

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

FRIDAY, 2ND SEPTEMBER, 2022

[CORRECTED COPY]

CONTENTS

	<u>Pages</u>
Minutes	2363
Communications from the Speaker	2363
Questions	2363-2378
<u>Oral Questions</u>	
(1) Palemo Convention on Human Trafficking (Q/No. 165/2022)	
(2) Heart Surgeries – Lautoka Hospital (Q/No. 168/2022)	
(3) Addressing IUU Fishing (Q/No. 169/2022)	
(4) Measures to Address Poverty Nationwide (Q/No. 170/2022)	
(5) Prediction of Storm Surges & Other Extreme Weather Events (Q/No. 171/2022)	
(6) Reconstruction/Rehabilitation – Kadavu Secondary Schools (Q/No. 172/2022)	
(7) Plans for the 2022-2023 Budget (Q/No. 173/2022)	
(8) Role and Functions – Department of Children (Q/No. 175/2022)	
<u>Written Question</u>	
(1) Committee on the Better Utilisation of Land (Q/No. 176/2022)	
End of Week Statements	2379-2393
(1) Independent Bodies and Commissions	
(2) Importance of a Knowledge-Based Economy	
(3) ICTs in Fiji's Rural and Maritime Areas	
Adjournment	2393

FRIDAY, 2ND SEPTEMBER, 2022

The Parliament met at 9.39 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

MR. SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Members were present, except the honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations, Youth and Sports; the honourable M.R Leawere; the honourable P.W. Vosanibola; the honourable Professor B.C. Prasad; the honourable L.S. Qereqeretaua; and the 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 Thursday, 1st September, 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

I welcome all honourable Members to today's sitting of Parliament. I also welcome those joining us in the public gallery this morning - a very warm welcome to you all, and those watching the live broadcast of the proceedings. Thank you for your continued interest in the workings of your Parliament.

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

Palemo Convention on Human Trafficking
(Question No. 165/2022)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Defence, National Security and Policing, Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management update Parliament on the implementation of the Palemo Convention on Human Trafficking?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- First let me thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and the Secretariat for allowing this question to be carried over from yesterday because of some official engagements, and I was not able to be in Parliament last night. We had the New Zealand Defense Secretary and his team with us and they left again this morning - they were here over the last two days, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

I wish to acknowledge the honourable Member for this question - very relevant, very important and very applicable given the challenges that we face today. I hope that all honourable Members will listen carefully and take responsibility as well in disseminating information and being alert and aware of what is happening around us and most particularly, if we can work together with the authorities concerned because this is a major issue that we all face.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the benefit of the general public and all honourable Members when we look at our general security architecture, conventionally you could say that the threats are very low - the possibility of a conventional attack against Fiji and its interests. But the biggest threat to security today not only for Fiji but probably in most countries, are what we call non-traditional threats. For us in the Pacific consistent with the Boe Declaration, we have identified climate change as the biggest threat that we face (that is the non-traditional threat); the transnational crimes; and this Palermo Convention that I am going to respond to today.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, my response is about the Palermo Convention. It is about the Convention Against the Transnational Organised Crime because the biggest contrast in society today and unfortunately, it is between the civil and the uncivil. We are supposed to be civilised and we have progressed so much but unfortunately there are still elements within our society (and this is the fact, this is the reality) and unfortunately it is something that we cannot control but we need to monitor and perhaps keep to a minimum if possible - the uncivil amongst our community.

Most of these groups are involved in organised, I say again Mr. Speaker, Sir, organised transnational crime. It is very, very important, Mr. Speaker, Sir. There are two major components to the Convention Against Transnational Organised Crime. The first component being the Palermo Convention which is the protocol against the smuggling of migrants by land, sea or air. This was adopted by the UNGA in resolution 55/ 25 I will not go into those details. This came into force around 2004 but this is what I want to say about the Palermo Convention. It deals with the growing problem of organised criminal groups who smuggle migrants often at the risk of the migrant, but bring in profits and gains to the perpetrators, the offenders. It will become clearer as I delve further into the issue.

The other component is the Vienna Convention which mainly deals with Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and of course, arms as well, Mr. Speaker, Sir. But for Fiji, we acceded to the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organised Crime, more commonly known as the Palermo Convention on 19th September, 2017. This came into force in 2004, if I remember correctly, but it took us such a long time to accede to the Palermo Convention. I will explain the logic behind it. It is simply because when we deal with transnational issues, it involves a lot of cross border issues as well and people who understand security, will perhaps better understand this.

There is a lot of involvement - Ministries of Foreign Affairs are involved, we have Interpol and so many agencies because most of the issues are crosscutting, overlapping, therefore the coordination between all of us, and not only that, we have our own sovereign laws. Perhaps, this is an area for those who have been following the US Report on human trafficking. This is one of the issues that we have with Fiji, because they want to impose their laws on Fiji's sovereign laws. They have gone well ahead of us in changing their laws over the years because of the change in the dynamics of security, but we here, not only Fiji but most of the region, our laws are still archaic and it is not suited to it. This is something that the honourable Attorney-General was talking about.

When there are changes externally, we have to look at changes within and in most cases we will have to change the legislations first and then we will change the policies as well, and then the strategies and activities will come into line. So this is why, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it took so long for Fiji because this is a transnational and global issue as well, before we zero it down to the local setting. I

am thankful that this is the first question for this morning because of its relevance and of course, why it is so important to all of us.

The three major components, we call it the three main Ps when it comes to this protocol. One is the protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons, especially women and children or known as the 'trafficking in persons' protocol. We have had instances in Fiji where people have just been charged recently for trafficking people. I will not go into the details, but it is common knowledge. People have been arrested and of course brought into court, prosecuted and most of them are serving their time now.

Perhaps the bigger danger, if I may digress a bit here, Mr. Speaker, Sir. This is why I have said that it is very important that we monitor our communities, particularly our children. In some countries, there is a relation between drugs and trafficking, and in some countries they attack the vulnerable, saying that this is a performance enhancement drug, particularly to farmers. Then the farmers who have no money start taking this and then they come in the name of performance enhancement - 'you take it so that you can increase your productivity because it is good for the country, you will get more exports out of your products.' Come a time the farmers are addicted and when they are addicted, this is when those behind this, the uncivil, start demanding for money. They know that these farmers do not have money, therefore, they have already done their work and know that the farmer has three daughters. Okay, you do not have the money, you cannot pay, how about you give me your three daughters and I will provide employment for them, and these three daughters will be arranged for jobs abroad.

Do your *Google* or go to *YouTube* - instances where Kenyan women are trafficked into India with the promise of jobs. Once they arrive, passports are confiscated and there are claims against all the costs - it costs you US\$27,000 to bring you from Kenya to here. You have to pay me this money. How do I pay the money? I was coming for a job. Given makeups, everything, there is a pick up coming at six o'clock and there will be clients waiting, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children - I hope I have covered enough to justify the importance of this Palermo Convention, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Two is the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air (Smuggling Protocol). In Fiji's case, we have a porous border but we are now signing with our partners on shiprider agreements, air reconnaissance and we are also looking at the possibility of using drones, let us move with technology so that we can better influence, we can better influence our areas, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and of course the Protocol Against Illicit Manufacturing and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition (Firearms Protocol) as well. That is known particularly as the Firearms Protocol.

Very quickly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the Protocol of Human Trafficking and Smuggling Protocol. This is a more important one for Fiji. Although we do not want to dilute the threat particularly with firearms and the components as well but I think, out of the two protocols, this is more of the bigger challenge for us - the Smuggling Protocol. Sir, on this I am pleased to say that Government through my Ministry has taken great strides to enhance our efforts to combatting trafficking in persons.

In January, 2020, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Defence, National Security and Policing was delegated the responsibility to administer Fiji's Anti-Trafficking Inter-Agency Committee. We have formed this Committee. If I may just very quickly mention the Members of the Committee - the Ministry of Women and Children, the Ministry of Employment, Office of the Solicitor-General, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Department of Immigration, Fiji Police Force, FRCS, and we are open to all agencies. On a needs basis and upon invitation, we are bringing CSOs and other organisations and there are two key organisations that we also work with.

One is the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and the other is very lately, the Asia Foundation is coming into the country and one of their main objectives is to specifically help Fiji in our human trafficking mechanisms, Mr. Speaker, Sir. But on the IOM – this is the International Organisation for Migration, not only when it comes to illegal smuggling of people but they are very important to us as well when we have disasters. We work very closely with them because they deal with internally displaced people and refugees as well. But in our cases particularly, post-disasters – many internally displaced people, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Sir, work has been ongoing with the Committee and we are happy to say that Government has also approved a National Anti-Human Trafficking Strategy and Action Plan as of 16 January 2021 and it focuses on prevention, protection, prosecution and of course partnership as well. I have mentioned the organisations that we work with apart from IOM and the Asia Foundation of course we have our bilateral partners and of course the international organisations for migration as I have stated and the Governments of United States, Australia and New Zealand as well.

Finally if I may just say Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have formed the committee, we have devised the National Action Plan and Strategy and also one of the key requirements is for us to have what we call a “Case Management Coordinator” so that all the reporting, all the activities are centralised particularly when it comes to reporting because it is a requirement that cases or those that become victims or survivor are provided with all and any necessary assistance that they may require and if there are investigations they must be supported and ensured that it goes all the way to prosecution.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, so far with the establishment of the strategy and the case management coordinator in the 2021-2022 Financial Year the case management coordinator has dealt with two referrals and to date in this Financial Year we have received and dealt with one referral so far.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, finally, we are at the last stages of finalising a National Referral Mechanism that ensures that any and or likely cases of human trafficking are referred to the CMC and of course we need to maintain a consolidated database on the prevalence of human trafficking in Fiji.

I think I will stop there in the interest of time but there is a lot to cover in this, feel free to honourable Members, the Committee under the chairmanship of the Permanent Secretary for Defence and National Security and Policing are always willing to give information and work with the authorities, the leadership of this country and the communities so that we can all address these issues for the obvious reasons that I have stated.

Heart Surgeries - Lautoka Hospital
(Question No. 168/2022)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services inform Parliament why heart surgeries at the Aspen managed Lautoka Hospital have not commenced as announced by the honourable Attorney-General on Thursday 24 March 2022?

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for that question, it has been confirmed for the end of the month and the reason is that there has been a surge of COVID-19 cases as you know there has been a slight change in Australia and also there has been the *influenza* season in Australia. This has actually put some pressures on the personnel who need to come over and actually do the open heart surgery for us.

The open heart surgery, maybe the honourable Member would know, is not a simple thing

where someone just fronts up today and gets an operation tomorrow like you would do with an appendisectomy. It requires assessment, optimizing the patient, it requires making sure that the patient who will have open heart surgery which means that the heart will be allowed to stop beating on its own and the heart-lung machine beats on behalf of the patient and making sure also that the patient will come back afterwards, that is the whole aim of the operation.

So there is a whole process involved in that and the assessments that need to be done are being done by both our local doctors working with their colleagues in Australia at the moment as we know and the honourable Attorney-General had talked about the other day that we will now have more than 700 of our staff that have now moved on to Health Care Fiji and we wish them all the best and some of them are my colleagues and I am very proud, actually very happy and excited for them in this new adventure that we are heading.

Mr. Speaker, just before I sit down and just seeing honourable Tikoduadua (I know this is an opportunity for me to say something before the end of this Parliamentary session) one thing that concerns me is that throughout this Parliamentary week is the fact that a lot of the Opposition Members just decided to go away. At one stage there was only five of this august Parliament. I know that some of them are unwell and they need to take rest but, Sir, this is Parliament. We must make time to be here in Parliament. All of us are busy. We are all busy. Honourable Rasova I know you are busy. We are all busy but we make time to be here in Parliament.

Honourable Tikoduadua was not here yesterday to actually ask the honourable Prime Minister his question on USP in the corruption in USP. You should have ask it that he can know for sure what happened.

Honourable Professor Biman Prasad and honourable Qereqeretabua are not here. Mr. Speaker, what concerns me is the level of personal attacks that happened and straight after that they go. This is Parliament where you actually come and discuss through debate and if you decided to make a personal attack be willing to stand as a woman and as a man to also receive not a personal attack but the reasoning why things have been made for the benefit of all Fijians.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Honourable Speaker, before I ask my supplementary to the honourable Minister, I just want to note there is nothing contravening any Standing Orders of Parliament the absence of any Member from this House for the businesses of the Members own concern. That is what the law says and is that not what we all are living by. No one is running away from anyone.

Anyway the honourable Minister is concerned about the actions of this side of the House, I think the honourable Minister should go out there and do his job well...

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- When I was there in the hospital and where were you.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- ... and look after the State of our health system to make sure that when a promise is made and that is why we asked the question and that the honourable Minister on behalf of the Government should deliver the services as promised by the Government.

MR. SPEAKER.- Ask your question.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- That is all I have to say, Mr. Speaker.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- I did not hear the honourable Minister say when it will commence. I mean, the promise was made can you give us definitive dates on when this will happen, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, he has answered that appropriately.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had alluded to earlier at the end of the month and in addition if you wanted to know, honourable Gavoka, more than \$8 million worth of equipment that are coming across to Lautoka: \$3.5 million is already in-house, there is a new CT Scan that is available and it is working; and another \$5.5 million worth of equipment in other areas that are coming across. All the equipment that is needed to do open heart surgery nearly all or all of them are actually in Lautoka and as I said it is the end of the month.

Addressing IUU Fishing
(Question No. 169/2022)

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

Given the vast ocean space and the need to address IUU, can the honourable Minister for Fisheries inform Parliament on the arrangements carried out by Fiji to ensure that Fiji waters are efficiently patrolled?

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank honourable Nath for the question.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this subject of Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing has been discussed in one way or another in Parliament but I will go through the subject that is being asked this morning. In general, the surveillance and the business of fishing vessels in Fiji waters is covered under three main headings: one is the legislative framework then we have the monitoring control surveillance and enforcement.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to ensure an effective approach in managing our vast ocean from IUU fishing we must have a robust legislation that is fit for purpose, forward looking and address the distinctive variables that exist in our ocean space. The Offshore Fisheries Management Act of 2012 and its regulations of 2014 has the objective to conserve, manage and develop the long-term sustainable use of all fisheries resources and as such has the legal provisions to address these needs. For example, part 5 of the Act under Licences and Authorisations it provides the legal basis in which licences are issued and also covers the need to have the needed permits to help track the fish trade from when it is caught until when it is eaten.

Additionally, as I have alluded to Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Act provides provisions for monitoring, control, surveillance and enforcement. In the work undertaken by our Fisheries Observers the monitoring exercise provides the critical scientific data that is needed to understand fishing trends and tuna stock. Through an advance approach and as a complement to having observers on board vessels, the Ministry implements an electronic monitoring system that records all activities on the vessel. In fact this fiscal year's budget has an allocation of \$550,000 for the monitoring systems.

The use of video footage sightings and observer report is used by the Ministry to identify illegal activities that occur on any fishing vessels in our waters. Moreover, Mr. Speaker, Sir, through our licensing and control mechanisms there are conditions in place to track the movement of vessels and activities that enter Fiji waters. This includes the mandatory Entry and Exit Notifications where vessels will have to report their location, fish on board and their intention when entering Fiji waters.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, apart from this manual reporting there are also mandatory requirements to assist vessel tracks that are held on board all fishing vessels. These are called the “Vessel Monitoring System” (VMS). This system works as a vessel tracker similar to GPS which are able to track using satellite reporting system housed at the Ministry of Fisheries and the Fiji Navy Regional Surveillance Centre. Through this collaborative work with the Forum Fisheries Agency all vessel movements in Fiji are analysed and monitored.

If vessels are suspected of illegal fishing these vessels are then tagged to indicate the need for thorough inspection and investigation during boarding and clearance exercise. Mr. Speaker, Sir, with an annual average of 1,200 foreign fishing vessels transiting through our waters or making port visits it is vital that systems are in place to conduct relevant checks on these vessels. Fiji is fortunate that it undertakes stringent boarding and inspection exercises that are undertaken by our Enforcement Officers.

The boarding and inspection are either conducted out at sea, in port or along the wharf depending on the type of vessels that pass through our waters. If vessels are suspected to have conducted illegal fishing activities the current law gives provisions for our officers to seize the vessel and fish on board while investigations are conducted.

On the basis of proving that an offence has been committed, the vessels are either fined, seized or sanctioned through the court legal proceedings to recover the loss incurred by the government. Moreover, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to address the vast ocean area that needs constant surveillance, Fiji should in collaboration with regional members of the Forum Fisheries Agencies and conduct five annual surveillance operations throughout the year. These surveillance operations cover the EEZ and high seas in the Pacific region and use analysis historical and real time data to track fishing vessels that operate in the region. This operation is assisted by surface and area lessons provided through the joint support for the United States, France, Australia and New Zealand.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, Sir, our Fisheries and Naval officers have just completed one surveillance operations called Island Chief in which we saw our officers conduct joint patrol in our waters on one of the Ministry’s operatives just returning to shore from a three week stint in Her Majesty’s New Zealand Ship (HMNZS) Wellington. Additionally, through Shiprider Programme such as with the Governments of USA and UK our officers are now going on board USA Coast guard and UK Naval Vessels and conducting surface patrols in our EEZ.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is through such tools and platforms that Fiji is able to effectively manage fishing activities which occur within our waters. This coupled with fit for purpose training for observers, enforcement and Prosecution officers is what equips us to undertake the vital work needed to address our IUU fishing. I thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Measures to Address Poverty Nationwide
(Question No. 170/2022)

HON. A. JALE asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation update Parliament on the measures taken by the Ministry to gauge how poverty is being addressed nationwide?

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Thank you, honourable Jale, for the question. Mr. Speaker, Sir, at the outset, I would like to take Parliament back to yesterday’s discussion where this side of the House was labelled as pro-rich. I would like to state here that this side of Parliament - the Government side,

is very much pro-poor. We implement policies, we have programmes that are there to assist the most vulnerable of the society, including the senior citizens, the disabled, children, women and the poor.

My Ministry is mandated to look after the poorest of the poor with all the Social Protection Programmes we have. All in all, we have six Social Protection Programmes, the:

1. Child Protection Allowance;
2. Poverty Alleviation Benefit Scheme;
3. Social Pension Scheme;
4. Subsidised E-Transport Programme for Older Persons and the Disabled;
5. Food Voucher for Pregnant Mothers; and
6. Allowance for Persons with Disabilities.

Sir, on 7th April, 2022 in this Parliament, honourable Professor Prasad moved a motion regarding poverty. Both sides of Parliament spoke on the motion and this side of Parliament very clearly put across the fact that alleviating and addressing poverty is a whole of Government approach. All the Ministries have their own budgets inbuilt within them, and across the Government, there are 124 Poverty Alleviation Programmes with a total budget of \$972 million per year.

Sir, the Ministry of Women looks after Social Protection Programmes and we have close to 150,000 social welfare recipients who benefit from those Programmes. Previously, we used to have the Welfare to Workfare Programme, unfortunately, that has been stalled, but we do hope to bring that back.

With those Social Protection Programmes, we assist, as I have said, the most poorest of the poor with cash allowances per month, vouchers and a whole range of things that had already been discussed on 7th April, 2022. We have a small Unit - Poverty Monitoring Unit that helps other Ministries look at the performances of their Poverty Alleviation Programmes, and we hope that this will continue in order to see the impacts of our Social Protection Programmes in trying to assist the poor people.

Apart from that, if you look at education, Mr. Speaker, Sir, free education and subsidised transports, it does have an impact of how families that are suffering from poverty, are able to sustain themselves. The inflation mitigation package that has been rolled out by the Ministry of Economy, close to 200,000 Fijians will be assisted and payments have started to roll out. We have heard a lot of positive stories from those beneficiaries on how these assistance will be able to help. So, all in all, poverty remains a priority for the Government, and across all Ministries, the Government has had budgets to ensure that every Ministry, whether it is Agriculture, Rural Development, Fisheries, Forestry or Health are, there to assist people who need our assistance.

HON. A. JALE.- A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker, Sir; what process do you have in your Ministry, to identify people who need poverty alleviation assistance in rural or remote areas?

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Social Welfare has Officers all across the country and we have our Field Officers. We make sure that our programmes are made aware to all communities when we go and talk for outreach programmes. So, they apply, we assess their applications and try to make sure that in a shortest possible time, assistance reaches them.

Prediction of Storm Surges and Other Extreme Weather Events
(Question No. 171/2022)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Infrastructure, Meteorological Services, Lands and Mineral Resources update Parliament on what steps have been taken by the Fiji Meteorological Services to improve the prediction of storm surges and other extreme weather events that cause coastal inundation in Fiji?

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you for the opportunity to address this question and also thank you, honourable Bhatnagar, for the question.

The Fiji Meteorological Services has worked very closely with the World Meteorological Organization in developing and strengthening the systems that we have to monitor and predict elements related to our climate that can have an adverse impact on our country. Because of this collaboration, Fiji was chosen as one of the demonstration countries for the Coastal Inundation Forecasting Demonstration Projects (CIFDP). So we have had a demonstration project here in Fiji to demonstrate how this technology can be used, and other countries can then take that on board. This was funded back in 2012 by the Government of Korea.

As a result of this CIFDP, a number of things were developed. First, was a storm surge modelling programme. Storm surge is when the water comes inland when you have storms, so this storm surge modelling programme kicks in whenever we have a tropical cyclone of Category 3 and above. From the programme, they are able to estimate the water level heights and how this will go into inland and inundates our coast lands. So that storm surge modelling is now in place.

Secondly, tropical cyclone with model. This estimates the height of the waves that will be generated because of the cyclones. Two things that are coming up - one is the surge inland which is a storm surge and secondly, is the height of the cyclone. For those of you who have been part of the NDMO recent events when there was a tropical cyclone, the Fiji Meteorological Service is able to give an estimate of the wave heights that will be coming in, in different parts of Fiji waters.

The third model that has been put in place is in particularly in relation to the Coral Coast. So there is a coastal inundation model for the Coral Coast, which looks at the damaging heavy swells caused by storms that develop to the far South of Fiji. A lot of storms develop to the far South and they tend to impact on Kadavu and the Coral Coast, especially during our dry months. So, that model is now in place.

The fourth model is wave buoys. We have wave buoys that are out in the ocean that can track the height of waves that are coming through. So you have the forecast and you have the wave buoys that can give you real-time information on what the actual height of the waves are. Wave buoys were deployed off the Coral Coast and Kadavu over the recent past.

As a result of this exercise, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the CIFDP, the Fiji Meteorological Service has worked with a number of different agencies for various things. These include the Japan Meteorological Agency that developed the storm surge model for Fiji and other Pacific Island Countries in the region, and this has been operational since 2019, and there is still an ongoing collaboration with the Japan Meteorological Agency on further improving the model.

Secondly, the Fiji Meteorological Service has been able to work with Tonkin & Taylor (International). This is a NZ modelling agency which developed the tropical cyclone wave model. Once again, the Fiji Meteorological Service continues to work closely with this agency to make further improvements to the existing model. That wave model is operational and limited to Fiji only.

Thirdly, the Fiji Meteorological Service also works very closely with the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), which is developing a higher resolution wave model for the Southwest

Fiji waters up to seven days. So, seven days in advance, we can get some estimates on the kind of waves that will be coming through.

As I have mentioned before, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the wave buoy development for the Coral Coast and Kadavu, unfortunately, something happened to one of those deployed wave buoys, I think in Nabukelevu in Kadavu. Either someone stole it or may be *TC Sarai* has removed it and got tangled up, so there is an issue around that. But the Fiji Meteorological Service is now looking to hopefully, deploy two more wave buoys just outside the Suva Harbour in the near future.

All of these agencies that I have listed – the Japan Meteorological Agency, Tonkin & Taylor and the SPC are also heavily involved in the training and capacity building for our Meteorological Officers, who use all of these products because all of these will help us to maintain the systems that we have when the projects have ended. These developments are first for the Fiji Meteorological Service and have improved our warning advisories, as well as our confidence in providing those advisories.

One of the developments that has also taken place as a result of the focus on capacity building in the Fiji Meteorological Service, we have a Senior Meteorologist at the Fiji Meteorological Service who has now developed a wave forecasting system for Fiji and the Southwest Pacific region as part of his Master's degree programme at the Yokohama National University in Japan. So, this model runs twice daily on the Fiji Meteorological Service server with hourly forecasts for up to five days. This also gives us more information on waves and ocean forecast and makes this available to the Fiji Meteorological Service.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the programme itself has really improved and really advanced our ability to be able to provide adequate warning, and also for all our coastal communities and our tourism industry. The CIFDP actually finished in 2019 but there are some components of it that are continuing. There are also plans to further extend this project and currently, the Fiji Meteorological Service is working together with the Government to source adaptation funds so we can do some further improvements to our ability to be able to predict waves. Part of that, hopefully, if the funding comes through, is to expand the high resolution wave model to the whole of Fiji waters to get high resolution and baseline data for both, topography and bathymetry. Bathymetry is the study of the sea floor and the way that it is structured. So, if you have good information on that, it gives you additional information on coastal inundation and the impact of coastal inundation.

Thirdly, is to expand the CIFDP to the other coastal areas of Fiji that are frequently impacted by coastal inundation and storm surges. The wave buoys that we have, they complement the tidal gauges. In Fiji, we have tidal gauges in Suva, Lautoka and Vatia. So combined information from the tidal gauges, wave buoys and the models help us to continually improve our ability to give forecast for the benefit of the people of our country. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Reconstruction/Rehabilitation – Kadavu Secondary Schools
(Question No. 172/2022)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts, and Local Government update Parliament on the reconstruction and rehabilitation of major secondary schools in Kadavu?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I also thank honourable Rasova for

the question.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are three secondary schools in Kadavu and the schools are Vunisea Secondary School, Richmond Methodist High School and Kadavu Provincial High School. We all know that in April 2020, *TC Harold* which was a Category 5 Cyclone caused significant damages to a lot of schools in the Northern Division and in the maritime zones.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, climate change is a sad reality which we have to deal with on a regular basis. Tropical cyclones, whenever they come, cause a lot of damages not only to schools but to other infrastructure such as hospitals, residential buildings, et cetera.

Over a period of time, the Government has been spending large sums of money to repair schools and if you take into consideration the last Category 5 Cyclone that we had starting from 2016, the Government had spent more than \$250 million just to repair and rehabilitate schools around the country. The cost of damages sustained by all three Schools were substantial. Richmond Methodist High School had damages valued around \$1,226,895; Vunisea Secondary School - \$235,000; and for Kadavu Provincial High School, it was close to a million dollars.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, after assessing the damages caused by *TC Harold*, the honourable Prime Minister sought assistance from the Embassy of Japan to restore the facilities of all three Secondary Schools. The Embassy of Japan agreed to reconstruct and rehabilitate the facilities by providing funding directly to the Schools under the Grant Assistance for Grass-Roots Human Security Project (GGP).

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Japanese Embassy provided \$597,494 to Richmond Methodist High School to build three new concrete classrooms and two new concrete ablution blocks. Vunisea Secondary School received a grant of \$589,791 to build two new concrete classrooms and a new girl's dormitory. The School was provided with 20 bunk beds with mattresses, 40 desks and chairs, teacher's table and chairs, eight bookshelves, six long tables and benches, 6 mirror sets with frames, two office tables for teachers and an ironing table by Japan International Co-operation Agency (JICA).

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a sum of \$1,686,303 was given to Kadavu Provincial High School to construct six classrooms; two dormitories - one for male and one for female; a new dining hall, and to supply 240 desks and chairs for students, six sets of tables and chairs for teachers, 40 double bunks for male and female dormitories and dining hall furniture.

The work at all the three Schools started during the pandemic, that is in March 2021 and we all know what happened in March 2021 - that was the second wave that the country was trying to handle and the COVID-19 cases spiralled during that time but I must give it to the contractors who were at the site and they tried to get on with the work.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the work at Richmond Methodist High School and Vunisea Secondary School was completed by February 2022, and both Schools were commissioned and are now using the improved facility. The project for Kadavu Provincial High School also started in March 2021 but there were some issues related to adverse weather condition which caused some challenges to the contractor in terms of accessing the road to transport the materials to the site. During that time, there were a lot of restrictions placed on the movement of people, although the goods could be taken to maritime areas.

The Authority could not go to the island to fix the road and there was a delay in getting the road fixed which meant that at a later stage, the cost of the materials went up. So, when the cost of

the materials went up, obviously, no contractor wants to go out of pocket. In that situation, the Ministry of Education and Japanese Embassy Officials all met with the contractor to assess extra funding that would be needed to complete the job. And I must thank the Ministry of Economy that in this financial year, a sum of \$375,000 was allocated for that particular work to be completed. Sir, the improved facilities and better infrastructure such as new classrooms, new ablution blocks, new classroom furniture, et cetera, will create a better environment for teaching and learning.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to thank the Embassy of Japan and the Government and people of Japan for assisting Fiji in rehabilitating schools and this unwavering commitment and support has enabled Fiji in the restoration of schools after *TC Harold*. Even this year, the Government of Japan is helping six other schools to repair and rehabilitate classrooms that were destroyed by various cyclones.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to assure all Fijians that this Government has and will always prioritise education to transform the lives of our people for better future.

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- Thank you very much, honourable Minister, for a very detailed summary of events that happened in the three sector schools in Kadavu. Thank you also to the Japanese Embassy and JICA.

My supplementary question is that in 2022, I was in Naleca, Kadavu, the US Army through the US Embassy was fixing the Kadavu Provincial Primary School. At this moment, we have not heard anything from the US Army. Can you, please, provide detail, whether you have known anything about the US Army coming to assist the Kadavu Provincial Primary School?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is completely a new question. The question was on secondary schools, not primary schools.

MR. SPEAKER.- It is completely a new question, Honourable Member. We will move on to the next question.

Plans for the 2022-2023 IHRDP Budget
(Question No. 173/2022)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport update Parliament on the Ministry's plans for the Intergraded Human Resources Development Programme (IHRDP) which was allocated \$500,000 in the 2022-2023 National Budget?

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank honourable Pillay for his question.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Integrated Human Resources Development Programme, commonly known as IHRDP, is probably one of our most important grant assistance programmes under the Ministry. The Programme is actually designed for Fijian people with entrepreneurial ventures in the peri-urban, rural and the remote areas.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, under the leadership of our honourable Prime Minister, we have the confidence to invest in our Fijian people. As the country progresses, we will not leave any Fijian behind. This Programme has been undertaken from the mountains of Namosi to the coastline of Cakaudrove, to the Far East parts of Cicia and Yacata Islands, and these have all been assisted under

IHRDP - the Programme that answers the needs of our rural entrepreneurs when no one gives them a chance and our honourable Prime Minister actually gave them a chance.

Briefly, I just want to outline the plans for the IHRDP and I wish to provide a quick overview. The Ministry of Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport (MCTTT) has been administering the Programme since 2016, and has funded a total of about 39 projects all around Fiji at an approximate value of about \$1.7 million. I am pleased to report that from the 34 projects that were monitored in the last financial year, we have created about 275 direct new jobs that have been created, leading to the improvement of approximately 1,303 livelihoods.

In the 2021-2022 financial year, the Ministry received an overwhelming response through the Expressions of Interest (EOI) and a total of about 171 applications were received, with a total project value of about \$11.4 million. In the last financial year, our private sector-led IHRDP Committee approved 16 projects valued at \$657,488.70 and IHRDP contribution was \$441,433.98, as the funding is on cost sharing of one-third two-third basis.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with the growing demand over the years for such support programmes, the Ministry in this financial year has been allocated \$0.5 million to further roll out IHRDP, and this has been dedicated to fund successful business proposals that seek funding for capital projects. Our assistance is targeted towards a wide array of sectors such as fisheries, forestry, agro-business and manufacturing. The Programme encourages applications from the tourism and hospitality providers, information, communications and technology service providers and financial service providers and given our responsibility also with respect to climate change initiatives, Sir, we further encourage applications in the renewable energy space or greener applicants.

Applicants from the mentioned sectors could apply for procurement of manufacturing machines for value adding, farm mechanisation, construction of warehouses, storage facilities, eco-tourism projects, product development for businesses and this grant can also be used as equity fund with financial institutions for capital expenditure and diversification processes.

We will continue with the partnership on a one-third two-third basis whereby the two-third portion is paid through Government grant and one-third is applicant's cash contribution. This enables a sense of ownership and responsibility by the recipients towards objectives and our success of the project. As I have said earlier, we are encouraging greener and sustainable business practices by our business sector, especially the MSMEs, and we have funded solar power systems that are providing renewable electricity for businesses in rural settings.

Assistance has actually opened, Mr. Speaker, to sole trader business partnerships, cooperative businesses and companies operating in rural areas. We have quite a few cooperatives that have been part out of the Programme. We have assisted groups and communities that have been shortlisted for funding to be formally registered as a cooperative business. The formal registration allows these groups and communities to have some legal substance and legal recognition in the business society and carry out their businesses with much ease and proper governance structures.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the livelihood of many Fijians that are linked to such communities and groups are significantly impacted as being a registered entity and this opens opportunities for easy access to finance and grants and entering large contracts with other business ventures. We will amplify the stakeholder and community awareness on the Programme to ensure coverage on the topic is widespread.

The 2022-2023 Expression of Interest (EOI) for IHRDP, Mr Speaker, Sir, will open tomorrow, Saturday, 3rd September, 2022, along with the National Export Strategy (NES)

Programme. We are working with relevant Ministries and stakeholders to ensure that the information about this Programme is widely circulated with face to face awareness sessions in the rural communities.

I also take this opportunity to encourage eligible Fijians to apply. Please, apply if you need assistance and information on MSME Programmes. Please, visit our offices in Suva, Rakiraki, Sigatoka, Lautoka, Labasa and Savusavu. I also encourage all the Opposition Members to, please, tell your constituents to apply for such assistance and programmes offered by the Government.

This is not a handout or a freebie, Mr. Speaker, Sir, they work hard, they enjoy the one-third two-thirds contribution, this is a genuine partnership between the Government and our grassroot communities and they will significantly improve the lives of our rural people. I urge everyone to refer to our success stories and two of the great success stories is the Cicia Women's Project for virgin coconut oil and the Lovu Youth Cooperative from Gau that was assisted through a boat, engine and a solar freezer. I thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I hope that answers the question.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the next question has been withdrawn so we will move on to the last question for today.

(Question No. 174/2022 withdrawn)

Role and Functions – Department of Children
(Question No. 175/2022)

HON. A.D. O'CONNOR asked the Government, upon notice:

With the Ministry's additional budget for the establishment of the Department of Children, can the honourable Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation inform Parliament on the role and functions of the said Department and the plans in place to progress its establishment?

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank honourable O'Connor for this very important question.

At the outset, I wish to acknowledge that this is an important progress in Fiji's history as it marks a serious commitment by our Government to finally establish a dedicated Department for Children. Basically, it seeks to ensure a more coordinated, strategic, structured and reformed system to promote and ensure the prevention and responsive approaches to child protection nationally and internationally.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the functions of the Department is summarised as follows:

1. Progress in building the Fijian Child Protection System and delivering quality service for children is hampered by limitations in legislation, international structures and workforce.
2. Legal reform is needed to bring the Fijian regulatory framework on Child Protection in line with international standards.
3. Institutional reform is needed to ensure consistency between child protection mandate and Government structures in charge of its implementation.
4. A need for a specialised and clearly appointed child protection to ensure professional practice.

The Department of Children will specialise in delivering services that are aligned with legislative commitments and will serve to strengthen Child Protection and Child Welfare Services nationwide. Specific roles and functions will include:

1. ensuring children's goals, programmes and service reflect continuous learning of the effect of policies, programmes and services for the wellbeing of families and children; and
2. ongoing development of an integrated child protection system.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this specific allocation will address the need to secure the Director for Children's position and its Administrative Assistant, while existing reforms will be activated to demarcate Child Protection and Welfare Officers from Social Welfare Officers within our existing structure. This will be an internal process which will require validation, alignment and realignment of its function and purpose.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government is making a conscious choice to reform its Child Protection System through the establishment of the Department of Children. This rational supports the dedicated approach Government has for resourcing for this financial year and will be able to pioneer recruitment of the Director of Children and the demarcation of roles and responsibilities to ensure service provisions on Child Protection and Child Welfare.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I take my seat, I would like to add that recently, there has been reports of children on our streets, whether they are begging or sleeping and homeless. I believe that this Department will enable our Welfare Officers and Child Protection Officers to handle those cases. And on this note, I am pleased to announce that in this financial year's budget, the Ministry has been able to secure financial support to ensure we engage an organisation. We will outsource this service.

We are profiling the homeless people on our streets. Currently, we have 189 across the nation. There is no reason for some of them to be on our streets but, unfortunately, circumstances beyond their control has pushed these people and they try to find shelter on our streets. So, with the added allocation in this financial year, we will be able to secure and outsource the services for a shelter where these homeless people and children who do not wish to return to their homes can find shelter. It is going to work as a night shelter, where they will get food and a bed, but only profiled ones because we are continuously progressing with returning some of these homeless men, women and children to their homes.

Initially, I used to have this view that it is parental responsibility to make sure that the children stay home, but when we profile these children, we find out a lot of other reasons -reasons like why children do not want to be home so it is justifiable. Whilst strengthening values for our children and strengthening family units, we want to make sure that children remain in their homes where they are safe and secure from the other evils that happen on the streets. I thank the public for showing so much interest in the welfare of our children and I hope to get their support in future too so we can return these children back to their homes.

Written Question

Improvement of Agriculture Production - CBUL
(Question No. 176/2022)

HON. I. KURIDRANI asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment update

Parliament on the number of farmers that have benefitted from the work of the Committee on Better Utilisation of Land (CBUL) for the past three years and how this has improved agriculture production?

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

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, question time is now over. On that note, we will now suspend proceedings for a break. Parliament will resume in half-an-hour.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.53 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.26 a.m.

END OF WEEK STATEMENTS

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

Honourable Members, I have been advised that the End of Week Statement of the honourable Professor Biman Prasad is withdrawn, therefore I now call on the honourable Ro Filipe Tuisawau to deliver his End of Week Statement. You have the floor, Sir.

Independent Bodies and Commissions

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to address my End of Week Statement, to make my contribution on the topic of Independent Bodies and Commissions.

Sir, while it is true that a semblance of elections and democracy has come about under the Constitution, the truth is that Fiji remains a democracy in progress because we are far away from the promise of true democracy and true equality promised by the 2013 Constitution. While the fast growing array of Independent Bodies and Commissions glitter brightly, playing their roles in the galaxy created by the honourable Attorney-General, the truth is that all that glitters is not gold. The truth, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that there is much to be desired in the contributions of these independent commissions, who in the recently enacted budget received approximately \$35.3 million – Independent Bodies and \$41.2 million – Independent Commissions.

Sir, I will focus only on a select few - Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission, FICAC, Online Safety Commission, Electoral Commission, Fiji Elections Office and the Media Industry and Development Authority (MIDA). Of all the Independent Bodies and Commissions, the only one that appears truly independent, although the Attorney-General has continued to hack at its independence and professionalism is the Office of the Auditor-General. Under Section 152 of the Constitution and I quote:

“152(1) At least once in every year, the Auditor-General shall inspect, audit and report to Parliament on -

- (a) the public accounts of the State;
- (b) the control of public money and public property; and
- (c) all transactions with or concerning the public money or public property of the State.

(2) In the report, the Auditor-General must state whether, in his or her opinion –

- (a) transactions with or concerning the public money or public property of the State has been authorised by or pursuant to this Constitution or any written law; and
- (b) expenditure has been applied to the purpose for which it was authorised.”

We have witnessed through the various Committees and through Parliament the various Reports of the Auditor-General presented where breaches resulting in millions of dollars in cost. These reports hold Government and Ministry heads to account but ultimately the buck stops with the Minister. Government should not be putting undue pressure on the AG's Office just because they do

not like it when the truth is exposed. However, the question is, what happens to the abusers identified and the staff responsible? If there are financial losses, are these recovered?

For the whole audit process to be truly independent, the Public Accounts Committee needs to be adequately staffed, empowered, to institute further investigations and that it should be chaired by the Opposition with the majority from the Opposition. This should also be applicable to all other Standing Committees so that they could provide more in-depth analysis on issues raised, rather than these ongoing compromises and resulting in mundane predictable Committee Reports.

On Parliament, Standing Order 51 has been totally abused, resulting in a Parliament dictatorship rather than a Parliamentary democracy.

On the Fiji Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission, we hardly see the Director, and he seems to only come out and publicly attack Opposition political parties. Otherwise, he is in hibernation. Why is he sitting back and relaxing? When we were taken in for questioning to the CID Headquarters in relation to the controversy surrounding Bill No. 17, where was he? Let me quote the Human Rights Activist, Ms. Shamima Ali:

“Former Human Rights Commissioner and Human Rights Activist, Ms. Shamima Ali, has questioned the role and credibility and independence of the Fiji Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission. She stated that the actions of the Commission’s Director, Ashwin Raj, has become a worry for human rights defenders in the country and internationally.

While part of FHRADC’s mandate is to monitor, investigate and report on compliance with human rights standards in all aspects of individual lives, the Director has a tendency of focusing more on socio-economic rights, and very little on civil and political rights.”

She said and I quote: “that while socio-economic rights were important, they could not be separated from civil and political rights as all human rights were indivisible and inalienable to each other.” She is the co-ordinator of Fiji Human Rights and also stated that the Commission has failed to comply with the guiding principles that are set out in the PARIS principles of the National Human Rights Institutions.

Fiji’s Human Rights Anti-Discrimination Commission’s failure to comply creates doubt at its independence and credibility. Since its re-establishment post-*coup* 2006 the Commission has not made any genuine step towards compliant with the PARIS principles. The civic space rating of Fiji by Civicus Monitor remains classified as obstructed. Sir, FICAC is the *FijiFirst* Government regime primary attack dog on Opposition political parties, as we have seen. It is in attack mode these days with Opposition politicians as parties are now taken to task as we approach Elections. Hardly anything happens about the Government side when we lodge complaints.

On the Online Safety Commission, again, it appears to come out to attack Opposition political parties. Otherwise, it is silent for the rest of the year, or working silently behind the scenes with the Supervisor of Elections to get *Facebook* to take down anti-*FijiFirst* Government groups and pages.

It seems that the Electoral Commission only serves at the pleasure of those ‘you know who’ and are promptly removed, and they do exercise their independence as the Electoral Commissioners appointed in 2013, discovered when they tried to discipline the Supervisor of Elections for insubordination.

The Elections Office (we have covered this adequately) is led by a power-mad hungry person, whose primary duty is to exploit any weaknesses in the Opposition political parties, while holding the FijiFirst Party to a different standard and bending over backwards.

On the Media Industry Development Authority (MIDA) established by the Media Decree in 2010 which hobbles the media, restricts the right to information of citizens and rights of the media, has been rightly condemned by all Opposition Parties and right thinking people, but has been basically asleep in the last few years since the media are now truly intimidated and cowed submission.

In July 2021, the Office of the High Commission for Human Rights and SPC Human Rights Division published a new report analysing the human rights situation in the Pacific, highlighting about Fiji that the Public Order Act and the Media Industry Development Act have stifled human rights defenders by criminalising free expression, assembly and association and that the sedition law imposes restrictions on freedom of expression.

It is unfortunate, Sir, that collectively these bodies receive millions and exists solely to protect certain elements in Government, as we see this week and creates more and more laws in an attempt to protect itself from its own failures and tries to guarantee a return to power in this year's Election.

The truth, Sir, is that the FijiFirst Government cannot fool all the people all the time and the time for reckoning has come regarding this independent institution. The truth, Sir, is that the heart sign has worn off and the people can see clearly how they have not been served by these institutions.

On the Judiciary, there is a general lack of confidence in the Judiciary and there is a need for an independent review by internationally-recognised review bodies to make recommendations and bring back confidence.

In fact, the Justice William Marshall Petition of 2012 details instances of interference with the Judiciary and FICAC, and so an independent review is long overdue. I reiterate that some of these independent institutions and the people in it are compromised. The problem is one of legitimacy, and this problem of lack of legitimacy originates from the act of treason in 2006 and the Bainimarama *Coup* which illegally removed the legitimately elected government.

Let me remind the people of Fiji that the Courts declared the 2006 *Coup* illegal. The Bainimarama Regime did not accept and, therefore, abrogated the 1997 Constitution, formulated and wrote the 2013 Constitution and imposed that on the nation.

Two Elections have been held under this imposed Constitution but nothing will change the fact that the 2013 Constitution and related legal political frameworks are products of a sinful violent act of treason where guns and violence was used. People suffered and hundreds were victimised. It was an ungodly and ungracious act - pure and simple!

The corruptive nature of that act permeates through all systems of Government today, including the so-called independent institutions. The nation continues to suffer the consequences today. It continues to hang like a black cloud over the nation and is a heavy burden on the sole of our nation. Why? Because the product is that the Government constitutional political system is the illegitimate unrighteous product of a sinful unrighteous act. Righteousness excels a nation, Sir, but seen as a reproach to people.

A *coup* goes through a natural cycle, including the act of treason, consolidation, acceptance that it was wrong and unrighteous. You conduct a review consensus and validation by the people, their national acceptance and legitimisation. That was what happened with the Rabuka *coup* in 1987.

their national acceptance and legitimisation. That was what happened with the Rabuka *coup* in 1987. Imposition of the 1992 Constitution, the Constitution Review Commission and bipartisan basis.

MR. SPEAKER.- You are going over time, honourable Member.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- That is, Sir, what needs to be done and I am calling on the leaders today to follow the path in order for us to move forward.

I end by wishing you, Mr. Speaker, the honourable Prime Minister and the honourable Leader of the Opposition, and all honourable Members of Parliament, all the best in the Elections and we shall leave the outcome to be decided by the people.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thought the honourable Member was actually going to make some useful contribution on independent institutions. However, as usual, he cannot let go of his obsession about this Constitution and, indeed, the so-called illegality of it.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, he chose to select a few independent institutions but before that, I would like to highlight to Parliament that for the first time, independent institutions in Fiji actually have separate budget items. In the Budget Estimates, Sir, you will see that under Head 9 and Head 13, we have one-line items that have been allocated to these independent bodies.

The reason why they have one-line item, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is because they have the ability to look after their own finances. It is not set out by the Government machinery and in that way, they are truly independent – the Office of the Auditor-General, the Fijian Elections Office, the Judiciary, Parliament, Office of the DPP, Media Industry Development Authority, and the Independent Commissions – Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission, the Constitutional Offices Commission, FICAC, Public Services Commission, Accident Compensation Commission of Fiji (ACCF), Legal Aid, Online Safety Commission, Electoral Commission, Fijian Competition and Consumer Commission.

If the honourable Member bothered to be genuine in his contributions, he would have actually acknowledged the fact that we have these independent institutions that actually now have complete control over their finances. For example, when we do formulate the Budget, we do not come and tell Parliament how to spend their money, it is up to them. They have complete control over it, and the same with the Judiciary. Before, Mr. Speaker, Sir, if they looked at the Estimates, we have set out exactly how much money Judiciary could spend. Now, they have a one-line item which gives them further financial independence too.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Member talked about the Human Rights Commission. Again, as usual, he quoted someone else, who quoted someone else and other people. He never has any original thinking himself, nor any sort of intellectual input himself.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fiji Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission is an independent body. They do not focus on civil and political rights, but only focus on socio-economic rights. But as he had pointed out himself and I hope he understood what he said, these rights were indivisible, in other words, you cannot only focus on one and not focus on the other.

The Fijian Constitution, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in fact, for the first time ever in any Fijian Constitution, we actually have socio-economic rights. We have rights, for example, for housing, access to water, economic participation, access to transport and connectivity with portable water.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, together with that, we have the civil and political rights. They are equally

as important as each other. If people are hungry or if people do not have connections to electricity, those discriminatory provisions or those lack of accessibility to those fundamental rights actually causes civil and political issues. That is how people are actually able to exploit them. So this is why these rights are indivisible.

He said, "Oh, they do not focus on civil and political rights." He is talking about Ashwin Raj. The problem with the Opposition is that, they personalise things. They attacked Ashwin Raj. Honourable Professor Prasad attacked Ashwin Raj. Honourable Qereqeretabua, in a very (I thought) disgusting manner, attacked the Supervisor of Elections, calling him all sorts of names. That is the calibre of contribution.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I was just thinking last night when I went home that they were attacking and undermining the electoral system, attacking and undermining the Electoral Commission, attacking and undermining the Supervisor of Elections, so hypothetically, what if they won the Elections? They are saying that they want to win the Elections. Honourable Gavoka is saying they will win the Elections. So, what if they win the Elections?

Suddenly, Saneem who is the Supervisor of Elections would be alright, the Electoral Commission would be alright, suddenly the Electoral System would be alright as well as the Constitution. What leg do they have to stand on? They would have zero legs to stand on.

That is why we have continuously said, "Please, if you are patriotic Fijians, if you believe in a sustainable democracy, do not attack independent institutions." There is a fundamental premise of running any country. They go and berate those institutions and the system, yet they want to compete or participate in the political sphere in that same system. They never thought about the fact that they are undermining continuously, what if they won? It would be such a hypocritical position. They are all looking like stunned mullets. That is the real issue that you have.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, again, the Supervisor of Elections has actually made this clear in the past couple of days. The same thing with honourable Professor Prasad, he stood on the floor of this Parliament and he lied. He said you lodged a number of complaints about FijiFirst but none of them have actually come to the fore. Therefore, it is in the public interest for the Supervisor of Elections to tell members of the public that to protect his institution and protect its independence, that it is actually a lie. They have not lodged any complaints because what they are trying to perpetuate on the floor of this Parliament is that, "We have lodged this complaint, somehow or the other these people are not attending to it."

Honourable Tuisawau has done exactly the same thing today. No complaints have been lodged. Even the ones that were lodged, Mr. Speaker, Sir, they are frivolous and vexatious. If they themselves cannot adhere to the laws or regulations, that is their problem. If we see another political party breach one, we will complain about it. That is our right to do so, in the same way it is their right to lodge a complaint. But do not lodge a complaint for the sake for it. You need to adhere to the laws. We adhered to the laws, so if we are greatly compliant with the laws, do not blame us for it, you go and look into your own house. Look at the billboards, the signage that you have, meeting notices, several of them are non-compliant.

We have people telling us from New Zealand that Rabuka is having dinner functions to raise funds. People are simply going at the door, paying money, no one's name is registered and they just take the money. If they are able to do that with one single individual, imagine what they are going to do with others. What amount of money has been laundered? What amount of money has been given by people without a registration of who is giving the money?

People have the right to give the money, that is their right, no one is saying that. All we are saying is that, the person gives money, you need to know who it is. We need to know that it is not coming from business, we need to know that it is not coming from a non-Fijian or non-former Fijian. It is very simple, just comply with the laws.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, again, another fallacy, honourable Tuisawau. He went on about the Media Industry Development Act. We have said several times and they have the ability, they have the intellect to go and check themselves. There used to be an organisation called the Media Council which was made up of media companies in Fiji and it was self-regulatory.

If you look at Schedule 1 and Schedule 2 of the Media Industry Development Act about standards, it is verbatim the same standards that the Media Council had, they have not bothered to check that. It talks about standards. How do you portray children? How do you portray sex? How do you classify TV programmes? All of those things are there, verbatim. Yet, they are going on as if some stuff has been brought out from the neither regions of someone's anatomy and put in there.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, exactly the facts are there, yet they have this narrative and he has actually abused his End of Week Statement. He talked about independent bodies, but has made a political statement about it. He went on about Judiciary, I challenge him to say that outside this Parliament. There is not a lack of confidence about Judiciary, in fact, it has been enhanced. We now have more rural sittings in more maritime areas, in the rural areas, Mr. Speaker, Sir. We now have more Judges in the Western Division.

The Western Division, Mr. Speaker, Sir, they generated the bulk of the Fijian economy - tourism, pine, gold, sugar, but they had only one Civil Judge and only one Criminal Judge for the entire Western Division starting at Korolevu in Nadroga, all the way up to Ra - one Judge for civil matter and one Judge for criminal matter. Honourable Waqanika will confirm that. Today, they have four or five Judges. That is what you mean, access to justice. Today, we have Legal Aid being given access of \$5 million. People who are on the bottom end of the socio-economic scale are able to get access to justice. They have not mentioned that at all.

We have rooms for feeding mothers. The Legal Aid Commission Officers can go and draft your Wills for people who may not be that wealthy but they may have a house or may have a car. It gives some level of comfort, solace and certainty to the family. They get represented in criminal matters. Abhorrent as a crime as may be that they are accused of, yet they get legal representation. They have not mentioned that at all.

I challenge honourable Tuisawau to give one single instance where they have found the Judiciary to be corrupt. I challenge him to say that. In the same way, we have challenged them since 2014 to say, "Where in the electoral system - electoral process has there been some shenanigans going on that is not above board." To-date, they have not provided a single shred of evidence.

In the same way, they are saying that about the Judiciary. When they do not like decisions, they said that, that particular body is not independent. When they like the decision, the body is alright. So, this is the level of personal analysis that takes place, and this is why, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is highly unpatriotic. It is not leadership-like quality to be able to constantly undermine independent bodies when they are completely independent. Thank you, Sir.

Importance of a Knowledge-Based Economy

HON. S. NAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to provide my End of Week Statement on the importance of a knowledge-based economy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the concept of a knowledge-based economy was coined to recognise the importance of knowledge, information, and ideas as a key source of economic growth and development. Technological changes, innovation and human capital advancements drive the development of a knowledge based economy. Most of us would have heard this old saying, ‘give man a fish, you feed him for day, but teach a man how to fish, you feed him for a life time.’ But, Mr. Speaker, Sir, if you provide him or her with the technology and the market linkage, you feed the entire nation and the region. That is knowledge economy.

Enhancing human capital through information technology and innovation offers endless productivity gains, which is a key ingredient driving the success and development of many economies around the world. Mr. Speaker, Sir, to be able to fully participate in knowledge economy the following four pillars are important:

1. Education and training - an educated and skilled workforce is needed to create, share and use knowledge;
2. Information infrastructure - a dynamic information infrastructure ranging from radio to internet is required to facilitate the effective communication and processing of information;
3. Right economic incentive and institutional regime, where regulatory and the economic environment enables the free flow of knowledge and support investments in ICT and encourages entrepreneurship, which is central to the knowledge economy; and
4. Innovations systems - network of research centres, universities, think tanks, private enterprises and community groups is necessary to tap into the growing stop of global knowledge and assimilate and adopt it to local needs and create knowledge.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji is a young country with the 70 percent of the population below the age of 40 years. This is the greatest asset we have as a nation, with the significant investment in human capital development and ICT development. We are in the right path to harness this great asset and tap in to the knowledge economy. The Bainimarama Government, since 2013 started with the bold investment to revolutionise human capital development by providing free education to every single Fijian, at the early child hood, primary and secondary levels. Not only this, we have been providing transportation assistance, free text books and invested millions to improve the learning infrastructure and school environment.

All this ensures that no-one is left behind, no matter what their socio economic status is, no matter where they live, no matter who they are including their gender, culture and ethnicity for that matter, and the females are no longer marginalised. Previously, females were the first ones to drop out if parents could not afford their child’s education. Today, it is no longer the case. We are taking everyone together by providing them with equal opportunity, we are empowering them with skills and knowhow required to be successful to make sure the country is successful.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have had many significant investments in tertiary education with the provision of scholarships and TELS. Never before have we had this unprecedented level of access to tertiary education. Many Fijians have told us that had it not been the support provided by the Bainimarama Government, they or their sons, daughters and their grandchildren would have never been able to afford tertiary studies. Today, we have more females graduating in both under graduate and post graduate levels.

In fact, data shows that since the establishment of TELS, more females have qualified from the scholarships and study loans. This is true empowerment. But we have to keep this sustainable.

Reckless promise to make tertiary education fully free is unsustainable. Such policies are just populism and pie-in-the-sky kind of promise from a political party that is struggling to be relevant or should I now say, struggling for its own existence. Apart from tertiary education, Mr. Speaker, Sir...

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- We shall soon see.

HON. S. NAND.- We are also increasing our focus on technical and vocational areas as demand for these skills require increase due to our own development needs and more recently, given the outflow of skills to Australia, New Zealand and other countries.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government in its recent budget provided funding for the development of a 10-year Human Capital Development Plan. An international expert in human capital development and labour market has been engaged to lead the development plan. This work will stocktake our current human resources capital status, scope labour market demands for the next 10 years, identify investment priorities through scholarships and study loans.

Having a human capital development plan is one of the fundamentals to demonstrate globally on the seriousness of our pursuit. In the current budget, the Government has established a new scheme such as upgrade of post-graduate, masters and PhD levels. These are all culminating towards the development of a knowledge economy.

Information infrastructure, Mr. Speaker, Sir, apart from the education and training, a dynamic ICT infrastructure and connectivity is equally important for knowledge-based economy. Fiji as a nation has made great progress and 95 percent of Fijians today have access to mobile and internet connectivity. Mobile phone costs have come down significantly over the last few years. Internet speed in Fiji is better than many comparable countries and cost is much cheaper. We have more mobile phones in the country than adult population.

Digital wallets like M-PAiSA, MyCash have now become a key feature in our financial transaction platforms. I am not promoting them; these are the realities on the ground. Our online payments and online services have also become equally prominent. All these did not happen by themselves. It was the reforms and investments by the Bainimarama Government in the ICT sector that enabled this progress.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Bainimarama Government liberalised and opened up the telecommunications sector. Prior to this, we had a monopolistic arrangement which stifled innovation and meant fewer choices for Fijians with exorbitant charges. After the opening up, we saw new entrants in the market, competition picked up and mobile phone charges came down significantly. All these greatly helped improve overall efficiency in the economy and create new pathways for better and cheaper service delivery for Fijians.

As we go ahead Mr. Speaker, Sir, we need more investments in this area. We need to be mindful that while digital connectivity is the greatest equaliser, it can become the greatest dis-equaliser too. That is why our Government is spending millions to connect to rural schools and rural communities to ensure that no one is left behind. A regulatory and economic arrangement that enables innovation by supporting investment and free information flow is also critical together with education, training and availability of ICT infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have a Constitution that protects the rights of everyone and ensures security, stability in the country. We have strong laws to protect property rights and maintain the rule of law. We have an independent judiciary that can enforce contracts. We have a conducive business environment with low taxes and streamlined business processes to entice new investment

and further support investments.

We are investing billions of dollars in modernising our infrastructure, connecting people to roads, electricity, water and other utilities. We have invested in our airports, our national airline, in our seaports to improve connectivity. We have brought in strategic partners in entities like EFL and Fiji Ports that will help further modernise these critical service providers. These investments Mr. Speaker, Sir, is to ensure that we create an enabling environment for business that can support innovation and a knowledge-based economy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we also need to invest more in research and innovation and explore how best we can further incentivize and help patent creations, intellectual property, new research, knowledge creation, local software developments and commodification of knowledge into new products. While knowledge creation is important for small developing countries like Fiji, even more important is our country being able to import and learn new technology and ideas from the already available pool of global knowledge and technology adapted to local needs. The universities, think tanks, private enterprises and community groups play a pivotal role here. We need to become agile to be able to adopt new role, better technologies and more collaboration with countries that have done well in these areas and will be beneficial.

In conclusion Mr. Speaker, Sir, the knowledge-based economy is characterised by the presence of a higher percentage of highly skilled employees whose jobs require special knowledge or skills. Unlike in the past, when the economy depended heavily on unskilled labourers and consisted primarily of producing physical goods, the modern economy is comprised more of service industries and jobs that require thinking and analysis of data. The modern economy is also known as the post-industrial economy or the information economy, in reference to the central importance of information technology in the economies of developed nations.

In the new knowledge-based economy Mr. Speaker, Sir, the most valuable assets that a country owns is often intangible assets such as patents, copyrights or proprietary software processes. It is in contrast to previous economic epochs such as the agrarian economy, where the land was usually the primary asset and the industrial economy where manufacturing plants and equipment were the key assets for most businesses.

MR. SPEAKER.-You have overrun your time honourable Member.

HON. S. NAND.- Just about to conclude Mr. Speaker, Sir.

The knowledge-based economy supports and is fuelled by innovation research, and rapid technological advancements. The overwhelming majority of workers in a knowledge-based economy are very much computer literate and skilled at creating business and financial models.

There is an increasing emphasis on data collection and analysis and on the development of algorithms and artificial intelligence. Harvard Business School Professor, Mr. Michael Porter, argues that in today's economy, the ability of a business to develop and maintain a competitive advantage in the workplace is more dependent on the ability to quickly adapt to an ever-changing world. The bottom line is that knowledge provides the foundation to be able to compete in the modern global economy.

However, the transition from an industrial or service-driven economy to a knowledge-based economy is not without challenges and the process is a long one. All these unprecedented advances in human resources, ICT's and access to free education is on the right track. While others talk and promise the moon and the stars, FijiFirst, under the leadership of our honourable Prime Minister

delivers what is required and is just.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will be very brief as honourable Sachida Nand has eaten into my time.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think the point that I would like to make very quickly is that not all countries can immediately become what we call knowledge-based societies where we have everything is based on technology. A country like Fiji of course, and numerous other countries have a mixture of what may be called (in a rudimentary manner) agrarian economies plus technological economies or knowledge-based economies. What it does give us Mr. Speaker, Sir, is a prime opportunity to be able to take advantage of both and you are able to do the transition. So, for example if Fiji is focused a lot on agriculture we need to be able to ensure that we use the technology to be able to enhance the productive capacity in the agricultural sector.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point that we need to make that we can get from his statement is that we need to be very strategic about it. We need to be able to take a holistic approach to it. We have seen honourable Members from the other side just talk about one particular sector but it is also about taking a very holistic perspective in respect of creating a knowledge-based economy.

There are certain fundamental issues that needs to exist before you have a knowledge-based economy. One of them, of course, is that you need to have a legal framework that actually gives people the opportunity, the confidence to be able to be creative, innovative, to have what we call a market place of ideas. We need to be able to enhance the potential of individuals.

We are actually very lucky as honourable Sachida Nand had highlighted, that 70 percent of our population are below the age of 40 and 65 percent are below the age of 35. M-PAiSA, for example the programme for that was written by someone from Labasa who worked at Vodafone. So, there are numerous hidden talents that exist in Fiji. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have a historical basis of where we have not assessed or judged our people or enhanced knowledge and the capacity of people, from the individual assessments.

We have lumped people in ethnic groups. If we look at our immigrations forms, before the honourable Prime Minister directed us to change it (post 5thDecember, 2006) it used to say if Fiji citizen - if I'm migrating - name your race, Indian, Fijian, Others, is what we used to have. They did not say are you a doctor, engineer, nurse so we know who we are losing, or we know who we are gaining. That is what you need to have a knowledge-based economy because it is a market place of ideas.

For any country to be mature as far as a knowledge-based economy is concerned, we need to be able to give people the opportunity and the environment to harness out those ideas. A classic point is Professor Paresch Narayan who recently helped set FNU up with the Climate Change Research School or the school that is going to be there. He is one of the 500 most cited researchers in the world. This Professor came from Navua from Vashist Muni Memorial School, went to MGM, went to Suva Muslim School, to USP, and was a Gold Medallist at Monash University. And we were told by him that when he was at USP, and wanted to do his PhD, one of the Professors we know very well said to him in Hindi, what are you going to do by doing a PhD. No point doing a PhD.

Today he is one of the 500 most cited researchers in the world. He has come back to Fiji because he believes the right environment exists. He believes that he will be judged on what he can contribute not by his ethnicity so we need to understand that. People need to be judged on that basis if we want to create a truly knowledge-based economy. In the same way honourable Sachida Nand highlighted, that today we now have more females in high schools and university because of free

education. You need to provide the right legal framework. You need to have, as we highlighted, the right judicial system in place, all the independent institutions need to function well and we need to be able to give people the opportunity to say “yes, I am free to use my mind, my mental capacity.”

So, common and equal citizenry does matter. Calling people *vulagi* does matter because it alienates people. Honourable Gavoka, stands up and says *lewenivanua* - he cannot even say Fijian Citizens. Section 5 of the Constitution says we are all Fijian Citizens. These are the things that makes people more patriotic. They want to contribute. They see this is their country. If you see this is your country, you will want to contribute but every second day you get told you do not belong here, what will they do? They will use their brain cells, their skills set and they will go. If people are not being appointed through OMRS they will not contribute fully well.

The other point that I also wish to make is that the honourable Sachida Nand talked about the information technology. That of course is critically important. Today Ministry of Agriculture and various other organisations are now using this opportunity, where we have 95 percent of Fijians actually connected to be able to give them access to technology. Farmers can be given information on the kind of soil that is required. We now have *Walesi*. There are certain channels that are dedicated to increasing the knowledge information that can be imparted to them.

On the other hand, Sir, we have the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) sector that has developed highly significantly. From a Government perspective strategically, for example, as announced in the Budget, we are landing a second submarine cable in the Western Division. A million dollars is being allocated in the Budget because we need to build redundancies. If we have one cable down the other one will actually work. It will also mean a lot more companies will be attracted to come to Fiji because redundancies have been built in. There some very fundamental issues like we talked about the other day, access to electricity, but also having a redundancy in terms of infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have of course a number of initiatives that are on foot, the honourable Sachida Nand also talked about many of them and in the interest of time, I would like to end there but essentially we need to tap into the skillsets, innovation, creative thinking of our young people and that is precisely what we are doing by giving them access to free education from early childhood to Year 13, giving access to university studies and also saying to them “Please go out and be creative, please go out and think of new ideas”.

There are various tax incentives that we put in place; 30 year, 20 year tax holidays that has been put in place and we look forward to that giving us a lot more enhancement in terms of our productivity, in terms of the growth of our GDP and we have the wonderful opportunity where we are in the transition stage from agrarian-based society to what we call a “technological” based society but we have the wonderful opportunity to be able to merge them all to be able to take advantage of both the sectors.

ICTs in Fiji’s Rural and Maritime Areas

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank you for this opportunity given to me to deliver my End of Week Statement.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Information and Communication Technologies or ICTs play a momentum role in all aspects of our society changing the way in which we communicate with each other, how we access information, work, conduct business, engage with Government agencies and how we manage our social life. The COVID-19 pandemic has optimise the shift to online spaces.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the past ever since independence the rural and maritime areas in Fiji had always faced challenges of poor ICT infrastructure development handicapped by the distance especially in case of scattered island groups, mountainous terrains and lack of supporting infrastructure such as electricity.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Government has turned these challenges into opportunities and use various tools such as satellites and imaging technologies and the use of solar power energy sources to connect these communities both to mobile network and internet connectivity.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the ability and accessibility of high quality affordable ICT services in Fiji is essential to promote innovation, economic growth and development. I would like to focus on the two areas in which ICTs have benefitted the rural and maritime areas.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, firstly the connectivity access empowers our people and provides for closer interaction with government agencies for example parents of a newborn in Wainikoro, in the interior of Vanua Levu instead of going to the BDM office to register the newborn can begin this process online through Digital Fiji platform from their home. They can book their appointment online and go to their nearest BDM office to verify the details and pick the birth certificate in one visit.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, instead of cash pay-out, members of landowning units receive their equal land lease monies directly in their bank accounts from the iTaukei Land Trust Board. The use of mobile e-wallet have also significantly increase the economic participation of people in the rural and maritime areas.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the current roll out of the Inflation Mitigation is being paid out predominantly over 95 percent through money wallets which requires connectivity to mobile networks.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, secondly access to connectivity enables timely access to information, uncensored to accurate and verified information, this equips people to make better informed decision about their lives. For example the online portal for the laws of Fiji which was launched in 2016 has the most up-to-date laws as they are passed or amended by this Parliament. Fijians do not have to visit the law firms to pay them to have access to the provisions of a particular law, Mr. Speaker, Sir. This is available right at their fingertips.

Also, live Parliament sessions are broadcasted on the dedicated *Walesi* Digital TV platform and the *Walesi* Mobile App whereby our most remote and maritime communities have access to as well, from the comfort of their homes. Therefore, it is critically important that as honourable Members of Parliament, we are making accurate and factual statements.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in closing remarks, Government intends to continue to make ICT widely available in Fiji including the most remote parts of the country and I am confident that the Government will deliver on its promises.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the honourable Member for his End of Week Statement.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is absolutely critical that we connect people in the rural areas as the statement that was made by honourable Sachida Nand which is essentially paraphrasing what we have said previously; that the digital connectivity can be one of the greatest equalisers but it can also be the greatest disequalisers if you do not connect those who are on the periphery of the geographical landscape of connectivity.

We have places like in Kadavu, Sir, that may have a small village but it may connect half a million dollars to connect 30 people to the internet or to mobile phone connectivity. Mobile phone companies will not go there because it does not make commercial sense to them. So Government actually has put in money to connect those places.

We, Mr. Speaker, Sir, on that basis identified the number of areas as also highlighted to Parliament. For example, we have a list of areas that have been gazetted and I hope they read these gazettes. There are 240 sites that include for example a place in Ba, Bua, quite a few places in Cakaudrove. In Kadavu a lot of places, Lau includes Kabara, Moala, Fulaga, Lomaloma, Moce, Totoya), Kubulau, and then of course in Lomaiviti including Sawaieke, Koro; then we have Naitasiri (quite a few places), Namosi a number of places, Navosa, a few places in Tailevu and the island of Vatulele and Wainunu in Bua.

There are about 240 sites and I urge the honourable Members to go and read the gazette. We have already gazetted these areas, of these areas, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in this year's budget there are about 90 locations where they will either have towers put up what we call "repeater stations".

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we plan to have these 90 places at the end of this financial year connected, already tenders have been put out into the public space and we hope to have the works start very soon. The reason why we are going out to the private sector, Sir, is because we can then simultaneously have made different locations being connected for mobile phone connectivity but it is also noted about mobile phone connectivity.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to very quickly highlight a few things: As has been mentioned on the floor of Parliament quite a few times that the telecommunications sector in Fiji was very stifled in the sense it was very monopolistic. They had exclusive licence for Vodafone, exclusive licence for TFL, exclusive licence for what was then Cable and Wireless or FINTEL. Sir, FINTEL was owned about 49 percent for memory by Cable and Wireless which is an English based company.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, under the Bainimarama-led Government we have what we call the Radisson Accord Agreement. I still remember quite clearly we spent about three days and three nights, we have reached an agreement, we had support from the World Bank Advisors, we reached an agreement around about 2.00 a.m. or 4.00 a.m. We then subsequently roll out the new laws that were put in place, we brought in experts from overseas and today, Mr. Speaker, Sir, our connectivity through smart phones is as low as FJ\$99; data plans for one gigabyte for as low as FJ40 cents (\$0.40). All these have led Fiji to being transformed into digital economy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the data plans of one GB go for as low as 40 cents making Fiji the third cheapest country for internet plans in the world. The cheapest is Israel where one gigabyte of data cost approximately 10 cents followed by Kyrgyzstan where it is 20 cents Fijian and we are about 40 cents. These are some of the strides that have been made and unfortunately some people may not necessarily understand this, that internet connectivity plans et cetera are a lot more expensive in our neighbouring countries, not just Pacific but countries like Australia and New Zealand.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as announced in Parliament previously, we have what we call the Northern connectivity programme for 40 schools and health centres where we supply and install electrical solution such as solar power where they do not connect it to the grid. We supply and install connectivity equipment including routers, antenna assistance, modems, satellite kits and necessary equipment to facilitate internet connection supply; and we saw peripherals such as computers, webcams, headsets, printers and equipment to be used by beneficiaries and internet bandwidth.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, most of the beneficiaries I have a whole list of 40 of them, I do not intent

to read out, we will put it up on the Government *Facebook* page for everyone to see. Out of these 40 sites, it is very empowering if you were there at a lot of these places, 26 of them had in fact communities living around the schools. Some of them the villages are right next door, we had nursing stations where people are living close by, we have civil servants living close by, so what we have done is we Wi-Fi the entire school compound that people from the village can come and sit in the school compound and get connected to the internet, get connected to viber and WhatsApp. They apply for Government services on their phones and that is what we have done as far as those schools and nursing stations are concerned.

It is estimated that about 10,000 primary and secondary school students in the Northern Division were connected as a result of this internet connectivity and about 7,000 Fijians living in communities around these schools have actually been connected.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the 2022-2023 financial year which is now, 80 schools have been identified of which 49 schools will be connected as phase 2 of the project. Out of that, we will have approximately 30 schools being connected this year (31 in fact) and they have been highlighted through and we worked with the Ministry of Education. The number of schools have been connected including in the islands too where the schools as remote as Naitavuni, Nukuiya, Turagabeci Primary School and Totoya District School et cetera - they have all been connected or will be connected this year.

Furthermore, we have now the *Walesi* platform and I think the honourable Members of the Opposition have sort of ridiculed that. The *Walesi* platform, essentially, there are about seven channels. One of them of course is televising all parliamentary sessions, when we are not sitting, they actually highlight the Committee Sitings, they highlight reruns of parliamentary sittings. A lot of Fijians are getting access to this information.

Then we have an educational channel, we have a faith based channel, which is called 'Hope' then we have three channels by the *FBC*, we have a couple of channel by *Fiji One* and we have *Mai TV*. Before *Mai TV*, for example, which I know some of the Opposition Members have appeared on they were only confined to Suva-Nausori corridor. Today, anyone is connected to *Walesi* in Lau can watch *Mai TV* because they are all free to air channels. This is what we call giving people access to information, empowering them with information to make informed and right choices.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, *Walesi* is also in the next phase where we will be able to then have messages coming either way too. As we have seen, they have also been very instrumental in connecting a number of schools to the *Walesi* channels because of the education channels. We also give free set of box for those households that earn less than \$30,000 and you can be rest assured that most in the rural areas actually get this new sets of boxes that have been given to them.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the last point we wish to make also is that, the areas that have been allocated under the gazette notice - how it is funded. We take a small percentage of the profits of mobile phone companies and we put it in a Trust Fund.

We have recently amended the law to ensure that some more of it can be used for connectivity. Government then allocates funding towards that and the models that we have now adopted, Sir, is that when we put up a tower, it is not going to be exclusively Digicel or exclusively Vodafone. Both the companies should be on the tower and should give the consumers a choice because as we have seen, sometimes Digicel has a better data plan.

Vodafone may be has a better voice plan, as a customer I should be able to have that choice even though I may be living in some remote part in Kadavu or Lau I still should have that choice and

by giving people the choice, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and giving them connectivity, we are empowering all Fijians and in particular as a subject matter of this particular End of Week Statement it is about connecting those people in the rural and remote areas because they must be brought from the periphery into the centre.

ADJOURNMENT

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

That Parliament adjourns *sine die*.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, given that this is the final sitting of Parliament I take this opportunity to thank you all for your contributions during this fourth and final session of Parliament and of course for the duration of this term of Parliament. You have all served the country well. To all those of you who are standing in the upcoming General Elections: I wish you all the very best.

Honourable Members, in anticipation of the dissolution and questions pertaining to what happens after the dissolution, a list of frequently asked questions and responses have been provided to all honourable Members for reference. Your respective Whips will also notify you of other matters in preparation for the dissolution of Parliament.

Honourable Members once again, I thank you for your valuable contributions. For me it has been an honour to have served with you all.

I now adjourn Parliament *sine die*.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.29 p.m.