PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

THURSDAY, 8TH AUGUST, 2019

[CORRECTED COPY]

C O N T E N T S

THURSDAY, 8TH AUGUST, 2019

The Parliament met at 9.30 a.m., pursuant to notice.

The Honourable Speaker took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Honourable Members were present.

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Wednesday, 7th August, 2019, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirm

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

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote on the motion.

The Question is:

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Wednesday, 7th August, 2019 as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Nays')

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, there being no opposition, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CHAIR

I welcome all Honourable Members to today's sitting. I take this opportunity as well to welcome the student delegation from Akita City in Japan, *bula, vinaka* and welcome to Fiji. I trust that your visit will be fruitful, productive and rewarding, you are are most welcome.

I also welcome the teachers and students of Gau Secondary School. You are most welcome to Parliament and I hope that your visit is rewarding, fruitful and productive.

I also welcome members of the public joining us in the gallery and those watching proceedings on television and the internet and those listening to the radio. I thank everyone for taking an interest in your Parliament.

PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

Standing Committee on Economic Affairs –
Fiji Electricity Authority 2017 Annual Report and 2018 Annual Report

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, the Honourable Vijay Nath, to present the Committee's Report. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. V. NATH.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. The Standing Committee on Economic Affairs is pleased to report to Parliament its finding and recommendation on the Fiji Electricity Authority 2017 and Energy Fiji Limited 2018 Consolidated Annual Report.

The year 2018 held great significance, not only for the Company but also for the people of Fiji as it marked the successful corporatisation through which Fiji Electricity Authority received its new name - Energy Fiji Limited (EFL). As we all are aware, through the corporatisation, the Fijian Government extended 5 percent of its shareholding interest to the Fijian people, giving them an opportunity to gain financially from the growth of EFL. As of 2018, 35,736 customers became shareholders of EFL.

The Committee, while deliberating on the Reports, noted EFL's goal of achieving 90 percent renewable energy by the year 2025 and conducted site visits to various renewable energy sources around Viti Levu to check on the progress so far. Some of the sites visited were the Butoni Wind Farm, Nabou Green Energy Plant, Wailoa, Monasavu and Nadarivatu.

The Committee values the important role that renewable energy plays to help mitigate the impact of climate change and applauds EFL for embarking on new projects, as well as consistently upgrading existing plants in order to achieve their goal.

While conducting its site visits, the Committee was also made aware of the amount of resources (capital, labour and equipment) invested in the maintenance and upgrade of the renewable energy projects and appreciates the continuous efforts EFL makes, despite rising operational costs. This was apparent through the reduction of fossil fuel usage from 45.45 percent in 2017 to 41.02 percent in 2018, and the increase in renewable energy from 54.55 percent in 2017 to 58.98 percent in 2018.

For the period of 2017 and 2018, EFL once again, delivered excellent performance which is clearly evident as they maintained three straight years of gross profit of over $70 million until 2018.

The Committee also noted the increased number of customers benefitting from the various subsidies provided by the Government. Further to this, we would like to take this opportunity to applaud the staff of EFL for the key role they played towards achieving the mission and vision of the organisation.

Finally, I would like to thank the Committee Members who were part of the team that produced this Report: the Deputy Chairperson, Honourable Veena Bhatnagar; Honourable George Vegnathan; Honourable Ro Filipe Tuisawau; and the Honourable Inosi Kuridrani. I also take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank the Parliament staff for giving us invaluable support.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, I commend the Fiji Electricity Authority 2017 and Energy Fiji Limited 2018 Annual Report to Parliament.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Please, hand the Report to the Secretary-General.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move a motion without notice that a debate on the contents of the Report is initiated at a future sitting.

HON. V.K. BHATNAGAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

Question put.

HON. SPEAKER.- The Question is:

That a debate on the contents of the Report is initiated at a future sitting.

Does any Member oppose?

(Chorus of 'Nays')

HON. SPEAKER.- As no Member opposes, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

Motion agreed to

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I have been informed that there are no Ministerial Statements for today.

As all Honourable Members may be aware, Parliament agreed to Standing Order 51on a motion moved by the Attorney-General yesterday, with respect to the Civil Aviation Reform (Amendment) Bill 2019. Honourable Members, are reminded that the debate will be limited to one hour.

I now call upon the Attorney-General, the Honourable Aiyaz-Sayed Khaiyum, to move his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

CIVIL AVIATION REFORM (AMENDMENT) BILL 2019

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, pursuant to the resolution of Parliament passed on Wednesday, 7th August, 2019, I move:

That the Civil Aviation Reform (Amendment) Bill 2019 (Bill No. 25/2019), be debated voted upon and be passed.

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

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now call upon the Honourable Attorney-General to speak on his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, this particular Amendment Bill, by way of background, relates to the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) which launched its Universal Safety Oversight Audit Programme (USOAP). With the aim of promoting international aviation safety, USOAP provides an avenue through which member States are audited to determine, amongst other things, the extent of safety measures taken, as well as the available resources for international aviation by each member State.

Under the USOAP, ICAO's coordinated validated missions are conducted to help ascertain progress made by member States in resolving safety deficiencies identified during USOAP audits. ICMVs are conducted on site, and are used to validate progress made by member States in resolving safety oversight deficiencies identified during audits or previous audits.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Bill itself provides for the operation of airports or aerodromes under Part 2. The Act currently provides a broad definition of aerial work to mean, and I quote:

> "Any purpose, other than the carriage of passengers or cargo, for which an aircraft is flown if hire or reward is given or promise in respect of the flight or the purpose of the flight."

This, however, is not consistent with the definition of the term, "under the International Civil Aviation Convention."

Accordingly, the Bill seeks to align the definition in the Act to the definition provided specifically under Annex 6 of the Convention. As we know, we have different annexes that get added on to the Convention. Furthermore, under Annex 4 of the Convention, a member State is required to certify aerodromes used for international operations.

However, Section 10 of the Act provides for, amongst other things, aerodromes used for commercial air transport to be designed and operated in accordance with international aerodromes standards published by the Civil Aviation Authority of Fiji (CAAF) through the relevant standard documents.

The Bill, therefore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, seeks to amend the Act to harmonise the certification requirements of aerodromes and international requirements. This is to ensure that all aerodromes used for international transport operations, whether commercial or not are, in fact, designed and operated in accordance with such international standards.

Section 10 of the Act also stipulates a maximum validity period of 12 months for a certificate or registration approval of an aerodrome. However, other certificates issued by CAAF allow for a longer validity period. The Bill, therefore, seeks to amend the Act to allow for a longer validity period for a certificate or registration of approval of an aerodrome.

As highlighted, when introducing this Bill, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Clause 1 of the Bill provides for the short title and commencement. If passed by Parliament, the amending legislation will come into force on a date or dates appointed by the Minister responsible for civil aviation by notice in the Gazette.

Clause 2 of the Bill amends Section 3 of the Act by aligning the definition of what is aerial work to a more specific definition under Annex 6 of the Convention.

Clause 3 of the Bill amends Section 10 of the Act to require aerodrome serving all types of international air transport operations and not just commercial air transport operations, to be designed and operated in accordance with the aerodrome standards published by CAAF through its standards document.

Clause 3 of the Bill, Mr. Speaker, Sir, also amends Section 10 of the Act to clarify the issuance of a registration approval by CAAF.

Clause 3 of the Bill further amends Section 10 of the Act to allow for a longer validity period for a certificate or registration approval for the operation of aerodrome by removing the 12 month

period, leaving this period to be stipulated in the relevant standards document issued for the operation or registration of an aerodrome.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, of course, a number of consultations was held with CAAF. As you know that this does not, in any way, involve the day to day impact on the travelling public, but it is more to do with the safety and our ability, as a country, to meet these international standards that is required of us and, of course, we are able to then meet the standards by an amendment to the existing legislation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is why we are recommending the amendment to this Bill, and as I highlighted earlier on in the introduction of this Bill, we have the ICAO team that will visiting Fiji later on this month, so we will be able to have these amendments in place before they get here. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General. Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion.

Honourable Niko Nawaikula, you have the floor.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. As you know, we spoke at length the last time about the failure of the other side of the House to understand due process in bringing Bills to Parliament, ignoring the necessary contribution of the public for an inclusive approach in making our laws, so they were denied when the motion was passed to bring this under Standing Order 51.

Now, in relation to this, here we are to debate on the merits of the proposed amendments. What the other side must understand is that, this was an initiative of a past Government, especially the Government of the Leader of the Opposition. They were the ones who brought the Civil Aviation Reform Bill and they are just taking it out, by taking it out in a very very bad way – casual, derelict.

The past Government that initiated this reform did consultations and the reform was synchronised and structured. It was systematic, rather than what the Government is now doing which is *ad hoc*, it is a knee-jerk kind of reform, and that we noted it failed since 2006 because of very bad leadership - piecemeal amendments like this one. Why did not they rethink about this when the Budget was passed? Why is it necessary even now?

Having said that, Honourable Speaker, we have scrutinised what little amendment that is there which they say is not necessary to be given out to the public and the problem that we see there is that, this is a licence. Usually, that was one year ago.

Licences, by its very nature and its name, are normally one year because it gives the opportunity for the Government or for anyone giving it, to review it in relation to safety, review it in relation to performance. But here, we see that it gives too much power to the Minister, and that is very, very risky. That is the reason why…

HON. A. SAIYED-KHAIYUM.- It's not the Minister, CAFF.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- It does not matter.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- But it is giving you ….

(Honourable Member interjected)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- But, you are tabling it now.

HON. SPEAKER.- Do not carry out a conversation between you two. Through the Chair!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Wide discretion. Too much power, and that is the reason why we are opposing this.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Are there any further interventions?

There being none. Honourable Attorney-General, you have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Opposition have mentioned on a number of occasions for us to follow the process. We are indeed following the process, Mr. Speaker, Sir, because the actual process under the Standing Orders does allow us to actually file or table Bills under Standing Order 51. Even when you table Bills under Standing Order 51, there is a process within itself that we have to comply with, which is what we are doing.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just to remove any misapprehension or misunderstanding the Honourable Member may have, he is saying that CAFF and the Minister are the same thing. No, they are not!

The CAFF is an independent body with an independent Board that actually gets certified by ICAO. The country gets certified by ICAO and it is what you call, the competent authority as far as ICAO is concerned.

ICAO does not recognise the Minister responsible of civil aviation or the shadow Minister responsible of aviation or Members of Parliament, they still recognise the competent authority of that particular country, and the competent authority is the one that actually gives the certification.

Under the certification, Mr. Speaker, Sir, if one were to meet the standards, they have to ensure that the certification that is given and whoever actually receives the certificate, has to comply with those international standards. If the competent authority does not enforce the particular licence or whatever permit that is given, then they themselves are in breach of the ICAO standards and no competent authority or national competent authority wants to be in breach of the ICAO standards.

If you are actually in breach of that, there are various ramifications and, indeed, repercussions, because you will not be then recognised, the airport premises, the airlines that fly into the air space, you will not actually have the ability to, therefore, consequently be able to certify them. It will have an enormous catastrophic economic impact.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, again, the misapprehension and to say that the Minister and the competent authority is the same thing, no it is not. Please, let us not obfuscate issues or misrepresent things. This, again, will help us to be in compliance with the law in place, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and it would be good for Fiji. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Attorney-General.

Honourable Members, the Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

The Question is:

Pursuant to the resolution of Parliament passed on Wednesday, 7th August, 2019, the Civil Aviation Reform (Amendment Bill) 2019 (Bill No. 25/2019), be debated, voted upon and be passed.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Ayes' and 'Nays')

Votes cast:
Ayes - 27
Nays - 22
Not Voted - 2

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, there being 27 Ayes, 22 Nays and 2 Not Voted, the motion is, therefore, agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

[A Bill for an Act to amend the Civil Aviation Reform Act 1999 (Bill No. 25/2019) enacted by the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji. Act No. of 2019]

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, as you may be aware that Parliament agreed to Standing Order 51 on a motion moved by the Attorney-General yesterday with respect to the Maritime Transport (Amendment) Bill 2019. Honourable Members, are reminded that debate will be limited to one hour.

I now call upon the Attorney-General, the Honourable Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum, to move his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

MARITIME TRANSPORT (AMENDMENT) BILL 2019

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, pursuant to resolution of Parliament passed on Wednesday,7th August, 2019, I move:

That the Maritime Transport (Amendment) Bill 2019 (Bill No. 26/2019) be debated, voted upon and be passed.

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

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now call upon the Attorney-General to speak on the motion. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in fact, a lot was said yesterday when we were simply talking about the motion itself which, kind of, spilled over into the substantive area of what the Bill seeks to do. But

quite a lot has been said and I am sure the Honourable Minister for Transport would take a few moments to comment on that too.

But essentially, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Bill as we will see, is a simple amendment which is really a one-clause amendment that seeks to increase the period of the ability of the Minister responsible for transport to give a coasting trading licence for upto a period of 20 years.

As announced, Mr. Speaker, if I could talk at a macro level and also, again, go back to what the Honourable Leader of the Opposition had highlighted the other day in his quest to find out what we can do to liberalise the economy, to create more private sector investment and, indeed, spur on private sector investment. In response, we had said that we need to be able to unshackle many of the regulatory provisions that currently hold us back from getting more private sector investment. You need private sector confidence into the system and, indeed, bring in mainstream commercial banks.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reality of the matter is, and I am sure that the Honourable Minister for Fisheries would mention this, given his experience in the maritime industry, that casting trading licence, unlike what Honourable Tabuya proposed or suggested in her contribution yesterday, will not create monopolies because coasting trading licences, Mr. Speaker, Sir, are actually given on individual vessels. So you have the licence given to individual vessel and those licences are then monitored in terms of its compliance with the regulatory requirements or, for example, seaworthiness and various other requirements that makes a ship be able to sail or travel from one point to the other point safely. Mr. Speaker, Sir, that, again, is a misplaced notion.

Of course, as the honourable Minister would highlight, we actually call for tenders for these things. For example, when we have shipping franchises, we call for tenders, but that does not stop other individual private companies from starting up their own routes. If they believe that, that particular route is lucrative, they can get into that business. And it is actually not a trite point but, indeed, a very important point that if you want to invest in a particular industry, you need to be able to go into that space by surety. If you have surety and if you know that there is actually stability, then you have the ability to bring in the private sector and in this particular case, the banks.

We have last year, Mr. Speaker, Sir, approved the ability of LTA to give road service licences for omnibuses, those big buses that we see running on the roads which we generally call buses, for periods of up to 13 years. Why did we do that? So that these bus companies have certainties, so they can go out and buy a $200,000 or $250,000 bus, that do not have tarpaulin as windows. Some of the long distance buses actually have toilets in them and they now have Wi-Fi because they now know that they have that licence for the next 13 years or so. So in that way they can to the private sector. The banks will say, "Alright, you have a 13 year licence. You want to buy five buses from wherever. Yes, we will lend you the money because we know you have the licences." Indeed, we went one step ahead.

There will be certain other amendments made to the regulations where these private institutions can use these road service licences as collateral. In other words, bringing down the interest cost of the funds, if they go out and borrow from the banks.

Similarly, we want to have a situation for the maritime industry. Why are we denying the maritime industry of this? Why are we denying the travelling public in the maritime areas of getting certainty, getting better quality boats?

Now, they have said that we have not consulted. Do you think that if you go out to the public and say, "Oh, do you think that we need to have better buses? Do you want better ships?" What do you think they will say? Of course, they will say, yes.

If we go out, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to the shipping companies and we you to them, "Would you like longer term coasting trading licence?" Of course, they will say yes. It is in no-one's disinterest to not have this. You are not denying anyone's rights. This does not, in any way, deny anyone's rights, it is to the contrary. It actually enhances people's rights.

There is a constitutional requirement under the socio-economic provisions that we must have better connectivity and access to transportation is one of the key requirements under the socio-economic rights of the Constitution. In this way, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are actually facilitating it

Please, let us not be dogmatic about Standing Order 51. Look at the substance of it. What really is quite baffling is that, on Monday, we introduced a particular motion under Standing Order 51 and they did not oppose it. Yesterday when we introduced it, they said on a matter of principle, they want to oppose Standing Order 51. It just depends on the timing, therefore…

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- … there is no principle position.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- They are saying abuse, they are saying it is sickening, but I say that your inconsistency is nauseating; lack of a principle position.

On Monday, you allowed Standing Order 51, no opposition. Yesterday, you agreed to not have it in place. So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is just noise coming from the other side.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, this amendment is a good amendment. The travelling public of the maritime areas will greatly appreciate this because in time to come, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the people who want to get into the business of providing maritime shipping services will have a lot more confidence, the banks will get into play and you watch how this particular sector will change quite significantly in the next few years. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Attorney-General. Honourable Members the floor is now open for debate on the motion. Honourable Salote Radrodro you have the floor.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. At the outset, I must raise my objection to that Bill, not only for the processes that it had come through to this House and also Honourable Speaker, I really would sincerely ask the Government side, what is the intent of this change?

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Who really benefits from these changes?

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. S. V. RADRODRO.- Who really benefits from this change in this legislation, Honourable Speaker?

The fact that it had come through Standing Order 51 denies the people any opportunity for consultation, particularly for those who are going to be using these services.

(Honourable Members interjected)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- It also denies different business owners the opportunity to air their views on this Bill, Honourable Speaker.

When the tender is done and called, say, for example, if companies like Patterson Brothers Shipping Company Ltd, Interlink Shipping Line Ltd or Goundar Shipping Ltd, apply for a tender, any one of these companies that will win the tender will win it for 20 years.

We acknowledge that there may be a need for change, but the change could be for three years or for five years and we ask the question, why 20 years? Honourable Speaker, whichever company that wins that tender will hold it for 20 years and for those who have shipping companies, like the Honourable Koroilavesau, they would know that whoever wins the tender cuts out the other companies. Is it fair to the service providers? Is it fair to the general public?

Honourable Speaker, also this amendment must be looked at together with previous amendments to the Ship Registration Act 2015. In the previous amendment 2(A), it states and I will read, "...allows Maritime Safety Authority not to de-register shipping vessels operating commercially that are 55 years and over." Subject to adherence to conditions set in the amendments, it must be noted that in the primary Act, there was no such requirement.

Furthermore, Honourable Speaker, Section (4), (5) further allows the registration of second-hand ships imported for commercial purposes that is 20 years and over. This, therefore, enables vessel operators to purchase older vessels that could have changed hands many times. My concern, therefore, Honourable Speaker, particularly for the travelling public to the maritime areas, although there are additional requirements in the amendment made, it is still opens up to our people's safety issues and life threating incidents that can bound to happen.

For example, Honourable Speaker, there was this ship, the *Princess Ashika*, that Fiji had and it was sold to Tonga. Just a few days ago a friend of mine in Tonga posted on *Facebook* an article in memory of those that had lost their lives through the *Princess Ashika*, Honourable Speaker. This is the risk that we run.

Honourable Speaker, the change in this piece of legislation must be looked at in conjunction with the amendment that was done to the Ship Registration Act 2015. How old are these fleet that is going to be operating and holding a licence for 20 years, Honourable Speaker? I highlight this because of my sincere concern for the traveling public, particularly those to the maritime areas, who will be affected, Honourable Speaker.

Again, I would implore on the Government side to put on their humanistic lenses and consider the human element, Honourable Speaker, in regards to these changes that are coming into the House through this legislation. Again, I will ask, the change in this legislation is to benefit who? Is it to the traveling public or is it to the business owners, Honourable Speaker? Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. Honourable Anare Jale, you have the floor.

HON. A. JALE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for allowing me to speak on the debate on this Bill. I would like to acknowledge the speed that the Government has taken in regards to the concern by the people who live in maritime provinces.

I also note, Mr. Speaker, Sir, from the Budget Address where the Honourable Minister for Economy had laid the initiatives that would be taken in terms of the purchase of new boats, the removal of VAT from the purchase of the new boats and I think that should be commended.

A Standing Committee had already been put in place by Parliament to look into the petition on the affordable, safe, and dependable shipping service to maritime provinces. I am asking the Government if they can take due note of the recommendation that will come through. I do understand that the Standing Committee on Natural Resources has done a lot of consultation within Viti Levu and also travelled to islands to talk to the people about what they feel, should be looked into by Government in terms of maritime transportation. I would suggest that the report of the Standing Committee, Mr. Speaker, Sir, be given due consideration by the Government of the day.

As I see in the Bill, on the issue of 20 years it says, "Up to 20 years", so it gives the discretion on the Honourable Minister to decide - not 20 years, it could be lesser. I think the issue is the flexibility, which is noted.

I need to also mention, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the importance of getting good boats to Fiji. The issue about the age of boats that come to Fiji, they need to be safe. The age of the boats should be something that needs to be considered very seriously by the Ministry of Transport in terms of the policies of purchasing boats from other countries.

The passengers' accommodation in the boat is what led to the petition that came before this House, and I am suggesting that this is something that the Honourable Minister for Transport needs to look into. We need to see that we provide comfortable and safe accommodation in the boat for passengers who travel to islands in the maritime provinces or areas that require transportation by sea.

The boat operators should pay some costs in terms of delay of departure of boats. Our people are suffering and most of the time, they come two or three times to the wharf after being told that the boat will be leaving at a certain time, but are told to go back because the boat was not ready to depart. I am suggesting to the Ministry and the Government to please, take note of this. These are the very poor people, they do not have much to spend but they have been spending all their savings and I am raising it for the Government to take note of.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the Bill before the House and I think that you will provide a good initiative to move forward in terms of the provision of safe and affordable shipping services to maritime provinces.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank you, Honourable Member. Honourable Minister Semi Koroilavesau, you have the floor.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir, and I thank you for the opportunity to have a short contribution and support the Maritime Transport (Amendment) Bill 2019 that is before the House. I decided to stand up and make a short contribution because of Honourable Salote Radrodro's comments and I just want to make some basic correction on what she had stated before the House.

To clarify the subject, Honourable Speaker, Sir, the coasting trade licence is to allow a vessel to trade within a specific area and the type of trade or cargo to be carried. As we all know, there are different types of cargo but as is common in Fiji, it is a combination of passengers, vehicles and general cargo.

The Bill basically seeks to allow the Minister to issue a coasting trade licence for a period of up to 20 years. It could be five, 10 or 15 years, but not more than 20 years.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- It is very basic.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, this is the simple purpose of the Bill and it does not, in any way, affect the safety and the operational readiness of vessels to be used.

There are other requirements of survey that are carried out by the Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji (MSAF). They are required under the Act to inspect and pass ships annually. This licence will basically allow the Minister under the recommendation of MSAF to issue the coasting trade licence with a specific period, as I have already alluded to, for up to 20 years.

I would like to thank Honourable Anare Jale for his support of the Bill because this is basically an issue….

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- … that has been discussed on numerous occasions and the plea from the Opposition is to have better ships travelling to our maritime islands. This is also an opportunity for vessel owners to buy better ships.

As I have alluded to yesterday, it gives them the security of tenure. They can go to the bank, tell them, "I have the licence for 10 years to 20 years and I have the financial backing to allow me to purchase new vessels."

The issue that has been raised by the Opposition, if they do not support the Bill, then they are basically forcing the travelling public in the maritime islands to continue travelling on substandard ships.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.-If they go against the Bill, then they are telling the travelling public to the maritime islands that the ships that they are travelling on now is sufficient for them to travel on from now and into the future. Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Mitieli Bulanauca, you have the floor.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. I look at the Bill and I thank the Government for bringing up some improvements, particularly for increasing the coasting trade licence to 20 years from one year.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Up to.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Yes, that is what I said.

So, I feel that it is important to increase it from one year to 20 years. But it is also important to ensure that MSAF inspects it every year, to ensure that the conditions are good and safe for passengers to travel in.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- In addition to the franchise that has been approved to 15 years, I personally support the proposal that has been here for franchise and so increasing the coasting trade licence to 15 years.

In terms of buying 55 year-old ships from overseas, I do not support it. Why not 35 years or 40 years? At one time, the maximum limit was 35 years to 40 years. Now, it is 55 years. In here, we will need MSAF to ensure that the boats are in good condition for the safety of passengers to travel in.

It is important to do that because there are bad examples of MSAF here. It was only after a month of inspection of *MV Liahona* that the ramp fell off in Kadavu. Secondly, the *Princess Ashika* was not certified seaworthy here in Fiji, and they tried to get Tonga to purchase the boat, then they certified it seaworthy and after a few months, it sank in Tonga killing 80 people.

That is what I am concerned with, the actions of MSAF because we are buying old ships. I would also recommend that there be a maximum of 25 years on the age of ships and they do not allow any more ships to come to Fiji after 25 years. It is important that MSAF ensures that ships are in proper condition for the passengers to travel in.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Bill is more concerned about buying older ships from overseas. Why do we not build our own ships here in Fiji? We should be more concerned about that.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- We should build our own new ships here in Fiji, Mr. Speaker, Sir. We have the skills here in Fiji to do it. We can give employment to our people here in Fiji. Our focus should be more on that; building new ships here, as it would be more custom-built for our islands and people in Fiji rather than buying older vessels from overseas. It is important that we rethink our focus in building our own ships here in Fiji, as well as employing our own people. That is all, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. Honourable Simione Rasova, you have the floor.

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. I would like to contribute to this Bill before the House to allow for the issuance of coasting trade licence for a period of up to 20 years, instead of one year. Thank you very much.

I think it is not very clear here. The way I see it, is it the franchise scheme that is going on the boat or what? Subject to review, giving 20 years licence for the boat to travel, I hope it is subject to review by MSAF annually or probably bi-annually. I also hope that the company that will be given the 20 years licence, will not subcontract that licence, like in the Fiji Roads Authority. They gave the licence to a company but that company subcontracts to other small companies, and we hope that it does not.

Currently, the boats that are coming in are older than me. They are coming here as brand new….

HON. SPEAKER.- That is very new.

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- It is older than you, Honourable Speaker.

(Laughter)

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- And we have to see that the licences given to those boats, they have to come and celebrate its first year over here, if you can do that for the 20 years. So, within the 20 year period is going to be 20 years so we can celebrate its 20 years.

The Honourable Members over there will never know how to travel on those boats, Mr. Speaker, because they travel on the naval ships. They do not know how we travel. Ask the Honourable Prime Minister! He just came back from Gau, he went on the naval boat. Then you will never know how to travel on maritime boats.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- There you go, Mr. Speaker. I go to Kadavu every week and even with this new boat, everyone lies on the walkway, on deck and they charge numerous amounts on the cargo. They are not making money on the passengers but on the cargo. That is my contribution, thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member but as for the age, do not be misguided by the looks.

(Laughter)

I give the floor to the Honourable Jone Usamate. Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to support this particular Bill. I think the amendment that is being made to the legislation is something that meets the needs of what we need today. It is just that all the things that you have raised, the amendments that we are making in this Bill are part of the solution to fixing that problem.

I think there were some issues raised by the Honourable Salote Radrodro and I applaud the sentiments expressed by the Honourable Anare Jale in supporting this because it is part of the solution to making sure that the people who travel in our boats can travel in better boats. When children from

Gau get on the boat in Qarani or if they get on the boat in Nawaikama, they deserve to travel in better boats.

We need holistic solutions to this. This is obviously a step in the right direction. Anyone in this House who wants the people in the maritime areas to travel in better boats should support this because it is a proactive approach, a systemic type of a solution to make sure that we can provide better boats.

There are two basic arguments and one is the economic argument that we keep talking about. As the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy had said, if someone is thinking about investing in ships to travel the maritime routes, especially the uneconomical routes, we need to make a distinction between the coasting trade licence and the shipping franchise scheme.

The coasting trade licence gives you the right to run the ship - ship by ship. So if my ship is called "Jeke" and I get a coasting-trade licence for Jeke, I cannot use that licence for another ship called "Mere". It is just for that particular ship, so it is a licence on the ship by ship basis. So what the Honourable Rasova was talking about on subcontracting it, it is not possible because your licence is for the ship Jeke rather than the ship Mere, so that needs to be clear.

Once you get a coasting-trade licence, it means you can operate that ship in Fiji Waters. Now, there is no tender called for this coasting-trade licence, as the Honourable Salote Radrodro has talked about. Tenders come in when you apply for the shipping franchise scheme for uneconomical routes. You tender for the uneconomical routes and then you get that awarded. Only in that case is a tender called.

We need to separate the difference between the coasting-trade licence, the difference between the shipping franchise scheme, what is tendered and what is not tendered. Coasting-trade licences give the right for any ship to operate in Fiji.

Obviously, all the concerns that were raised by the Honourable Bulanauca, the Honourable Salote Radrodro, and Honourable Rasova, if we are able to give longer term licences for people to buy the ships, they are more likely to invest more money into better ships and that is what we all want. We want better ships in this country.

I have taken my children to Lau for what we call the "*kau mata ni gone*" and my children have slept on the floor. I have had to carry one of my daughters when she was around in Class 3 under an umbrella sitting on a kerosene drum for the whole night just because the ship was crowded. I do not want that happen to anyone else. How do we try to address this problem? Come up with solutions so we can have better ships. Obviously, this is something that is going to be valuable for those who want to invest in this particular sector.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order! Do not carry on a conversation between you two. The Minister is speaking and whether it is a Minister or a Backbencher, they should be accorded that courtesy. Do not carry on a conversation across the floor, address it through the Chair!

You have the floor, Minister.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The fact that you get a coasting-trade licence for 20 years does not mean that MSAF will still not carry out its regular assessments on an annual basis on that particular ship.

Obviously, if we are going to approve a coasting-trade licence for one year or five years or 10 years, there will be a number of criteria that will be put in place to make sure that when that licence is given, there is a belief in the regulators that, that ship will be in a good condition for the 10-year or 20-year period. So even though the licence is given, you still have the regular checks that need to be done. I think in some cases, you have the six monthly checks and surveys that are called, and also the annual ones. Those things will continue to be implemented.

Earlier this year, we had a bit of controversy with the implementation of the safe ship management system. Once again, this is trying to make sure that some of the responsibilities for making sure that ships are safe, is given also to the owners of all the ships, to make sure that they have their own responsibilities to make sure that the ship is safe for anyone who is travelling on those particular boats wherever they are. So all of these, working in tandem should help us to ensure that we have better ships in Fiji and that is what we all want.

People are willing to invest, if they know, if I have got a 20-year coasting-trade licence or if we get to the shipping franchise scheme and they get awarded a 10-year licence for the shipping franchise scheme, they will be more willing to invest in the ships that we need in this country.

Over and above that, one of the other things that is very important for us is in terms of climate change and in terms of greenhouse gas emissions. We know that many ships that we have are fairly old and there is obviously a need to mention, a bit more fuel efficient.

Fiji has a number of targets in terms of greenhouse emissions. We have a Fiji target to have zero emission by 2050. Obviously to do that, we need to make sure that the energy that we use to power all these lights, that more of this is renewable energy, plus we need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the transport sector.

We have a target in the *Laucala Declaration* for the ships in the Pacific where the target is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in our maritime sector by 40 percent by the year 2030. In order to do that, we need to bring in better ships or retrofit existing ships.

Obviously, this development that we have here where we are going to encourage people to buy newer ships, will help these targets of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. This is also related to the *Suva Declaration* that we had a few years ago, where the Governments in the Pacific agreed to try to limit the global average temperature increase to below 1.5 degrees centigrade above pre-industrial levels and all of that is related to reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

I believe that this development that we have, encourages ship owners to bring in better boats; boats that are more fuel efficient, so it will do two things. It will help us to address greenhouse gas emission reduction and at the same time, provide safer ships for people that are travelling in maritime areas.

I noticed the comment that was made by my senior old boy there, the Honourable Bulanauca about the fact that we should build ships in Fiji. A question to be asked, who closed the shipyard? What happened to that shipyard? Who got rid of it?

It is not an easy thing to develop the skills to have people to build ships. It is not something that happens overnight. It needs a lot of skills and competencies to be developed. Once you sell the shipyard, you give it out on very cheap rates, it is very hard to be able to get all those skills back in place so we can continue to build ships.

I think all of us should support this Bill. If you support the targets that we have for a reduction of greenhouse gas emission, if you also support the idea that the people in maritime areas deserve to travel in better ships, you should support this Bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Niko Nawaikula, you have the floor.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I am sitting here, Honourable Speaker, and I am very worried. I am very worried after hearing the Honourable Minister for Transport and the Honourable Attorney-General from the other side, it seems clear to me that they have lost sight of their responsibility.

They talk about the commercial side. They talk about private interest. That is not why you are here. Listen to this. Why you are here is for the interest of the public…

(Chorus of interjections)

HON, SPEAKER,- Order, order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.-…for the common good. You are not here for the commercial interest. You are not here for the bus companies. You are not here for the shipping companies, and that is why you are doing this.

You listen to the whims of the bus companies and what do you have? Buses going and exploding. You listen to the whims of the shipping companies, what do you have? Ships sinking. So please, understand that you are here for the common good.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- And that is what is being sacrificed here.

The Honourable Minister for Transport said that they are resolving the concerns we are raising from this side. No! The concerns we are raising is safety. You sacrifice safety by giving the discretion from one year to 20 years. That is the whole problem.

There were very good reasons and you ask yourselves, why did our forefathers and the fathers of this nation limit it to one year? It was for a very good reason - safety, safety safety! Interest of the public, interest of the public, interest of the public! Common good, common good, common good! Because within that time they can assess whether it is in the best interest of the public that it should continue. So it is a safety question and you would have a situation where the ship going and suddenly sinking and when that happens, do not come crying to us.

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua, you have the floor.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Thank you very much for giving me this time, Honourable Speaker.

I actually was not going to stand up to make a contribution but I just had to after hearing the words; safety, safety, safety, coming from the other side and the words, nauseating inconsistency. That is exactly how I am feeling right now because it seems like we have forgotten that in April, all 27

Members from the other side, including those from Lau, voted against a motion brought to this House by the Honourable Anare Jale, seeking a petition to be brought to a Standing Committee asking for safety for shipping in the Lau Group.

That is my contribution. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

Honourable Attorney-General, you have the floor for your right of reply.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, very quickly, just to perhaps, inform Honourable Members of the Opposition and to reiterate what the Honourable Minister for Transport had highlighted that the shipping services in Fiji are provided purely by the private sector, so you have Pattersons, Gounder Shipping, et cetera.

Anyone at this point in time can go and buy a ship and they can start running shipping services. The only way they can commence shipping services and continue in providing the services is, they must meet the standards imposed by MSAF, and that is on a yearly basis. Even prior to that, if MSAF feels that they need to go and inspect a ship, they can go and do that. So this is the private segment, they actually run that completely on their own and there is no prohibition for them, apart from the safety requirements.

The second aspect of it is the Government Shipping Franchise where most of the shipping companies do not go and provide shipping services in what they call routes that are not lucrative, uneconomical, no economies of scale, but as a Government, we want those ships to go to those islands where there maybe, for example, two villages or one village. But it is uneconomical for those ships to go so for that, we call for tenders, and the reason why we call for tenders is because we actually pay them money to go to those routes.

In the same way, we have a subsidised scheme for aeroplanes. There are certain outer islands where the Fiji Link, Northern Air will not fly to because it is uneconomical for them. But now, what Government does, it again call for tenders and says, for example, "Who wants to fly to this particular island?" Then they put in their tenders. Then we actually award the tender to someone and we pay them the money. That means there are two distinct aspects, so please try and understand that. It does not, in any way, affect any transparency which you are trying to refer to.

Again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think Honourable Rasova had mentioned that most of us have not travelled on the ships, therefore, how can we talk about the ships. You do not have to be a disabled person to make policies and laws about disabled persons.

The Honourable Minister for Women, within the purview of her Ministry, looks after the disabled persons. Under this Government, we have made more strides in terms of what the disabilities face than any other Government.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- We have ratified international conventions and brought in new laws. In the same way, I have not travelled to one of those outer islands on those ships, yes, I have not.

But I have travelled once in one of the naval ships to Kadavu, I have travelled once, of course, on the Patterson Ship from Natovi to Nabouwalu, and I have done that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, that does not, in any way, mean that we do not have any empathy with people who travel on those ships. It does not, in any way, mean that we do not understand what the trials and tribulations they have gone through, it is actually included in our Manifesto. So, please, that kind of argument is quite ludicrous. It does not follow any logic.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, safety, of course, has been talked about and I want to reiterate that, please. I wish more Honourable Members of the Opposition were in this particular instance, like the Honourable Anare Jale. He has recognised the fact that we are trying to take a holistic approach towards solving the problem of the shipping industry.

Honourable Nawaikula says, "Oh, we only will support the private sector." *Areh!* That is how we provide the service, and that is the way we do it. Otherwise, what he is actually implying is that, all ships in Fiji for maritime services should be all owned by Government, and we should go off and buy an entire fleet of ships. The money is limited, we have to be creative.

All bus transportation in Fiji today what we call public transportation, is owned by the private companies for decades in Fiji, it is not owned by Government. We call it public transportation, we provide various incentives for them, yet we use it, and yet is owned by the private sector. They do not see the logical linkages between that, Mr. Speaker, Sir. If we are able to get more private sector interest in providing maritime services then, obviously it means that Government does not have to have a capital outlay.

We do not have to make budgetary allocations and go and buy millions and millions of dollars' worth of ships. We want them to buy it on their own, they make the money, we provide the service, we make sure they provide the service and we make sure there are safety standards. That is how it is done overseas, it is so logical.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, without taking too much of your time, I would just like to say, please. I hope that the Honourable Members will look at the long term aspects of it. Please, I implore you once again, do not object to something just because it has been brought as a Bill by us. Look at the outlook of it, do not be so dogmatic. Do not follow your dogma.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, again, there has been inconsistency in the application of the so-called principle against Standing Order 51, when they allowed one on Monday.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this amendment to this Bill will now create a completely new era in the shipping industry in Fiji and most definitely, they will see a lot more changes, give more confidence and more private actors to come into the space and improve the quality of shipping services for ordinary Fijians who use those services. Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General. Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote.

The Question is:

> Pursuant to the resolution of Parliament passed on Wednesday, 7th August, 2019, the Maritime Transport (Amendment) Bill 2019 (Bill No. 26/2019) be debated, voted upon and be passed.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Ayes' and 'Nays')

Votes Cast:
Ayes - 26
Nays - 20
Not Voted - 4
Abstention - 1

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, there being 26 Ayes, 20 Noes and 4 Not Voted, the motion, therefore, is agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

[A Bill for an Act to amend the Maritime Transport Act 2013 (Bill No. 26/2019) enacted by the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji. Act No. of 2019]

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will now take an adjournment to suspend proceedings. Morning tea will be served in the Big Committee Room and we will resume in half an hour. We adjourn.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.45 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.17 a.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- As Honourable Members may be aware, Parliament agreed to the Standing Order 51 motion moved by the Attorney-General yesterday in respect of the Telecommunications (Amendment) Bill 2019. Honourable Members are reminded that the debate will be limited to one hour.

I now call upon the Attorney-General, the Honourable Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum, to move his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS (AMENDMENT) BILL 2019

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to the resolution of Parliament passed on Wednesday, 7th August, 2019, I move:

That the Telecommunications (Amendment) Bill 2019 (Bill No. 27/2019) be debated, voted upon and be passed.

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

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now call on the Attorney-General to speak on his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker Sir.

Mr. Speaker Sir, as in the introduction of the motion itself yesterday, we talked about the rationale behind this particular amendment to the Telecommunications Act of 2008.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the Bill essentially which, as we know, is in three Clauses, seeks to amend the Bill to introduce a levy of 10 cents for every gigabyte of data used by a customer of a telecommunication service provider.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if I could contextualise this, a few years ago, we set up a Telecommunication Development Trust Fund in which a small levy was charged on all incoming international calls that were made coming into Fiji. And as a result of that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we were able to raise funds that have been subsequently invested in the telecommunication sector overall and the ICT sector itself.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as highlighted also, the revenue that has been generated from that, initially averages approximately $6 million to $7 million a year. However, we have seen that revenue collection dropped quite significantly because of the fact that most people no longer use a mobile phone for voice connectivity. They do not simply dial a number (+1) whatever it is, or (+64) and dial the number. They essentially now use other Apps, such as *Viber, Skype, Messenger* and various other Apps where they can actually make a call using data.

In order for us to be able to continue to invest in the telecommunication sector, in particular for those areas or sectors of the population where we have a very low population density, we need to be able to have funds for that. And, indeed, many countries have actually adopted this approach and we, of course, were not the first ones to have set up such a trust fund, and we obviously emulated what other countries had done. So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this essentially seeks to levy that.

Gigabytes, of course, is the measurement of data. You have 1 gigabyte and then, of course, you can go into terabytes - the more data you use and the capacity that needs to be built.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to also highlight one particular issue. As announced in the 2019-2020 Budget and if you see on page 66 of the Budget Address, at the moment, the Southern Cross Cable that lands in Fiji is the connectivity for us to the rest of the world and for the world into Fiji. So, it provides the pipe, if you like. Just only until recently, the cost of that was $256,000 per month for a single 10 gigabyte line.

Because of the fact that FINTEL has a monopolistic position, they were, in an unregulated manner, charging these rates. So, we asked FCCC to actually look at this monopolistic position of FINTEL because obviously we are interested in ensuring that ordinary Fijians have access, not only to connectivity, but affordable connectivity.

In this assessment, FCCC also found out how much money FINTEL makes, the cost of them actually landing the cable in Fiji and their costs. And as a result of that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, instead of now paying $250,000 a month for one 10 gigabyte line, the cost has now fallen almost six-fold to $40,000 a month, a savings of $2.5 million and that, of course, can be passed directly to the Fijian consumers and businesses alike. Indeed, the cost of that should come down quite significantly and, of course, FCCC would be keeping a watch, to ensure that those costs are actually passed on to the consumers.

So, given that and given the fact that at the moment, FCCC is currently looking at what we call the 'termination rates' being also further rationalised and, indeed, reduced, this termination rates essentially means the connectivity. So if you, for example, have a Digicel phone and you call a Vodafone number, the call goes into the Vodafone system, then they charge a fee for actually bringing that call in, and then you hear what we call the termination rate and then Vodafone picks up that line to pass it on to their customer. Normally, what happens is that, when you have a company that has a dominant position in the market, and if you have a new entrant into market, normally the dominant player can start dictating the rates.

We obviously understood that, we got Vodafone and Digicel to open up their books, to look at what are the costs involved. Normally, for example, in the dominant situation, you would have the incumbent always saying, "Look, I have invested in all these towers, I have invested in all the infrastructure, some new entrant comes in, simply piggybacks on my infrastructure. So, obviously, I have to be cognisant of that."

Similarly, for example, with ATM usage, et cetera. We expect, however, Mr. Speaker, Sir, a period of time that, that termination rates will also come down, so FCCC is currently looking at that.

The point of me telling all of these, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that, overall the cost of access to data and access to voice in the connectivity and termination rates, is significantly coming down in the Fijian market. So this small fee of 10 cents per gigabyte will not necessarily make a dent to the ordinary consumer because they will now, of course, be getting reduced rates in any case because of the sharpening of the pencil that has been facilitated by FCCC.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I just wanted to also give a sense to Honourable Members of Parliament as to what was the general, sort of, usage by customers. We have had discussions with the various suppliers. You can, for example, buy what we call a prepay, which is generally when you go and pay upfront and you get the data or you get the voice, the number of calls you can make, or a post-pay, which is when they bill you afterwards. In prepay, you can earn a weekly plan of 7 gigabytes for $7 at this point in time, or a 15 day plan of 15 gigabytes for $15, one month plan of 25 gigabytes for $25 or 50 gigabytes for $50.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, what we are told on average, because we have so many *Facebook* users, et cetera, people tend to use lot of data now too. On average, we have people who do prepay by using upto 7 gigabytes or there about on average. Of course, that varies but overall on average, that is the kind of usage we have.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have also had the figures that came in for Digicel too, and they were not able to give us a more nuanced, sort of, detailed information as Vodafone, but they have told us on average, Digicel mobile phone data customers use about 2.8 gigabytes of data per week, or 11.4 gigabytes of data per month. If someone were to use, for example, 2.8 gigabytes of data per week, they would be paying a little over 20 cents additional, or the supplier will actually subsume that cost themselves so it does not pass on to the customer, and you only pay on the data that is used as opposed to the unused data.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, of course, the leveraging of the levy will go towards the Trust Fund and as we have seen, we have used the Trust Fund funding for the funding of *Walesi* and the funding of the A.M. radio frequency that now covers all over Fiji. We work in collaboration with JICA and I would like to once again acknowledge JICA for their investment of over $11 million, and we used the Trust Fund money to actually pay for the duty in that respect. Of course, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have a number of other projects that had been funded in that respect, in particular, the Telecentres.

Of course, we now have with the advent of *Walesi*, are getting connectivity both, of terrestrial and satellite means. We are now able to give community halls and various other remote areas where they congregate as a community to be able to provide that. We have done this is in numerous places as I had mentioned yesterday, in the village of the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, in Taveuni, and in various other places around the Cakaudrove area, and numerous other parts of Viti Levu too, where we actually give them a Set Top Box for free. We actually buy them the television set for free, we set up the area, so they get connectivity and people are able to come together to watch there.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with those introductory remarks, I would like to urge all Honourable Members to actually support this because this is for a worthy cause, and to be able to ensure that we get more and more Fijians connected into the ITC space. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General. Honourable Members, the floor is open for debate on this motion. The Honourable Biman Prasad, you have the floor.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to contribute on the Bill, and I thank the Honourable Minister for his explanation on the rationale for levying this 10 cents per gigabyte levy. I think the Honourable Minister himself has provided enough rationale or counter argument to the increase or imposition of this levy.

We note and appreciate, Mr. Speaker, Government's effort in liberalising the telecommunication regime. We note the statements made by the Honourable Minister in Parliament with respect to how people are using the *Walesi* platform. We also appreciate his explanation on how FCCC is going to help bring down the overall cost of telecommunications in the country, his reference to the Southern Cross Cable, and we appreciate all that.

Mr. Speaker, I think if we want to improve the access to technology for our people, we have to do that. I think that is the trend around the world - telecommunications accessibility, access to internet. This thing, Mr. Speaker, is no longer a want but it is a need for individuals and for families.

I think what the Honourable Minister said with respect to the reason why people are going on to using data more and more is perhaps, the argument against the imposition of the levy. On one hand we

are saying that we are bringing the overall telecommunication cost down, we want people to have access to internet, we want people to use more data, yet we are trying to put this levy.

The Honourable Minister said yesterday, Mr. Speaker, that this is not going to be backdating, but for a lot of people, while the average cost right now or the average usage might be lower, I think there are certain categories of people and certain areas where people live, the internet usage would be much higher. So I do not think that it is a very, very small levy and I suspect that this might be a basis for future increase in the levy. So in some ways it is, kind of, a 360-degree turnaround in terms of the argument that we are trying to reduce the cost of internet, but at the same time we are trying to put this levy for every gigabyte of data that we use.

As I said before, Mr. Speaker, I understand the idea of the Development Trust Fund but in my view, if the overall cost of telecommunications is coming down and if the Government is telling us that their policies of liberalising the telecommunication regime and ensuring that there is fair competition and that there is no exploitation of consumers under the watch of FCCC, then I do not see a need for this kind of fund anymore and this kind of levy.

As I have said, the average might be lower now but just as an example, if a family uses, say, 50 gigabyte of data, probably that is standard, I do not know. But in some areas, in some categorises of families, the usage could be as high as 50 gigabytes. That would mean paying $5 extra as internet charges. So really, Mr. Speaker, I do not see a need for this levy now when the Government on one hand is saying that we want people to have access to telecommunications, want to have access to internet, it does not make sense, in my view.

I see, Mr. Speaker, an ulterior motive here really. It is all about raising revenue. I think the Honourable Minister gave it away when he said that this Trust Fund was getting $6 million to $7 million when people were using more voice data, which is now down to $2 million or $3 million. So if the objective is to increase the Development Trust Fund and you are saying that the overall telecommunications cost is coming down and a lot of it is through the policies where you increased competition, then I really do not think it makes sense to put any of this kind of levy on the users of internet. So, Mr. Speaker, I do not see any justification for this imposition of 10 cents levy for every gigabyte on data used by customers. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. I give the floor to the Honourable Adi Litia Qionibaravi. You have the floor, Madam.

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to respond to the proposed amendment to the Telecommunications Act, the Telecommunications (Amendment) Bill 2019.

The Bill, Mr. Speaker, Sir, seeks to impose a levy on all service providers of internet. It sounds very nominal at 10 cents for each gigabyte, but it has implications in the pockets of those who are seeking to provide sufficient food for their daily needs.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, determination cost is not something new, it has always been an issue between service providers in Fiji. We view the cost as a continuing effort to gauge and punish the average consumer, who must pay for the FijiFirst policy miscalculation, mistakes and adventures, Sir. We view that the amendment should have been part of the Budget proposal and debate.

The first issue, Mr. Speaker, Sir, concerns investor confidence. They are continuing to watch and they are continuing to assess the environment of doing business in Fiji. Continuous changes in policies portrays inconsistencies and affects investor confidence. We desperately need investment to

improve the much needed economic growth in Fiji, not to mention employment opportunities for our school leavers and those who continue to look for employment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the FijiFirst Government is mercilessly imposing excessive fees, fines and charges across the board. It is strangling the nation. Despite high and increasing cost of living, the ordinary people continue to be punished by the FijiFirst Government with all these levies, fees and licences.

The recent increase in fees for birth certificates which will now cost $10 at the Registrar General's Office and $15 at Post Fiji Limited, is unjustifiable since these documents are used almost daily by ordinary people. A death certificate will now cost $15 and a marriage certificate $25, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

There is always reference to the increase in tax threshold and the increase in disposable income for our people. But, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the continuing increase in fees and charges, in fact, means that the tax savings and increase in take-home pay is just totally absorbed in the increasing fees that are continued to be imposed without consulting the people of Fiji.

With those reasons, Sir, I do not support the motion before the House.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. I now give the floor to the Honourable Lynda Tabuya, you have the floor.

HON. L. TABUYA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I rise to contribute to the debate on this proposed Amendment Telecommunications Bill.

Honourable Speaker, I rise to speak on behalf of the youth of Fiji, who through this 10 cents levy per gigabyte to internet providers, will then pass it to the consumers who will affect them the most.

I mention youth, as I said, where majority of the population will be affected by this. Now, the time when we just see increases in the price of plastic bags from 20 cents to 50 cents, increase in birth certificate cost as was mentioned by my colleague, the proposed increase in electricity which, by the way the Fiji Competition & Consumer Commission (FCCC) is going around the country to consult with people.

The Honourable Attorney-General when we were debating the Maritime Bill this morning said that if you go out to consumers and ask them if they want better boats, of course, they are not going to say, "no". Well, the same concept applies here for FCCC. They are going around the country, consulting with people about the increase in electricity, they are not going to say "yes". So it is the same kind of concept he is applying there, he is going to think about the role of FCCC.

He is talking about the sharpening of the pencil by FCCC. Sharpening of the pencil is not enough. If the Government is genuine, Honourable Attorney-General, to bring this levy to the House, then at the same time bring these proposed changes, saying that it is going to happen in the future, that maybe the cost will come down, if I am a Vodafone customer call Digicel, then bring it here, be genuine about it. The 10 cents levy, then at the same time bring that change, not waiting for FCCC to sharpen a pencil.

So, again, increase in fuel, which will inevitably increase the cost of goods and services, yet another increase we see here that will affect the majority of our population on the minimum wage, who need our collective responsibility to manage the high cost of living.

Now, with the internet users in Fiji numbering over about half a million as was being alluded to, an increase obviously with this 10 cents levy, increase in internet charges will happen, this will net the Government millions and millions in revenue. But by making access to the internet more expensive, are we killing the proverbial goose?

Youths who do not have any money by the way, need to access the internet to enable their studies and business opportunities. So why is the Government attacking this and why is this being fast-tracked without proper consultation?

I believe the Government in its rush to fill its coffers with much needed revenue has overlooked the potential devastating impact that this will have on the majority of our citizens which is our youth. I propose that this Bill not be fast-tracked. Let us go through the proper consultation process, refer it to the Standing Committee to consult over half a million of our consumers of data.

The access to data for many years is their only pathway out of poverty and this is being touted by the Government. Digital Fiji, access to the internet, they are trying to make everything electronic, it is going to cost us more, so where is the logic in that? Please, do not make this journey harder as a nation, let us sit together and talk through this. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. Honourable Minister for Agriculture, you have the floor.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I do not think anyone in this House can deny how important data accessibility is for a contemporary society. Some 20 years ago, data was the domain of the rich and elite in the society. But, now, Honourable Speaker, Sir, everyone needs data to perform - provision of information, accessibility of information, communication, education, et cetera.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, in small developing countries when you have got unequal societies, inequality between geographical space, between groups of people, who is supposed to eliminate that inequality? Who is supposed to ensure that everyone can grow in an equal level platform? It is Government.

How can Government can do that? Government can do that by treating as a public good and then funding a public good.

Now, how do Government fund public goods? Roads, water, health, education. Government has to raise money. The Honourable Minister for Economy earlier this week said that money does not grow on trees. You need to understand that it does not drop from the sky. If the economy grows, if you provide an enabling environment for a particular sector to grow, then we take a small portion of it in the forms of tax, fees and charges. This is what the Government wants to do, to take a small portion from data provision (those companies providing data) and then use that money to ensure that it provides that particular accessibility to this important service so that everyone can grow up together.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, in this age, in contemporary Fiji and also developing countries, if Government does not do this and I want to emphasise this, we will contribute to the growing inequality in our country because a lot of people are still in the rural, interior and maritime Division, who cannot afford to have accessibility to data and we need to race against time to take data out to them. But it does not happen if you just leave it to the private sector organisations, the telecommunication providers.

If you go to some places and when the reception is slow, I call Vodafone or Digicel but mostly Vodafone as I have more accessibility to Vodafone because I know some people there, and I say, "Why is there a connection problem here?", that is, in Korotale, Rakiraki." In the last four years, still

we have problem in connection. What do they say? "Doc, it is not very economical to put another tower there." I mean, that is the reality of a private sector business. They will go where there is positive returns.

So, that is where the Government comes in and assists them in ensuring that people who live in those areas are not deprived of that service. Otherwise, eventually, in the medium to longer run, people will get frustrated and they will start leaving those areas. And that is why we see some of the islands and in the interior, emptying out. That is why this Government has a vision and is saying, "Let us give them the basics so that they are there and they do well", and we utilise those resources out there. Otherwise, we will see an influx of people.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, if we do not provide data and educate our children, they will have difficulty in competing, not only locally in a level playing field with everyone, but also internationally. If these children go and study in universities outside in the global education market, they will find themselves in a disadvantaged position.

(Honourable Member interjected)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- You don't understand!

Honourable Speaker, also if you look at any employer, they are wanting IT skills. So, what we are saying is that, we will need to assist and provide a framework so that our children and our people are able to have access to data, and that is what we are doing.

It is the Government that will come in to ensure that we level the playing field and provide accessibility to data through this levy that we are putting. So, 10 cents maybe small for you but 10 cents over the unit that we are charging.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I support the Bill. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. I give the floor to the Honourable Tuisawau. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to contribute to the Telecommunications (Amendment) Bill 2019.

The Honourable Minister for Agriculture stated they can stop rural to urban drift. I think it is very simplistic just to say that when you provide data and television that you can stop the drift. When he was explaining it, it was as if we are going through foundation economics or social science which is, I mean, to be honest in terms of explanation.

I acknowledge the explanation from the Honourable Minister for Economy in terms of this Bill and I note that the explanations mirror the ones provided yesterday in terms of the background of the Bill. I am just reading through yesterday's *Daily Hansard* regarding that explanation and just to quote from Page 2608, it says: "This Trust Fund, Mr. Speaker, Sir, has been in existence for quite some time…" This is the Telecommunications Development Trust Fund where the 10 cents levy on data usage, I assume, would be deposited, but the question I have is, doe this Development Trust Fund have a board? Is there a report on it in terms of audit, on what has been used or not been used? There are concerns about governance and transparency in terms of usage of funds.

The other issue about this Trust Fund and the last I heard of it was that, there was a press release regarding this Trust Fund that money which was unused from e-tickets or card would be deposited into

this so that amounted to a few millions a year, I think. I am not sure whether there has been a report on that since the establishment of the e-ticketing, and also for citizens who cannot utilise the balance of their funds, some had $1.00, 50 cents or 10 cents but it adds up. That needs to be clarified because what we are proposing here is that, this 10 cents go to into this Fund.

The other concern I have is regarding what is stated, "The moneys have been used to initially start up the work with *Walesi*." I just had a look through the *Walesi* website and let me read it out:

> "What is Walesi? Walesi Limited is a State-Owned Company founded by the Fijian Government in 2015 to oversee the transition from analogue to digital TV across Fiji."

So founded in 2015, and is a State-Owned company and let me read the Economic and Fiscal Update, Supplement to the 2019-2020 Budget where it lists State-Owned Entities:

- Fiji Airports Limited;
- FBC;
- Fiji Hardwood;
- Fiji Public Trustee;
- Food Processors;
- Post Fiji;
- Fiji Rice;
- Unit Trust;
- Viti Corp; and
- Yaqara.

There is no *Walesi* there, even though it was established in 2015, and even under Commercial Statutory and Majority Owned Companies, it is not listed. So this statement in the website on *Walesi*, where does this *Walesi TV* exists in the Government structure in terms of Government Owned Entities or where Government Equity Investment is? Is it a ghost company or is it being set up outside the normal Government structure in terms of State-Owned Entities?

That brings into question, Honourable Speaker, the accountability and transparency I am talking about in terms of the reporting and audit of this Trust and *Walesi*. My understanding is, *Walesi* has not provided any Annual Report to any Standing Committee of Parliament.

The other issue is, we collected $5 million in 2017 (this was in the statement yesterday), 2018 - $4 million, so the Fund keeps on going down to $394,000. There have been explanations about *Walesi* using this for Wi-Fi, community halls, TV, et cetera. That is why I am saying, was there any feasibility study done or cost benefit analysis, before the *Walesi* went on this enterprise?

The other concern I have is in terms of our budget. If you look at Head 16, Programme 3, Activity 1 (10) - Grant to Walesi of $10 million. We are collecting funds here but they are being granted this money per annum. I cannot work out how come we are giving funds to *Walesi* to do the work while we already gave them $10 million?

In the previous year, they were also given funds according to this; in 2018-2019 - $19 million. So $19 million and $10 million, a total of $29 million in the last two years. Maybe, telecommunications equipment is expensive or whatever, but there is a lot of public funds that are being expended on this. Definitely we need audited reports, transparent governance in terms of, not only the Trust Fund but also *Walesi*.

The final issue I have regarding this, and would like to ask, who are the Executives of *Walesi* in terms of the Board and those within the Board? There are some with radio background from New Zealand. How did they come in, was it through connections? Those are fundamental questions we need to ask - accountability, transparency, reporting, good governance, Trust Fund, *Walesi*, and now we are being asked to raise this Fund which had been reduced to $394,000, to bring it up again to, I do not know. Maybe, $5 million or whatever the fund was before.

That, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is my contribution to the motion. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. I now give the floor to the Honourable Attorney-General to his right of reply. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just very quickly to highlight Honourable Tabuya, I think she may have misheard what I said later on. She said FCCC cannot always simply sharpen the pencil, they already done it in the space of accessibility to the Southern Cross Cable.

As I had mentioned, the cost per month for a single 10 gigabyte line used to be only until recently, $256,000 a month. Now, it is $40,000 a month, Mr. Speaker, Sir, almost a 600 percent reduction. So obviously the cost for the Internet Service Providers (ISPs) is reduced by 600 percent and they will pass it on.

If we have two or three ISP providers, if one of them does not want to pass on the cost, the second one may want to pass on the cost, the third one may actually reduce it by even further cost, so there will be competition. In that way, it is beneficial for the consumers - basic market economics. So please, be rest assured that has already happened. I have already announced that in the Budget.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other thing is, I wanted to tell the Honourable Members that currently the New Zealand Government is actually looking at an overall New Zealand digital service tax which is going to be based at 3 percent the gross turnover of these digital service providers. We have not even been doing that for this.

Secondly, they said we want to collect revenue for Government, this goes to a Trust Fund. For anyone who understands Government accounting is that, it does not go to Consolidated Fund that we present as a Budget. It is not part of that revenue. So, again, it does not, in anyway, affect our cash flow. It is about getting monies together for specific purposes. I think the Honourable Ministers who have already spoken have already highlighted what it is specifically going to be used for, it is not just *Walesi.*

Walesi had actually kicked off, we had the assistance of ITU, kicked off the project. Of course, it needs to have a lot of investment. We are putting up about 17 towers, we are building redundancies, so in times of climatic changes these towers can be used for other purposes also. We are trialling in some of the islands at the moment, where people who have access to *Walesi* television can actually send back data. We trialled it in two places in Fiji at the moment for that.

We get more regular reports - the Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Women, Minister for Defence, Minister for Transport, people will get all forestry, fisheries and everything. They can get their data as opposed to sending people across. This is the capacity, and honourable Tuisawau should appreciate the fact and he should know this, that we are using technology now and also we are buying space up in the air. We are paying for satellite services to be able to get people to have access to that connectivity through satellite, funded by the State, so that everyone can have access to it.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point that I want to also highlight, I know honourable Tabuya wants to, and like most of the honourable Members on the other side, they only think up to their noses because they want to play populist politics, saying, "Ah, this is for the youth."

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, obviously her voice was quite mute when it came to women's issue just only a few weeks ago, but that we leave that for later on discussions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point I want to highlight is that the youth of Fiji know that only a few years ago, before the liberalisation of the telecommunications sector, the unit cost of a mobile phone for voice at peak period was 99 cents a unit.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- 30 seconds.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Yes, for 30 seconds. Today, at peak period, it is about 33 cents. Before, text messages was 50 cents a text message, now if you buy certain packages it is free for a number of text messages. You get free voice for a number of calls you make. She did not highlight any of that, that did not exist but only few years ago.

As a result of the fact that this cost is so low, we have close to 600,000 *Facebook* users. What do they use? They use these things, most of them. Probably, 95 percent use mobile phones. If it was so unaffordable, Mr. Speaker, Sir, none of these changes would have taken place. Indeed, the uptake of this technology would have been very muted, as it was only a few years ago, a complete non-recognition of that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, please, let us not play into that. You are talking about cost of living is going up, tax rates, no one pays taxes below $30,000, no one ever dreamt of that. We now have free education, increased maternity leave. They talk about electricity cost….

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, they talk about electricity cost. We have a Electricity Subsidised Policy in place. So, irrespective of the electricity tariff going up, the reality is that those families that earn less than $30,000, we pay 50 percent of their bill. That system never existed before.

The reality of the matter is, they do not think long term. You need the service provider to have enough funds for capital projects. These companies do not sit around for charitable purposes. They need to be able to have the funding to invest in the next day, next renewable project.

We have more people already connected to the grid. They are not going to get the money from the air, and the same as our milkshake to be cheaper at the airport. They have absolutely no economic sense, no financial norms, as to how the system works. I shudder to think they were ever in those decision making processes, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker Sir, in any case, I think honourable Professor Prasad mentioned about businesses and others that maybe affected by the usage of this increase of this 10 cents per gigabyte. A corporation or business can claim there is an expense in the normal tax finding purposes. Again, it is a claimable expense, Mr. Speaker Sir.

Mr. Speaker Sir, we have, of course, increased, losses are now being carried forward for the next eight years, do they make any losses? You can include it in your tax purposes, Mr. Speaker Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reality of the matter that we are thinking long term. They seem to have, like a conspiracy under every little piece of paper. Everywhere there is some conspiracy. Everywhere there is....

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is also this, kind of, siege mentality that people are always caught in the same socio-economic warp. Mr. Speaker, Sir, yet, what a defeater's attitude. What a despondent position! We now have people on the island of Lomaiviti where the Honourable Prime Minister recently went. We have millionaires there. We have people in Vanualevu planting *yaqona*, they are reaping $2 million per harvest.

(Honourable Member interjected)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Get that mentality out of your head! Stop being so fatalistic!

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Leader of the Opposition talked about feeling the pinch in his village and district, et cetera. We went to his village, we installed the *Walesi* platform and we put in the solar panels, Mr. Speaker Sir. The roads in there are a lot better. It does not take hours to get to Savusavu.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reality of the matter is and again, I say this and I have been saying this almost everyday, when we have this discussions, when we are talking about national matters, please come to this Parliament with clean hands and someone even saying, with even clean minds.

So again, this collection of fees is for the future. I mean, no one in this room and I think we actually talked about it, has mentioned even 5G. The world is gearing up for 5G. We are not going to have 5G now, but definitely we will have it later on. But do they understand the costs involved in 5G?

In most countries where 5G is going to be implemented, the State has to fund a lot of money upfront. It requires a relocation of frequency, we are currently involved with the international community in respect of the relocation of frequency, so countries in the Pacific can actually have 5G. So, we have to think ahead. Where will the money come from? We still will want it, our population, our youth will want 5G, we want faster speeds and we want greater artificial intelligence access so money needs to come from somewhere. So, if we, as a country, come together and set aside a small 10 cents that builds up into a coffer, Mr. Speaker, Sir, so we can have a better services in the future.

I would like to end with what the Honourable Minister for Agriculture and Waterways and Environment highlighted, that there are still people in Fiji who we need to very quickly bring on to speed. We need to get them into the ICT space very quickly and by improving this kind of capacity and

services, we will be building and mainstreaming them and it is critically important. Let us not forget those people. Do not be so urban-centric. Think about the people in isolated areas. The youth are in isolated areas, we need to think about them.

In the same way, we talked about shared infrastructure cost. If we do that, then we have lot more funding available for consumer services and improvement services, Mr. Speaker, Sir. So I would like to thank all honourable Members who have spoken in support of this, and let us support this motion. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General.

Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

The Question is:

Pursuant to resolution of Parliament passed on Wednesday, 7th August, 2019, the Telecommunications (Amendment) Bill 2019 (Bill No. 27/2019) be debated, voted upon and be passed.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Ayes' and 'Nays')

Votes Cast		
Ayes	-	27
Nays	-	22
Not Voted	-	2

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, there being 27 Ayes, 22 Nays and 2 Not Voted, the motion is, therefore, agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

[A Bill for an Act to amend the Telecommunications Act 2008 (Bill No. 27 of 2019), enacted by the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji. (Act No. of 2019)]

HON. SPEAKER.- We will move on. As Honourable Members are aware, Parliament agreed to Standing Order 51 on a motion moved by the Honourable Attorney-General yesterday with respect to the Excise (Amendment) (No. 2) Bill 2019. Honourable Members are reminded that debate will be limited to one hour.

I now call upon the Honourable Attorney-General to move his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

EXCISE (AMENDMENT) (NO. 2) BILL 2019

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to resolution of Parliament passed on Wednesday, 7th August, 2019, I move:

That the Excise (Amendment) (No. 2) Bill 2019 (Bill No. 28/2019), be debated, voted upon and be passed.

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

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now call on the Honourable Attorney-General to speak on the motion. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is unfortunately, again, one of those anomalies that FRCS was not able to pick up and it has brought to our attention because of the drafting that they had done at that point in time whereby there was an error made where the rate of excise was prescribed for Schedule 2 of the Act, but sweetened beverages were not specifically included in Schedule 1, because you need to actually have it mentioned in Schedule 1, and then you need to have it mentioned also in Schedule 2. They only had mentioned in Schedule 2.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, of course, we have said that we want to be able to fix up these anomalies. While FRCS has been charging and collecting excise on sweetened beverages since the amendment, it has only recently come to its attention that Schedule 1 is inconsistent with Schedule 2 and the FRCS, in fact, should have provided instructions to amend both, Schedule 1 and Schedule 2 during the 2016 Budget itself.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the FRCS itself, of course, will have to deal with these anomalies. They will have to deal on an individual basis with whomever they charge, but the legal position as far as we are concerned is, we need to bring about an alignment of the listing of sweetened beverages.

So, you will see, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in Clause 2 of the Bill itself, to insert "sweetened beverages" in columns 3, inserting again "sweetened beverages" with added sugar artificial sweetener. Also, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is a deletion of item 8 because it is no longer relevant, nor have they been charging for that, and that is what the amendment seeks to do, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General.

Honourable Members, the floor is open for debate on this motion. I give the floor to the Honourable Niko Nawaikula.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. This side of the House is opposing this amendment.

The honourable Attorney-General had said that the purpose of this amendment is fix an anomaly, but if you look at it generally, you will see that there is a spate of measures that are being undertaken by this Government to look for funds - birth certificate charges are being increased, Water Authority of Fiji is now charging exorbitant prices, Energy Fiji is seeking to increase and here, we have the telecommunications, so it tells us that really, the Government does not have any money.

The Government is broke. Well, to borrow his own phrase, the reality of the matter, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that the Government is broke. It does not have any money and is doing these measures to extract money from the very poor, the poorest of the poor, and that is unprecedented.

The honourable Minister for Defence can confirm that the 995 Special Constables are still to be absorbed because there is no money. Can you dispute that? That is why we are opposing this, it is very clear. You do not have the money and you coming here expecting….

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is open for debate on this motion.

Since there are no other speakers, I now call on the Honourable Attorney-General for your Right of Reply. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for clarification again to honourable Nawaikula, I am sure he would have had the time, as a lawyer, he would have seen the Schedule. Essentially, you can see the sweetened drinks is not in Schedule 1, but is actually listed in Schedule 2, so that is the anomaly that we are actually trying to correct, Mr. Speaker, Sir. That, of course, is paid by companies that actually make these drinks.

Of course, you may argue and say that they may pass it on to the consumers who go off and buy sweetened drinks, but that is one of the objectives, that we get less and less of our people to buy sweetened drinks and carbonated drinks because we have high levels of NCDs, to discourage them from doing that. That is the objective.

In the same way, we charged 50 cents for a plastic bag, so people do not throw it away. They use it, so they said, "I paid 50 cents, let me use it again." That is the whole purpose. It has got nothing to do with birth certificates. I do not know how many times honourable Naiwaikula would have printed his birth certificate. You are only once, in fact, it just reminded me of a Letter to the Editor that (I think) I read on Monday by a lady called Premila Kumar where she said that she could not understand why people are going on about this birth certificate.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reality of the matter is, we she said, we are born only once, you need a birth certificate once, you die only once, you need a death certificate once….

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- and, Mr. Speaker, Sir, you are married only once in some cases, of course, some may get married more than once, but they need that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reality of the matter is, if you look at countries, like Samoa, it charges in excess of FJ$50 for printing of a birth certificate. We have said that if you register your child on the digital platform, you do not pay for registration, nor do you actually pay for the birth certificate itself, the hard copy. If you do some registration digitally, you do not even pay for that, and that is free.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, that lady in that *Letter to the Editor* wrote; "Yet, they complained about something as important as identification". Yet, they normally seem to write any letters of complaint. So the norm in any media organisation, go and interview people on the street, talking about the price of kava, most of them drink it everyday, smokes cigarettes, buy sprint, sprite, coca cola or whatever it is, second day, third day or everyday; what about that? So, it is fine, if the price of that goes up. It is fine if you pay for that everyday, but birth certificate, heaven forbid, is going up to $10.

Even though we could not get it for free, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we do not need it every day and we have already announced that very soon, we will be getting e-birth certificates. You do not even have to print it. So, again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I cannot see the logic in all of these.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, getting back to the actual motion itself, it is an amendment to correct the anomaly, like I said. FRCS has to deal with this now because of the fact that they were just anomalies

but I know that we will agreeing on this motion, we will be agreeing on this anomaly and then FRCS can get along with the businesses of enforcing the law. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General.

Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

The Question is:

Pursuant to the resolution of Parliament passed on Wednesday, 7th August, 2019, the Excise (Amendment) (No. 2) Bill 2019 (Bill No. 28/2019) be debated, voted upon and be passed.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Ayes' and 'Nays')

Votes cast		
Ayes	-	26
Nays	-	20
Not Voted	-	5

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, there being 26 Ayes, 20 Nays and 5 Not Voted, the motion is, therefore, agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

[A Bill for an Act to amend the Excise Act 1986 (Bill No. 28/2019), enacted by the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji. (Act No. of 2019)]

HON. SPEAKER. Honourable Members, on that note, we will suspend proceedings for lunch which is being served in the Big Committee Room and proceedings will resume at 2.30 p.m.

Honourable Members, we adjourn.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.18 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.32 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, as mentioned in the past few days, at the end of the first two motions under Schedule 1 of the Order Paper, we will be voting merely to note the Report.

Honourable Members, I now call upon the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, the Honourable Viam Pillay, to move this motion. You have the floor, Sir.

REVIEW REPORT OF THE CONSUMER COUNCIL OF FIJI 2016 ANNUAL REPORT

HON. V. PILLAY.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I move:

> That Parliament debates the Review Report on the Consumer Council of Fiji 2016 Annual Report, which was tabled on 12th July, 2018.

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

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now invite the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs to speak to his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, the Consumer Council of Fiji is a statutory organisation established under the Consumer Council of Fiji Act 1976 (Cap 235). It is funded by taxpayers through the Ministry of Industry and Trade and also provides external pressure as a watchdog to create fair and just delivery of goods and services.

First and foremost, the Council is an advocacy organisation. It campaigns to bring about changes by flogging the Government, businesses and regulators for the introduction of legislation that will improve the consumers' welfare. The Council tackles unfair practices and exposes companies, regulators and service providers that fail consumers.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, Parliament, in its sitting on Tuesday, 17th April, 2018 referred the Consumer Council of Fiji (January to July) 2016 Annual Report to the Standing Committee on Social Affairs. The Committee reviewed and collated information through an evidence session with the Consumer Council on Tuesday, 29th May, 2018. This assisted the Committee Members in analysing the organisation's operations, achievements and challenges encountered during the 2016 financial year.

It was pleasing to note that despite the devastation of *TC Winston* in 2016 which left a trail of destruction and the effects of which were felt by consumers, robust consumption and investment activities continued to be undertaken by the Council. Furthermore, the Council remained focussed in resolving consumer complaints and providing sound advice to Fijians who sought redress for unfair treatment in the marketplace.

In its scrutiny process, the Committee noted that the Council registered a total of 1,365 cases during the seven months of 2016, worth $2,963,326 out of which 1,011 cases with a value of $1,551,224 was recovered from traders or service providers. The Council has played a positive and assertive role in achieving a marketplace where consumers are well-informed, confident and protected from unlawful, deceptive, misleading or otherwise objectionable practices.

The Year 2016 marked enormous achievement by the Council in bringing smiles to the faces of Fijians through the passing of the Fair Reporting of Credit Act 2016 to regulate the Data Bureau, followed by the launching of Fiji's ever National Consumer Helpline - a toll free telephone service that provides direct access to consumers irrespective of where they live in Fiji.

To conclude, the Committee commends the performance of the Consumer Council of Fiji and acknowledges the responses and clarifications made by the Council during its evidence session with the Committee. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Chairperson.

Honourable Members, the floor is open for debate on the motion, anyone wishing to take the floor? Honourable Ratu Filipe Tuisawau, you have the floor.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I would like to contribute on the motion at hand regarding the Report on the Consumer Council of Fiji 2016, particularly, the recommendation that all enforcement agencies strengthen their surveillance of standards on imported goods.

Fiji is an importer of raw and refined goods and has been one of the victims of secondhand products. A lot of cars have come into the country, not only vehicles but recently we have seen a lot of food stuff, animal by-products and this has resulted in health and environmental issues from the consumer compliance side. It is also probably one of the factors which has given rise to Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) in this country.

The other reason which has seen the rise of imported cheap secondhand kind of quality food, et cetera, is the low wages, unemployment, poverty of access. If you go to the supermarkets, there is quite a lot of imported fruits, for example, peanut butter, et cetera, and some of these are imported from countries which have not traditionally exported them. There has been a study in one of these rich countries of origin where the standard of food in terms of quality has been determined as less than what is being produced in Australia and New Zealand. So I am not sure what kinds of tests are being done in Fiji or what kinds of safeguards are there in terms of the imports of these food stuff.

In addition, we have seen in the Budgetary allocation the reduced budget for some of the statutory authorities dealing with surveillance of imported goods (Biosecurity Authority), and this is likely to impact on the supposed performance and surveillance capability of this organisation, not only in terms of equipment, operational expenses, et cetera, but also having trained a competent staff.

It would have been also prudent for the Committee to have invited Biosecurity Authority and Customs officers to seek their views on this recommendation, rather than just leave it to the Consumer Council of Fiji. From the perspective of this side of the House, there needs to be more and better coordination and consultations between the various Government agencies.

The other issue is Fiji's dependency on agriculture and its nominal contribution to GDP, but still a major job-creating sector, is also vulnerable as I mentioned with the import of poor quality farm products. It would also have an impact on our National Export Strategy. We are of the view that these factors make it important that Government must explore means and ways to strengthen our surveillance of imports over the quality of goods and how it impacts on the local economy, environment and health of our people.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Those are my contributions regarding the motion at hand on the Consumer Council Report.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. Honourable Minister for Industry, Trade and Tourism, you have the floor.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for giving me the opportunity to speak on this Report. It is rather ironical because I prepared the Report, presented it to the Standing Committee and never thought that I will be presenting it in Parliament. So, here I am with my own Report.

I just want to say that the Consumer Council is a very very important organisation and it is an organisation that works on its own, protecting the interests of consumers because a single consumer or an individual cannot express his or her rights but collectively when they do so, that brings about that united voice which can then change the policies and processes that can benefit a consumer.

And I can say with confidence that over the years, the consumer complaints number went up from barely 400 complaints in 2005 to over 3,000 complaints in a year. So, the number went up simply because of the awareness. Consumers knew their rights, they knew their responsibility and they expressed it. They brought the matter to the Council and the Council investigated a number of cases in that regard.

Now, I would like to talk about the various recommendations that were made in the Report. Sir, I wish to update the House on the development of each recommendation.

With regards to the recommendation in the Report on the enforcement agencies to strengthen surveillance on standards of imported goods, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is an issue which each and every country struggles with - border control. One may feel that, yes, Australia has got the best law, they have got the best labs and, therefore, they will be able to protect the consumers very well. In fact, that is not the case.

Recently, a reputable departmental store, like Target was found selling cosmetic products that were counterfeit. We now live in an age where there are counterfeit products. The way it is produced and marketed, it is very hard for a consumer to identify original from a fake and that becomes really a major problem. So it is a struggle that each and every consumer organisation and country with their surveillance team, they try and do the catch up to ensure that consumers are protected.

We have also done a number of product testing in Fiji. This was funded through Consumers International where we had sent a number of food products to Singapore for testing, just to establish sugar, salt, fat content. So, as and when, the money was made available, the products were tested. But we do not have a high standard lab in the country to do such kind of testing because otherwise, any company can take you to court for releasing such data when your labs are not certified.

Moving on to the next recommendation which was on prank calls. I am extremely grateful that in 2006, a Consumer Helpline was established with Consumer Council of Fiji and the Helpline was 155. This was the best thing that ever happened. It simply meant that any person from anywhere with any subscriber could call Consumer Council and lodge their complaints and Consumer Council has a Call Centre that attends to the calls and then they take action on those calls.

As I said, the Consumer Council is an advocacy agency. In other words, when they receive the information, they conduct mediation to solve the complaints. That is all they can do, nothing beyond that. But then, while solving the problems, they identify the root cause and often the root cause of the problem may be related to the product, process or the policy. So any three-piece is what the organisation has to then look at and see how policy reform can be brought about.

We recall a number of areas where Consumer Council really made an impact, for example, Data Bureau, was one area. The Consumer Council never ever said that we do not need a credit reporting agency. We simply said that we needed a credit reporting agency that is under a law because at the end of the day, such agencies deal with a lot of personal information and we cannot allow institutions to use

personal information for their own gain. And it was based on the number of complaints we were receiving that we made a recommendation to the Government and I am very thankful that the Government considered and then they introduced a credit reporting agency under the law.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, insurance is another very important area, we all know that. Unfortunately, only 10 percent of our population have property insurance and this is one area that the Consumer Council of Fiji worked tirelessly with various agencies, to ensure that the policies that the insurance companies introduced are consumer-friendly. I must say that there were a number of insurance companies, like BSP, who had a lengthy discussion with Consumer Council as to how they can make the wordings more consumer-friendly.

So the efforts were being made, but we looked at it from another perspective and our perspective was that, we have to look at the laws which need to change to better protect consumers. So that is all I wanted to add. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. I now give the floor to the Honourable Viliame Gavoka. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. Honourable Speaker, I wish to contribute to the dialogue on this motion. At the outset, I am grateful that we have a Consumer Council in Fiji looking after the affairs and the safety of the consumers in our country.

Honourable Speaker, if you look at Recommendations 1 and 2, they are about the enforcement and surveillance of imported goods. And area that has always concerned me, Honourable Speaker, and I believe it also concerns a lot of people in Fiji is the backup services for white goods.

If you go into any house or village, invariably you will see refrigerators that cannot be repaired, stoves, washing machines (it happens in my family), and when I asked the question, "Can this be repaired as in the past, if a refrigerator broke down you knew who to call, et cetera?" The answer is that, when you go to the retailer, their suggestion is that you buy a new one. So what it tells me is that, a lot of these products do not have the backup to back up their products in terms of repairs and maintenance.

In the vehicle industry, we all drive Mazdas, Toyotas and Nissans. We know that there is a dealer who sells you that car, if anything goes wrong they can service it with spare parts. This is not the case with white goods. In the past, I think it was different with few brands like Philips and the like, and they had the backup, but today with the many brands of white goods, there is very little backup. Once something goes wrong, eventually you throw it away.

I wonder if the Consumer Council, going forward, can ensure that when they bring in a product to Fiji, the importer must undertake to have all the facilities in place for a backup, that is, those who can service it, including the spare parts. A TV that gets hit by any power outage virtually cannot be repaired and this is the grassroot people who are being affected.

We have to appreciate, Honourable Speaker, that it is now a consumer society, the range of products in Fiji are quite impressive. A housewife was telling me when you go to Courts Samabula now using the vernacular, "*e rawa ni ca na ulumu",* the range of stuff that is there that she wants. I mean, that is Fiji today, but the issue is that, a lot those white goods, once you buy them and once something happens to them, that is the end of it, it cannot be repaired.

So I would ask, going forward, that the Consumer Council look at this. And I would say, maybe a little old-fashioned, you limit the brands but ensure that whatever they bring into the country is of

quality and has the backup, instead of just anyone bringing in their product into Fiji. That, Honourable Speaker, is something that I believe resonate with a lot of our housewives in this country.

And on the issue of insurance, I read this with interest. We, in the Standing Committee of Economic Affairs, scrutinise the books of the insurance community and I think going forward, we should ask for input from the Consumer Council. As she was sharing with us today, the penetration for insurance is very, very low in Fiji - 10 percent to12 percent, and general insurance in particular is very low. The effort is there to try and increase the penetration, but I believe the Consumer Council can also help in convincing the fraternity and in helping to market this issue to our people in general.

All in all, Honourable Speaker, the work of the Consumer Council is very much appreciated and I just wish that those two points can be recorded and some solutions found for them. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member.

I now give the floor to the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs to speak in reply. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I just like to commend once again the work of the Consumer Council of Fiji and also thank all the Honourable Members who were part of the Committee.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote to note the content of the Report.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Nays')

HON. SPEAKER.- As no Member opposes, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

Motion agreed to.

Honourable Members, I now call upon the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources, the Honourable Sanjay Kirpal, to move his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

REPORT ON THE 2013 ANNUAL REVIEW OF THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE

HON. S.S. KIRPAL.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I move:

> That Parliament debates the 2013 Annual Review of the Ministry of Agriculture which was tabled on 12 July 2018.

HON. J. SIGARARA.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now invite the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources to speak on the motion. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. S.S. KIRPAL.- Honourable Speaker Sir, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and the Honourable Members of Parliament; on behalf of the former and current Honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Natural

Resources, I take this opportunity to speak on the motion in regards to the 2013 Annual Review of the Ministry of Agriculture which was tabled in Parliament by the former Honourable Chairperson of the Committee on Thursday, 12th July, 2018.

Honourable Speaker Sir, the bipartisan Committee Report examined the operations and the various approaches undertaken by the Ministry in 2013, and aligning the approaches towards achieving key strategic priorities of the Ministry and set targets for the year. Its performance was compared and analysed in terms of its administration, legislation, organisation structure, financial management, functions and programmes for 2013.

Honourable Speaker Sir, the review at first was made possible through consultations and verification meetings with the Ministry of Agriculture. Under the period of review, the Committee noted that the Ministry had developed strategic priorities to ensure that agricultural communities are further enhanced with significant contribution towards Fiji's economy. Also, it ensures food and income security for the Fiji citizens.

Under the REDD+ Policy implementation, the Ministry developed the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan to address issues, such as conservation and biodiversity, inland waters, protected areas and invasive alien species to sustain land. The Report captured major success of projects undertaken by the Ministry through aid, research and development strategies that enhances growth and production of livestock.

With those sentiments, I thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Chairperson. Honourable Members the motion is open now for debate. Honourable Niko Nawaikula you have the floor.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I wish to make some contribution to the debate. I was a Member of this Committee that scrutinised the 2013 Agriculture Annual Report. All the other members have gone and I am the only one who is left.

It was a bipartisan Report. I endorse entirely the findings there and I wish to raise some issues of concern on this particular Ministry at that time, understanding, of course, that this was 2013, the answer from the other side is that, all those that may have been addressed but the fact remains that these issues were raised at the time when that Government was in power in 2013.

It is good also that I am talking now because the Honourable Minister can rebut whatever I said. There were many bad things about this Ministry. We talked about production and the Honourable Minister stated that relatively, they are growing but that is not what the Report is saying. For example, if you look at page 11, it says and I quote, "The Committee noted that $552 million of imports of crops and livestock was produced by the Ministry in 2013 and produced only $180 million from domestic for the same year, hence a trade deficit of $372 million". So, there you go.

The Official further added, I quote: "Since 2013, they have been unable to extract the figures that were only represented fresh, chilled and processed crops." So, during this time, the Ministry was unable to extract data in relation to this and that is very unfortunate, Honourable Minister, and to the Government.

And it goes on in relation to crop and livestock. I quote:

> "The overall trade of agriculture commodities and products remain in deficit for the period under review.

On livestock, the Ministry of Transport is in the process of trying to entice investors, such as Grace Road."

Now, we all know what has happened to Grace Road, so that is the kind of management that we have from this Ministry.

Cocoa rehabilitation was already started in Namau but still has not gotten off the ground to a favourable level. We hope that all these will be addressed and maybe, if I could invite also the Honourable Minister to the findings of the Auditor-General's Report for this period which is the basis of the Annual Report. And right across the board, totally bad, errors in TMA bank reconciliation.

Further it says, and I quote: "It has been a common practice for the Ministry to utilise capital budget surplus at the end of the year to meet operational costs." That is just not on, and the Honourable Minister may have an answer to that.

Even on the operating of Trust Account, revelation that there were no reconciliations prepared for the months of April to December 2013; all this time, no reconciliations. If I can just shed some of these anomalies on the selected AH&P projects and this is a big waste of public funds.

There is a project where $10,998 was allocated, it is called the Sikeli Beef Project. What we have found was that, 24 coils of barbed wire were not utilised by the farmer and that was kept under the house. Pine posts had not been used and not properly kept by the farmer. The paddock was overgrown with non-pasture grass. So what is the explanation to that, Honourable Minister or the Government?

There is another one where an allocation of $39,000 to one Apolosa Tikoinasau. The farmer was provided with $21,000 both of assistance, however, there was no evidence of farming activities underway as at February 2014, so where has all that money gone to? That money is not your father's money, that is our money, that is public money! So, it goes on.

There was another case - $31,000 allocated to one Mr. Santa Ram, approved assistance for $9,000 for the pine post, however, was assisted with $11,000 worth of pine posts that were not there. Items supplied had not been utilised as at January 2014, and it goes on, and on and on. We would like to hear explanations to this.

(Laughter)

It is a laughing matter, Honourable Speaker, but this is not our money, this is public money and I could go on and on. The pictures are here and I hope you have the report there and you can please, provide an explanation to the House on how this has happened. What form of management do you have to manage public funds that has allowed this to happen? It is all from there to there (referring to book). I do not want to read it all but….

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Read!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- All right, I will do that, I have 20 minutes.

Suren Singh, allocation of $21,000 - item supplied has not been utilised as at 2014. Selema Bolavucu, an amount of $10,658.30 - item supplied has not been utilised as at January 2013. Acquittals, acquittals, acquittals, how do you acquit that?

Water tank is used for household consumption instead of the dairy farm. So in here, you have the water tanks that were supposed to be for the dairy farm but upon inspection, it was not used in the farm but it was used for the family.

According to delivery docket, the farmer was only supplied with 10 coils of barbed wire, although 20 coils were approved to be supplied. The reduction of the approved assistance was not recommended.

Next, we have Delainakabuta Sheep Project - $19,162 allocation, item supplied has not been utilised as at January 2014. Acquittal!

Electric fences was supplied instead of the approved normal fencing and had not been utilised or kept at the farmer's residence.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- A point of order, Mr. Speaker, Sir. This is about the Annual Report, it is not about the Auditor-General's Report. That is not the Annual Report.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- The Annual Report is based on this.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- No, Mr. Speaker, Sir, he is wasting Parliamentary time. This Report is not the Annual Report.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- This is the outcome of that.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- This is not the Annual Report.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- You are not achieving your production because of this.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Annual Report 2013.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- He is getting the Auditor-General's Report, that is for another time when the Auditor-General's Report will be tabled, you can come with your story and we will respond.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Well, Honourable Speaker, I was not going to read all these. They have asked me.

(Honourable Members interjected)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I did not want to, but you have asked me.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, you heard the Point of Order?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Yes.

HON. SPEAKER.- And I have heard them ask you as well but the thing is, you now know what the Point of Order is, so you can correct yourself.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Yes, well I correct myself like that. I said I had enough and then you asked me. I do not want to be standing here in this mad house doing this, but you asked me to do that.

(Honourable Members interjected)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Well, it is even painful for me to read it.

(Laughter)

I tried so I will leave it there and I will ask the Honourable Minister, please, give an explanation and assure the public that this will not happen because this is not their money, this is not his father's money, this is the public money.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Prime Minister, you have the floor.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I wish to contribute to the motion by Honourable Sanjay Kirpal.

Mr. Speaker, the agriculture sector is the key driver for growth and has great potential to transform Fiji's economy and the livelihood of all Fijians.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I commend the Committee for their insight and their constructive comments on the Report although farmers were affected by *TC Evans.*

The 2013 Agriculture production increased by 6.8 percent. This is testament of Government's commitment to the sector and farmers' resilience when faced with adversity.

Mr. Speaker, as you have heard from the Honourable Minister of Agriculture in the last couple of days, Government will continue to put in place mechanism to enhance its export capacity and maximise its potential through value-addition of its products to attract premium returns. Government is also privatising capacity building within the sector through scholarship opportunities provided by renowned partners in this sector.

Based on these remarks, Honourable Speaker, I, therefore, support the recommendation of the Report. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Prime Minister. Honourable Minister for Fisheries, you have the floor.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I want to raise a Point of Order on Honourable Niko Nawaikula. This is the second time he has called this Honourable House "a mad house". I would like Honourable Niko Nawaikula to withdraw that.

(Honourable Members interjected)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- You make this look like a mad house.

HON. SPEAKER.- I have already asked him to correct himself on that point, we will move on. Honourable Mitieli Bulanauca.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I will be brief on the import - $552 million imports; exports, $180 million in that year - 2013. The trade deficit of $372 million, that is

wrong. What is being done to reduce that deficit? Our Agriculture Department is very important to our economy, and I fully support Agriculture to reduce that deficit.

I am also interested in how this subsistence in market commodities are measured, it is very important because subsistence level of farming too are economically supporting quite a fair share of our population here in Fiji. Even I think it is about 50 percent. They need to be commended there. It is important to properly identify how those are measured so that we can improve if we need to improve to help those subsistence farmers in more production at that level.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also thank the Ministry for the increases in production; beef industry, 41 percent; dairy industry, 7 percent; sheep industry, increases to 44 percent; pig industry, increases to 17 percent; apiculture (I think this is the bee industry), increases to 15 percent. I congratulate them for doing that. Poultry increases to 44 percent and great increase in livestock production as well from 2012 to 2013. But I am concerned, Honourable Speaker, Sir, those increases are not enough to reduce trade deficits.

In 2013, imports going that way and exports going that way. Today, the graph still shows that and even more. The export should be more and more and reduce the deficit. So, it is important that we fully support the Agriculture Department here in our budget as it is one of the economic areas in which more of our people will be employed and we can export more. The graph is still showing that. So, increase more budget for it in future, that is my concern. Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I wish to contribute to the debate on the Report that we have before us. I only wish the Honourable Nawaikula recalls who the Permanent Secretary was during the year 2013 because the main man in the Ministry is the Permanent Secretary. He was a SODELPA Candidate in the 2018 Elections.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, production in 2013 was low but we keep highlighting the selective comments by the other side of the House. There was low production in 2013 because it was immediately after *TC Evans* in December 2012.

Agriculture recovery, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is not immediate. That is why you will see that recovery takes five years, even particularly for medium term and long term crops, so this is where you have the low production in 2013. Let us put it into context, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

The absence of data, let me again address this issue raised by the Honourable Gavoka yesterday, he loves talking about the agriculture revolution. Revolution is not short term, revolutions are always long term. It is a strategic approach and, of course, this is where it all started.

In 2013, we had to analyse the sector and we had to analyse the environment. In 2014, the Agriculture Policy Agenda came into place, not only looking at production because the agriculture sector was production-driven, looking at the whole value chain because agricultural products are perishable and we need to have cold storage systems, pack houses, et cetera.

Surveys were done and the markets both, domestic and international markets and the exporters and the database is critical because we want to know where we are. Agriculture back then did not even know where they were and, therefore, the need for the database is the beginning of the agriculture revolution.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, 2010 was *TC Thomas*; 2012 was *TC Evans*, 2016 was *TC Winston,* and that is why you will see the, sort of, a yo-yo performance in the graphs of the agriculture sector because of these factors that are beyond the control of any government.

But, Mr. Speaker, Sir, let us applaud the efforts of the farmers. There is always quick recovery, particularly on the short term, medium term crops on the joint efforts between the farmers and, of course, the Ministry of Agriculture, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

A lot, I would say, Mr. Speaker, Sir, took place from 2013 and the Honourable Member loves quoting from the Auditor-General's Report. I have just been advised that in 2018, the Ministry of Agriculture had an unqualified report from the Auditor-General's Report.

Achievements, Mr. Speaker, Sir, although may be not listed in here but I am talking about setting agriculture up for the long term. We have talked about agriculture when the Ministry of Agriculture developed the database. Now, they are in a better position and the Strategic Development Plan that will take it further to the next 5, 10 and 15 years has already been developed as well because the data, hopefully after the 2019 Census, will become official and recognised as per the arrangement with the Bureau of Statistics because those data are very, very important in terms of the way forward.

Market access is very, very critical. Government continues to work with the Ministry of Industry and Trade and, of course, our foreign nations to access new market segments that are very, very important for us because traditionally, Australia, New Zealand and the US are our key markets. But now, we are flying into new destinations.

Even the domestic market alone is huge and when we want to lift agriculture up to from subsistence level to the next level, particularly semi-commercial and commercial level. The market is very, very important and, of course, the role of the key stakeholders, particularly the exporters.

Our partnership with other partners becomes important. New Zealand provided funding for the Brucellosis and TB and likewise, Israel. The Honourable Minister talked about students who have left for Israel. These are the things that have been done during this period, Mr. Speaker, Sir. And we have the Australian Council of International Agriculture Research that are partnering with the Ministry in a lot of research work.

Honourable Professor Prasad always asks about the work of the research. The Honourable Minister talked about the green pearl guava the other day. They are now establishing orchards because it took seven years to develop that guava variety and it is now retailing at $15 per kilogramme. These are not marble-sized guavas, they are big guavas, Mr. Speaker, Sir. It took seven years to develop that. That is the revolution. It just does not happen overnight.

Livestock sector is important, 80 percent of the livestock sector is about the feed. New feeds were brought in. The Honourable Minister always talks about juncao grass. This was brought in during the agricultural revolution period. We have the Mulato grass, something that has never been heard before but that has been launched as well.

The embryo transfer, they have started with the Senepol breed and this year, they will start with the other two breeds on the Droughtmaster and the Vorderwald to support it. This is all that is in that agriculture revolution plan, Mr. Speaker, Sir. You need to improve the dairy industry. The introduction of the Swiss Brown breed is already there.

We have to improve the goat sector and, of course, the sheep sector. Government introduced, during this agriculture revolution, the Boer goat breed and Fiji fantastic, our local breed sheep that has been in the country since 1981. But we are still importing, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Then Government during this agriculture revolution period brought in the new breed which is the Dorper breed so that it can be crossed again with the Fiji fantastic so that we can have better quality meats, so that it can be sold to our tourism market and of course, our hotels as well.

New *dalo* varieties were also launched by the Research Division. That is the *Tarova Loa* and *Tarova Vula*, and likewise, new *kumala* varieties - the Moonbeam variety. These are all things that take place behind the scenes which we will not see the immediate results, but it is about a long term solution for the problems that we have been inheriting and facing over the years.

Capacity development was a huge problem but I can confidently say in this Honourable House, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that I think the Ministry of Agriculture has the most number of PhD qualified people in the Ministry and likewise, those with Postgraduate studies, our Veterinary Officers. There were no local veterinarians in the Ministry of Agriculture but the two foreign Vet Officers have now retired because we have all the posts now being filled by locals. We have to invest in our capacity and of course, the capability development as well.

You will see new processing facilities, not only for the farmers but for the exporters as well. And of course, farm mechanisation. For us to go to the next level, we need to go into mechanisation and Government provided funding for mechanisation.

The revival of the Agriculture Marketing Authority of Fiji (AMA), I talked about this yesterday, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Where was AMA in 2006? It was struggling. Today, AMA is a totally different entity altogether. That is the revolution.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Annual Report?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- On Annual Reports, talking about AMA, Mr. Speaker, Sir, because most of the documents were confiscated by FICAC because of some investigations, that is why AMA was not ready to provide annual reports. Now, that has been released so AMA will provide annual reports. It is one thing to provide an annual report, but it is one thing to salvage the business and that is what is happening today, Mr. Speaker, Sir. That is good leadership. That is the revolution.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, things do not happen overnight. We all need to support the agriculture sector. We are very equally interested and, of course, sympathetic as well. But I just wish to urge all the Honourable Members of the House, let us go back to our respective communities and encourage the people to do more because right now, we can keep talking until all the cows come home, but we need to do the work. Government has got the technical expertise, Government is providing the funding, together with our partners, but we need to work together.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the agriculture sector has progressed a lot in the last few years and we commend the officials, we commend the work of our partners and, of course, let us hope that they will continue to do so because it is important, not only for our country but for our visitors who do visit the country as well because of the high import level. We must all understand this, it is not only about Fiji's own people but we have an equal number of tourists visiting the country every year. So we need to feed them with proper food and nutrition as well, Mr. Speaker, Sir. That is my short contribution to the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister.

Honourable Simione Rasova you have the floor.

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I would like to contribute to the motion on the 2013 Annual Review of the Ministry of Agriculture.

Thank you Honourable Kirpal for the Chairmanship of the Natural Resources Committee. I thank all of the Honourable Members who have contributed, and I thank the Honourable former Minister for Agriculture for supporting the current Minister for his report.

I would just like to jump right into the recommendation, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I will tell you a story that in 2006 we came from overseas and one foreigner (agriculturalist), Mr. Speaker, Sir, said when we came from Nadi to Suva , and he said, "You people in Fiji, there is grasses all over from Nadi to Suva. Where do you get your market from?" He thought that we were growing grasses. So it is a challenge for the Ministry of Agriculture. Let us plant, let us not plant grass.

(Laughter)

He thought that we were planting grass. So, Ministry of Agriculture, I think that is a challenge for you to review that.

I thank the Committee for Natural Resources, this 2013 was a post-Government at that time and it even took from 2013 when Government came in to 2018, this is now tabled in 2019 and that is a delay.

One of the recommendations by the Committee, the Annual Report be produced immediately in the following year. So we have the 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017 yet to be tabled.

Second recommendation, the value of products for all agricultural programmes at the Ministry invested should be highlighted and reflected in the return of investment.

The Ministry's Annual Report should reflect the Ministry's performance and achievements against the set targets in accordance with the Ministry's Annual Corporate Plan. The Ministry must indicate measures undertaken to address issues raised in the previous audit report.

And another recommendation, the Ministry strengthens its human resources recruitment policy to ensure that vacant positions are filled in a timely manner.

I thank the former Minister for Agriculture, he said that PhDs and Doctors and veterinarians are now qualified so we hope that the productivity of Ministry of Agriculture will go up, provided that, as alluded to by the Honourable Bulanauca, he said that the imports is about over $100 million and the export is about $50 million, so there is a deficit over there.

Anyway the results of crop research findings be disseminated widely to empower farmers and the public. The results of collaborative researches done in 2013 should be introduced to farmers.

The recommendation that the newspaper publication be published in Hindi and iTaukei vernacular *Nai Lalakai* and *Shanti Dut* and the cost of radio programmes be highlighted in the 2013 Report.

And some other issues of concern Mr. Speaker, Sir, to single out export figures that were assigned to agriculture to highlight only the crops and livestock. Export figures that identified all the

four subsectors but for the 2013 export figures, the Ministry had narrowed the export figures to only two including crops and livestock.

In conclusion Mr. Speaker, Sir, in 2013 the Ministry's performance was affected due to recovering from *TC Evans* in December 2012. The Ministry's Annual Report was not utilised by $2.7 million due to the effects of *TC Evans* and coupled with non-filling of a number of vacant positions and the availability of building materials in most of the hardware. That is all that I wanted to contribute Honourable Speaker, and I thank the Committee of Natural Resources for bringing up the Annual Report of 2013. Thank you very much.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. Honourable Inosi Kuridrani.

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir. I will just make a brief contribution on the motion at hand. In fact, I felt reluctant to make a contribution based on the fact that the Report is for 2013.

Anyway, I would just like to make a point on the recommendations of the Committee. They made nine recommendations and the first recommendation was that annual reports to be produced immediately in the following year and we are now in 2019, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and we have not seen any other report apart from this 2013 Report. For me, the other eight reports down the line are not attended too. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. Honourable Viliame Gavoka, you have the floor.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you Honourable Speaker. I also wish to contribute to the debate on the motion before the House in relation to the 2013 Annual Report of the Ministry of Agriculture.

Honourable Speaker, I know it is 2013, about six years ago, but perhaps, we should bring what was highlighted then into the present days and as I said that I do not want to belabour the point about the agricultural revolution. I believe according to my colleague, the former Minister that it is a long term project, but, what we see evident through our eyes everyday is that, revolution is not well structured and the results on some of the produce that do not really need a long gestation period are still lacking in a big way.

When the agricultural revolution was announced in this House, I highlighted that point that a few weeks later in the village of Volivoli where they plant a lot of *kumala*, this is in the Sigatoka district, near my village, they were ploughing the field with bullocks and plough. I mentioned in this House, I said if it is a revolution, how come they are still preparing the field in the way that I saw in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. We all know Volivoli, whose flat area is there, and the reply was, "that is revolutionary, bullocks and plough was revolutionary." So that is the confusion that I see on the other side and sometimes a lot of these projections, a lot of these plans can be regarded as hot air. I cannot find better words to say than that.

Honourable Speaker, as an hotelier, the cost of food in Fiji is very very high. What the hotels buy to prepare for guests is reflected in the menu prices and we all know that Fiji is very expensive in that area. Let me say this - on the day we will see the roadside stalls stocked to capacity with produce, that is the day we also see the prices of food decreasing in the hotels.

Today, Honourable Speaker, if you drive from here to Lautoka or on the Kings Roads also, the stalls that were newly built are still very very empty. When you see that, you know right away that the

hotels are struggling to buy the food to prepare for the guests, and while they are struggling with that, the cost are high and reflected in what we charge our tourists.

So, I hope that the time is coming that these stalls would be stocked to the brim and we can say then that our tourists can enjoy food at a reasonable price. We all have driven around Thailand, Malaysia in the countries and you will see how full the stalls are with producers. What you see in Fiji is very very sad; very very poor; there is very limited choices available and even those that are available are only in bits and pieces.

So, if you want us to believe there is an agriculture revolution, please, we need to see that the produce are in plentiful supply. We are talking about guava now which takes seven years but other producers take less than a year or even months and those are the ones that are lacking from the stalls that we see on the roads.

What I see, Honourable Speaker, is the lack of resources, planning and commitment. I hear today that there are a lot of doctorates (PhDs) in the Ministry of Agriculture now. Surely, if you have that then they must find a way to carry out research to improve the yield of the pawpaw and the *kumala* in the Sigatoka region. They are stunted, Honourable Speaker. The pawpaws you see now in Sigatoka in Nadroga are tiny, the *kumala* are tiny. Surely, with all these PhDs, with all these linkages to all these organisations, they must find a way to carry out the research to improve the yield on those crops.

I hear today that the pawpaws and the *kumala* in Sigatoka - that is the way it is, you cannot increase the size, stunted. I suppose when you talk with dwarfs you will always be dwarfs, this is what I am getting from the other side.

There was a symposium in Israel in June where 40 countries attended and the focus on that symposium was to improve yield. I asked the question, did our people go to Israel to go and study that, given the yield in this country? We always see them travelling; we see them travelling so much but do they go to the right places? Go to Israel, go and study how they improve the yield!

It is very sad, Honourable Speaker, when you drive down to Nadroga, you see all these tiny pawpaws...

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- It is the variety.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- It is not the variety, it is the stunted that I am talking about.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Like the sweet potatoes, I asked the people of Volivoli, "What is wrong with the sweet potatoes?" They said, they just do not grow well any more. Surely, these PhDs can find a way to improve and increase those yields. So, Honourable Speaker, it is very sad.

I talked about mechanisation, Honourable Speaker. There was a period there in Navosa when there was only one tractor for the whole of Navosa and it did not work for months and when I brought it up in Parliament, they said, "We are waiting for the operator." It took months, Honourable Speaker, so that is why I keep bringing up this revolution thing that it is not well-coordinated, not well-planned and the sad part is what we see now.

I have come to the conclusion that the increases in the agriculture in this country that you are touting here has come through the new immigrants to this country. The new immigrants are the ones who are producing under agriculture for us and I think they can do that without the help of the Ministry of Agriculture. That is the sad reality in Fiji today, Honourable Speaker, and I hope we can find a way around it. We have for many years been talking about helping the non-sugar sector, it fell on deaf ears.

Honourable Speaker, we all want agriculture to succeed but I think some people need to be serious about this and do not go about it in the way they do things; like cowboys. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Member. Honourable Minister, Dr. Mahendra Reddy, you have the floor.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, to respond to Honourable Nawaikula and Honourable Bulanauca, I suggest they read this theorem by two famous Trade Economists, Heckscher and Ohlin who said, and I quote:

> "For a country to produce and export a particular commodity, that country must utilise the most abundantly available factor intensively in the production process."

Go, read and understand that and then you read your letter that you wrote on 20th June, 2000, as Board Secretary of the then NLTB to the Head of the Military Council that will explain the state of agriculture. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. Honourable Members, I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources to speak on his Right of Reply. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. S.S. KIRPAL.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. I thank the Committee for the Ministry of Agriculture 2013 Annual Report. I would like to remind the Opposition that the Ministry of Agriculture was the neglected Ministry till the FijiFirst Government came into power. The farmers lost their land because of non-renewal of leases by the SDL Government.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. S.S. KIRPAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, agricultural farmers are thankful and happy under the leadership of our Honourable Prime Minister. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the Parliament will now vote to note the content of the Report. Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Nays')

HON. SPEAKER.- As no Member opposes, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now call upon the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications, Honourable Aiyaz Saiyed-Khaiyum, to move his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

CONDEMNATION COMMENTS ON SOCIAL MEDIA BY HON. M.D. BULITAVU

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I wish to raise a point of order in relation to this. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

I understand that this motion has been accepted under Standing Order 46(3), but I am not privy to that. What I am privy of is the Standing Order as well as the fact that I have now read the motion, and I wish to raise the point of order under three grounds, if it could be noted - under Standing Order 48 (a), (b) and (d). That is the basis on which I am raising this.

If I could make a submission in relation to those, Honourable Speaker, allow me, please, to do that. Standing Order 48 says:

"A motion is inadmissible if, in the opinion of the Speaker -

(a) the debate on the motion would be likely to promote or provoke feelings of ill-will or hostility between different communities in Fiji;"

Looking at the motion objectively, it is my view and humble submission that the purpose and motive of this motion is to put two communities against each other. Objectively speaking, the purpose for this is for political gain but that will be the effect. That is my humble submission under that and I wish for you, Honourable Speaker, to make a Ruling in relation to No. 3 under those three headings, that is the first heading.

The second heading or basis in which I am raising this Point of Order is under Standing Order 48(b), if you could allow me to read that, I quote:

"A motion is inadmissible if, in the opinion of the Speaker,-

(b) the motion would, if passed and put into effect, be inconsistent with the rights and freedoms recognised in Chapter 2 of the Constitution;"

Specifically, the right to a fair trial, the right to freedom of speech, speaking of fair trial, Honourable Speaker, we have the Court process where evidences go through strict guidelines and we have that.

Specifically, in this case, investigations have been done so with this, in all likelihood charges could be laid and if this House proceeded to prosecute and make a judgement on the show of the hand it will be very, very unfair to this Constitutional right to a fair trial. That is the second basis in which I am asking for your Ruling on that Point of Order.

Thirdly, Honourable Speaker, on Standing Order 48, if I could be allowed to read that, I quote:

"A motion is inadmissible if, in the opinion of the Speaker,-

(c) the motion contains statements of fact or the names of persons that are not strictly necessary to render the notice intelligible or, if necessary, are unable to be authenticated."

Objectively looking at the contents of the motion I think it is default in relation to that. There is no certainty of who made this statement, there is no certainty of the publication made by *Fiji Sun*. On those grounds, Honourable Speaker, I wish for a Ruling and I know we can take whatever time we can to do this but I think it is important that it is scrutinised under Standing Order 48 so that it is clear that we are not interfering otherwise we will be debating on a motion that is totally out of order. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Niko Nawaikula for his Point of Order. Honourable Members, I had replied to the Honourable Leader of the Opposition in a letter and I shall read extracts from that letter which will clarify the points that he has raised in that Point of Order.

I have sought independent legal advice from the Solicitor-General as to whether the lodgement of a police complaint renders the motion admissible. We have also sought confirmation of the facts from the Commissioner of Police.

Upon consideration of this issue and taking into account the facts provided by the Commissioner of Police and the independent advice of the Solicitor-General, I have decided that the motion is admissible and shall continue. Notwithstanding that the Honourable Mosese Bulitavu was detained and later released and a complaint was indeed lodged with the Police. The fact is undeniable that to-date there has been no charges laid. As such, the matter is not before the courts and is not *sub judice*.

I also wish to draw your attention to the fact that the Honourable Bulitavu is not an arrested or detained person as he is not currently under arrest or held in detention by the police. As such, the reference to its rights and as an arrested or detained person are not applicable at this point.

Furthermore, the grounds for which a motion may be declared inadmissible are succinctly provided in Standing Order 48, which states, and I quote:

"A motion is inadmissible if, in the opinion of the Speaker -

(a) the debate on the motion would be likely to promote or provoke feelings of ill-will or hostility between different communities in Fiji."

In this regard, I find that the motion seeks to achieve the exact opposite. The motion is urging Parliament (this Parliament) to strongly condemn statements which had the potential to provoke ill-will between communities in Fiji.

The motion will enable Parliament to present a unified position to all Fijians on the need to respect diversity and to refrain from provoking division.

"(b) the motion would, if passed and put into effect, be inconsistent with the rights and freedoms recognised in Chapter 2 of the Constitution."

The motion does not in any way do this as there are no rights being infringed. I would like to emphasise that the right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty as enshrined in Section 42(a) of the Constitution specifically applies to every person charged with an offence.

As Honourable Bulitavu has not been charged with an offence, I find that the motion tend in no way infringe such rights. Also, as I have stated, there is currently no pending case before the courts and thus, the motion does not prejudice any decision before the courts;

"(c) the motion contains unbecoming or offensive expressions, or expressions or words that would not be permitted in debate." Though I do personally find the comments quoted in the motion to be in bad taste, I do not find that the motion is in itself offensive or unbecoming as it seeks to condemn such comments;

(d) the motion contains statements of fact or the names of persons that are not strictly necessary to render the notice intelligible or, if necessary, are unable to be authenticated." The comments and statements are clearly quoted in the media and to my knowledge have not been disputed. As such, I do not find that the motion is inadmissible in this regard.

That is the ruling. Honourable Attorney-General, you have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move that Parliament strongly condemns the following statements made or published by Honourable Mosese Bulitavu in the media, including social media.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will read the translation of the vernacular. It begins with:

"This foreign behaviour is not *iTaukei* nor Christian.

Murder and stabbing in the past were only done by Fijians who are descendants of the indentured labourers from British India and was never part of Fijians who are *iTaukei*. Indigenous Fijians are now slowly sharing some foreign behaviour. We, *iTaukei* do not engage in romantic relationships like this to the extent where it leads to murder. We have customs and traditions based on respect. It is not *iTaukei* to murder if a relationship breaks down because we have our *bulubulu* custom or tradition of seeking forgiveness.

I was brought up in Labasa and it was common to hear an Indo-Fijian man murder his wife if she is caught in an affair in the cane settlement. These affairs are common amongst married Indo-Fijian women in rural areas. A Hindustani language in Labasa *qhatai maro* or hit the neck was a slang that the *juri* in other words knife (there is a knife emoji) is well sharpened. For *iTaukei*, assaults of women were common given their built. In rural Vanua Levu communities, they use the "juri" (and there was a knife emoji), or *patar* (stone) was common with Indo-Fijian boys when we get into a fight. But again, it is uncommon or *vulagi* for iTaukei men to use knives or stones." Thank you.

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

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now invite the Honourable Attorney-General to speak to his motion.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will speak on this motion and I do so with a lot of sag wind. The statement by Honourable Mosese Bulitavu, Mr. Speaker, Sir, which must be condemned by every single Member of Parliament can be dissected into two ways.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I know that all the Members of this Parliament, at least the members of Government will all speak on this motion and they will all be talking from their own perspectives. I simply want to contextualize, Mr. Speaker, from a philosophical perspective the issues that have arisen

from the statements. The first being, of course, the racialised approach of the statement; the racial prejudices and of course that Fiji into the stereotype and the need to stereotype. The question that should be asked Mr. Speaker, Sir, in particular, in this Parliament is, why do people make racialised comments? What drives people to do that?

There are of course a number of theories, Mr. Speaker, Sir. One of them is that some people believe and indeed that some people have said that race is a fact we cannot deny. What this means, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that they believe and I quote "a person's characteristics, attitudes, abilities and behaviour were determine by his or her so called racial makeup.". That all groups, races of people (these terms are used interchangeably) carry within them traits that were passed from one generation to the other or to the next. No individual could overcome the qualities of race. All human history can be explained in terms of racial struggle and I continue with the quote: "These inherited characteristics related not only to outward appearance and physical stature or structure but also shape internal mental life, ways of thinking, creative and organising abilities, intelligence, taste and appreciation of culture, physical strength and military prowess. Mr. Speaker, that is one rationale.

Mr. Speaker, that is in fact a direct quote from the Nazi German ideology. The other idea is, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that race ethnicity is simply a front to mask classed privilege and for certain people to gain access to power. Simione Durutalo, who I have a lot of respect for, and unfortunately he is no longer with us, in his seminal work, the paramountcy of Fijian interest and the politicisation of Fijian ethnicity said, "it is not often appreciated that ethnic institutions, associations and parties may be created or instigated by the man of power pursuing their own special interest which are time and again the constituted interest of emerging social classes.

Ethnicity, in this context, becomes a mask for classed privilege. He continues to say, "ethnicity is a historical construct, not in the sense of it being simply preyed at once sometime in the obscure past and then persisting ever since, but rather that ethnic affiliation must be created or reproduced in the present for it to be maintained. New racial ethnic groups are constantly being created while others go out of existence and even when they survive, the cultural characteristics are often altered." Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I have said, the first quote that I read was what Hitler and the Nazi Germans believed.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the second was from Durutalo, who obviously had a class analysis of ethnicity. Of course, many have debunked the Nazi theory but unfortunately some people still believe that. Unfortunately, it would appear that Honourable Bulitavu's comments has in a way reinforced that because he believes that certain characteristics of people are passed over from generation to generation because of their race or ethnicity. And therefore people are forever caught in that type of characteristic because they cannot escape it nor can others enters into.

The second theory, Mr. Speaker, Sir, from Durutalo, I believe is also applicable in this case because of the changes in society, because of the change in the Constitution, because we have a younger population, we live in a more liberal society and everyone is now called a Fijian, the power elites who previously were able to call upon vote banks feel like they are losing power. And indeed they are. So they have to constantly, they have to reinvent this ethnic identity and try and homogenise their groupings. This approach, Mr. Speaker, obviously clouds over the power dynamics that play. What this does apart from homogenising people, it creates an "us" and "them". Our sense of identity is always in reference to the other.

What it also does, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that by homogenising people, it overlooks intra-group disparities, intra-group injustices. So we know that people belong to one ethnic group are not usually homogenous. Within a group, we have women, you have children, you have different people with different abilities, disabilities, socio-economic status, some are rich, some are poor, some come from smaller provinces, some come from bigger provinces. So, in fact, Mr. Speaker, Sir, again, diminishes

the differences within the group and I will come to that later. Homogenisation, of course, Mr. Speaker, Sir, de-humanises people. When you say all groups of people are like this, the other group is like this, we take away their individualism, we take away their individual human dignity.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, when we homogenise people from one ethnic group, you particularly overlook like I said gender differences within groups. And precisely that statement did that. In order to justify between us and them, between the Indo-Fijians and *iTaukei* people, Honourable Bulitavu, in a way said that beating up *iTaukei* women was alright because you are not being beaten up by weapons, violated by weapons, it is alright to be bashed up.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the wider context, what he said that they should be happy. This has meant the very perverted nature of violence being justified within the cultural context. Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we know that in this quest for us and them, we always have women who lose out. The Honourable Leader of the Opposition would know, following 1987, at one point in time, there was a move to have separate courts based on ethnicity. And, of course, thankfully the idea was debunked.

The issue then arose and I remember following the debate then and many NGOs made representations on their part. What would happen if an *iTaukei* women was raped? Would *bulubulu* be recognised by the court system? I remember as a prosecutor, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I prosecuted a rape case of a nine-year-old girl being raped and the court proceeding was in Korovou where raped by a 21-year-old and the men between the two parties agreed to the *bulubulu* and agreed that the charges that were, in fact, the complaint that was lodged by the mother and daughter should be withdrawn.

I still remember the face of that nine-year-old girl and the mother who actually came to see us here in Suva and said, "Please I want to proceed with the trial" even though the men of the family have agreed on the *bulubulu*. We, in fact, pursued the case. In fact, at that time, the police recommended to the DPP's Office, they said, "drop the case because they have done *bulubulu* and we said, no. We had a no-drop policy then. And I am glad to say that in fact, that person was prosecuted successfully.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, of course, the issue then arises if we had specific ethnic courts, what would happen if we have inter-ethnic group rapes. But, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it leads to a deeper issue because when you actually have wars, when you have disputes, whether the war is about economic access, whether it is about territory, whether it is over religion, ethnicity or whatever the case there may be, the people who suffer the most are the women and it is quite paradoxical, Mr. Speaker, Sir, because the women on one hand are seen as the guardians, gatekeepers of a particular ethnic group.

That is why we have words like "mother-tongue", "motherland" because the women are seen as the people who actually expand your particular grouping. But they are the ones who have been violated the most because we have a perverted nature of patriarchy throughout the world. If you are fighting another group, you are going to rape their women, say somehow or the other you are diluting their ethnicity. We saw that happen in Bosnia, Rwanda, rape tend to simply set-up ….

We saw that in Muainaweni and I have said this in this Parliament previously, where women were violated by having cassava shoved up their vaginas.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the point I am trying to make here is that it is a very twisted way of looking at things. So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we, of course, have been prone to various vestiges of ethnic categorisation.

Let me read out, Mr. Speaker, Sir, some of the things that were being said throughout our history which I understand that many of the Members from the other side may actually not realise this, but in fact it has actually happened, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I quote:

> "The majority of the white settlers of Levuka were convinced of their physical intellectual and even moral elevation about the savage Fijians. They called Cakobau "an old nigger", more in his place digging or weeding a white man's gardens than trying to be King of Fiji.
>
> One Levuka settller exhorted his fellow settlers to elect him as their representative and he would ensure the creation of a Constitution under the so-called Cakobau Government that would ensure the pre-eminence of the white race in Fiji's Government to which he felt he was entitled by the intellect and civilisation and to teach its savage inhabitants the divine religion of work."

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we, of course, have other ethnic categorisation that took place, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as one of the colonial administrators said:

> "He was amazed at the way that racial prejudice were worked upon the jeers raised from the old days and the successive jibes against the Indians. The general attitude was that the Indians were not wanted except as labourers and small farmers and must be kept in the place they do not like, they could clear out and make room for more docile set of plantation workers."

Another quote:

> "The handing over of Fiji to evil, smelling treacherous, non-educated garlic-eating Indians, would be one of the greatest crimes in the humanity in the history of British Empire if they were given the right to vote."

Mr. Speaker, Sir, of course, we have modern day prejudices that came about, and I would like to quote of course, also from the Honourable Leader of the Opposition after 1987, in his book, "Rabuka, no other way", when he talks about the Indo-Fijians and, of course, he says, "No to the Indians":

> "They speak to me and they say they agree. But you can't tell with Indians. They may be saying one thing, but feeling something else. With Fijians, meaning iTaukei, you can tell if they are lying. With the Indians, I can't tell if they are lying or not."

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our history has been perpetuated by this kind of stereotyping, and my point about stereotyping, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that we need to ensure that we move away from it as a modern nation State. It does not make sense. You cannot run the modern 21st Century in a globalised world, when you have a moderation State with common and equal citizenry to have those kind of prejudices because you cannot run Government successfully. You will every single time be making decisions based on communalism, not choosing the best person, not getting the best contractor but based on communalism.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we must move away from these sins that security lies in ethnicity. Security, Mr. Speaker, Sir, lies in building strong, independent institutions that can guarantee the rights of the Constitution that is enshrined with the Bill of Rights.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, governance of a modern State must be built on inclusiveness on the basic common equal citizenry, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, any attempt to start stereotyping, categorising, analysing national policy based on ethnicity is extremely dangerous. That is why we have consistently said in this Parliament, "Please, do not do it" because it starts incrementally, slowly, slowly it starts.

You look at the history of Nazi Germany, you look at the history in Asia, various other countries where these types of shenanigans took place, it was unchecked and suddenly slowly turned into something quite catastrophic. Mr. Speaker, Sir, as opposed to seeing everyone equally, we must all know that we all belong to the nation State of Fiji. It does not mean we deny the individual ethnic background, religion, province or their family.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have had our Members of the Opposition asked or commented on questions on Agriculture based on ethnicity. Scholarship is based on ethnicity, access to kidney dialysis on ethnicity, Mr. Speaker, Sir. We heard comments made "You should be grateful you are here, you have done this out of the goodness of our hearts", Mr. Speaker, Sir, but we must understand that as leaders of our country and as leaders in Parliament, we must move away from that way of thinking because this is precisely what it does.

Of course, we pointed this out to the parties like National Federation Party (NFP). We said to them and Honourable Prasad unfortunately was caught in conundrum. When we pointed out he stood up one week in Parliament, I think this was in the last session saying that these are unracial comments. He said they are not making racist comments. Within a week when Honourable Lalabalavu made a comment about NFP and Labour Parties being *vulagi* parties, he said that is not acceptable.

Our point being, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that those comments of *vulagi*, et cetera, has led or precipitated by the fact that these comments have continuously been made for the past five years. It is an incremental work-up to that particular position, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we all know that the former leaders of NFP were visionary. I hail someone like AD Patel as a man of vision, he actually rejected independence, he said until we get rid of the rationally-based electoral system because it will perpetuate our people to be locked up in blocks, in groups.

Unfortunately, he died at the 11th hour, unfortunately his successor believed too much in the system thinking it will all be solved. But, Mr. Speaker, Sir, irony, of course, is that we now have people justifying racial idioms, saying it is an acceptable idiom.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, idioms are also prejudice idioms, it is not only about the *iTaukei* people who are prejudiced, there are Indo-Fijians who are prejudiced too.

There is prejudice all around us. We, as leaders, however have to show the way, that is the point. I know how people have been discriminated against by *Indo-Fijians* against *iTaukei* people on a daily basis. As a kid I remember seeing that, that is not justified.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reality is that we must condemn the stereotyping because these kinds of comments create ill-will subsequently. This motion is not about creating divisions, this motion is about making sure that we get rid of divisions, we get rid of stereotypes, we view each other individually and we recognise the fact that there are many injustices irrespective of which ethnic group we belong to, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, but the reality, of course, is given the history of Fiji, the institutionalisation of prejudice has taken place against *Indo-Fijians,* it is a fact, it has been institutionalised, its mainstream, discourse.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, last but not least, I would like to also say, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that many political parties in the past in Fiji and across all the different political parties have used communal politics as a means of gaining votes, as a means of getting easy access to votes. You and I look the same, you and I speak the same language therefore you vote for me and that is the shallowness of the appeal.

We go to the same church, same temple, same mosque "Vote for me". What we are saying, we need to have much more deeper appreciation of the modern nation State. We must also have deeper appreciation of the individuals that live in our society, Mr. Speaker, Sir. We cannot say that this is a reality and therefore political expediency, "Let's continue with this."

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to say towards the end now and I do not talk about faith generally, but some people do a lot about faith at the drop of a hat, by one saying 'Amen', I say 'Amen' in my religion too but by me saying it loudly does not make me any closer to God, it is about what it is in my heart, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, all faiths - *Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism* whatever the case may be, they all believe that we all human beings are God's children. We are all equal in the Eyes of God, Mr. Speaker, Sir. It is basic tenet of Christian theology, basic tenet of Hinduism, basic tenet of Islam, Mr. Speaker, Sir - the three major religions in Fiji.

You can have tomorrow an iTaukei being a Hindu, you can tomorrow have an Indo-Fijian being a Christian. You can have any other group being any other religion. Does that mean if we are going to start judging as a primary denominator of assessing identities with ethnicity, that tomorrow you have someone of an ethnic group against whom you have created as the other and then become part of a church, your temple, your mosque, you are going to treat them differently? Does God treat them differently?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, unfortunately for many Members of the Opposition that contradiction does not actually ring a bell, it does not ring a bell with them. They do not even see that there is a contradiction. So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reality of the matter is that we have always said - led by the Honourable Prime Minister, our leader, that we need to be actively aware of how we act in Parliament, not just in Parliament but also outside Parliament. People watch us, people see us, people listen to us, they get influenced by us.

So, it is highly incumbent upon us to do the right thing, highly incumbent on us to embrace every single voter in Fiji or even a non-voter who is a Fijian citizen, because what we do, what we say matters to them and we actually become role models. So, Mr. Speaker, the idea of moving this motion is to ensure and hopefully, God willing, that this type of comments will at the very least not be made publicly.

The Honourable Bulitavu is a leader in his own right that he, God willing will no longer do this - make this kind of comments and let me also say a last thing: it is incumbent upon all of us (whether this side of Parliament or that side) to speak out against it and we should have the political gumption and the morale conviction to do so. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General. Honourable Members, we have the suspension motion. For the purposes of complying with the Standing Orders with respect to sitting times, I will allow the suspension motion to be moved.

I now call upon the Honourable Leader of Government in Parliament to move his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

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

> That under Standing Order 6 that so much of Standing Order 23(1) is suspended so as to allow the House to sit beyond 4.30 p.m. today to complete the remaining items as listed on today's Order Paper.

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

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now call upon the Leader of the Government in Parliament to speak on the motion.

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are on the last Agenda Item on Schedule 1 and, of course, we still have Schedule 2, thus the request for sitting beyond 4.30 p.m. today. Thank you, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is open. Is there anyone wishing to take the floor? I give the floor to the Honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament for your reply.

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- I have nothing further to add, Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

The Question is:

> That under Standing Order 6, that so much of Standing Order 23(1) is suspended so as to allow the House to sit beyond 4.30 p.m. today to complete the remaining items as listed on today's Order Paper.

Does any Honourable Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Nays')

HON. SPEAKER.- As no Member opposes, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, before we adjourn for afternoon tea and then we will continue with the debate after that, I just want to remind Honourable Members and those members of the public who think otherwise, the motion is not a privileges matter raised in accordance with Standing Order 134. As such I highlight that the motion is not procedurally dissimilar to the motions we entertain on a regular basis. It is a matter raised for discussion by the House. After all, the House regulates itself.

On that note, Honourable Members, we adjourn for afternoon tea.

The Parliament adjourned at 4.21 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 4.50 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on this motion. Honourable Prime Minister, you have the floor.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. Honourable Speaker, I would like to make a response to the motion at hand. Honourable Speaker, let me begin by acknowledging a sovereign reality. There has never been a time when Fijian women and girls had been spared the brutality of domestic and sexual violence. It may be painful to accept but that is a tragic and indisputable fact of our history and indeed the history of all humanity. And that scourge of violence and abuse perpetuates to this very day.

Anyone who rejects the truth, stands in denial of the very suffering of women across generations and the survivors of abuse today. Only by acknowledging the age of nature of these crimes do we stand a chance of eradicating them entirely. Only by treating domestic violence as the national problem that is, can we address it properly at all levels of society and in every Fijian community and only by taking this problem head on and pursuing real solutions that embody the truth can we give women and girls in Fiji the opportunity to live free from the lurking threat of violence and abuse.

Honourable Speaker, I have met with Fijians who have spent nearly their entire lives helping lead the campaign to end domestic and sexual violence in Fiji. I have given those leaders my total commitment to ending this long standing plague on Fijian society. I have raised awareness in communities on the resources available to women who have survived abuse.

I have demanded that the men of Fiji join me in taking ownership of this issue because like it, or not, it is men who perpetrate the vast majority of these crimes, regardless of their ethnicity, as some still say and regardless of their social status, the province they come from, or whether they worship in church, at temple or in a mosque. Abuse knows no colour, no creed and the abuse of Fijian women will not end until all men make the effort to condemn this sort of violence, condemn abuses and speak out in defence of the women and girls of this country.

The nature of these crimes can make them incredibly difficult to combat. Physical and mental abuse often go hand in hand and victims can be manipulated into thinking that they are to blame for the crimes committed against them. Victims can be intimidated into silence, crimes go unreported and abuses go unpunished. What is worse is that entire communities turn a blind eye to the abusers and do not report such crimes to the Police. They accept and expect a certain level of abuse against women and against girls. That culture of tolerance is the ugly underbelly of Fijian society that stretches back as far as history records and that has made a counting for the true scale of this issue all the more difficult.

Mr. Speaker, a patriarchal mindset of men who commit abuse does not always manifest in violence. We see that same mentality in men who think women not to be brewing tea in the Board Room rather than leading the meeting, the men will think women belong in the kitchen making dinner rather than going to work and earning a pay cheque to support their families and the man who believe they rank above women even in this every Parliament simply by virtue of being male. Those men all share the same backwards mentality, those men all feed into the same culture of abuse in our society and in my view those men are all cowards.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Mosese Bulitavu proved himself to be such a man when in response to a horrific act of violence committed against a Fijian woman, he gave voice to an ugly and insufferable lie on his social media. I rise today to condemn that statement. I hesitate to even read Honourable Mosese Bulitavu's words aloud, the language is offensive and unbecoming of this august

Parliament. But it is important we state exactly what was shared so that we can sure and sure that it is never, never, never ever repeated.

On 4th July, 2019, Honourable Mosese Bulitavu posted a message on his *Facebook* that contains the following and I quote:

> "Murder and stabbing in the past were only done by Fijians who are descendants of the indentured labourers from British India and was never part of Fijians who are *iTaukei's* now slowly sharing some *i tovo vulagi* (foreign behaviour)."

Mr. Speaker, those were the first words out of Honourable Mosese Bulitavu's mouth upon hearing news of a murder of an innocent woman. His first instinct was to blame an entire race of people for the evil actions over sick and twisted individual, but he did not end there, he ran onto stereotype Indo-Fijian women as being promiscuous.

He claimed that *iTaukei* men only beat *iTaukei* women because they are bigger than them. Worse, he insinuated that the *iTaukei* women should be thankful these beatings are not carried out with weapons. Every word, Honourable Speaker, was a slap on the face to the victims of domestic abuse and a step backwards in our campaign to rid our country of this terrible crime, but I think what Honourable Mosese Bulivatu had to say is just as despicable as what he did say.

He did not condemn the individual actions of that abuser and killer. He did not call for an end to domestic violence in all its forms against women of all backgrounds. He did not raise awareness of the resources available to women who are suffering from domestic violence. He did not mention No. 1560, the Helpline available to all women 24/7 where they can report domestic violence and seek assistance.

He did not choose to lead, he did not choose to be decent, he did not choose to be actually try and helping women in need. Instead, he chose to give voice to a divisive lie; make no mistake they were not good intentions behind his post, Honourable Speaker. It came from a place of hate. Honourable Bulitavu took a ghastly crime and used it as an ammunition in his campaign to drive his divisive "us versus them" narrative; the same narrative his pushed in his entire political career.

Mr. Speaker, today it has fallen upon all of us to do the job that the Leader of SODELPA and his new President should have done long ago not only by condemning Honourable Bulitavu but by speaking the truth and undoing the damage he has done to the national effort to rid Fiji of gender-based violent crimes. Mr. Speaker, the tragic reality is that murder in all communities, all over the world is an ancient as Cain and Abel and women have historically been this proportionate victim of such deadly abuse.

We cannot view our past through rose coloured lenses. The notion that *iTaukei* society was utopia, free from gender based violence or that weapons were not used to deadly effect is nonsense. The historical record is clear; *iTaukei* people waged war, they committed murder and they perpetrated acts of deadly violence against women. As did the ancestors of Indo-Fijians, as did the ancestors of the British, the Chinese, the Nigerians and every other people on earth. And sadly,Mr. Speaker, descendants of all of those communities still commit such crimes and women far too often remain the victims. Since the dawn of humanity, the root cause of these atrocities had been struggled for power and economic dominance coupled with a misogynistic mentality that sees women as inherently unequal and as possessions that can be used and abused at will.

When we make up ridiculous justifications for domestic violence in our society, Honourable Speaker, we give those man an excuse for these actions. It is people like Honourable Bulitavu who give those abusers the chance to blame their despicable behaviour on someone else.

Frankly, I find the idea the *iTaukei* men are not responsible for their own actions to be insulting. The truth is, no one forces any man to be an abuser. No one forces any man to murder innocent women. Evil men decide to commit those cowardly acts all on their own. What we should be demanding is that those men take responsibility for the crimes they have chosen to commit, regardless of their ethnicity, regardless of the religion, regardless of their province or status in society.

Mr. Speaker, I realised Honourable Bulitavu has since tried to superficially distance himself from his statement but anyone who has read his so-called apology will know that he was not genuinely seeking forgiveness. No sooner had the word "I apologise" left his lips that he doubled down on his totally unfounded argument. That is not a real apology, Honourable Speaker. That is not a real effort at seeking reconciliation and anyone who pretends otherwise is deluding themselves intentionally or otherwise.

Mr. Speaker, if any Member of the FijiFirst Party to ever make such statements, that day would mark the last day in this party. That is the standard by which this Government operates. That is the high level of responsibility to which we all adhere. And it is shameful that the Leader of the Opposition and the President of SODELPA have allowed Honourable Bulitavu to remain among the party's ranks. It is shameful that he still sits in this Parliament. And it is shameful that the Leader of the Opposition and so many on that side of the House have refused to stand up against Honourable Bulitavu. They have refused to stand up for the truth and they have refused to stand up for the women and girls of Fiji.

Honourable Bulitavu's has been verbally abusing the women of his own party for years. He is a bully inside this House and outside as well. So, I have to ask, how much power Honourable Bulitavu wields in that party that he can intimidate so many of his party members into silence.

To the man who rank in the Opposition: many of you have daughters, many of you have wives, and all of you have mothers. Why have you not spoken in their defence? To the women of SODELPA and NFP who have failed to categorically condemn Bulitavu in the 35 days since he made those comments? Where have you been - Honourable Lynda Tabuya, Honourable Salote Radrodro, Honourable Adi Litia Qionibaravi, Honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa and Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua? Your silence has signified your compliance and your acceptance of a despicable attempt to excuse domestic violence in Fijian society by directing misplaced blame along ethnic lines.

In the aftermath of Bulitavu's assault on the truth and common decency, your nation demands a new voice in your condemnation of this hateful ignorance, but you chose to stay quiet. I urge you, do not let that silence continue and do not fill that void with ambiguous and specific criticism on meaningless story. You must name Bulitavu and you must emphatically condemn his words of hatred. You have a right to speak, you have the freedom of expression and now, you have the opportunity to rise above politics and speak to what you believe to be right and just. I ask that you do so, not for the sake of your political careers, but for the sake of every Fijian, particularly the women, girls and young girls who have been victims of domestic abuse.

Those survivors deserve to have this issue treated seriously. They deserve leaders who speak out in their defence. They deserve to know that the crimes committed against them are categorically condemned by those elected to represent their interest. This is your final opportunity to do something, to say something and to send the clear message to our people that we do not tolerate this kind of behaviour; not now, not ever.

Mr. Speaker, Bulitavu's statement was not only steep in misogyny, it was racist and it is no coincident that his post came on the use of comments by Honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu who called National Federation Party (NFP) and Fiji Labour Party (FLP) "*Vulagi* Parties" in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, I know the word *vulagi,* itself is not inherently offensive. I know it is a word often associated with our guest. In some cases, it can be used respectively. You can be a *vulagi* in a village that is not your own, you can be a *vulagi* to another province.

I, myself, Honourable Speaker, have been a *vulagi* in villages in Fiji before, but what some fail to understand, including Honourable Kepa and Paul Geraghty and other apologists is that the context in which the word is used is what matters.

HON. MEMBER.- Absolutely!

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- At the national level, the notion of being a *vulagi* does not apply to any Fijian. No Fijian can be a *vulagi* in this country to which they are born, where their ancestors are buried and where their grandchildren and great grandchildren will one day call "home". Our Indo-Fijian brothers and sisters are not and never will be *vulagis* in Fiji. They are one with us and they are part of us, now and always.

The NFP and FLP are both Fijian parties, they are not foreign. They are members not staying in Fiji on a tourist visa, they are Fijians; as Fijian as I am and as Fijian as anyone sitting in this Parliament. For those who fail to see the harm in referring to our countrymen and women as *vulagi,* Bulitavu's racist comments prove exactly why it is a problem, because when we see our people as outsiders or as foreigners to our nation, we narrow our view of the world through the covered lens of ethnicity, of religion and background. We do not see national problems for what they are, instead we blame many things even individual choices and actions on some ambiguous "other people".

Honourable Speaker, this is not the question of semantics as some like to paint it, it is the question of something far bigger and more important. It is the question of who we are as a nation and the level of compassion with which we treat our fellow citizens. It is a question of the bonds that bind us together, the purpose we share and our collective commitments to this country. Every minute we spend viewing national issues as ethnic issues, as religious issues or as issues relating to different provinces, is a minute wasted, and when it comes to preventing domestic violence, every minute counts.

Solving a Fijian problem such as violence against women requires action from all Fijians. It requires us to put down our communal and political banners and rally together to protect those who are suffering, those who have survived the abuse and those living in fear this very moment of reporting their abuses to authorities.

Honourable Speaker, God has blessed Fiji with world-renowned beauty and he has filled our country with people who wield a range of extraordinary talents and capable minds, and who hold tremendous capacity for love and acceptance. But God's greatest gift, Honourable Speaker, is something less tangible. His greatest gift is the opportunity He has given each of us to be good stewards of those many blessings. That includes the beauty and the bounty of our natural world and includes the people - all of the people who call this nation their "home".

We can only call ourselves "good stewards" when all God's people are cared for, protected and empowered to better their lives. That include those who are strong and those who are weak, those who may be different from ourselves and those who are our kin, and those who are most vulnerable from the young to the old and all those in between. It is our duty as elected leaders in this Parliament to lead our people in the sacred way. When we speak, others listen; when we act, others follow and no matter which side of this Chamber we sit, our voices and our deeds today will become the words and actions of future generations.

Let us not raise a generation of men like Mosese Bulitavu and Fijians who enable his behaviour. We can set the new example, a better example. We can support this motion and we can be leaders worthy of the people who are meant to serve.

In this moment, Honourable Speaker, the eyes and the expectations of our fellow Fijians are upon every one of us. The women of this country are watching; the young girls of this country are watching; and survivors of domestic and sexual violence are watching as well. They are waiting for us to make stand in their defence; in defence of the truth and in defence of all those most vulnerable in society. I urge every Member of this House to back this motion. If you fail to condemn this statement, history will not forget your silence, nor will the Fijian people.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Prime Minister for his statement. The floor is open for debate. Honourable Premila Kumar, you have the floor.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Ministers, Assistant Ministers: thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak on the motion. I wish to specifically comment on the issue related to the insult hurled at the women in the rural areas by Honourable Mosese Bulitavu which should not go unchallenged.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I stand in solidarity with all women, children and men, who have suffered in silence or lost their lives to gender-based violence in denouncing in the strongest possible terms, the racist and misogynist-bullying perpetuated by this Honourable Member.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, violence is oblivious to colour or creed or race or ethnicity. Fijian women and children from all walks of life, rich or poor, literate or illiterate, able or disabled, young or old, urban or rural dwellers have all been subjected to misogynistic-bullying and family violence at some point in their lives, and sadly there are those who have lost their lives to family violence.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this year alone, six women have lost their lives because of domestic violence. Family violence is a national menace that has no face, no race, no ethnicity, no colour or creed, but an experience filled with pain, shame, suffering, uncertainty, separation of loved ones, broken families and children who are tragically left to contain the rest of their lives without a parent.

This is precisely why, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Honourable Bulitavu's social media post and utterances are both mischievous, disrespectful and an insult to women. By saying what he said, he has blemished the character of all Fijian women.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I agree with and thank our Honourable Prime Minister who earlier stated, and I quote:

> "Bulitavu's statements are an insult to the women of Fiji on two fronts - He is not only showing his ignorance by putting harmful and dishonest ethnic stereotypes which are racist but behind this statement, lurks a deeply seeded and deadly patriarchal mentality."

I condemn the Honourable Bulitavu's statements, not because he has attacked the women of my community but because, Mr. Speaker, Sir, all women belong to our community. I am therefore urging my fellow women parliamentarians across the floor to join us in condemning such attacks.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I urge all Members to exercise responsibility and show maturity while debating and making public statements on such crucial issues. One must not misinform and base his or

her statements on sheer claims. Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is grossly unfair for Honourable Bulitavu to have painted rural women of a particular ethnic community as 'unfaithful'.

It is an insult to our community that was subjected to so much physical and emotional abuse under the indentured system. Then he flippantly claimed that women of another ethnic community are often physically abused because of the physical powers of the men of that particular community. If this was not justification for gender-based violence, then what was it? Our silence will only encourage racist, bigoted and misogynistic voices. For the first time in Fiji's history, we have ten women parliamentarians. Unfortunately, the Opposition Women Parliamentarians did not speak against such statement.

I said in the past we can differ on ideologies and thought but we must have the courage of conviction to work on a united front to combat national problems such as gender-based violence, we owe it to the people of Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, according to the Fiji's Women Crisis Centre Survey, 64 per cent of women here in Fiji are subjected to unacceptable violence and that is a very high number. I must also point out that speaking of this gender-based violence is not just the job of the women leaders because we happen to be women. But it is the responsibility of our main counterparts to also speak out against all forms of hatred and violence.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our leader, the Honourable Prime Minister, who I must commend, was the first leader to condemn Honourable Bulitavu. As Members of Parliament, our job is to amplify the voices against gender-based violence and not to go silent because those that perpetuate hatred and glorify violence happen to be our own.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Honourable Bulitavu will go down in the history of our country as someone who has no respect for women.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Hear, hear!

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- As Members of Parliament, we all have been voted in by Fijians, irrespective of race, colour or religion.

We may defer in our political philosophy and ideologies but no one has the right to disrespect or insult women of any race.

Our Honourable Prime Minister who is visionary and a great leader has worked tirelessly to uplift the principle of equality and promoted equal citizenry of all Fijians. And here, we have someone like Honourable Bulitavu, who utters words that are hurtful, demeaning, racial, and derogatory and targeted at women of one ethnic group (Indo-Fijians) for being promiscuous and, therefore, deserve truly.

Directly or indirectly, the other *iTaukei* to be grateful for being physically beaten and not murdered. We, as leaders, should appreciate the contribution of all women and should never should stoop so low, as Honourable Bulitavu to utter such comments on the character of Fijian women.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me conclude by reaffirming our full confidence and trust in our Honourable Prime Minister, who has given us equal rights in this country. I support the motion, thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. I give the floor to the Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation. You have the floor, Madam.

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. I stand in support of the motion before the House. The statement made by Honourable Bulitavu was made in relation to the alleged killing of a young woman by her partner, a case of domestic violence and a case of gender-based violence.

Fiji is a proud nation on many fronts, Mr. Speaker, Sir, but, when it comes to gender-based violence statistics, we should all hang our heads in shame.

According to a survey carried out by the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre in 2010 and 2011 on violence against women, overall:

- 72 percent of women have suffered at least one form of violence in their lifetime from their intimate partners. This is physical, sexual or emotional violence.
- 64 percent of those women suffered sexual violence.
- 61 percent suffered physical violence.
- 58 percent suffered emotional violence. and
- 69 percent of women are subjected to, at least, one form of cohesive control, such as needing permission for healthcare and other restrictions on who women see or talk to, including friends, family and other men.

In 2009, the Bainimarama-led Government introduced the first Domestic Violence Act in our history, which created a specific mechanism for the protection of survivors of domestic violence and the prosecution of perpetrators. The removal of the need to have the evidence of a rape victim corroborated in Court through the Crimes Act 2009, made the prosecution of this crime much easier, empowering victims who are almost always women.

A further amendment to the marriage age raising it to 18 years in 2009, ensured the ending of the exploitation of young women through marriage. In 2012 an amendment made to the Family Law Act recognised the rights of *de facto* spouses in relation to property and spousal maintenance, which protected particularly women who are the most vulnerable when such relationships ended.

In 2017, the Honourable Prime Minister launched our first national Domestic Violence Helpline, which empowers victims of domestic violence who are almost always women to report instances of violence through a toll free line - 1560. This complements the Child Helpline - 1325, which was launched in 2015 for the reporting of the abuse and neglect of children.

Prior to and throughout this period, civil society continue to carryout advocacy work, holding the three Arms of the State to account for the statistics on violence against women.

Government in collaboration with civil society, development partners and UN bodies, continue to work together on programmes and initiatives, all targeted at addressing violence against women and girls.

A lot of good work is going on to complement the firm national legal and policy foundation that we have. But, I have said this before and I say it again, all these great legal and policy foundations will come to naught, if we do not talk about and address the elephant in the room - sexism.

Sexism is a prejudice or discrimination based on a person's sex or gender. It can affect anyone, but it primarily affects women and girls. It has been linked to stereotypes and gender roles, and may include the belief that one sex or gender is intrinsically superior to another.

Sexism manifests itself in many ways and forms. Statements like, and I quote: "Housewives are complaining that there is no Boom on sale." A sexiest view that the washing of laundry is a role reserved only for women. Then that is the statement made by Honourable Bulitavu.

Mr. Speaker Sir, on a reading of Honourable Bulitavu's initial statement on *Facebook* on 4th July, 2019, and his official statement clarifying his position issued on 10th July, 2019, it points to a mentality which appears to accept that it is alright for a man to beat or even kill a woman, especially if she is having an affair; a mentality which appears to accept that when men beat up their spouses, it is not a crime as a traditional apology will cure it; a mentality which appears to promote the non-prosecution of the hideous crime of domestic violence.

I know that the mentality I am talking about is not a reflection of the mentalities of all men in Fiji, we know that. That is why all men who do not share the same views as Honourable Bulitavu on that side of the House, need to speak up in condemnation of the statements made. Similarly, all women on the other side of the House need to stand up for the over 400,000 women out there. If the men would not do it, ladies stand up and say something. For if you keep quiet for the sake of political expediency, then that is really sad indictment for all of you.

Nowhere in the two statements do we see a condemnation of the act of violence, possibly a murder. In fact, the Honourable Member goes to great lengths in the 10th July statement to justify what he said on 4th July, by digging up historical records on the indenture experience in Fiji, which made general statements about the perpetuation of violence against unfaithful indo-Fijian wives.

The historical record touched on the indenture experience and nothing else. The manner that the extracts from that historical record was used, points to a myopic mentality which appears to suggest that domestic violence which is linked to extra-marital affairs is some way was only limited to the indo-Fijian community at that time, but and I quote, "is now common in other communities".

Seriously, he did not have to traverse into history to get a fair picture of domestic violence in Fiji. All he needed was a 2010/2011 study by Fiji Women's Right Movement, a study that he and other Parliamentary Members should know about since they have been attending the Human Rights and Violence against Women Workshops run by the Fiji Women's Rights Movement in partnership with the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation.

Now, if he had read that Report, he would have realised just how wrong his statements were, when he decided to target one particular one particular ethnic community as having a high tendency for domestic violence. It goes on to say and I quote, "too many women are being killed in Fiji by their husbands and intimate partners. We need to find a solution for this problem." Nowhere does he condemn the act of violence.

What is even discouraging is the silence from the Members of the Opposition on the motion before the House. Just yesterday, we heard from the Opposition about the need to work together across Party lines on the issue of drugs.

In fact, we have no hesitation in singing the same tune when it comes to condemning domestic violence as a national issue. But when it comes to one of their Members making comments which do so much damage to the great work done by Government and the non-government sector in combating

violence against women, what do we hear from the Opposition? Nothing! Silence! That silence is deafening!

We have so much to say about sweetened beverages in this House, so much to say about the cost of the internet, so much to say about civil aviation and maritime safety, but when it comes to the killing of Fijian women, we have nothing to say? Is that what we are? Is that what this Parliament is about?

Violence against Women, Honourable Speaker, it thrives in a shroud of silence. First, it was a silence within the home which kept the violence under wraps and unreported. Then the Bainimarama-led Government brought in domestic violence laws and policies with the complementary work of the non-government sector, we gave those women a voice, and the mechanism to amplify their voices beyond the walls of their homes.

As national leaders it is our inherent duty to ensure that our voices are louder, clearer and unequivocal in condemning violence. That unity is needed in this House, if our nation is to believe that violence against women is really unjustifiable on any ground.

If they are willing to work with us on drugs but not on violence against women, what are we saying as a Parliament? Are we saying that the life of a victim of violence is not worth as much as that of a victim of drug abuse? Do they know that domestic violence is one of the biggest risks to women's physical health and mental well-being in Fiji?

According to the same study I have been referring to, more women in Fiji are affected by domestic violence than by diabetes, high blood pressure or hypertension. What is even more disappointing, Honourable Speaker, about the statements made is that, it was made by an officer of the law - a lawyer who is the Member of Parliament. As Members of Parliament, people look up to us. Members of the public pay attention to what we say, and they draw different sorts of inspiration from it.

What exactly was the motive behind the statements made? We may never know. What is clear though is that, statements like that pushes back on this national effort to rid our nation of domestic violence. As responsible, honourable and respected Members of this august House, we no longer have the privilege of saying whatever enters our mind. Our thoughts need to be filtered before they come out of our mouths as statements because they carry so much weight with members of the public.

We have all heard of the saying, "Think before you speak." The word, "think" is made up of five letters, an acronym for "true, helpful, inspiring, necessary and kind." So before we speak, especially as Members of this House, let us ask ourselves the five questions always:

1. Is what we are about to say true?
2. Is it helpful?
3. Is it inspiring?
4. Is it necessary?
5. Is it kind?

I personally feel that the statements made by Honourable Bulitavu failed on every one of those. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister for her statement. I give the floor to the Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts. You have the floor, Madam.

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

The Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Members of the House, I rise before this Parliament to condemn in the strongest terms the statement made by Honourable Bulitavu and, of course, to support the motion before the House. I speak not only as a Parliamentarian, but also as the victim of domestic violence.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, from childhood, I and my siblings were raised in a very emotional and physical abusive household. I witnessed firsthand the destruction, the of domestic abuse in a family, a family that secretly torn apart, tries its best to maintain the image of a happy and a loving home, a family that hides its pain with a smile to the neighbours around to avoid the stigma of victimhood.

I have endured the lasting scars of the trauma, scars are still there today and those scars were ripped open by you, Honourable Bulitavu. My mother suffered in silence, and so did we. What was the fault, I ask myself. What was our fault? We were children, we could not do much to help our mother come out of that.

I stand here with so much admiration and respect for my mother for her courage of walking out of an abusive relationship. I still recall my last day of primary education, the day my mother left the man whom we called our father; the man who was supposed to love and respect us.

I still remember that faithful early morning, after my uncles have taken my mother away, when our house got burnt down. It was only through the strengths of my neighbours and my elder brother, that we were pulled out of the burning house. God knows how the house got fire, but I think it was obvious how it did.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have spent my life fighting for equality and respect. This Government, the FijiFirst Government has given me the platform to spread that mission to the ministries I have had the honour to serve. My message to the women and families out there who go through this abuse on a daily basis, there is help out there and we need to break that cycle of violence.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to this Government I have got passion into helping those who are marginalised with the sole aim of ensuring our society is truly inclusive. It is a shame that the progress we have made as a nation is not reflected in the painful divisive politics of the Opposition.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, domestic violence knows no race, nor religion, no creed, no colour, no ethnicity, no socio- economic and geographical barriers; it has no boundaries. Through the Ministry of Women under this FijiFirst Government, we have worked to ensure that victims like me of any ethnicity had the support they needed. Through the Ministry of Health we have worked to ensure that patients of any ethnicity were provided with the best medical care they needed. Through the Ministry of Education we are working to ensure that every student of any ethnicity has a future that is brighter than ever before.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, that bright future cannot be achieved with the kind of darkness spread by Honourable Bulitavu; to spread the stigma of violence on such a public platform only serves to silence victims like me and it feeds the stigma that allows more abuse to be carried out. Words, Mr. Speaker, have consequences. So, yes, Honourable Bulitavu, I am a proud Indo-Fijian woman and yes, I am a victim of domestic abuse. But I can tell you that through my service to this Government, abuse is blind to ethnicity. There are victims in every community, in families of every background but by labelling abuse with a painful stereotype, more of those victims will be scared to step forward. So instead of spreading these stigmas and stereotypes, we need to tear them down.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we in Parliament have been elected to serve our country, we are leaders and as such we need to lead with integrity, compassion and with the commitment to all the people that we

serve. If we are not able to do this, we should not be representing Fiji at all or we should not even be in this House.

The Director of Public Prosecutions, Mr. Speaker, Sir, said that violence against women is already under reported so that is what makes the Honourable Member of the Opposition's words even more abhorrent. Women only report when they have been beaten multiple times on multiple occasions, when they need to be hospitalised or are in danger of losing their lives. Suffering battered women syndrome, Mr. Speaker, Sir, women cannot leave their relationships suffering and sometimes dying at the hands of their abuser.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we must break this culture of silence, a culture of violence, a culture of suffering; we must break this. And to do this, we must ensure full empowerment of women and men equally and end all forms of discrimination.

In 2013 we started a journey of eliminating discrimination and in logical distinction between one person and another, we began this with fundamental principles that we are all equal citizens of one nation. And I am proud to be part of that Government that has taken the bold step to implement international best practice so that everyone is treated equally and fairly under the law, and so our freedoms are protected from any form of discrimination against race, culture, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and religion. The promotion of equal citizenry is critical for social cohesion and peace.

We must call out discrimination wherever and whenever it occurs; we must. By speaking about it, we can remove the stigma that women and some men face when they are abused. We will also emphasise repeatedly, if necessary, that this is not the norm and that it is not acceptable in any part of Fiji or any part of the world for that matter. Victims do not deserve stereotypes. They deserve our help; it is simple as that. In Fiji we know that sexual physical emotional abuse unfortunately still occurs in almost all settings.

My Minister colleague, the Honourable Minister for Women talked about statistics. It happens at home, at school, at work, in community and is often perpetrated by someone known to the victim; a parent, spouse, relative, neighbour, teacher, school mate or a friend. Violence affects the victim's psychological cognitive and social well-being and development. I still carry them. Sometimes when I lose my temper and I start acting like my father, my mother says, "Your father's blood runs in you." Should I get blamed for that? Children learn what they see because our parents are our role models. Children who are victims of it, who are abused often do not do well at school, engage in risky behaviour and sometimes abuse their own family members in turn.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, abuse in any form therefore does not only violate the victim's and their rights, it has a lot of impact on our society as well. We are facing a cycle of violence, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and this is why racist stigma and enforcing comments like Honourable Bulitavu's are reprehensible. One silent victim can lead to generations of abuse. Like I said, children see their parents fighting and then mothers being beaten and they believe it is alright or it is normal. So, when they become parents themselves, they repeat the same behaviour. So what do we do? We need to act decisively to break the cycle of violence. It is not normal and it is unforgiveable.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, cultural and traditional stereotypes and prejudices, unequal power dynamics and long standing patriarchy are common challenges we face in realising the rights of our women and children. However, these so-called taboos are sometimes effective contributors to the prevalence of violence against women and children. These taboos also contribute to divisions rather than unity.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Honourable Prime Minister said and I quote:

> "This problem will only be resolved by changing our culture. It is a fact that violence against women represent what I like to call that ugly underbelly of our culture. We all know it. It has been with us for a long time and it weaknesses like an infected wound slowly and progressively. Although as a society we surely lament it, I believe we have also tolerated it."

As a former school teacher, as a mother and as a parliamentarian, I know if I can mention again, our children mimic the behaviour they see and experience.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is for this reason that we need to set examples in our homes, workplaces, schools, places of worships and communities. We need to turn back the tide of violence whenever it rears its ugly head. Again, our Honourable Prime Minister said, I quote: "Men who bit women are cowards and criminals."

I echo those remarks today, abuse in any form is cowardly and so is typing racist, stereotype remarks behind a keyboard. Real men do not hit women. Real men do not hit children. Real men love their families. Real men are counted.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I encourage all victims of abuse to not be silenced but to use this as an opportunity to come forward, speak up, report abuse to the Police otherwise such violence will continue. Violence will be condoned and it will feed into the normalisation of violence. It will question our integrity values, ethics and respect and support for one another and of course erode our various societies to its death.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as the Minister for Education, I am mostly at pain to hear reports of violence inflicted by a very small number of our teachers on our children in schools. It is simply not Fijian. What is Fijian though is for us to stand together, united, to address this unacceptable trend and break the cycle from the start.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we need to work together to root out this troublesome trend and working with our children is a start. We need to understand and respect each other's culture to cement social cohesion to bind our people and our nation together.

We should aspire to learn about the rich evolving cultures, traditions, language, history and practices of our diverse communities. We should share and learn about our stories and history. Peace and social cohesion can only be achieved when people of all backgrounds truly know and understand each other. This, Mr. Speaker, is exactly what we are doing through our school system. However, we need to have to have more consistent messaging and behaviour. Schools are re-enforcing the same; positive behaviour we expect in our homes, workplaces and communities, after all it take a village to raise a child.

This is a journey, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that we must undertake hand in hand. It is through introduction that we learn, it is through learning that we understand each other. From understanding, we become friends and not just acquaintances. From understanding we truly become Fijians, united through what brings us together; our common humanity. Domestic violence is the behaviour which should never be justified nor condoned nor defended.

I conclude with the following lines from the Human Rights and Anti-Discriminatory Commission Report I found on my table yesterday, it says and I quote, "Neither greater, nor lesser but equal. Dignity, equality and freedom for all in Fiji."

The point here, Mr. Speaker, Sir, if I can go back, real men do not hit women, real men and women do not justify, defend and condone violence. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. I now give the floor to the Honourable Selai Adimaitoga. You have the floor, Ma'am.

HON. S. ADIMAITOGA.- Thank you Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I just want to open my statement by sharing a very good Bible verse - Matthew chapter 7 verse 2 says, "For with what judgement you judge, you will be judged and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you"

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we Members of this House have a responsibility to every single Fijian. We have a duty to promote peace and to unite our people. I am sad to say that the other side of the House has failed when it comes to this.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the comments made on social media by Honourable Bulitavu has brought great shame to all of us. The Honourable Member has brought great shame to all the women of Fiji. When he said on social media that stabbing of women was common in the descendants of indentured labourers because they had extra-marital affairs. I was ashamed that someone who sits in this House with me would make such comments. He then went on further to insult *iTaukei* and Indo –Fijian women on television. How dare the Honourable Member accuse an entire group of people like this? You do not just make general statements like that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, make no mistake this was an attack based on ethnicity and attack on women. Violence against women is vile act which we should all condemn instead of saying false general statements. Honourable Bulitavu's words are un-Christian and not what a proud Fijian would say.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Honourable Bulitavu went on to say that beatings using hands were more common against women in an *iTaukei* community. What! What message is his statement sending to our children? You are shaming good *iTaukei* men who have never touched women in their lives.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the women on this side of the House strongly condemn Honourable Bulitavu's racist and sexist remarks because we are strong women and we will set the right example for every girl in Fiji. Every girl who is in a classroom studying to achieve greater things must know that no one has the right to beat them and then they can be anything that they want to be.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Honourable Bulitavu and his lies have been empowered by the silence of the women on the other side. You would think that Honourable Qereqeretabua who is quick to nit-pick on the smallest issues would quickly stand up and defend the women of Fiji. No! She remained silent through this whole issue letting every Fijian mother, daughter, sister, wife and voter down.

Of course, she had earlier remained silent with her fellow Honourable Pio Tikoduadua where the party was labelled "*vulagi*" by the very people sitting next to them using the excuse that the leader had already made a statement. What a slack excuse! She does not wait for her leader to make a *Facebook* post or write a speech and give her opinion on issues about this side of the House. Why wait this time? I am very disappointed.

The Opposition Party, Honourable Lynda Tabuya is very quick to enter any legal union strike in the last hour, live- stream it on her *Facebook*, but when it comes time to actually defend something worthwhile like the women of Fiji from her fellow Opposition member's bad comments, not a single post condemning Honourable Bulitavu was found on her *Facebook* page. How pathetic!

Honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa, Honourable Adi Litia Qionibaravi, Honourable Salote Radrodro all remained silent as Honourable Bulitavu brought shame to Fiji. The women MPs on the other side have failed our people by refusing to defend our women, but it is not just the women MPs, Mr. Speaker, Sir, even the male MPs on the other side did not have the guts to stand up and defend the women of Fiji. How slack!

The Honourable Attorney-General in an earlier session said that all the people would see what the other side was about in these next four years, he was completely right. Have they done anything at all to the people of Fiji in the last four years? Have they done anything at all for the people of Fiji in the last four years? No, nothing, they should be ashamed.

My leader, Honourable Bainimarama has done more for Fijians than all the SODELPA, NFP combined, including Honourable Rabuka, Honourable Tuisawau, who are unable to do anything about Honourable Bulitavu. My PM came out very strongly against what was said. He had guts, unlike them.

Mr. Speaker, it is clear that the Opposition does not care about Fijians. They do not do anything useful and they most certainly will not stand up to defend women from attacks from their own Members.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Honourable Bulitavu has brought shame to this House, shame to the women, shame to all Fijians and not a single person on that side has the guts to do anything about it. Shame on the Opposition! All of them, shame. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Adimaitoga. I give the floor to the Deputy Speaker of the House. You have the floor, Madam.

HON. V.K. BHATNAGAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also rise to contribute to the motion on the floor. Mr. Speaker, Sir, Honourable Bulitavu's most humiliating and degrading comments are an insult to our mothers, to our sisters, to our daughters and wives.

This is what the so-called Honourable Bulitavu said, "I was brought up in Labasa and it was common to hear an Indo-Fijian man murder his wife if she is caught in an affair in the cane settlement. These affairs are common amongst married Indo-Fijian women in rural areas."

It is sickening, Mr. Speaker, to know the level of thoughts he carries in his sick mind. I simply cannot hide my exasperation even if I wanted to, Mr. Speaker, Sir. He dared to speak of married Indo-Fijian women in rural areas having affairs in cane settlements. Oh, God! Is that not outrageous? It is appalling. Shame on him! Is this how he perceives women? Is this how much respect he has for women?

A woman is a woman, Mr. Speaker, Sir, regardless of colour, creed, culture and ethnicity. She is someone's mother, she is someone's wife, she is someone's grandmother, she is someone's daughter and someone's sister, who is being verbally tortured and demeaned by Honourable Bulitavu. Every time I call him "honourable", Mr. Speaker, Sir, I sometimes, feel like asking him whether what he did was so very honourable, if what he did or said was so very honourable.

The fact of the matter is, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that Honourable Bulitavu had made the most denigrating remarks against women. This is racist, defamatory and sheer insult to our women. He further went on to comment that for *iTaukei* assaults on women, they are common given their built and these women should be thankful that they were not assaulted or beaten with weapons or knifed to be blenched. What does this mean, Mr. Speaker, Sir? That is all right to beat women, please, go ahead, assault them, molest them, rape them, beat them but, please, do not use knives and stones. Is this Mr.

Bulitavu's stance on violence against women? It is very sad, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that the so-called Honourable Member of this august House resorts to or rather stoops so low as to attack women in such a despicable manner.

Honourable Bulitavu does not stop there. He goes on: It is not *iTaukei* to murder if a relationship breaks down because we have our *bulubulu* custom. It is ironic. How he shamelessly disguises his disrespect for women in the name of respect for customs and traditions. Let me ask you this, Mr. Bulitavu, which custom or tradition teaches any of us for that matter, including you to disrespect the very femininity that carried you for nine months and went through excruciating pains?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, he did not think for a second before commenting so irresponsibily on allegations of love affairs in cane settlements and these women who are daughters, sisters, mothers, grandmothers fill me with great disgust, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

The fact that a Member of this august House thought it fit to voice such humiliating comments without reflecting on the impacts these will have on our youths and how they perceive our history and the legacy of our *Girmitiyas* is simply baffling and unacceptable, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Women are not objects, they are source of life. They deserve the utmost respect. He has slammed the value of our women by endorsing the practice of '*bulubulu'* which objectifies the self-worth of women who have been done wrong.

The question is; is this how we want our daughters to grow up? By accepting and forgiving every wrong-doing they have to endure, we are forcing them to become weak, we are forcing them to agonize their pain further. We are disempowering them.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, violence against women and girls is a widespread and systematic violation of fundamental human rights and an enduring form of gender-based discrimination. It occurs in every country of the world, rich and poor, stable and in conflict, and affects most women and girls, regardless of their age, race, religion or socio-economic status.

The intersection of violence against women with gender disparity and unequal power relations, creates systems of patriarchy, where women's rights are oppressed and they become vulnerable to exploitation and discrimination. This is where people like Honourable Bulitavu and the like-minded, make things more complicated in our fight towards countering the evils of violence against women, with their narrow and one-track misconceptions about women and how women themselves are responsible for the horror they endure, statements of such nature filled thoughts of irrational reasoning and logic, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

In his outrageous statement, Mr. Bulitavu at point-blank has blamed the indentured labourers (the *Girmitiyas*) for violence against women. I quote:

> "Murder and stabbing in the past were only done by Fijians who are descendants of the indentured labourers from British India and were never part of Fijians who are iTaukeis"

Mr. Speaker, Sir, such shallow mentality does not even deserve a response. The very descendants who you blame, Mr. Bulitavu, were the backbone of our economy. People who are remembered and saluted for their sacrifices even after 140 years have been blamed for introducing murder and stabbing. Thank you.

You have to be humane to understand the pain, the sufferance, the trauma and torture the indentured labourers went through, indulging ethnicity in social issues is a cheap political stunt.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this kind of irresponsible comments can lead to racial discrimination and disharmony. Mr. Speaker, Sir, to make the change needed in Fiji will involve strengthening family values and norms, positive parenting, premarital counselling, goodwill and ambassadorship program and nurturing discipline in all our children. This can all be done and needs all of us to work in solidarity to battle domestic violence.

The Fijian Government has given the boldest political mandate that it does not tolerate domestic violence in our nation. It is this will that drives us to battle domestic violence now and in future.

Our Prime Minister was the first to condemn Mr. Bulitavu's hate speech against women and this speaks volumes about the stand he as a leader of a country takes when it comes to protecting and defending our women.

Seeing various women and organisations voice out their thoughts on the statements made by Mr. Bulitavu, Mr. Speaker, Sir, gives me a sense of assurance that when you point a finger at a woman in prospect of demeaning her, she does not stand alone. The most uplifting lesson we learn from this disgraceful incident is that in our country most women back women. We stand tall in protecting our femininity and our dignity as Fijian women.

I salute every Fijian women who took a stand against these barbaric statements as together we are stronger and we become a greater power to battle with.

I urge every women to take a stand against such demeaning allegations. We need to stand in solidarity and condemn this utter annoying behaviour.

Before I conclude, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is disheartening to say that there are five women sitting on the other side of this august House who talk about more women representation in Parliament, who talk about empowerment of women, who talk about equal opportunities for women, but regrettably none of them dared to emphatically take a stand against the most disgusting and demeaning comments made by Honourable Bulitavu.

This tells us a big question mark on their commitment and responsibility towards the fight for violence against women. Mr. Speaker, Sir, actually I challenge Honourable Kepa, Honourable Madam Qionibaravi, Honourable Qereqeretabua, Honourable Tabuya and Honourable Salote Radrodro to take a stand and condemn the sick mentality of Honourable Bulitavu.

Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker. I wholeheartedly support this motion. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Deputy Speaker. Honourable Professor Biman Prasad, you have the floor.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand on behalf of the National Federation Party to support the motion before Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, when it was first revealed through the media on 5th July 2019, I made the following statement on behalf of the National Federation Party. I wish to put it on record for the sake of prosperity because our detractors continue to twist facts and launch cowardly attacks not only against me, but my fellow colleagues and in particular Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua for not speaking out.

On 5th July, 2019, Mr. Speaker, this is what I said and I quote the statement that I sent to all the media organisations on 5th July, 2019. It reads as follows:

"SODELPA MP, Mosese Bulitavu, is racially slurring and demeaning *Indo-Fijian* women with his insulting comment that accuses rural *Indo-Fijian* women of committing adultery and therefore being murdered by their husbands. This is reprehensible and despicable. As a lawyer, Mr. Bulitavu is trying to blame *Indo-Fijian* women for the heinous crime of murder which he claims has spread to the *iTaukei* community.

And he also goes on to blame *iTaukei* women for getting beaten up by their husbands who escape punishment because of the culture of *bulubulu.* This is shameful, he has insulted our hardworking women, mothers, daughters and sisters. He should hang his head in shame and publicly apologise to all women whose morality, character and credibility he has attacked. Racial slurs and malicious attacks have no place in our society. There are times when every effort is being made for the social, economic, and political advancement of women. Mr. Bulitavu's comment raises serious questions about his intensions to racially denigrate women."

Mr. Speaker, those who continue to attack me, I did understand what else I was supposed to say to satisfy the insatiable appetite of many, including the Director of Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission, along with a permanent radio broadcaster, well-known for attitude towards NFP during talkshows that she has hosted and especially when she has the Honourable Attorney-General as her guest and the Managing Director (News) of one of the daily newspapers, profiteering on taxpayers' funds through exclusivity on Government advertisements, who went to the extent, Mr. Speaker, of counting the number of words in the statement. She is a shining example of one who believes in equality and not quality.

Mr. Speaker, once again, I make this abundantly clear, and I did not want to talk about the NFP but I am tempted to or I have been forced to talk about NFP because of the reference by the Honourable Attorney-General when he was moving the motion.

The NFP, Mr. Speaker, is an impregnable principled fortress that has survived the political storms in this country for 56 years. The Party was born in 1963 when I was a little child. Many of us in this Parliament and, indeed, a vast majority of our population were not even allowed to know how and why NFP was formed after our Party *tataiya*, a *Girmitiya*, urged descendants of his fellow *Girmitiya* and A.D. Patel to form a political party. And this happened under a mango tree in Vaileka with the legendary Nakauvadra hills overlooking the historic sugar town. The NFP swiftly evolved into a genuinely multiracial party in conformity to its constitution, and we remain so to this date.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, we will not and refuse to be dictated by a 'fly by night', what I call johnny-come-lately, and those with no political conviction for principles and political morality and ethics.

Political parties, Mr. Speaker, have come and disappeared before us, but we will remain the foundation of those principles and we cannot be uprooted, come hell or high water.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, it pains me to hear the politicisation of the motion itself when we should be talking about what is in front of us in terms of the motion. I know, Mr. Speaker, many of my colleagues on the other side have issues about many things. I know many of them are reading prepared speeches, that is fine with me, Mr. Speaker, but let us concentrate on the issues.

Mr. Speaker, all of us are mere mortals, we are not perfect, I do not pretend to be one. We all have said one and done things that we have or consider or have in the past considered of t considered to be legitimate.

I can give many, many examples, Mr. Speaker, on the political front, concerning actions, political rhetoric with those doing so, who believe it to be normal, but considered racist, inflammatory and hurtful to many others. To those making such remarks or acting in such a manner, it would be a matter of some kind of bewilderment as to why so many people totally disagree with him or her. It would be natural to say, "Hey, what have I done or said that is wrong?"

Mr. Speaker, in Honourable Mosese Bulitavu's case, it is not one about making a passing remark or cracking a joke to his colleagues. It is about denigrating our women, mothers, sisters, our *Girmitiya* and the earliest descendants and, of course, extending it to our *iTaukei* mothers and sisters in the rural areas.

By extension, it is casting a slur at all women who are sons and daughters of our rural mothers and sisters in all our ethnic groups. Women who would be gathering as a wholesome community united in both, triumphant times and in tragedies, and at the same time ensuring that the needs of their family, children, members of their extended family and indeed all others, s paramount at all times.

Mr. Speaker, as a child born and raised in an extremely rural area in the Northern Division, surrounded by the *iTaukei* community, I can testify how our rural women put others before themselves and leave no stones unturned in ensuring the happiness of all others before their own. And to level them as promiscuous and it being the reason for them being murdered or *iTaukei* community learning murderous ways from the Indo-Fijian neighbours in a locality, deserves condemnation, Mr. Speaker.

In a multi-racial, multi-ethnic and multi-religious country, all of us should be leading by example. We must be seen to be working and taking the high moral ground, even if we personally struggle to do so.

Mr. Speaker, it behoves upon all of us to ensure that we cast aside our prejudices of any kind, because we are tasked with working for the national interest at all times, both in and outside of Parliament.

We do hope, Mr. Speaker, that this motion serves as a reminder to all of us to immediately stop being dishonourable to the task at hand and that we got elected for by our people and start the march for unison, harmony and to achieve lasting social economic and political advancement of all our people.

With those remarks, Mr. Speaker, I support the motion before the House. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Professor Prasad. I give the floor to the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- Thank you, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to respond to the motion before this Honourable House to sanction and condemn Honourable Mosese Bulitavu.

I rise today with an equally heavy heart with those of my colleagues on the Government side. The Honourable Member, Mr. Speaker, Sir, named in the motion, is under investigation from the Police and the Director of Public Prosecutions Office (DPP) for possible breach of the Public Order Act.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, breaches of the Public Order Act require the DPP to consent to and approve the laying of charges. This means that the DPP will evaluate the evidence from the Police investigation before deciding on whether to lay charges or not.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Police investigations are ongoing and the DPP, therefore, still has to make its decision. If charges are laid by the Police with the concurrence of the DPP, then the matter comes before the Court, who will then decide or make the finding of fact and law under this matter.

As we are aware, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Constitution grants the Judiciary and the judicial powers of the State. The SODELPA stands for the rule of law and the independence of the Constitutional Offices that have specific functions under our Constitution. In this instance, the Police, the DPP and the Court.

It is, therefore, our collective position, that to participate in this debate may prejudice the rights of the Member named in this motion and usurp the function of the Police, the DPP and the Courts, if charges are laid against that Member.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would be the only speaker from my Party parliamentary caucus on this motion, and we will be voting against the motion on those grounds. I thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Leader of the Opposition. I now give the floor to the Honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations and Youth and Sports. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and Honourable Members, I rise to contribute to the debate on the motion moved by the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister of Economy, Civil Service and Communications regarding the statements made by the Honourable Bulitavu which deserves to be condemned in the most direct manner for its racist and demeaning comments directed at the Fijians of Indian origin, particular our hardworking rural women.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the whole country is watching us, and they are also listening. They all want to know what we are saying or what we have to say. The comment directed at the Fijians of Indian origin, comes on the back of the labelling as guest or *vulagi* by a senior SODELPA leader a week earlier.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the comment have already attracted wide response from the public and from Honourable Members of this august House. The responses have rightfully condemned the racist statement made by the Honourable Member from all right thinking leaders, as well as citizens of Fiji. No right thinking Fijian will accept such comment. The Fijian public deserve better leaders than Honourable Bulitavu.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the statements have come at a time when more than ever before, we need leadership that has a strong moral and ethical basis. As Parliamentarians, we are not only represent a particular Party or any particular Constituency, but we represent certain basic ideals in respect to the views we hold.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these includes respect and upholding of moral values and views that shows the leaders that we do not turn into divisive figures, that we respect all races and religion, and above all we respect our women and girls.

We must ensure that we do not engage in talk or behaviour that is an insult to the position of power and responsibility that we hold. In this instant, the Honourable Member has engaged in more

than a passing comment. He has carefully worded his statements to ensure maximum damage to those he had chosen to offend.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, and Honourable Members of this august House, let us not be under the false impression that these were spur of the moment words. The statement by Honourable Bulitavu expresses horrible sentiments of racist view. He chooses to target Indo-Fijians and their *Girmitiya* heritage in the one grab. It vilifies them as immoral beings and attempts to remove them from their dignity as human beings. He goes even further to remove them from the rights as citizens of Fiji.

Now, going back multiple generation, since the first *Girmitiyas* arrived in Fiji 140 years ago, the use of word "*vulagi*" to denote the Indo-Fijian as an outsider or a foreigner is part of this deliberate attempt to show discord.

Let us make no mistake. The term "*vulagi*" was used to divide Fijians and to place Indo-Fijians where they were placed by earlier ethno nationalists branded as outsiders. Be it the work of the late Butadroka and the 1970s of the violent *iTaukei* Movement behind the 1987 and 2000 *coups*.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, no one is going to be fooled by the word "traits" and defend such as that some members of the Opposition and the SODELPA leadership is that *vulagi* means honoured guest.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as someone who has worked closely with the *iTaukei* community for many years, I know exactly when and how the term is used and *vulagi* as used by Honourable Bulitavu is exactly the opposite of being a honoured guest in its context. The Honourable Member should know better than to vilify Indo-Fijians whose ancestors suffered during the Indentured System.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the ill-treatments are well documented. I do not want to go into details rather than a civil contract of work, indenture was turned into a panel contract where labour was expected with violence and force, where labour was expected without thought for humanity, where labour was expected less than a living wage for almost the whole period of indenture between 1879 and 1916.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, even more hurtful were the comments by the Honourable Member on the Indo-Fijian women. In one swift moment, he branded them as immoral and extended this immorality to their *Girmitiya* ancestors and then extended justification for violence against *iTaukei* women based on the physical of *iTaukei* male.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is sad to note that some usually vocal speakers on gender issues from the Opposition in particular our women Members have remained silent on this matter.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is not a matter on which you can take sides. The country is watching us as leaders. These women showed the way forward for their children and descendants. They not only survived but they rose to fight the injustice of labour policies and lack of opportunities for education for their children during and after Indenture, not to seek benefits for themselves but that their children were able to have the opportunities that they did not have.

Part of their legacy was to live behind a strong tradition of women who worked on family-run rural farms. They continued and continued the tradition of hard work and sacrifice. They are cheerful and warm-hearted women. To cast stain on their r character as he has done through the stereotype as immoral women is the lowest of all acts. It is a grave insult and worthy only of outside condemnation and censor.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our strong *iTaukei* women are known like their Indo-Fijian counterparts for their hard work and sacrifice for their children and families. Many of them travelled miles to sell

produce from farms they worked on or sell goods they have harvested from the land or sea. They keep families and communities together through their hard work and strong sense and commitment to their religion.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, they are once again been relegated to be obedient and abused housewives rather than being respected as mothers, sisters, wives and the real builders of this nation. They do not deserve to be at the receiving end of the statements such as those made by the Honourable Bulitavu. It is sad to note that while he says he lived close to Indian settlements in Labasa, he has chosen not to learn more about the neighbours and people he says he grew up with.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we commit to a united Fiji, the implication is worrying. For Honourable Bulitavu as a public leader also promotes himself as a role model in particular through the social media platform, he is promoting racist behaviour among our young and justifying it as somehow being culturally acceptable.

As Minister for Youth, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I urge all young people to reject such statements and by extension ways of behaviour for being racist. Say no to the race card! Say no to racist comments! And I say this to all our youths and to all our Fijians.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the words and sentiments expressed by Honourable Bulitavu are designed to extract maximum damage to race relations in Fiji. The ideals of a united one Fiji under the FijiFirst Government is under direct attack by his statement. Fiji prospers when we all act and work together as Fijians. Everyone prospers, it is not just material prosperity but spiritual and cultural growth when we engage in building a nation rather than dividing our beautiful islands.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is also individual growth when we choose to live as a united people and live the good energy of a multi-racial Fiji, rather than live an act as an angry individual with negative energy through racist thoughts, words and actions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we would do well to preach and practise unity, peace and harmony in Fiji. The foundation for a united Fiji are expressed clearly in the 2013 Constitution of the Republic of Fiji through its Preamble. It is expanded upon in its opening chapter and with each chapter and section from thereon.

The Constitution uphold in every chapter and section that rise to tranquillity and dignity of this citizenship to all Fijians regardless of race, class, creed and background. The statements by the Honourable Member cuts deeply against the intent and sentiments expressed in Fiji's supreme law of the land.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it attempts to take away a cheap manner, the dignity of ordinary Fijians. The statement attempts to remove the historical dignity of the *Girmitiyas* and their contribution to assist in building modern Fiji while facing the loss of personal freedom and dignity in the plantation of Colonial Fiji.

His statements directly attacks the personal dignity and integrity of all women. Worse he goes on to identify and brand Indo-Fijian women with immoral or bad character and as such attempts to justify sexual abuse and violence against them. The debate today also needs to send a strong message to all and in particular to our political leaders that Fiji and its supreme representative body, this Parliament will censor and condemn in the strongest possible attempts all racist statements whoever he or she may be.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, during a recent walk through the Ba Market, an old *iTaukei* friend joined me. He expressed his disappointment and gave me his apologies as a proud *iTaukei* on the comments made by Honourable Bulitavu. He was in particular sad about the use of the word "*vulagi*". He said it was not fitting for any person, let alone a holder of public office to use it against a fellow Fijian and my friend said he would no more consider me to be a guest or "*vulagi*" in his house or land as he would consider someone from his own *tikina*.

"We go back too far than that", Mr. Speaker, Sir, he said. As we shared a "*bilo*" amongst the crowd in the market, he made a lasting statement, "we have also come too far as a united Fiji now, to go back to the bad old days." I knew exactly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, what he was saying. I know more and more Fijians are expressing what my *iTaukei* friend said at the market and look forward to a united and prosperous Fiji with no time for racist comments.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as a politician, I never thought that a time will come in this new Parliament that we will have to debate something which relates to race. For quite long, we had this game since Independence. A nation which was divided into racial compartments not because of us, because of the Constitution. The Constitution was designed in such a way to keep us apart. Before elections, we used to have Indians versus Fijians, so the 2013 Constitution, Mr. Speaker, Sir, gave us the opportunity for Open seats. Why was it done?

It was done and the architect of that Constitution at that time thought that we had to rebuild Fiji into a multi-racial country and that is why all Communal seats were taken away and we have Open seats now. There will be no more Indians, Fijians and Others before the Elections, all have to go to everyone unlike before. And we have a Constitution. But we all will have to work together to make sure that the Constitution works. But if we have statements like this from politicians, where are we heading to? What do we want to achieve? Do we want to go back to the old days, divide and rule for political survival? Is that what we are here for or we are here for our future generation? We need to be honest. We have to tell the nation what we are here for. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to thank you for this opportunity.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. Honourable Alexander O'Connor, you have the floor.

HON. A.D. O'CONNOR.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Mr. Speaker, Sir, allow me to contribute to the motion before the House. I find Honourable Bulitavu to be an unabashed racist and misogynist who lacks historical consciousness. He has consciously misappropriated history to demean and incite hatred towards an entire community on the basis of race, ethnicity and gender. The fact of the matter is that his social media post did not appear out of thin air. He decided to exploit an already charged atmosphere of racial antagonism. He has descended to a new low by criminalising the descendants of Indentured Labourers as a naturally violent community established securely in a culture of murder and stabbing and the lowering of value of Indo-Fijian women showing open sexual desire.

No community, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is naturally violent. Mr. Speaker, Sir, Indo-Fijian men were not born murderers and Indo-Fijian women were not born with the natural inclination to have extra-marital affairs. History teaches us that suicides, rape, murders and infanticides amongst other social ills which Colonial authorities conveniently classified as crimes of sexual jealousy were in fact a consequence of the Colonial policy of disproportionate sex ratios where for every hundred men, Colonial rulers and capitalists recruited 40 women in the coolie lines.

Stereotyping, debasement and de-humanisation, as we know, breed racism. Sadly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, such comments are reminiscent of the fervour of racist vitriol that has shaped much of our history in our struggles for common and equal citizenry. Not so long ago an entire community was likened to a

barking dog and incidentally, it is not racist according to our Opposition political parties including the NFP. The Leader of the Opposition has publically struggled to recognise everyone as Fijians and incidentally it is not racist either. When another traditional leader of SODELPA labelled NFP and FLP as *vulagi* political parties, the leaders of NFP and FLP jumped up and cried racism while the SODELPA lot is still immersed in a flurry of semantics, justifying why the term *vulagi* is not racist. Call it by any other name, racism is racism and we cannot be selective about which acts of racism we condemn and the ones we condone.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, descendants of indentured labourers made Fiji their home 140 years ago and only in 2013 were they extended their constitutional right and dignity to be called "Fijians". We must weed out racism. More than ever, we must unite and jealously guard our hard-fought constitutional right to be called "Fijians" despite our race, ethnicity, gender, colour, creed or economic status.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, perhaps the same could be said about us part-Europeans or '*Kai Lomas*' as some call us. Prior to 2013, we were always referred to as 'Others' and this was evident in all public and civil certifications and declarations.

However, upon arrival into Fiji in the late 1840s and early 1850s, our forefathers were given both land and women-folk in exchange for cases of alcohol, weapons and tools. Since then there has been inter-marriages of all races - iTaukei and '*Kai Loma'*, iTaukei and Indo-Fijian, '*Kai Loma'* and Indo-Fijian, Indo-Fijian and Chinese, Chinese and iTaukei, Chinese and '*Kai Loma'* and not forgetting our Rotuman, Rabi and Kioa communities as well as other Pacific Islanders. So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, why categorise people with stereotypes?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I strongly condemn the comments made by the Honourable Bulitavu and I support the motion. I thank you, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable O'Connor. The Honourable Jone Usamate, you have the floor.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I stand to support the motion namely:

> That Parliament strongly condemns the statements made or published by the Honourable Mosese Bulitavu in the media, including the social media.

Just to start off, I am a bit surprised that the Honourable Biman Prasad spent most of his contribution on this particular debate talking about our side of the House rather than condemning the words of Honourable Bulitavu, what a shame.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- You started it!

HON. J. USAMATE.- The Honourable Leader of the Opposition has also not condemned the statement of his Member.

(Honourable Members interjected)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. J. USAMATE.- He has not - what a shame, what a tragedy. Reading through the comments made by the Honourable Bulitavu, I detect a number of shocking things and these include;

1. Only Indo-Fijian women engage in extra-marital affairs, that they have a propensity for being promiscuous and has implied that they deserve the treatment dished out to them by their aggrieved husbands. This is absurd, ridiculous and reprehensible.

2. That our different ethnic cultures are not equally-based on respect, that is an affront to all of us in this House.

3. That only descendants of indentured labourers murder, and stab people - absolute hogwash.

4. That the assault on iTaukei women are common because of their built. This suggests that it is all right to assault iTaukei women because of their built, that is, it is all right to assault women, that this is normal.

Those are some of the things that are coming through. Every single one of these things, every utterance wreaks of racism and misogyny. It glosses over violence, it glosses over domestic violence. It tries to paint an image that such things happen only in one community and not in another. This is absolute rubbish.

Violence is violence and it must be condemned wherever it takes place and in whatever form it takes place. It is not something limited to any particular group. When and if a young woman dies at the hands of an intimate partner, in her own home, this should never ever be trivialised or discussion on the topic of who a vulagi is, what they taught us and where they belong. Our focus should always be on the violence, no, our focus must be on the key issue, and the key issue of gender-based violence.

Our focus must not be on trying to explain why it is all right for these things to be happening or to try and explain in a way on some ridiculous cultural explanation, but to focus on what we can do to end it. This is the major issue here - gender-based violence. That is something that we need to eradicate and get rid of, irrespectively of ethnicity, irrespective of race and we need to eliminate this.

Yesterday, we had some discussions on the issue of domestic violence and why it is so prevalent. When asked, the Honourable Minister for Women told this House that one of the major causes of such violence is because of mindsets and mental attitudes towards domestic violence against women and children. It is the way we think and what we perceive as norm, that is the major underlying cause of this, and this is something that we in this House have to address first in ourselves, and secondly in the communities that we lead and that we are part of.

Fiji, like many other countries is facing the challenge of domestic and sexual violence with almost two thirds of the country's women are saying that they have experienced domestic or sexual violence during their lifetime.

According to the 2010-2011 survey by the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, 72 percent of Fijian women have experienced physical, sexual or emotional violence from their spouses or intimate partners in their lifetime, Honourable Speaker.

This problem is not limited to any ethnic group or any social class, it is not just the problem of the poor, it is not just the problem of the rich or of the urban or of the rural, it transcends all groupings and it affects women from all parts of society. The baseless and unsubstantiated allegation on the Grimit descendants by the Honourable Bulitavu was absolutely uncalled for.

Fijian Parliamentary leaders should regard all Fijians equally, it was a ridiculously disrespectful accusation to imply that *Girmitiyas* and their descendants, customs and traditions are not based on respect as opposed to the *iTaukei* customs and traditions.

All of our customs and traditions are based on respect and every culture is based on respect, Mr. Speaker, Sir. It may or may not necessarily mean the same for all of us but to each of his own. The comment is also a relentless misrepresentation of the mentality of the male population at large. I think he forgot that as a representative of the people, his words carry more weight than his own personal force on any issue. Not all men condone violence against women and misogyny.

And not all *iTaukei* condemn racism and sexism. The comment by the Honourable Bulitavu stinks of misogyny and he has said, what he has said as a Member of Parliament, as a national leader of all of the people in this country. We are elected into Parliament and we come here to work together for the good of this nation and all of our people, including our women. He has thrown a cover of an evil act of murder by making more important the discussion on who taught the *iTaukei* to use stones and knives.

In a good reflection of our own communities can we truly said that violence against women is not a reality in a lot of *iTaukei* homes, it happens everywhere. He says in one of his statements that for *iTaukei* assault on women is common given their built or how they are built. I have a wife, I have children, I have grandchildren and one of my granddaughters is almost as big as me, does that mean that it is okay for her to be assaulted because of her built?

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- No.

HON. J. USAMATE.- What does it mean? Does that mean that if someone has a big built, it is okay to assault them? Is that what the implication is? To the female members of the other side, do you standby and agree with these sentiments? Do you agree?

Why did you not immediately condemn his comments? Why are you not condemning it now? Or where will condemn these comments? Will you condemn it now only because they have not let this matter died? Why did the Honourable Qereqeretabua not immediately respond on social media when she is so quick on social media on other matters? Why has the Honourable Salote Radrodro not make any comments when she holds herself out continuously as the Opposition's gatekeeper on Women's empowerment?

The silence in particular means that the female members are lady members of the Opposition side have let political expediency compromise a very real issue. These utterances are an indicator of what is inside of a person and I am reminded by the poem that came out Post-World War II saying:

> "First they came for the Socialist, I did not speak up because I was not a Socialist, then they came for the Unionist and I did not speak up because I was not a Trade Unionist; then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out because I want not a Jew; then they came for me and there was no one left to speak for me."

This country needs all of us to speak out against things that attack our people. Here it is, we have women in this House. Some of us in this House are iTaukei women and the Honourable Bulitavu has implied that it is all right to assault iTaukei women because of their built.

Will you not speak out? There is utterances for me represent the shameless attempt also to drive wedge between our State groups. It panders to the kind of popular ideologist that may bring about approval from a segment of our society but its ramification are frightening for the future of our country. Please, do not make statements for political expediency at the expense of the future of our country and

of our nation, shifting the blame to the *Girmitiya* descendants suggest that the Honourable Bulitavu is implying that we need someone to blame for the social ill and refuse to put up a fight against violence against women. That is not who we are.

We must fight this, we must all condemn gender-based violence and we must teach our younger generation to respect women and treat them as equals. We should not blame anyone, we must take responsibility for our own actions and make a pledge to have every Fijian women enjoy her human rights to the fullest.

Everything we do as Parliamentarians, everything we say, every utterance that we make has an impact on the people of this country and on the future of this country. Sometimes it does not impact immediately in the way you want but it may also have an impact in the long term and medium term in a way that you do not want.

Let me give an analogy on the impact of using social media having the same effect as the real life situation. A black family enters a coffee shop in a small Texas town, a white man places a card on their table and the card reads, "You have just been paid a visit by the Ku Klux Klan". The family stands and leaves. Messages have an impact on people.

The social media postings by the Honourable Bulitavu has the same impact on the audience of his postings. The women of our beloved country and our fellow Fijians of Indian descent to express such opinions without foreseeing the ramifications is irresponsible and self-indulging. The Honourable Bulitavu has continued to repeat the same mistakes even when he has been told that they were racist and now sexist.

Why does he do it Mr. Speaker Sir? Why does his Party not discipline him? Why are there no repercussions from his Party? Do they agree with his sentiments? Is this just an attempt to cause uproar and get more people to view his social media contributions? Or is there a group of supporters that encourage him to make his controversial statement boldly?

The Honourable Bulitavu chooses simple answers to difficult problems and refuses to see the complexity behind the issue. It is not that a certain ethnic group that causes abuse but individual's abuse by using ethnic stereotypes, it draws a divisive line where there is no such line.

In the Honourable Bulitavu's cycle of divisive courage and apology we see that he pushes the buttons of certain individuals who look to re-establish patriarchal and ethnic divisions. This is in contrast with what this Government champions - gender equality and inclusivity.

Free speech through social media is not a licence to spread racist and sexist propaganda. He has overstepped the fine line between freely expressing his opinion and hate speech. His social approach in his position of power have had a malicious effect. It adds legitimacy to racism and sexism. People will read his post and think that this is the right way to express his thoughts.

He has importantly apologised, it is not enough when the damage has already been done. People will be discussing what he has posted, around the grog bowl. Leaders should be leading by examples and not by creating animosity.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the world is moving ahead with the quest to eliminate discrimination against women and against race. As leaders in this Parliament, we cannot afford to be regressive in our thinking. This is a recipe for being left behind, while the rest of the world moves ahead.

Let us as a House, send the message of condemnation. Let us tell our country that everyone in this country is important. Let us get rid of the stereotypical thinking that our older generation have. We must do it now.

Let us tell the people of this country that they matter, every single one of them matter, and they have a right to dignity, they have a right to equality and they have the right to be respected.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I strongly support this motion. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister for his statement. I give the floor to Honourable Mahendra Reddy.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of Opposition, Honourable Members of this House, I rise to comment and condemn the statements made by the Honourable Mosese Bulitavu.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Honourable Bilutavu stated that, and I quote:

> "Stabbing of a partner is the 'vulagi' or foreign way of doing things for the iTaukei and have been brought in by the descendants of indentured labourers from British India and that Indo-Fijian women having extra marital affairs is rife rural areas."

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is no constructive research that can conclude his statements to be true.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me also inform Honourable Bulitavu that the movement of labourers from India to Fiji from 1879 up to 1916 was through the agreement to work on the plantations on a five year term, which is commonly referred to as *Girmit*, a shorter version of the word agreement.

There was a total of 42 ships and 87 voyages that brought labourers to Fiji, the first ship *Leonidas* in 1879 and the *Sutlej V* in 1916. Mr. Speaker, Sir, there were altogether 13,696 females and 31,458 males transported during the period of indentured emigration.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, according to Historian, Ahmed Ali, *Girmit* constituted a 40 year phase (1879 to 1919) in Fiji's history. For labourers of Indian descent was from 1884 to 1919 contemporaneous with the emergence of Fiji Indian society based where life had its fluctuations but was in contrast to the sullen misery of the plantation lines at the mercy of the s*ardar* and overseer.

The rewards of enterprise in the free imparted influence in the development of Fiji Indians as much as the rigours of *Girmit*. So *Girmit* remained an unforgettable and unforgotten adventure and ordeal. In its proper perspective, it represented a facet of Fiji Indian experience. It did not comprise the whole experience, it was by no means the sole determinant of their future.

The desire for success in the material world of here and now as a motive force had preceded *Girmit* and outlived it to strengthen ethos of the community. One must survive the best means for it was capitalism by success depended upon industry, intense individualism and magic of western education.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the history of humankind has all too often been written in the history of men - their wars, their dynasties, their thoughts and their comments, as Minault wrote in 1983. The views and contributions of women has neither been appreciated nor knitted into the mainstream of history. No doubt, social histories have included chapters on women but have never focused on them.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, women cannot continue to be defined and differentiated with reference to men, as the Historian, de Beauvoir, observed in his writing on 1987. Ideally, women should be studied not in isolation, but interaction with men and society generally.

Shameem (in her writing in 1987) opined that in the literature of indentured labourers in Fiji, little attempt has been made to make critical sense of the vast amount of factual data that scholars have collected on women, saying that if it had not been for intermittent reference to women the reader could have assumed that the writers were describing a colony of men only.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, historians have largely ignored that the Indo-Fijian woman or have been indifferent to them. However, when in need for a scapegoat, colonists and capitalists during indenture and nationalists after the women hauled them up from the sidelines of history with criticise and denounce her for various ills and crimes of the society. Since the very beginning, the blames and censure against Indian women in Fiji have become fast and hard.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do note that the first set of writers of Indians in Fiji in the early 20th century gave Indian indentured women a raw deal. They held them responsible for the prevalence of immortality on sugar plantations. C.F Andrews and Pearson, Burton, Garnham and Tota Ram Sanadhya, essentially belonged to this group. Burton, Walker and Stanner added racist prejudice to the plots. The works of Mayerand Gillion removed some of these biases but did not do much to remove the prejudices prevalent to the texts against Indo-Fijian women.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the latter half of the 20th century, Fiji Indian scholars, like Ahmed Ali, Vijay Naidu, Vijay Mishra and Brij Lal, reassessed the existing facts and brought forth the other side of the picture. Narsey, Sutherland and Lal portrayed Indo-Fijian women as victims rather than the cause of the wrongs prevalent on Fiji plantation as victims for the larger forces of colonialism, capitalism and orthodoxy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, *Girmitiyas* was immediately recognised as ground-breaking in methodology and conclusions. Essays on women shows that the previous focus on their allegedly immortal character was not only wrong but served to divert attention from the conditions on the plantations. Elaborating on the theme he showed that suicides were not caused by sexual jealousy among male workers, but rather by the breakdown of integrated institutions on the plantations. *Girmitiya* women were the victims rather than the cause of many of the innocent plantations and they bore the brunt of oppression from men, whether European or Indian.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our females were the ones who suffered the worst during the *Girmit* era. They worked two shifts, they worked on the plantations and after a days of hard work when everyone retired to rest, females would then start their night shift of work to look for firewood, cook dinner, wash clothes and get ready for the next day.

Their hours of work was not 10 hours or 14 hours, they work from 5.00 a.m. in the morning until 11.00 p.m. in the night. They longed to have a decent rest or sleep. They ate the last, slept the last and the first to wake up early in the morning. They had the entire responsibility of the household, except the responsibility of decision making. They were the energy of the household, they were the uniting factor of the household and family. For someone to accuse them for extra marital affairs demonstrates not only lack of their knowledge of our society but also lack of respect of our women.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Honourable Mosese Bulitavu needs to be condemned in the strongest terms. Honourable Speaker, Sir, his statement just not only promotes racial discrimination but also gender discrimination. Women and girls represent half of the world's population and, therefore, also half of its potential.

Gender equality, besides being a fundamental human right, is essential to achieve peaceful societies with full potential and sustainable development. Moreover, it has been shown that empowering women spurs productivity and economic growth.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, women's rights are the fundamental human rights that were enshrined by the United Nations for every human beings on the planet nearly 70 years ago. These rights include the right to live free from violence, slavery, discrimination, to be educated to own property, to vote, and to earn a fair and equal wage. As the now-famous saying goes "women's rights are human rights" that is to say, women are entitled to all of these rights.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Prime Minister has always echoed that we are all Fijians. We all share destiny and hold equal values in our democracy, no matter who we are, what our ethnicity, what gender we belong to, what religious beliefs we hold and what social status we belong to.

While some of the Honourable Opposition Members statement promotes xenophobia which is the fear of hatred of that which is perceived to be foreign, I see this as a vehicle to dislike or prejudice against other minority races. According to UNESCO, the terms xenophobia and racism often overlap, but differ in how the latter encompasses prejudice based on physical characteristics while the former is generally centred on behaviour based on the notion of a specified people being adverse to their culture.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me remind Honourable Bulitavu that respect to human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex language or religion is established under Article No. 1 of the Charter of the United Nations as one of the purposes of the organisation.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides that everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedom in the declaration without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex language, religion, political and other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status and a large part of the policy, normative and operational work of the United Nations has been directed towards the elimination of discrimination.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action confirms that protection and promotion of human rights is the first responsibility of Governments and core to the work of the United Nations. The platform for action firmly anchors the achievement of gender equality within a human rights framework and makes a clear statement about State responsibility in delivering on the commitments made.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, all major international human rights instruments stipulate ending discrimination on the basis of sex. Like Fiji, almost all countries have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) described as the women's international Bill of Rights.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we grow in age, our wisdom gets us to reflect on our past. We then realise how our women, our mothers and wives have sacrificed their life for us.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I come from a family of four siblings and my father passed away when we were very small. Two of us just started high school education while two were in primary school. Two of us, myself and my elder brother, were expected to drop out to look after the 30 acre farm which was under bank overdraft. Instead, my mother stepped into my father's shoes and allowed us to continue school. The rest is history.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I can never accept the likes of Honourable Bulitavu to say that such godly figure in my family and in all families had extramarital affairs.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I grew up alongside an itaukei village. I was adored my itaukei neighbours. The mother of one of our rugby superstar, the late Mr. Senivalati Laulau, Mrs. Lati, our next door neighbour was like our own mother. She was a pillar of strength for our family after the death of my father.

When our cane used to be burnt down, she will be the first one to turn up with her sons to assist us in harvesting and getting it to the mill on time. She was one of the persons who stood firm for us to continue schooling after the demise of my father, providing support to my mother for the farm work.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I cannot tolerate any comments by the likes of Honourable Bulitavu, on such a godly woman who shaped my life. She also shaped the life of my fellow Member, Honourable Osea Naiqamu, who comes from the same family and was raised by her. Mr. Speaker, Sir, it needs to be condemned in the strongest terms.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, like most of us here, I am also a father of a 22 year old daughter and an 11 year old son.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the day Honourable Bulitavu made the comment, my daughter asked me; dad why is Honourable Bulitavu making such a sweeping and denigrating comments about our women? Are Members of Parliament supposed to set the highest standards and benchmark for the society?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this takes me to the next point about what this Parliament is about. The title of "Honourable" is bestowed upon us by the people of this country. We are supposed to be role models at every point in time at every place. I cannot say that while I am in a pub consuming alcohol and dancing on the table with my shirt off and say it is my personal life, taking public office requires one to make sacrifice in public interest to define a future Fijian society.

What we do, what we say, how we behave will define our future Fijian society. Mr. Speaker, Sir, no men, let alone a Member of Parliament can make such sweeping accusation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in Honourable Bulitavu, I see him as a countless pure in our society. If this is not removed now, it will engulf the entire society and destroy our beloved country.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our women need support and protection. Protection of women's value and virtue, immaterial of what ethnic group they belong to, what religious belief they hold, what income level they are on and where are from. We will also do good by encouraging and empowering others to do the same.

By doing so, a home at home can be models for what other women in the world over can aspire to be with the journey of supporting and protecting the rights for women, we will progressively contribute towards building a moral community.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I urge Honourable Bulitavu to get out of this dichotomous hatred of us versus them, men versus women and do justice to this elected position for the betterment of this country.

I urge him to look around himself and join us and help us in building this moral community where women are respected and allowed to grow without any limits.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister for his statement.

Honourable Members, we will now break for dinner which is served in the Big Committee Room and will resume in an hour's time to continue with the debate on this motion.

We adjourn for dinner.

The Parliament adjourned at 7.07 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 8.11 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will continue with the debate on this motion. Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Thank you very much Honourable Speaker.

Honourable Speaker, I rise today in support of the motion presented by the Honourable Attorney-General which seeks that the Parliament strongly condemns the following statements published by the Honourable Mosese Bulitavu in the media including social media.

Honourable Speaker, let me go back a bit in history. In the ancient kingdoms, in the ancient Rome and ancient Greek civilisations, women were treated as a commodity. They were traded, they were bought and they were sold. The despicable physical violence, sexual violence and emotional violence that were subjected to as slaves is still ringing in the histories. Honourable Speaker, after a while, people realised that women were an integral part of our community and that was a first sign of us evolving.

In the middle ages in many countries, women did not have a right to own property, did not have a right to vote and were subjected to a lot of other discrimination but luckily, we evolved. Women today, in many advanced jurisdictions are treated as equal to men, if not superior. It is therefore surprising that, that evolution has totally bypassed people like Honourable Bulitavu who have not evolved from the atrocities of many centuries ago where it was entertainment to torture women, to see them killed and to see them raped in the ancient civilisations.

Honourable Speaker, the comment that Honourable Bulitavu made, and I will read the relevant parts of it, "that murder and stabbing in the past were only done by Fijians who were descendants of indentured labourers from British India and was never part of Fijians who are *iTaukei*."

Honourable Speaker, many years ago when I started practising as a Barrister, in those days, laws of Fiji were quite different. There was a Matrimonial Causes Act, there was the Maintenance and Affiliation Act, the Proceedings of Divorce and other matrimonial causes were based on fault. I do not know whether Honourable Bulitavu practised in those days or not, whether he ever practised in court, but these cases had parties from all races which had Indo-Fijians, it had iTaukei.

The laws did not discriminate between the parties. The people who came to the court with their personal differences and as he put it, "to sort out their romantic relationships", did not differentiate between the races, religions or gender. He goes on to further say that for *iTaukei*, assaults on women were common given their built. In rural Vanua Levu communities, the use of *juri* or *patar* was common with Indo-Fijian boys.

Honourable Speaker, just like Honourable Bulitavu, I also grew up in the rural part of Vanua Levu, Nabouwalu to be precise and in that community, there was no such thing. Everyone lived together in peace and everyone had respect for each other. I still live in a rural community in Ba and what he has said whether it is against the Indo-Fijian women or against our *iTaukei* daughters and sisters is downright insulting and it should be condemned in the harshest terms.

Honourable Speaker, it will be surprising if Honourable Bulitavu ever read the precedence of the cases that have gone in our courts. In the old Penal Code, before the Crimes Act came into force, the old Penal Code was the primary law under which criminal prosecutions took place and our Fiji law reports are full of cases where assaults on women, assaults by women and assaults between men were subject of cases and there was no such case where we could distinguish between races or religion.

In fact, there were some volumes which had equal number of cases against both. The evidence that was given in Matrimonial Causes in those days in a fault-based system and evidence given by women from both races who were subjected to enormous tortures by their spouses; hot water was thrown on them, hot oil, knifes were used, beating, punching, marital rapes, et cetera. And these things, for the information of Honourable Bulitavu and people who think like him, did not have any differentiation between race or religion or whether it was *iTaukei* or Indo-Fijians.

Honourable Speaker, Honourable Bulitavu, the statement that he made, he has made a comment, "… we *iTaukei* do not engage in romantic relationships like this to the extent where it leads to murder. We have customs and traditions based on respect. It is not *iTaukei* to murder if a relationships break down. We have our *bulubulu* custom of seeking forgiveness and as the Honourable Attorney-General has highlighted there were instances in courts where the perpetrators came to court and said that we have reconciled with the people. We have reconciled with the victim and that was seen as a mitigating factor in some courts. Luckily, the court systems have evolved and unfortunately, Honourable Bulitavu has not evolved.

Honourable Speaker, it is this Government that saw that there was a problem with the old laws and therefore it brought a new modern law which is the Domestic Violence Act and that was to protect every woman and child from domestic violence. There are countless lawyers among us who spend their entire days in court trying to give the rights to those women and children who have been assaulted or who have been victims of domestic violence.

To say that domestic violence is alright, whether it is because you are of a different race or because of a different built is just downright insulting to these women who had been wronged. All the noble efforts of our Government and our Prime Minister in bringing modern laws to protect our women and girls will go down in vain if people start following the lead that is set up by Honourable Bulitavu and the people who think like him. People should see the difference between the leadership of the two parties and how we have handled the situation. Our Prime Minister, our leader has made it clear that if such a comment or such a statement had been made by an MP from our side, that would have been his/her last day in Parliament.

Therefore, the comments or the response by the Honourable Leader of the Opposition that this matter is before the Courts and they will not comment further on it, it is just not good enough. There have been cases and there should be cases where if a person has breached the party ethics, the party lines, there will be morality in the high moral ground that a party has set and there should not be a place for that person in that party.

The FijiFirst Party has for years propagated and promoted the rights of women, whether it is inside the home, whether it is in public, or whether it is in our courts by making laws. Therefore, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition should be more strict and more stringent in dealing with matters that have this kind of effect because it already has a snowball effect where people on social media are commenting that in some sections that what Honourable Bulitavu had said is right.

Is this the type of message you are going to send to our children, young people in high schools, universities? Obviously not a lot of them, but it is disheartening to see that some people do actually comment that, "yes, people in this country are *vulagi* even after 145 years of co-existence; that it is right to punch your wife because she is of a different built or of a different race. It is a disease and if it not stopped today it will spread.

Honourable Speaker, the Honourable Bulitavu is supposedly a lawyer, I do not know whether he has ever practiced or not or whether he has done his PDLP or not. But he is also the SODELPA spokesperson for defence; defence spokesman. Is this the type of defence spokesperson that a party

needs? A person who is to defending the people who have been wronged, who have been hurt, who have been forced to go to court to get their rights. Instead of defending them, he has attacked them. He has tried to use the stereotype that it is only Indo-Fijian women who engage in extra-marital affairs and that is the reason why they are murdered. It is totally outrageous to tell someone that you have murdered or you will be murdered because of this, this and this. It is insane. What about the laws of our country? What about our moral obligation to protect the women and girls of this country? What message are we sending out to our young people?

Honourable Speaker, the National Federation Party should get a lesson out of this. For years the Honourable Prime Minister has been telling them, that when there is racial attacks, when there is attacks based on ethnicity, they duck under the table. They do not object to it. In fact they remained silent. This is the day that was coming to them.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Honourable Speaker, had the National Federation Party taken a stand earlier, had the National Federation Party years ago at the start of the Parliament in 2014 taken a stance against this, they would not have seen this day. They are called *"vulagi"*, Fiji Labour Party is called *"vulagi";* it is not an attack on those two parties only, it is an attack on the people they represent.

In fact I am very surprised that the NFP leaders have only chosen to pay lip-service in condemning Honourable Bulitavu's comments. The media they were very soft because of the room that they are sharing has created that.…

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- It is this type of behaviour that has got NFP to where they are today. Had they been stronger, in fact, Honourable Qereqeretabua and Honourable Tabuya, these two Honourable Members are very quick to go on social media at a drop of a hat, whatever happens - social media, pictures and videos, why not in this case?

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- If you are worried about Indo-Fijian women, if you think about these Indo-Fijian women then what about the comment that iTaukei assaults on women were common given their built. If they are worried about women they would have commented by now, but, no, for political expediency.

NFP will not say it because they share the same values, SODELPA will not say it, they have already demonstrated, the leader has taken a shortcut out of it. Honourable Speaker, in the modern world, forget about Parliament, forget about the public even in sports, if you make a racist comment, you are thrown out. In football, in rugby, when someone makes a racist comment, FIFA throws the players out.

(Honourable Members interjected)

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- They do not like it, then listen, please. You people have no idea. Even in sports if you make a racist comment, you get banned.

The recent case of the rugby player Israel Folau made a comment that was not based on the principles of equality in Australia, he is still fighting a court case, but, what do we see here?

In Fiji's highest democratic institution, the Parliament, people have been making racist comments from day one and NFP has been ducking under the table and they are getting merit out of it. SODELPA is getting encouraged by the silence of NFP and that is a fact.

Honourable Speaker, our Constitution has enshrined the rights of everyone in this document. Section 36 (3) of the Bills of Rights clearly stipulates that: "everyone has equal rights in Fiji regardless of their race and their gender."

This is the Constitution that Honourable Bulitavu, Honourable Prasad and Honourable Pio Tikoduadua took their oaths under. To join this Parliament, they took oath of this Constitution and yet….

(Honourable Members interjected)

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- You will not understand, you are not the professor of law.

(Honourable Members interjected)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Honourable Speaker, in fact, our Standing Orders have been praised in many international forums that I have been to because this Standing Order is one of those rare ones where there is a special section for gender equality.

In Standing Order 110 (2) and I will read for the benefit of Honourable Members who do not understand the essence of it, it says:

> "Where a committee conducts an activity listed in clause (1), the committee shall ensure that full consideration will be given to the principle of gender equality so as to ensure all matters are considered with regard to the impact and benefit on both men and women equally."

The Standing Order which is the bible of this Parliament and which everyone follows makes a special provision for equality for women, and what do we get here, an Honourable Member of this Parliament goes out and makes comments like:

> "It is not *iTaukei* to murder and stabbing in the past was only done Fijians who are descendants of the indentured labourers. These affairs are common among married *Indo-Fijian* women in rural areas. For *iTaukei* assault for women were common given their built. In rural Vanua Levu communities, the use of patar …"

This kind of things, Honourable Speaker, is undoing all the good works that have been done by the Honourable Prime Minister from 2006, then after 2014 in bringing equality to the nation. Honourable Speaker, this type of behaviour should be condemned in the harshest stands by every Honourable Member of this Parliament, which the Members on the Government side are doing, not only to condemn the actions of Honourable Bulitavu, but to tell our future generations that gone are the days when you could call someone "*tevoro"* or someone "*vulagi",* gone are those days. With the

modern day and age, we are all equal here and our women and girls of whichever race they come from deserve protection and they deserve our respect.

(Honourable Member interjected)

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- They are not listening because they do not like it and this is the exact same thing I was trying to say, Honourable Speaker, when racial comments come, they hide, when racial comments are made outside, they try to defend them. These people are not racist, who said it? And what happen? One week later they got a taste of their own medicine.

With these words, Honourable Speaker, I fully support the motion that this Parliament strongly condemns the following statements made or published by Honourable Mosese Bulitavu in the media, including social media. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister for his statement. You have the floor, Honourable Member.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I rise today to contribute to the motion before the House, condemning Honourable Bulitavu's statement on women and our status in this country. Honourable Speaker, Sir, the comments made by the Honourable Bulitavu has made an emotional impact in our communities and I was shocked to hear of those remarks which are completely unacceptable.

Language works like this has a flippantly no place in politics or in today's society. You might find it entertaining to some members of the public but it has a hurtful impact to women of this country. Mr. Speaker Sir, these women who Honourable Bulitavu referred to has toiled the land and helped build this country. These women were once silent due to cultural and language bearings. These women not only had to care for their families but worked day and night to put their children and grandchildren through schools for education to have a better life than theirs.

These women Honourable Bulitavu referred to, Mr. Speaker, Sir, are our grandmothers, mothers, aunties, sisters who we owe our life to and deeply thanked too, who we look up to and greatly respect within our communities who now have been de-humanised for his political game.

Honourable Speaker, these comments I think were made by desperate politician wanting to be relevant but as an education person, a lawyer, husband and as a grandson, son and as a Christian, he is well aware of the repercussions it can make.

He is well aware of the cause and effect of such degrading statement that cause tension and hatred amongst people, tribes, families, neighbours, communities and friends. I really cannot say what the Honourable Bulitavu was expecting from such comments however, he chose that path. Honourable Speaker, these derogatory statement made leads to hate speech which is offensive on race and religion. There is an overlap between the two, it can be defined as all forms of expression which spread inside, promote or justify racial hatred or other forms of hatred based on intolerance.

Statements given by Honourable Bulitavu can cause deep social divides, repeated exposure to racist speeches can increase people's prejudices, feelings of being threatened, hatred and propensity to violence. Statements of hate and racial divide distance individuals. It normalises behaviour which is otherwise unacceptable, it arouse anger and fear and provides a surge of stress hormones.

It makes it harder for people to control their emotions and think before they act. Honourable Speaker, Sir, Honourable Bulitavu should know that statement that he made can disengage morality and

cause de-humanisation which can trick a specific group or some women and can build up distrust and contempt against the group of people been referred to. While statements of hate and racism becomes normalise, it becomes socially acceptable to discriminate and oppress a particular group when hate speech is systematically developed.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, we must, as Members of this House urge our communities and community leaders to intervene early to prevent such speech from being normalised. Once it is normalised the de-humanisation of our group is difficult to reverse. The holocaust is a classic and extreme example of how hate speech can mobilise a population to commit terrible atrocities. The Jews were considered by Nazi Germany, requiring fumigation by the Iranian State.

Honourable Bulitavu, with this extremist views, should be expelled from his Party, however, one can only really tell what views the other Members are supporting. To degrade this more, the women of Opposition have never made any comments to reject statements of racism or prejudices of discrimination and of hate.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, statements given by Honourable Bulitavu cannot be defended on grounds of freedoms of speech because it inflicts real and direct harm making way to dehumanise outsiders as second class citizens, not deserving the protection and dignity afforded to full members of the communities.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, we have heard throughout the week Honourable Salote Radrodro's concern about violence against women and children and yet she has no will to address this issue with her male Members. All her concerns here in Parliament is just like painting a wall, just here to make a statement with no effect at all.

Honourable Speaker, it is amazing how loud and seemingly concerned the women Members from across the floor can be when the House is in session and when the cameras are rolling. I know for a fact that these women have spoken in public debates, attended workshops locally and regionally in regards to women empowerment and in promoting women engagement in business and becoming role models in communities.

However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it baffles me when they all turn a blind eye and pretend that all is all right, as if nothing happened when a statement of dehumanisation was given generally to women of ethnic background who have given their all and their best for the country they call "home".

Honourable Speaker, how can this be? When these women Members of Parliament have made such comments in this august House either absolutely concerned or in total support of women's empowerment. This shows that making a scene here, was all put-on.

Honourable Speaker, on the *vulagi* statement, I am totally with the Honourable Prime Minister in saying that the term is usually used when visiting a village or a community, not a national level when it does not apply to those who were born here, and consider this land their only home they know and love. This is their home, this is their land, they love and will always love.

Honourable Speaker, similar extreme views expressed by Honourable Bulitavu is the very reason why the world around us had gone to the state of destruction when ideal state of a country stirring of racial disharmony causing ethnic dehumanisation of human beings, who were all created equal under the sun. We need to seriously ask ourselves: How do we want our children and grandchildren to live - in hate, bitterness and in jealousy? We are the role models we are what they will become.

Honourable Speaker, with these few words I sincerely hope with all my heart that derogatory comments will not be condoned. I urge all members of the public and leaders of the community to work together to help build this country to be a better place for our children and the most vulnerable in society. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, you have the floor.

HON. V. NATH.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I wish to share my view in condemning the statement made or published by Honourable Bulitavu in the media, including social media. At the outset, I must say that the comment made by the Honourable Member is total disgrace and his apology is not enough to take away the pain of what he said. What makes the statement even more deplorable is that they are not supported by fact and also that it is coming from a Member of Parliament who has taken an oath to serve our people.

As a Parliamentary Member, Honourable Bulitavu knows too well he has the nation watching and listening to him. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am born and bred in rural community in Baulevu, Nausori and living peacefully with all living in that area. We are all one family. I feel very ashamed, I would say "*madua vakalevu*", when I first heard about the comment, especially when I think about the women in my community and particularly, the elderly woman. My question is that, how is such statement coming out from an Honourable Member of Parliament?

A Parliamentarian is someone that is seen as a leader, whom the community looks up to in bringing about change, someone who makes decision at the highest level in Government, someone whom people believes in, someone who brings positive thoughts in improving the livelihood of people, someone who is sensitive and caring for all citizens. It is extremely sad and disgraceful of a man being sustaining to be so irresponsible in his comments towards the issue of violence against women, stereotype and tragic.

We need not get away from this racial stereotype. People do not commit crime because they are of a particular race or religion but because they are criminals. This is a fact that we cannot deny.

We are glad majority of Fijians not only from Fiji but overseas, who strongly condemn Honourable Bulitavu's statement and call for his resignation. This statement is not only an insult to Indo-Fijian but also to the *iTaukei* women and an insult to everyone.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, I can say this with conviction as a Member of FijiFirst Party, had any Honourable Member of FijiFirst Party said this he/she would not be sitting in this Parliament today. Behaviour will not be tolerated as we are a Party build on principles of respect, humanity and equality.

Speaking of family, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I really believe that we as a nation are part of a big Fijian family (*matavuvale levu*). This is why I am proud to be part of the FijiFirst Government as it has sealed in the 2013 Constitution for all to be called Fijians.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are part of a family under one house. The comments made by Honourable Bulitavu is contrary to this. How can we build a nation, if Honourable Members like Honourable Bulitavu want to constantly divide us? Even the *Bible* says, and I quote from Matthew 12:25:

> "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand."

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Honourable Bulitavu's comment is totally unacceptable and I totally condemn such act, and totally support the motion before the House. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Vijay Nath for his statement. Honourable Dr. Salik Govind, you have the floor.

HON. DR. S.R. GOVIND.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Cabinet Ministers, Honourable Members of this august House and members of the public; I rise to contribute in support of the motion to condemn Honourable Mosese Bulitavu on his derogatory statement about our mothers and sisters in this country.

Our nation has been blessed to have a multi-ethnic society with such cultural and traditional diversity. We are the only such nation in the Pacific region and only a few in the world, who enjoy such a status.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our Government under our most distinguished Prime Minister, has continued to put in place national policies and plans so that all our citizens can continue to enjoy the basic human rights without any fear of colour, creed, race and ethnicity. This has also contributed towards Fiji's membership to the United Nation Commission on Human Rights.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am shocked and dismayed that a person of such standing in our community and in this august Parliament has the audacity to make such derogatory public statement affecting our mothers and sisters.

Honourable Bulitavu's statement has socially and psychologically affected, not only the indo-Fijian women but their families and the entire nation and has even reached families abroad.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Bulitavu is not only a Member of this august House, but also a Member of the important Parliamentary Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights. The role of this Committee is to uphold and protect justice, law, and human rights of all our citizens.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I cannot understand how Honourable Bulitavu can carry out his role if he holds such a discriminatory and derogatory view against a particular ethnic group, and especially our women.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the citizens of our country look up on our Parliament as providing leadership and guidance, and statements such as of Honourable Bulitavu does not help in making our august Parliament credible.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as a Member for the Justice, Law and Human Rights Standing Committee, I had the opportunity to be part of the Committee receiving submissions from the general public on an important Bill, the Registration of Sex Offenders Bill in the Western Division recently.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Honourable Bulitavu was also part of this Committee. What I noticed at several meetings during the submissions that the attendance of the public was not only low but people were talking about Honourable Bulitavu's presence in such an important Committee in view of his statement in the media during the same week.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the damage that has been done through his statements cannot be undone. I urge the Honourable Members, to strongly condemn Honourable Bulitavu's statements, but also urge the Honourable Leader of Opposition to take appropriate action against Honourable Bulitavu.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for allowing me to make a few comments and I strongly support the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank Honourable Govind for his statement.

(Honourable Members interjected)

HON. SPEAKER.- If there is no one else wishing to take the floor, I will give the floor to the Honourable Attorney-General for his Right of Reply.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank you and I thank all the Members who have actually made a contribution.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I highlighted in the introduction and, indeed, as encapsulated by the Honourable Prime Minister, the reason why I brought this particular motion is to very strongly condemn the utterances by Honourable Bulitavu because of the enormous impact such utterances have by Members of Parliament. Its ability to influence people, its ability to set a political discourse of this country, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and that is precisely what we have been saying. It has been lost in NFP, Mr. Speaker, Sir and I say this with confidence, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I will come to this, the reason is that, as we have seen and I quoted from Natzi Germany and other countries, you can take the example, these prejudices are slowly built upon year after year, month after month, day after day, which seeks to permeate through every facet of our society. That is what we are scared of, that is what we are worried about and that is what we must stop.

The interventions in Government in 1987 twice, the interventions in Government in 2000, and I will come to 2006, Mr. Speaker, Sir, was premised on the idea of ethnic differences. There is a significant difference. When you have interventions in Government where it splits our society based on ethnic differences, it creates archaism, archaism that is very hard to fill, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and that is precisely what we have been trying to do, what the Honourable Prime Minister has being trying to do and what this Constitution seeks to do. That is what we are trying to address.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Honourable Professor Prasad talked about NFP being a great party, formed under a mango tree, et cetera. The reason why he keep on bringing this about, is because he has not addressed the substantive issue. He has not addressed the hypocrisy, Mr. Speaker, and it is an epitome of the hypocrisy that exists and I will show and demonstrate.

When Honourable Lalabalavu made those statements about NFP and Labour being "vulagi" parties, and is there on record,

Honourable Prasad made a statement saying, how can they call us a "vulagi" party when we have had iTaukei members? He quoted Honourable Tuisawau as being a member of NFP, and then he quoted Honourable Tikoduadua and Honourable Qereqeretabua as members. He said, therefore, as a result of iTaukei people being members of NFP, NFP cannot be…. (Honourable Member interjected)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, he said, as a result of iTaukei people being members of NFP, NFP cannot called a "vulagi" party. He missed the point! He missed the point that the Honourable Prime Minister is trying to make. That goes to show the shallowness and the impotency, and I have said repeatedly, the impotency of him as a leader of NFP. We do not want to know what NFP was like, we want to know what NFP is like today, not what it was like. We want to know what it is like today.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, he, of course, has obscured those comments. He, in fact, defended Honourable Qereqeretabua for not making comments. Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is not about defending. She had numerous opportunities but she did not.

But the point is, Mr. Speaker, the appeal made by Members of this side of the House, of this Parliament by the Honourable Prime Minister, the female Members of this side of Parliament, they did not let go. They spoke from the heart, they spoke about how they felt, they spoke about their own personal experiences as a woman, and the women on the other side had the opportunity to do so, not just tonight, but prior to tonight.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- And the reason why Members of this side of Parliament kept on talking about how they had the opportunity to do so when some of them were so active on social media on any comment. Yet, on this they were so deafeningly silent. That is the hypocrisy and that I think is what causes a lot more anguish to people than anything else. That is the hypocrisy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think the issue here is, heaven forbid, if one of the Members of FijiFirst had made such a comment, I can assure the Honourable Members that the female Members of the Opposition would have been there day in, day out. They would have let loose. Honourable Prasad and Honourable Leader of the Opposition would have let them loose. That is what would have happened, Mr. Speaker, Sir. But because now, it is one of them who is making the comment, they have, Mr. Speaker, Sir, allowed political expediency to get in the way of common human decency, common human principle and human rights.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is unfortunate that Honourable Prasad's impotency seems to be contagious. The Honourable Leader of the Opposition seems to get it now too. He has got that impotency now too. Mr. Speaker, Sir, he had a wonderful occasion this evening to take a principle position to condemn this and he could have shown leadership as our Honourable Prime Minister has done, leadership in condemning gender-based violence, leadership in condemning racial stereotyping but he failed to do so. Why did he do that, Mr. Speaker, Sir? The reason he gave was that there seems to be apparently, according to him, a legal impediment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Honourable Nawaikula had raised a Point of Order when I got up to submit my motion and you, very elusively and eloquently gave the reasons as to why you allowed this motion and the three points that the Honourable Nawaikula raised, you addressed them head-on. You pointed out that there is no issue of *sub judice*. Any good lawyer would tell us, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is no *sub judice* in place. There simply a complaint has been made.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, and to Honourable Nawaikula's credit, he accepted your ruling quite graciously. One of those rare occasions, he accepted your ruling quite graciously and Mr. Speaker, Sir, despite that the Honourable Leader of the Opposition raised exactly the same rationale to not make a comment. In other words, he has shown contempt for what you had ruled. That is what he has done, Mr. Speaker, Sir. It would appear the wimpish approach of the Leader of Opposition is because he has given in to political expediency. It would appear, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that the Honourable Leader of the Opposition does not want to make those statement against racism. He does not want to make a statement against gender-based violence because simply it was someone who made that comment, it is someone who sits behind him.

I am not here to speculate about how much power Honourable Bulitavu weaves in that political party, it is not my business. But what I am saying, Mr. Speaker, Sir, what today demonstrates, when the day he made his comments, how the President, Honourable Tuisawau made certain comments; the supposed apology which was again a wimpish apology. None of that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, has augured well for us.

None of them, Mr. Speaker, Sir, has showed us any particular type of stoicism, any particular resolve and adherence to principle position; not of that. Political expediency has got in the way and the Honourable Leader of Opposition's rationale for that has today meant, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that the female Members of his party are not able to stand up and speak today. They did not stand up and speak. No point saying no now; they did not stand up and speak. They should have been the first ones and for me, I kind of question now, this Parliamentary grouping of women parliamentarians that they have with their great terms of reference. It is all hollow, all hollow if you cannot stand up at the right time.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, also the Honourable Leader of the Opposition's position has meant that the Honourable Members like the Honourable Jale who I know has been influenced by the NGO and has a lot of good comments to make, and does make the right position known as he did with the Maritime Industry Act, Mr. Speaker, Sir. He himself was not able to speak because of that, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Today marks, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the epitome, this is a perfect example of how political expediency trumps over basic human decency, dignity and righteousness.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am reeling to say this because I am quite astounded by the Leader of the Opposition's rationale for not speaking against this. He has been the Prime Minister of Fiji. He is actually a seasoned politician. He was able to remodel himself from a military person to a Prime Minister, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

He has been the Head of the Executive, he has been the Head of the Defence Forces, he knows, he knows when the matter is *sub judice* or not. He knows that in his heart. The Honourable Leader of the Opposition does know that, Mr. Speaker, Sir. But again, it is not about the Honourable Leader of the Opposition usurping the powers of the Police or the DPP, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Parliament has certain privileges too, and no one has been charged.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is in fact being disingenuous. We constantly had spoken about coming to this House and being upfront. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I highlighted the issue about this us and them mentality. We have seen it constantly manifesting itself in Parliament, jibes here, comments there, agriculture analysis based on ethnicity, keeping the answers based on ethnicity, who is getting the services, justification of racial DBM is stereotype as it maybe, Mr. Speaker, to the extent, and I remember thinking about this.

I remember a few sessions back, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and this is how trivial it gets. I think the Honourable Minister for Sports talked about how Roy Krishna won this International Award and everyone stood up and congratulated him. Honourable Leawere, after a while stood up and said, "We must not forget the rugby boys."

Areh, we were talking about Roy Krishna. We were talking about football. It is not a threat to rugby. We all love rugby. When the Fijian Sevens Team does well, we congratulate them, we talk about them, we give them the accolades, we do not have anyone from this side saying, "yeah, but we must not forget about the football team. Let us not forget about Roy Krishna." We do not say that!

It is that sense of insecurity, Mr. Speaker, Sir. It is that sense of prejudice that permeates through every faculty. That is what we must get rid of, Mr. Speaker, Sir and if the Honourable

Members on the other side were honest with themselves, they give themselves a moment to contemplate and do a bit of self-reflection. They need to do some self-reflection, Mr. Speaker, Sir, because that is what is required indeed after this statement that has been issued.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we need to make progress in our country. We need to stand up and speak out when something as momentous as what has been done happens in our country. There is certain basic values and principles that we must always speak out against, we must stand up against, or speak for if it creates that level of anxiety in our society and has an ability to affect our society, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, with those words, I would like to emphatically say that we must all vote in condemnation on the utterances by Honourable Bulitavu because it is actually anathema to a free and democratic society where everyone's rights and privileges are maintained. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General.

Honourable Members, the Parliament will now vote.

That Parliament strongly condemns the following statements made or published by the Honourable Mosese Bulitavu in the media, including social media –

> *"Tovo vulagi sega ni vaka iTaukei sega ni vakarisito* (Translation: This foreign behaviour is not *iTaukei*, nor Christian)
>
> Murder and stabbing in the past were only done by Fijians who are descendants of the indentured labourers from British India and was never part of Fijians who are *iTaukei (*Indigenous Fijians) are now slowly sharing some *itovo vulagi* (Translation: foreign behaviour). *Keda na iTaukei eda sega ni dau veidomoni vaka tu oqo, me tini ena laba*. *E tiko na kena itovo kei na kena ivakarau yavutaki ena vakarokoroko.* (Translation: We *iTaukei* do not engage in romantic relationships like this to the extent where it leads to murder. We have customs and traditions based on respect).
>
> It is not *iTaukei* to murder if a relationship breaks down because we have our *bulubulu* custom (tradition of seeking forgiveness).
>
> I was brought up in Labasa and it was common to hear an Indo-Fijian man murder his wife is she is caught in an affair in the cane settlement.
>
> These affairs are common amongst married Indo-Fijian women in rural areas in Labasa. *Qahtai maro* was a slang that is well known and refers to a knife that is well sharp.
>
> For *iTaukei,* assaults on women were common, given their built. In rural Vanua Levu communities, the use the *juri* or *patar* was common with *Indo-Fijian* boys when we get into a fight. But again it is uncommon or *vulagi* for *iTaukei* men to use knives or stones."

Honourable Members, does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Ayes' and 'Noes')

Votes cast:
Ayes - 30
Noes - 21

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, there being 30 Ayes and 21 Noes, the motion is therefore agreed to unanimously.

Motion agreed to.

Honourable Members, just a point I have said it before, when we have motions, I look around to see who wants to take the floor and I looked around, looked around, looked around today and I nearly got sleepy just looking this way and this way, you have to indicate to me. And the thing is, once I give the floor to the mover of the motion for his right of reply, that is it. So I am willing to take and give you a chance to make a contribution, but, you have got to help me because it gets very lonely up here.

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we still have another Agenda Item to attend to which we will do now.

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

Vunisea Government Station – Status of Generator
(Question No. 171/2019)

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA asked the Government, upon notice:

> Would the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Disaster Management and Meteorological Services advise Parliament on the status of the generator(s) at Vunisea Government Station in Kadavu?

HON. J. USAMATE (Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Disaster Management and Meteorological Services).- Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Thank you, Honourable Member, for the question about the generators in Kadavu.

The Ministry has just acquired a number of new generators for somewhere around $1 million. One of these generators has just now been installed in Vunisea on 21st July this year (2019). This is a 350kva generator, it is currently operating and provides services for 18 hours per day for the consumers in Vunisea. I think that is the short answer to it. The generator is in place and it is providing the services for Vunisea up to Namalata.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I just want to ask a supplementary question. If I could ask the Honourable Minister, how many generators have gone through the Vunisea Government Station over the last 12 months to 18 months, please, because I understand there have been a lot of breakdown of generators and replacements? Thank you.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Vunisea had a hybrid system, has a solar plant and then you have a generator so that they help each other out. With the storm surges that we had out of *TC Keni* in April 2018, that storm surge impacted on that particular generator. So, there was a standby generator that could not function so they have to hire an alternative generator to take the place of the standby generator.

Now, that we have bought our new generators, one of the seven that we have bought. Three of these generators had been put in Nabouwalu, others have been put into Lakeba and Rotuma but the new one that we have put in with 350kva, we now have plans to extend. The Ministry is looking to extend the network not just from Vunisea but also to Mokoisa, Wailevu and Tavuki. That will extend the grid that will allow us to use 80 percent of the capacity of that new generator. That is something that the Ministry is now looking at doing.

HON. SPEAKER.- For the second oral question for today, I give the floor to the Honourable Jale Sigarara to ask Question No. 172/2019. You have the floor, Sir.

Forensic Investigation Capability in Fiji and the Region
(Question No. 172/2019)

HON. J. SIGARARA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Defence, National Security and Foreign Affairs brief this Parliament on the Forensic Investigation capability in Fiji and the region?

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU (Minister for Defence, National Security and Foreign Affairs).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I thank the Honourable Jale Sigarara for this question.

Forensic investigation capability is a very critical component of the work that the Police performs and I am thankful to the Commissioner of Police and his Management Team for developing this capability in the most recent past.

I am sure a few Honourable Members of the Opposition have been through the facility. I remembered when I joined the Ministry of Agriculture, some of these work were undertaken in Koronivia, but basically, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it includes six major Units:

1. Crime Scene Investigation - I am sure the Honourable Members of the Committee who went there would have seen the new kits that have been given to them. The crime scene is very critical for the investigators and these kits have been decentralised to the Divisions as well. If the team from Suva needs to be deployed, they will just come, pick up these boxes in the four Divisions, or the members who are in the Division, because we are still training them, and decentralising them.

2. Criminal Records - That is where all the records are kept. For those who want to be enlisted and have their records cleared, that is where criminal records are kept.

3. Forensics Fingerprints - Very critical, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Before they used to do a lot of dusting but now they have a technology that can be used there.

4. Pathology - This is quite new, they have their own doctors now. They have been able to do, I think, more than 800 cases in the last year.

5. Forensics Chemistry - This is the component and biology as well, used to be in Koronivia where they were assisted by the Honourable Minister for Agriculture. Sir, apart from Fiji, we also have responsibility with our small Pacific Island States.

6. We provide the services to Vanuatu in terms of DNA and drug analysis, crime scene investigation to Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu, as well to Kiribati and Fingerprint Training to most of the other Pacific Island countries.

I will stop there, Mr. Speaker, Sir, unless there are further questions from the floor. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- We will move on to the third question for today.

Policies Ensuring Sufficient Supply of Tuna to PAFCO
(Question No. 173/2019)

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

> Can the Honourable Minister for Fisheries inform Parliament on the policies put in place to ensure PAFCO receives sufficient supply of tuna to ensure continuous operation?

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU (Minister for Fisheries).- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, and I thank Honourable Rasova for the question.

Sir, Government has always supported the operations of PAFCO and we will continue to do so. It is important to understand that Fiji's current fleet cannot sustain PAFCO's albacore demand, which is the main tuna species that is being manufactured at PAFCO by Bumble Bee. To address this, the Ministry of Fisheries has put up plans to secure raw tuna for PAFCO with the support of line agencies and partners.

Apart from working closely with Bumble Bee and Fong Chung Formosa (FCF), the Ministry of Fisheries has mapped out plans, looking to have a robust future of tuna supply. In short, Honourable Speaker, we need to attract more fishing vessels to come to Fiji and unload more tuna for PAFCO and other value-adding companies.

The plans, including our discussions with Pacific Islands up North, consisting of countries that are under the Party to Nauru Agreement (PNA), have vast EEZ and a lot of supply of tuna. We are working closely with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on negotiations to ship some of the tuna down to Fiji which will then re-supply PAFCO.

We are also looking at joint ventures in securing tuna within the Northern Countries, especially Kiribati and Tuvalu, that have tuna joint ventures with commercial countries to fish out there, and then bring the tuna back to Fiji.

We are also looking at fishing spots. We are trying to establish fishing spots here in Suva and one in Lautoka. This will allow more fishing vessels to come in and offload, and this will secure more tuna for PAFCO and other value-adding companies that operate within Fiji.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. Honourable Viliame Gavoka, you have the floor.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Honourable Speaker, during the scrutiny with the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, PAFCO indicated that they get 70 percent of tuna from Bumble Bee through the Taiwanese connection but 30 percent, they believe they can buy within Suva. They were promised by the Ministry of Fisheries that they would be given an indication of the volume of Albacore landing in Suva and making their way elsewhere. They are still waiting for that promise to be fulfilled. When can Ministry of Fisheries secure that information and pass it on to PAFCO? Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, the capacity in PAFCO is 30,000 matrix tonnes. At the moment the fishing vessels that are unloading tuna in Fiji can only supply 19,000 matrix tonnes (which is about 60 percent of total capacity). As I have alluded to, it basically plays on supply and demand. If Bumble Bee and PAFCO are able to buy at the price that the fishing vessels are offloading here then the supply will be consistent. If they are not able to meet the prices that has been dished out by the fishing vessels that unload fish here, we cannot interfere into the process of demand and supply.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. We will move on to the fourth oral question for today. I give the floor to the Honourable Alexander O'Connor to ask Question No. 174/2019. You have the floor, Sir.

Illegal Sand & Gravel Extraction – Control of
(Question No. 174/2019)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources update Parliament on what measures has the Ministry taken to manage and control illegal sand and gravel extractions in the country?

HON A. SUDHAKAR (Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources).- Thank you, Honourable Speaker and I thank Honourable O'Connor for that question.

Honourable Speaker, in the previous years, the Ministry has received numerous complaints on the uncontrolled and illegal extraction of sand and gravel from all the Divisions mainly due to the increasing demand by the construction industry for roads and infrastructure. The limited supply of the sand and gravel natural resources cannot meet the accelerated demand, hence sand and gravel resources are being exploited unsustainably and more so, illegally. Consequently, the Ministry has taken drastic approaches to resolve this.

The first of that step is, foremost the Ministry has created six new positions with a budget of $410,000 for technical assistance, Natural Resource Duty Officers for river gravel and sand monitoring. Their role is to monitor river gravel and sand extractions and other natural resources under the administrative authority of the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources.

These Natural Resource Duty Officers provide ground monitoring on sand and gravel extractions. They provide necessary support services to supervisors in relation to the administration and monitoring of such resources and routine update of royalty on such operations. Also, they conduct awareness to local communities on the subject of river gravel and sand extractions and other related natural resources.

The iTLTB issues licences from dry land pits. In collaboration with the Ministry, joint inspections by the two agencies are carried out to resolve any boundary disputes that may arise which would have led to illegal extraction.

Many of these disputes concern flood plains, as rivers naturally change formation over time. What may be under water now, will not be in 10 years' time. Therefore, the more the two agencies work together, it would benefit Government's effort to reduce such illegal extractive activities.

The Officers were trained in their first year at Mineral Resources Department on the importance of their roles and responsibilities. In addition, they were also trained on the field, that is, to build and strengthen their technical capacities and know-how.

This financial year, the Officers will be deployed to the three Divisions and they will be supplied with vehicles to assist their field monitoring inspections. These Officers will work with Divisional Land Managers, solely focussing on the monitoring of river gravel and sand extractions.

Honourable Speaker, the Ministry is also working on finalising a River Gravel Extraction Management Guideline. This Guideline will provide further information on the obligation of the requirements for people undertaking gravel and sand extraction in Fiji. Furthermore, the Guideline aims to provide a balanced supply between demand for gravel and sand extraction, and the need to provide some system of control place.

In addition, the Ministry has also sought legal advice on the possible grounds of charging illegal extractors of river gravel and sand. There have been incidents where police are only able to support the Ministry in issuing stop work order, but cannot proceed to lay charges due to the ambiguity of relevant laws and which under review.

Honourable Speaker, discussions have been underway with FRCS on the import of machineries and effective regulation of the import of the use of mobile crushers. The Ministry is liaising on a collaborative platform for control of mobile crushers which is widely used in illegal river gravel crushing operations.

I would also like to state, Honourable Speaker, there being highlighting in various media reports that illegal extracting gravel and sand without permission is actually theft of State property and it does not only cause a loss to the State, it also causes a direct loss to the landowners, who are entitled to the royalties from the extractions. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua, your supplementary question.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, a supplementary question for the Honourable Minister. As the Honourable Minister has said that there will be monitoring groups checking on illegal extractions or making sure there is no illegal extractions.

A request from some people that use the Navua River daily if it might be possible to allow them, the daily users, to sight extraction companies' licences. In the event that the Ministry or the monitoring groups cannot make it in time or waiting for police, would be local communities, those who use the river daily be allowed to sight the licences. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Honourable Speaker, when someone applies for a gravel extraction licence, there is a checklist that we provide to them. They have to get the approval or permission of the *mataqali or vanua* to use the river channel for their fishing rights. They also get from us their EIA. They also get the rock sample analysis and they also have the application letter with the company searches and everything.

The contractors who are extracting on site will not know whether the person asking for the licence is actually from the *mataqali* or not. So, I advise the Honourable Member, the people who have queries can straightaway approach our Divisional Officers in their respective Divisions and they will

show them the copies of the licence, if they are members of that particular landowning or fishing right owners. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Saukuru.

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Honourable Speaker, thank you. Just a supplementary question for the Honourable Minister. I received complaints from the Western Division landowners who are wanting to get licence for extracting gravel. The process is normally delayed. Have you got plans for facilitating the issuance of licence for extraction of gravel?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Honourable Speaker, as I had explained just now, there is an entire process that has to be followed because we just cannot issue licence to the first applicant. There has to be the following requirements, there has to be:

- an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA);
- a rock sample test;
- the waiver of fishing rights; and
- application letters.

In fact, there is a whole checklist.

If those landowners do wish to apply for a licence, they can come to the Divisional Office, they can produce all their documents and after they have done their part, it does not take long.

We have issued licences and I think Honourable Ratu Matanitobua can testify to that. His *mataqali* applied for a licence, they have complied with all the requirements and they were issued a licence within three days.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, we will move on to the next Oral Question for today. I give the floor to the Honourable Mikaele Leawere to ask his question.

Monitoring and Registering Slumlords
(Question No. 175/2019)

HON. M.R. LEAWERE asked the Government, upon notice:

> Can the Honourable Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism, Local Government, Housing and Community Development explain to Parliament if there are strategies in place to monitor and register slumlords, who exploit victims by way of high rental charges?

HON. P.D. KUMAR (Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism, Local Government, Housing and Community Development).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

The issue of slumlords and informal settlement is complex and it is extremely difficult to monitor and register slumlords. The reality is, we do not even have a register for legal landlords so registering slumlords is going to be even difficult.

I would like to mention here that whenever we acquire development lease, the Ministry conducts a socio-economic survey. This is done. And the socio-economic survey data is collected and kept.

But what I would like to say now is that, we need a lot more expertise in collecting such data. So in that regard, the Ministry will be conducting socio-economic surveys with assistance from UN Habitat Fiji, after which a database will be developed. So all those 43 areas where we have acquired the development lease, fresh surveys will be conducted with a wider scope.

The data collected will allow the Ministry to capture accurate, social and spatial information. At the same time, the Ministry will collect information on tenancy arrangements, if any, within the informal settlement. That is all I have to say, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister. Honourable Lynda Tabuya, you have the floor.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I have a question for the Honourable Minister about these slumlords who actually live in the settlements and I have seen quite a few where they actually do not just charge rent, but they actually supply water and electricity illegally to about a few homes around their own home.

What is the Ministry doing about that to check on these slumlords that are not just illegally, but also unsafely supplying water and electricity and also really doing it quite unjustly and unfairly? In the instances where they are unhappy with their tenants, they cut the water or electricity.

HON. SPEAKER.- Question.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- That is the question, Honourable Speaker.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, that responsibility does not lie with the Ministry of Housing. We have got Water Authority of Fiji (WAF) and we have Energy Fiji Limited (EFL), so they take that responsibility head on.

To begin with, anyone living in an informal settlement, as you know, they are living there illegally. In fact, previously, water and electricity was not provided to the settlements. But it was under this Government that water and electricity was being provided through letters that the Ministry of Housing wrote on their behalf.

So, if there is any form of stealing going on in terms of water and electricity, it is a matter for WAF and EFL to deal with that.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Leawere, you have the floor.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I have just heard the Honourable Minister say that those who are living there are living illegally. Then what can the Government do to make their living there legal?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, they can be made legal, provided they have the development lease. And as I said previously and I had mentioned it several times that we have more than 250 squatter settlements and the recent count has shown that it is actually over 300 squatter settlements that we have around Fiji.

So, the only way we can make it legal is by acquiring development lease and after acquiring developmental lease, then we need to develop the area and after developing the area, we give them the title. So that is the only way, we can do it.

HON. SPEAKER.- We will move on to the sixth Oral Question for today. I give the floor to the Honourable Alvick Maharaj to ask his question.

Progress on Mosi Flood Retention Dam No. 3
(Question No. 176/2019)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment update Parliament on the progress of Mosi Flood Retention Dam No. 3 that was under construction in the upper Nadi Watershed?

HON. DR. M. REDDY (Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment).- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to thank the Honourable Member for asking this question.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Nadi River flooding has been an issue, a challenge to the Government for a long time. Like Rakiraki, we are now dealing with the Nadi River flooding as well. The expert report from JICA suggested a number of interventions which are now being now underway and one of the intervention is to develop retention dams up in the catchment along the rivers that feed into Nadi flatland so that we smooth the amount of water that comes during the heavy rains.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are two rivers that contribute to flooding in Nadi Town, Nadi area and the Nadi flat basin. These are the Mosi River and the Nawaka River.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the expert report suggested construction of 12 retention dams. Up until now, four have been constructed - two in Mosi River and two in Nawaka River.

Last year, we started to construct the third retention dam in Mosi River. The retention dam, as I alluded to earlier that the purpose of the retention dam is, when there is heavy rain, the water will be collected in these dams and then it will be released slowly which will minimise the gushing down of a larger volume of water beyond their discharge capacity of the waterway and, therefore, spill out.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, 28th of June, a month ago, the dam construction was completed. We are now in the defect liability period so dam construction is completed at the value of $1.8 million.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are looking at now constructing a third. We have completed five - two in Nawaka, three in Mosi. We want to look at the third in Mosi River. At the moment, EIA is being undertaken at the spot at the Mosi River where we want to construct the fourth retention dam.

So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the good news is that, we will very soon be formally commission and this will be commissioned by the Honourable Prime Minister. We can get the date. So, it is now there and that will provide a much more relief in terms of smoothening the volume of water that will come down, should there be a major rainfall up there in the catchment. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. Honourable Kuridrani, your supplementary question.

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Honourable Speaker, I rise to ask a supplementary question to the Honourable Minister.

Can the Minister inform the House what is the status of the proposed seawall that was supposed to be constructed in your last year's budget that has still not being constructed today? Will they be constructed especially in the Western Division: Namatakula, Votua in Nadi and in Ba?

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- And Naboutini?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Honourable Speaker, let me just say if this question is on Mosi Dam. It has nothing to do with riverbanks and seawalls. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Rasova.

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I would just like to ask a supplementary question. Would the Minister advice Parliament whether free prior informed consent of the landowners was obtained prior to this project initiated? *Vinaka*.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.-Mr. Speaker, Sir, yes. That was what I was saying for the Mosi Dam we are undertaking EIA. One of the requirements of the EIA is to undertake consultations with the landowners and of course to get 60 per cent consent from the *mataqali*.

HON. SPEAKER.- We move on.

Honourable Members, I have allowed for this 7th Oral Question which was supposed to be asked by the Honourable Mosese Bulitavu to be asked by Adi Litia Qionibaravi. You have the floor, Madam.

Availability of Passports to Fiji Citizens
(Question No. 177/2019)

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI asked the Government, upon notice:

Would the Honourable Prime Minister and Minister for iTaukei Affairs and Sugar Industry inform Parliament on the availability of passports to Fiji citizens?

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA (Prime Minister and Minister for *iTaukei* Affairs and Sugar Industry).- Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Honourable Speaker, I rise to respond to the question from Honourable Qionibaravi. She does not look like Mosese Bulitavu. No! That is alright.

Honourable Speaker, from 2011, Fijian passports have been printed by a company called Oberthur Technologies known as IDEMIA, which is a company based out of Australia. We initially awarded the tender to IDEMIA to print Fiji's first ever machine readable passport books and the passports are currently in use in Fiji today.

But as time has marched on and Immigration Departments around the world have grown more sophisticated, Fiji's passports need to evolve to keep pace, and the security features of our passports in particular are in need of updating to protect them against forgery and identity theft. That is why we are undertaking a transition from paper-based passport to a new state-of-the-art e-passport.

This new upgraded e-passport will contain a new range of security features that will make it more difficult for people to illegally enter the country, and easier for Fijians to travel overseas to use e-passport gates and to speed through airport Immigration queues.

Honourable Speaker, we are not only making Fiji safer, we are making travelling easier. We are also setting Fiji up for wider visa-free status access around the world.

In embarking on the plan, Honourable Speaker, the Department of Immigration puts out an Expression of Interest (EOI) to attract bidders. Unfortunately that process was marred by interference from the then supplier, IDEMIA. Essentially they attempted to hold Fiji to ransom saying that, they would not supply a whole lot of stock of passports unless they were the successful bidder of the EOI.

Mr. Speaker, that is not how Government does its business. We do not tolerate any manipulation of the process that promotes good governance, transparency and accountability and we certainly do not accept companies dictating their own terms. So we ended our contract with IDEMIA.

Unfortunately, other bidders from that Expression of Interest failed to meet the stringent requirement we set out. But after a comprehensive global search, we enlisted a new supplier in March of this year, a German company named Muhlbauer Mozambique Lda Services.

As with all of our boldest project we were determined to find the very best partner and I am proud to say that we have found that with Muhlbauer Mozambique Lda, the international leader in passport innovation with its technology in the passports of highly developed countries from around the world. We have engaged their services over a period of six years to print new Fijian passports, which featured integrated circuits embedded in the cover containing the passport holder's biometric information. With the roll out of these passports, Mr. Speaker, Fiji joins the ranks of 54 other countries who have already ingrained such technology within their passports.

Honourable Speaker, when I say e-passports, I do not mean that passports are going entirely online, we are still talking about physical passport books and these books simply come equipped with a new range of security features. The biodata page, for example, is a polycarbonate seven layer heat pressed page, printed with multi-imaging techniques. But, while these e-passports are considerably more sophisticated, that does not mean they take longer to produce, in fact, just the opposite.

Mr. Speaker, our previous supplier was producing around 120 traditional passport books a day. However, our new supplier Muhlbauer Mozambique Lda can print that same number of e-passports in one hour; that is a serious upgrade. And we expect the first of these new passports to become publicly available from the 26th of this month.

Also, Mr. Speaker, for the first time ever the Department of Immigration is introducing official passports in accordance with Section 9(a) of the Passport Act 2002. As per the Act, official passports will be issued to members of the Disciplined Forces travelling on peacekeeping duties.

Given the tenable demands of our previous supplier, the Department of Immigration faced the brief passport shortage. However, the Department has been issuing temporary travel documents, including emergency passports and certificates of identity and also issuing normal passports from our reserves to ensure that those who need to travel are able to do so based on individual destination country requirement.

Later this month, Honourable Speaker, the Department will be issuing our new state-of-the-art passports, opening up a whole new range of opportunities for Fijian travellers and bringing a new level of security to our immigration system. I should mention, Honourable Speaker, that Fiji's current passport are still entirely compliant with the International Civil Aviation Organisation standards and every Fijian who holds a passport can continue to use that passport until its listed date of expiry.

Honourable Speaker, ladies and gentlemen and Members of Parliament should note that every Fijian is entitled to receive a new passport. There is no *vulagi* passport or an *iTaukei* passport, there is only one variety of Fijian passport carrying that beautiful view of Fiji blue. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Prime Minister. We will move on to the next question, the eighth Oral Question for today, by the Honourable Vijay Nath. You have the floor, Sir.

Human Rights and Gender Based Violence Training
(Question No. 178/2019)

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

> Can the Honourable Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation update Parliament about the dynamics of Human Rights and Gender Based Violence Training for its staff and what are the objectives and importance of this training?

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA (Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation).- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I think this evening we have heard quite a bit about gender-based violence from this side of the House and it is really good that we are ending tonight with another question on gender-based violence.

We can never say enough about gender-based violence because of the statistics that is staring at us in the face. Honourable Speaker, we heard about the underlying principles that lead to gender-based violence; about unequal power relations between men and women; about deep-seated, deep-rooted, discrimination against women; about gender stereotyping; and about statements that continue to inculcate the powers between men and women in Fiji.

The Human Rights and Gender Based Violence Training is run by the Fiji Women's Rights Movement and in collaboration with them, the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation thought it wise that as the Ministry being mandated to put in place policies and programmes to combat gender-based violence in this country, that the officers who deal with it are first empowered, that they have the right capacities to firstly recognise the nuances of gender-based violence.

That is the main reason why this gender-based violence training is run for officers of the Ministry. We have had two so far, the first one in September last year, the second one in July this year and the aim is to basically empower all officers within the Ministry to know about the nuances surrounding gender-based violence in this country.

Honourable Speaker, on that note, this training has also been run for Members of Parliament over the past years and it is saddening to know that despite this training, we still come up with sexist remarks in this House. It tells us as a nation, as a government, that we still need to do more, particularly in this House, and I hope that with what we have heard today, the fact that they have been so quiet about gender-based violence today from the other side of the House, that we will continue to foster forward and bring in the right awareness, the capacity building that we need so that we are able to stand up and condemn violence in the face when it happens in our country. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Supplementary question.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you Honourable Speaker and thank you the Honourable Minister for those comments. I remember yesterday the Honourable Minister had cited one challenge when she was asked what were the main challenges faced with the Ministry was changing of mindset. I would like to ask the Honourable Minister what plans are in place to be able to take that programme across the Civil Service and whether the Ministry has the resources to be able to do that? Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. It is good to know that there is interest from the other side on gender-based violence. Finally. I thank the Honourable Member for the question.

Yes, in relation to this particular training, apart from Parliament, the same training has been done in partnership with the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, the Fiji Police Force, Fiji Military Forces, Ministry of iTaukei Affairs and it is ongoing.

I am grateful for the assistance from the Australian Government through DFAT that has been funding a lot of these programmes. They are seeing the importance to change mindsets and yes, we are doing it in the Civil Service. We have been doing it for Parliamentarians but we have got to see the fruits of it and, unfortunately, I have yet to see that in this House from the other side.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, that ends the Oral Questions. We will now move on to the first Written Question for today, and I give the floor to the Honourable Tikoduadua to ask his question. You have the floor.

Written Questions

Police Investigation on Missing Children
(Question No. 179/2019)

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

> Would the Honourable Minister for Defence, National Security and Foreign Affairs table the full details of police investigations from the years 2014 to-date, by month, age, gender, division/area – on missing children and teenagers; the general circumstances of going missing; whether they remain missing or have returned home; the workforce hours spent on investigating these cases and trends related to these reported incidents?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU (Minister for Defence, National Security and Foreign Affairs).- Mr. Speaker, I will table my response at a later sitting date as permitted under Standing Order 45. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the second Written Question for today was supposed to be asked by the Honourable Mitieli Bulanauca, but I will call out for Honourable Lynda Tabuya to ask this Question. You have the floor, Madam.

Hydro-Power Plans
(Question No. 180/2019)

HON. L.D. TABUYA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Disaster Management and Meteorological Services inform Parliament on the Hydro-Power Plans for the nation?

HON. J. USAMATE (Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Disaster Management and Meteorological Services).- Mr. Speaker, I will table my response at a later sitting date as permitted under Standing Order 45. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- We move on to the third Written Question for today.

Visa Conditions by Foreigners - Measures to Monitor Compliance
(Question No. 181/2019)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Prime Minister and Minister for iTaukei Affairs and Sugar Industry inform Parliament as to the measures undertaken by the Department of Immigration to monitor compliance with visa conditions by foreigners?

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA (Prime Minister and Minister for iTaukei Affairs and Sugar Industry).- Mr. Speaker, I will provide the answers at a later sitting date as permitted under Standing Order 45. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Members. That ends the Questions for today.

Just a note on the reply to Written Questions which should come in regularly, not take two months or three months – regularly. So I will be checking on those Written Questions.

Honourable Members, we have had a long day, I thank you for your forbearance and for your participation in today's sitting. We adjourn till tomorrow morning at 9.30.

The Parliament adjourned at 9.58 p.m.