

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



DAILY HANSARD

MONDAY, 14TH MAY, 2018

[CORRECTED COPY]

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MONDAY, 14TH MAY, 2018

The Parliament met at 9.35 a.m., pursuant to adjournment.

HONOURABLE SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

Hon. Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum, Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications; Minister for Education, Heritage, Arts & Library Services and National Archives of Fiji
Hon. Lt. Col. Inia Batikoto Seruiratu, Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development and National Disaster Management and Meteorological Services
Hon. Ratu Inoke Kubuabola, Minister for National Security and Defence
Hon. Rosy Sofia Akbar, Minister for Health and Medical Services
Hon. Mereseini Rakuita Vuniwaqa, Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation
Hon. Commander Semi Tuleca Koroilavesau, Minister for Fisheries
Hon. Osea Naiqamu, Minister for Forests
Hon. Jone Usamate, Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations
Hon. Parveen Bala Kumar, Minister for Local Government, Housing, Environment, Infrastructure and Transport
Hon. Lt. Col. Laisenia Bale Tuitubou, Minister for Youth and Sports
Hon. Alexander David O'Connor, Assistant Minister for Health and Medical Services
Hon. Lorna Eden, Assistant Minister for Local Government, Housing and Environment
Hon. Veena Kumar Bhatnagar, Assistant Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation
Hon. Viam Pillay, Assistant Minister for Agriculture
Hon. Iliesa Delana, Assistant Minister for Youth and Sports
Hon. Vijay Nath, Assistant Minister for Infrastructure and Transport
Hon. Parmod Chand
Hon. Mohammed Mursalinul Abe Dean
Hon. Jiosefa Dulakiverata
Hon. Viliame Rogoibulu Gavoka
Hon. Semesa Druavesi Karavaki
Hon. Ro Teimumu Vuikaba Kepa
Hon. Ratu Kiniviliame Kiliraki
Hon. Jilila Nalibu Kumar
Hon. Dr. Brij Lal
Hon. Ratu Naiqama Tawake Lalabalavu
Hon. Alvik Avhikrit Maharaj
Hon. Ratu Suliano Matanitobua
Hon. Alivereti Nabulivou
Hon. Ruveni Nadabe Nadalo
Hon. Niko Nawaikula
Hon. Mataiasi Akoula Niumataiwalu
Hon. Ratu Tevita Navurelevu Niumataiwalu
Hon. Howard Robin Thomas Politini
Hon. Prof. Biman Chand Prasad
Hon. Aseri Masivou Radrodoro

Hon. Salote Vuibureta Radrodro
Hon. Lt. Col. Netani Rika
Hon. Balmindar Singh
Hon. Prem Singh
Hon. Ashneel Sudhakar
Hon. Samuela Bainikalou Vunivalu
Hon. Mikaele Rokosova Leawere

Absent

Hon. Josai Voreqe Bainimarama, Prime Minister and Minister for *iTaukei* Affairs, Sugar Industry and Foreign Affairs
Hon. Faiyaz Siddiq Koya, Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism and Lands and Mineral Resources
Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy, Minister for Waterways
Hon. Commander Joweli Ratulevu Cawaki, Assistant Minister for Rural and Maritime Development and National Disaster Management
Hon. Anare Tuidraki Vadei

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Friday, 20th April, 2018 as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Madam Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome

HON. SPEAKER.- I welcome all Honourable Members to the May Parliament sitting.

I also welcome members of the public joining us in the gallery and those watching proceedings on television and the internet and listening to the radio. Welcome to your Parliament and I hope that you will enjoy today's proceedings.

Honourable Members, we have with us this morning the Members of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces who are attending the Regimental Sergeant Major's course in the RFMF Training Academy in Vatuwaqa and part of its training schedule is to observe Parliament proceedings. We extend our very warm welcome to you boys and we hope that you will enjoy today's proceedings.

(Applause)

Responses to Written Questions

For the information of Honourable Members, the Secretariat had received responses to Written Question Number 140/2018 to the Minister for Waterways; and Written Question Numbers 151/2018, 164/2018 and 165/2018 to the Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism, Lands and Mineral Resources. These responses have been conveyed accordingly to the Honourable Members who asked them and they are also available on *Facebook*.

Budget Address – 2018-2019

Honourable Members, the Acting Prime Minister the Honourable Attorney-General had informed the Business Committee that the Budget will be presented on 22nd June, 2018.

Pursuant to Standing Order 99 (3), the Members are given a week to examine and prepare responses to the Budget. In that respect, the July sitting of Parliament that was scheduled for 9th July, 2018 to 13th July, 2018 will now be moved a week earlier and the Budget debates will commence from the 2nd July, 2018 to 6th July, 2018. Thank you, Honourable Members.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND CERTAIN DOCUMENTS

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Members. In the absence of the Acting Prime Minister who is still to arrive, we will move onto the next item on the Order Paper and we will resume with the Order Paper when the Acting Prime Minister arrives.

Give us a minute please, especially the Honourable Nawaikula

(Honourable Acting Prime Minister arrives)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Welcome. When you are ready Honourable Acting Prime Minister, we are onto the Presentation of Papers and Certain Documents and you have reports to be tabled.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Speaker, my apologies.

Madam Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 38, I present the following Reports to Parliament:

1. Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption Annual Report 1 August 2016 to 31 July 2017 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 46 of 2018*);
2. Fiji Broadcasting Corporation Limited Annual Report 2010 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 09 of 2018*);
3. Fiji Broadcasting Corporation Limited Annual Report 2011 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 10 of 2018*);
4. Fiji Broadcasting Corporation Limited Annual Report 2012 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 11 of 2018*);
5. Fiji Broadcasting Corporation Limited Annual Report 2013 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 12 of 2018*);
6. Fiji Broadcasting Corporation Limited Annual Report 2014 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 54 of 2015*); and
7. Fiji Broadcasting Corporation Limited Annual Report 2015 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 13 of 2018*).

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Please, hand the Reports to the Secretary-General.

(Reports handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. SPEAKER.- Under Standing Order 38 (2), I refer the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption Annual Report 1 August 2016 to 31 July 2017, to the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights.

Also, under Standing Order 38 (2), I refer the following Reports to the Standing Committee on Social Affairs:

1. Fiji Broadcasting Corporation Limited Annual Report 2010 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 09 of 2018*);
2. Fiji Broadcasting Corporation Limited Annual Report 2011 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 10 of 2018*);
3. Fiji Broadcasting Corporation Limited Annual Report 2012 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 11 of 2018*);
4. Fiji Broadcasting Corporation Limited Annual Report 2013 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 12 of 2018*);
5. Fiji Broadcasting Corporation Limited Annual Report 2014 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 54 of 2015*); and
6. Fiji Broadcasting Corporation Limited Annual Report 2015 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 13 of 2018*).

I now call upon the Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations to table his Reports.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Madam Speaker in accordance with Standing Order 38, I present the following Reports to Parliament:-

1. Ministry of Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations - Annual Report 2014 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 07 of 2018*);
2. Ministry of Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations 2015 - Annual Report (*Parliamentary Paper No. 73 of 2015*); and
3. Ministry of Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations - Annual Report 2016 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 55 of 2018*).

HON. SPEAKER.- Please, hand the Reports to the Secretary-General.

(Reports handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. SPEAKER.- Under Standing Order 38 (2), I refer the following Reports to the Standing Committee on Social Affairs:

1. Ministry of Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations - Annual Report 2014 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 07 of 2018*);
2. Ministry of Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations 2015 - Annual Report (*Parliamentary Paper No. 73 of 2015*); and
3. Ministry of Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations - Annual Report 2016 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 55 of 2018*).

PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs to present the Committee's Report.

Standing Committee on Economic Affairs – Report on the Fiji Commerce Commission 2014 and 2015 Annual Reports

HON. L. EDEN.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs was tasked with scrutinising the Fiji Commerce Commission (FCC) 2014 and 2015 Annual Reports. Upon deliberations and discussions with the FCC, and given the time that has lapsed, the Committee chose to put forward a consolidated report as follows.

The Committee was confident that the FCC was well positioned to continue to play its role and accomplish its mission, which is to foster a competitive, efficient, fair and informed marketplace, to enhance the welfare of all Fijians.

In 2014, the Commission received 882 fair trade related complaints while only 384 were recorded in 2015. This increase in compliance was a clear indication that the Commission continues to strive towards efficient and effective practices. This was also a testament of the Commission's efforts to invest in the way they engaged with their stakeholders through outreach programmes, such as radio talkback shows, education programmes in schools and print media.

The Committee noted that resolving anti-competition conduct can be very complex, particularly when dealing with monopolies. The Committee recommended that the FCC continue to develop its network with independent stakeholders such as the Asian Development Bank (ADB), World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) to assist the Commission in these areas.

I thank the Committee Members, Honourable Vijay Nath, Honourable Alvick Maharaj, Honourable Viliame Gavoka and Honourable Prem Singh who were present in the production of this Report and also the Parliamentary Staff who assisted.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, I commend this Report to Parliament.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. L. EDEN.- Madam Speaker, 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. NATH.- Madam Speaker, 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 the motion?

(Chorus of 'Noes')

HON. SPEAKER.- There being no opposition, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs to present the Committee's Report.

Standing Committee on Economic Affairs -
Review Report on the Reserve Bank of Fiji August 2016-July 2017 Report

HON. L. EDEN.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, for the period August 2016 to July 2017, the Reserve Bank of Fiji (RBF) successfully met its core objectives of maintaining low inflation and an adequate level of foreign reserves, whilst ensuring a sound financial system. The Bank was able to generate sufficient income from foreign reserves, despite low interest rates prevailing in all markets.

Also of note was the growing asset portfolio which rose from \$16.8 billion in August 2016 to \$18.5 billion in July 2017, and further increased to \$19.4 billion by the end of 2017. This was almost twice the size of Fiji's GDP and the Committee commends the RBF for this impressive achievement.

The Committee was pleased to learn that the First Home Owner Facility qualifying threshold has increased from \$30,000 combined household income to \$50,000, and that interest rates are capped at 5 percent and can be rolled over.

Finally, the Committee would like to acknowledge and thank the former Governor, Mr. Barry Whiteside, for his service and leadership during his 40 years at the Bank.

I thank the Honourable Members who were involved in the production of this Report, and also the Parliamentary Staff who assisted.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, I commend this Report to Parliament.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. L. EDEN.- Madam Speaker, 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. NATH.- Madam Speaker, 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 the motion?

(Chorus of 'Noes')

HON. SPEAKER.- There being no opposition, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs to present the Committee's Report.

Standing Committee on Economic Affairs -
Review Report on the Fiji Revenue and Customs Service 2016-2017 Annual Report

HON. L. EDEN.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the Committee was pleased to note that the Fiji Revenue and Customs Service (FRCS) recorded an increase in revenue collection of 6.6 percent in 2016-2017, over the same period for 2015-2016, collecting a total of \$2.58 billion.

FRCS and the Fijian Government continued to reform the taxation system and we are confident that this will incentivise voluntary compliance, promote growth, and stimulate economic prosperity for all.

In addition, the organisation's Strategic Plan underwent an extensive review in 2016, focusing on four strategic focus areas, which were:

1. Partnership;
2. Legislation and Process;
3. People; and
4. Technology.

The Committee was also very impressed with FRCS's outreach programme, which not only provides valuable information, but also educates the general public on their tax obligations. It encourages self-assessment and correctly filed tax returns in a timely manner, creating a friendly taxation environment, which enhances voluntary tax compliance. The Committee recommends that this programme continues with a focus on specific groups in sectors which are still non-compliant.

Overall, the Committee was confident that FRCS continues to develop a robust, friendly taxation system that will maximise collection of Government revenue for the benefit of all Fijians.

I thank the Honourable Members involved in the production of this Report, and also the Parliamentary Staff who assisted.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, I commend this Report to Parliament.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. L. EDEN.- Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move:

A Motion without Notice that a debate on the contents of the Report be initiated at a future sitting.

HON. V. NATH.- Madam Speaker, 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 the motion?

(Chorus of 'Noes')

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

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights to have the floor.

Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights -
Review Report on the Online Safety Bill 2018

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I stand to present my Report on the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights to this Parliament.

I notice from the calendar and clock in front of me that today is 14th May, 2018 and the date is very significant for two reasons to all of us. Today marks the 139th anniversary of the arrival of the indentured labourers or the *Girmatiyas*, as they call it, a happy memory for all of us.

Also, today marks the 31st anniversary of the 14th May *coup* of 1987. On that day, Madam Speaker, a particular Colonel from the Army took over the Government and I am thankful to my leader and my Prime Minister, who has corrected the history of the past and brought us a Constitution which is fair to all of us. Under that Constitution, today we have made some revolutionary laws, one of which I am going to present to Parliament now.

Madam Speaker, Section 25 of the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji provides for the right of every person to access information held by the Government and to correct or delete false or misleading information that affects a person. Further, Section 150 of the Fijian Constitution provides that a written law shall make provision for the exercise by a member of the public of the right to access official information and documents held by the Government and its agencies.

Madam Speaker, a similar provision existed in the 1997 Constitution which provided at Section 174 that as soon as practicable, after the commencement of this Constitution, the Parliament should enact a law to give members of the Republic of Fiji, rights to access to official documents of the Government and its agencies. However, due to lack of political will or for some other reason,

none of the Parliaments constituted under the 1997 Constitution took the initiative to enact an information law.

It is this Government, Madam Speaker, and it is under this Constitution, that we have taken the initiative and it is the initiative that gives the right to each citizen to access official information. The Bill gives effect to a long overdue initiative of a Fijian Government that allows the people that freedom to access information.

We have heard numerous times, stories on how a decision was made by a Government agency against an individual but he/she was not provided any information on why the decision was made as such. There have been cases where tenders were submitted by people, their bids were refused, but they were not told why.

There are students who applied for scholarships, they were refused but were not given any reasons on why that decision was made. There are people who applied for jobs or promotions and were refused, but they never received any reasons on why such a decision was made.

The Information Bill, Madam Speaker, aims to empower the common Fijian to hold the Government and its agencies to account and to provide them with information on why a decision was made, provided the information directly affects a determination or decision made by a public agency in relation to the person making a request.

Such a provision ensures that while one person's right to access of information is furthered, another person's right to privacy is also protected. An example would be, while I can now use the law to know why my bid was refused, I cannot use it to know why another's bid was successful, therefore, protecting the business and trade secrets of the second person.

The Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights was tasked by the Honourable House to scrutinise the Information Bill and to provide a report to Parliament. The Committee, thereafter, held numerous public consultations to seek the views of the people.

The Committee, as part of its deliberations, also consulted the drafters of the Bill for certain amendments. Amendments were made to various Clauses and Sub-clauses of the Bill, and the amendment which were necessary have been made and marked in red in the copies of the Bill provided with this Report. The amendments were minor changes pertaining to drafting style and does not affect the substantive content of the Bill.

This Report will cover the Standing Committee's role in reviewing the Information Bill to ensure that all due processes regarding the Bill have been followed and to also ensure that the provisions contained in the Bill will contribute to the achievement of the Bill's objectives.

Some of the pertinent areas which the Bill addresses are as follows:

- Giving effect to Sections 25 and 150 of the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji, (Constitution 2013) whereby persons are given the right to access information held by Government;
- Providing for the implementation of functions of the Accountability and Transparency Commission;
- To recognise the right of a person to access information held by a public agency in accordance with the procedures prescribed in this Act;

- To ensure that a person is informed of the operations of a public agency, including, in particular, the rules and practices followed by the public agency in its dealings with members of the public; and
- to allow a person to make a request to correct or delete personal information held by a public agency in respect of the person to ensure that the information is correct, accurate, complete and not misleading.

At this juncture, I would like to thank the Honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights for their deliberations and input; the Alternate Members who made themselves available when the Substantive Members could not attend, the staff and officers of the Research Unit, and the secretariat; the entities who accepted the invitation of the Committee and made themselves available to make submissions; and the members of the public for taking an interest in the proceedings of the Committee and Parliament and for appearing before the Committee to make submissions.

I, on behalf of the Committee, commend the Information Bill 2016 to the Parliament and seek the support of all the Members of this august House for the Bill since it is designed for the greater good of all Fijians.

Madam Speaker, at this juncture, pursuant to Standing Order 121(1), I hereby table the Committee's Report on the Information Bill (Bill No. 34 of 2016), and pursuant to Standing Order 86, I request that it be set down for consideration by the Committee of the Whole Parliament on a future sitting day.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. SPEAKER.- Pursuant to Standing Order 121(1) and Standing Order 86, the Standing Committee has now reported back and the Information Bill (Bill No. 34 of 2016) is set down for consideration by the Committee of the Whole Parliament on a future sitting day.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights to have the floor.

Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights -
Community-Based Corrections Bill

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam. Speaker, I rise to present the Community-Based Corrections Bill, Bill No. 33 of 2016, to this august House.

Madam Speaker, Fiji is not immune to the impact of over-crowdedness of prisons, the cost impact it has on the taxpayers and the negative impacts that are faced by persons incarcerated in the prison system. This gave way to initiatives being introduced by the Fijian Government and the institutions responsible for these incarcerated persons to look at alternative ways to decrease recidivism and assist in rehabilitation of offenders.

However, the current laws are outdated and do not provide for vital provisions which have concrete effect on these initiatives. Therefore, the Fijian Government procured the assistance of local and international expert institutions in correction programmes, to try and fill this gap. Institutions

such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Fiji Department of Social Welfare under the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, who stepped up to assist the Government in this bold venture, thus the introduction of the Community-Based Corrections Bill 2016, which is a piece of legislation that aims to legislate community-based sentence options for courts in Fiji.

The Bill was referred to the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights by this august House for review and scrutiny. Apart from its own deliberations on the Bill, the Standing Committee considered numerous submissions received by it that highlighted certain issues.

Madam Speaker, during public submissions, the Committee was appraised of a startling fact and that is, that it costs about \$55 per day to keep one prisoner in prison. That would equate to over \$20,000 per year per person. If there are for instance 1,000 prisoners incarcerated, it would cost the taxpayers over \$20,000,000 per year to feed them and to look after them. If someone committed a minor offence such as theft of a loaf of bread or a can of *tuna* worth \$1 and was sentenced to imprisonment, the taxpayers would pay \$20,000 to keep him or her in prison for one year.

The alternative sentencing regime provided in the Bill, by no means, seeks to keep every offender off the prison system. As the old saying goes, “if you commit the crime, you do the time.” However, the Bill empowers the courts in appropriate cases to hand the offender an alternative sentence such as community work, such as weeding the local cemetery or cleaning the drains which is a way of giving back to the victims of crime.

The courts will be empowered to treat each case on its own merits. The Committee ensured that the views of the victims of crimes are also considered before an alternative sentence is considered by making it compulsory for the victim’s impact statement to be considered by the courts.

The Committee through the Parliament Research Unit also looked into other jurisdictions that have similar setups to which Fiji is aiming for by the introduction of the Bill.

The Committee, in its observation, also consulted the drafters of the Bill and this has assisted the Committee in its deliberation of the Bill.

This Report will cover the Standing Committee’s role in reviewing the Community-Based Corrections Bill, No. 33 of 2016, to ensure that all due processes regarding the Bill have been followed and to also ensure that the provisions contained in the Bill would contribute to the achievement of the Bill’s objectives.

Some of the pertinent areas which the Bill addresses are as follows:

- The provision of a range of sentencing options and the means for dealing with offenders, other than imprisonment;
- The provision for a victim impact assessment to be introduced to the court for consideration before sentencing;
- The establishment of conditions in order to facilitate and promote rehabilitation of offenders;
- The managing of rehabilitation programmes for offenders and their reintegration into the society;

- The provision of useful and timely information to courts to assist them in making decisions relating to community-based corrections;
- The administering of community-based sentences in a fair and effective manner; and
- the promotion of community participation and volunteerism in the community-based corrections programmes.

The review also highlights the reasons for needing such a Bill, such as the costly impact of having to provide for a prisoner whilst he or she is in custody. There was also consideration given to the gender perspective of the Bill and its impact on men and women.

Amendments were made to various Clauses and Sub-clauses of the Bill and the amendments which were necessary have been made and marked in red in the copies of the Bill provided with this Report.

I would like to also acknowledge that the Bill has been with the Committee for quite some time. In its pursuit to give the review due diligence, and due to the need for wider public consultations, a motion was moved to extend the time for the Committee to report back to Parliament on a later date.

At this juncture, I would like to thank the Honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights Committee for their deliberations and input; the Alternative Members who made themselves available when the Substantive Members could not attend; the staff and officers of the Research Unit and the secretariat; the entities who accepted the invitation of the Committee and made themselves available to make submissions; and the members of the public for taking an interest in the proceedings of the Committee and Parliament.

Madam Speaker, I, on behalf of the Committee, commend the Community-Based Corrections Bill, Bill No. 33 of 2016, to Parliament and seek support of all the Honourable Members of this august House for the Bill since it is designed for the greater good of all Fijians.

Madam Speaker, at this juncture, pursuant to Standing Order 121(1), I hereby table the Committee's Report on the Community-Based Corrections Bill (Bill No. 33 of 2016), and pursuant to Standing Order 86, I move that it be set down for consideration by the Committee of the Whole Parliament on a future sitting day.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. SPEAKER.- Pursuant to Standing Order 121(1) and Standing Order 86, the Standing Committee has now reported back and the Community-Based Corrections Bill (Bill No. 33 of 2016) is set down for consideration by the Committee of the Whole Parliament on a future sitting day.

Honourable Members, before we move on to the next item of the Agenda, I would like to remind the Chairs as I had previously requested that for every report tabled in Parliament, you must always include a paragraph on the consideration of gender as it is impacted in the reports. Thank you.

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

Resilience Project Agreement - FAO
(Question No. 166/2018)

HON. H.R.T. POLITINI asked the Government, upon notice:

Fiji signed a Resilience Project Agreement with the Food and Agricultural Organisation that will see the delivery of food security initiatives. Can the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management and Meteorological Services explain this initiative to the House?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU (Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management and Meteorological Services).- Thank you Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, first I wish to acknowledge the Honourable Member for raising this very important question.

I recall, Madam Speaker, that during the April Sitting of Parliament, I did highlight to this honourable House on the implications of climate change and climate-induced disasters in Fiji and particularly on the agriculture sector. Again, this is very important for obvious reasons, not only in terms of food and nutrition security but most importantly, how it affects households and, of course, the agriculture sector's contribution to Fiji's economy, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, in response to the question, let me highlight again before this honourable House that way back in 2014, there was a United Nations (UN) World Risk Report and in this World Risk Report, and this is where the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) is coming from, thus the partnership between Fiji's Ministry of Agriculture and the FAO.

The World Risk Report of the UN in 2014 identified Fiji amongst the 15 most exposed countries to natural hazards. Again, Fiji is amongst the worst affected and the most vulnerable when it comes to climate change and disasters.

In the South Pacific region alone, Madam Speaker, I know that Vanuatu tops this list, Vanuatu is the most vulnerable of all nations but Fiji is amongst the 15 most vulnerable countries, Madam Speaker. This involves the risks of cyclones, storm surges, flooding and, of course, the potential impacts of climate change.

You would also recall, Madam Speaker, that in the Paris Agreement under the Climate Change Agenda, we have launched what we call the 'Koronivia Initiative'. This is to address agriculture, particularly talking about climate smart and climate resilient agriculture because food security is very very important for all of us, given the fact that the UN also has identified that come 2050, we will need to feed an extra 10 billion people on this planet, Madam Speaker, and this is why the focus on resilience which I will come to later and, of course, this partnership with FAO.

Again, based on this Report, Madam Speaker, FAO is not only working with Fiji but I know that they also have identified some countries within the Southwest Pacific region to work on to address this issue, this common issue that we share Madam Speaker.

The partnership with FAO goes back a long time ago, Madam Speaker, and in the last 40 years particularly, we have been working very close with FAO, not only to address food security issues but most importantly to help us in terms of our development initiatives as well, given the importance of agriculture to the economy of the nation.

Madam Speaker, the Government of Fiji through the Ministry of Agriculture and the FAO have decided to co-operate on a project to strengthen the climate resilience of communities that are vulnerable to extreme weather events.

Madam Speaker, disaster will always be there and it is part of our society. It is, unfortunately, something that we cannot avoid but the best that we can do under the change in circumstances, Madam Speaker, is to prepare well, prepare better for the future, not only in terms of our development programmes, but most importantly during post-disasters when we deal with recovery as well. And this House has heard a lot of times about the Build Back Better Stronger concept because this is what resilience is all about. It is about preparing the people and the nation better for the future.

Madam Speaker, it focuses on food and nutrition security. I will not go into the details of food and nutrition security because health is a key stakeholder in this project, Madam Speaker, on Food and Nutrition Security. Again, given Fiji's problems in terms of food and nutrition security, I think I have mentioned this also in this House on what they call the Triple Burden of Malnutrition which I believe, Madam Speaker, you are well aware of is one of the major issues in this country.

The Agreement was signed with the FAO Director General, His Excellency José Graziano da Silva, on the 34th Session of the UN FAO Regional Conference for Asia and the Pacific (APRC) which we hosted in Nadi, Fiji from the 9th April to 13th April, 2018. This Project, Madam Speaker, is funded by the European Union and the main implementing agency, again, is FAO in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture.

Madam Speaker, this pro-resilience project aims to enhance national and local capacities to integrate disaster risk reduction in agriculture. Major efforts will be dedicated to strengthening communities' knowledge and means to identify and mitigate risks of having food security.

I will just end, Madam Speaker, by saying that there are two key areas focussed under these two major areas. We also have thematic within these two major areas.

The first one, Madam Speaker, is on improved climate risk identification and management. For us to be effective, we need to correctly identify the risks that are involved.

The second one, Madam Speaker, is how do we manage the risks? Like any other risks, risks can be:

- transferred;
- reduced;
- mitigated; or
- managed.

This is what this Programme is all about, Madam Speaker. That is the first key result area - identifying the risks and the management of those risks; at the national level, provincial level and village level.

Because of that, Madam Speaker, it involves the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Rural Development, meaning the NDMO because that is the regulatory arm of disaster and, of course, in terms of development as well, the Ministry of Rural Development itself and other key agencies, particularly the Food Security Cluster under the disaster management arrangement that we have in Fiji.

The other key result area, Madam Speaker, is just on climate smart and nutrition-sensitive agriculture techniques adopted by the vulnerable smallholder farmers. We have identified the risk in the first key result area and, of course, we need to learn to manage it.

Of course, when it comes to food security we need to look at climate smart and climate-sensitive agriculture and, of course, nutrition-sensitive as well, given the fact that I have talked about the Triple Burden on Malnutrition that seriously affects Fiji.

I will stop there, Madam Speaker, and I am happy to take on questions.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Professor Biman Prasad?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I remember when the Honourable Minister signed the Agreement, he actually talked about building resilience in the agriculture sector. My question to the Honourable Minister, is do we have a plan? Do we have a timeframe in which we are likely to achieve resilience in the agriculture sector?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. There are two parts to the question. My response will be in two parts; one, Madam Speaker, hopefully this week through a Ministerial Statement I will highlight on how disaster has seriously affected the performance of the agriculture sector, the yo-yo performance I would say, Madam Speaker, so that Honourable Members of this august House can understand, although Government is investing in the improvement of the agriculture sector but, of course, on the other hand, these are things beyond our control and this is why resilience building is so important. So, I intend to deliver a Ministerial Statement on the implications of disaster and disaster-related risks and calamities on the agriculture sector.

Secondly, Madam Speaker, yes, we have a timeline. This project, Madam Speaker, is for an initial period of three years. The cost is about US\$3.3 million and it has a timeframe of three years from 2018 into 2020.

I have talked about the two key result areas. These will involve the recruitment of about more than 150 staff - volunteers and fulltime staff, who will be very much involved in the training of the farmers and the stakeholders. I have talked about NDMO and what NDMO needs to have, what Ministry of Health needs to have, what the Ministry of Rural Development needs to do and, of course, Agricultural Officers as well.

This is very much in line with what I had explained in the April Sitting as well, Madam Speaker, about the International Funding for Agricultural Development Project (IFAD) that is currently being undertaken in Nadarivatu, the capacity building for our farmers is very, very critical. So that is the timeline, 2018 to 2020 - three years at the cost of \$3.1 million and, of course, there is a plan.

The FAO has a country office now in Fiji hosted by the Ministry of Agriculture and they will roll out their plan according to the Agreement that has been signed and these are all detailed in the Project Paper, Madam Speaker. As you know, the funding agency, which is the European Union, have very high standards on project implementation so all these are highlighted in the Project Paper that we have signed.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Niko Nawaikula.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Minister's answer is too general, it does not answer the question. I hear the increase in knowledge, I hear identifying the risks, I hear they are managing risks but could the Honourable Minister tell us specifically, what are some of the food security initiatives, the examples that we can look forward to as a result of this documentation or Agreement? Some examples, please!

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The first issue in food security, Madam Speaker, is to ensure that we feed our people and that involves production. That is where agriculture is so important. We have our commercial farmers, we have our subsistence farmers and I have talked about the training of more than 10,000 farmers under this project, Madam Speaker, so that they can learn to produce better yield with the limited land capacity that they have.

Production is the first, Madam Speaker, in terms of provision of food security. That is the responsibility of any government and, of course, with that, I wish to again acknowledge all the farmers in Fiji, who have continued to labour and commit so that people living in urban areas like us, are fed every day. Through the hard work of these farmers, the Honourable Member, has food on his table, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, to again highlight the fact that Fiji is doing well in terms of food security, Fiji was identified by the United Nations in 2014 as one of the first countries in the world to meet the Millennium Development Goal in terms of providing food security to its people. Madam Speaker, that is why Government is doing its best to continue to feed our people.

I have said this so many times in this House, Madam Speaker, it is not only about providing food, it is about giving the right food to our people. I have talked about the Triple Burden of Malnutrition, Madam Speaker, one is undernourished people, and that is the problem in Fiji. Stunting is a big problem. Anaemia, Madam Speaker, is the

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Member can go back and look at the World Health Report, anaemia is one of the biggest problems that we face in Fiji now.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- (Interjects)

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- And then people are

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Nawaikula, you have asked your question, please listen to the answer.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- That is the answer that he has given, please just let him answer. Honourable Minister, you may speak.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I do not know how else I can talk about food production. Well, the farmer has to take his fork and then go and dig, and then plant and then....

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Speaker, back to the Triple Burden of Malnutrition, the Honourable Member can learn from this:

- the lack of food; and
- lack of proper nutrition.

(Honourable Member interjects)

And what is the third, one Madam Speaker, I need to ask the Honourable Member, because he knows everything I am talking about.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Order!

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Speaker, the third for the information of

HON. SPEAKER.- ... everything you are saying, he says he already knows. So, in fact, I will terminate your answer to the question that was asked.

I now give the floor to Honourable Viliame Gavoka.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is always inspiring listening to the Honourable Minister for Agriculture. We are just wondering when are we going to see that agricultural revolution that he promised this House some time ago. Madam Speaker, he talks about preparing well, but can he enlighten the House on how he delivers this in terms of execution on the ground because last week our phones kept ringing hot, I mean everyone in this House? The distribution of assistance was a shamble, a disaster and it was all mixed up with home problems and agricultural problems.

This morning I got a call from Nadroga saying, what about agriculture? So, Madam Speaker, it is nice to hear about preparing and all that, what about execution on the ground? People are now going all over Fiji, standing in the sun, waiting for the Ministry of Agriculture to come and deliver what they promised. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- The onus is on the Honourable Minister to answer the question, if the question was clear.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- I did not really understand the question, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to Honourable Salote Radrodoro.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Can I ask him again?

HON. GOVT. MEMBERS.- No.

HON. SPEAKER.- No. Honourable Salote Radrodoro, you have the floor.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Can the Honourable Minister explain, roughly from the FJ\$7 million that is going to be allocated, how much of that is going to go to relevant key Ministries, like Ministry of Health, as you had mentioned and other Ministries for them to be able to have the kind of resources to implement your programme? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Speaker, I do not have the details but it is all in the project paper and the Honourable Member can get access to this, if she wishes. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Yes, I am just looking at the time now. We do not really have enough time, but maybe we can ask the question now so that all Members are aware of the question and over tea, we can think about it more. So I will now give the floor to Honourable Professor Biman Prasad to ask his question.

Enforcement of Review – National Minimum Wage
(Question No. 167/2018)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD asked the Government, upon notice:

Would the Acting Prime Minister inform Parliament of the timeline of the enforcement of the review of the National Minimum Wage rate of \$2.68 an hour as revealed in Parliament on 14th March, 2018?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I guess you can answer the question. Please, the Acting Prime Minister you have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM (Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications).- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the review has already commenced, thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Nawaikula?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- When can we expect a result?

(Laughter)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Once the review is completed.

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Gavoka.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam Speaker, will the review factor in the position of the Opposition side, that it should be \$5 an hour? Thank you.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, for any review to be credible, it needs to be independent, not to have input from people who have already pre-judged the matter. So, obviously any review has to be completely independent, has to be through all the stakeholders. Of course, anyone can appear before the review Committee and make their submissions. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Biman Prasad.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, we know that the last National Minimum Wage does not apply to the Wages Council, in fact some of the Wages Council Sectors were paying below the minimum wage. Would the Honourable Minister inform Parliament, is the terms of reference to the review going to take into account the wages sectors governed by the Wages Council as well, so that the minimum wage, whatever is determined is applied to those sectors governed by Wages Councils as well?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Acting Prime Minister.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I do not know where Honourable Professor Prasad gets his supposed facts from, it always seems to be incorrect.

The 10 Sectorial Wages Council also had a review and none of them get paid below the minimum wage. If he is referring to the trainees in the garment sector, that is a different category altogether. But all of them attained sectorial wages, they all in fact had a review and all of them had increases and in fact the salary rates are more than \$2.68 an hour.

In fact, they range from \$2.78 to \$5.57 an hour. In the case of a building foreman, the market range rate is \$10 to \$15 an hour, qualified electrician - \$8 to \$10 an hour. These are the market prevailing rates and, of course, the information is being given to us also, is that all of the 10 sectorial wages actually had increased too.

The minimum wage, Madam Speaker, let me reiterate, I think the Opposition is trying to obfuscate the issue. The minimum wage is only for those people who are of unskilled skill sets. So someone, for example, comes and cuts the grass at your house, anyone can walk out the street and come cut grass at your house, the minimum wage is applicable to them. If a person, for example, is doing nanny services or what we call 'house girls' in Fiji, it applies to them, Madam Speaker. It is a call for unskilled labour force. Everyone else actually has a higher rate than that. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- There being no further question, we will now suspend Parliament to have a break for refreshments and will resume at 11 o'clock. Thank you Honourable Members.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.27 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.00 a.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. We will resume from where we left off and I will now give the floor to the Honourable Alivereti Nabulivou to ask his question.

Update on the Commonwealth Youth Forum
(Question No. 168/2018)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Youth and Sports update the House on how many youths from Fiji participated at the recent Commonwealth Youth Forum, the assistance provided, and how were they selected?

HON. LT. COL. L.B. TUITUBOU (Minister for Youth and Sports).- Madam Speaker, the Acting Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition, I rise to respond to the question raised by the Honourable Member and I must thank him for the question.

The 11th Commonwealth Youth Forum was held in London from 16th to 18th April, 2018. “Powering Our Common Future” was the young people’s response to the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting theme of “Towards a Common Future” and illustrates the powerful potential of young people across the Commonwealth in devising solutions to more prosperous, secure, sustainable, and fair future.

The Commonwealth Youth Forum provided an opportunity for young people of the Commonwealth to build cross-cultural connections and networks, debate the challenges facing our young people and agree on youth-led initiatives to influence decision-makers and ensure young people have a voice in the future. The forum allowed young people to voice their concerns as representatives from the Pacific in global discussions towards achieving SDGs. This was, therefore, a potential avenue where our young people’s voice could be recognised and opportunities adapted to the Pacific.

Madam Speaker, with the significance of this event, my Ministry managed to send three youths. The invitation was circulated through the Ministry Divisions and their networks, and I was determined that those who were selected could reflect our diversity. The youth should be:

- aged between 15 to 35 years old;
- a Fijian citizen with a valid Fijian passport;
- involved in and have a sound knowledge of youth and sports development in Fiji;
- of good character; and
- required to provide a medical certificate and a Police clearance.

So the names were then screened and recommended to the Commonwealth Secretariat based in London. The applicants who met the Commonwealth’s definition of “youth”, being under 30 years of age were approved and comprised of two females and one male. The assistance by the Ministry was in terms of airfares, visas, meals and accommodation.

Thank you for the opportunity, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Professor Biman Prasad.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. The he Minister would recall that one of the recommendations of the declaration was collecting disaggregated unemployment data, particularly those relating to youth. Can the Honourable Minister inform Parliament whether the Government is going to accept that declaration and collect disaggregated data as mentioned in the declaration?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. LT. COL. L.B. TUITUBOU.- Madam Speaker, I must thank the Honourable Member. Yes, the Government will work on the collection of data. We are working together with the Bureau of Statistics and Nation Employment Centre (NEC) programme, where we will collect all the data on youths in Fiji. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Samuela Vunivalu, you have the floor.

HON. S.B. VUNIVALU.- A supplementary question, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Supplementary question

HON. S.B. VUNIVALU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. First, I would like to acknowledge the presence of the Warrant Officers and the tireless training cadre who are here. Is there any criteria in selecting the youth members and can you name the candidates? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. LT. COL. L.B. TUITUBOU.- Yes. Madam Speaker, I must thank the Honourable Member for the question. The names of the three youths from Fiji who participated in the recent Commonwealth Youth Forum were: Mr. Tomasi Vakausausa; Miss Herleen Emily Kumar; and Miss Hilda Vukikomoala. Mr. Tomasi Vakausausa is a representative of the Ministry of Youth and Sports.

Miss Kumar is a law student at the University of the South Pacific, and a social worker. She attended Sangam SKM College and Andrews Primary School in Nadi. She was also head girl at Sangam SKM College and the head of the Nadi Youth Club fostering about 20 youth members aged from 15-35. The third candidate was Miss Hilda Vukikomoala, she was the Pacific's representative at the Commonwealth Youth Council. She represented the Pacific Youth Council. Ms. Hilda recently attained a Bachelor of Arts Degree, majoring in Mathematics and Literature from USP. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER. Thank you. Honourable Dulakiverata, you have the floor.

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. A supplementary question.

HON. SPEAKER.- Supplementary question.

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- Can the Honourable Minister inform the House if there is a programme within the Ministry that would monitor the progress of these representatives when they return from the forum. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. LT. COL. L.B. TUITUBOU.- Yes, Madam Speaker. We have a monitoring tool to monitor the candidates. They have submitted their reports and also go out and do all the strategies that come up during the meeting. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Prem Singh.

HON. P. SINGH.- A supplementary question, Madam Speaker. Can the Honourable Minister inform Parliament, how will the Government comply with the declaration given that youth unemployment is the highest in the category of those unemployed in the country?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. LT. COL. L.B. TUITUBOU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I must thank the Honourable Member. Yes, unemployed youths register with NEC and whenever a vacancy exists in Ministries or Departments, they apply as volunteers and sometimes get that vacancy, but with the data collected, as I have answered before.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Ratu Suliano Matanitobua.

HON. RATU S. MATANITOBUA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. A supplementary question.

HON. SPEAKER.- Supplementary question.

HON. RATU S. MATANITOBUA.- The Honourable Minister had mentioned that only three youths qualified to represent Fiji. Can I ask the Honourable Minister, can the number be increased to five or seven? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. LT. COL. L.B. TUITUBOU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I must thank the Honourable Member. That is the figure given by the Commonwealth in London to provide three.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Now, I ask the Honourable Niko Nawaikula.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, I do not see in that list a youth representing the rural area who comprise of about 45 percent of our population. Can the Honourable Minister explain why no youth representative is included in that team?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. LT. COL. L.B. TUITUBOU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I must thank the Honourable Member for the question. Yes, time was given out to the Divisions and it includes rural youth as well. They came up with their qualifications screened, as I have mentioned, and sent to the Commonwealth Games. Those were the three candidates who were chosen.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to the Honourable Aseri Radrodoro to ask his question.

Basis of Share Offering - Energy Fiji Limited
(Question No. 169/2018)

HON. A.M. RADRODRO asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications advise the House on the basis of share offering in Energy Fiji Limited (formerly FEA) whereby Non-Subsidised Account Holders are offered 150 non-voting shares and Subsidised Account Holders are offered 250 non-voting shares?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM (Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications).- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the basis of offering the differential in the share allocation, Honourable Radrodro, is always to empower and enrich people who are at the lower end of the socio-economic scale because, as we know, the Government currently subsidises electricity cost to those people or households that earn less than \$30,000.

Those households, in the shares that we have given out now, they will receive more shares than those people who actually earn more than \$30,000, so we are trying to enrich and empower the people at the lower end of the socio-economic scale, and those who are obviously richer, we give them a lesser amount of shares.

HON. DR. M.T. SAMISONI.- A supplementary question to the Honourable Minister: the recent announcement on the privatisation of Fiji Electricity Authority to Energy Fiji Limited is that they are good and I certainly welcome it as a business person. But generally speaking, I am a little bit confused on the idea to be a good one, however, clarity is needed to understand how the scheme may tangibly be more inclusive of all Fijians and not just a coffer for income for the Fiji Government.

I have got about six questions but I know I am only allowed one, Madam Speaker. What does Energy Fiji Limited really offer; is it power and energy, or both? If both, how will EFL deal with options for people to have a solar system at home, the foreseeable risk to investing in utilities is a rising market of renewable energy?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, we have reiterated on a number of occasions in Parliament that it is not privatisation. Privatisation means when you actually sell the entity to private interest. We have said that it is a “divestment of Government shares”, now, to divest shares you need to actually have a limited liability company, you need to have a public company.

FEA is a statutory body, as you are aware, statutory bodies are created by statutes, it does not have shares. Now we have now corporatized FEA into Energy Fiji Limited which has shares therefore. What we have then done, and we have said that we will sell half of our shares to institutional investors, private investors. Government will still retain 51 percent because we believe energy is a strategic utility that Government needs to have control over. Everyone knows that Energy Fiji Limited, which used to be FEA generates electricity, distributes electricity and retails electricity.

There are many countries in the world, including Australia and New Zealand, where those three components of providing electricity have all been individually privatised, but FEA or Energy Fiji Limited will actually hold on to all those three components. However, this does not preclude the private sector in actually generating electricity to be able to supply to the Energy Fiji Limited grid so we have what we call “Independent Power Producers (IPP)”. So FSC, for example, is an IPP; Tropik Wood is an IPP.

There are various other companies that have actually made arrangements with Energy Fiji Limited to actually supply to the grid, so Energy Fiji Limited, buys electricity in bulk and then retails and distributes it through its cables and then sells it to members of the public. That is the model that

we are operating on and obviously as highlighted, we need to ensure that we have more contribution towards our electricity generation through renewal energy sources.

Renewal energy, of course, is free. You do not have to pay for the usage of the sun but the technology that existed to be able to harness the energy from the sun to provide electricity was actually somewhat archaic. It was expensive, technology every day is changing now, so we can use, for example, solar powered energy. We do have wind powered energy, tidal powered energy, various sorts of energy from renewal sources can be provided.

Now, Government has given an undertaking that by 2030, we will reduce the carbon footprint by 30 percent. Now, part of that are the three major sources: firstly, is actually depending on renewable energy; secondly, is having efficiency in transportation and using, for example, hybrid systems and public transportation; thirdly, of course, using increasing efficiency in the energy sector. This is why we should be able to use, for example, equipment that does not have the greater levels of efficiency usage of energy. So there are the three major components.

Just to address the fourth component of the question, Madam Speaker, the Honourable Member asked about; what can individuals do in respect of solar energy themselves? There are a couple of systems we have already highlighted in Parliament about this. There are some people obviously that have solar panels on their roofs. So, a very simple way to put a solar panel on your roof, when you turn on the hot water, the water is actually heated by a solar panel so you are not actually using energy from FEA, you are not using electricity from FEA. Of course, there are other companies now that come in to the private sector like Synergise. The company called Synergise (Fiji) Limited has actually outfitted Coca Cola's factory. So, Coca Cola's energy requirement is coming from the energy that is derived from the solar energy which is on their roof.

Port Denarau actually has that too. Many hotels are getting to that space. Now, the third part of that and which we are working with Energy Fiji Limited is for individuals to be able to generate electricity and be able to sell that to the grid. In some countries that has happened. So, for example, if your entrepreneurship skills are really good, you can actually cover your entire roof with panels. Now and then, the electricity generated from that you can actually sell it to FEA. You can use some of it, if you have any excess, you can sell it to FEA, now that requires obviously a whole heap of legal changes. It requires, for example, pricing mechanisms and those are some of the areas that we are working on and that is the third phase of it.

The last element of it, of course, is that there are many aspects to the energy accessibility so, for example, there are many villages and many deep rural areas in Fiji that do not have a chance for a long time to be connected to FEA. Imagine FEA running a power pole from Lautoka to the Northern tip of the Yasawa Islands, obviously it is going to be economically unsound to do that. So, we have what we call the "great stand-alone energy generation system" and that is very important to do so.

So, we have, through the leadership of the Honourable Prime Minister, teamed up with the Leonardo DiCaprio Foundation, where they have worked together to set up a trust, working with the NGO, together with Leonardo DiCaprio Foundation and, of course, Energy Fiji Limited now to have stand-alone systems. We have provided the seed funding for that, they have provided the seed funding for that and then people actually pay usage for that, but they get access to electricity and that is obviously very critical, that is all part of the ball game.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Dulakiverata.

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker, a supplementary question. Madam Speaker, the government is already subsidizing the electricity cost for these account holders. So, now that they are being offered \$250 non-voting shares, is the Government going to also subsidize the cost of shares? Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Acting Prime Minister.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, everyone, whether you are gaining 250 shares or 150 shares, you are getting it for free. So, it is subsidised - 100 percent, you are getting the shares for free.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Prem Singh.

HON. P. SINGH.- Thank you, Madam Speaker, can the Honourable Minister advise whether now that EFL is becoming corporatised and voting shares have taken into account the landowners whose land these EFL structures sit on, how does EFL hope to negotiate these lease arrangements that were previously negotiated, where the State depreciated them as public service compared to now - commercial arrangement?

HON. SPEAKER.- The Honourable Acting Prime Minister.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Member, I think, was in Parliament the day that I gave very detailed information in respect of the landowners and what land rentals they are being paid. They were paid peppercorn rent before, they are now being paid the increase rental that they are supposed to be getting for the land that has been used. They were also not compensated for the use of the land, they are now being compensated for that.

There are three elements of payments and they are also getting royalty payments. The amount of electricity that is generated they get a royalty payment and the amount of electricity that is generated from those sites, that is how they are being paid. I do not understand what your question is, the three levels of components have been paid.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Viliame Gavoka?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- A supplementary question, Madam Speaker: it is welcomed that the consumers are given these shares for free but we also remember, Madam Speaker, the landowners have expressed interest in buying some shares in FEA. Is Government considering a special allocation for them?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Acting Prime Minister?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, when we call for expressions of interest for the purchase or divesting of our shares, anyone can apply for the purchase of the shares.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Aseri Radrodoro, last question.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Madam Speaker, in terms of the share offering, there are those in the villages, in the rural areas who are prepaid customers and those that are post-paid. For prepaid customers, most of them do not fall under the subsidised account holders, so how does the Government intend to address that?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Acting Prime Minister?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- In fact, the Hon. Leader, I am sorry, I said “Honourable Leader”

Perhaps it is a sign of things to come.

(Laughter)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- The Honourable Member is actually incorrect because most people who do what we call “prepay” in the villages, et cetera, over 90 percent of them actually fall under subsidised category because most of them do not earn more than \$30,000. So they all get to 2 50-shares, so even prepaid customers (in fact I would venture out to say almost 100 percent of them all fall below \$30,000 income), they get 250 shares too.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to the Honourable Jilila Kumar to ask her question.

Addressing Road Fatalities
(Question No. 170/2018)

HON. J.N. KUMAR asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Local Government, Housing, Environment, Infrastructure and Transport inform the House on how the Ministry is addressing road fatalities?

HON. P.B. KUMAR (Minister for Local Government, Housing, Environment, Infrastructure and Transport).- Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I also thank the Honourable Member.

Madam Speaker, let me start by saying that road safety is basically everyone’s responsibility, in fact, it is a very wide subject. Madam Speaker, also it is not only the Ministry or the LTA, but it is also the Police that come into this subject matter. Unfortunately, I will be just speaking on the implementation of what LTA is doing right now.

Madam Speaker, the United Nations General Assembly has proclaimed the period 2011 to 2020 as the Decade of Action for Road Safety 2011-2020, that is, to reduce the forecast level of road fatalities around the World Bank regime activities conducted at the national, regional and global level.

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister launched the Fiji Decade of Action for Road Safety on 25th May, 2011 which introduced the seven focus areas which are:

1. Safer roads;
2. Safer vehicles;
3. Safer drivers;
4. Road safety education;
5. Post-accident care;
6. Accident data and research; and
7. Traffic law enforcement.

Madam Speaker, what the Ministry is doing, basically what LTA is doing is the installation of speed cameras by LTA nationwide from 10 poles with cameras in 2015 and now currently, we have 25. These are installed in black spot areas around the country, Madam Speaker.

Furthermore, Madam Speaker, LTA invested in the improvement on office processing equipment in 2017 to 2018, with an allocation of \$900,000. Madam Speaker, this will enable teams to reach customers more quickly within the specified 21 days' notice period.

On public awareness, Madam Speaker, Government, through LTA, has increased its awareness programme, both through mass media and community awareness programme. The print media which involves advertisement in the newspaper three times a week.

Madam Speaker, in terms of public awareness, some of the programmes undertaken by LTA are namely home visitation, driver intervention, safer pedestrian crossing, schools and community outreach programmes, billboards and road safety messages on bus stops.

Madam Speaker, in 2016, the total of 260 schools were visited in which our programme reached to a total of 87,936 students in Terms 1 and 2.

Upon request, Madam Speaker, again the team visited 31 schools with a total roll of 17,806.

In 2017, Madam Speaker, the team continued with our school visitation programme in which 76 schools were visited reaching out to 34,560 students.

Furthermore, Madam Speaker, LTA has introduced the 582 taxi platform to encourage and involve the general public in helping and supporting LTA to curb traffic infringement such as speeding, dangerous driving, running through red lights, mobile communication, loud music and defective vehicle.

In 2018, Madam Speaker, a total of 4,192 text messages were received from members of the public. I would like to thank all those general public who showed interest in this programme.

Madam Speaker, in terms of enforcement, as I have said earlier on that is not only LTA but it is also the responsibility of Police but having said that, now we have additional eight vehicles for the Enforcement purposes. LTA also increased manpower capacity in the Enforcement Unit by 20 percent since 2016.

In terms of Budget, the LTA Budget allocation for the Road Safety alone has increased by 48 percent from 2015, which was \$362,450 to \$700,000. A further increase by 22 percent from 2016 to 2017. For the financial year 2017 to 2018, the Budget was \$900,000.

Madam Speaker, to ensure safer roads, the FRA is responsible for providing a road network. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Parmod Chand.

HON. P. CHAND.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, I thank the Honourable Minister for his answer. On the same issue of road fatalities and the Minister's response of addressing them, can he confirm if by the same token the new Accident Compensation Commission of Fiji is anticipating increase in compensation claims and how swiftly the Commission can address them all?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Honourable Speaker, this directly falls under the Honourable Acting Prime Minister in terms of the pay-out, but I remember very well that before the launch, open invitations were sent to all the Honourable Members to be at the launch and unfortunately they were very busy and they could not attend. But if they did, they would have known the new system that we have installed.

HON. P. CHAND.- Answer your question correctly.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Semesa Karavaki.

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI.- Supplementary question, Honourable Speaker. I thank the Honourable Minister for his answer so far.

Honourable Minister, there was a Road Safety Council that was vested with the responsibility of taking care of road safety issues, especially the fatalities that they monitor of what is going on then, year by year. Would you please explain to the House whether you still maintain that Road Safety Council, and if it is not, then who is now responsible for the guilty that was taken care of by the Road Safety Council? Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Thank you, Madam Speaker and I also thank the Honourable Member. I think when he was there at Land Transport Authority (LTA), the Council was there, but that was more or less a duplication. So, right now, that is being looked after by Management. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Niko Nawaikula.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, previously when you looked at your television, you would see the fatalities this year compared to last year, a very good form of public awareness. Can the Honourable Minister consider reintroducing the publication of the comparative figures of all fatalities to the previous year as it used to have before on the television?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Yes, it is being done, Madam Speaker.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Fatality report. Every Sunday?

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Yes, I think you are very busy campaigning, you are not seeing it. Thank you Madam Speaker.

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- There being no other questions, I now give the floor to the Honourable Mikaele Leawere to ask his question.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE asked the Government, upon notice:

A recruitment drive by the Fiji Police Force on 30th April, 2018 attracted a large number of people for the interview but many were turned away as they did not possess a driving licence. Can the Honourable Minister for Defence and National Security inform the House as to why a driving licence is a requisite for Police selection?

HON. RATU I. KUBUABOLA (Minister for Defence and National Security).- Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the Honourable Member for the question.

Madam Speaker, the Fiji Police Force is currently undergoing restructure and reform in its endeavour to achieve the following:

1. Organisational and corporate relevancy;
2. Optimum business level performance;
3. Efficient and effective delivery of service; and
4. Command and control of criminal landscape.

Madam Speaker, the theme of the Fiji Police Force restructure and reform is 'Aligning Strategy Capabilities and Resources', and intend to create an organisational culture, branding and imaging to become a policing organisation that thrives on input and output based performance which is formed from the geo strategic landscape from where it operates in.

Madam Speaker, the rational of why driving licence is a requisite for Police selection from now and into the future are as follows:

1. There are no positions such as drivers in the Fiji Police Force. Only the Commissioner of Police has an allocation of a driver. Officers drive and attend to reports as well as follow up investigations themselves.
2. With the increase in number of vehicles, including motor cycles coming their way, there is a need for more drivers. At times, vehicles remain parked at the Police Stations as there are no drivers.
3. Being the major Traffic Enforcement Department in Fiji and with the increase of vehicle population in Fiji, policing this requires understanding of vehicle operations and getting a licence forms a basis of this.
4. United Nations and Regional Peacekeeping deployments, either for United Nations Peace Operations Review (UNIPOL) deployments or secondments, appointment has key requirements and deployment requirements as core competency, with at least Group 2 driving licence.
5. International, including some of our nearby countries like Australia, New Zealand and the Oceania Police Agencies have Police requirements, driving as an essential criteria.
6. Modernisation and transformation of Fiji Police Force and as catalyst to change in corporate culture augurs well in preparation of a new generation workforce for the future of the Fiji Police Force and the nation. A recruit candidate joining Fiji Police Force now will retire around 2050s. Thus Fiji Police is preparing a workforce, not only for now and tomorrow, but also for longer periods.

7. The Tier Model of a new Fiji Police structure will equip only certain number allocations of personnel, where there is no provision for so called extras as drivers. Thus, Madam Speaker, personnel allocated with these Tier modelled stations and community post will mandatorily have to drive to and from their deployment tasking of daily engagements by themselves.
8. Workforce of the Excellence; complete police officers, equipped with tools of trade, that is driving, swimming, English preferred second language and driving competencies to name a few, Madam Speaker.
9. Special Constables under the One Force Philosophy, Madam Speaker, will be absorbed or migrated into mainstream regular workforce, whereby adding requiring and enabling more front line police officers to operations and investigation deployment. Thus, the demand for Police drivers, per overall Police population will increase.
10. Cost to reduction of specialised drivers when all general duty officers can undertake driving duties along with other position descriptions.
11. Drastic reduction of driver population as officers promoted to officer or inspector level and above can no longer drive Police fleet. As such, Madam Speaker, younger Constables with entry level driving licence, officers need to be recruited and authorised to undertake and replenish a Police driver population.
12. Madam Speaker, a rise in specialist units within the Police Force has warranted specialised staff or units to attend to these specialised roles. The Fiji Police Force cannot afford to carry excess staff or drivers to these professional experts or staff. Rather, these officers need to attend to their duties themselves like driving rather than depending on some drivers to drive for them.
13. Recruit Constables equipped with driving licences shall form the source to graduate them to upper driving grades or classes, goods, heavy goods and Police mini and passengers busses. This to avoid recruiting upper class drivers and special constabulary for these purposes. Madam Speaker, ample time for preparation to acquire driving licences have been pronounced for candidates for this recruitment drive including postponement due to the two recent cyclones and floods.

It has never been that perspective candidates have been turned away from recruitment. Madam Speaker, requirement is based on multiple positive reinforced competencies and merit based multi criteria system in the likes of screening, aptitude test, agility test and personal interviews. Background checks of which physical ability to a certain assessment criteria is also tested and assessed.

Madam Speaker, let me assure this House that there is no element of discrimination or segregation to driving requirements as being an issue. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Supplementary question, Honourable Viliame Gavoka.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Supplementary question.

HON. SPEAKER.- Supplementary question.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Minister for a very comprehensive reply to the question but I think, Madam Speaker, you do not have to be an Einstein to understand that the vast majority of youths in the villages will not qualify for the Police Force because they cannot drive. Can the Ministry consider another path-way to enable our youths to take on this skill to drive, that is, we have Technical Colleges now in various parts of Fiji? Can you look at a pathway like that for them because if not, Madam Speaker, a lot of our youths will not be able to join the Fiji Police Force (FPF) because they do not have the skill to drive? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- The Honourable Minister.

HON. RATU I. KUBUABOLA.- I thank the Honourable Member. I cannot speak for the FPF on this issue right now but I will take it up with them. But I think, Madam Speaker, it is a requirement for recruitment. Just like going to school, Madam Speaker, you need to pass certain exams before you go to school. I would encourage that our young people in the rural areas to also acquire a driving licence if they want to join the FPF.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Semesa Karavaki.

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI.- Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I thank the Honourable Minister.

In view of the objective for officers who are recruited to properly understand the operation of motor vehicles, would you also consider to include in the criteria, the knowledge of motor mechanics? In order to realise or to achieve the objective for them to properly understand how a motor vehicle operates, would you also include in the criteria, the knowledge of motor mechanics?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. RATU I. KUBUABOLA.- (inaudible)

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Salote Radrodro.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker and I thank the Honourable Minister for his explanation.

From a human resource perspective, driving is a skilled job and I also believe the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) does not have driving as a requirement on their basic intake. Also, the Honourable Minister mentioned that the FPF is undergoing restructure. Can the Honourable Minister consider a review of the recruitment criteria, not to include driving because first, it excludes a lot of youth, who could be employed as police officers and also it is not a skill requirement for basic recruitment for Police?

I would say for Police recruitment, skill requirement would be communication skills, team work and problem solving. Those kind of skills, Madam Speaker, and not driving. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. RATU I. KUBUABOLA.- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Member. I apologise, we cannot consider that request.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Samuela Vunivalu.

HON. S.B. VUNIVALU.- Madam Speaker, a supplementary question.

HON. SPEAKER.- Supplementary question.

HON. S.B. VUNIVALU.- Madam Speaker, before this policy came into force, some policemen did not possess driving licence. My question is, in case of an emergency, can a policeman who does not possess a driving licence, drive a motor vehicle? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. RATU I. KUBUABOLA.- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Member. The answer is definitely 'no'.

HON. SPEAKER.- Last question, Honourable Dulakiverata.

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Minister for his reply.

This policy, Madam Speaker, is discriminatory, to say the least. What they are implying is that, every person in Fiji irrelevant of their background, had the means to obtain a driving licence or they must have a car in their own house. Can the Honourable Minister put in a policy so that after recruitment, they are given the time to acquire a driving licence?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. RATU I. KUBUABOLA.- No, Madam Speaker. That policy still stands and cannot be changed for recruitment.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

I now give the floor to the Honourable Ruveni Nadalo to ask his question.

Sigatoka River Banks - Rehabilitation Programme
(Question No. 172/2018)

HON. R.N. NADALO asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Local Government, Housing, Environment, Infrastructure and Transport brief the House on rehabilitation programmes undertaken by the Ministry along the Sigatoka River banks?

HON. P.B. KUMAR (.Minister for Local Government, Housing, Environment, Infrastructure and Transport).- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Member.

Madam Speaker, two years ago, I had a consultation with the ...

(Honourable Members interject)

(Laughter)

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- ... stakeholders in Sigatoka. He is quite right because normally he dreams a lot of things, unlike us, we do act and I will tell you the story of this project.

In that meeting, Madam Speaker, this issue was raised about the Sigatoka River banks and I was told by the stakeholders, especially the business community that they have raised this to the previous governments on the danger of soil erosion and nothing has happened.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker, after considering the request by the people of Sigatoka, we applied to the Government through the Challenge Fund for funding and I am happy to inform this honourable House that Government gave around \$890,000 for that project. It was basically neglected by the previous governments and when we saw the need, we went and we attended to it.

Madam Speaker, this project investment, as I had earlier said, which will cost around \$890,000, the work also included the hiring of its Civil and Structural Engineer to carry out the assessment which had been done, the designs, specification and tender document were all done and now the work has commenced.

The town of Sigatoka is a town situated beside Fiji's the longest river and has been commonly known as a River Town. The river bank along the town centre has been an attraction ...

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- ... and a famous spot for the Sigatoka River Bilibili Race.

Madam Speaker, the whole area is around 200 metres in length and 20 metres wide, and is in three levels with uneven ground. The area seriously lacks seating facility right now, or any other public facilities at this point in time. After completion, Madam Speaker, we will have increased the area for recreational purposes. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Viliame Gavoka.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just love this blaming previous governments, you have been in charge for 12 years. Hopefully, one day you will stop blaming others and then say that you take the responsibility.

But, Madam Speaker, remember I brought that issue to Parliament, saying that our youths in Sigatoka were playing rugby in the middle of the Sigatoka River and dredging took place and it has improved. I commend Government for that but 12 years late, that is not good enough.

The question, Madam Speaker, Sigatoka River is now alright, what about Tuva River? The villagers of Nalele and Navisabasaba had to flee to higher ground during the last flood, and also you were told that many times. Thank you.

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. In fact, it is not a blame game. I am not blaming ...

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P.B. KUMAR.-... it is the people who were present in that meeting.

(Laughter)

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- I am trying to relay that message to this honourable House. The people have raised this; they said that the previous governments have neglected, not me. Get it right!

On the other issue that was raised by the Honourable Member that falls directly under the Ministry of Waterways and definitely, that can be referred to them. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I give the floor to the Honourable Niko Nawaikula.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Is the Honourable Minister aware of the neglected pieces of metal, machinery, left there by the workers, possibly employed by you and can you make an undertaking to remove that?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker, I am very much aware of it, right now we are talking about the retaining wall, that is the subject matter before us but I know very well that the Ministry for Lands and Mineral Resources is attending to that. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I give the floor to the Honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker, a supplementary question. I thank the Honourable Minister for his reply. The question that I would like to raise is, can the Honourable Minister confirm whether the riparian rights are affected with your rehabilitation programmes of the river banks?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Not at all, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I give the floor to the Honourable Professor Biman Prasad.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Especially, Madam Speaker, I remember sometime back, the Honourable Minister for Agriculture gave a written response and said 550 metres from the mouth to upstream was dredged but the whole project was three phased and the last phase was in 2018-2019. Can I ask the Honourable Minister where we are in terms of the third phase, whether that work is continuing now?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. That was the last question, Honourable Minister you have the floor.

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker, let me reiterate and inform the honourable House, that there is a new Ministry of Waterways now and all these responsibilities fall directly, not indirectly, directly under this Ministry. I will advise my good colleague to liaise with the Ministry of Waterways. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to the Honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa to ask her question.

Dumping of Oil by Shio Dao – Suva Harbour
(Question No. 173/2018)

HON. RO T.V. KEPA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications inform the House what other action has the Government carried out to minimise the negative environmental implications on marine resources caused by deliberate pumping of oil into the Suva Harbour by Shio Dao?

Madam Speaker, that ship is 'Shi' with no 'o'.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. The spelling error is noted.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM (Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications).- Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the Honourable Leader of the Opposition for the question.

In fact, we did have some issues regarding the naming of the ship and the feedback that we have got, Madam Speaker, is not 'Shio Dao', in fact, the vessel where there was leakage was called LU RONG YUAN YU # 30. That was the name of the vessel where there was the oil spill.

Madam Speaker, I would like to highlight to Parliament that Government has put in place a number of relevant policies and legislations to set out the roles and the responsibilities of various agencies that will have the responsibility for minimising and indeed, management of the risks associated from such incidents, Madam Speaker. And of course, in this particular instance because it was within the port area itself, it falls under the Sea Ports Management Act 2005 and the Sea Ports Management Regulations 2008 to manage such incidents.

Madam Speaker, the spill that the Honourable Leader of the Opposition is talking about is described as tier one spill. These spills are within the capability and resources for an individual port operator to manage and mitigate the oil spillage. In this case, the fishing vessel had pumped oil pollutants into the sea while the vessel was docked at the Slipway. And this is one of the issues that we do have with a lot foreign vessels that do not necessarily respect the environmental standards that we do have and we need to obviously enforce that.

Madam Speaker, the moment the incident occurred, Fiji Ports Corporation Limited (FPCL) deployed their pilot boats and pollution officers actually to the Slipway itself.

The FPCL has a relevant oil spill equipment, along with dispersants and chemicals that clean up the oil slick and residue which effectively utilise to control and mitigate any negative environmental impacts from such a spill, Madam Speaker.

In fact Madam Speaker, what also happened was, FPCL issued an Infringement Notice to the ship owners of the fishing vessels for breach of the Sea Ports Management Act and the Regulations that are related to that and penalised them \$20,000. The penalties, of course, would compensate FPCL for the clean-up.

They had paid that penalty, Madam Speaker, of course if they had not, we would have ceased the vessel. So they paid the penalty, Madam Speaker, and we have of course in terms of such oil spillages will continue to ensure that there is a lot of public awareness created in particular of Port awareness by all the visiting vessels that come to our shores in particular in the port area to ensure that they do not carry out such actions, Madam Speaker. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Professor Biman Prasad?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. We are a party to the Commonwealth Blue Charter under the IMO, we have some commitments and given our own aim for blue carbon. Can I just ask the Honourable Minister whether the Government has any plans to actually remove some of those toxic laden or sunken vessels around the Suva Harbour? If there is any timeframe in which those could be dealt with?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Acting Prime Minister?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, again the Honourable Member perhaps was not listening but we have actually given a very detailed brief. There were some questions similar to that that was asked in Parliament some months back. In fact, I think maybe some of the Honourable Members behind you may have asked the question regarding them. It was done, I think in the last six months, I stand to be corrected but I understand it was fairly recently, where we gave a detailed listing of all the ships that are there, the cost that are involved in that and what will be done in the future. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Ro Teimumu Kepa?

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. A supplementary question, Madam Speaker, is a concern by the Nadonumai, Navukavu and Bukebuke *qoliqoli* fisher folk (fishermen and fisherwomen) because of the way the current moves around Suva Harbour, and it affects their areas where they go and fish.

The oil spill by this particular boat, I am told that there are other boats and this is quite common, Madam Speaker, for the oil spills to occur. This one just happened to be caught red handed by a concerned citizen who reported it to the authorities.

The oil spill, Madam Speaker, affects the fish and other marine life. The *Tui Suva's ika*, Madam Speaker, is the *cumu* but there is no more *cumu* in the Suva Harbour and there is no *dairo* or shell fish.

My question, Madam Speaker, to the Honourable Attorney-General is because this happened on a Saturday and most of these oil spills happens on Saturdays and Sundays, what sort of monitoring and supervision is carried out by the relevant authorities in this regard?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Acting Prime Minister?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you Madam Speaker. I would like to thank the Honourable Leader of the Opposition for the question. Madam Speaker, there are three key agencies that are actually involved in this and one of them, of course, is MSAF, the Fiji Ports Corporation Limited itself and also the Department of Environment. And has been seen given the fact that we had this leakage by this particular vessel, there is more of a heightened awareness and indeed need to ensure that there is proper monitoring and enhanced monitoring because unlike, for example, some

of the other ports in the world, where they have actually been implementing these very strict laws for a very long period of time, there is a culture of not doing so.

So I think some of these foreign vessels that actually do come to Fiji may think that because Fiji is a small country, they can do whatever they like. And of course, again and I will say this again because of lack of enforcement previously by the previous governments, there was a culture that was developing. So we have actually taken some stringent measures and we will continue to ensure that there is very strict enforcement of that and that a lot of ship vessels and owners actually become aware that they cannot do that simply because we are Fiji. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. There be no other questions, we will move on to the next item in the Order Paper - Written Questions. Now I call on the Honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa to ask her written question.

Written Questions

Update and Progress of Aspects of Educational Reform (Question No. 174/2018)

HON. RO T.V. KEPA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications update the House on the progress of each aspect of the educational reform and what concerns and remedial actions were raised by the stakeholders and taken by the Government?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM (Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications).- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, we will supply the answer as provide for under the Standing Orders. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to the Honourable Ro Temumu Kepa to ask her second written question.

International Gold Tournament (Question No. 175/2018)

HON. RO T.V. KEPA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism, Lands and Mineral Resources inform the House of the following:

- (a) how much has the Government paid out to the International Golf Tournament to date;
- (b) how much more has the Government committed to the event;
- (c) what tangible benefits have been received from this investment so far; and
- (d) have the organisers accounted for all the funds received to date. If not, why not and when will the Honourable Minister give a full accounting of these funds to Parliament?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- (Acting Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism, Lands and Mineral Resources).- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will provide the answer as provided for under

Standing Orders.

Roads, Bridges and Jetties Rehabilitation – *TC Winston*
(Question No. 176/2018)

HON. RATU T.N. NIUMATAIWALU asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Local Government, Housing, Environment, Infrastructure and Transport inform the House whether all projects under *Tropical Cyclone Winston* Rehabilitation of Roads, Bridges and Jetties amounting to \$13,850,000 have been completed?

HON. P.B. KUMAR (Minister for Local Government, Housing, Environment, Infrastructure and Transport).- Thank you, Madam Speaker, I will table my response as per Standing Order 45.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, and question time is now over. We will move on to the next item on the Order Paper.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

HON. SPEAKER.- The Acting Prime Minister, the Honourable Attorney General, Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications has given notice to make a Ministerial Statement under Standing Order 40.

The Acting Prime Minister may speak up to 20 minutes, after which I will then invite the Leader of the Opposition or her designate to speak for five minutes then there will also be a response from the Leader of the National Federation Party (NFP), or his designate, to also speak for five minutes.

I now call on the Acting Prime Minister to have the floor.

139th Anniversary – Arrival of *Leonidas*

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I rise this morning to give a Ministerial Statement on this very significant day in Fijian history.

Today, Madam Speaker, marks the anniversary of two major events in Fiji. Most importantly, this is 139th anniversary of the arrival of the first ship that carried indentured labourers from British India to Fiji.

Secondly, it also is 31 years to the day or one of the most traumatic and devastating moments in Fijian history, Fiji's first military *coup* which was carried out by the current Leader of SODELPA, Mr. Sitiveni Ligamamada Rabuka in May of 1987 in this very Parliament where he discharged his fire arm actually up in that corner and herded Dr. Bavadra and his Government into trucks to be incarcerated.

Madam Speaker, of course, one can say we had our first Constitutional *coup* prior to that when a minority leader in Government was sworn in as Prime Minister before the Leader of the then NFP, Mr. Siddiq Koya went to get sworn in, Madam Speaker. Perhaps there were some talks about being back-stabbed by the gang of three.

Madam Speaker, clearly however, the date of 14th May represents a tragic and cruel reality. This does not only commemorate the beginning of the tremendous contribution that indentured labourers or the *Girmitiyas* and the descendants have made in building the Fiji we know today.

On this day, Madam Speaker, we must also reckon with the lasting damage and division caused by the 1987 *coup*. This was due to the actions of Mr. Rabuka on 14th May marks a day that led tens of thousands of Fijians to flee our shores because they as descendants of the *Girmitiyas* were made to feel unwelcome like strangers in their own home, in their own country, as a country which was driven back into oppressive, divisive and destructive past.

Some may say that it was a coincidence that the 1987 *coup* fell on an anniversary of such an historic importance for so many Fijians. Other may say that it was deliberate and indeed if you read his accounts of the 1987 events, you would say it is deliberate.

Regardless, Madam Speaker, this certainly marred and added the twist to what should be solely or solemn and respectful commemoration and indeed celebration on the arrival of the first ship, *Leonidas*, to bring women, men and children from British India here to Fiji.

So, today, Madam Speaker, let us give that historical arrival of the first *Girmitiyas* vessel the importance in merits. Let us look back on the moment the *Girmitiyas* first came to our country after travelling under inhumane, difficult and degrading conditions. Let us give the *Girmitiyas* the recognition they deserve, pay tribute to their stories, their struggles, their sacrifice and ultimately their triumph, and their magnificent contribution to the building of our nation.

Madam Speaker, under the British Indenture System, hundreds of thousands if not, millions of people from British India were transported across the world in small crowded ships, in the harshest of conditions, like the Africans who were shipped to USA and the Caribbean. Many were taken from their families under false pretences with promises of milk and honey around the corner and some six months later landed here in Fiji.

No consent was sought from anyone, including the indigenous population then anywhere, including in Fiji. It was a decision made by the British Colonisers alone to bring them to Fiji, Madam Speaker. And it was up to no one except the British ...

(Hon. Member interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM ...and after up to four months or six months, we see the *Girmitiyas* were huddled into cramped living quarters known as coolie lines. While living there, they cleared lands, they built roads and they toiled in the cane fields and cotton fields and other fields under the crack of the overseers whip.

There are many accounts that exist from those early days. They tell of exploitation; they tell of mistreatment; they tell of routine and brutal beatings; they tell of rape; they tell of the excruciating hours of work; the pain, the suffering and the loneliness and the isolation for these *Girmitiyas*, Madam Speaker. They do not make for easy reading, in fact. Those accounts tell of a harsh and demanding existence and there was no surprise tragically that the rates of suicide among the indentured labourers was exceptionally high along with high rates of disease and infection that claimed countless lives.

Madam Speaker, almost two years back, we heard many of the first 10 accounts of *Girmitiyas* read aloud during our commemoration of the centennial of the arrival of the *Sutlej IV*, the final ship carrying indentured labourers to Fiji in 1916, thanks to Dr. Ahmed Ali who actually interviewed these *Girmitiyas*. We heard the stories of *Girmitiyas* in Fiji, the stories of Lakhat, Abdul Aziz,

Maha deo, Mahabir, Lotan and Pancham, all were brought and made to work here in our country and whose descendants live among us today.

It was an important, an emotional and indeed educational ceremony that this Government organised. We heard from many in attendance who attended these functions that up till then they did not fully understand the hardships these *Girmitiyas* faced in those early days. They did not know the brutal chapter in the Fijian history, Madam Speaker. Of course Madam Speaker, we will be commemorating in a big way of the 140 years of the arrival of the *Girmitiyas* next year.

Another fact, Madam Speaker, that some may not know is that many indentured labourers because of the harsh conditions, sought to escape from their overseers actually took refuge in *iTaukei* villages. This happened to such an extent that the British actually had to make a law banning villagers from hiding escaped *Girmitiyas*. In fact, if you check the Ordinances you will find that, that Colonial separation of course began then. It was illegal to give refuge to a runaway *Girmitiya*.

Indeed, Madam Speaker, this lack of knowledge stems from the fact that the *Girmitiya* experience has been very much marginalised from the national narrative. Indeed, Madam Speaker, one of the - probably I would call one the most honest intellectuals and academics from USP, Simone Durutalo - who unfortunately is not here with us, very poignantly highlighted that the bringing in of the indentured labourers into Fiji helped buffer the indigenous population from the exploitation that actually took place in other countries by the Colonial powers and somewhat ironically because of the politicisation of the ethnicity was subsequently seen as the greatest threat to their survival.

Of course, Madam Speaker, this is because of the fact that many of these politicians still continue with that way of thinking that our dynamics in politics is predicated on ethnicity. They, of course, need to rid their minds of the Colonial way of thinking, Madam Speaker. As highlighted, unfortunately, Fiji was subject to Colonial socio-engineering, designed to keep the Indo-Fijians and *iTaukei* separate and even turned both groups against each other and the consequence of those practices and policies led to over a century of exclusion of Indo-Fijians even after the *Girmit* era ended.

Though they lived in Fiji, although they worked for Fiji and although they did their part in more making Fiji stronger, the *Girmitiyas* and their descendants remained on the margins of our society. They were seen as separate, even after generations in Fiji, they were seen as outsiders, they suffered under old Colonial systems of oppression, their voices were silenced, and they felt unsafe in their own country, the country of their birth, and the discriminatory laws and policies of past Governments in Fiji.

But despite that great adversity, Madam Speaker, those indentured labourers always held on to the dream that one day their children and their children's children would find a better life in this country; that one day their voices will be heard equally; and that one day Fiji would truly become their home, they could call their home, and indeed they consider their home. Even a century ago advocates in the *Girmit* community made very clear that all they wanted was equality; all they wanted was an equal voice and equal stake in our national life. This was put forward by the famed advocate of Common Franchise, S.B. Patel when he said, and I quote:

“All we want is a recognition of the principle of common and equal rights. We should not mind if we had only 100 Indian voters in those days provided we had a common franchise, we should not even mind if a European represented us as long as he was elected on a common ticket.”

In other words, “one man one vote” in those days because women were not allowed to vote until 1963 in Fiji.

Another advocate, Pundit Vishnu Deo, was one of the three Indo-Fijians allowed to be elected through the Legislative Council and he moved the motion calling for common and equal citizenry back in 1929. The motion was defeated and Mr. Deo walked out of the Parliament with the other Indo-Fijian Members and when the next nominations were called to fill the Legislative Council vacancies, in the very powerful statement of national solidarity, no such nominations were made, right up to World War II, Madam Speaker.

In fact, Madam Speaker, in the early years, it was the Federation Party which later became the National Federation Party that once championed those calls for common roll and the one principle common and equal citizenry and indeed a common name, a fact that many of our young people may not know, even that the NFP of today has fallen so far from the principles that it was founded, Madam Speaker.

They even have hesitation in having all these citizens being called Fijians, they still struggled with that today. It was the NFP Leader, Madam Speaker, A.D. Patel,

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, A.D. Patel, a principled leader, a leader with foresight and indeed a visionary, a resolute opponent of communal politics who said that Fijian independence should not move forward until there was common and equal citizenship an equal voting system that treated every Fijian citizen equally.

So, Madam Speaker, the dream for common and equal citizenry, Fiji have been a dream deferred for more than a century until this Government finally made it happen; until this Government realised that the dreams of A.B. Patel, S.B. Patel, Pundit Vishnu Deo and all those indentured labourers brought to our shores those many years ago, along with their descendants.

So, really it is cruel, Madam Speaker, that on this day meant to honour and dream the legacy of those proud Fijians in 1987, SODELPA’s current leader chose to carry out the first military *coup* in Fiji, throwing this country into the throws of chaos and delivering a devastating blow to the campaign of justice and equality for every Fijian, irrespective, Madam Speaker, of ethnicity, gender, province.

On 14th May, Madam Speaker, Rabuka, the leader of now SODELPA, ripped apart the social and political fabric of our nation, triggering the most disastrous political era in Fijian history. His action drove tens of thousands of our people away from our shores, many of our best and brightest under his leadership, that day brought about nearly two decades of institutionalised racial supremacy, and indeed ingrained provincialism through the 1997 Constitution, Madam Speaker, many of our people were treated as “second class citizens”. It was not only bad for inter-ethnic injustice or relationship but within the ethnic groups themselves, in other words obfuscating the injustices their group within the ethnic groups too.

Madam Speaker, because of that group, innocent people were taken hostage, beaten and threatened with their lives. The media was actually not free then, *Fiji Sun* was actually burnt to the ground in Lami and some would know. It would appear some on the other side want that to happen today too, Madam Speaker. There were attacks in places of worship and high ranking and senior civil servants were forcefully removed from their positions because they were Indo-Fijians, not because of lack of merit or capability.

There was footage of Indo-Fijians crawling under cars to escape being attacked as violence across the country spread. Racial violence attacked some organised, some random, some opportunistic, it was hell on earth, Madam Speaker, it was chaos and anyone lived through that time can tell you what happened, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, that *coup* was not some momentary impassioned action, it was actually an intentional attack on preserving the position of the elites, prefabricated on ethnicity, Madam Speaker. And of course, you know what happened after that, introduced a racist, political and social structure in Fiji beginning nearly two decades of divisive policies, entrenched provincialism and ethnic discrimination.

Nearly two decades of corruption, reckless financial management that cost us our only national bank, the National Bank of Fiji and nearly two decades of Fiji falling behind the rest of the world, that dark period, Madam Speaker, only came to a real end under the Bainimarama-led Government.

Finally, this Government said “Enough is enough”. Well, one would hope that we all have the good sense to do everything possible to prevent our nation from slipping back into that dark past and from returning to Rabuka’s Fiji, those lessons of history had clearly been lost upon some of us in this House, Madam Speaker, because the members of SODELPA now fall in line behind the same leader who single-handedly stained the Fijian calendar on this day, 31 years ago, Madam Speaker.

The same leader who once dragged our nation violently back into the past and the Honourable Members of SODELPA, Madam Speaker, can tell Rabuka that his regret for his actions is not enough. His regret alone cannot fix the damage he caused to our nation, the 20 years that this nation was stalled in its development, families were broken apart as Fijians fled the country and the blood that was shed, all because of his selfish, personal and political ambition. His regret has not fixed Fiji, Madam Speaker, this Government has had to do that. Of course, Madam Speaker, we are now supposed to take that regret seriously because again this leader does not believe in common and equal citizenry.

The takes issue with all of us being treated on a level playing field and all of us being called “Fijian”. To this day, Madam Speaker, we still fail to see the strength in our unity. He is blind to our progress. Our nearly nine straight years of economic growth, the investment we have brought to our country, the development we have delivered, the record number of Fijian children in our schools and the pivotal leadership, our Honourable Prime Minister, is showing on the global stage, Madam Speaker, and of course, some do not understand, they make comments about his absence from Fiji.

Now he claims, he seeks to make Fiji free again when all ordinary Fijians want is to be free of his old style of politics and to be free of the culture of violent political upheavals that he began. What the Fijian people want is to be free of the shackles he placed on our nation when he tried to turn Fijian against Fijian, when he marched into Parliament and drove those thousands of our countrymen and women from our shores.

Madam Speaker, I can assure you that under this Government, under our Prime Minister, one day when parties like SODELPA complete the journey into irrelevance, Fiji would finally be free, free from the bigotry, ...

(Applause)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- ... free from the fear-mongering, free from the lies and free from the old politics of division, discrimination and destruction, free from Rabuka’s Fiji.

(Applause)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, we on this side of the House recognise his actions from what they all are; evil and unjust. He claims in his books that he spoke to God, Madam Speaker, God does not tell you to oppress the weak, God does not tell you to bring about injustices, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, while 31 years some time ago, we are still paying for his mistakes. Quite literally as the collapse of the National Bank of Fiji (NBF) has resulted in an inter-generational debt that Fijians are still paying for today. It is, we, who have had to pick up the pieces and finally right the wrongs that were done to the legacy of the *Girmitiyas* and their descendants, actually every Fijian and because of them, Madam Speaker, I assure you that it is, we, who sit on this side of the House under the leadership of our Honourable Prime Minister, who will sit on the right side of history.

(Applause)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- It is this Government, Madam Speaker, that is finally helping to realise the dreams of those early *Girmitiyas* who were so badly wanted greater things and a greater life for the descendants and the basis for our greater progress that once the way of rights and protections in the 2013 Fijian Constitution; a Constitution, Madam Speaker, that finally recognises all of us as equal and all of us as Fijians.

Madam Speaker, for the early *Girmitiyas*, there was no access to education and the children grew up with no schooling, people in villages had no access to education, Madam Speaker, unable to read or write. It was across the board, it was across the socio-economic spectrum, it was not based on ethnicity. But even then, they knew education was a key to a brighter future.

Today, Madam Speaker, every Fijian child can get access to education, every Fijian child whether they are a descendant of a *Girmitiya*, whether they are living in the maritime islands, whether they live in the villages, everybody is treated equally, everyone gets free education, everyone has equal access to scholarship, whether the son or daughter of a chief or not a chief, whether they are a commoner's child, they can get access to education, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, those days of the past, of course, have gone. Today, thanks to the leadership of our Honourable Prime Minister, primary and secondary education is now free for all Fijians.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, I just wanted to say before I finish off, the vast majority of our young people know we are a nation of many cultures, many ethnicities and many perspectives. They know those differences do not make us weak, they make us stronger, they make our country stronger, they make each one of us better and that is the real positive change that has been brought about by this Government and that critical shift in our national mentality. And that is the greatest tribute we can give to the legacy of the *Girmitiyas* in Fiji and that vision of an equal, inclusive and prosperous country must continue and it will continue under this Government, Madam Speaker, under the leadership of our Honourable Prime Minister.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, over the past 12 years, our progress has shown that a united Fiji and an equal Fiji, is a very strong Fiji. We have shown that when we empower every member of our society, we will succeed. Young Fijians succeed, our landowners succeed, our

civil servants succeed, Fijian women succeed, Fijian youths succeed, Fijians living with disabilities will all succeed, Madam Speaker, every Fijian will succeed. As we head into our nine straight years of growing the Fijian economy, we will show that we are all stronger working together as Fijians towards a common national goal, Madam Speaker.

It has taken unrelenting political will and is required strong and decisive leadership to take us to where we are today and make no mistake, Madam Speaker, it will take the same quality of leadership to keep the old forces of division and communalism at bay. Fiji will not be saved, Madam Speaker, by those who sit in silence like those in NFP, who choose to do so, who do not display the stoic and visionary leadership that their old leaders show. They are perhaps simply after driving the black cars, Madam Speaker.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Our progress will only continue, Madam Speaker, under the same goal and vision leadership of our Honourable Prime Minister that this Government has supplied for over a decade.

As we celebrate our progress and commemorate the proud legacy of the *Girmitiyas* in Fiji, Madam Speaker, let us reaffirm our stand against bigotry, discrimination, divisiveness. Let us reaffirm our stand against those old politicians and reaffirm our own commitment to each other as Fijians, our commitment to working side by side to build a new and better Fiji, and that commitment, camaraderie, brotherhood, sisterhood and that unity in our society, Madam Speaker, are the ultimate dreams of the *Girmitiyas* who were brought to Fiji 139 years ago today, and those who followed them.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, we are all living the dream today, irrespective of our backgrounds and we will continue to honour their memories and legacies in the years ahead, Madam Speaker. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Leader of Opposition or her designate to speak in response.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the Attorney-General for his statement which, according to the paper that was sent out, was going to be on the indentured labourers celebrating the 139 years of the first arrival. I did not know, Madam Speaker, that he was going to go into the *coups* and other issues.

When I was in primary school, Madam Speaker, we were told by our teachers that people who live in glass houses should not throw stones. When you are pointing a finger, Madam Speaker, four fingers are pointing back at you so I am not going to go into the *coups* because history is not going to be kind to the FijiFirst Government and their past 12 years and the wrongdoings they have been doing in this House and in this country, Madam Speaker.

I will just continue on a very important subject which is about the indentured labourers. Madam Speaker, they first arrived during the colonial era. They were brought here for a purpose and it was a commercial one, to improve the British economy as the colonies were sending raw materials and in this case, we started with raw sugar to Britain to help service the empire. When the first *Girmitis* arrived, Madam Speaker, we acknowledged the *Bose Vakaturaga's* crucial role in accepting them into Fiji as the first boat arrived five years after the signing of the Deed of Cession.

I will give you an example later on how the chiefs to this present day still carry out a very crucial role in this regard. I also thank the *Bose Vakaturaga* for their endorsement of lease arrangements of land laws and ALTA for the benefit and security of *Girmitiyas*.

Madam Speaker, on the abolition of the Repatriation Act; no more repatriation of *Girmitiyas* back to motherland India, they were accepted to be citizens here, changing their passports from the British one to a Fijian blue passport.

Madam Speaker, we have a lot to be thankful for, Madam Speaker, so many wrongs that need to be righted, so many issues, not only with the *Girmit* descendants but many more issues where indigenous Fijians issues so close to their hearts and future need to be addressed.

Madam Speaker, I will just speak on one of the ships that arrived here in Fiji. Of the 87 ships, Madam Speaker, which arrived under this programme was the fateful journey in 1884 (and this is 10 years after the signing of the Deed of Cession), this is of the "*Syria*" which was wrecked during a storm at Nasilai Reef in which 58 men and women perished. Dozens were injured and hundreds thrown out to the sea. It was the villagers, the people of the village of Naivilaca in Noco, who rescued those injured and the other survivors gave them food and shelter in Noco.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Honourable Attorney-General, listen and you might learn something!

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Can I be given more time, Madam Speaker because of the....

HON. SPEAKER.- Please carry on, please do not respond to interjections because you are losing time.

HON. RO. T.V. KEPA.- While hundreds were thrown out into the sea, it was the people of the village of Naivilaca, Madam Speaker, who rescued those injured and the other survivors gave them food and shelter. While 58 of those passed away are buried in a place called *Waiwai* which is part of Naivilaca village, which to this day is set aside as a very special place for the ancestors of the *Girmitiyas*, Madam Speaker, and which they have also visited their descendants.

Madam Speaker, the legacy of the *Syria* continues to this day and some of the chiefs in Rewa and Noco and who were also members of the VLV in 2007 before it was abolished by Decree, Madam Speaker, by this present Government, the legacy of the *Syria* to mark the Rewa Day in 2016, last year, the relationship was taken to another level by the bequeathing of the title of "*Luvedra Na Ratu*" or child of the chief by the *Vanua of Burebasaga* to all the descendants of the Indian indentured labourers.

May I say here, Madam Speaker, this is an issue we have to progress with very slowly. The people of Rewa, Madam Speaker, I am very happy to say here publicly, we have accepted this wholeheartedly. *Burebasaga* is right behind it, we want to continue with this, Madam Speaker, however, we have to be mindful of the different histories of our people here in Fiji and we have to progress with it, Madam Speaker.

Other provinces, we have *Girmitiya* descendants belonging to their *vanua* have also expressed interest in what Rewa has done. We are aware that the younger generation of Rewans and *Girmitiyas*

descendants, *Luvudra Na Ratu* have to continue this journey and identify themselves with this identity and belongingness.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now call on the Leader of the National Federation Party or his designate to speak in response.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the Acting Prime Minister for his statement. Today, Madam Speaker, indeed is an historic as well as a tragic day. Historic for the reasons that we are commenting on the arrival of indentured laborers in this country and tragic because 31 years ago, this very Chamber witnessed the first military *coup*, Madam Speaker, and the start of the *coup* culture. Then Madam Speaker, the last *coup* we had was in 2006 executed by the Honourable Prime Minister.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- The NFP/FLP Coalition Government of Dr. Bavadra was only in power for five weeks, yet we were told by the former RFMF Commander and then Interim Prime Minister, now Honourable Prime Minister on 22nd May 2008, whilst speaking to Nadoi Village in Rewa that the military *coups* were executed by the military in 1987, in 2000 and of course 2006, because politicians had failed.

Madam Speaker, I wonder sometimes how can politicians fail in five weeks when the military did the *coup*, yet Madam Speaker, ten years after the 14th May 1987 what I call the oppressor and the oppressed came together to give Fiji the 1997 Constitution and restored equality, dignity, justice of the descendants of the *Girmityas* as well as of all other citizens.

HON. GOVT. MEMBER. - (Inaudible)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, we all know the contributions of our forefathers, and the descendants of the *Girmitya* to this country after 39 years, and in fact Madam Speaker, overwhelmingly we have had a peaceful co-existence for the last 139 years, except for the period after 1987 and 2000, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, let me just quote Justice Jai Ram Reddy, a grandson of an indentured labourer and as the Leader of the Opposition and as the Leader of the National Federation Party to the Great Council of Chiefs on 6th June, 1997, and Madam Speaker, this will go down as a defining moment in Fiji's history then rightly said and I quote:

“The Indians of Fiji brought to these shores as labourers did not come to conquer or colonise, our ancestors came to this land in search of a better life, in search of a future their dream for their children and their children's children. Though they travel to these islands long after their ancestor surely the dreams and hopes of those who landed from the *Leonidas* were not that different from those who came ashore after the epic earlier voyage from the West.”

Madam Speaker, we seem to have forgotten and some would have just forgotten those who fought hard for virtues and principles in support of those who had taken our freedoms in the past. But we had the perfect opportunity to put this right, Madam Speaker, and unfortunately, we have not done this and this is why for this particular occasion, two years ago on 29th April, 2016.

I had moved an End of Week's Statement calling on the Honourable Prime Minister to involve all Honourable Members of Parliament in a bipartisanship to organise national celebrations to observe

the 100th Anniversary of the beginning of the end of the indenture system. I had also called for a declaration of a one off public holiday. While responding, the Honourable Prime Minister rejected the request of a one off Public Holiday for Government to commemorate the historical event. He described the NFP's call as a political stunt ...

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- ...a gimmick and empty gesture and a fearsome exercise. So we find the concern and interest in descendants of the *Girmitiyas* by this Government today quite hypocritical, Madam Speaker.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Secondly, Madam Speaker, if this Government had any shame, if they have any shame, Madam Speaker, they will lift the ban on one of the most famous ...

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- ... descendants of the *Girmitiyas*. Anyone in this world, Madam Speaker, who is talking about the history of this country and history of the *Girmitiyas* cannot escape quoting Professor Brij Lal.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- The man, the man has been banned, Madam Speaker, he was hauled to the Military, sworn at, spat at and then this Government has the hypocrisy of banning him and his wife from this country, Madam Speaker.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, when we come into Government, we will lift that ban, Madam Speaker. The other point I want to make, Madam Speaker, before I conclude, I hear the Honourable Attorney-General always talking about NFP being silent. I know why they have been demonising us on this side. I know why they are dehumanising the SODEPA leader, I know why they are dehumanising SODELPA because they are going for Indo-Fijian votes ...

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- ... and people in this country know, Madam Speaker, that they are not going to buy that this time. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you Honourable Members. At this point, we will suspend proceedings for lunch. Please note that lunch is provided for Honourable Members in the Big Committee Room. Parliament will resume proceedings at 2.30 p.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.33 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.30 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will resume from where we left off and I have been informed that there are no Bills for consideration today, so we will move on to the motions.

I have been informed that the Deputy Chairperson of the Social Affairs Committee will move the motion. I wish to clarify that at the end of the debate, we will be voting merely to note the report and once the vote is taken it ends there, and the report will not be debated again in Parliament.

I now call upon the Deputy Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs to move the motion.

MOTIONS

REVIEW REPORT ON THE CONSUMER COUNCIL OF FIJI 2015 ANNUAL REPORT

HON. V.K. BHATNAGAR.- Madam Speaker, I move:

That Parliament debates the Review Report on the Consumer Council of Fiji 2015 Annual Report, which was tabled on 5th March, 2018.

HON. S.B. VUNIVALU. - Madam Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

HON. V.K. BHATNAGAR.- Madam Speaker, Honourable Acting Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of Opposition, Honourable Ministers and Honourable Members of Parliament: On behalf of the Honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, I take this opportunity to speak on the motion in regards to the Committee Review Report on the Consumer Council of Fiji 2015 Annual Report, which was tabled in Parliament on 5th March, 2018.

Madam Speaker, the Committee Review Report on the Consumer Council of Fiji 2015 Annual Report is a bipartisan report, inculcating consensus from both the Government and the Opposition sides. During the scrutiny process, the Committee had reviewed the report and invited the CEO of the Council for a presentation on its overall performance and achievements in 2015, to which issues of concern were highlighted.

Madam Speaker, the functions of the Consumer Council of Fiji is to protect the rights and interests of consumers through advocating and lobbies, enforcement agencies and policy makers to bring about reforms for the benefit of all consumers. The Council's role is to promote fair and just delivery of goods and services.

Madam Speaker, the work and achievements of the Council is commendable as the only representative and advocate of consumer rights in ensuring that their needs and interests are protected and served to the best of their ability. In 2015, Madam Speaker, the Council registered a total of 1,672 consumer complaints out of which 1,374 complaints were resolved, which recovered a total monetary value of \$3,429,561.

Madam Speaker, the Committee throughout its review, took note of the Report and has no major issues in terms of the performance of the Consumer Council of Fiji, as the Council was impactful in various areas such as its involvement:

1. In the taskforce that monitors the market after every budget announcement to ensure that reduction in the duty free prices were actually passed on to the consumers; and
2. Health care policy contribution, campaigning against the marketing of sweetened beverages to children and in its submissions during the budget consultations, proposing and supporting the tax charged on sugar sweetened drinks and levy on tobacco and alcohol.

In 2015, the Council has performed well to fulfil its obligation and further, to educate, create awareness on consumer issues, provide market surveillance to keep track on prices, quality, standards and for any unfair trade practices.

Madam Speaker, with those few comments to enlighten the House as a Member moving the motion, I thank you for this opportunity.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Parliament is open for debate and I invite input, if any.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, just a very brief comment and I just wanted to pick on the Conclusion in the Report which says, and I quote:

“It realises that Consumer Council recognises that much more needs to be done to strengthen Fiji consumer protection laws and redress mechanisms which are critical to the wellbeing of consumers.”

I hope, Madam Speaker, the Government at some point, hopefully in the Budget, will let this Parliament know exactly what those consumer protection laws are, that need to be brought into Parliament and whether, without those laws, we are not properly able to address and redress the mechanisms.

The other point, Madam Speaker, as I had said, I think the Consumer Council’s role is very important in protecting the consumers. It can be quite complicated for many of our ordinary people and quite rightly so, the Report points out that many of the ordinary consumers are not aggressive in complaining. That is understandable, Madam Speaker, because many of them find this quite onerous and I am glad that the Consumer Council is talking about a lot of education programmes to address them.

But even with education programmes, it would be very, very onerous on a large majority of the ordinary consumers, especially those from the poor households, to actually get access to this redress. We get calls, Madam Speaker, every now and then that people want to go to the Commerce Commission. They do not know whether to go to the Commerce Commission or go to the Consumer Council and it is always a difficult challenge for many of them.

So, I do hope and I think for the Consumer Council to actually work effectively, they need to be adequately resourced and I note the presentation from the Consumer Council which says that to deliver the target, the Council received a Government grant of \$700,000 VIP which was not sufficient. The Council had to request for an additional grant of \$113,170 VIP during the year, so the total grant received in 2015 was \$813,000, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I hope that with the increases already, that the Government will look at resourcing the Consumer Council properly and appropriately in the next Budget. I am not sure whether these amounts were increased in the 2017-2018 Budget but certainly these are issues that I thought would be appropriate to raise at this point in time.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Ruveni Nadalo.

HON. R.N. NADALO.- Madam Speaker, I rise to contribute in support to the Committee Review Report on the Consumer Council of Fiji 2015 Annual Report that is before the House.

Madam Speaker, the Consumer Council of Fiji has excelled over the years since the inception of its legislation known as the Consumer Council of Fiji Act 1976 (Cap 235). The Consumer Council of Fiji provides the external pressure as a watchdog to create a fair and just delivery of goods and services. The Council tackles unfair practices and exposes companies, regulators and service providers who fail consumers.

Madam Speaker, we acknowledge the Council's commitment towards its roles and also, in the collection and disseminating of information in respect to matters affecting the interest of consumers and also in conducting research and investigation into these matters.

Madam Speaker, to name a few of the significant outputs of the Council in 2015 were the setups of the National Consumer Helpline, which helps consumers to lodge complaints through its toll-free telephone services against unscrupulous traders and service providers who fail to adjust the changes in price and pass down tax and duty reduction on goods and services.

Another positive initiative was the establishment of the Price Surveillance Joint Taskforce with other key agencies that monitor the VAT and Duty Reduction that was announced in the 2014 National Budget.

Madam Speaker, the other initiative was the opening of the Fiji Mediation Centre on 14th October, 2015 along with the induction of the 14 accredited mediators which was a positive and significant step for Fiji. Madam Speaker, on that note, I would like to commend the Consumer Council of Fiji in all its initiatives in promoting the interest and rights of all consumers.

Madam Speaker, with that contribution, I support the Committee Review Report on the Consumer Council of Fiji 2015 Annual Report that is before the House. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, there being no other input, I invite the Deputy Chairperson to speak in reply.

HON. V.K. BHATNAGAR.- Madam Speaker, I have no further comments to make. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote to note the content of the report. Does any member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Noes')

HON. SPEAKER.- There being no opposition, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs to move the motion.

REVIEW REPORT ON THE RESERVE BANK OF FIJI 2015 JANUARY-JULY 2016 REPORT

HON. L. EDEN.- Madam Speaker, I move:

That Parliament debates the Reserve Bank of Fiji 2015 January-July 2016 Report which was tabled on 7th March, 2018.

HON. V. NATH.- Madam Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Now, I invite the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs to speak on the motion.

HON. L. EDEN.- Madam Speaker, in line with Government's change in fiscal year, the Reserve Bank of Fiji (RBF) subsequently adopted the 31st July period end, to ensure that its financial year coincided with the Fijian Government's financial year. Therefore, Madam Speaker, this Report covered just a seven month period from 1st January, 2016 to 31st July, 2016.

Overall, the Bank's performance during this seven month period was positive, despite various setbacks earlier in the year, namely the devastating effects of *TC Winston* in February and the after effects of heavy rains caused by *TC Zena* in April.

At the end of July 2016, Foreign Reserves stood at \$1.982 billion which was the equivalent of 5.5 months of retained imports. This is highly commendable in light of the fact that the International Monetary Fund states that benchmark of three months is quite sufficient.

As at 31st July, 2016, total currency in circulation was \$751 million. The value of notes in circulation rose by 2.3 percent and the value of coins in circulation rose by 5.7 percent. The \$100 note recorded the highest growth, whilst the \$50 note was the highest circulated note.

The impact of post-cyclone activities saw the agriculture and construction sectors decline, and this led to the downward revision in projected growth for 2016 from 3.5 percent to two percent. Other notable points of interest, Madam Speaker, that I would like to share are as follows.

All profits can be repatriated by foreign banks as long as they retain their capital adequacy ratio of 12 percent in Fiji. This applies to all foreign banks and credit institutions. In accordance with the Reserve Bank of Fiji Act 1983, the sum of \$16.929 million was paid to the Fijian Government for the period 1st July, 2016 to 31st July, 2016.

Also, in that period, Madam Speaker, 10,623 inward remittances were conducted by the mobile money channel, an increase of 201.3 percent for the same period in 2015.

With regards to the Small and Micro Enterprises (SME) Credit Guarantee Scheme, Madam Speaker, the Committee noted that since its inception in 2012, some \$80 million had been loaned and that only three cases of default were registered.

On currency exchange rates, Madam Speaker, the RBF sets the base each morning against the basket of five other countries - Australian Dollar, New Zealand Dollar, Japanese Yen, Euro and United States (US) Dollar, with US Dollar being the predominant one. Traders then set their rates with a spread of five points either way.

With the influx of new currency traders, the Committee recommended that the stringent control measures in place must continue to ensure that external reserves and currency are protected.

The Committee noted from the Report that inflation had risen to 5.5 percent and one of the main contributors was our national drink, *yaqona*. Almost two percentage points of the 5.5 percent inflation outcome at July end was driven solely by higher *yaqona* prices.

We also noted, Madam Speaker, that the threshold for the RBF Housing Facility for First Home Owners sat at \$25,000 combined household income. The Committee felt that this was a very important initiative and recommended that the Bank be encouraged to increase the threshold to \$50,000, and we are pleased to note that this has come to fruition, as I mentioned this morning when I tabled our Report on the RBF 2016-2017 Annual Report.

At the end of deliberations, Madam Speaker, the Committee was satisfied with the work being done by the RBF. I was especially pleased to see that the Bank had achieved an excellent ratio of gender balance with approximately 50 percent of their staff being female, including in positions of Senior and Middle Management. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Parliament will open for debate. I invite input, if any. Honourable Viliame Gavoka.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to contribute to the debate today regarding the Annual Report for RBF in 2016.

Madam Speaker, I am a Member of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs and it is always a delight, talking to the team at RBF. They are very professional, on top of the situation and which is evident by the way they manage the economy of this country.

We commend them very highly and we know and we have highlighted the level of professionalism that we see within RBF and we ask them a question, how can this be the minimum standard for all agencies of Government in this country? And they spoke about the way they grow, their challenge and many agencies in this country will need to emulate what is at RBF. It is, like I said, delightful, talking to them.

Madam Speaker, there are two issues that we brought up in terms of recommendation. One was the one that was highlighted by the Chairperson about the price of *kava*. I never thought I would see the day where *kava* would be mentioned as the major contributor to inflation in this country. Well, that was what happened in 2016, Madam Speaker. Out of the 5.5 percent inflation, 2.5 came from *kava*, (*yaqona*) and that was because of *TC Winston*.

I raise this, Madam Speaker because it behoves us to relook at our traditions; the consumption of *yaqona* which is so huge, especially within the native population and compounding that now is the recent cyclone that hit Kadavu because *TC Winston* virtually destroyed *yaqona* in most of Fiji, except Kadavu, but now Kadavu has also been hit.

We will be looking ahead to a period when *yaqona* will be very very expensive in this country. As you know, it is integral to our traditions and you can imagine how much it will cost us to do the needful in terms of traditional obligations. I wonder if we can have this dialogue as leaders of this country on how we can mitigate this because we still see funerals, weddings, where consumptions is still very, very high and we begin to wonder how much is it costing our people already who are amongst the poorest in our community. I hope out of this, I know there is a *Kava Bill* that is to be debated in Parliament. I think it should come quickly so that we can look at this Madam Speaker. It

is not only the indigenous people also the Indo Fijian community, kava is also a huge drink now. You go to an Indo-Fijian funeral now, kava; the Kava Bill is quite huge.

Hopefully what I have highlighted here can trigger some dialogue; bipartisan, we look at this and see how we can reduce its impact on the economy of our people. That is the first one, Madam Speaker.

The second one is the saving scheme on No. 10; the Committee knows that a pension saving scheme which provides an option for people to contribute to. I think when it came up in our debate last month, the reaction from the other side was very anti this because they thought that this pension scheme would be threatening FNPF. It is not, Madam Speaker, this pension scheme is an alternative and it is optional, it is not mandatory. So I would hope that Government would push this through. I believe it is with the Office of the Solicitor-General and it should be finalised and brought to Parliament. Again, it is not threatening FNPF but for people who can no longer join FNPF, can contribute to this.

Even if you are a member of FNPF, which is mandatory, you can voluntarily contribute to this one also. Those are the two issues that I want to bring up, Madam Speaker, and on the pension scheme, I hope the Government can relook at its position because from the indication we got last time, it is not part of their priority, but I think a lot of people in this country would like to see this being established. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- There being no other input, I invite the Deputy Chair to speak in reply. Sorry, Honourable Professor Biman Prasad.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I give the opportunity to the Honourable Attorney-General to go first. Madam Speaker, just very briefly, I note there are some valuable recommendations from the Committee and in particular, I just want to reiterate Recommendation 10 but also Recommendation 11 which talks about the current threshold for RBF housing facility for first home owners at \$25,000. The Committee is correctly recommending that the Bank should be encouraged to increase the threshold to \$50,000, given the difficulty at the escalating cost of housing and the affordability of housing to a lot of people.

Turning on to number one, Madam Speaker, and I know I have raised this before. I think the Reserve Bank quite rightly recognises the idea of Ease of Doing Businesses and clarity in terms of overseas remittances. Madam Speaker, that is a positive thing, but I just want to use this opportunity to reiterate once again that our ranking, the World Bank Ease of Doing Business ranking, has on average just been 73 between 2008 and 2017.

In fact, I know the Honourable Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism, Lands and Mineral Resources once remarked that maybe the World Bank's assessment is not correct. Nonetheless, Madam Speaker, I think we need to take this seriously, our ranking has gone down from 2016 from 97 to 101. We also have very poor ranking in Starting a Business, for example, 160. Paying taxes is another one, Madam Speaker, 120 and here I think there needs to be much more co-ordination and better synergy between different approving agencies and those which deal with businesses directly.

Madam Speaker, I think we cannot ignore that ranking because we also talk to businesses apart from the Government and there is a lot of concern with respect to paying taxes and quite rightly the ranking is quite low. Whether the Fiji Revenue and Customs Service as a revenue collecting authority, is providing that ease and getting the taxpayers to understand the law and deal with them in a way that tax paying is not drag on business and that it is not having a negative impact on those

who may want to expand their businesses or those who may want to start a new business, because Madam Speaker, whether we like it or not, especially for our overseas investors.

When they look at the option of investing in Fiji, the first thing they do is go and look at our laws; they look at our tax laws, they look at different agencies and obviously they also look at all bank ease of doing business ranking because it is out there. So, I like the idea that the Reserve Bank of Fiji actually recognises that on their part that they would need to deal with some of the bottlenecks and ensure that there is no difficulty with that, but more importantly, Madam Speaker, I think the Government needs to seriously look at how the different agencies are working together and we should be able to improve our ranking because that is important for our overseas investors and those domestically who would want to set up their businesses. So, that is all I have to say on this, Madam Speaker. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Acting Prime Minister.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Speaker, just a few comments on the RBF. I agree with the Honourable Viliame Gavoka on one of those rare occasions that the RBF is extremely a professional team. It is an independent body and we have got some very good young professionals who are heading the team and indeed they are more independent contrary to what the Honourable Biman Prasad seems to think previously.

Madam Speaker, the reality is that the monetary policy is actually implemented by the Reserve Bank or the Central Bank of any country and it is very critical for them to play a pivotal role in terms of managing inflation, inflows and outflows of money but also in providing a conducive environment for investment purposes, that of course is very closely linked to interest rates that is available.

As we have seen, Madam Speaker, the investment as per percentage GDP has increased quite significantly and it is not only driven by the public sector but also by the private sector. As highlighted also, the lending ratios have increased quite significantly, from very sort of basic types of lending, to people wanting to buy their second hand cars, to consumer goods, up to buying homes at the top end, and also of course the commercial end of investment. This is why, for example, we see a lot more warehouses, factories et cetera, being built. So, that has been very critical in respect of the nine straight years of economic growth that we have had, Madam Speaker, and of course it is projected to grow for another at least two or three years.

Madam Speaker, the recommendation of course talks about the SME Lending Sector and I think that is also very critical. The Government has over the past number of years in collaboration with the Reserve Bank of Fiji, of course, for example, has provided various initiatives, whether it is the filing of VAT returns by small to medium enterprises, the VAT threshold has been increased to in fact create a particular level of ease for these businesses.

There is no doubt that the Ease of Doing Business overall needs to be improved. I think every country in the world continuously seeks to improve the Ease of Doing Business. Of course, we have a much bigger task ahead of us, but we believe it is all coming together, notwithstanding the fact that the manner, the methodology that was actually used to measure the Ease of Doing Business was actually flawed and the World Bank has actually agreed with that. But that does not in any way negate the fact that we still need to do some work in that respect. And there are a number of electronic solutions that we are currently working with and also as highlighted in Parliament previously, we are currently working with the Singaporeans in respect of that in that space.

Madam Speaker, I think the other point that we wanted to highlight is the contribution by the Reserve Bank in terms of complementing the fiscal policy of Government. I think that is also again very critical for us to be able to ensure the rate of consumption or the level of consumption in Fiji has increased significantly. A very simple example is, everyday there is some Fijian or Fijian household that is actually being connected to electricity. The moment you connect them to electricity, there is an immediate demand for certain goods that actually has an impact on our foreign reserves. So once a home gets connected to electricity, they want to buy a fridge, they want to buy one microwave, washing machine, they want to buy an electric kettle, they want to buy a television set, none of these goods are actually produced in Fiji. So, they need to be bought from overseas and of course there is huge demand for foreign reserves and notwithstanding that, Madam Speaker, we have also seen that our foreign reserves has been high since ever been in respect at least 5.5 months' worth of training in international benchmark is much below that.

Again, Madam Speaker, there is a number of areas that we want to work in the housing sector. Again, as announced in the Budget, we provide a number of initiatives in respect with interest rates being offered. We are currently working on some various initiatives regarding housing. There will be some announcements made in that respect. The income tax threshold in respect of concessionary loan has gone up to \$50,000, Madam Speaker, from \$25,000 to \$50,000 that has already been implemented. I think that is a very critical aspect of not just in terms of giving ordinary Fijians the right to actually have home ownership, but it also creates a lot more robustness in the economy because as we all know that construction actually leads to a lot more creation of jobs.

The Reserve Bank of Fiji also, Madam Speaker, linked to that, although they have separate reports filed is the Financial Intelligence Unit. I think we need to work very closely with the Financial Intelligence Unit. There are a number of players, of course, coming within the economy when we liberalise the economy, but we need to keep a watch on that. Similarly, the RBF monitors the level of funding that comes in on an individual basis.

Last but not least, Madam Speaker, the ability to work with all the different agencies. Of course, there are a lot more synergies now than had been previously. Again, we hope that with the electronic movement that we put in place or in that space, we will see a lot more changes. Of course, Fiji Revenue Custom Services now has a lot more appropriate technology in terms of filing returns, et cetera. I think the fact that they have those gold passes, et cetera, encourages people to be more compliant with taxes and that of course will be very, very critical for us.

Madam Speaker, once again I would like to thank the Committee for their recommendations and also the hard work done by the Reserve Bank of Fiji. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. There being no other input I invite the Honourable Chairperson on the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs to speak in reply.

HON. L. EDEN.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have no further comments.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Parliament will now vote to note the content of the Report.

Does any member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of "Noes")

HON. SPEAKER.- There being no opposition, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

Motion agreed to.

REPORT ON THE PETITION REGARDING VATURU DAM

HON. SPEAKER.- I have been informed that the Deputy Chairperson of the Natural Resources Committee will move the motion. I will now call upon the Deputy Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources to move the motion.

HON. A. NABULIVOU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I move:

That Parliament debates the Report on the Petition regarding the Vaturu Dam which was tabled on 10th February, 2016.

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- Madam Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- I invite the Deputy Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources to speak on the motion.

HON. A. NABULIVOU.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Acting Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and Honourable Members of Parliament: On behalf of the Honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources, I take this opportunity to speak on the motion in regards to the Petition regarding the grievances of the landowners of Vaturu Dam that was presented to Parliament on 20th May, 2015 by the Honourable Viliame Gavoka.

Madam Speaker, the grievances raised by the landowners of Vaturu was the unfair termination of land boundaries, land ownership for the 14 landowning units of Vaturu.

The Petition seeks to have the arrangement between Government and the landowners of Vaturu Dam reviewed, moreover the Petition was signed by more than 500 members of the landowners of Nagado and Natawa Villages in Nadi.

Madam Speaker, the Vaturu Dam was constructed in 1979 and since then has sustained the sourcing and delivery of clean and safe water from Teidamu in Lautoka to Momi in Nadroga.

There were four leases made by the Government through the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources to the 14 Landowning Units. The issues on these four leases were agreement to lease documents subjected to proper survey. The four leases issued were the:

- i) Water Treatment Plant at Nagado;
- ii) Water Pumping Station at Nagado;
- iii) Road Access from Vaturu Dam to Nagado Water Treatment Plant; and
- iv) Vaturu Dam Catchment and Dam area.

The Committee, in its observation, noted through the submission of the iTaukei Land Trust Board that the Government surveyors need to act to ascertain and confirm ownership of the land boundaries, redefine it with landowners as most of the landowning units do not know the extent of their boundaries.

Madam Speaker, the Committee noted during the iTLTB submissions that the ownership of the land in which the Vaturu Dam sits had to be confirmed by the *Veitarogi Vanua* of the iTaukei Land Fisheries Commission (iTLFC), as there were claims that some *yavusa* owned the whole area and they disputed and was reserved to them.

The Committee further noted that the issues rest with the survey registers to resolve all disputes and could only be resolved by the confirmation of the survey, whether it is a survey of the boundaries or the redefinition of the actual iTLFC boundaries.

Madam Speaker, unfortunately this Petition is a result of unresolved survey land boundaries of the 14 landowning units covering the dam proper and water catchment area. The landowners are victims of the lack of will and commitment by responsible institutions of the Government to conclude the Vaturu Dam lease.

Madam Speaker, the Committee Report is a bipartisan one, best concluded that it is the prerogative of the Government to resolve this issue immediately and bring it to a close.

Madam Speaker, with those few comments, I support the motion in this august House.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, the motion is now open for debate and I invite input, if any? Honourable Dulakiverata?

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to support the motion since this is a bipartisan Report and I would like to comment on some of the issues that have been raised.

Madam Speaker, with the Recommendation No.1, the lack of will to resolve the survey boundary by the relevant stakeholders is reflective of the non-committal to address volatile but solvable land disputes. This issue is long overdue and must be resolved once and for all to the investment of the stakeholders.

Madam Speaker, as Members of this august House might know that this area is where the Sleeping Giant Mountain Range is in Vaturu. The area is very rugged and inaccessible. Also, there is a lack of survey control positions in the area that would allow the surveyors to carry out surveyor work in the area.

So, Madam Speaker, to contribute to the delay in the survey, a team of surveyors from the Control Unit had to first go there and establish these Control Stations before the actual survey team moves into the area to carry out the survey.

Madam Speaker, the survey that had been carried out is a periphery survey of the leased area and they also demarcated the NLC boundary or the landowners' boundary within the leased area that they had surveyed. The problem that arose, Madam Speaker, as has been alluded to by the Deputy Chairperson of the Committee is that most of the misinformation happened in the consultations because some of the landowners have not even visited those areas, let alone know their boundaries on the ground.

So now, Madam Speaker, that the survey had already been completed, may be it is the right time for the landowners to go with the surveyors to show them on the ground where these boundaries are. I think that would help resolve some of the outstanding issues, Madam Speaker.

On Recommendation No. 3, Madam Speaker, that the completion of the survey will determine the true and rightful ownership of the land disputed as per the Petitions, as I had already mentioned that that should be the next move, to get the landowners to visit the sites with the surveyors, Madam Speaker.

On Recommendation No. 9, Madam Speaker, the Taskforce should also consider compensating the landowners of standing trees on the water catchment area based on the volume assessment by the Department of Forestry. Madam Speaker, we do not have a confirmation whether an inventory assessment of all the commercial trees growing in the catchment area has been done so that lease could be assessed and be paid to the landowners as opportunity costs to the landowners because once the area is used for catchment then it will not have the opportunity to harvest this timber so that is one of the issues that is pending, Madam Speaker.

On Recommendation No 10, Madam Speaker, the site is currently being leased since this land will not be utilised for agricultural purposes. For the expiry of the lease the iTLTB should advise ILOU whether this is the better option than the outright purchase.

Madam Speaker, there are two leases: one is the catchment area; and one is the dam area which had been flooded, so what we are saying is that, the right option should be given as to how this land should be acquired by the Government; should it be leased for 99 years or should it be acquired outright as these are the ones that would benefit the landowners in the long run because if the lease is expired after 99 years and to be returned to the landowners then they would not be able to use it for the purpose they want because it is all flooded, so the option is there, Madam Speaker.

Another observation, Madam Speaker, is the need to periodically review the rental regime of such larger projects to ensure that the landowners benefit from the enhanced value of the projects as time goes by. As we know, Madam Speaker, this has happened to Monasavu. I think because of the expediency of the project, because of the need for economic development of the country that some of these issues were not looked at properly, so I think, Madam Speaker, it is time that some of these lease conditions should be reviewed to ensure that the landowners benefit from the deal.

Those are my comments, Madam Speaker, thank you very much.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to Honourable Prem Singh.

HON. P. SINGH.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the Committee for this Report and I also thank the Committee for making some very good recommendations.

Madam Speaker, this Petition arose out of the differences between the 14 landowning units that own the catchment and the dam area. The three issues that existed in 1979 were the Regional Water Supply from parts of Nadroga to Teidamu in Lautoka. When the land was acquired, the leased area was not properly surveyed and then came the catchment area.

So, Madam Speaker, the matter has been dragging from the Lands Department to the iTaukei Land Trust Board (iTLTB) without any speedy resolutions and as a result of this delay, there were a lot of confusion on these 14 landowning units which lead to feuds between and amongst the landowning units.

So one of the recommendation, Madam Speaker, is that an Integrated Taskforce be formed, comprising of the members of the Natural Resource Committee and I think this will be the first time that we agree to this recommendation that a bipartisan recommendation would be taken on board to fix the problem which has been there since 1979.

Madam Speaker, the concerns about the delay in formalising land boundaries and disparities also lead to disparities in the distribution of rent moneys, as rightfully observed by my colleague that the lease moneys owed to them in respect of non-harvestable forest which are encapsulated by the dam, which is rugged.

Madam Speaker, this is a concern and I hope that this Integrated Taskforce that will be formed will address these issues, not only in respect of Vaturu but this Taskforce can be used for other few steps that are still pending before us during this Parliament or have been there for quite some time.

Madam Speaker, one of issues that I would like to address here is the grievances of this nature that they have carried on just because sometimes it has been said that it is very sensitive, but then the sensitivity of these issues, Madam Speaker, cannot be just under those carpet, we have to address them at some point in time.

So I thank the Committee for these recommendations and I hope that we do take them on board and give the landowners what they deserve. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Niko Nawaikula.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I would like to make a brief contribution. I am thankful that the Committee has sat down to discuss this. Unfortunately, this Committee has resolved nothing but it has raised very important issues relating to (I would say) the exploitation of the resource owners in relation to their resources. The problem that you have in Vaturu is the same problem that you have with Monasavu, Nawailevu, the indigenous pine landowners and is the same problem that you have with the resource owners who own the mahogany.

The problem is `justice`. These resource owners have been exploited far too much for many times over and over again. It is because Government (and I am not apportioning the blame on anyone, we are here as responsible people), if problems were conducted previously, we can make amends for that. It is a problem of justice; it is a problem of exploitation of their resources; it is a problem of not recognising their proprietary right; and their right to participate in every aspect of their resources.

If I can illustrate that: let me start with Fiji Pine. Fiji Pine started in 1973 with the promise by the late Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara that this will be their pot of gold. Whose pot of gold? The resource pine owners, and he asked them "Pool your land together and plant pine" and they did (72,000) and the government assisted by giving \$4 million yearly to be owned by them.

In 1990 when the pine was ready to be harvested, government changed. The government said, "instead of giving the ownership to the company, it took ownership of the company and it took control of Fiji Pine Ltd (FPL) and gave them only 100,000 shares, 100,000 A-class shares and it gave to it a total ownership of this company and the resource owners who owned the value of that land where pine, \$240 million worth, that was never recognised.

So any government, that government, this Government that will do justice to these people is to give that ownership, recognise that they should own this resource ...

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- ... recognise that they should own the majority share in FPL. That is the same problem. Even in mahogany, Madam Speaker, mahogany started as a need to replant indigenous timber that were taken away and Government assisted by money that was being funded by overseas, European Union or somewhere, I do not know. But I know that from that time, it was agreed, it was known that the mahogany plants will belong to the landowners. It was known then, it will belong to them. If they formed the company, this company will belong to them and you should ask now the representatives of the Director of Lands, the representative of i-Taukei Land Trust Board, the representative of Government, whichever government at the time; what happened?

They did not give to them the ownership of their resource, they did not give to them, they formed another company. They passed laws to take away the ownership of mahogany and they put it in a council. They denied them their rights. That is their right and it is a problem, I say it again, is of justice. You should give to the resource owners what they deserve, but you cannot do it. They cannot do it because it took away from them control of their land. It took away from them control of their resources. So it is up to us, if we are responsible legislators, we should give all these back to them, including you, Honourable Minister.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- No, mahogany. No, I am saying that I am not apportioning the blame to anyone. But if you want to be a responsible government, do justice and give to them justice.

What happened at Vaturu Dam? In 1979, they gave a lease, Madam Speaker and now, everyone else is making money out of that. The Chairman of the Committee has just told us that it is delivering water from Lautoka to Momi, and who is making money from them? Everyone else and what are the landowners doing? Sitting in their village - nothing. The only thing that they are getting is peanuts, rent from iTLTB which is calculated on the non-capital value of their land. And then when they took their land, they made a generator, Fiji Electricity Authority (FEA) now Energy Fiji Ltd. Did that add on to the income that they are receiving? No.

The only amount that they are receiving has remained static from that time until now. They made electricity out of it. They sold all the water and they are sitting there, poor. So, I say it again, it is a problem of justice. We should give to them, their just reserves.

We have just talked about EFL turning into a commercial company. Did we give the majority ownership or fair share of ownership to the landowners at Monasavu? No. Did we give that same benefit to the landowners at Vaturu? No. So we should ask ourselves, ask yourself that side of the House, ask yourself, this side of the House, what are we doing to the poor resource owners?

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- We should do something and I wish to end that, whichever government, that government, this Government, then give to them the full benefit and proprietary ownership, their just returns, whichever government. I do not care whether it is that side, or this side. I just want the truth, I just want the benefit. I just want justice to be done.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Acting Prime Minister.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, just honing back into the actual subject matter of this Committee, the Committee made a recommendation regarding the dispute or the confusion regarding the ownership as to which *mataqali* or landowning unit actually owns which part of the land, and we have confirmation this morning from the Permanent Secretary of iTaukei Affairs, and if I could read out to you, Madam Speaker. He said, "I wish to confirm as far as land ownership is concerned, the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs has led a composite team of officials from Lands, Water Authority of Fiji, iTLTB and met with all relevant stakeholders in Vaturu, in both villages, Nagado and Natawa in mid-2016." This report I see, Madam Speaker, is dated 56 of 2015, so a year later.

In all those meetings, the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs and the Native Land Commission reconfirmed that the disputed land parcel belongs to *Mataqali Voqa* and copies of Registrar of Native Land and associated maps were provided to *Mataqali Voqa*, *Mataqali Sautabu*, *Mataqali Navuke*, *Mataqali Raravatu*. Such the issue of land ownership has been dealt with and claims have been nullified by the Native Lands Commission record.

Madam Speaker, as far as the boundaries are concerned, they have achieved a resolution on that and they have actually established which land owning unit actually owns which parcel of land.

Madam Speaker, I would like to now give in that that has been resolved and therefore, it is on the recommendations of the Committee will no longer be pertinent, given the fact that the dispute or the confusion regarding the parcel of land ownership has been resolved now.

But I would like to take this opportunity as Honourable Nawaikula has, to highlight some of the issues that he has stated about what he terms 'justice'. He is absolutely right, Madam Speaker. We need to ensure that there is justice irrespective of whichever government, but justice, Madam Speaker, should not only be restricted to a particular component in our national right. Justice must apply to everyone, justice must apply and be available to everyone on equal terms.

Madam Speaker, justice also means a recognition of what has happened in the past. Madam Speaker, if we want to talk about land ownership, we can go back into history; we can talk about the alienation of native title on the basis of some of those lands being converted to freehold land. We know that happened. We know that some native land previously during the Colonial times was permanently alienated and then became freehold; we know that.

Despite that, however, Madam Speaker, today Fiji is one of the very few countries of what we call 'circular communities', where 91 percent of all the land is still *iTaukei* owned land. This land, Madam Speaker, cannot ever be sold nor can it be permanently alienated because this Constitution protects that right, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I can say prior to 2013, as it has been seen, Honourable Ratu Lalabalavu can testify to that and various other Members of the previous government where despite the so called "entrenched provisions" *iTaukei* land was permanently alienated. Momi and Denarau being some recent examples of that, Madam Speaker.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Yes, it was legally done but it was to the detriment of the *iTaukei* landowners.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- It was detriment to the *iTaukei* landowners because the legal system, the constitutional system was flawed. It allowed for the permanent alienation of *iTaukei* land under this Constitution; you cannot ever do that. This is why, Madam Speaker, you need to uphold this Constitution and Honourable Nawaikula, Madam Speaker has actually failed to address that.

Madam Speaker, 91 percent of land is *iTaukei* land. I also agree with Honourable Nawaikula when he has said that previously, when some of the leasing arrangements were put in place, we had what we call peppercorn rent, given a few pennies, and that is precisely what happened to the mahogany plantations.

Mahogany plantations, Madam Speaker, were actually planted by or put in place by the then Colonial Government through the then Ministry of Forests which the Honourable Nawaikula failed to address, put in place by the Ministry of Forests then, then back in 1999 or thereabout, then we had the Fiji Hardwood Corporation Limited that was actually set up. I do not know which Government, but I think it was either the SVT Government or the SDL Government; it was the SVT Government, they put that in place. They transferred the mahogany plantations, Madam Speaker, to Fiji Hardwood Corporation Limited to a limited liability company. They were going to be owned by the Fijian Government. There is a gentleman currently in Naboro who was the CEO subsequently of that mahogany.

Despite the fact that Fiji Hardwood Corporation had one of the largest planted non-indigenous, largest planted mahogany forest in the world, it is still continuing to make losses. It had a debt stock in 2007 of \$25 million. When the 1999 corporation was set up, a trust was set up for the landowners and they were given a 10 percent holding in it, without much say at all, just to make it all superficially legitimate.

As to why they did that, why they transferred it out of Ministry of Forests and set up Fiji Hardwood Corporation, Madam Speaker? One can only speculate but I would speculate further to say, it was done because someone thought they can fill their pockets with it. Madam Speaker, there was unhindered, unhindered harvestation, taking place of mahogany forest, unpoliced. You could go to a member of a landowning unit who may have connections, pay them some money on the side and go and cut off a little bit of the forest, that is what that was happening.

We had logs basically ripped up in basic form and being sent off to Guatemala, a company called Mega Mandiris did most of the exports and their Fijian mahogany that was planted legitimately on land lease was mixed up with forest that was illegally harvested from the Amazon and therefore the value of Fijian mahogany went down the gurgler and as a result of that Madam Speaker, the Mahogany Industry Act was put in place.

As a result of that, Madam Speaker, that Act being put in place, we saw the death stock now reduced to about \$5 million or \$6 million. As a result of that, Madam Speaker, the peppercorn rent is no longer being paid, the landowners are being paid a much higher rent than before. As a result of that Madam Speaker, they have being paid royalty and we have continuously specifically stated, "yes, they need to be paid more, we need to get rid of debts at a much higher percentage stake ownership in it."

Madam Speaker, if you have a company, nothing becomes hunky-dory just because you change the ownership. You have to have the right people to run it, for it to make a profit, for it to be run commercially. We have for the first time in Fiji's history and the Honourable Niko Nawaikula said, "yes, whatever reason there was in Fiji Pine, et cetera that they changed the ownership." For the first time however, Madam Speaker, we had Fiji Pine paid \$7 million to the landowners, landowners have bonuses - never in the history this has been done, and they receive such a huge pay out. Never, Madam Speaker!

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, that is a testimony, but it is also a testimony. I do not know how many Honourable Members of the Opposition have actually gone to the Tropik Woods site, if you look at the level of investment, the high technology equipment that has been used to rip pine timber and make it into timber pieces that are actually highly classified, getting much higher value for the finished product, computerised in countries like Sweden, et cetera, that is what that is at stake. That is what we want to do if you are able to get high quality products from

your companies, obviously you get paid a lot better, obviously then you are able to pass along to your employees, pass that on to the general Fijian economy.

It is not simply about some magic wand changing ownership, everything will become hunky-dory, and we have seen what happened previously. Simply, where ownerships were changed, we did not have the right people to run it, companies went under. Fiji Airways being a classic example, when we say Air Pacific a long time ago and I completely agree with him, Madam Speaker.

In the negotiations, if you look at the leases that were given out by iTLTB, that time NLTB with hotel leasing, a lot of issues happened but, Madam Speaker, again there is a Constitutional provision now. Honourable Jiosefa Dulakiverata talked about the leases being paid, yes, and in fact the landowners now have a recourse. They can refer to this Constitution and say ‘my constitutional rights says, I need to be paid market rates, market rental.’

So, even if your lease does not have market rental, you have a legal recourse to be able to get market rental, and that is slowly being implemented by iTLTB but landowning units have the ability to do that now. If it does not get implemented, they can take them to court because you now have a Constitutional provision, ALTA, NLTA, all of these “TAs,” all of them made unimproved capital value rental, now you get to pay market rental, that is the right of the landowners in Fiji now and that must be exercised; I completely agree with that. We ourselves have discovered, for example.

The Nausori Airport, look at the rental that they were receiving? Pathetic rental, we are now reviewing it to give them market rental and that is what is going to happen, Madam Speaker. So, Madam Speaker, it is very enticing when you go out to the members of public and you make all these grand statements as Honourable Niko Nawaikula is doing over here, it may seem enticing but it is actually very hollow.

The reality is, we need to look at what will be the benefits of following a particular structure? Will you ultimately help the organisation run properly? Will it have durability? Will it be sustained? Will you have the right people? Will you have the people on the Board who would understand business, who know how to make the right decisions? Do you they know about the technology, modernisation?

So, Madam Speaker, of course, there has been wrongs that have been done in the past. This is the solution, it is precisely the solution. We have already stated, for example, we have a Cabinet Paper as we have highlighted. We are working on the royalty sharing. Again, this has been provided for by this Constitution and that is all come into the fore, Madam Speaker.

So, Madam Speaker, as far as the recommendation by the Committee is concerned, some of it, of course, is no longer relevant because the fact that dispute is no longer a dispute - everyone, the landowning units have actually agreed to the boundaries and who are the rightful owners of that. But as far as the wider context is concerned, Madam Speaker, I mean, there has been some factual inaccuracies about the fact that the water has been used also for generation of electricity. Madam Speaker, I have already highlighted that, I think, in a couple of sittings ago, that has not been used for the past year and a half. And we have also said to FEA that they need to be able to look at how they can actually compensate for the usage of that water and paid the rightful rates and that needs to be done, we agreed with that. But the fact is, it is currently not being done because there is some technical issues with it.

So, Madam Speaker, we need to ensure and it makes economic sense. It does not make economic sense where we are fighting over these things. The overall economy will always prosper. This says, landowners must be given market rental that must be done. And it says, the people who

lease the land, their rights must be protected. If all of that is enforced, Madam Speaker, we can focus on the big game, and what is the big game?

The big game, Madam Speaker, is economic development, economic empowerment, that is the big game because if we speak to every Fijian, irrespective of their background they want a better life. They want better living conditions, they want access to consumer goods, and the fundamentals of the economy must be put in place to be able for that to happen, Madam Speaker.

So, Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the Committee once again for their input but also just to highlight the fact that some of the recommendations may no longer be relevant, and I would like to thank them for the work. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Viliame Gavoka?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I wish to contribute to the debate on this Petition which was my petition and it came to me through the landowners of Vaturu. My immediate reaction was that, people who own the resources that are so critical to the life of the Western Division should have their issues discussed at the highest level in this country, hence my decision to bring the Petition to Parliament.

As mentioned by the Honourable Deputy Chairperson, the water from Vaturu provides water for people from Momi in Nadroga to Teidamu, just outside of Lautoka, that is, in Drasa. It is a huge area, Madam Speaker, and within that area you have the big resorts of Denarau, and indeed, when I was talking to the resource owners, they say, “We are sitting in the hills and the water from here is enabling those big hotels to operate.” Yet, you look at the way they are compensated - what the hotels make and what the villagers make up in the highlands of Vaturu.

There is about 9,000 acres there, Madam Speaker, that has been leased for a catchment area and all round each year there make about \$264,000, around that figure. And that is why my colleague, Honourable Dulakiverata he is saying, “as the economy grows the rewards for the resource owners should also grow in tandem with the economic growth.”

The Honourable Minister for Economy says, “it is a big game”, sure, it is a big game. And I remember the day when they started setting up there, Madam Speaker, in the 1970s. I am from the West, I live in Nadi and I saw the mobilisation of the resources to start on Vaturu - Nadi before that time used to have some huge water problems, including Lautoka. We commend the foresight, the will of the Alliance Party then, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, for starting something, I can only say gigantic that has met the requirements of the Western Division.

Madam Speaker, when we spoke with the landowners, a lot of conditions of the lease are not being observed or respected.

1. They were told that they could grow, build or run tourism businesses around that area. When they went up to talk to the authorities, the people concerned, they have been pushed back. The Water Authority of Fiji (WAF) is saying, “No, you cannot do tourism here”.
2. They cannot graze their cattle in that area now.
3. The forestry element that was introduced by my colleague there.

So, Madam Speaker, going back to what Honourable Nawaikula was saying is that, we must observe justice. We have reneged on a lot of the conditions related to Vaturu, and that is why I brought up this Petition, that this House would debate it and I am glad that the Honourable Attorney-General is saying that the ownership issue was being resolved, which is fine.

That is the work of this Committee of this Parliament, that we were able to bring the issue to the authorities, to the people in charge to say definitively, these are the owners of Vaturu. I must commend Parliament for that, and that there is a pathway for people to bring their issues and it can be resolved here. But we need to look further than that.

One of the areas of discomfort, Madam Speaker, is in Recommendation Number.1, the lack of will. We give the impression, Madam Speaker, that the resource owners issue do not always have the support that they deserve. Somehow, we feel that when it becomes a resource owner issue, it is just pushed aside or dismissed.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Nonsense!

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam Speaker, today in Vuda and I brought this up last month, is not nonsense. The people of Vuda have agreed to give their *i qoliqoli* for a marina and there were two valuations. One valuation was by the Ministry of Fisheries, a fully documented valuation of \$860,000.00; and another valuation was given by USP, no documentation, the valuation was \$200,000.

I ask the question here, why are we giving the project and paying only the lower valuation? I think someone from the other side said that it is not being finalised yet, but they are working in Vuda, already working. So, that is why we are concerned, hence my statement that sometimes we get a bit casual about landowners' issues. And I believe, Madam Speaker, it behoves us to broaden the issue here, to broaden the dialogue, Monasavu, Nawailevu and all the areas where the natives of this country have given their resources so willingly. We need to be a bit more serious on how we resolve them.

Sometimes, we are so generous, Government like FijiFirst hold us hostage to our generosity. That is the problem in this country. We talk about Monasavu and they say, "Yes, you did not give electricity to the people around Monasavu", forgetting that the chiefs of this country were charged with the leadership of this country and it was paramount to them to bring electricity from Monasavu to a place like Suva.

Well, that is a typical of the native indigenous generosity. But this FijiFirst will use that to their advantage, holding us hostage to the way we are. What we are saying is, time has changed. In 1979, we started Vaturu and that was about almost 40 years ago. It is time to resolve it, time to relook at some of those issues and that is why we need bipartisan support and we need leadership of the highest level to resolve those issues.

I was looking forward this morning, Madam Speaker, to celebrate the *Girmitiyas*' 139 years and I was shocked that it became so political. I became so disappointed, here I was, I wanted to listen to the contribution of the *Girmitiyas* which I know has been pivotal in this country, from Papua New Guinea to French Polynesia, there is no country in the Pacific like Fiji, and I salute the *Girmitiyas* for their contribution.

I was also looking forward to celebrate it, Madam Speaker, in this Parliament but it became a cheap political dialogue. I mean, it was so disappointing, Madam Speaker!

We should not be shallow in the way we handle this kind of dialogue, Madam Speaker. We need the leadership to do it. And when we talk about leadership, where is our dear leader? He has been away a lot of time. He was not here the last time, he is not here again this time, I mean, this is the Parliament of the people of Fiji. He is showing disdain by not coming to Parliament. Can that be made known to him, please?

Madam Speaker, I rest my case - Vaturu is so important to us, we need to take this very seriously. Do not be dismissive, do not blame the past! We are here today, like my good friend here said; "Let us do it, both sides to come together." And you know the *talanoa* you talk about all over the world, can we have *talanoa* in Fiji, please?

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- There being no other input, I now give the floor to the Deputy Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources to speak in reply.

HON. A. NABULIVOU.- Madam Speaker, I have no further comments.

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

(Chorus of 'Noes')

HON. SPEAKER.- There being no opposition, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

Motion agreed to.

Honourable Members, we have had a very interesting debate, very interesting discussions and I thank you for this robust and healthy debate that we have had today. We have all enjoyed it, and I am sure people would have enjoyed it as well.

So, now we have come to the end of today's sitting. The Parliament is now adjourned until tomorrow at 9.30 a.m. Thank you, Honourable Members.

The Parliament adjourned at 3.48 p.m.