Krishna;
- Mr. Mohnish Prasad;
- Ms. Sherylin Hassan; and
- Mr. Anasa Matakece.

Solicitor General's Office

- Ms. Pritika Prasad, Acting Solicitor-General;
- Ms. Mary Lee, Assistant Solicitor-General;
- Ms. Glenys Andrews;
- Ms. Valerie Narain;
- Ms. Manuliza Faktaufon;
- Ms. Suliana Taukei;
- Mr. Yabaki Vosadrau;
- Ms. Zanuba Bhatti;
- Ms. Maria Cobona;
- Ms. Priscilla Singh;
- Ms. Sheik Shah Rup;
- Ms. Zakiyya Ali;
- Mr. David Solvalu (one of the drafting officers from another organisation).

Those are the young men and women, who actually worked behind the scenes and we ate many ice-creams at about 2 o'clock in the morning. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like all of us to put our hands together for them.

(Acclamation)

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like, of course, thank them back and would like to now get into some of the main issues. Before I do that, I also wish to (again from the bottom of my heart) thank the honourable Prime Minister for his leadership, guidance and his ability. I say this unreservedly, unequivocally, his ability to think outside the box, the ability to be agile and flexible to changing circumstances, demonstrated that no other Prime Minister ever had to do this. No other Prime Minister has ever had to deal with a pandemic for one year and I would like to really thank him for that, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are on a strong path of economic recovery and when we said the “Bula Boom” they made fun of it. Why did we say the “Bula Boom”, Sir? Because we are now welcoming tourists to this country with the big *bula* that we are known about. The big *bula* smile, the big *bula* experience, that is why we are calling the “Bula Boom”. We had only 34,000 tourists last year, some of them would be returning Fijians visiting friends and relatives. We are now going to come to about half a million tourists. That is a boom. We are obviously from a low base, but it is a boom, Sir, and they made fun of it. No matter how much they tried and refute it, that is the fact.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the figures were revised to 12.4 percent. We are now looking anecdotally, it may be even more and that is a conservative sum. They made fun of that. Honourable Professor Prasad said, no matter what pandemic or whatever, he said, you still had a contraction. So in other words, tomorrow, if we have an earthquake, if we have a volcano like Tonga did and we then say, the economy will get contracted, Sir, he will then say, “oh, I do not care about the volcano, you still had a contraction; I do not care about other people dying, you still had a contraction.” This is the level of contribution.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as he knows and everyone knows that the 2022 growth is coming from a low base after a massive 17.2 percent contraction in 2020 and a 4.1 percent contraction in 2021. Every single country in the world was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. We faced our highest ever economic decline and I will say it again unequivocally, it was because of decisive and strong leadership. We were criticised so many times when the honourable Prime Minister said we will do a lockdown based on science and health advice. We will do bubbles. They said, “Do not do bubbles, do not do lockdowns.” When we then lift it up, they said, “Do lockdowns, do bubbles.”

Mr. Speaker, Sir, when we heard the word “vaccine”, immediately we went to our development partners. The honourable Prime Minister and Foreign Minister were on the phone talking bilaterally to different countries saying we need the vaccine. We were talking to Asian Development Bank (ADB), World Bank that we needed vaccine because we knew there would be what we call “vaccine injustice” because smaller countries would get pushed to the bottom of the line and I need to say this again.

If USA is going to go to a pharmaceutical company and say, “with nearly 300 million people, 200 million of us need to be vaccinated with two doses that means 400 million doses order” – placed with the pharmaceutical company. Fiji with about 900,000 people, 600,000 people need to be vaccinated, our order is 1.2 million doses. Who will get priority? We knew that would happen and because of the efforts of the Minister for Foreign Affairs and also the Prime Minister, the Indians gave us the first 100,000 doses, then the Australians, then the Kiwis, then the Americans and now even the French are giving us doses. Every one of you in this room has been vaccinated, you are not paying a single cent for it, we are as a Government, did not pay a single cent for it. We had to pay for the administration of it, we had to hire vehicles, we had to pay nurses, we had to send people on boats, on horses or whatever it was, to get to people to vaccinate them.

But, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there was a decisive decision made that if we do not achieve high levels of vaccination, we will not be able to open our economy. No Jab, No Job policy worked, the \$360 worked. Yes, that was a condition and yes, it worked. Honourable Prime Minister said we will open before Christmas, we opened on 1st December and we had our national carrier ready to fly. If we did not have a national carrier, we will be twiddling our thumbs then Virgin Airways would have said, “oh guys, look we are going to come on 30th December”; Air New Zealand may say, “we are going to come on 19th December”, Qantas may say, “we will come on 30th January”, we would have been left to their whims and fancies.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is obviously some kind of gloom and doom theory by the Opposition. Like I said earlier on, everything we did, they had to oppose it and everything was played politically. As we have said in Parliament before as Bill Clinton said, “Is the economy stupid?” That is what we need to

rescue, that is what our focus is. This entire budget has been said as an elections budget. In fact, elections is far from our thought. We are primarily concerned, if you look at the gist of the budget, most of the policies that we announced previously, Sir, are continuing.

The new things are what we call the inflation mitigation, everything else is the same, no changes. Some, yes, adjustments here, forestry's got a bit more money, certain adjustments have been made in various other Heads but we continue with that. If we wanted to do really an elections budget, we could have done a lot more. It would have been irresponsible, we would have been physically responsible. Deficit has been reduced from 12 percent to 7 percent. We could have said, "Elections year, let us blow it out." None of them mentioned that deficit has come down from 12 percent to 7 percent; none of them.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, they, of course, try to discredit what has been called the "Bainimarama Boom". The fact is, that we have never had nine years of consecutive growth increase. Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is a fact. Again, honourable Gavoka, please, do not embarrass yourself. Because you are saying borrowing, all governments in the world borrow. The issue is when you borrow, what are you using the money for? If you borrow and if you are going to borrow money to cut a road in Tawake, connect people to electricity, give people water, build hospitals, build nursing stations that is good news of borrowing money.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, again, it is a very fundamental issue, he should know as a former banker which he says he was. Honourable Professor Prasad has got a number of assets, maybe some overseas, maybe under other people's names, I do not know but the fact is that, he has assets. If honourable Sigarara, Mr. Speaker, Sir, does not have that many assets, the amount of money that honourable Professor Prasad can borrow would be far greater than honourable Sigarara, it is a fact, it's what happens. The more assets you have, the more capacity you can borrow. It is very simple, Sir. If the economy is doing well, financiers see that you have a continuous growth rate, they will be able to lend you money.

However, none of them actually, Mr. Speaker, Sir, mentioned the fact that our GDP doubled in such a short period of time. It doubled and there was improvement in income levels. People have more cars, more homes have been bought, start new businesses, embrace new opportunities, better services, improve life, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is the result of the nine years of growth. Honourable Professor Prasad talks about the marginal economic contraction of 0.69 percent in 2019. He said the economy was slowing prior to COVID-19, but he conveniently ignores the sustained and strong growth and nine years prior to that. He goes on about the 0.6 percent. The world actually went into recession, he does not talk about that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to put things into perspective, our real GDP in 2022 is almost 116 percent higher than what it was in 2006, more than double. Compared to the year 2000, our real GDP is 263 percent higher and compared to 1970, our real GDP is 6,311 percent higher. That is why we called it the "Bainimarama Boom". Now, of course, we have the *Bula* Boom on our coming out of the pandemic and that is despite being faced with the COVID-19 crisis and the natural disasters, they do not seem to mention that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, no one talks about the 14 cyclones we have had, no one talks about the fact *TC Winston* wiped off one-third of the value of our GDP in 36 hours. I am glad honourable Radrodro acknowledged the fact that the schools we built from the Rebuild Programme - Build Back Better, after *TC Winston*, none of them got affected. At least, I thank him for his honesty in that respect and the same, I thank him also for his honesty regarding rural infrastructure roads. Yes, not everything is perfect. I also thank him for his acknowledgement how a road from Nadi to Suva through inland Viti Levu would open up opportunities for those landowners, open up opportunities not just for those landowners but other Fijians living in other parts of Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it was quite interesting how honourable Lalabalavu does not want to benchmark us against the developed countries like Australia, New Zealand and Singapore, but he wants us to be compared to Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea. This is the level of Opposition we have in terms of their contribution, a true reflection of the shallow depth of SODELPA's vision and leadership capabilities.

Honourable Lalabalavu came up with his own figures for real growth, he and his so called economy's friends, we know who they are, do not agree with the credible institutions like IMF, World Bank and ADB on growth projections. This is really absurd. In fact, the ANZ as we said, are projecting we will grow by 22 percent, we do not agree with them, but that is their projection and I hope they are right, some miracle gets pulled out.

Honourable Lalabalavu also refuted the poverty numbers from the World Bank. Really honourable Lalabalavu? The Opposition likes to pick and choose commentary from these agencies only when it suits their political narrative and that is the point I was trying to highlight. They all have embraced a particular narrative, they will not change from it, even though the facts may be staring straight at them in their faces, they will not change.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, they talked about extreme poverty. Extreme poverty is defined by the World Bank, is almost non-existent in Fiji; what we call "abject poverty". The poverty rates to the 24.1 percent as per the 2019-2020 HIES. This was the lowest level of poverty ever registered in Fiji. In 2002 and 2003, poverty rate was 35 percent, in 2008 and 2009, the poverty rate was 31 percent, then it fell to 28 percent in 2013 and 2014 and to around 24 percent in 2019 and 2020. Based on current population estimates, it is clear that under the Bainimarama Government and of course, the FijiFirst Government, almost 100,000 Fijians have been lifted out of poverty. That is the boom.

Lifting 100,000 Fijians out of poverty is no ordinary feat. It is a direct result of nine years of consecutive economic growth and various social empowerment initiatives like free education, equality in employment, creation of thousands of jobs under the Bainimarama Government; we had the lowest unemployment rate in about 20 years. They equate growth with debt levels. It logically does not work. They do not even understand the basics.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, of course, we need to continue to fight more against poverty, it is not an overnight fight. It requires continuous efforts, extra effort from everyone, decisive leadership, strategic thinking and way forward thinking, not only up to the next elections, but five years, 10 years and 15 years' time.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we have said, the Budget is fiscally responsible. We have been saying, we have reduced the fiscal deficit from 13.8 percent to 7.4 percent GDP. Our debt-to-GDP ratio is now on a downward path, declining from around 89 percent this year to 85 percent at the end of July 2023. Based on our planned fiscal consolidation, the debt-to-GDP ratio is expected to fall below 70 percent of GDP by the end of this decade. There has been so much misinformation and fear mongering by the Opposition on the debt issue.

Again, I have to go and do this sort of one zero one kind of lesson on debt. We have said it many times and I will repeat it today, the high levels of borrowings during the COVID-19 period was absolutely necessary and appropriate. That is why we had all our lenders and partners supporting us because that was the right thing to do. Had we not done that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we would have had a Sri Lanka kind of crisis much earlier than Sri Lanka.

The international media and our Opposition are trying to portray (or some of the elements in the international media) the Sri Lankan crisis as a debt crisis because it suits their narrative. It is in fact not

a debt issue. In fact Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Sri Lankan crisis is more of a foreign reserves crisis and less of a debt crisis. They had many things before the pandemic. One of their Ministers decided to overnight say, “no more fertilizer, only organic fertilizer.” Their agriculture output dropped by 50 percent. Sri Lanka, with certain products, they never used to import it. They started importing it because they could not have enough food to feed themselves as they could before. A strain on the foreign reserves.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, of course, they are not able to buy fuel, food and other necessities and even medicine because they do not have the exchange, foreign reserves. They cannot pay their debt because of that. We, by borrowing more from offshore basically meant (honourable Rasova understands this), that more foreign reserves came in, so we built up our foreign reserves because we knew the foreign reserves that used to come from the tourists, no longer can come because the tourists are not coming and we need foreign reserves to trade. We need foreign reserves to buy cars, medicines, and buy fuel. All the three fuel companies in Fiji buy all their fuel from Singapore, they trade in US dollars, we trade in Japanese Yen, Australian dollars and US dollars.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with borders closed and the tourism industry asleep for almost two years, we lost around \$3 billion in foreign exchange - gone! We still had to pay for our fuel bill, pay our medicine, raw materials - all the hardware you buy in Fiji is from overseas, the clothes you are wearing is from overseas. It may be sewn here but the fabric is from overseas. We borrowed almost \$2 billion in external loans during this period, not only for budget financing but more importantly to sustain our foreign reserves.

Also, the triple whammy was that we used that money to pay for unemployment benefits for our people. Mr. Speaker, Sir, \$432 million was paid out directly. Those people and I will say this again and I said it in the budget consultations - the lady who sits in the Hilton corridor or in Outrigger who makes handicraft, she no longer had a job. She benefitted from the \$90, the two rounds of \$50 and the two rounds of \$360. The lady who sells boiled *ivi*, roti parcels, lovo pack, *mithai* outside the airport to the airport workers, to ATS workers, Fiji Airways’ workers had no longer any business because they shutdown. So she was assisted. People in the informal sector were assisted as a result of that. We assisted our people, we built up our foreign reserves, we did not touch the money internally because there was a strain on that and of course, we built up our liquidity. Now there is more liquidity in the system which means interest rates will come down.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we also, of course, as a result of what we are doing, how we were spending the money - the Australian and New Zealand Governments were happy with the fact that we topped-up social welfare, they were happy with the fact that we were rolling out unemployment benefits also gave us budget support, and we very much appreciate that, Sir. And of course Mr. Speaker, Sir, the sale of 44 percent of EFL shares helped. They would not tell you the fact that FNPF made a huge windfall from that, they initially bought 20 percent, the Japanese came and bought it and they made a huge windfall. I will come to FNPF later on, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the point is, when we say what is your alternative - what would the Opposition have done in 2020? What would they have done? No one, right from the honourable Leader of the Opposition to honourable Gavoka, honourable Professor Prasad, none of them, though political opponents are outside, none of them have said what they would have done in 2020. What would have been their formula to be able to arrest the situation that arose as a result of the pandemic? What would have been the economic formula they have because the borders were closed?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the point is, they cannot say, “this is our secret” - the event has passed, you can tell us. It has got nothing to do with the manifesto.

(Laughter)

Sir, you cannot say that we would have told you because it has gone. What would you have done? We are not asking you to tell us what you are going to do but what would you have done? Not a single person said that. Honourable Professor Prasad said to cut civil service pay, published in the *Fiji Times*, cut 10 percent pay. Honourable, not honourable, I wanted to say honourable, he is no longer, well never was honourable - Narube said that we should cut down the civil service size, reduce the hours. All of them said that, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Till today, and honourable Prasad has the gumption to argue about this but he has not told us what he would have done. Not what he is going to do, what would he have done, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the debt issue - Fiji's debt level is at sustainable level. This has also been confirmed by credible international institutions like the IMF, World Bank, ADB, ANZ Bank and international credit rating agencies. I would like to urge all Fijians - please do not be misled by these people or the people outside. You can see the results on the ground. Mr. Speaker, Sir, credible lenders like the World Bank, ADB, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and others are willing to lend five times more than what they did before. This simply means they have the confidence, Fiji will be able to pay its debt and debt levels are sustainable. No lender would lend to a person or country if they thought the borrower would not be able to repay back.

Honourable Lalabalavu claims that ADB has said that Fiji's debt is unsustainable. That is not true, Mr. Speaker, Sir - if it was true, why is ADB still lending to Fiji. They wanted to lend to us also for the Nadi River, but we said we did not want it because we have a difference as to how we should mitigate those risks regarding whether we should do dredging or build flood plains. Why would someone lend to you if you cannot pay back, honourable Lalabalavu especially multilateral banks that are triple A-rated by an international credit rating agency. Any restructuring of any sort would result in lower credit rating for them, for the multilateral banks yet they continue to lend to us. Opposition so-called experts, can they explain this? They are all lying, Mr. Speaker, Sir. These lenders do not listen to the critics here in Fiji because they are focused on the truth and do not care about the politics because they very well know what these Opposition politicians are saying is not correct. Fijians also should not fall for these lies, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Honourable Lalabalavu said, "Oh, they are lending to Sri Lanka now." Yes, that is different. It is what you call a rescue package - rescue lending like they did in Greece. It has come after governments have been toppled. It has come after governments changed, a lot of prescriptive policies, austerity measures. They will tell them to raise their VAT. They will tell them to cut back on expenditure. They do it with all these prescriptions. Everyone knows that. They are not prescribing those to us, Sir. They are not telling us to have these kinds of austerity measures that they put in Greece or in Sri Lanka. See this is the kind of level of unsophisticated, non-nuanced analysis.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, measuring debt sustainability is a technical and complex issue, so anyone that takes a simplistic approach and talks about nominal debt or dollar value of debt, for example \$10 million, is trying to mislead or scare us for their own interest. Simply saying that debt levels increased to \$10 billion without looking at other factors, holistically makes no sense. Let us take an example. Country A has a debt of US\$88 billion and Country B has a debt of US\$976 billion. Country B in this case, Mr. Speaker, Sir, which has \$976 billion, has almost 11 times more debt than Country A. Someone might tell you that Country B is too much in debt and if you just look at the normal value of debt, Country A is in a better position. But it is not true. Guess what, Country B is actually Australia. Australia whose debt is highly sustainable and Country A is Sri Lanka. But Sri Lanka is in trouble. It has got lower debt value, only US\$88 billion. Australia is US\$976 billion but we know that Australia is in a much better position. So again, this kind of rudimentary, basic kind of analysis, crass analysis does not make sense, just kind of grabbing onto something - \$10 billion debt.

This, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is a classic example to show that the nominal debt level does not tell you much. There is a classic case to show that the nominal debt levels do not tell you so much about debt sustainability. Sustainability is what matters. In the same way, if honourable Prasad borrows because he is asset rich and is cash rich too, he can repay his debt. No problem. He can borrow \$2 million. He can still repay his debt. Mr. Speaker, Sir, beware, we have to tell members of the public that as soon as someone talks to you about nominal value of debt, he or she is not trying to scare you or probably do not understand about debt themselves.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to suit their narrative, they have gone to another platform now. The Opposition started quoting debt-per-capita, in other words, debt per person – divide the debt by the number of people in that country to compare debt levels across the economy. In the same way, honourable Tikoduadua said, “Oh, the Prime Minister is not telling the truth by saying that the iTaukei youngsters who are actually millionaires because if you take the dollar in Trust, I think \$54 million, divide by the number of young iTaukei people that means they do not.”

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- What a stupid analysis! What so obtuse and his leader is backing him up. Everyone knows, Sir that a landowner in a tourism area in Nadi will get paid far more than probably a landowner in Lau. You do not take an average. A person in the Coral Coast will get far more for their land lease money than someone from the interior of Naitasiri. So, obviously, there will be people within that \$54 million parcel of money who would get more than others.

There are teenagers who have got \$0.5 million and some of them have got, now they are only six years old. By the time they reach 18 years, guess how much they will get? However, of course, a young person who is in Lau where the land is not leased much, or in the interior of Naitasiri, or in the interior of somewhere else, will not have that much but the landowners where the land is high in demand, they will get more. Make sense? Landowning units, *i tokatoka*, they have small parcels of land, they will not get that much money. It is just basic and honourable Professor Prasad is just howling on.

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- No!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- This is the problem. They latch on to a narrative and they just do not want to let go, in spite of the facts.

Honourable Lalabalavu and honourable Professor Prasad, if Fiji is a debt-per-capita more than Sri Lanka, why did Sri Lanka fail - if they are going to use that analysis? The debt-per-capita in Fiji is higher than Sri Lanka. If that is the indicator, then why Sri Lanka failed?

Australia has a debt-per-capita of US\$41,000; New Zealand has a debt-per-capita of US\$26,000; the US has a debt-per-capita of US\$95,000 while Japan's debt-per-capita is US\$103,000. Does the Opposition mean by using this, honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu (this is the problem when you rely on those people), that these countries are worse off than Sri Lanka because their debt-per-capita is higher than Sri Lanka which has a debt-per-capita of around US\$4,000 only? So, if you are going to use that as an indicator as to how well you are doing, your theory is completely flawed.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Checkmate!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have countries like Sudan that has a debt-per-capita of US\$1,900 and PNG with US\$1,500, does that mean that those countries have better situations than Australia, New Zealand and others? That is absurd! It is illogical. It is stupid and obtuse.

(Honourable Professor B.C. Prasad interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Honourable Professor Prasad, please, listen. We hope you have not taught the same to your students. We have more sensible lecturers like Dr. Rup Singh and others replacing him at USP.

(Honourable Professor B.C. Prasad interjects)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- They're not stupid!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- No, you are, that is the problem.

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- That is what you are trying to portray. I know what I am talking about

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, he has made statements outside Parliament too about debt-per-capita and now he wants to defend it. He is saying it is one of the indicators, when he tried to say that that is the indicator. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the most common way to compare debt levels across countries is to look at their debt-to-GDP ratio.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Please, stop muttering!

This is like comparing your debt to your income level. Sir, GDP simply measures the total income of the country or the total value of goods and services produced in the country during the year. Again, there is no magic number for the debt-to-GDP ratio to measure debt sustainability because even the debt-to-GDP ratio does not give you the full picture about the debt portfolio. It is largely useful to compare debt levels across countries relative to their respective GDP levels. But, again, it does not say much about debt sustainability.

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- You sound like a first-year economic student.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have to talk in that manner because your side does not understand.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji's debt-to-GDP ratio is on a declining trend since 2009 and reached around 43 percent pre-*TC Winston*. The large reconstruction spending after *TC Winston* increased the debt-to-GDP ratio. However, it is still below 50 percent of GDP, honourable Kuridrani. This is the same reconstruction effort that was acknowledged by honourable Radrodro. After the COVID-19 crisis, the increase in borrowings and large contraction in GDP has led to the debt-to-GDP ratio increasing over 80 percent.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Kuridrani says that we have exceeded the benchmark 40 percent debt-to-GDP ratio. He conveniently forgets the pandemic and the debt levels across all countries have increased. Sir, 40 percent debt-to-GDP is not a realistic benchmark for all developing countries in a post-pandemic world. Every single country in the world has increased debt post-COVID. This will eventually come down as the economy recovers, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, had we not borrowed during COVID-19 the economy would have collapsed. We would have had large devaluation which they do not acknowledge, social challenge would have increased and price levels would have skyrocketed and our reputation internationally would have been tarnished. Through our decisive leadership and various hard measures, we have come out of the COVID-19 crisis successfully.

To really understand that, Sir, we have to look at various factors like:

- the cost of debt;
- the ability to refinance debt when it falls due;
- the exposure to foreign exchange and interest rate fluctuations;
- the availability of foreign exchange when an external debt has to be paid;
- the profile;
- the quantity of debt repayments of the upcoming years;
- the level of Government revenues to service the debt;
- the purpose of the debt, understanding who are the lenders and what are the lending terms and conditions;
- what is the state of the economy and the outlook;
- what are the consequences if Government decides not to borrow and many other factors.

It has to be a lot more nuance, a lot more sophisticated. We are sure the critics are not telling any of this to the public, Mr. Speaker, Sir, but the Government of course and our lenders watch this closely. The fact is, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the FijiFirst Government has always been borrowing for capital expenditure investments which will generate future returns to repay this debt. When the critics claimed that the future generations will pay the debt, they do not tell you that the future generations will also benefit from the roads we are building today, the communities we are connecting to electricity today, the schools we are building and new hospitals we are building today and other infrastructure that we are investing in and indeed planning for the future.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- The cost of debt as we know, Sir, the cost of building something today is far cheaper than building it 10 years down the track. The cost of debt has also significantly come down, Sir. We have borrowed over \$900 million, more than 10 percent of our debt portfolio, Sir, is highly at concessional terms equating to over 60 percent grant element. They need to understand that. The amount of money that we borrowed, we will only pay back 40 percent. They need to understand and grasp that. The World Bank and JICA have lent to Fiji at 40-year terms, 10-year grace period and almost zero interest rates. Grace period, of course, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I need to spell this out for honourable Bulanauca, we do not have to make the principal repayments for the first 10 years. Again, this \$900 million cannot be compared to \$900 million in the past, borrowed at over 7 percent to 10 percent at 10 or 15-year terms.

In 2006, the SDL Government then borrowed over \$320 million through the issuance of global bond with the coupon of 6.875 percent. Sir, \$320 million, 6.875 percent with the entire \$320 million, to be paid in a lump sum after five years. Imagine that! Paying interest rate of 6.875 percent and you have to pay the entire sum at the end of five years. This risk profile of the five-year bond

was far riskier compared to the JICA debt we have borrowed with payments spread over 40 years and interest cost at 0.01 percent. Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji's ability to service debt has increased significantly. We have over 10 times more revenue than what is needed to service the debt every year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have to know that we do not have to pay the entire debt in one year as repayment is spread over many years and we have more than enough revenues and over \$3 billion in foreign exchange to meet the debt servicing cost.

Fiji, Mr. Speaker, Sir, has never defaulted on debt. We also never default another current scenario. Anyone that may say that Fiji may default on the debt, of course, is lying. We need to tell members of the public, "please do not fall for these lies." We never have and never will default debt. They said China will take over Kadavu if we do not pay the debt. Kadavu is still with Fiji and China is still where it is. So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, please, we want people to rely on the facts.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point I want to make also is about FNPF and Fiji Airways. Honourable Jale, who made this very vociferous statement on FNPF and I will need to get the facts here. Honourable Jale was part of the Board in FNPF when they made many investments without going to members of the public, without going to the workers. There was a handful of people, they had what they used to call in those days "Employee/Employer and Government representatives". They actually engaged in Natadola and Matapo. They had one of the people from Matapo, Gary Erwin who actually ended up in prison. We had an undischarged bankrupt from Europe whose name is Gerard Saliot, he was declared bankrupt. He had five pending bench warrants issued against him, yet they engaged with him. He used to be flown in a helicopter from Nadi Airport to Natadola - red carpet treatment.

All of these was done, money was going down the gurgler, no consultations and here we have, Sir, an investment in a Fijian company and any person who understands investment would know that if you have a viable company that may then come down because of things outside its control and the share price may drop and if you buy the shares at a time where the share price have dropped, knowing full well that the share price will increase very soon because business is back and booming, you will get a huge windfall. They do not tell us that, they are going on employer/employee representatives. In fact, after 2007, we had (because the law was such then) people like Felix Anthony and Daniel Urai who were board members.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Yes, we did. So what, we admit! We did because the law at that point in time was the same as it was prior to 2007.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Shoosh!

The law was such where we had to ...

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Please, you are making a lot of noise.

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- The law was such where you had to have two representatives from Government, two from employers and two from employees. My point being, these two gentlemen picked up somewhere between \$156,000 and \$186,000 just in fees and allowances. They raked up telephone bills up to \$3,000 to \$4,000.

Honourable Tikoduadua, who is now sitting on the other side knows this full well, honourable Professor Prasad. He was part of the Prime Minister's Office then; he knows that. My point being and the reason why I am telling you this, Sir, is that just because you have employee representatives or employer representatives does not mean that there will be good investments made. It does not mean that there will be transparency in the way that they choose investments. I have got a whole list of companies that went under - Tropic Health and Bligh Water Shipping Limited which your new leader was part of, he was the CEO for a while.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Jale, you may rekindle some of your memory here. They bought land in Nadi without any due diligence for supposedly a hotel. The land is there, I do not know whether they have sold it or not. All of these things were done, Sir, without any proper due diligence. Now, all in the name of, "we had an employee representative, we had an employer representative."

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is the institution with the largest cash reserves. You need people on the board who know how to make investments. You need a management team that can carry out due diligence, you need an Investment Committee that have the acumen and the skillsets, investment knowledge, know-how and experience to be able to scrutinise anyone that wants to come and make an investment or use the FNPF fund. That is what matters.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have got the rate of return on investments. Even in the pandemic, Sir, 2020, 2021 and 2022, the rate of return on the shares was 5 percent and 6 percent, despite the pandemic, despite the fact that we had a slowing down of global economy and despite the fact that the domestic slowdown of the economy. They say we use it as a cash cow; what utter nonsense! The Ratu Mara Government borrowed money from FNPF, the Rabuka Government borrowed money from FNPF and the Qarase Government borrowed money from FNPF.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is the level of obtuseness demonstrated by the honourable Leader of NFP. In this period when the global economy has slowed down, when businesses have shut down locally, where would FNPF get that high level rate of return other than in government bonds? Where else would they have invested? He cannot tell you that, he does not know that. In the same way they cannot tell us what would they have done in 2020-2021 from an economic budget perspective? They do not know that, all they know, "oh, he shouldn't have done that." They do not know the alternative.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we can tell you many people prior to 2007 who used to have a lot of side business, honourable Jale. People used to come, private businesses ...

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- ... who used to come and borrow money from FNPF to put up their buildings, no due diligence. It was who you knew, who was on the Board, how many lunches you had and how many dinners you had.

Now, you have a proper law in place that has that high level of scrutiny. It has to go through various stages of scrutiny, investment committees done by the management. In this Fiji Airways sale, they had something like 32 advisors at one point in time to help them make the right decision. They engaged people from overseas who were experts in the aviation sector. That is what happened, Sir, and that is what needs to happen. In the days prior to 2017, it did not happen.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to also now continue with the rest. The AFL/Fiji Airways deal that they were going on about. Many countries in the world, Sir, have their airports managed by their national carrier because the main throughput of that airport is done by the national carrier. It makes a lot of sense, it creates synergy and a seamless travel experience for those people who come into the country. They went into all these conjecture, no one is going to lose their job but as I told the media yesterday, Sir, it does not mean that everything is hunky dory all the time. We had some senior management person in AFL who was caught smuggling alcohol. People who came to the airport, friends, families, people who they knew, they brought them along to the duty free, pushed their way through because the senior management said, “let this person take five bottles of whiskey” or whatever it was; charged by FRCS, fired by AFL. So please, you need to understand what is happening.

The management of that is nothing peculiar, there is nothing sinister, AFL is still a limited liability company, it still has its Board. It does not mean there is a lack of confidence. It is actually providing the synergy that is required and most airports do, do that, Sir. We do not want disconnectivity. Someone said, “It is like guarding Dracula. Honourable Professor Prasad said, Dracula guarding the blood bank. What blood bank? What Dracula? I do not know how many movies this man watches. What is the name of the guy? Christopher Lee is no more, Sir, Christopher Lee is gone.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we cannot have disconnectivity.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we need these two companies to be in a lockstep, working together to ensure every airline, every visitor, returning Fijian, freight shipper and inter-island travellers see the very best for our country represented at our airports. One of the mandates we have is that Fiji Airways which also runs Fiji Link must improve the airports at Labasa, indeed, and must improve the airport at Taveuni and must improve the airport at Savusavu. There is a real need to draw those synergies, in particular, those three main airports that feeds tourist, feeds people into that. The airport experience must be enhanced, Sir. Mr. Speaker, Sir, of course, will build their further collaboration.

None of them actually mentioned or were proud about the fact that Fiji Airways was going to commence direct flights to Vancouver. There are so many Fijians who live in Vancouver. There is another market source we can capture that people from the East side of Canada can also come to Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Leawere (again unfortunately he is not here), like most on the other side just make flippant comments. He said, “Oh we’ll let go of our sovereignty because of Fiji Ports Corporation Limited.” We have highlighted that several times since the sale of FPCL that the

asset base is still remaining with the Sovereign State of Fiji. We have created a company called “Assets Fiji Limited” where all the real estate of FPCL has been transferred to Assets Fiji Limited. Mr. Speaker, Sir, FPCL and the shareholders are interested in providing the services, they do not really care who owns the assets. They want to provide the service and make money from providing the services. They do not understand that. You do not need to own the asset to make money. You need to own the operations to be able to make money and they do not understand this.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government, as a result of that, is now receiving three times more the dividends that it was receiving before the divestment. The net profit after tax has consistently grown and remains stable even during COVID-19 at around \$22 million plus. The FPCL and Ports’ operations did not experience, not even one day shut down during the pandemic due to well-established business continuity plans.

With the subsidiary partners of Fiji Ports Terminal Limited continued better turnaround times, elimination of congestion fees because shipping companies are charged congestion fees at Fiji Ports before this divestment. They no longer have that, no change in fees and charges to counter rising cost internationally.

The statutory role of FPCL is still maintained through the Sea Ports Management Act and there has been no dilution of the role. Fiji Ports continues to serve maritime trading through high standards to Fijian businesses.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Professor Prasad and honourable Tikoduadua said the guaranteed sugar price is completely incorrect and shows that out of political desperation he and his political party have now resorted to blatant lies. In fact, it is concerning that despite the clarifications from myself in presenting the Budget, the honourable Prime Minister, the Minister responsible for Sugar and other Members, NFP is still going around telling people that \$85 per tonne guaranteed price will not be provided for. It, of course, is wrong, Mr. Speaker, Sir. We call on honourable Professor Prasad to again publicly withdraw, and I know he is not going to do that, he has got too much of an ego, as he seems to have intentionally misled Parliament and confused the farmers and other stakeholders in desperation for political survival.

Sufficient funds have been allocated to ensure the guaranteed cane price of \$85 per tonne will continue, making the fourth consecutive year that farmers will get a guaranteed price of \$85 a tonne. As we have said, reduced budget allocation does not mean that we have removed the guaranteed price. In fact, the increase in the domestic sugar price and upward trend in the global price of sugar has meant that the cost to the Government has been reduced. Therefore, the \$8 million allocated in the Budget is sufficient. Just like if honourable Rasova decides to bring agricultural produce from Kadavu and say, if he starts growing cassava, and we say to him, “We will give you \$85, we will make sure that you always get \$85 for a bag.” You go to the market and you get \$60, we will pay you the difference of \$25.” So we need to make a budgetary allocation for that. But if tomorrow you go to the market and they start buying your cassava at \$80 a bag, we only have to make a \$5 allocation for you. So in other words, the budgetary allocation will be less. Honourable Mere Naulumatua understands this. Honourable Professor Prasad and honourable Tikoduadua to say this is actually completely misleading, they do not understand basic finance and basic maths.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, again, you see this is a whole conjecture, going to the public, “You will not get \$85 a tonne”, I am going to say this come what may.” I have always said this to honourable Professor Prasad - size does not matter. The size of the budget allocation does not matter, it is the quality of it. Of course, they have forgotten the fact that we have increased the budget allocation for fertiliser. As some of the earlier speakers from this side of Parliament have said that the fertiliser price is almost tripled - \$80 to \$90 a bag. The sugarcane farmers are still paying \$20. Before the

pandemic it was \$45.65, the farmer paid \$20 and the Government paid \$25.65. Now, a bag of fertiliser is \$85, maybe it will go up to \$90. Assuming it is at \$80, the Government has to pay \$60 a bag, the farmer will still pay \$20.

Increased allocation in the budget, someone said about too much assistance to the sugar cane industry. We made a provision in the last budget Sir, that we said that 43 percent of cane farmers (honourable Professor Prasad and honourable Tikoduadua and this johnny-come-lately to the sugar cane industry, they do not understand this) in Fiji cut less than a hundred tonnes. So assuming that I cut 50 tonnes of sugar, that means my gross income is \$4,250 a year, take out my cartage, take out my fertilizer, my lease money, how much will I make in a year - \$2,000, \$3,000, \$2,500 in one year but why do they continue to cut cane? Because they will lose their lease if they stop planting cane.

The honourable Tanya Waqanika spoke about landless people, she did not mention these people, she only talked about the blackbirded community, she forgets very conveniently these people.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, and we have made an allocation in the Budget, we said those people who now want to get into other types of farming or want to go into any other type of lease, please come forward. We have already had 16 applications, people are just tiptoeing now. Out of that, Sir, majority of them said, "We do not do sugarcane farming please give us a residential lease, that is all we want." They want a 99-year residential lease, please give that to us because we need our homes. If they stop planting cane, they will become landless, honourable Waqanika, they will end up as squatters.

When honourable Nawaikula (no longer honourable) went with his friend before, Qarikau to Vanua Levu, 50 percent of the cane production finished. Those lands are now unoccupied, landowners are not getting any money because of political reasons, gone into the bush, no alternative farming for them, they will all end up along the Suva-Nausori corridor. They all want water now, getting illegal connections, pressure on the infrastructure in the Suva-Nausori corridor; they do not talk to you about that. When they talk about water woes they do not talk about that, they do not talk about displacement of people whose leases were not renewed.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Who said?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- It is a fact. Some of them are building their homes on top of a sewer pipe, it is a fact. You go to a soccer match, football match you see all the Labasa flags here - in Suva. Why? Because they are here. Unfortunately, for the Suva fans.

(Laughter)

Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is a fact. They have now come forward to us saying, "Please convert our leases to residential lease." We expect more to do so, more will come forward and in that way we will be able to rationalise the sugar cane industry. There are some farmers who are doing well, some landowning units have gone into a thousand acre farming - honourable Lalabalavu should know this in Vanua Levu, honourable Bulitavu knows this exactly well. That is why he gave that speech, because he is actually working at the grassroots level, he is not working at the political level that these people are.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the inflation mitigation versus what they call the "freebies". If I could respond to the issue of unemployment assistance, inflation mitigation and social protection. I find it really quite horrendous to listen to the Opposition calling them all freebies. If we said, Sir, that every person in Fiji will get \$180, irrespective of your income, then I would say it is freebie. They call it the *saqamoli* budget.

Honourable Qereqeretabua limited to the World Bank extreme poverty measurement of \$1.90, what she actually fails to forget is that \$1.90 is for your survival. It means you have no other source of income, that is what it means but she used that - crass not sophisticated in analysis, completely pedestrian, US\$1.90 she is only giving \$1. These people already have a source of income, this is just assistance to them to meet the inflation cost.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- What a fundamental issue, Sir. In fact, I feel embarrassed to actually stand up in Parliament to make these points. I should be sitting down by now but I have to respond to them, making all these flippant comments. These are for people who already have an income, say less than \$50,000 you will get that income even social welfare recipients are getting a top-up on top of what they are already receiving.

Aftercare Fund, Government Pensioners - all of these people then 10 percent subsidy on the bus fares. We are not saying to the bus company, "Hey, you reduce your bus fare by 10 percent." We know they have to survive too. We are not saying to EFL, "Hey, we are not going to increase your electricity rates", we know they have to survive too, they need to have a good balance sheet so Government forks it out and pays on behalf of the citizens.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Kuridrani, again he said, "Oh, all this money will go to the businesses." *Areh!* The business is the one that runs the supermarket. At the moment you are buying your floor from them so what is the big deal? The big deal, Sir, is that these people will now have extra money to go and buy it. So what is he saying - People do not go to shops. He said, we should not have done this, we should have built infrastructure.

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Yes.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- See the point is this, Sir. We are building infrastructure, we are building roads. Your leader is saying, "Do not give money to FRA." Honourable Radrodro says, "Give money to FRA." We are building bridges.

(Laughter)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Clarification! I did not say, "Do not give money to FRA", I said, "Budget of \$300 million a year to FRA, so please ...

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Withdraw, withdraw.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Can you give him a yellow card? He is telling a lot of fibs, Sir, please.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, I have not got a yellow card. I have only got a blue card.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Put him out for a while, please.

MR. SPEAKER.- You have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sir, honourable Gavoka says, "Reduce the budget to FRA." He says, "Give more money to FRA." He says, "Build more jetties and roads."

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we can do both. If you say to a family, Sir, “Look, we are not going to give you the one dollar ...

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- A Point of Order.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- *Areh!*

(Laughter))

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- I mentioned “supporting”, he is misleading. I said, “Supporting infrastructure”. I mentioned cold storage improvement, some roads, hospitals need to improve - those are the mitigation factors in my view.

HON. MEMBER.- Do not give money.

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Do not give money where?

(Laughter)

I did not say, “Do not give money.” Sir, I was saying that in my view that is a mitigating factor but giving cash to people does not mitigate inflation. That was what I was saying, an example where a woman to come from Navosa, paying \$70 to go to Koromumu Hospital. If they provide that infrastructure, that is, improvement to the hospital at Navosa, that woman will only pay \$10 or \$5 to get to the hospital.

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- They do not know. They are not that credible.

MR. SPEAKER.- You have made your Point of Order.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, if I could just correct honourable Kuridrani, he said that we should focus on those areas, I accept that he said that. But what he was saying, “Do not give this money for inflation mitigation”. Not every person was going to go down to Koromumu; we know that. There are people living in Keiyasi who may not be sick, so what about them. If the price of floor has gone up, if the price of soap has gone up and the price of sugar, tea, everything has gone up then we need to help them. That is what you call “mitigation of inflation”. All other countries are doing it, even countries like Australia are doing it to help meet those costs.

The bridge will be built, the hospital will be built, those people will be covered, but in the meantime there is an immediate need that people need to have. There are people with five children. If the person is earning \$15,000 a year, they have got five children, suddenly the price of all these basic items have gone up because 21 items have gone up, they need some assistance. We are giving to them now that is what they need. They do not care about some bridge, they do not care about some hospitals and Fiji is not only made up of people in Keiyasi. There are lots of other people all over Fiji that need assistance, Sir.

As I said in the introduction of the Budget on 15th July, a budget is about addressing your immediate needs. It is also about planning for the future; you have to be able to do both. There is an immediate need in respect of this unprecedented rise in the price of imported goods. It is a well-known fact everywhere in the world. Read all the reports, prices are going up, price of wheat went up.

The honourable Prime Minister highlighted the other day about the weekend where Turkey struck a deal with Ukraine and Russia. We do not know whether wheat will come down, but there is an anticipated reduction. In the meantime, the price of wheat will go up, in fact, it is going to go up. Still no access to wheat. So, we are going to tell those families, “No, we are building a bridge, do not worry. In the meantime, you go fend for yourself. Go and buy flour at a higher price, we do not care.” That is what you are saying.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- No!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is the kind of what we call, honourable Professor Prasad said the *Saqamoli* Budget. Honourable Qereqeretabua and honourable Tikoduadua may think it is actually quite funny but it is actually not. It is a typical of what we call a “five penny contribution to a five percent party.” But that is the level of contribution.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on top of the \$500 million, we have provided unemployment payment and financial relief in the past three years, on top of zero-VAT.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are continuing with our social welfare payments. We said to the market vendors, “You do not have to pay fees for another year.” They actually appreciate that. They do not have to fork out annually \$200 or \$300 as some market vendors do, Mr. Speaker, Sir, but they all call it freebies.

There are a lot of people applying for jobs. When they apply for jobs, the employer wants a police clearance and it costs about \$40. We are paying that. They want your birth certificate, we are paying that. If you are a taxi driver or a bus driver or a carrier driver and your licence expires, we will pay for its renewal. If you are applying for a fishing licence, we pay for the renewal of that. Those are what we call “everyday expenses” that we are trying to meet. They are small amounts, but they actually have a huge burden on the disposable income of individuals; very basic, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we would like all Fijians to know that the Opposition is actually saying that we should not give you any of these.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Yes, absolutely.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- What they are also saying is that, the 20 cents levy we reduce from fuel, we should not be giving you that also.

HON. J. USAMATE.- That’s what they say.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sir, by putting those 21 items on zero-VAT, from a revenue perspective, we have lost \$165 million. Everyone buys soap, everyone buys tea, because we know that those people who go and buy that at 9 percent, we would get \$165 million. But we have made a decision to forgo that revenue so that ordinary Fijians could benefit from it.

We made a decision, Sir, to forgo the revenue that the Municipal Councils get, but we are actually going to supplement it for them. The revenue that we get from the 20 cents levy on fuel (\$55 million), we have forgone that completely. At least the Municipal Councils are getting paid, we are paying it for them on their behalf. The LTA we are getting on their behalf, Births Deaths and Marriages we are getting on their behalf. But those two major expenditures, we have forgone.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other issue that was raised, honourable Qereqeretabua made a flippant comment on why six months. I think I have already addressed that, Sir. If you read most of the literature that is coming out, God willing, there is an expectation that inflation will peak in six months’ time.

Essentially, when it peaks, it means after that it will come down. Peak is always a peak, it will come down after the peak. It is like climbing the Mount Everest, then you come down. So that is why the six months.

As I have said, God forbid, if the war extends, we do not know what is going to happen. We may have another catastrophe globally, or inflation may come down sooner than that – we do not know. That is why we need to do a review. That is why a responsible Government will do a review of it. In the same way, we review it after the pandemic struck us, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Qereqeretabu said, “Oh, because nothing is good with the Government, that is why they have to do this.” It is not about Government being bad or good or not right or wrong, it is about what is going to happen economically and what is going to happen globally.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think the other point that some of them did make, they said; “Oh, you cannot have 12 percent growth because the global growth rate is only 3 percent.” That is the average global growth rate. Some countries will have 15 percent growth, some will have 1 percent growth, some people will have 25 percent growth, then you average it out. That is how it works, that is how you measure it. So, for them to logically say, “Just because the world growth rate will be 3 percent, we cannot have 12 percent growth rate.” We are starting off from a lower base – basic, again.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have mentioned the taxation that honourable Gavoka referred to. Of course, we have removed 10 percent ECAL and we have removed STT. I think he wants to bring it back. He wants to bring back stamp duties. So, we want to tell all businesses, all the people who actually got ease of doing business that SODELPA and I do not know who else will bring stamp duties.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is the problem with them, they only look at one figure. This is probably the former FRCS officer who was giving him the advice but they do not look at the multiplier effect of not having stamp duties. This is the problem. They do not look at the multiplier effect, for example, of giving those kind of concessions on filmmaking. We have reduced it. I do not know whether he acknowledges that in his speech or not, I kind of switched off. We have reduced it, to make it a lot more amenable to our economic conditions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, of course, he talked about in a very kind of ambiguous manner. He said, *lewenivanua*, will help the *lewenivanua* and I said at the end of it, who is that? Who is *lewenivanua*? Who do you mean? He said, “All people.” So, why could he not say all Fijians? Why did he call *lewenivanua*? It is ambiguous. Again, they are subtly bringing in this ethnic thing into it. All of them are, Mr. Speaker, Sir. No matter how much you say, “Oh, please” that is what it is. In the same way that you defended, honourable Bulanauca.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Pacific Labour Mobility Scheme, all Fijians are the beneficiaries of the Pacific Labour Scheme. All Fijians are beneficiaries of the Duavata Initiative that we have with New Zealand, not on an ethnic basis, honourable Waqanika. I was quite surprised by your kind of xenophobic comments that suddenly will all be reduced and become I do not know whatever she was saying and she went on about Indians. She actually lied she said she did not say “Indians” but actually she did. When we persisted only then she admitted it. In the same breath, earlier on in her speech she quoted from the *Bible*. I really cannot see how people can quote from the *Bible* or from any scripture but then lie in the process too.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, she also insulted every single Fijian that has applied to go overseas under the Pacific Labour Scheme, has insulted every Fijian that is currently working there. A few months ago, Sir, I was at Wagga Wagga. I had a town hall meeting with those Fijians who are working in Wagga Wagga, a lot of them are working in abattoirs. The meeting, 90 percent of the discussion we had with them, they

talked about how can they buy vehicles and send it over? How can they invest in FNPF? How can they buy a home? Will they be eligible for the First Home Grant?

These people were thinking about investing back home. They were asking, “Can you talk to the Australian Government because we could have been given three-year visa. We want to bring our wives or husbands.” Some of them were females also. They wanted to bring family members. That was what they were discussing. To say and rubbish that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is a huge insult. It goes to show a complete lack of understanding.

Sir, under the Pacific Labour Scheme, the Fijian Government does not select the people who will go overseas. The Fijian Government provides a facilitating role. People have to register through the National Employment Centre (NEC). The overseas recruiting employment agencies come to Fiji. They look at the group of people they want and there is, Mr. Speaker, Sir, an opportunity for them.

Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, through his initiative through the Ministry of Forestry, they are providing a lot of training now for a lot of young people in sawmilling, portable sawmilling, using chainsaws and nurseries. There is a huge shortage of people to work in the forests in New Zealand because as you know, Mr. Speaker, Sir, a lot of the forests in New Zealand are run by private companies. They are not owned by the State but private companies.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a lot of them have been recruiting, in fact some of the people who were certified over the weekend in Nadi they have already got jobs. Some of them have been given three-month contract, six months contract, they go and come back, earn some money, some of them work in Fiji, some of them are talking about starting their own business. We are looking at outsourcing through NDMO, et cetera.

For example, if there is a cyclone rather than using civil servants, we can outsource it to these people who live in that particular area, province and village we can hire them out. They know how to use chainsaws and we will pay them for that. That is the kind of expertise we are building. That is the kind of business opportunities we are creating. They get some overseas experience well and good. They are building that cadre of people in Fiji, Sir.

So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, again, it seems to me that whilst they talk about freedom, they are going to restrict freedom of movement. Say if tomorrow, some Fijian wants to go and work overseas, some Fijian wants to go on a three-month visit or three years visit, they will say to them, “do not go” because we want you here. That is their choice, we cannot force them. These nurses who are being demanded overseas, we are going to say to them “do not go”; we cannot force them, this is a free country. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this kind of lack of analysis, short term goal is quite worrying.

The other point I wanted to talk about is the University of the South Pacific (USP). They talked about USP quite a lot. Coincidentally, I just wish to read a letter that I received whilst on the floor of Parliament on Monday and it is written to the Pro-Chancellor and Chair of Council, Dr. Hilda Cathy Heine, University of the South Pacific and it is titled “Re: Whistleblowing against Director HR and Divisional HR”.

“Dear Madam,

I have been in USP for the past few years and I currently work in Divisional HR. This is to bring to your attention on the actual abuse of office by Director of Human Resources USP. Recently, few selected staff (only Indians) have been promoted on acting roles and these roles have very high salaries. New positions have been created, such as HR Business

Partner and Team Leaders with very high salaries. Only selective names were chosen for these acting roles. Why weren't the other staff considered?

Staff who were currently on acting roles do not have enough management level experience and are given doubled the salary. This is just an act of collusion and corrupt practice within Divisional HR. If HR is unethical, then how other staff outside of HR will be treated? They are setting bad examples. All other divisional staff are now talking about HR staff promotion, especially staff given acting appointments with no experience on higher role.

Some had only occupied HR Assistant and HR office rank up till now. The Business Partner role has been advertised just for the sake. The positions would be automatically rewarded to internal staff on acting roles. This is just the formality. I will ensure this matter is escalated to higher authorities for an investigation on Director of HR.

Previously, there have been fraud cases against USP VC and HR. Again, this matter needs to be raised so there is fairness and transparency in the entire recruitment process. The good applications from within the HR Division USP and outside applications will be discarded. I work here and I know the corrupt process has been used. The recruitment process is handled by Totivi Bokini Ratu, hence copying him as well.

The Government of the day has been strict on the illegal recruitment process at USP and now it is again time to investigate. If HR itself is not following the rules and regulations, how can you expect other staff at the university to follow the same? Very soon, other divisions and faculties will follow the same strategy. Restructure, provide fancy job titles and increase staff salary without proper justification. This is just illegal practise by HR Division.

There have been other capable staff within HR and how come acting positions were only given to selected staff, some with no experience. They are all new positions. This is just a scam knowing that positions will directly be given to staff who are already on acting role. Advertising and conducting interviews are just the formality. This is just so unfair practise where other staff within HR Division are affected. This needs to be investigated. Why are other staff within HR treated unfairly? Why cannot promotion be based on merit?

There has been no other division or faculty pay rise due to change in job title restructure. This is just a scam by Director HR, soon his salary will be aligned.

Hoping for a positive and fair outcome”.

This is in line with the Whistle-blower policy and is copied, Director Assurance and Compliance USP, Prime Minister's Office, Totivi Bokini Ratu and Minister for Education. Attorney General's Office stamp 22.07.2022.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Leawere and his leader, honourable Gavoka did make a statement about a week ago saying (and I only know from the media) that they said if there is nothing to hide, why are they afraid of an investigation? A few days later, I understand that honourable Gavoka has a change of heart now and wants us to give the grant.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Misleading Parliament, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I said, “let us end the stalemate but leave the running of the USP to the Council and pay up the dues.” Correction, Mr. Speaker.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- It was a change of heart though. You did say, “let us investigate. What are they frightened of?”

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have continuously said this, the honourable Prime Minister had said this, I understand he also informed the Samoan Prime Minister of this too, after she had dinner at honourable Professor Prasad’s house. It was on *Facebook* and is well known, it is okay with other people they were there. It is fine, you can have dinner wherever you like that is fine. I understand all NFP were there and others of their supporters. But Mr. Speaker, Sir, the point is this...

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Even Richard Naidu was there!

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

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

HON. J. USAMATE.- What is the Point of Order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Point of Order, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is really unbecoming of the honourable Attorney-General. He is reading an anonymous letter and he is naming and defaming people who cannot defend themselves here. He is mentioning Totivi Bokini Ratu. I get a lot of anonymous letters about the honourable Prime Minister, about the honourable Attorney-General, about what is happening at FNU and what is happening in the Ministry of Education. I can come and read all those letters here and name people and defame them.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- This is really abuse of parliamentary time. I mean, he should just stick to the Budget instead of reading a letter and defaming people.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Absolute nonsense!

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, you know very well that the subject of USP has come up in this Parliament so often, it is almost a repetition, repetition, repetition and all that he is doing is answering to some of those. Now, it is a whistle-blower who sent the letter and he read it openly.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- In the past you have not allowed to name people. The honourable Minister is reading an anonymous letter - naming people and defaming them. That is what he is doing.

MR. SPEAKER.- I have never made a ruling about that in the past. Never!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, you have to make a ruling on it. What you are saying, is that I could come with an anonymous letter, read it here in Parliament and name people. I get so many anonymous letters about so many people here on issues that were raised. If we are going to

allow this standard in Parliament, Mr. Speaker, Sir, then it is a free-for-all. That is what I am saying, I think you should tell the honourable Attorney-General to refrain from doing that. That is all I am saying.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, you have made your point. The honourable Attorney-General is making his Right of Reply and he has the right to bring up those matters that have been mentioned. He has got a right to read that if he wants to. You have the floor.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, he does not have the right to defame the people who cannot defend themselves here.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, that point about the defending the right of people who cannot defend themselves has been brought up in this Parliament so often by you.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, you have stopped Members from making that.

MR. SPEAKER.- By you and by others. Honourable Member, you made your point.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sir, no names have been mentioned, except for Totivi Bokini-Ratu. That was the only name and the letter actually says if you will listen because I know he is caught up in this theatrics. The recruitment process is handled by Totivi Bokini Ratu, hence copying him as well, that is all. It does not say he has done anything wrong. No other names have been mentioned so who is being defamed?

The problem is, unfortunately for honourable Professor Prasad, he is very personally linked to this whole issue of USP, we all know. Not just being a former staff member of USP, but also his spouse is working at USP and also he has very close links and openly known with the Vice-Chancellor. Unfortunately, he is kind of a bit jaundiced in terms of his contribution regarding the contribution at USP.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Well I can say many things about you.

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Do not go there!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, my spouse certainly does not work at USP, nor have I ever been a student of USP, so I do not have any links with USP. I do not know what he is on about.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, you need to make a ruling. This man is talking about my links with USP - of course I have links with USP, of course everyone has links with USP, of course he has links with people in Government. His brother is the CEO of FBC and he is the Minister for Communications, I can say he has links. This man goes beyond any political morality and is trying to make a case.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- He has gone on and on for almost two hours pontificating here and there and trying to respond to every little thing that has been said by the Opposition, and throws in things here and there to make his point. This is abuse of parliamentary time and process. Absolute abuse by this man.

(Honourable Members interjects)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

Honourable Members, you know in a Right of Reply that the person giving

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Wait until I finish.

The person giving the Right of Reply has got every right to answer every statement that was made by that side of Parliament or this side of Parliament. That is his privilege, and for this occasion we are talking about the Budget, he has got the right to do that and I do not deny him that right.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Mr. Speaker, Sir, one thing we have learnt in the past eight years is that when honourable Professor Prasad starts really getting irked up and starts doing his theatrics, we know that we have hit a raw nerve - when he has been caught out or when there is something very close to him, that we have actually revealed the truth on.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Talk about yourself, my friend!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- He raised about my brother, honourable Bulanauca and everyone has talked about my brother at FBC, but FBC is not the subject of investigation and FBC does not get the kind of grants that these people get. That is the point of difference. Please, stop trying to obfuscate.

We have made a very simple proposition. The Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee of USP raised a number of anomalies, the Chancellor raised a number of anomalies and we said they need to be investigated independently by an independent body. Please, tell us what is the truth and we will give the grant. I was asked by I think the *Fiji Times* or someone outside, saying honourable Professor Prasad said there have been so many investigations and nothing has been revealed. There has been no investigation whatsoever on the issues....

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Five investigations.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- No, there has been no investigation on the issue...

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Done by your people.

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- There has been no investigation on the issues that have been raised by the Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee and the Chancellor.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I cannot understand why they have this huge problem about it. What are they afraid of? Is there something they have to hide; nepotism, favouritism, people being appointed like that letter shows?

Notwithstanding that, the Fijian Government continues to assist our USP students through TELS and scholarships. It is an utter lie by the Opposition and other political parties outside that the future of the students will be bleak because the government is not paying the grant. Yes, I would admit Sir, if we

did not pay the TELS fees, if we did not give the Toppers Scholarship, if we said to students, “don’t go to USP” - we are not doing that.

The students have a choice - they get a Toppers, they want to go TELS, they want to go to USP, no problem – go, that is your choice. We will pay for it. We have not stopped anyone. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government is paying the scholarships and provides loans to students to cover their studies at USP. Sir, \$156 million has been paid by the Fijian Government to USP from TELS and National Toppers from 2014 until now. No other member country contributes anywhere near to what the Fijian Government pays, none of them.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in 2014, we paid altogether \$4.7 million, in 2015 - \$10 million, 2016 - \$7.1 million, 2016-2017 - \$17 million, 2017-2018 - \$26 million, 2018-2019 - \$21 million, 2019-2020 - \$28 million, 2020-2021 - \$22 million, this year we expect to pay \$16 million, altogether \$156 million, that is what we paid.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- So what?

HON. S. ADIMAITOGA.- Not a “so what?”

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sir, he is saying “so what”. Unfortunately, honourable Professor Prasad please, I am feeling embarrassed for you now. Please, do not.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- You are embarrassing the whole country by doing that.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I said I felt sorry for him but he attacks me personally, but anyway.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Climate Change Act, we have gone over the alterations made to the Climate Change Act multiple times in Parliament and the revision being referred to by honourable Qereqeretabua was in fact a change made in early 2020. We have been through this also before. The inclusion of the ban on deep sea mining which reflects this Government’s position on this issue was originally included due to its linkage to ocean protection. It is in the original draft.

However, through consultations, it was deemed to be a policy which is better linked to the Mining Act, Deep Sea Mining is not a climate change issue but it should be a condition in the Mining Act. So, if you go to the Mining Act that is technically where it should rest, not under climate change. Again this is very crass analysis, “oh, they took out deep sea mining from the Climate Change Act, let us go for it” but they do not understand that it should be in the Mining Act. In the same way, we do not put mining over other things in here, that is under the Mining Act.

It is an issue which is associated with environmental degradation and it is likely to play a role in exacerbating the stress on our marine environment. That is why it has to be in the Mining Act. That is why, in the same way for example, the Mining Act will set out the parameters. If you are going to, for example, do bauxite mining, how are you going to get rid of the spill that comes from it? How are you going to deal, for example, with the tailings - that is in the Mining Act, Environment Act.

Climate Change Act is to do, as the word suggests climate change. It is not the Environment Management Act, not the Mining Act, it is the Climate Change Act. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is the kind of

level of response I have to do because honourable Qereqeretabua and others have put all those things out there without thinking, political point-scoring and have sort of gone off, very whimsical kinds of statements.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Part 9 of the Climate Change Act introduces the requirement to design a 5-year carbon budget to achieve Fiji's long term emission reduction target. This section further establishes the process of the development of a 5-year carbon budget plan to plan a whole of economy emissions reduction to achieve net zero by 2050 target.

It is clearly written under Section 9 of the law, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that the Minister with the assistance of the National Climate Change Coordination Committee must determine a carbon budget for Fiji in respect of each of the following periods, honourable Qereqeretabua.

1. 1st January, 2026 to 31st December, 2030;
2. 1st January, 2031 to 31st December, 2035;
3. 1st January, 2036 to 31st December, 2040;
4. 1st January, 2041 to 31st December, 2045; and
5. 1st January, 2046 to 31st December, 2050.

Honourable Qereqeretabua, please read the Act. Do not get someone to tell you what is there or not there. The carbon budget under subsection 2(a) must be determined on or before 31st March, 2023. I hope Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Qereqeretabua is here with us on 31st March, 2023. Time and time again we find ourselves in the same position. The Opposition unwillingly do not put the time to read the key pieces of national legislations but have the gall to poke holes in Government's approach to critical issues of national wellbeing, when the answers to their questions are not only publicly available but also in this case, available in written law.

Any sane minded person would know that operationalising a law as comprehensive as the Climate Change Act cannot be implemented overnight. The reforms it requires are extensive and we pledged not to fast-track implementation in a way that increases the burden on Government and indeed the private sector. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we cannot engage in productive debate if the Opposition does no more than showing up and speaking out without actually thinking and doing their research. Their responsibility as the Opposition to ask questions that have a basis and as I have said continuously, please read, please research and please think.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we have said continuously, there has been no alternative budget being presented. They have not even told us what they would have done in 2020 nor have they said what they could have done positively or contributed to Fiji's economy. In fact Mr. Speaker, Sir, they do not even seem to have a policy or strategy. The political opponents outside are saying, "When they deliver the budget then we will reveal our manifesto", honourable Tikoduadua said yesterday that "we will not cost our promises." He said, "We are not going to adhere to the law" in the same way they are not adhering to the advertisement law. That is what he said.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- The law is crooked, that is why.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- He said they are all stupid. When other countries are already adopting these laws Sir, they do not want to be honest with members of the public. They have this political culture of hoodwinking people. They feel ashamed to tell the Fijians their real plans and perhaps that is the reason none of the parties have released their manifesto except I think Unity Party. I think Unity is having a...

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Unlike you before the election - unlike you, you released it the day before elections.

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sir, you see he is getting really desperate.

(Laughter)

Very desperate. I love this.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I am telling you the truth but you are lying.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think they are having a dispute in Unity Political Party about who claimed what slogan at the moment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, while FijiFirst introduced hundreds of policies, we have not seen any specifics from the Opposition apart from criticism. Of course, honourable Professor Prasad as we know when he was asked for an alternative ran out of a radio interview in New Zealand. Sir, the honourable Lalabalavu questioned the increased transparency efforts brought about by changes in the Financial Management Act. Transparency is now mandatory for all parties including FijiFirst when campaigning. It is applicable to us too. Do you have a problem with that? We have to be just as revealing as you have to be revealing.

The Opposition and other political parties are busy fighting on petty issues such as one party had copied or stolen the mission or motto of the other party. Can they successfully run a government? Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Lalabalavu called Vanua Levu campaigning. Unfortunately for them, we were the first ones to actually turn up there to have those kind of consultations and mind you Mr. Speaker, Sir, we started budget consultations back in 2016, it is not something new that we pulled out of a hat and in fact, they lamented honourable Lalabalavu how many politicians from the past have never been to that area, nor have they had that level of consultations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, they did talk about certain capital projects not being implemented in the past two or three years. How can it be possible to deliver the implementation of those capital projects over other urgent and pressing priorities, of course, COVID-19 pandemic during these troubled times. If we have capital projects that could be put on hold and we used that funding to address, for example, increase the budget for health, increase the budget for unemployment benefit, of course, we will do that. If something is not failing and not critically needed now, we will of course put that on hold.

If there were certain electricity projects, we put it on hold because people needed money to be fed and we did that Sir, that is what we call prudent management. They talk about, “oh, these projects were not implemented.” Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Lalabalavu talked about the underutilisation of expenditure even in 2019-2020. We had COVID-19 in March 2020, Sir, and most projects stopped and most ministries other than the critical ministries stalled all operations which were not COVID-19 related; another bias just to suit their narrative.

The Viria Water Project as some people call it, commonly the Rewa Water Project is the largest ever infrastructure project in Fiji’s history, thus far at a cost of \$270 million. One project at \$270 million, Sir, because of over 360,000 Fijians who reside in the Lami to Nausori corridor and demand approximately 174 million litres of water a day. The production capacity at the moment, Sir, is only a 172 million litres of water, two million litres of water short.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, by the opening up of Viria, if you drive down the back road, past ACS, you will see there is so much work happening seven days a week. They have already laid nearly 19 kilometres of pipes out of the 27 kilometres they are supposed to lay. Already they have done work so fast. Of course because of COVID-19, a lot of the engineers could not come. It would be ready in May of next year, Sir, only a few months away.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it will resolve the water problem. It will end water woes in the Lami to Nausori corridor by an additional 14 million litres of water. At the moment we are short of two million. We will add 14 million litres of water. That amount exceeds the current demand by 38 million litres. What does that mean? Honourable Kepa would be happy to know. People living in Korovou or towards Korovou and other places in Nausori who currently do not have reticulated water systems, they can actually have tap water after that because we will have 38 million litres of more water a day. These things obviously cannot be done overnight.

In fact, if COVID-19 had not happened, this would have been implemented by now. They do not take that into consideration. They just simply want to say, “No, they are not dealing with it. Water woes are there.” They do not talk about the fact that infrastructure has been so old. There was no rebuild programme. We are doing that. As honourable Usamate said, it cannot be done overnight. Sir, \$270 million of which \$32 million we got from the Green Climate Fund as a grant. Honourable Prime Minister goes overseas, talked about climate change, we go and talk to all these institutions, as a result of that we got a \$32 million grant towards the \$270 million project. Unheard of, it is unprecedented actually, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Naulumatua talked about the housing sector, squatters, et cetera. We have projects. None of them mentioned the fact that in Fiji never before have we had what we call the “First Buyer Programme”. We give a grant, Sir. It is \$30,000 for those people who earn less than \$50,000 a year, you are building your first home. When we announced this last year, we had it previously, we had it at \$5,000, \$10,000, \$15,000 and last year we increased the sum. Sir, within three months, the fund finished. It meant that dozens of Fijians were building new homes. It meant dozens of Fijians were also buying new homes and then also those up to \$100,000 can get access to the fund.

We also announced in the Budget the social housing assistance, what used to be called the “one-third, two-thirds project”. It is now Social Housing Assistance where we give up to \$10,000. We will give the actual plan for free which is cyclone certified. We will contribute that. In that cost we have also built in for cartage because we know Lau, Lomaiviti and Yasawa need access. If someone wants to build a house in the village, it includes the cost of the cartage, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Good, thank you! I wish you had said that.

There were four members from SODELPA who came to the budget consultations; honourable Bulanauca, honourable Leawere, honourable Rasova and honourable Vosanibola. We have been calling them for the past number of years, they do not turn up. I think the first time they turned up, honourable Radrodoro and a couple of others had turned up. After that, no one turned up. I actually thought because honourable Leawere gave this wonderful appreciation speech at the end of it all, I thought there would be some common sense that will come out of their delivery but it did not. None of them! Honourable Bulanauca, I kind of expected that. None of them!

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Read the *Hansard*. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we appreciate some of the things that had been done but we suggested more areas to invest and expand into.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- He also threw in terrorism and all that in between, Sir.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Do not lie!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Professor Prasad had mentioned about how we gave housing numbers and all of that before the 2018 Budget.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have 42 sites for development leases. Most of these land, where we have what we call “squatters”, where we have, for example, we go and pay the development lease to iTLTB. So those squatters under *vakavanua* arrangement, where they may be paying the local landowner or just one individual \$30 or \$50 a month or sometimes when there is a *magiti*, they come and demand more money that has all stopped now. We now pay that development lease money directly to iTLTB, who then gives it to the landowners. So, those people living in those 42 areas, again they did not mention that, they no longer are paying any money. What we have said, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that, we will develop these as subdivisions.

Honourable Waqanika had a go at us regarding the new laws we had put in place. There are certain squatter areas, Sir, and as we all know, squatters do not build their homes in alignment with the road. In fact, there is no road in most of those places. Some people build houses right next to each other where they can actually hear each other snoring. There is not enough space between the houses.

If we are to do a proper subdivision, Sir, where we have got the development lease and we are paying the lease, if they want roads, streetlights, footpaths and a 99-year lease and some of them will be subsidised with low-income people, they need to align their homes with the subdivision plan. How can we build a road between two homes if you can hear the other person snoring? Where will the road go?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have had a number of these projects put on hold because most of them may be in agreement but there are five of them, “I am not going to move my home, come what may. I am not going to allow for the drainage.” We are paying for the lease, we have got the development lease. One has been held up for the past five years. Why? Because three or four people did not want to move their homes.

What we have said in this law, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that if she bothered to read it rather than try to score political points and going on about freedom, et cetera, we have said that if we have got a development lease and we are going to subdivide the land, you have to move your house to another area so we can build the road, put the drain, put the footpath, put the streetlights so buses can come and run there. You can drive your cars there too. There is absolutely nothing wrong with that. They are not being displaced, they are simply being told to move to another area. If they do not comply, they have to comply, we will move it for them. Otherwise, we will be languishing for the next 20 years to 30 years. It is a practical solution, yet they go on about this, pontificating as if there is something drastically wrong.

In the same way, honourable Waqanika said, “You are following Rabuka. He said to nationalise land”, and she used the Surfing Act. What a stupid load of nonsense! Does she know that Cloudbreak which is a surfing area near Tavarua was licensed by the Rabuka Government or post-

1987 by one of the governments? Tavarua Resort was given a 20-year licence over the surfing area. An individual foreign company was given a licence. Honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu may know about this.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, what did that mean? It meant that people from Nabila and other places could not even go there themselves. You could only go once a month on a Sunday or Saturday and other Fijians who wanted to surf could only go on that “once a month”. Tourists from other resorts could only go there once a month. Only if you stayed at Tavarua could you go and use Cloudbreak – exclusively.

Cloudbreak is one of the best surfing waves in the world. There are apparently only two places in the world like that. People come from far and wide. So at the behest of the Fijian Government and the Fijian people, you had one company that made zillions of dollars because the Government gave them a 20-year licence.

At the Nadroga/Navosa Provincial Council Meeting when I went with the honourable Prime Minister and other Ministers, one of the villagers (I forgot his name, I wrote his name somewhere) said to me, “Thank you very much for this Act because now I have a thriving business because when tourists come, I have an outboard engine, I take them and I charge them lots of money. I am making money from taking people to the surfing area.” He does not have to go and get a licence. No one from Tavarua or some other company stops him, and he is a member of that *qoliqoli* area. He is making money, he has got his business. What is wrong with that? And she here is saying that we have nationalised it. What stupidity! Again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, she was pontificating, she is going on this ethnic line. That is basically what it is.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point that I also wish to make is that the Budget does not in any way address the issue of NCDs, that we do not have a holistic Budget to address issues such as substance abuse, NCDs and other issues. Mr. Speaker, Sir, if you look at the Budget, I did not say it in my speech because they would have said I am giving a long speech, it could have been a four-hour speech then. But if they read the Budget Estimates, in the 2022-2023 Budget, Sir, the Ministry of Health has been allocated \$5.4 million in funding which is an increase of \$2.2 million that covers 29 Public Health Programmes such as:

- Communicable and Non-Communicable Disease Prevention and Control;
- HIV Aids Prevention Control Programmes
- Fiji Suicide Prevention Programme;
- Mental Health Awareness; and
- Polythene Bowls among other Programmes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Jale said, “We have deserted all our foreign relationships. The people are looking down on us”. Again, what a preposterous statement. Does he know what is happening? Maybe he just irked about the fact that he was not given an invitation. But the fact of the matter is, Sir, is that Fiji’s international presence has been far greater at this point in time than any other point in time.

Fiji, our honourable Prime Minister is looked upon by many other countries in the world, regional players who look upon his leadership to be able to quell regional issues and he provided that leadership. A lot of that has been done privately. A lot of that has been done behind doors but we achieved the outcome. For the first time in Fijian history, Fiji got invited to G20. They do not take all of these into account. They are caught in a timewarp.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua went on about Civil Service pay. Civil Service pay obviously did not get cut, Civil Service salary is about \$1.1 billion, maybe she is just trying to cover up for the fact that her leader said, “give them a 10 percent pay cut during COVID.” The fact is that we have also recognised and as highlighted by the honourable Minister for Health and others that those scarce skillset midwifery will get allowances, waiting allowances, allied health workers will also get paid overtime even though they are in a different Band. All of that will be adjusted. The teachers are getting that increased salary, Mr. Speaker, Sir, all of that is happening.

The honourable Bulanauca said, “Why is this increased budget for RFMF? Is Fiji going to be invaded?” Again such a superfluous comment. As the honourable Minister highlighted, he said in the Budget Address also that the reason why SEG 1 has increased is because of the fact the allowances that need to be pegged to the salary was caught in the 2013 allowance. So, we are just bringing that into alignment. Someone was questioning, I do not know whether it was honourable Qereqeretabua or honourable Waqanika the timing of it. They did not question the fact that MSAF has also been given an increment. We wanted to do this during COVID, Sir, but of course we could not do it in COVID, you do not understand. In 2020 and 2021 we could not do it, now when we have got the fiscal space, we are doing that. Same thing is done with MSAF. We announced it in the Budget. There are some key qualified people who are leaving because the salary structure at MSAF. We have increased that so we can retain them.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a couple of last points that I would also like to make. Honourable Tuisawau went on about Act No. 22 of 2021 which was commonly referred to as Bill 17. It is no longer a Bill, it is an Act of Parliament, no consultation and again before the enactment of Act No. 22 of 2021, in order to lease iTaukei land there were five things you had to comply with:

1. 60 percent of the members of the landowning unit whether it is a *mataqali* or *tokatoka*, 60 percent of them have to agree to lease the land;
2. Agree for what purpose they lease the land for;
3. Agree for how long they will lease it for;
4. Agree for what will be the premium paid, in other words you value the lease and then whether they agree with the premium;
5. Agree with the annual lease payments made.

Those five things Mr. Speaker, Sir, existed prior to Act 22 of 2021. Those five things after Act 22 of 2021 have not changed at all - still there. The consent of the landowners for those things were required before the law, after the law; not changed. Honourable Tikoduadua went on about it, all these other people because they thought this is political capital for us. We can now go and tell the iTaukei people that your rights have been taken away. It was not affected at all. They all jumped on the band wagon, still harping on about it hoping they might get them some votes.

The only thing that has changed Sir, is the administrative arrangement with iTLTB. The same thing Sir, applied to State land. When you acquired State land or lease to get electricity, water or mortgage, you have to get a consent of the Director for Lands all the time. Same thing with iTLTB; electricity, water, mortgage, iTLTB Management, not landowners, but management.

You have seen that so many people have given us feedback, so many landowners have given us feedback and this is great because now we are getting more people demanding for our land. We can ask a higher premium, it is as simple as that. What is wrong with the iTaukei landowners getting a higher rate of return on their land? What is wrong with that? I ask that question continuously, what is their objective? These are the same people, before 2014 they said you vote for this Constitution, you vote for Bainimarama, you live in reservations.

Honourable Bulitavu and honourable Nawaikula did videos on that, we know that. Then before 2018 they said, “Kadavu is being sold to China”, now before this Elections, they are going on about Bill 17; no traction. Since the 2013 Constitution, as they said Bainimarama becoming Prime Minister since Bill 17 or Act 22 of 2021; no rights have been affected of the iTaukei people - none whatsoever. All of those three things have come to no fruition as far as their advocacy was concerned, none whatsoever. No iTaukei people in Fiji today will say that their rights have been taken away or that someone is leasing their land without their consent – no one and that is a fact, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just lastly I wanted to make a point. They went on about the voter turnout. The point is that the voter turnout of course, we do not have what we call “compulsory voting” in Fiji and we agree with everyone that says that voter turnout was low in 2018 compared to 2014; yes it was low. We do not like it to be low. Of course, countries like USA, voter turnout is only in the 50 percent. Some other countries are much lower, we want it to be higher.

In 2014, it was about 86 or 87 percent, it is therefore the responsibility of every single political party to ensure that the voters turn up to vote. It is therefore also the responsibility of every single political party to not castigate the electoral system. On one hand, you castigate the electoral system, you castigate the institution that is running the elections and then you expect people to turn up to vote. You yourself are undermining the actual process.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Qereqeretabua and others when we say about how corruption is reduced in Fiji, this is Transparency International’s Report, it is citizen’s views and experiences of corruption. They highlight, “Oh, the electoral system is corrupt, we are interfering.” Sir, the reports by credible organisations say otherwise. It says:

“We asked citizens in all countries about their personal experience with corruption in accessing basic services such as health care and education to better understand what happens in people’s daily lives. We found that bribery and the use of personal connections are widespread in many parts of the region and across many key services. Which is the highest one:

- Solomon Islands - 21 percent;
- Vanuatu - 21 percent;
- New Caledonia - 31 percent (actually higher than those above);
- Tonga - 38 percent;
- Samoa - 17 percent; and
- Fiji - 5 percent.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, again looking beyond bribery, the misuse of personal connections, NFP is always going on about personal connections. Bribery is not the only form of corruption that people can experience when interacting with public services, relying on personal connections is a form of favouritism that can introduce systemic biases in how public services operate and which groups are able to use them:

- New Caledonia - 52 percent;
- Vanuatu - 40 percent;
- Solomon Islands - 36 percent;
- Tonga - 55 percent;
- Samoa - 27 percent; and
- Fiji - 17 percent.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is not published by the Fijian Government, this is actually published by Transparency International which is actually a leading organisation in the world that assesses. Then we have studies here, sextortion rates (you know what that means), honourable Professor Prasad:

- French Polynesia - 92 percent;
- New Caledonia - 76 percent;
- Papua New Guinea - 51 percent;
- FSM - 46 percent;
- Solomon Islands - 33 percent;
- Kiribati - 31 percent;
- Vanuatu - 22 percent;
- Fiji - 11 percent;
- Samoa (less than us by one) - 10 percent;
- Tonga - 5 percent; and
- Pacific average - 38 percent.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have to highlight this because I remember when presenting the Budget when I talked about how corruption is reduced in Fiji, honourable Qereqeretabua made a very sniding laugh about it. Sir, here we have vote buying rates by country:

- FSM - 58 percent;
- Papua New Guinea - 57 percent;
- Kiribati - 45 percent;
- Solomon Islands - 25 percent;
- Vanuatu - 25 percent;
- French Polynesia - 23 percent;
- Samoa - 11 percent;
- New Caledonia - 6 percent;
- Fiji - 4 percent;
- Tonga - 3 percent; and
- Pacific average - 26 percent.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is on the flip side. It says: “Taking action. Ordinary people can make a difference in the fight against corruption.” That is how they feel. Solomon Islands - 84 percent: believe that they can make a difference, Fijians - 83 percent feel that they can make a difference, and the others, of course, are lower than us. Sir, that is the summary of all the ones that I wanted to say, the others are quite long.

The last one that I also wanted to make, honourable Kuridrani and various others talked about this. They talked about other countries’ debt to GDP ratio and if I can read this out:

Debt to GDP ratio in 2018		
Country	Before the pandemic (%)	After the pandemic (%)
New Zealand	28	52 (almost doubled)
Australia	42	62
<i>Tourism-driven Countries</i>		
Maldives	72	137
Mauritius	66	101
Bahamas	62	103

Saint Lucia	60	96
Fiji	46	80

That is now put into context, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The last point I want to make also and I have got that nominal value of the debt. The other day, I think honourable Lalabalavu or one of them compared us but when you actually measure debt internationally, you measure it in US dollars; that is what everyone does.

Tourism-dependent countries; nominal debt value if you came to the presentation which honourable Rasova, honourable Vosanibola, honourable Leawere and honourable Bulanauca came to, Bahamas' debt level is US\$11.4 billion, Mauritius - US\$11.2 billion, Barbados - US\$6.6 billion, Maldives - US\$6.3 billion, Fiji - US\$3.7 billion and then we have, of course, Saint Lucia - US\$1.7 billion and Seychelles - US\$1.1 billion.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if you look at the larger countries, and this is US dollars again but trillions of dollars, not billion, trillions. Sir, US is the most debt-ridden country in the world, \$30.5 trillion is their nominal debt value; Japan - \$13 trillion, People's Republic of China US\$12.8 trillion; UK\$3 trillion; India \$2.8 trillion and Australia \$976.7 billion. Sir, I just wanted to put that into context and highlight that to you.

I would like to thank you very much for your indulgence. I would like to thank all the honourable Members for their contributions and more importantly, to all those Fijians, like I said in the beginning, who contributed to this consultations. We have spoken to hundreds, if not thousands of people regarding this Budget.

This Budget, as we have said, is about addressing some immediate issues like inflation and it is also about putting in place various processes for long-term planning. We have invested, for example, into the ICT infrastructure, the honourable Professor Prasad made a mockery of our BPO sector saying, "We gave them all these incentives, nothing has happened, very slow", it is happening. You do not just because you offer an incentive this year, suddenly people will start coming in. You need to look at other incentives. You need to be able to make sure that the communication sector is liberalised, you need to make sure the cost-structure is good, you need to make sure that, for example, as we have said in this Budget, we are putting a landing station in the Western Division. We need to build redundancy.

We are currently talking to a submarine cable company to put another submarine cable to land in the Western Division, just in case God forbid, something happens to the Southern Cross Cable. All of these things are being done, but the BPO sector grew 3,000 jobs during the pandemic. They did not acknowledge that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we have said, the Budget is about the future, it is about the immediate needs, it is also putting in place the various strategic policies that we have in regards to that and we look forward to ensuring that we provide the stability and the level of consistency. Some people talk about that it is time for change, the issue is - change to what?

If anything, the contribution by the Members of the Opposition inside Parliament and those outside is anything to go by, then it will be really stupid to make a change because this is the only side, this is the only Government and this is the only political party that can provide decisive leadership and that can provide strategic leadership. It has the visions and in fact, we are, no matter how much honourable Gavoka will laugh, and no matter how much of a mockery honourable Professor Prasad wants to make, the fact is that FijiFirst Government provides stability, confidence

and it gives justice to all Fijians and makes sure there is equality both, not just in the distribution of the economic well-being of our country but also in respect of the rights of all Fijians.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, pursuant to Standing Order 99(3), the 2022-2023 Appropriation Bill, 2022 (Bill No. 27 of 2022) has been read a second time and without any questions being put, the Bill and the Estimates now stand referred to the Committee of Supply.

Honourable Members, on that note, we will now take a break and we will have a combined tea and lunch break, and I will be very generous with the time. I will give you one-and-a-half hours for that combined break and we will resume after that. We have got a lot of work to do after that, so we adjourn for tea and lunch.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.19 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.15 p.m.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE SPEAKER

Committee of Supply - Budget Estimates

Honourable Members, Parliament will now resolve into Committee of Supply to consider each Head in the Budget Estimates. It is envisaged that this process will be completed on Thursday evening, after which the Committee of Supply will then vote on the Schedules and Clauses of the 2022-2023 Appropriation Bill 2022.

For the information of honourable Members, we will attempt to complete debate and votes on Heads 1 to 22 before we adjourn tonight. As you are already aware by now for the Committee stage, I will sit at the Table with the Secretary-General and Members will refer to me as “Mr. Chairman”. The mace will also be placed on the lower bracket, signifying that Parliament is in Committee.

Honourable Members, the Secretary-General will then announce each Head separately. Members may then speak on that Head and you may speak more than once on each Head. Please take note that in some of the Heads, there will be several programmes and activities listed. I remind Honourable Members that we will deal with these progressively and we will not regress to the programmes and activities that have been earlier discussed.

Honourable Members, as you may all be aware, you may also move amendments to the Estimates under the respective Heads. If a Member moves an amendment, I will call for a seconder and then debate will ensue. At the end of the debate, the mover will have the right of reply and this will be followed by the vote on the amendment. This will be the process for all amendments that will follow. Amendments are limited to those permitted under Standing Order 100(2) being an increase, decrease or removal of the item or subhead from the Head being debated. When there are no further amendments and debates, we will then proceed to vote on the Head.

Honourable Members, please take note that the amendment slips and copies of Standing Orders 100 have been placed on your tables to assist you during the Committee of Supply stage. E-copies have been emailed to all honourable Members connecting virtually. There are Heads 1 to 50 which we need to get through today and tomorrow, therefore, I seek your full cooperation during this crucial process. I think that is clear. Everyone has been through this before. We will be going through this again in our own time.

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON THE 2022-2023 APPROPRIATION BILL 2022

In Committee:

Head 1 – Office of the President

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The floor is now open for any comments.

Question put.

Head 1 agreed to.

Head 2 – Office of the Prime Minister

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, there is an amendment by the honourable Bulanauca.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, I move:

That Programme 1-1-6 - Fiji Mahogany be increased by \$500,000.

HON. RATU T. NAVURELEVU.- Mr. Chairman, I second the motion.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- May I just comment, Mr. Chairman, the \$250,000 there is for Fiji Mahogany Trust is purely for the administration of the Trust. The additional \$500,000 is to be managed by the Trust as well to help the commercial activities for value adding in the Mahogany Industry, particularly to increase value adding products for export.

At the moment, there are over 50 percent of sawn timber export at the moment, so we need to increase the production of mahogany sawn timber for export. If this can be increased by \$500,000 to assist existing businesses that are already there to increase their capacity to mill, process and export

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Chairman, I just want to support the motion to increase the allocation on SEG 6 on Fiji Mahogany Trust (FMT). The reason for that is, I just want to remind the Parliament on my intervention earlier yesterday with regards to some issues being raised by landowners on whose land Fiji Hardwood Corporation mahogany plantations are located and when they have these issues, FMT, I believe is not resourced enough to respond effectively to the wide and varying issues that arise out of the interest of the landowners and the plantations are wide and buried and big and FMT needs to have a very close association with landowners to protect their interest.

Just one example, as I had noted earlier Mr. Chairman, was these logs that were left to rot in Tailevu belonging to *Mataqali* Ravouvou in the *Vanua o Bure*. Just because of a dispute between the dairy farmer and Fiji Hardwood Corporation, in that, it turn the landowners have lost revenue from rotten timbers that has not been stamped.

If you are driving to Rakiraki, you will see these piles of mahogany on the side of the road, so I would just like to support this motion by the honourable Bulanauca to increase this allocation for the interest of the landowners whose interest is protected by Fiji Mahogany Trust.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- In support of the motion by honourable Bulanauca, I think that the motion is a very good one in terms of expansion of the work of the Fiji Mahogany Trust to not only look after the affairs of the landowners but also to assist in getting them to participate in the commercial activities generated from the mahogany.

We note that Government has given licences through their arms for those who can log the mahogany and also those who can export, et cetera. So it is unfortunate that not a lot of landowning units on whose lands that the mahogany have been planted on, are actually not part of these commercial activities. I stand to support the need to increase the allocation for Fiji Mahogany Trust so that we can see some benefit being given to landowning units in terms of commercial activities and other businesses that have been generated from the mahogany trees, currently.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sir, the motion being moved by honourable Bulanauca to amend is different from what honourable Tikoduadua is saying. Honourable Bulanauca is talking about value adding, honourable Tikoduadua is saying that the money be used to resolve disputes, and honourable Aseri Radrodro is saying that we need to get this money to be able to get more landowner participation. But you have to look at actual trust or the constitution itself to see what it is there for? Honourable Bulanauca knows that the trust actually sits with the Mahogany Industry Council and they participate in that.

The funding here is not to meet the expense of value adding but it is more to do with the coordination between the landowners. I can tell you where that money goes to - the trustee fees, travel expenses, other allowances and logistics, meal allowances, registration of Trust Board Training, site visits and components and meetings with the beneficiaries - that is where the money goes to. In respect of the actual value adding and the access to the mahogany itself, of course landowner groups have actually applied for the licences. Honourable Bulanauca, was involved in one of those companies and I understand that company is no longer operational and he knows that.

Honourable Aseri Radrodro, you should know that this does not set up landowner companies. They have the ability to apply themselves and as you know (honourable Bulanauca also knows this) that the Trust was in doldrums for a number of years because of the mismanagement of funds that was given to the Trust Fund - its objectives were not being achieved. In respect of honourable Tikoduadua's claim about the dispute and timber rotting, - it is obviously a civil matter. It is not the FMT's mandate to go and resolve that issue - it is a civil matter that needs to be resolved. If the Fiji Hardwood Corporation is not cooperating, et cetera, they could have been brought to our attention. I do not know if it was brought to our attention or not but now you have raised it with us, we will talk to them about it. But it is not FMTs mandate nor is it within the FMTs purview to go and resolve a civil matter, if you are talking about accessibility to land.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, given the fact that the Mahogany Trust is more about a liaison group in respect of how they interact and do the consultations, this amendment to give it more money would, in fact be misplaced, so we recommend that we stick with the \$250,000.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Mr. Chairman, the explanation done by the honourable Minister for Economy is understandable, it is for the trustees and I understand that. The landowners have fair access. If that can be extended to help the landowners and also the existing businesses of other races that are already there, to pop up the value adding part of it as has been emphasised, for export particularly decking and so on, on value adding. It is very important to be assisted somewhere whether through the trust or somewhere along there to help the existing ones and landowners coming into it..

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sir, as honourable Bulanauca correctly pointed out, that the trust is for that purpose which he has just stated. In respect of doing value adding in terms of other forms of assistance that could be done through other avenues, whether it is through forestry, whether it is through Fiji Hardwood Corporation, as opposed to doing it within the constitutional framework of an organisation that does not have it within its remit of the Constitution to be able to do anything other than what it is being set up for.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members the amendment has been moved and we will vote on the amendment that has been moved by the honourable Bulanauca.

Question on amendment put.

Motion lost.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, on Head 2-1-2-10 Small Grants Project, I see that in terms of the estimate in 2021, it is less in this year's budget of 2022-2023. Can we have some clarifications on that SEG, please?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- My apologies, I did not hear the question.

HON. M.R. LEAWARE.- It is on SEG 10 - Small Grant Projects, just \$2 million more allocated in the last budget, but now it has been reduced. Any clarifications on that?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I thought you would be happy about that. It has been reduced by \$1 million because the current scope of works has been carried out through the PM's Small Grant Project, the capacity for it to be able to deliver that. There is no point allocating funding another million dollars just for the sake of it just because we allocated it the last time, so we cut it back to \$1 million.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Chairman, Programme 1-2-6, I seek some clarification regarding the allocation of the small grants to Rabi Island Council and Kioa Island Council. The reason why I am seeking the clarification is that, most of the people who make up the membership of these Island Council or the particular ethnic group, some of them only have Fiji passports and the rest are still very much governed from their own sovereign countries, Kiribati and Tuvalu. Does the allocation of grants cater only for the people who hold Fiji citizenship or also for those with direct links to the Island Councils under the various sovereign countries? That is the point of clarification I am seeking.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Chairman, essentially it is for the activities of the Rabi Island Council. On the allocation of the annual grant of \$155,000 - 70 percent of the funds are diverted for development and 30 percent is to meet the operational cost. A sum of \$307,470 has been released to date to meet the operational expenses as rent, utilities, wages, salaries, and stationery expenses. Development grants cover additional expenses which provides value to the community for example, plant equipment, fibre glass boats, building materials, et cetera.

The Rabi Island Council also has investments as it is providing office space to companies - the Banaban Building which they have here and their financial statement is prepared annually. So essentially, it is for those people who are on the island itself, who are living there as a community. This, as you know honourable Member, is something that we inherited from the British. These people were moved here because they mined their island and took the phosphate from the island and they had nowhere to live. So, of course in those days because of the British Colony they brought them over to Rabi and Kioa so that is what has happened.

The same thing with the Kioa Island Council – an annual grant of \$70,000 is provided where 100 percent of funding is diverted toward development. The sum of \$59,137 has been utilised to undertake the upgrade of their water supply system project and for the project to commence the Kioa Island Council is waiting on the agreement to be signed with WAF. In regards to income generating projects, the Island Council is undertaking a procurement of Yamaha outboard engines from Asco Motors and the LPO has already been issued to Asco Motors. There is no other source of funding for them.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Chairman, I seek further clarification on that Sir. The issue that is clouding my view here is that Rabi Island Council and Kioa Island Council, most of them up until this point in time do not hold any citizenship in Fiji. They belong to their sovereign country so they are governed by their sovereign country, and yet this grant is coming out of our national budget. If it is for the people that hold Fiji's citizenship that is alright with me but for the rest. I am grateful for all this time that they have been sitting there because the Qarase Government did something on that, we should issue passports to them (citizenship). Thank you.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- That is being done.

HON. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, if I may help clarify the issue about the citizenship, in fact, that is true. I remembered when I was acting in the Prime Minister's portfolio this was something that was been sorted out between Immigration and the two councils. There are some exchanges now so that we can regularise and of course issue passports accordingly. This is not only for Rabi and Kioa, there are even immigration issues involving the whole Pacific Island countries - some Tongans who came as students are still here, so work is currently being undertaken between the Department of Immigration and the councils to sort out some of these issues.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- It does help also Sir that we now have the opportunity to have more than one citizenship.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, I move without notice:

That Head 2-1-2-10 be decreased by \$990,000 in respect of Small Grants Projects \$1 million.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- I second the motion.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Thank you Mr. Chairman, it is no secret that this SEG10 will be utilised as a slush fund by the Prime Minister's Office for his private projects all over the country for vote buying and that is probably why we have been seeing some Prime Minister's Office staff hanging around the front of the Chamber all this week. I reckon this allocation should be slashed by \$990,000 and let him make do with the \$10,000, until the honourable Prime Minister can update this Parliament with his latest Annual Report. The last one was for 2018-2019 - this Parliament and the budget process is not a private ATM for this government.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sir, does that even require a response. This kind of sarcasm – really, how do we respond to that? But Sir, there is obviously a lot of projects under the Small Grants Projects with the Prime Minister's Office as I mentioned earlier on. Honourable Leawere asked why was it \$2 million and now it is \$1 million and I said that he would be happy about it. Honourable Qereqeretabua thinks it should be only \$10,000, slush fund and all that nonsense.

Mr. Chairman, if I can just sort of give an example. What are these funds used for? In 2021-2022:

- Construction of school chain-link fence and gate of Ratu Iliesa Memorial School;
- Nabukaluka Evacuation Centre; and
- Construction of walkway with roof at Vunibokoi District School.
- Completion of 1x2 classroom in Navakasiga Primary School and Naceva District School.

Those are schools in the rural areas that need assistance.

Honourable Qereqeretabua does not even have the decency of listening to the explanation that we are giving, where she is requiring \$990,000 be cut, she is not even listening. This is the Committee of Supply. You are supposed to be listening to issues that you raise, honourable Qereqeretabua. These are schools.

Moce Secondary School. Purchase of beds and mattresses for Kubulau District School. Those people who do go to deep-rural areas do know that some of the schools where kids are travelling for primary school boarding school. Some of the schools that have been set up by these communities, they do not have funds. We give FEGs. But they do not have the material to build these things. Some of the schools do not even floors and this is what it does - basic assistance.

Setting up of water pump – Nageledamu Village. Completion of evacuation centre – Vunivutu Village, Maui Village Women's Group.

Mr. Chairman, 2022-2023: Taunovo Village – solar works. Tokou Village – completion of dispensary. St John Bosco Primary School – completion of multipurpose shed. Nateca Village – repair of one wooden boat. You call it a slush fund? Vusama Village – setting of water pump. These people did not have a pump, they are getting a water pump. I want them to know that honourable Qereqeretabua and NFP think it is a slush fund to give people water. Vuniwai Village – solar system for 46 houses. Sawaieke District School - solar system. Rukurukulevu Village - seawall steps and Bucalevu Secondary School – school driveway to be cemented.

Mr. Chairman, some of these areas, some of the ministries of course they have their mandate to be able to do some of these things. Sometimes these are small ones that actually get left behind. Some of these things come up as a matter of emergency. People do turn up and do ask the PM's Office for assistance and if we see that there is obviously a particular restrain on it, we have cut it back by \$1 million. One would think, "may be election year, we will ramp it up." If it was a slush fund, honourable Qereqeretabua, we will ramp it up to \$3 million to \$4 million. But we actually cut back on it because we cutting our deficit back. We have got these projects, some of them have not been completed. We are trying to complete these then we move on to the next one. It is a huge insult when they make those kind of comments.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Chairman, I am kind of surprised at the honourable Attorney-General's response on two counts. One, of course, he admits that these are projects that those ministries need to undertake and if he is talking about rural schools, this is what we have been saying. What is the Ministry of Education doing? What is the Ministry of Rural Development doing? These are activities that need to be identified in the mainstream budgets.

I agree with honourable Qereqeretabua when she used the words "slush fund" because this is a government, Mr. Chairman, which is known, if you look at 2018 and what they did, the amount of money through all kinds of initiatives and they are still doing it. Even the last Election Observers Report actually pointed, you know the use of government funds during an election year or during the campaign it was very clear. She is making a valid point and to say that NFP does not want people to get these things, we understand the Prime Minister gets the request, different ministers get requests from everywhere but to make it like as if NFP is opposed to helping people

(Laughter)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- He is laughing now because that is what he was trying to do.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You have been caught out.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- That is what he was trying to do. He is laughing now because that is what he was trying to do.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Don't personalise things.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- So the point is, Mr. Chairman, this is a Government and that is why we are raising this. She is absolutely right that this is not the time to allocate funds like this. If the respective Ministers, ministries that is their responsibility, they should do that. Let us cut out this crap that we are opposed to people getting assistance.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Member, I give the floor to honourable Qereqeretabua for her Right of Reply. We have had enough debate on this item.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Two points, I do agree with the honourable Professor Prasad that this should be the line Ministries responsibility, chain-link fences, flooring, et cetera.

In my Right of Reply, I think if the Government had any sense they would have diverted this \$990,000 to the agriculture allocation especially to strengthen our food security because of global supply chain disruptions. We have heard about that all this week and then only then can the honourable Prime Minister go and wear a *salusalu* with the honourable Minister for Agriculture for the disbursement of meaningful farming implements and market pathways that are beneficial to farmers.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Member, just stick to this activity. Forget about agriculture. Honourable Members, we will now vote on this amendment.

Question on amendment put.

Motion lost.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Programme 2-1?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Clarification on Programme 2-1-1, even in Programme 1-1 as well. There seems to be an increase in the allocation that has been given from the previous year's allocation. Can we just get a clarification on the reasons for the increase in established staff?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Programme 3-1, Sir, this is the increase as a result of the transfer of the funds from SEG 7 which is the IBMS Project Monitoring Staff to fund the System Analysis position. So, essentially there were 12 vacant positions that will be filled in the coming months because when they want to be filled before we did not fund it, but now they will be filled.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Just another clarification. I note that this is my second term in Parliament. Those that were in the first term in Parliament, they are eligible for pension. I do not see pension for MPs somewhere. Where are they allocated?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- It is in Head 50.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Managed from the Cabinet Office?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Yes, it is in Head 50.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Programme 3-1?

HON. PROF B.C. PRASAD.- Just a clarification – Programme 3-1-9 - Disaster Recovery for ePassport Project. I note that there are other allocations about vaccine passports. So, how is this linked with the ePassport, the allocations here and allocations in your Ministry?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Passports are separate to the vaccine passports.

HON. PROF B.C. PRASAD.- It is not related to vaccine passport?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- No, this is a normal passport.

HON. PROF B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you .

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Clarification on Programme 3-1-9 – ePassport Enrolment Kits for Immigration Offices and Overseas Missions. Can we just get an indication of which overseas missions will this ePassport Kits be used?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Currently, the following High Commission Consulates have the ePassport kits:

- High Commission in Wellington;
- Fiji Consulate General & Trade Commission in Sydney;
- High Commission in Canberra;
- Consular Office in Washington;
- Consular Office in Geneva;
- Consular Office in Abu Dhabi;
- Consular Office in London; and
- Consular Office in Tokyo.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, we will now vote on Head 2.

Question put.

Head 2 agreed to.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, we will move onto Head 6 – Ministry of Defence, National Security and Policing. The honourable Attorney-General whose portfolios we were going to take has been called out for a diplomatic appointment. In the meantime we will move on.

Head 6 – Ministry of Defence, National Security and Policing

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Programme 1-1?

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Chairman, I would just like some clarification from the Minister on why under SEG 7 the allocation for Remembrance Day Celebration (\$120,000) is actually less than the national event for Fiji Day Celebrations.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- With the Remembrance Day Celebration, there is only one major activity in Suva which is the national and then the Ex-Servicemen Association in the divisions, they just have their own as compared to the national celebrations, it is usually celebrated. We have the national and we have the main geographical centres as well. One major celebration in the East which is usually held in Levuka and the one in the West is usually held either between Nadi or Lautoka and, of course, for the Northern Division in Labasa. So the magnitude of the events dictates the allocation accordingly, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Chairman, I move without notice:

That Head 6-1-1-7 in respect of Human Trafficking be increased to \$1 million.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- I beg to second the motion.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Chairman, I think it is a little bit tokenistic that this Government is allocating a measly sum of \$10,000 to tackle human trafficking when we can already

see the signs of its prevalence around the country and we have all seen global reports about human trafficking. I do not think that we need to remind the Minister that human trafficking is happening here amongst our people. Is a scourge on our nation that must be ripped out because of its linkages to things like prostitution, drug trafficking, pornography and who knows. Maybe even in the trade of human organs if live bodies are transported closer to where the buyer is, this is why I am moving that this allocation be increased, Mr. Chairman.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, I wish to respond to that. Of course we are concerned about human trafficking but the Ministry is not doing the work. The Ministry is responsible for the policies and the strategies behind this. The work is done by the border agencies particularly. The critical work in terms of human trafficking and everybody knows about the US Report. We are sorting it out, there is a Committee, I have already raised that in Parliament and that is why that allocation, Mr. Chairman. The Ministry of Defence does not go out and do this work, if that can be made clear to all honourable Members of this Chamber, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Attorney-General, we are on Head No. 6 at the moment. We have skipped whilst you were away but we will go back immediately after this. Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote on the amendment.

Question on amendment put.

Motion lost.

Head 3 - Office of the Attorney- General

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Chairman, may I ask for clarification on Programme 1-1-1, Personal Emoluments with an allocation of over \$3 million, please? How many lawyers are in the Solicitor-General's Office?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Chairman, if the honourable Member would see that it is an increase of \$64,000 and not \$3.3 million. In the last budget it was \$3.2 million, it is gone up by \$64,000. It funds the salaries of 80 established positions of which 71 are filled and nine vacant, which are under recruitment process. That of course, includes lawyers and other staff too.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- The reason I asked this is because it seems that a lot of legal cases or perhaps all legal cases involving the Government seemed to be handled primarily by R. Patel Lawyers, specifically, Mr. Devanesh Sharma and Ms. Gul Fatima and interestingly, I just note that this firm also represents the Government's FijiFirst Party so I would like to understand which allocation this Ministry is paying for legal representation by R. Patel as surely there must be enough experienced lawyers in the Office the Solicitor-General, who taxpayers pay for before I consider to move a motion or not.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, we will now vote on Head 3.

Question put.

Head 3 agreed to.

Head 4 - Ministry of Economy

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Chairman, I just need clarification on Programme 1-1-6, we note that the Operating Grant to FRCS has increased from \$27 million to \$32 million, now it has

gone up to \$40 million in this year's allocation. Can we get a clarification on this before we can move a motion to the increase or decrease this allocation of \$40 million?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- The Annual Operating Grant is provided to FRCS in meeting the operational expenses, include employee cost, training, travel accommodation, communication, postage, IT cost, utilities, motor vehicle expenses, property expenses, other operating expenses and VAT.

In 2022-2023, FRCS is looking forward to successfully rolling out its strategic plan and achievement of expatriate outcomes, including the delivery of excellence in revenue collection, border protection, trade and travel facilitation to help Fiji grow and protection from external border hazards too, because they look after customs. Of course, it includes capital works too.

Major forecasted capital works include the completion of NTIS project, upgrade of office facilities in Suva and Lautoka Wharf, because we see there has been leakage points, renovation for Lautoka Office, upgrade of the accounting system, technical training for staff and renewable of Joint Card for taxpayers expiring in 2022-2023. If you have the Joint taxpayer card that is expiring, we need to issue you new cards in respect of that. So there is a number of IT projects too including the physical upgrade of those facilities at Suva and Lautoka wharf and also for the renovation of the Lautoka Office.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Chairman, I move without notice:

That Head 4-1-3-7 be decreased by \$2.5 million in respect of implementation of new budget system which was allocated \$2.5 million.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- I second the motion.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Chairman, I moved this motion because we have heard absolutely nothing about this proposed new budget system. It is clear that the Minister knows he has a problem but \$2.5 million is not going to fix it and perhaps if this Ministry respects the taxpayers enough with an Annual Report we could see where this was going but it is just hypocrisy in the highest order that the Minister comes here to ask for \$3.8 billion but could not be bothered showing taxpayers how it uses their taxes through Annual Reports and this is just basic, Mr. Chairman.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sir, honourable Qereqeretabua is just another different plane altogether. The current process of budget preparation (budget books), required working on Microsoft Excel and Word which requires a lot of effort and time whereby the Budget documents are printed and manually checked for any errors. Therefore, a new software is required to be implemented to ease the formulation of the budget. These things they do not come about when you flick your finger.

To make a transit from the manual system, \$2.5 million has been allocated for the implementation of the new budget system which involves a procurement of the new budget software and it is related services from Questica Software Limited in USA. The cost breakdown as follows; Payment to Questica - \$2.3 million, PC upgrade for budget and planning - \$80,000, minor renovation works - \$20,000, training - \$20,000 and contingency fund - \$50,000. ITC has approved that the hosting services will be on cloud-based and within the approved cost. A contract agreement has already been signed between Questica and Ministry of Economy.

So what honourable Qereqeretabua is saying is, let us be caught up in the last century and let us do all of this manually. So all those staff whose names I read out, they need to work and enslave

themselves and not get into modern technology because when you prepare them sometimes when you make changes it moves because it is on MS Excel.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Chairman, it is 2022 and if the honourable Minister for Economy is saying that we cannot be stuck in the last century, then whatever we have been using these last few years?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- MS Excel, that is what we have been using. That is what I just said to you.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members we will vote on this amendment that Head 4 be increased by \$2.5 million in Programme 1-3-7 – Implementation of new Budget System.

Question on amendment put.

Motion lost.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, we will now vote on Head 4 – Ministry of Economy.

Question put.

Head 4 agreed to.

Head 5 – Ministry of iTaukei Affairs

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Programme 1, Activity?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Chairman, SEG 6 – *Turaga ni Koro* allowance. How much do they get, Mr. Chairman and how many *turaga ni koro* do we have across Fiji?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Chairman, *Turaga ni Koro* allowance – *Turaga ni Koro* of course, are appointed under the iTaukei Affairs, *tikina* and village council regulations. The *Turaga ni Koro* allowance consists of three components. Monthly allowance of \$100. We have 1,218 *Turaga ni Koro*. TMO – telegram money order charges of \$16,400 and training expenses of \$16,000. So, it is 1,218 *Turaga ni Koro*.

The additional funds provided, Sir, for the allowance of 45 new *Turaga ni Koro*, who will be appointed in the new financial year which is about \$54,000. Training expenses - \$3,600 and TMO – as you know some of them need the TMO, charges of \$6,400. So, 1,218 plus the new 45 *Turaga ni Koro*.

The *Mata ni Tikina*, Sir, funding for the quarterly allowance of 262 *Mata ni Tikina* in 14 provinces. The allowances actually vary from \$320 to \$560 per quarter due to factors such as geographical areas and other contingency cost.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Chairman, I would like to move a motion on that one.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Well, you better start writing because I have three other motions here. Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua, you have the floor.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Chairman, in respect of Head 5-1-1-5, it mentions Tabua Shop Expenses - \$40,000. Could I ask for a clarification from the Minister on the \$40,000 allocation for

this Tabua Shop? How many *tabua* have been bought and sold? When will Parliament see a breakdown of this operation and whether it is profitable or not because again, we do not have an annual report to draw from?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sir, to support the Tabua Shop's mission to protect and promote the *iTaukei* cultural heritage, particularly in the trade of *tabua* while promoting sustainable development in terms of monitoring and regulating the circulation of *tabua* in accordance with its prominence within the *iTaukei* culture. The budgetary provision is for:

1. Conducting awareness in the various *iTaukei* communities and to all *tabua* users on the various components of *tabua* policy; and
2. Buyback scheme, include buying of *tabua* from pawn shop owners and the general public to replenish the *tabua* shop.

The Ministry has confiscated 130 *tabua*. The Ministry is currently consulting and negotiating with iTaukei Trust Fund on the operation and management of the *Tabua* shop.

Head 5-1-1-6:

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, I am proposing:

That we increase the Turaga ni Koro Allowance twice to \$2,988,000 in Head 5-1-1-6.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- I second the motion.

HON. A.SAYED-KHAIYUM- Honourable Gavoka is moving that too, isn't it?

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- This issue has been raised various times at the Provincial Councils and also by the *Turaga ni Koro* themselves, in terms of the increased role they are playing. In the past, they played a more passive role but now they are very active and a lot more responsibilities is placed on them from the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs and the Provincial Councils, in terms of not only monitoring and also general management in villages but also reporting.

The reporting requirement has increased and this has placed a lot more on them. In fact, it seems to have become more full time role now. Probably in the future, it needs to be assessed and formalised in order to adequately recognise this position of *Turaga-Ni-Koro*.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Anyone else wishes to speak on this motion.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- I withdraw my motion but I would like to speak on this one, Mr. Chairman, if I may. I totally agree with the motion to increase the allowance for the *Turaga-Ni-Koro*, I asked for more.

These, Mr. Chairman, are really people who are up on 24/7 basis looking after the affairs of the villages. Their work is quite challenging and if properly resourced and remunerated, they can uplift the standard in villages and in many areas; the supervision of the fishing, any business activities like farming. We are not fully utilising them, Mr. Chairman. I believe, if they are trained properly and properly paid, they can be more effective at various level.

What I hear from Government now there is about 1,263 villages across the country. These are people who are economic units. I lived in my village for most part of my life and I see a lot of programmes from the agencies carrying out training programmes, awareness programmes and the like in villages but

as soon as they depart, things fall apart. There is no follow through. Sir, NGOs do a lot of work in the villages. There is no follow through and life goes back to normal and the quality of life in the village continues to deteriorate in many ways.

So, our Party will be looking and upgrading the governance in the village and to strengthen the position of Turaga-ni-Koro, hence their request that be appropriately remunerated and given all the support to be virtually like CEOs in a unit. In many ways, it can help the economy of the villagers, in addition to the social and responsibilities that they look after today. That, Mr. Chairman, are the views of the Party that we look after the Turaga ni Koro as they are in charge of the huge segments of our population.

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Mr. Chairman, just in support of the motion in Parliament, right now, most of the civil servants that are coming to the villages do not bring their *sevusevu*. They said that they do not have allocations for these traditional customary duty and it is the Turaga ni Koro that runs around in the village collecting money for the *sevusevu* of these civil servants to look good in coming to the village or in the communities.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- It is not true.

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Hey, I stay in the village, Sir.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- That is not true, when we went to your village we brought our own *sevusevu*.

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Yes, I said most of the civil servants that are coming now.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Chairman, if I could just help clarify or honourable Rasova wants to go before me, Sir, Kadavu before Nadroga.

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- I thank you, honourable Minister. In regards to the *Turaga ni Koro*, I think there is a rule but then I support the motion by honourable Ro Filipe Tuisawau in regards to the doubling of their allowances. Their allowances is about \$400 every quarter, but given that in our village, we do not have a *Vale ni Vanua*, it has all been damaged by the hurricane, so the *Turaga ni Koro* does almost everything. He feeds them, house them and these are almost all the Ministries; the Health, Fisheries, Agriculture, Police, and I support the increase of the *Turaga ni Koro* allowance all over Fiji.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Chairman, I was going to make a comment, if you do not mind, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- You have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Chairman, just for the honourable Member's information, the *Turaga ni Koro* were paid \$75 prior to 2016 and we increased it to \$100 a month. We do have budgets for *sevusevu*, honourable Kuridrani. We increased the allowance for the *Turaga ni Koro* from \$75 to \$100, District Advisory Councillors never used to get paid, they are also paid now as they also provide service together with *Turaga ni Koro*. We try and get them all to work together too, so the increment was made in 2016.

Of course, Mr. Chairman, in time to come, when we get a lot more fiscal flexibility, we will be able to increase those allowances for all those such people in the same way that we increase the allowances from \$50 a month to \$200 a month for the community nurses and they actually play a very pivotal role in that respect, Sir.

HON. RO. F. TUISAWAU.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In response to the honourable Attorney-General, thank you for saying that we will move forward on that, but this should have been done a long time ago. I think they have been paid lower than the minimum wage, and we brought this up here on numerous times. The other side has never even considered it and today, I am asking the honourable Members on the other side...

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- We increased it, what are you talking about?

HON. RO. F. TUISAWAU.- The increase is not adequate, we have inflation, cost of goods have gone up and our honourable Members on this side have mentioned the reasons that it needs to be increased. That was a few years ago. I think you do not understand the term “inflation”, but I am asking the Government side, if there are some things which you can go along with us in the Opposition regarding this Budget, this is the one, so I am asking you to use your conscience and let us approve it together.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Chi, chi, you go and change your way of thinking then.

(Laughter)

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We will now vote that Head 5-1-1-6 be increased by 1,494,000.

Question on amendment put.

Motion lost.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Chairman, I would like to propose:

That Head 6-1-1-6 - Provincial Councils (\$4,242,895) be increased by \$3 million to \$7,242,895.

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

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Chairman, the reason behind this is that the allocation is basically for salaries of those who are working at the Provincial Councils, but the operational cost is not covered - that is covered by the *solu ni Yasana*. I mention this because it is like a double taxation on the *iTaukei* population especially those at the villages but of course they are supported by their compatriots who are working and that includes all of us - that is why I am saying it is a double taxation.

It would be appropriate or good for the Government to also cover - just like any other organisation or department - or fund the operations which the personnel need to do. The personnel or staff cannot just be there on their own, they need funding for their operations and that includes vehicles, office expenses, et cetera. That is why I am asking for this and I am proposing that in terms of that amount to be increased by \$ 3 million.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sir, if the honourable Members was astute he would note that the iTaukei Affairs Board has actually come down in terms of funding from \$5.2 million to \$2.1 million and that \$3 million reduction in fact has been given to the Provincial Councils. If you look at the figures for last year, iTaukei Affairs Board received \$5.2 million and now they are receiving \$2.1 million - is a variance of \$3 million and that \$3 million has gone to the Provincial Councils.

Mr. Chairman, a lot more financing beef up has been provided through the Provincial Councils itself. So, we have the 111 staff from the iTaukei Affairs Board payroll now in the Provincial Council payroll. So Provincial Council numbers, technically in fact, have gone up as a move from the iTaukei Affairs Board.

In the current financial year the Assistant Roko, Treasurer and Conservation Officer were reflected under the iTaukei Affairs Board payroll, whereas these officers actually operate from and are situated in the respective Provincial Council's Offices. Movement is now aligned to reflect the current establishment in the iTaukei Affairs Board and each Provincial Council Office - those positions have, in fact gone to the Provincial Council Office. They have a lot more say, and they are the ones who actually pay them the salaries and the increase is due to the transfer of funds with the iTaukei Affairs Board as per the comments I just made. If you look at the Provincial Council Office Budget it has actually gone up by \$3.086 million compared to last year, which I sense he has not picked up.

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Mr. Chairman, I just seek clarification from the honourable Minister regarding the \$4.2 million for Provincial Councils. What is the distribution of that \$4.2 million to the Provincial Councils?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sir, it depends obviously on the size of the Provincial Councils, not all Provincial Councils have the same size. As you know you come from Ba and it is one of the largest provinces, and has higher areas to cover, some provinces are much smaller. So it depends on the size of the provincial councils themselves. I cannot give you a break down now of that, but it depends on the size of the provincial council office.

HON. RATU T. NAVURELEVU.- Mr. Chairman, I wanted to just speak in support of the motion regarding the provincial councils. I guess that the funding provided by the Government is only for salaries and wages of the staff in the provincial councils. What we are concerned about is the operating fund for the provincial council which are met only by those provinces using profits from their company, the dividend from their investment and the provincial rate. That is the reason why we requested if the fund is increased to accommodate the expenses of the provincial councils. They are doing similar jobs and services as other Government departments which have been given expenses for operating, that is why I support the motion.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Tuisawau, you have the right of reply.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Chairman, in response to the honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, the movement of personnel might be the case, but the fact as confirmed by the *Turaga Tui Namuka*, the provincial council personnel or staff are funded by the Government, but the operations are funded by the people of the province including their dividends - that is why we are asking for that. It is not to fund the salaries but to cover the operational cost which are covered now by the members of the *yasana*, including through the *solu yasana*, to at least give relief to the people in the provinces.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, we will now vote on the amendment.

Question on amendment put.

Motion lost.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Chairman, I just wanted to ask the honourable Minister for a point of clarification on Activity 1-7 - Review of Village Guidelines. Are these village guidelines same as

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We are on Activity 2 now. We have done Activity 1.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- My apologies, Mr. Chairman, as the motion was still being debated, I was waiting to be given the opportunity just to clarify this one issue.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- I let this one pass on this occasion.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Just a point of clarification from the honourable Minister, on SEG 7 Review of Village Guidelines, is this something similar to the by-laws that have been shelved and what is the \$20,000 for?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Chairman, not the bylaws, it is essentially to ensure that we have this review, ensure hygiene, sanitation, and the environment is maintained - basically the order in the villages, nothing to do with the bylaws. It is just a guideline.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Activity 2.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Raise your voice so that I can hear it.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Mr. Chairman, it is on SEG 10 - Survey of Unsurveyed Lands, is this to do with some villages that are yet to be surveyed? Just some clarification on that.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- The survey of all unsurveyed *iTaukei* land - once the *iTaukei* land boundaries have been demarcated, the work involves consultation with landowning units to clear and clean reference points, plant pegs, measure and fix boundaries, calculate, compute survey software, plot and draw survey plans and draft register of *iTaukei* land document. As you know, some of these boundaries are not clearly defined. They have to go out into the bush and mark these lands.

Mr. Chairman, Sir, in 2021-2022 the team undertook the following consultations and survey completion of the following:

1. Tikina Vatulele, Nadroga, Navosa – 100 percent completed;
2. Tikina Malolo, Nadroga, Navosa – 95 percent completed;
3. Tikina Namosi – 20 percent;
4. Tikina Serua – 30 percent;
5. Tikina Nadi, Ba – 90 percent;
6. Tikina Vitogo, Ba – 80 percent; and
7. Tikina Lakeba, Lau – currently sits at zero percent.

Those are the identified areas, the redefinition for the 14 landowning units. For 2022-2023, this will fund the operational expenses for the survey and demarcation of *iTaukei* land in the following Districts:

1. Nadi in Sabeto;
2. Ba Tikina Vitogo;
3. Serua as in Deuba, Nuku, Serua-Tikina;
4. Lau, Lakeba, and
5. Kadavu, Tikina Sanima

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Chairman, on SEG 7 - Customary Title Disputes (\$30,000), I wish to seek clarification on this one. I see in a lot of meetings that the honourable Prime Minister goes to, he always comments on the number of vacant traditional positions in the provinces. Are most of those due

to disputes? Because if they are, then this allocation is insufficient. If it is not disputes then the ministry must be resourced to go in and ensure that these positions are filled, because it keeps coming up year in, year out. The government keeps highlighting the fact that a lot of traditional positions are vacant either because there are too many disputes or we are not applying ourselves to have them filled. I fail to see any allocation here that could help resolve the issue that keeps coming up.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sir, what the honourable Prime Minister has been talking about is that there is an issue about unfilled positions but there are no disputes - it is simply not filled and that does not mean that there is a dispute, and of course there are some that is disputed. One is unfilled and one is disputed. This essentially is an ongoing process where the confirmation of every customary title is solely dependent on the request that is received from the *vanua* if there is a dispute.

Dispute cases are both formal and informal - they go and sit down, reconciliation or they talk with the formal ones. Funding generally is here to meet the travel and accommodation costs for inspection and various other things, contingency costs. Some of the unfilled positions are not because there is a dispute, they simply have not been filled but there is no dispute.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Yes, on that note there should be some resources here for government to help the *vanua* to fill these positions otherwise some of them have been vacant and left unfilled for years. They must take up the initiative and have this filled. So, there must be some allocation here to resource a team otherwise it will continue to remain unfilled and we will keep hearing about this and nothing gets done and the *vanua* is weakened in the process. What I am saying is - if it is a dispute thing then increase the allocation and if it is not, then help them to fill the positions, whatever it takes.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- We cannot force them.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members we will not vote on Head 5 – Ministry of iTaukei Affairs.

Question put.

Head 5 agreed to.

Head No. 6 – Ministry of Defence

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, we have done the activity but we have not voted on the Head. We now vote on Head 6.

Question put.

Head 6 agreed to.

Head 7 – Ministry of Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for any comments.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Chairman, Programme 1-2-7, could the honourable Minister please clarify if \$201,845 allocation for Project Officers – Labour Services means that these officers will be hired to ensure robust contracts, insurance, injury, disability cover, and fairer salaries for our Fiji people going to offshore employment such as fisheries observers and domestic and regional observers and also the Pacific Labour Scheme?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sorry, Sir. Was that a question?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Would you repeat that, honourable Member?

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Yes, Mr. Chairman, with pleasure. Could the honourable Minister clarify please if that \$201,845 allocation for Project Officers – Labour Services under SEG 7 means that these people will be hired to ensure robust contracts, insurance and injury and disability cover, and also fair salaries for our people who are going on offshore employment such as fishery observers for domestic and international and regional fishing boats and also the Pacific Labour Scheme?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sir, if I can clarify, it funds wages of 10 Data Entry Clerks, Band E – Step 1 to assist with the calculation of wages arrears backdated three years for backlog cases of 25 security companies, 40 supermarket branches that are currently investigated by the Ministry for non-compliance on wages regulation in the following areas:

- Non-payment of minimum rates of pay;
- Overtime;
- Meal allowance; and
- Annual Leave.

These companies have not paid these. Complaints have been lodged. They now have to do the data entry. They are doing the investigation.

The number of cases is expected to increase with the implementation of revised national minimum wage rate because as you know that every quarter the minimum wage is being increased. There are some companies, we are getting complaints, which are not actually adhering to this minimum wage increase. So, we need to investigate. We need people that document this. So, this is why we made this additional allocation. There is a new expenditure allocation to deal with these domestic issues at this point in time and that is what it is for. It includes also the FNPF component.

HON. M.R. LEAWARE.- Mr. Chairman, Programme 1-3-10 - Workmen's Compensation. Is that to do with Accident Compensation Commission Fiji (ACCF) or is it just the pending cases that are there in the Ministry to be compensated or assisted? Just some clarification from the honourable Minister.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Sir and I actually apologise, it should be called "Worker's Compensation" not Workmen's Compensation. They have changed the law to make it gender neutral so unfortunately anyway, honourable Qereqeretabua when we get the new system, it will be easier to change which you blocked.

Mr. Chairman, this funding is obviously to do with injuries and death occurred before 31st December, 2018, before ACCF came into being. It has got nothing to do with ACCF. This is the backlog of cases. So, if you see honourable Leaware, the amount of money that has been given in this Budget is less than the previous year. Why? Because the backlog of cases are being cleared.

In the previous year, you had \$1.2 million. This has been reduced by \$346,000 so it is now \$900,000. God willing next year it will be far less. So, then it will be clearing up all the backlog of cases prior to 31st December, 2018. All workers compensation goes to ACCF now, new ones.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Programme 1-4?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Chairman, Programme 1-4-7, can we have some clarification on Foreign Employment Mobility Services. What is it?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- This is with the regularisation of 12 project officers under SEG 1. The Foreign Employment Service and Pacific Labour Scheme vote has been merged into the Foreign Employment Mobility Services. This is to do with the recruitment and selection where they assist monitoring local and overseas contracts, et cetera.

The Medical and Fitness Test, we have an allocation for that. Marketing Training Awareness, Policy and Process Review, Stakeholder Collaboration and, of course, the office needs to run specifically for this office supplies and equipment. That makes up \$230,000.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- So, essentially the people who are going overseas on seasonal work come under this unit, is that what you are staying?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Yes, they look after specifically. So, it is not just for the ones who go to Australia, there are also the ones that go to New Zealand under the Duavata Initiative.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Still on Programme 1-4-5 – NEC Board Expenses allocation (\$5,140), I just wanted some clarification, please. The Ministry of Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations also has overdue Annual Reports to this House so my question is, how many unemployed people registered with the Centre have now found a job last year that warrants this expense for the board?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sir, the honourable Member has got the wrong forum, this is the Budget she can ask that during Question time.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Member, are you asking about this figure?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sir, I have already answered it. The figure is to do with the board for NEC; meetings, expenses, catering, travel, logistic for consultation.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, we will now vote on Head 7 - Ministry of Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations.

Question put.

Head 7 agreed to.

Head 8 – Ministry of Foreign Affairs

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for any comments.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Chairman, in relation to Programme 2-1-8 - Refurbishment of Overseas Missions (\$1,000,000), it is under “R”, which means it is highly unlikely that this will happen. Can the honourable Minister, please, clarify if this \$1 million allocation for the refurbishment of Overseas Missions means we have not yet sold our Overseas Missions that the honourable Minister for Economy had said in a previous budget and which a large chunk of revenue projection from those sales did not actually happen? Which Overseas Missions are being refurbished specifically?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sir, the priority is being given to Canberra and Wellington. Wellington, Sir, as you know one of our buildings, you cannot actually stay in the building. Wellington as we know is an earthquake fault line so there are cracks appearing in the building.

Currently, the High Commissioner has to be housed in another premises. A few years ago, Sir, the Australian Government offered us to buy one of our buildings we owned in Canberra because when we bought that building at that point in time, they used to use asbestos. There was a buy back scheme in Canberra, so we actually sold it, they demolished it and rebuild something else.

In the same way, we are talking to the New Zealand Government in respect of our building there which we own and also the building which we own in Canberra. Sir, you would know that you were in fact a High Commissioner to United Kingdom too. That building is in urgent state of repair, there are about four levels to it, it is near Hyde Park. We are prioritising, obviously we are trying to be fiscally prudent, but at this point in time we are looking at Canberra and Wellington being upgraded but if we had other forms of refurbishment.

In UK, I do not know if you have been there honourable Qereqeretabua, but it is worth quite a lot of money but it also can quickly deteriorate if we do not fix it up too.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, we will now vote on Head 8 – Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Question put.

Head 8 agreed to.

Head 9 – Independent Bodies

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for any comments.

HON. RO. F. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Chairman, on this particular Head on Fijian Elections Office, we heard the honourable Attorney-General this morning on the independence of these Independent Bodies. I would like to reiterate the concerns of the independence are not only coming from us, but also the political parties and international forums or bodies.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Which international body?

HON. RO. F. TUISAWAU.- Journalists and media associations, generally.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Journalists? They are not independent bodies.

HON. RO. F. TUISAWAU.- This is our concern, Sir, and there are various ways to rectify this. He has stated it is independent, but we need to look at it from a rational point of view. There is unease within the population regarding the independence of these bodies.

On the Fijian Elections Office, Sir, there has been concerns about the software used there and that was also one of the recommendations made in the Joint Opposition Parties' submission.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Chairman, the honourable Member is talking about something that is completely different from the Budget. He is talking about software, et cetera. He needs to get to the point, Sir.

HON. RO. F. TUISAWAU.- I am coming to that.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Well, get to it quickly.

HON. RO. F. TUISAWAU.- I am proposing an increase (this is good for the Elections Office) of \$1 million to the Fijian Elections Office.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- What for?

HON. RO. F. TUISAWAU.- Firstly, \$500,000 for an independent audit of the Fijian Elections software systems including the algorithms setup, basically to check whether the rules incorporated in the calculations within the computer systems are accurate, credible and transparent. That is why I am calling for an independent audit of that with that \$500,000 out of the \$1 million increase which I am suggesting.

The other \$500,000 (and this is from our experience at the last Elections) where the honourable Attorney-General was at the Count Centre when the count was on. There were concerns about interference with the count and to alleviate those concerns, we in the Opposition parties would like that funding of \$500,000 to set up a duplicate count centre to be managed and staffed jointly by Opposition Political parties. This will ensure transparency of count and to alleviate any concerns ...

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You are a joke.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- ... held by the population by the people. There is another verification in place in order to ensure that the Elections counts are transparent and credible.

MR. SPEAKER.- Move your amendments?

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, I move an increase of \$1 million.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I second the motion, Sir.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Yes, I have explained that, I have no further issues to add.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Chairman, this is more a general comment in support of what has been said earlier. In fact, I laughed this morning when the honourable Attorney-General made this sweeping claim about some of the independent bodies are, in fact, we should have an independent inquiry as to whether these independent institutions are truly independent because just recently, I have talked about the Fijian Competition and Consumer Commission, as an example.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sir, FCCC is not in Head 9.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Independent Commissions.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- We are in Head 9, it is not a commission. It is in the next Head.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Yes, I am just giving an example in response to what you have said earlier about the independence of independent institutions. It is really a joke from the honourable Attorney-General to say because he knows that many of these independent institutions are not independent. And we know even here in this Parliament that the kind of interference that takes place

so, Mr. Chairman, I think the honourable Attorney-General should stop claiming that these independent institutions are really independent as they are not.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sir, can I make a comment?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Yes, you have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sir, if honourable Professor Prasad is saying that Judicial is not independent, I want him to say it outside Parliament. I really wanted him to do that, if he really believes that, Sir.

Secondly, his stupidity or by honourable Ro Tuisawau about having a second counting station. I was no way near the counting area, it has already been explained but they are harping on a narrative. International bodies have said the Elections were credible.

Our Elections Office had been held in highest esteem. They have got enough exposure, enough training and they have also got those accolades (please read those). You are actually just hanging on to some narratives that say ‘international organisations’, what? You are talking about ABC Australia? That is all you are hanging your hat on? Algorithms - you are reading too much conspiracy books, that is the problem, Mr. Chairman. How can you, even if there was to be a second counting station funded in \$500,000 absolutely no clue as to how it is done, absolutely no clue how much people get paid. He plucks out \$500,000 (I do not know what part of the anatomy) and says ‘Let’s just have it’.

Mr. Chairman, this is a real preposterous proposition.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Yes, the honourable Attorney-General, as usual, comes up with....

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- *Areh*, speak on the motion, do not speak on me.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- How many people believe him? That is what I am trying to ask here. The argument here today is between what he is saying and what we are saying, so it is always good to have an independent audit. What is wrong with an independent audit, why are you afraid of it?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- The UN is auditing the Elections Office.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- He mentioned the different Election Observers, et cetera, they do not go into these details, and on the duplicate count centre, that can be done with that amount.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Oh yes, right.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- We just need a small group of people ...

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Go back to USP.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- And we get the information from our agents at the polling centres and all they do is they message us the photo of the result. We take that, input it and we can even use MS Excel, it is not as expensive as you are saying. That is why I am proposing those two amendments of \$1million (\$500,000 each) for those initiatives.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We will vote on this amendment.

Question on amendment put.

Motion lost.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Chairman, this is a request for clarification from the honourable Minister. The Fiji Elections Office on Page 58 is being allocated \$16.9 million here and \$14.8 million under Head 50 for Elections. Given that it is now August 2022 and we have about six-month window until the last possible date for Elections January 2023, is a total of \$31.7 million to run the Elections for about 682,000 registered voters plus the ongoing voter registration overseas for postal votes sufficient?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Member, just deal with this one, forget about the other Heads that will come later. You can ask the question on that when we come to that.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- So can I continue, Mr. Chairman?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Yes you can.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Knowing also that the Fiji Elections Office is supposed to hire buses to transport voters to their polling venues so that you do not get a worse voter turnout that we did in 2018, is this amount sufficient?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Chairman, the funding obviously is sufficient. We have had discussions during Budget consultation with the Elections Office. The Elections Office is not going to supply buses, it is working with the bus companies to make sure that the buses actually run. It is sufficient enough.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members we will vote on Head 9.

Question put.

Head 9 agreed to.

Head 13 – Independent Commissions

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Chairman, Head 13-1-1 – FICAC, I notice it is being allocated \$10.5 million and this is requesting clarification. That is an increase from \$7.9 million that was allocated in the last Budget. Can the honourable Minister, please, update us to his knowledge is in their workplan that justifies a little over \$3 million increase because this seems to be a little bit shady with all the gung hoe investigation of people and jailing them, but again no annual report? So the question, should they be surcharged investigated according to their own anti-corruption laws if they cannot show transparency on how they use our public funds.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Chairman, the honourable Member is incorrect in saying that there is no annual reports. I wonder which planet she lives on. FICAC has been giving its annual reports. It gives its annual report to His Excellency the President also, it has appeared before the Committee also.

On the increased funding, she says that they take them to court and jail them. Sir, FICAC does not jail people, it actually investigates and prosecutes. It is the judiciary that assesses the cases and the judiciary then makes a decision. So, FICAC does not do the jailing, get your facts right.

Mr. Chairman, Sir, the other reason why it has actually been extended is that there is fast-tracking of cases now. You have got specific anti-corruption cases, there is a backlog of cases, I think one of the Members in the Budget Address said, “Oh, what has happened to the Water Authority of Fiji complaint (\$33 million)” someone referred to from the other side. It is essentially to ensure that we get more people to be able to do this investigations really quickly Sir.

It is also the training requirements: improvement of IT infrastructure and digital investigation equipment and media campaigns. The salaries and allowance Mr. Chairman, Sir, make up \$6.3 million, there is 155 established positions, 148 are filled, 7 are vacant and there is operations, travel subsistence, communication, maintenance and operations, vehicle, procurement of goods and services, special expenditure, capital purchase which is about \$600,000. So that is what the increase is for Sir. Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We will now vote on Head 13 – Independent Commissions.

Question put.

Head 13 agreed to.

Head 14 – Fiji Corrections Service

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The floor is open for any comments on Head 14.

HON. M.R. LEAWARE.- Mr. Chairman, Programme 1-2-7, it is regarding this rehabilitation programme. I just need some elaboration from the honourable Minister. Does this cover the work of Corrections going out to the communities, schools in terms of awareness or is it just specifically for inmates after they have been incarcerated? Is the allocation about that? I was just wondering if that covers the whole of Fiji in terms of rehabilitation programme in terms of awareness to avoid further occurrences of being brought into prison. I was wondering if that amount covers the communities all over the country.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Yes, Sir, it is for a number of rehabilitation programmes. It does apply across the board with more for things like online church services for inmates who cannot come out. There is also the Counsellor and Psychologist Awareness Workshop as well as the *Musudovu* Operations, Electrical Training, the Refrigeration Course, Electrical Materials, et cetera. Also, the training equipment for the vocational side of things. It funds all of that in terms of the rehabilitation programme within the prison itself.

There is also various outreach programmes that we do have, Sir, including for example the Yellow Ribbon Project. I have been to a couple of those where they bring in potential employers and they had them out at the Fiji Sports ground at Laucala Bay, where all the different inmates, some are chefs, some have different skill sets and a lot of them actually got recruited by employers whilst they were in prison.

Some of them have three months or six months to come out and they recruited them. As soon as they came out they actually had a job and as we have found with the rate of recidivism in fact increases when people come out of prison system and they do not actually get a job because people actually ostracized them. That is part of that programme, rehabilitation links in with Yellow Ribbon

Project creating that awareness within the members of the public and this is why honourable Member the rate of recidivism in Fiji has actually decreased substantially. It used to be 50 percent only a few years ago, it decreased quite substantially.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Gavoka, you have the floor.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman. On combining these two – rehabilitation and yellow ribbon, we have a situation here on our people who are accepted to go and work overseas but because there is a police record that goes back 10, 15 or 20 years, they cannot go. Some of these offences were pretty trivial like, drunk and disorderly, trespassing and they are that old and unfortunately, the NEC policy is that, no matter how old the offence, if you have a police record, you cannot go on seasonal work.

I know I have checked with some people and they said look you can expunge the record after 10 years but when you rehabilitate them and they carry that kind of record with them, there is very little possibility for them to be part of this seasonal work programme overseas, so when we look at this, I wonder if that can be included in it, so they can be rehabilitated in full, not to be carrying a record that disables them from other opportunities.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sir, just to respond to that, that is not part of the purview of this particular Head but what honourable Gavoka is saying, it has been a problem for some people but after 10 years, you can have your PCs or previous convictions, the record given to you where anything prior to 10 years does not appear. Some employers of course, go the extra mile and want everything that you want. I know of people who have actually gone overseas on this Scheme where they have actually had convictions but it was like 15, 20 years ago, 25 years ago because that the record that they presented and as honourable Gavoka said some of them have very minor offences, the drunk and disorderly, et cetera.

It also depends on the employers, Sir, and depends on where they are going to work. If you are going to, for example be a fruit picker, your employer may not necessarily be as severe in respect of the restrictions. If you are going to work in somebody's home like aged-care services, they may think alright, you may not necessarily be suitable so it depends. It is horses for courses but we can have after 10 years, your PC can show that there is no convictions. Of course, someone has the right to go and look beyond that. But some people of course, have gone also.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, can I just help as well because this is something that we are also involved in, the police. One, as alluded to by the honourable Attorney-General, it depends on the preference of the employers. But what we, the Fiji Police Force is also doing is, they also issue a certificate called the "Rehab Certificate", which some employers allow that and accept it, particularly for those that have records, and especially for those that want to go for the Pacific Labour Scheme.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- I appreciate that, Mr. Chairman, but NEC has a policy that if we have a police record - forget it. I mean that is basically what they are saying to people now. So, if that can be changed, it will be appreciated but right now that is the policy of NEC and no matter how old it is, if there is a police record, you do not get considered for these overseas things.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Some people have gone through NEC.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Where is the honourable Minister?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- He is attending to a family death.

Head 14 – Fiji Corrections Services:

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We will move on to Head 14 – Fiji Corrections Services.

Question put.

Head 14 agreed to.

Head 15 – Ministry of Justice

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The floor is open for any comments.

Head 15-1-1-7:

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Chairman, I just want to seek clarification on Head 15-1-1-7 - Fijian Vaccine Pass System Operating Cost (\$2,607,968) and at the same time, if I may just jump ahead and seek clarification from the Ministry of Communications on Head 16, Page 71, Fijian Vaccine Pass System an allocation of \$1,696,901. Can I just ask the honourable Minister what is the difference with the same allocation for two different Ministries?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Just take this one at this time. When we get to that page, we will deal with that.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sir, this allocation in the Ministry of Justice is to do with the actual operational expenditure of this Vaccine Pass and there is recruitment of staff because we need people to do the data entry which will cost about \$246,000 because we are going to pay some rental and storage cost \$209,000, training \$15,000 and operating expenditure of having these people to go out.

In the next financial year, the Office will continue upgrading three centres in Suva, Lautoka and Labasa be equipped with more IT equipment and issuing of Vaccines Passports Certificates and that is what this is for. So, the operationalization, in fact, hiring of the staff because the reason why is in the Ministry of Justice because that is where the Births, Deaths and Marriages (BDM). So, they need to be able to link with the Birth Certificates and your Vaccine Pass itself.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, we will vote on Head 15.

Question put.

Head 15 agreed to.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Tikoduadua, take note when we get to the next Head, you can ask your other question on that.

Head 16 – Ministry of Communications

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The floor is now open for any comments.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- I would just like to ask as a matter of clarification from the honourable Minister about what is given that there is an allocation for Qorvis Communication - \$800,000. How much is paid to them from which allocation and what is their role?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- As it suggest, for Qorvis Communication gets paid \$800,000, just for Qorvis.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Yes, we have this allocation for Qorvis Communication, so the question is where is the allocation for Vatis in the Ministry of Communications and where is it coming from?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sir, we have Public Awareness, Media Relations - \$256,880.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- That is clarified with the previous question.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I am sorry, Sir, it is not just Vatis, the other expenditure related to public awareness, media relations.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- *Areh* ignore him, not worth it.

Head 16-2-1:

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Chairman, can I have some clarification on Head 16-2-1 - Ease of Doing Business (\$9 million)? I would have thought that this belongs to Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Tourism and I believe at one time, the honourable Minister had indicated that Ease of Doing Business is no longer any need for it. Why do we have this \$9 million on Ease of Doing Business or rather, what is it for? I know there was a committee that was looking into this two or three years ago, would that be this?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Chairman, there is a difference between Ease of Doing Business Survey which is conducted by the World Bank which is what the honourable Minister for Commerce, Trade and Tourism was talking about, how it has been corrupted in the survey which we have been highlighting for a number of years. Of course, it fitted the narrative then of the Opposition in particular, honourable Professor Prasad had just left but that was Ease of Doing Business Survey.

This is Ease of Doing Business in Fiji for businesses in Fiji. As we have highlighted previously, this essentially is to allow for the new business licence and getting construction permits, enable and participates in government agencies to approve the applications online. Both the applicants and processing agencies will be able to track the progress of their application submission.

The system will collate 16 plus approval agencies and encompass 25 e-services relative to permits and approval for starting a business and obtaining building permits. That is all the different agencies, whether it is the National Fire Authority (NFA), Occupational Health & Safety (OHS), everyone will be part of this. You will be able to apply online, submit your documents online and you will be able to then get your approval online too, it should reduce significantly.

Has anyone that is doing business in Fiji, if I go to different agencies to get approvals, most of them will ask to replicate the same information you have just given to other agency, even filling out your address, basic details, so this will be one window where it applies. All the agencies will get the information and they can then give you the approval.

Of course, Mr. Chairman, it requires a lot of investments in the e-space. That is why it is actually under Programme 2-1 - Digital Government Transformation (DGT). That is why it is there because it is a software and the DGT office has acquired the services from various companies. There was a tender

called, there is a company called Toppan Ecquaria Pte. Ltd that has in fact, been given the software development. He is the new technology partner.

Head 16-3-1:

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Mr. Chairman, on Head 16-3-1, I thank the Government for the feasibility study on International Redundant Connectivity that is proposed for the Western Division. I seek clarification from the honourable Minister. There are two international connections in the Pacific, we also have Hawaiki Cable apart from the Southern Cross Cable. My question is, are you planning to have an alternative route for international connectivity or you will retain the same Southern Cross Cable?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Chairman, the word “redundancy” means that you are not going to use the same line. Redundancy means if one fails, you pick up the other one, so why would we lend the Southern Cross Cable also in the Western Division? The whole point of redundancy is that, if Southern Cross Cable goes down then you get another one. Obviously, we will get another one. We do not want to pre-empt who is going to be because there will be tenders called who will give us the best deal, but most certainly, it will not be Southern Cross Cable because then you do not have redundancy.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Chairman on Head 16-3-1-7, there are two allocations for ICT meetings, one is for \$50,000 and one is for \$200,000. Just seeking clarification from the honourable Minister on those two allocations?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- The first one \$50,000 is to fund for hosting or attending ICT related meetings such as the Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation (CTO), that is when we attend some of those meetings to fund those expenses or if we have meetings locally held in Fiji or within the region.

The second one is the Special ICT Meetings which is \$200,000. The Special ICT Meetings (let me give you the exact detail), we have been given the opportunity to host two international workshops in Fiji. One is by the International Telecommunications Union, the Radio Communications Seminar which will be held this year in October, \$100,000 has been allocated for it, so we will get tourists filling up our hotels and the second one is the Asia Pacific Telecommunity (APT) a Policy and Regulatory Framework Forum which will be held in July of next year which has got a \$100,000. We are expecting a range of about 70 to 100 participants to attend these two meetings.

Mr. Chairman, of course, it is vital for Fiji to be represented and host international workshops and conferences. We are the telecommunications hub in the Pacific, we need to maintain that level, not just credibility but of course, the standard and put ourselves out there. These organisations have reached out to us and we made this allocation, obviously it has an economic spin over because they occupy hotels, they come and stay here and that is what we are hosting the meeting for.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, we will vote on Head 16.

Question put.

Head 16 agreed to.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, on that note, we will suspend the House for half-an-hour so that you can have a stretch.

The Parliament adjourned at 4.32 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 5.08 p.m.

MR CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, we will now vote on Head 17.

Head 17 - Ministry of Civil Service

MR CHAIRMAN.- Since there are no comments, we will vote on Head 17.

Question put.

Head 17 agreed to.

Head 18 – Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Chairman, Programme 1-1-7 - Administrative Expenses (\$50,000). I would like to have some clarity from the honourable Minister. What kind of expenses are these and should it not be broken down into specific expenditure in other SEGs?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, this is mainly for office equipment, not only improvement but of course the purchase of maintenance equipment particularly the computers, printers and other office needs.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Chairman, Programme 1-1-6, can we get some breakdown in terms of the District Advisory Counsellor Allowances? How many District Advisory Counsellors are entitled to this \$623,000?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, there are 302 District Advisory Counsellors all over Fiji. In the last financial year, few of the DAC appointments were vacant and of course some have been filled now but in total we have 302 District Advisory Counsellors all over Fiji.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Chairman, Programme 1-1-8 - Final payment - Namarai, Kubulau and Wainikoro Government Stations.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, these area mainly retention fees based on the contract. As I did state yesterday, we have constructed a few new rural government stations and we have Namarai, Kubulau is the quarters and, of course, Wainikoro Government Station as well, so these are the retention fees.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Chairman, SEG 6 Annual Fees – Centre for Integrated Rural Development for Asia and Pacific, just a clarification on the nature of our membership and the benefits regarding that.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, Fiji joined the Centre for Integrated Rural Development for Asia and Pacific (CIRDAP) in 2013. It is headquartered in Dhaka, Bangladesh and Fiji is the 15th member.

We sent our people for training and of course to see the best practices in terms of rural development. Included in that, we have an agreement with India, and this is out of the relationship that we have established with CIRDAP - we are sending one officer from the Ministry every year, an undergraduate to go and do postgraduate diploma studies in rural development in India. A lot of benefits that we are getting out of this, Mr. Chairman, and the allocation is our fee that we are required to pay annually.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Programme 2-1-9 - Institutional Strengthening for Divisional and Provincial Offices (\$25,000). All the four Commissioners – Central, Eastern, Western and Northern have similar allocations of \$25,000 under SEG 9 which comes to a \$100,000. What does this institutional strengthening activity mean?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, this is about improving the standards and of course equipment as well in most of the rural outposts. One of the disappointing things that we faced in the past, and this is the image of Government in the rural areas – the offices are neglected. They would have furniture from decades ago, and this is why the Ministry has been given the allocation.

If you go now to Vunidawa, you will see the change in the office in terms of equipping them, including multimedia and things like that. This is why the allocation is given to the four Divisional Commissioners and of course, now, we have new stations like Kavala and Namarai and they have to be equipped as well so that they can perform their functions effectively and efficiently.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Chairman, I have a motion but I will probably change that for a clarification. The honourable Minister has explained SEG 9 on institutional strengthening. Does that cover the capacity building in provincial council offices, or just what you have mentioned?

HON. LT.COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, provincial councils come under iTaukei Affairs, but this was a change done by the Qarase Government based on a Mosese Sikivou Report where we have come away from District Officer. We still have the District Officer post but most of them were aligned towards the provincial administration and boundary, so their title now is Provincial Administrator.

In terms of skills, if you look at SEG 7, I will use that example as well for community capacity building- we have talked about Turaga ni Koro, every now and then they are changed, Mata ni Tikina are changed - we do the trainings so that they are aware of the Government processes and systems and we have that allocation there as well. Of course, from that institutional strengthening as well, particularly, when needs do arise.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Chairman, I want to move without notice:

That Head 18-3-1-10 - Grants to Self-Help Projects be increased by \$2 million from the allocated \$1 million.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Chairman, I beg to second the motion.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Chairman, it is very clear that public funds are not entirely getting into the hands of those who need it the most, especially with this Budget. Our rural people need access to their public funds to help them improve their livelihoods and dignity. Why is Government still offering water-sealed toilets which are clearly non-Category 5 cyclone pro-structures as the honourable Minister for Health recently did in a blitz in March? Why are our people not being offered the latest technology that is better for our environment and improves health risks like, leptospirosis and typhoid, such as compost toilets that the SPC in Nabua have already assessed as having potential for use in the Pacific? Also, Mr. Speaker, Sir, why are our rural communities, especially in the Western Division not being assisted and encouraged to get into solar farms, so that they can be self-sufficient in energy security and sell back access power to the EFL grid under power purchase agreements? Surely, with the fluctuation in oil and energy costs, this should be topmost in the Government's agenda. Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members when you move an amendment, it is either increase or decrease. Give one reason and that is it, that is what we do and either we increase it or decrease it. Any further comments on that motion.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, under the same SEG, there is an allocation for Rural High Risk Water and Sanitation which is specifically for water in high risk areas, those that suffer from leptospirosis, typhoid, et cetera, and of course flushed toilets. That is a new allocation that just came in two years ago. Self-Help is a totally different allocation altogether for a different purpose which unfortunately she does not understand.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I have no further comments.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members we will now vote on this motion.

Question on amendment put.

Motion lost.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Chairman, Can the honourable Minister detail why it cost \$20,000 under SEG 7 - Guidelines for Constructing New Evacuation Centres and Retrofitting Existing Evacuation Centres (\$20,000). I am just wondering about who is going to be doing this. I hope it is not going to be some lucky consultant come to pick the brains of our locals who know very well and have lived through these gaps already to prepare the guidelines for constructing new evacuation centres and retrofitting existing evacuation centres.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Which planet do you live on?

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- How is this \$20,000 going to be utilised for this SEG?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, this essentially is to allow the NDMO to coordinate and facilitate discussions and consultations to lead to the formulation of guidelines for the construction of the new evacuation centres and the retrofitting of existing evacuation centres. This is the NDMO coordinating and facilitating discussions with the various communities around Fiji. Thank you.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, as I have alluded to so often in this Parliament, unfortunately, some of the community halls that are now referred to as Evacuation Centres were not build to standard and that is why we have to have a proper guideline and who is going to be awarded this? It will be out on tender and anyone is free to bid and it will be awarded accordingly.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- For this \$20,000, it is just for the discussion and consultation of the public. You cannot build an evacuation centre for \$20,000, nor can you get an expatriate consultant for \$20,000 as you seem to allude.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- But if I may add on to the evacuation centres, Mr. Chairman. I just told honourable Lalabalavu that this Friday before Parliament, I will be convening a virtual meeting, thankful to the new partnership that we have with UNDP. Under the new strategic development plan that focuses on resilience, we have an allocation now through an organisation that will give us a few million dollars through that organisation to construct a few new evacuation centres and of course there is also opportunity to do retrofitting. So, we will be getting the list this Friday.

As you may recall, in the 2020 Budget, four evacuation centres were already approved but was not funded because of COVID-19. So probably those four will be priority but again we are thankful for the partnerships that we have, it is not from Fiji taxpayer's money but we should be able to do some evacuation centres and of course retrofitting as well in this new financial year. So, the meeting will be this Friday, Mr. Chairman.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Chairman, I do have a motion. I have no further comments on that one. This is on SEG 10 now, Sir.

Mr. Chairman, on Programme 4-1-10, I propose:

That this SEG be increased by \$2 million in respect of Disaster Relief and Rehabilitation Fund which has been allocated \$500,000.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- I second, Mr. Chairman.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Chairman, we all remember all the horrifying natural disasters that we have lived through just over the last few years and I really hope that we have learnt our lessons. If another category five cyclone were to pulverise our nation like it did with *TC Winston*, is this \$500,000 allocation supposed to be enough to get us back on our feet?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, the word is actually “Relief and Rehabilitation Fund.” Sir, we already have other funds available. We have, for example, the Prime Minister’s Disaster Relief Rehabilitation Fund account. It has already got \$3.2 million. This Relief Fund, of course, Sir, is an emergency fund that is available to NDMO. In case they need it during an emergency, for example, it can range from food, it can range to any other type of service. We, of course have other funding too that is available to us.

Honourable Qereqeretabua, again, has misplaced her comments that this is the only fund available. It is not. There are other funds available too but there is a specific allocation made to NDMO in respect of any disaster, Sir, for relief purposes.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Chairman, I do hope that our side will support my motion because as I speak, there are people still living in tents after having been relocated, so I think that this \$2 million increase is well justified.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, we will now vote on this amendment that Head 18 be increased by \$2 million in Programme 4-1-10 with respect to Disaster Relief and Rehabilitation Fund.

Question on amendment put.

Motion lost.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, we move on and vote on Head 18.

Question put.

Head 18 agreed to.

Head 19 – Republic of Military Forces

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for any comments.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Chairman, can I just to ask a bit of clarification on Programme 1-1-7 Basic Recruit Course. How many do we have each year and the numbers that you recruit per intake? I presume here that there is more than one basic recruit drive each year.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- With the allocation, the number that the RFMF is looking at is 100 and they can just do that 100 within one training cycle, Mr. Chairman. But I hope that the honourable Members are also aware that there is a recruit training that has just passed out recently. It usually happens every year when we have selection for officers. So, when they have their recruit training, some also join then but this is just for one recruit and about 100 personnel been considered for this intake.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Staying on Programme 1-1-8, I am just asking the honourable Minister if he can detail the SEG 8, an allocation of \$900,000 allocated for the Renovation/Upgrade of RFMF Infrastructure, Amenities and Office Buildings. Could he please clarify if this will include the rebuilding of the 3FIR building that caught fire at Queen Elizabeth Barracks on Christmas Eve last year?

Secondly, can I also ask the honourable Minister to briefly update what the findings are from the National Fire Authority Investigations into this incident and should this allocation be increased to include 24 hour CCTV recordings? I note that on SEG 8, there is also an Upgrade/Renovation of RFMF Quarters and Barracks but my questions specifically is about the 3FIR Building at Queen Elizabeth Barracks.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- The breakdown for the \$900,000, \$350,000 is allocated for the construction of a new warehouse. The aim of this project is to construct a new RFMF Warehouse at Jerusalem Road in order to centralise procurement and distribution of stores for both, RFMF Operations as well as HADR activities in the Central and Eastern Divisions. The estimated cost of the project is approximately \$3.7 million which will be implemented in phases.

Phase 1 will involve civil works such as road, installation of EFL power supply and soil excavation work. Phase 2 will involve the actual construction work for the warehouse. Phase 3 is the installation of equipment and commissioning of the project.

Mr. Chairman, the project commenced in 2018-2019 financial year and funds were expended to undertake the topographical survey for the lots at Jerusalem Road and due to funding constraints rising from the natural disasters and COVID-19, the project had to be deferred and of course we have the funding now for this year.

For the funding for this year (2022-2023), funds allocated will cater for early civil works such as side levelling, soil compaction, Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) and the installation of service such as water, electricity and sewerage system. Mr. Chairman, another \$100,000 is allocated for the upgrade/renovation of RFMF Quarters and Barracks.

For the 2021-2022 financial year, the funds were utilised to upgrade and renovate nine quarters which consist of CO 3FIR's quarters, 1x 6 married quarters at Queen Elizabeth Barracks, Nabuni and the Deputy Commander RFMF's quarters and variation for Director Human Resources Management quarters.

In the financial year 2022-2023, funds allocated will be to cater for the three East and three West Accommodation. These are soldier's accommodation for those that do not know and of course, for East and West as well, the DLP for CO 3FIR's quarter. Of course, \$270,000 is also allocated for purchase of ITU equipment. The allocation caters for IT infrastructure and networking capabilities as well as procurement of IT equipment for the RFMF.

Again for the 2021-2022 financial year, the funds have been expended for the procurement of desktops, laptops and installation of IT equipment, network structure, cabling, equipment storage

backup and the list goes on. In fact, the estimate for it, Mr. Chairman is around \$400,000 but the allocation is \$400,000.

For this financial year the infrastructure upgrade of \$200,000 will focus on fibre optic and copper relocation, copper rehabilitation and running of new fibre optic cables at QEB and another \$200,000 will be allocated for replacement and the procurement of laptops, computers. Communication equipment as well, an allocation of \$200,000. Kitchen equipment, an allocation of \$65,000 and the purchase of specialised medical equipment. Sorry, I will not go on the list where those will go but that is the breakdown of the \$900,000 roughly, Mr. Chairman.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Chairman, can I seek clarification on Programme 1-9-8 - Upgrade of RFMF Nadi Camp (\$250,000). I think for most of us when you hear about Nadi and the military, there is Blackrock there. The impression is that the military facility in Nadi is at Blackrock but the camp is still being maintained honourable Minister, can you explain why we have this? That is the impression the public gets that Blackrock is the military base in Nadi and here you are still maintaining the Nadi Camp, can you explain that please?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Blackrock has a different purpose, it is an institution for Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) and Peacekeeping Training, but the troops that are in Nadi are there for the safety and security of the Airport and they have special arrangements with AFL and CAAFI. That is why we need to maintain that Camp. They have their drills, how long does it take them to get into the airport facility if there is a threat, et cetera.

But this allocation Mr. Chairman is for the kitchen and dining facilities in that Camp. If you have been there, it is in a bad state for ages and this is why that allocation is given but we need to be in the AFL compound in Nadi for the obvious reason that I have stated.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Chairman, Programme 1-5-7 - Maritime Surveillance Centre Operations (\$50,000). I understand that under the Vuvale arrangement a new maritime essential services centre valued at approximately FJ\$124 million in Lami is supposed to be ready by 2024 and until that happens, do we still have our sovereign EEZ to police and surveillance? Can the Minister clarify, please?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Please, what is your question on \$50,000?

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- With your permission, Mr. Chairman, to explain my question, just two days ago the Police Commissioner was on FBC News saying that Fiji did not have enough manpower to fight hard drug dealers who are exploiting our EEZ to sell methamphetamine and cocaine. Is this allocation enough?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- This is to do with the Fiji Military Forces.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Yes, RFMF, Navy.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Yes, we have a huge maritime zone and we have challenges to try and influence our EEZ but this is basically just for Maritime Surveillance Centre Operations when it was set up in 2017, Mr. Chairman.

This funds of \$50,000 will be used for the payment of software allowance because they have the Marine Traffic Automatic Identification System, the flight radar ProAir satellite coverage, the VAMS licence and of course, these applies not only to the Fiji Navy but of course also to all the

agencies because we are centralizing our maritime surveillance operations and that include information on air rescue, information on land rescue and information on sea rescue as well.

This is a big change that we have done since 2018. You would recall, Mr. Chairman, when we had that incident in Labasa involving the plane, it was a difficult task trying to coordinate. Now this is why we need all these different software because land, sea and air rescues are being coordinated from one Centre. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Programme 1-5-7, Mr. Chairman, and before I move a motion, it is regarding a Naval Recruit Course of \$150,000. Can we just get a clarification in terms of the number of recruits in terms of this \$150,000 allocation and in terms of gender equality whether this will be accommodated in this basic recruit course?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, we are looking at 70 personnel and Government is an equal employment opportunity provider. We have women now in the Fiji Navy and as long as they meet the conditions.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Chairman, 70 is the number?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, yes, 70.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Chairman, I move a motion:

To increase this basic recruit course by another \$150,000.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- I second the motion, Mr. Chairman.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Chairman, I thank the honourable Minister for the information that has been given but I think there is a need to have more Navy recruit and personnel to take into account the new Surveillance Centre that will come into play in 2023. Also, there is a need to increase the recruitment of girls and women into the Navy to ensure that there will be a criteria set. There are a lot of unemployed youths so there is a need to consider this recruitment process in the Navy to try and give employment opportunities to our young girls, especially, now that the Government is using this labour scheme to send people abroad. So this is one way they can also...

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- We do not send people abroad, people choose to go abroad.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- ... choose to come to the Naval Employment Centre.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, I wish to say that we cannot just recruit people and then leave them idle because there will be no boats or no jobs for them. Next year we will have, around May, the next boat that is coming online.

Part of the manning of the *Puamau* which will be the new boat is considered here, we have to train them. Of course, for women, as I have stated, Government and the Fiji Navy is an equal employment opportunity provider. We have even now sent women for officer training and the first two have qualified. The first one is from Verata District. I want you to know that, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- What a coincidence.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- The second who graduated out of UK is from Nadroga.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- What a coincidence.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you for the information, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, honourable Minister. I have no further comments.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- You still wish to carry on with this motion?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Withdraw. Are you withdrawing?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- I said okay, thank you. He has clarified some of the issues, but you can put the motion to our vote.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- I will put the motion the vote. You cannot tell me to withdraw.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We will vote on this motion.

Question on amendment put.

Motion lost.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUDUA.- Mr. Chairman, Head 19-1-6-1 - Officers and Other Ranks (\$1.086 million). Honourable Minister, we understand that Territorial Force comprises a significant contribution to the RFMF, particularly through peacekeeping operations and peace support operations.

Parliament does not get enough feasibility about the use of the Territorial Force and how it interprets due to the lack of report by the RFMF with regards to Territorial Force part of their annual reports. I would just like to ask the honourable Minister, we are waiting for annual reports to understand this, so when should we expect the first annual report? I know there has been a backlog.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, the new Commander of RFMF has assured me that they are finalising the annual reports, as I have stated previously in this Chamber, that they will start from the current year and work backwards, because it goes with the audit reports as well. So we should be expecting it and we just need to be familiar with the Annual Reports Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members we will vote on Head 19 – Republic of Fiji Military Forces.

Question put.

Head 19 agreed to.

Head 20 – Fiji Police Force

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The floor is now open for any comments.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Chairman, I have a question for clarification from the honourable Minister on Programme 1-1-4 - Power Supply (\$1.2 million). I find similar entries for the other Divisions. Can the honourable Minister clarify that so that I do not have to answer the other similar allocations for other Divisions?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you Mr. Chairman, this is for the payment of electricity bills for all the police institutions and those in the living quarters, particularly the Police Headquarters, Nasese and Nasova Police Barracks and other institutions that currently fall under this activity.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- The honourable Minister mentioned about Nasova quarters, et cetera. Does he also mean the Force is paying for electricity bills for the accommodation of police officers too or are these for the administration only of the Fiji Police Force?

I would assume in the Minister's reply, he alluded that this SEG 4 is for power supply and also covers the areas of Nasova. So my question is does that also cover the areas of accommodation for the police given that the assumption that police officers would be paying for their own electricity bill.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, I will have to come back on that because I know that they used to have kerosene allowance. Just to give the right answer, I need to clarify this and get back.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- If I could clarify, no it does not cover the individual quarters. This covers, for example the electricity bills for the police headquarters complex, the four Divisional headquarters, CID, Internal Bureau headquarters, Narcotic Bureau, Fiji Police Academy at the Nasese, Nasova barracks as you know we have got facilities there, the Training Centre, et cetera, the Transport Pool, Forensic Building, Dog Kennel, et cetera.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- I might be jumping the gun here but like I had asked earlier for clarification. The other Divisional Headquarters have similar allocations for power supply. You will find that like for instance on page 103 for the Southern Division you have an allocation of (\$200,000). I agree yes to police accommodation, police pay their own but I take it that this is for administrative purposes only rather than individual quarters.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Yes.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Chairman, Programme 1-1-5, there is an e-transaction cost of \$50,000. What is the e-transaction cost relating to in the Fiji Police Force and this Criminal Information System annual fee of \$50,000?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, this is to facilitate the changes to cashless transactions, particularly while obtaining police clearance to service providers like Vodafone, M-PAiSA and the Digicel whatever as well.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- This Criminal Information System annual fee of \$50,000.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- It is the annual subscription for the Criminal Records Information System (CRIS). An Automated Fingerprint Identification System. (AFIS).

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, we will vote on Head 20.

Question put.

Head 20 agreed to.

Head 21 – Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The floor is now open for any comments.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Mr. Chairman on Programme 1-1-5 - School Scouts Programme (\$98,000). Just a question to the honourable Minister, what schools would qualify for this programme, is it for male and female students? If not, where is the Girl Guides programme, if this is just for male students?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman. People had put in their proposals which was considered by the Ministry of Economy and one such proposal was put by Fiji Scouts Council and that is how this particular item is what you see before you and Fiji Sports Association will be using this money for training girls and boys.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Mr. Chairman, Programme 1-1-7 - Education Forum (\$10,000). Can we have some clarification from the honourable Minister in terms of the \$10,000, is that enough to cover all the travelling in terms of those members who come to attend that Forum?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Yes, it is sufficient, Mr. Chairman, Sir.

Head 21-2-2-6:

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, Programme 2-2-6, this issue seems that there is not enough funds for some of the primary schools I have come across in terms of maintenance. So, I am not sure whether this covers that and the need for urgent school repairs, toilets, windows, pathways and upgrading of toilets, et cetera. So, I am just wondering if that could be looked at and increased.

The other issue, honourable Minister is school grounds. For example, in Rewa, Naitasiri and Tailevu there is only one ground there which is Cakobau Park and it is always congested. So, the school grounds are being used for major games.

In these provinces, we are using Naluwai District School, Burebasaga District School and Nakelo District School. I have come across seeing them in terms of the collection of gate-takings, et cetera with the schools also partaking of that. Major games are happening there so the grounds need to be upgraded and maintained. I am just seeking clarification whether that can cover that because it just like an extra burden on the school committees.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, there is a purpose for FENC and the purpose for FENC is very clearly outlined in the school handbook. There are five categories and how the money should be used and there is no allocation for what he is talking about.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Chairman, I move:

That the amount be increased by \$5 million because obviously, that is not enough because I have seen schools struggling in terms of basic maintenance, Rewa District School, Burebasaga District School and some of them are buying their own furniture now and seeking donations. So, it is a rationale suggestion.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Mr. Chairman, I second the motion.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- So, the second one is definitely a need. It is an extra and it is not budgeted for the grounds used by for national competitions. For example, Skipper Cup, Vanua Shield, and these includes a lot of wear and tear on the school grounds. The Committees have to bring in sand to bury the ground. FRU keeps setting high standards and they come in, they do this and do that, otherwise you will not have the game here. So, I am asking for extra allocation to the school committees. It is not only in Rewa, Naitasiri, Tailevu and it is all over the provinces.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, there is provision, if the funds are left in any of those five areas that I mentioned for five allotments then they can request for virement. So, provision is there for virement.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- You have your Right of Reply.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- The provision is there but my assertion is not enough which is why I am moving the motion for an extra \$5 million.

Question on amendment put.

Motion lost.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Chairman, under Programme 4-1-5, there is an allocation of \$20,000 for Year 12 Life Maths. Can I just get some explanation for that, please?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, there has been a change in the curriculum and we have introduced Life Maths and Pure Maths. Life Maths was introduced for Year 11 already, Year 12 will be introduced in the next academic year and this money is for training of teachers and preparing any resource materials that are required.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Mr. Chairman, on Programme 8-1-10, the question is on the Rehabilitation of Levuka World Heritage Structure (\$1.5 million). Can you explain what this is about, honourable Minister, and whether it covers individual homes where they are required to have the maintenance up to world heritage standards?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, the amount allocated under this particular SEG will be used to rehabilitate Levuka Community Centre and St. John's Catholic Church.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Mr. Chairman, just a question to the honourable Minister on St. John's Catholic Church, what are you going to be doing there? Is it for the stained glass or what is it for?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- It is a complete renovation, ensuring that we maintain that place as a heritage, the way it was before. If the stained glass is there, it will be maintained and the heritage architect as well as the team have put up the plan for the rehabilitation of those two sites. If you are wondering where we are at this stage, the tender was called, it is closed, so we are in the construction or renovation phase now.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Chairman, along the same line, I remember I asked this question in the Supplementary Budget. Is this the same allocation as that or is this in addition to what was allocated in the previous one for Levuka in the March Budget because St. John was in that allocation too?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- This is the church, not the school.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Chairman, if I could, in the Revised Estimate, it was \$147,000, now it is actually \$1.5 million, so obviously work has progressed. So, we are going to go into the construction phase, to start doing the actual work.

There has been a change of \$1.3 million in other words, physical work will actually start, happening at the restoration and strengthening of the Levuka Community Centre and the rehabilitation of St. John Catholic Church in Cawaci.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Chairman, I am still on SEG 10, honourable Minister. I would like to ask about the upgrade of the Fiji Museum with the allocation of \$718,000. Now this is under 'R' and the Museum I believe has been closed for quite a few years now. Do we have a date by when the Museum might reopen?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- The Museum is open for certain functions.

HON. L.S. QEREREQERETABUA.- No, that is the verandah, but the actual Museum itself?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- I will not be able to give you a date. Museum is run by a Board and they will be able to tell me the date. But I know there is a lot of work going on and they would like to complete that work before it is open to the public.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sir, honourable Qereqeretabua seems to make a lot of "Oh, I notice under R". Yes, there is a reason for that because you actually have contracts and when it is under "R", it means that it is being supervised. So when contracts are given tenders, funds are released based on the acquittals that are made. It is proper accounting. When it is not under R, the money is simply given to the Ministry but because it is a major project it has to be under R.

Sir, CIU also has a check-off on it so, for example, there is additional requirement of \$468,000, you will note that in the last budget they received \$250,000 and there has been an additional requirement of \$268,000 for renovation of current storage, expansion of buildings of two levels, painting of exterior and other repair works, installation of air conditioning system, installation of new shelves inside collection storage, wiring works and new extension. These are all the works that are done. So 'R' (please understand) is nothing sinister as you are trying to portray, - 'R' is when there is proper accountability so monies are then acquitted on the basis of acquittals made.

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

Question put.

Head 21 agreed to.

Head 22 – Ministry of Health and Medical Services

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Chairman, I would like to ask the Minister under Programme 1-1-6 - Grant to NGOs (\$1,000,000). I just wanted to know the NGOs that are the beneficiaries of this \$1 million allocation and whether the RAF Fiji is included in that.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Which NGO in particular - FRIENDS?

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- No, not FRIENDS. FRIENDS is a friend of RAF.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- The particular list itself - I would not be able to tell you actually where the RAF is, but I can bring that later. I just want to say, Sir, this was previously \$500,000 but it has now been increased by another \$500,000 to \$1 million because obviously we found that we want to collaborate a lot more with CSOs.

The other thing that has changed is the way that we actually process this. Before we had this long-term arrangement that we had in place and we found in some instances that money was not used in a transparent way. So now we have an expression of interest that is done, all of them including St. John Ambulance have to apply every year and we then identify those who meet that, then we are able to work with them given the budget. But we found that \$500,000 was not enough and we are thankful it has now been moved to \$1 million.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.-Mr. Chairman, SEG 8 - Maintenance of Sub-Divisional Hospitals, Health Centres and Nursing Stations and I am asking this question on your behalf too, Mr. Chairman, as this is about the Wainibokasi Hospital. What type of maintenance is going to happen at the Wainibokasi Hospital in terms of this allocation?

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Mr. Chairman, I can say at this stage one of our multilateral partners has picked up Wainibokasi apart from a few other Health Centres in the next financial year, but that is not captured in this budget alone. Wainibokasi is in our list for fixing, not through this budget line, but through one of our multilateral partners.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Chairman, still on SEG7, could the honourable Minister please clarify the allocations in Indemnity Charges of \$150,000; Medical HR Contingency \$2.5 million; Health Care Financing \$30,000 and Health Information System \$70,000?

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Mr. Chairman, the Medical Contingency is what we pay General Practitioners and Specialists from private sectors that actually do locum for us. So if you went, for example, to Valelevu, it now has more than 20 doctors, and about five of them are actually locums and they come and provide support after hours at night. So you would have seen some of these Health Centres now work 24/7.

The reason why they are able to work 24/7 is because these doctors and Specialists work there after hours. Our Specialists at CWM are being strengthened and supported by Specialists from the private sector who actually were working within the Ministry of Health, and we can bring them back on locum to help us, especially with the on-call arrangements as such. The numbers we have here are 31 GPs and nine Specialists.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Chairman, on SEG10, there is this Kidney Dialysis Treatment Subsidy of \$1.5 million. Can the honourable Minister clarify this, what percentage would this be to the total spent by people on dialysis? It is saying that \$1.5 million is going to subsidise dialysis, in the bigger scheme of things how much do we spend on dialysis every year? I ask the question because I have a friend in Sigatoka, a colleague in my company whose mother has three dialysis a week and each session is \$200, so he is spending \$600 a week - how far does this go in helping to bring down the cost of dialysis?

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Mr. Chairman, this is for those who meet the threshold, those below \$30,000 are able to utilise this funding. We have dialysis available through the National Kidney Centre in Nadera and also the private dialysis units - those who meet the threshold are able to go there and the Government subsidises and gives \$150. In Labasa, that is run by the Board of Visitors and it is actually subsidised. You also have to remember honourable Member, that dialysis is available at the CWM Hospital in the Intensive Care Unit, so acute dialysis happens in the hospitals for any Fijian whether you earn \$30,000 or more, you get it for free. If someone is very unwell and goes into the

hospital and needs dialysis to stay alive, they get it for free during that acute stage, but it is the chronic dialysis when they actually get home, those who actually meet the threshold can then apply and get this subsidy.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Tikoduadua, I always come back to you.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Chairman, just in two parts; First, I would just like to thank the honourable Minister for saying that he is going to come back to us with the NGO names. On SEG 6 - I just wanted to re-enforce that. I have a motion on SEG 10 though, I do not know if you would like me to move that now.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- No, not yet.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman, just a matter of clarification from the honourable Minister for Health with regards to SEG 1. I note that the doctor's salary is still the same with the allocation. Are you intending to recruit more doctors under this allocation?

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Do you mean the one from last year until now because if you look at it, last year it was \$91 million now it is \$92 million.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Secondly, on SEG 5, with the increase in the allocation for security.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- For security services - \$4.7 million, that is for the security services that has been tendered out. So, when you go to CWM hospital and Valelevu, during the time you were at the hospital we used to have people employed by the Ministry. What we found is that in some instances they did not turn up to work or quite a bit of them were unwell. That is why we outsourced it in the tender and at the moment I believe Grid Security is the one that is covering a lot of the hospitals.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, I move:

That Head 22-1-1-10 be increased by \$500,000 with respect to Kidney Dialysis Treatment Subsidy.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- I second the motion.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, there seems to be a never ending need for kidney dialysis which is really proportional to the spread of NCD in Fiji. I know we have had a whole lot of debate about this. I am sure that there is never going to be enough money to allocate but in this regard, I believe that we should add another \$500,000 to the initial allocation of \$1.5 million to make it \$2 million to create opportunity for people who are suffering from kidney problems in to the future. Thank you.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Thank you Mr. Chairman, Sir, I speak for the motion from honourable Tikoduadua and in particular when we are talking about dialysis and kidney disease. I always wonder how much funding we are giving to the prevention of NCDs in Fiji and I go forward a couple of pages and I see the National Centre for Health Promotion for example, is getting \$200,000; Communicable Disease Prevention and Control - \$80,000; Non-Communicable Disease Prevention and Control - \$150,000 and so forth, so I want to endorse the motion from honourable Tikoduadua to increase the allocation for dialysis treatment subsidy.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, if I may, when someone has kidney dialysis that means their kidney is already diseased, the prevention is completely different. We are talking about kidney dialysis and I want to make a few things clear. In the previous budget it was \$75 subsidy about two budgets ago. This is the government that actually provided a subsidy of \$75 then it went up to \$150. In the last budget it was \$1.2 million, it is now being increased by \$300,000 to \$1.5 million. It has increased on the number of patients that are seen, identified by the doctors that actually meet the threshold.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members we will now take a vote on this motion.

Question on amendment put.

Motion lost.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote on Head 22 – Ministry of Health and Medical Services.

Question put.

Head 22 agreed to.

Head 23 – Ministry of Housing and Community Development

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for Head 23 – Ministry of Housing and Community Development.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Sorry, his is not on this particular Head. I am just trying to ask a point for clarification, Mr. Chairman. Because you had announced earlier that we would end with Head 22, can we just get some indication in terms of how far you would like to proceed in terms of the Head? We are fine if you want to proceed but just how far as we need to re-sort our notes and all that.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- I am surprised, you normally do your homework well ahead of what we have to do. Just give me five minutes and I will answer that question for you.

Honourable Members, we will now vote on Head 23.

Question put.

Head 23 agreed to.

Head 24 – Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for Head 24 – Ministry for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Chairman. I hereby accept the position of Minister. The Economic Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, Programme 1-1-7 - \$18,000. Could some clarification be provided on that please in terms of programmes, where it is covered and the nature of the coverage?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, this is in lifting up persons living with disabilities and their families out of financial hardships through skills training and provision of seed

grants for business of successful recipients. A training will be conducted by a successful trainer who is experienced in training persons with disabilities, proposed some relevant licence if needed, seeds release-based on approval processes. It is for them.

This funding is increased by \$8,000 but as you also know, Mr. Chairman, that there other assistance too apart from the allowances that the people get jobs anywhere else, we get a 400 percent tax deduction. So we find a lot of people or some people are being given employment opportunities. This is just to help them. And of course there are other Ministries that can also help them whether it is through maritime development, agriculture, et cetera, in terms of jobs or farming, et cetera.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Chairman, this is still on Activity 1. On SEG 7 there is an allocation of Community Based Corrections Programme - \$70,000. I need some clarifications from the honourable Minister with regards to the nature of the programmes allocated here. What relation is that to the Yellow Ribbon Programme covered for women?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sir, if I could clarify, Community Based Corrections is a system that fosters community based sentencing options and rehabilitation/reintegration of offenders. It complements Yellow Ribbon.

There is also, Mr. Chairman, it cater for activities like purchase of information, communication, education materials, rehabilitation programmes, mini expo for children or in conflict with the law, juveniles, restorative justice conferencing and awareness, monitoring evaluation and learning exercise for the activities carried out on rehabilitation programme and there is also consultations with magistrate, in particular with juveniles.

A refresher training for the community volunteers, supervisors and there is some remuneration for volunteers. The allowance of supervisors are, of course, paid only on days they are engaged, so maybe say twice a week, that is what it caters for.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- On Programme 1-2-7 - Integrated National Poverty Eradication Programme (\$200,000). Is this like for the whole of the Government Ministry or just an aspect of that for women, children and poverty alleviation? What does it cover, honourable Minister?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sir, this unit monitors and evaluates the impact of poverty, alleviation programmes of Government, Intergrated National Poverty and Eradication Programme Framework (INEP) which will contribute and assist towards poverty reductions. So they work together with the different Ministries saying, "Look, this is our experience, how can we actually help, identify and alleviate poverty?" This is an integrated approach. You will also see that it is for Strengthening Coordination Structures Mechanism Framework Systems under INEP, monitoring evaluation of 10 Government Poverty Alleviation Programmes and conducting awareness on Government's Poverty Reduction Programme. The Budget for this has increased slightly by about \$15,000 compared to the previous budget. So, it is now \$200,000.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Chairman, on Programme 3-1-8, can we have an update on the Fiji Barefoot College (\$1.1 million)?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sir, this is coming to a conclusion. The reduction and the allocation of course is a final contractual payment for the completion of the project. The Barefoot College, Mr. Chairman, Sir, is to empower rural women in Fiji to be solar engineers, be local capacity and electrify poor of the grid communities' clean low cost solar energy. It is the first ever woman solar training centre of its kind in the Pacific. It will create low carbon development pathway to reduce the current and future contribution of climate change.

A total of 1,200 rural households are expected to benefit each year from this initiative. To-date the total percentage of works completed is 72.76 percent. The works that have been carried out, site civil works, ceiling electrical works, interior painting works underway at classroom and administration building, the ceiling and tiling works, interior painting works underway at the staff accommodation building plus the works underway at the water tank base and battery room, electrical works underway and piping works underway. We expect this to be completed in this financial year and we hope to have the launch of it very soon. In fact it is a big deal for that particular part of Vanua Levu.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, we will now vote on Head 24.

Question put.

Head 24 agreed to.

Head 25 – Ministry of Youth & Sports

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Chairman, on Programme 1-2-7 (\$500,000) for Youth Capacity Building and Training Programme. Can I ask the honourable Minister to explain what programme is included in this allocation?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Chairman, it does involve a number of initiatives. It covers the Youth Development Programmes and support the youths with Youth Farm Initiatives Assistance and income generating projects for improved livelihoods and their well-being. The Capacity Building and Training Programme is in line with the Government's Budget Guidelines - Economic Recovery and New Business Development, protection of the most vulnerable and of course food security.

Mr. Chairman, some of the initiatives that have been engaged in this particular programme has been climate change programmes, conduct and implementation of National Certification Resilience Level 1, Youth Coast Care Programme (\$8,000), Implementation of Waste Management Programme (\$8,000), Youth Grant and Youth Farm Initiative, Youth Farm Initiative Assistance (\$160,000), Income Generating Projects (\$100,000), Training Cost at Nasau Youth Training Centre, Agriculture Training, Carpentry Training, Outreach and Monitoring of Youth Grant Assistance Training Programmes, Youth Club Registration (we help them to register their clubs) and Wages for Youth Training Centre.

Mr. Chairman, one of the big initiatives that the Ministry of Youth is helping us with is getting all the youth clubs to register so they can also qualify for this Jobs for Nature 2.0 programme that we have got, where Government will actually pay them the minimum wage which will be \$4 an hour from next year January to actually go out and plant trees. For them to qualify, a youth club has to be registered or women's club has to be registered for them to qualify and we have allocated substantial amount of money for this programme. The Ministry of Youths is working together with the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, Rural and Maritime Development, they are all working in conjunction to be able to ensure that we roll this programme out well.

HON. RO. F. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Chairman, seeking clarification from honourable Minister. Before I note that we used to have Construction and Maintenance of Rural Grounds on Programme 2-1-10 or some thereabouts. Is that in another programme or is it deleted?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Chairman, if I could respond? It does not mean it is deleted, but it means that at moment it is not funded. Of course, Mr. Chairman, it can come back on, but we have

for this particular purpose the construction of hard courts. We support the construction of two hard courts; one is the construction of a hard court in Tataiya Memorial School, Rakiraki and Kamikamica Park, Lautoka and the construction of two multi-purpose courts at Tuatua Housing in Labasa and Vunidawa in Naitasiri. The one in Rakiraki and the Kamikamica Park will cost around \$94,000, the construction of the two multipurpose courts one will be at the cost of \$180,000 and the one in Naitasiri will be at the cost of \$360,000.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Chairman, on SEG 6 - Overseas Sporting Tours allocation of \$1.9 million. In that allocation, would you also include teams like the Drua franchise or is it for other sport given that Drua is a franchise already supported by Government.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sir, the way the Drua works is that if you see this allocation in Head 50, you will see the \$3 million for the purchase of the rest of the shares. So this will be a total input of \$6 million. Drua then does its own thing. Their company and they have worked within their own financial framework. This is in respect of other overseas sporting tours so the ones that have been identified, Mr. Chairman, Sir, is the Archery, Pacific Games Athletics, Basketball, Cricket, Hockey, Netball (we have also), Fiji Rugby Union which is the Women's 15 ranking event, the Northern Tour sanctioned event which is the preparation of the 2023 World Cup playing Scotland, Ireland and France and the Fijiana 15 test match playing Japan, Australia and New Zealand essentially to improve our ranking. So this is what it has been allocated for. World Cup Sevens ranking event, Special Olympics - Summer Games and Weightlifting, Pacific Games through Oceania, Senior, Junior and Youth games and Yachting.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, we will now vote.

Question put.

Head 25 agreed to.

Head 26 – Higher Education Institutions

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, I note that USP is not there but there is no point in asking for an explanation. So I suppose we will just need to ask the question, will you pay the grant in the term of your Government and include that.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- No.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Or will that be reconsidered and on what grounds? Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Just take into account what is under Higher Education on that Activity.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM. Sir, I had explained this in the Revised Budget Address that should USP go ahead with the independent investigation in respect of the matters that have been identified by Chair of ARC and the Chancellor and investigation results come out, we will find the money to provide the funding. We are quite happy to do that and we can do that. But they have to go through that process.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- I do not know whether you are commenting or

HON. V. R. GAVOKA.- I am lamenting this because we are really telling the whole world that USP is no longer important to us. At least put a provision in here and then decide how to go. If you totally remove it from the Estimates, you really are telling people that this is an institution that

will no longer support and no longer consider. Look, the perception you are creating is very dangerous, when you come up with something like that. It is mind-boggling that we can just turn our back on an institution like USP. I just cannot comprehend it. How can you be so careless about USP?

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- You want us to throw money ...

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- No. You have issues but at least make the provision in the budget and work towards rectifying the issues. Here you are telling everyone, you do not care, close the university, go somewhere else. That is what you are saying.

(Honourable Members interject)

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Order! Order!

Honourable Member, you can only discuss what is here in the budget. If USP is not here, it is not here for discussion. You can discuss other university or institutions that are there, that is what it is. That is what the budget is about. We are talking about this current budget. That Programme regarding USP will come up during the year, it always will. It has come up in the past, Government has dealt with it in the answers, it will come up again in the future, but it is not an end, it is a thing in progress. Government has made the conditions so let us just stick to what is here on Head 26-1-1.

Honourable Members, we will vote on that Head.

Question put.

Head 26 agreed to.

Head 30 - Ministry of Agriculture

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Can we just get a clarification on 1-1-10 from the honourable Minister regarding the Agriculture Marketing Authority - Capital Grant (\$1,500,000); and Committee on Better Utilisation of Land (\$6,900,000)?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Chairman, the AMA Grant is given to AMA to allow them to collect produce from interior, maritime areas where other exporters do not go and middlemen do not go and pick it up because it is expensive, it is not worth. This particular amount is given to allow them to go and pick up the produce, bring it and sell it and pay them.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Chairman, on the same SEG, I would like to move a motion:

To increase this allocation on SEG 10 for Agriculture Marketing Authority from \$1.5 million to \$2 million.

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

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Chairman, the issue of Agro Marketing Authority has always been a matter for concern for rural-based farmers, particularly, the subsistence farmers, as the honourable Minister has explained. The issue seems to suggest that there has never enough capacity within AMA to receive all of the produce that the farmers expect AMA to buy. In order to alleviate that particularly because this is dealing with the poorest of the poor. To increase this

allocation from \$1.5 million to \$2 million to look after the interest of all our rural farmers whose produce if they come to the market would normally rot if they are not able to sell it in time and if the private sector does not take them. Thank you.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, if I can explain, that is incorrect that AMA has not been able to pick up produce. AMA has expanded in terms of area of collection and AMA has grown in terms of volume that they collect and AMA has grown 300 times in terms of the number of containers that they are lifting and exporting.

AMA has also expanded in terms of the produce that they pick up. Now, they are picking up in extended areas - fish, they are picking up *dalo*, cassava, *kava*. Mr. Chairman, Sir, if you look at the AMA numbers now, they will show you that AMA has done extremely well over the last three years.

The issue of volume, what we have done is to ensure that we pick up the produce as much as possible, we have also made two tier price. The first tier we offer them the market price and then beyond that first tier volume, we are offering them a slightly lower price so that we collect their produce and sell it at a lower price here so that they are not able to leave their produce and rot.

So, Mr. Chairman, Sir, AMA has done extremely well and I urge the honourable Member to see me later on and I will give him the data on how AMA has expanded in terms of collection area and in terms of volume.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, I support the motion for the need to increase the allocation for AMA Capital Grant. There is a need to increase the presence of AMA, for example, in the Province of Naitasiri. There is a need to set up a collection centres say in Vunidawa, Sawani or Naqali. This is evident Mr. Chairman, Sir, during the lockdown as a lot of farmers brought their produce down to Sawani and most returned to the village without their produce being bought by AMA. This is something I hope that the AMA will look into to ensure that when farmers bring their produce to the respective collecting centres they need to first be paid at an equitable rate.

If not at the market rate, you need to pay them first at a rate that is usually transacted in the market and also make sure that most of the farmers when they bring their produce to the city centres are received by AMA. So I support the motion in the sense that there is a need to increase your presence closer to the farmers and setup collection centres rather than bringing their produce right to Nausori to sell.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- No, Mr. Chairman, Sir, let me tell you something: that areas closer to Nausori, et cetera, where the exporters and middlemen are picking up. By law we are not supposed to pick it up from them, we are not going to the farmers because these are the areas where exporters are picking up and the exporters are complaining before that AMA is cannibalising in that area.

So we made it very clear to AMA that these are the areas that you are not supposed to go. You are supposed to go to Kadavu, Cicia, Nadarivatu, Nabuatoutou, Cikobia ...

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Listen, let me explain, what happens is that when the exporters have enough of produce in this area then they do not want to pick up the extra, then these farmers bring it up and they want to dump it up with AMA. Then AMA buys it but does not go to those areas because the exporters will complain. These are Sawani, Muaniweni, Viria – these are areas divided by the exporters. There are designated exporters who are operating out of these areas. AMA is not supposed to

go and collect from those areas. It is only in the interior where exporters are not going, that is where AMA is going. That is what this operating grant is for, for them to go because those areas are not economical for private sector operators to go and pick it up.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sir, can I add one thing because as part of the budget consultations, we had a number of submissions on this. We had one gentleman saying I want a particular price for my cassava. I am not getting it at Nausori Market because there is in fact an oversupply of cassava. A lot of people are growing it, so the private sector comes along, there is a lot of competition, they pay a lower price. This farmer said I want to be paid this price. AMA should pay me this price. I said but how can AMA pay this particular price and what will AMA do because they cannot sell it. He said I really do not care. You just throw the cassava away but I want my money for the cassava. AMA cannot do that.

It will be completely unsustainable. AMA simply cannot buy at a price that the market does not dictate. If AMA buys it at that particular price then AMA will not be able to sell it because people want to pay a lower price. How will they be able to export it? That is some of the things you need to understand and I think some of the contributions being made simply see AMA just as a buying agency. But AMA also, when it exports itself, it also makes money too. This is why some of the funding there, they do not give a 100 percent because they use that money to also go and do more business. So, we need to understand that, Sir,

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- . Thank you, Sir. Just a matter of clarification from the Minister. If he can just clarify about this programme of the Committee of Better Utilisation of Land (CBUL).

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Speak on the motion.

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Sorry, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, we will now vote on this motion.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Sir, can I get my right of reply.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- You can. I am feeling generous.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I hear what the honourable Minister is saying and the clarification by the honourable Attorney-General. The reality on the ground is that, the subsistence farmers are saying there is a disconnect between the Ministry of Agriculture and the farmer, in terms of the agriculture encouraging farmers to produce but at the same time since AMA is under the authority also of the Ministry of Agriculture, it is unable to deal, unable to accept everything that the farmers produce.

Obviously, I recognise the issue on the interest of the private sector in this regard as the honourable Attorney-General has explained. But the reason why we would like to see and you know, a higher allocation than what is allocated here is because the need is great. You only have to go to the Suva Market or the Nausori Market, Mr. Chairman, to see the farmers who come all the way up from the *colo* of the Waidina, *colo* of the Wainimala to sell their produce like *dalo*, *tavioka* and *vudi* in great amounts but are unable to you know sell it all because the volume is too much, so there is a lot of reliance.

Agro Marketing to look after the interest of farmers that are well into the interior of Viti Levu. I recognised what the Minister is saying, that farmers down below are also trying to take advantage of that but I would still ask, Mr. Chairman, for the interest of all these people, who you know, who have rotten produce every Sunday morning, who are unable to sell their goods because there is so much volume but

it is not being bought by Agro Marketing, to increase the allocation at least by \$500,000 to \$2 million to meet the needs of these poor subsistence farmers.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Chairman, just to clarify the misconception....

(Hon. Lt. Col. P. Tikoduadua interjects)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Yes, do not get angry.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- I am not angry. I am addressing this motion.

Honourable Members, we will vote on the amendment.

Question on Amendment put.

Motion lost.

Head 30-2-2-9:

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- I want clarification from the honourable Minister regarding Activity 2-2-9 on Farm Mechanisation of \$1.5 million.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Chairman, there are two components to that. I had explained yesterday in my speech that we are now going in big time into mechanisation of our agriculture sector. In that mechanisation agenda that we have, we want farmers to form cooperative where we will provide them with machinery. In this case, there are three machineries we are targeting, tractors, excavator and rice harvester.

So, we are organising the farmers into groups and getting them to register as a cooperative and we are looking at providing tractors, excavator and harvester. So, for harvester we are looking at 10 harvesters this time around and three excavator in this area where ginger grows.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Which areas are you targeting for this ginger excavators?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Naitasiri area and then we are looking at providing tractors to cooperatives throughout Fiji about 25 of them.

All these three machineries, Government will provide through this allocation - two-third of the total cost and one-third will be provided by these groups of clusters of cooperatives.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- On SEG 10, there is a machinery outsourcing, how is that different from this farm mechanisation.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Chairman, this is the first time the Ministry of Economy has provided this \$7 million. Until now the Ministry has been organising its tractor for land preparation, excavator for land clearing, bulldozer for land clearing. But giving the limited number of machinery, we will not able to get the machinery on time to the farmers. So, we have now decided with the Ministry of Economy that we will outsource the entire activity, whether you need it for ploughing, in field drainage, land clearing, you need a bulldozer or an excavator, tractor or rotavator, there is a 50/50 cost sharing basis. So, it ensures greater efficiency of service delivery. It will ensure that farmers get it before the planting times starts, so that there is no delay in that crop cultivation and ensure that we are able to bring in new land under cultivation eventually raise productivity and production.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Chairman, can I just ask the honourable Minister to give us an indication of the waiting time that the farmers experienced when they book a tractor or what not? We have been getting a lot of calls that it take months before the machinery gets into the farmers. Do you have an average rating time nationally or regionally? Can you indicate that?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- That is precisely why we are now outsourcing. It will not be our tractor they have to book, they have to wait. What Ministry of Economy will do, they will get a tender out to register providers of machinery. Those who will provide tractor in area wise in Nadi, Lautoka, Ba, Labasa, Seaqqa, Wainikoro, et cetera, excavator, bulldozer, so the moment we get a request we will immediately go and inspect and then give the job order to that particular registered provider whether it is a tractor, excavator or bulldozer, they have to pay their 50 percent and when the job is done we inspect and then we will pay the remaining 50 percent to the provider.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Chairman, when will you expect this to be in place, honourable Minister?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- As soon as the Budget is out, the Ministry of Economy will get the tender out. So it will take a couple of months to get this through.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, we will now vote.

Question put.

Head 30 agreed to.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, we have now concluded voting on Heads 1-30, eight more Heads than I had anticipated. We will now adjourn the Committee of Supply until tomorrow.

Honourable Members, before we adjourn, I will have to resume my seat, just bear with me for a couple of minutes.

The House resumed:

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we had gone beyond Head 22 because dinner is prepared for 7 o'clock and it is just on 7 o'clock, so you are in time for dinner.

We adjourn until tomorrow morning when we will continue with the Committee of Supply.

The Parliament adjourned at 7.08 p.m.