



Eleventh Parliament

Sixth Meeting

**NATIONAL PARLIAMENT OF
SOLOMON ISLANDS**

Monday, 17 April 2023

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

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NATIONAL PARLIAMENT OF SOLOMON ISLANDS

Monday, 17 April 2023

The Speaker, Mr Patteson John Oti, took the Chair at 10:04.

Prayers.

Business of the House

ATTENDANCE

All were present with the exception of the Ministers for Infrastructure Development, Minister for Public Service, and Members for North Guadalcanal, West Makira, North Malaita, Small Malaita, Malaita Outer Island, East Are'Are, Ulawa Ugi, South New Georgia/Rendova/Tetepare, West New Georgia-Vona Vona and West Honiara.

SPEAKERS STATEMENTS

The SPEAKER: As you know the Governor General will address this House later to outline the executive government's legislative plans for the year 2023. By virtue of Paragraph 4 of Standing Orders 7, The Prime Minister has invited His Excellency, The Governor General to address the House as this is the first sitting of the Sixth Meeting.

TABLED PAPERS

- (a) The Audit Report on the Procurement relating to Covid-19 Disaster Relief Fund by the Ministry of the Infrastructure Development. (National Parliament Paper No.1 of 2023)
- (b) The Audit Report on Procurement relating to Covid-19 Disaster Relief Fund by the National Disaster Management Office (National Parliament of Paper No.2 of 2023)
- (c) The Audit Report on Procurement relating to Covid-19 Disaster Relief Fund by the Ministry of Health and Medical Services (National Parliament Paper No.3 of 2023)
- (d) The Thematic Audit Report COVID-19 related Procurement in a State of Public Emergency by three ministries (National parliament Paper No.3 of 2023)
- (e) The Truth and Reconciliation Commission Final Report with Recommendations Shorter Version (National Parliament Paper No.5 2023)
- (f) The Report on the Public Health Emergency Bill 2021 (National Parliament Paper No.6 of 2023)

(g) The Land Board Annual Report 2022 (National Parliament Paper No.7 of 2023)

STATEMENT OF GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

The SPEAKER: Honourable Members in order for Parliament to prepare for His Excellency The Governor General's arrival, I will suspend Parliament.

Parliament is suspended

(The Speaker leaves the Chair)

(The Governor General is escorted into Parliament by the Honourable Speaker of Parliament and His Lordship the Chief Justice of Solomon Islands)

(National Anthems played)

Parliament resumed

The SPEAKER: Honorable members, His Excellency the Governor General will now address Parliament.

Opening of Parliament

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

GOVERNOR GENERAL (10:39): The Honourable Speaker of the National Parliament of Solomon Islands, Your Lordship, the Chief Justice, the Honourable Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, Cabinet Ministers, Leader of the Opposition, Leader of Independent Members of Parliament, Deputy Speaker, Members of Parliament, Attorney General, Lord Mayor of Honiara City and Councilors, Provincial Speakers, Premiers and Members of Provincial Assemblies, Heads of Mission and members of Diplomatic Corps, Reverend Church leaders, Constitutional Post holders and Permanent Secretaries, traditional chiefs and leaders, distinguished guests, fellow Solomon Islanders, ladies and gentlemen;

Opening Remarks

I bring warm greetings and special well wishes from His Majesty King Charles III, and as the constitutional representative of His Majesty the King, the Head of State of the Independent Democratic Sovereign State of Solomon Islands, it is my humble duty and special privilege as the Governor General to be able to deliver this Traditional Speech from the Throne.

I wish to sincerely congratulate the Honorable Prime Minister and the Democratic Coalition Government for Advancement (DCGA) for calling the Sixth Meeting of the 11th Parliament to convene today.

In my address to Parliament in 2020 I have reminded and encourage Ministers and Members of Parliament of the importance of your positions. I do not think I need to remind you again. You are now well versed with your mandates and functions.

As this is my last address to this Eleventh Parliament, I wish to take this opportunity to thank the honorable Prime Minister for inviting me to open each meeting of the Eleventh Parliament.

Reflection

Honorable Speaker, before proceeding further I wish to reflect on the past four years. Exactly seven days from now would mark four years since the Democratic Coalition Government for Advancement was elected into office. It was on 24th April 2019 when the Honorable Prime Minister was elected into office in this very chamber. However, I note with great sadness, that this election was followed immediately by a riot.

As a country, we must overcome these challenges. We cannot continue to claim to be a Democratic country when we do not respect the rule of law and the principles of representative democracy. We must learn to accept the democratic process with humility. We cannot continue to claim we are a Christian country and do not practice Christian principles in our everyday lives.

As we head towards the 2024 National General Elections, we must learn to stand together and be united in our vision and collective efforts to help our country and our people grow and prosper. We must resist anything that will cause divisions and disharmony among us.

I appeal to all Members of the National Parliament and the Provincial Assemblies, Church leaders, Chiefs, Community Leaders, women, men, youth, boys and girls to remember our National Motto: To Lead is to Serve. We must be active agents of positive change and unity in our various communities. We must be the building blocks of our country. There is no better place to see the country's commitment to this values than in our National Anthem. We declared Independence on the 7th of July 1978. On that date we became a nation. Our new National Anthem foresaw a country desiring of peace progress and prosperity, a country where men should be brothers be to make nations see. o achieve these ideals we must overcome any divisive force that can threaten our unity as a nation. I urge us all to be caring for one another. We have a duty to leave behind a legacy of peaceful, prosperous, safe and secure country, free of threats and violence to our future generations, their children and grandchildren. With God's help Solomon Islands will prevail.

Honorable Speaker, it has not been an easy four years for our country. The global COVID-19 pandemic hit our country in early 2020 and almost brought our economy

to a standstill. The COVID-19 pandemic measures we implemented to protect the population from the pandemic were revoked in June 2022. These measures affected many of the government plans because we focus on protecting our people from COVID-19 and keeping our economy afloat. The government's legislative agenda was one of the casualties of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The November 2021 riot, a manmade economic disaster, exacerbated magnitude of the negative economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Sadly, the country is still suffering from economic losses caused by distraction of the country's economic infrastructure during the 2021 riots. The economic hardships we are currently facing are largely due to these two events from which we have not yet fully recovered.

Had it not been for the cushioning effect of the construction of infrastructure for the 2023 Pacific Games, the funding of other game-changing infrastructure development and the ongoing development assistance for the essential services from our development partners, the economic impact of these two events would have been much worse.

Honorable Speaker, the opening of the border in May 2022, and the various infrastructure spending ahead of the 2023 Pacific Games have boosted growth. The recovery has been fragile as the Ukraine war has led to higher inflation and worsening of the terms of trade.

Real GDP growth in 2023 is projected to be around 2.1 percent. This positive rebound is expected to be supported by growth in Key sectors, such as primary industry and service sector.

That said; let me remind our people that we have not recovered from these major shocks to our economy yet. Thus, it must be a top priority for this government to continue to support economic recovery and building resilience.

Pacific Games

Honorable Speaker, as we all know, we will host the 17th Pacific Games in November. Its opening ceremony is exactly seven months and two days from today. This is the first time our country will host the full version of the Pacific Games, which is a tremendous honor for us, as a people and as a country. The hosting of the 2023 Pacific Games has transformed our sports facilities, our athletes and our capital city.

I imagine it was a surreal experience for our athletes that use these world class facilities during the recent Solomon Games in March. I was extremely moved to see our athletes enjoying these facilities during the recent Solomon Games. After almost 45 years since independence, we finally have the sports infrastructure. Thanks to the DCGA government and our development partners the sport infrastructure

represents our investment for our youths as sports people, a legacy for our future generations. They belong to our people and we witnessed that when our athletes from all nine provinces used these facilities during the recent Solomon Islands Games.

As a country and people, we are very fortunate to have these facilities. Our previous generations of athletes were not so fortunate to train in such facilities. I humbly call on all Solomon Islanders to look after these world-class sports facilities.

In seven month's time, we will welcome up to 10,000 visitors to our country, about 5,000 of whom are sportsmen, sportsmen, sportswomen, and officials from participating countries, including supporters and tourists. As hosts, we will welcome our visitors to our shores. They include both athletes and visitors, and it is our obligation as a people and a country to ensure that their stay with us here in Honiara is an enjoyable one.

We have successfully hosted the Festival of the Pacific Arts in 2012. I believe that we can do it again for the Pacific Games in November this year. Let us be gracious and respectful hosts to our fellow Pacific brothers and sisters.

Infrastructure projects

Honorable Speaker, our challenge since independence has been the lack of strategic and transformative infrastructure to drive economic growth. It still remains a challenge today. Building strategic infrastructure in strategic locations can radically transform our country. Despite of course, the challenges posed by our geographical locations, this is the direction we must pursue in the long term. With support from our multilateral and bilateral partners and through strategic use of the concessional loans, I believe we can do it.

Honorable Speaker, Solomon Islands is the second most vulnerable country in the world. The increasing frequency of severe weather events, including cyclones, heavy rains, flooding, and landslides, coupled with other natural disasters such as earthquakes and tsunamis, is a major challenge for Solomon Islanders.

However, this government welcomes the increasing engagements by our bilateral and multilateral partners in infrastructure building in the Solomon Islands road, the Aviation project, land and maritime connectivity projects, Tina Hydro, Telecommunication Towers, Solomon Islands Infrastructure Project, and the Bina Harbor Project, to name a few.

I also note the recent visit by the China International Development Cooperation Agency to meet with the Solomon Islands Government regarding new infrastructure project that can be explored by the People's Republic of China and the Solomon Islands government after the 2023 Pacific Games.

I also applaud those constituencies that took initiatives to construct new roads and maintain existing roads in their respective constituencies through their CDF allocations.

Policy Program 2023

Honorable Speaker, in my address to Parliament last year, I outlined the two main policies that the DCGA government has driven. These two policies are (i) The COVID-19 Community Transmission Policy and (ii) The Fiscal and Macro Economic Response Policy. The implementation of these policies is reflected in appropriation of supply in our Budget that was passed by Parliament last year.

We are now in April, and I believe that a good percentage of this budget must have already been expended in implementation. I will leave the update on the implementation of the Development Budget to the relevant Ministries in the reply to this address in the ensuing days.

The review of National Development Strategy

Honorable Speaker, I wish to state that the National Development Strategy is currently under review. It will be brought to Cabinet and then tabled in Parliament this year as well. This is an important piece of document because it paves our way forward in terms of strategic development, including our preparation for the LDC Graduation.

In relation to our graduation from LDC, which was originally scheduled for 2024, we are confident that we will receive adequate support to differ the graduation by three years to 2027. In the meantime, we are stepping up our engagement with the Labor Mobility Program with Australia and New Zealand. By the end of 2023, we expect to reach at least 6,000 Solomon Islanders engaged through the Labor Mobility Programs and remitting millions of dollars each year back to their relatives, which contributes to our economic recovery.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report

Honorable Speaker, much has been said about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report not being tabled in Parliament. This is not true. As you well know, the TRC Report was already tabled in Parliament in 2014 in accordance with Section 17 of the Truth and Reconciliation Act. It was tabled as Parliament Paper No.40 of 2014, and was tabled on 5th September 2014 by the Prime Minister at that time. As such, it is a public document.

That said, one of the main issues to be brought to Parliament in this Meeting is the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Executive Summary Report. This is a synthesized summary of the five volume TRC Report. The tabling of this document

will enable Parliament to ask the government on what it has done in addressing recommendations in the TRC Report.

The Federal Constitution

Mr. Speaker Sir, an important matter which is still work in progress is the consideration of the process recommended by the Chairpersons of the Eminent Persons Advisory Council and the Peoples' Congress on the implementation of the proposed restructure of the country's government system under Federalism.

The final draft of the proposed Federal Constitution was handed to the Prime Minister in 2019. Whilst acknowledging the processes recommended, it was the intention of the government, however, to subject the draft constitution to a peer review and economic analysis. This process is important to establish the answers to many questions on the economic viability and sustainability of the system and to ensure that we do not undermine our national unity, security and happy co-existence.

The government was not able to undertake that process because of the pandemic, which made it difficult to secure technical assistance to do that work. The government will still pursue these tasks this year.

I must urge the national government and the provincial governments to tread this part very carefully. The future of our country and the next generation is at stake. All the legal and technical questions aside, the important issue is the readiness of the provinces to adopt the federal system of government as designed under the new Federal Constitution within the next two years. The answer is not clear.

Any forward direction on this very important matter must incorporate a strategy to prepare the provinces to cope with the demands of the new system. This simply means we must now embark on a path that will progressively devolve powers to provinces together with the necessary resources for provinces to implement their planned programs as a transition to a new form of federation.

The Legislative Calendar 2023

(i) The digital legislation infrastructure project

Honorable Speaker sir, the government is also embarking upon a digital legislation infrastructure project. The project commenced on January 26th, 2017, and has involved completion of 255 Acts, comprising 542 point entire versions of those Acts. The objective is to produce in accessible electronic form, the entire body of Solomon Islands primary legislation in both point-in time and up-to-date versions. This will incorporate all changes made since the respective Acts were commenced and to

create and maintain a series of related indexes of both principal and subsidiary legislation and of the gazette.

There have been many challenges and difficulties in producing the final collection of Acts for publication as reprints. In the process, errors in the text of the legislation have been identified, which require legislative action to rectify to ensure each reprint of an Act will be correct.

The relevant legislation to enable and rectify issues identified will be brought to Parliament in this 6th Meeting of Parliament. The reprints package include Legislation Bill, Constitution (Amendment and Validation) Bill and Legislation (Amendment Repeal and Validation) Bill.

In my last address to Parliament last year, I outlined a number of Bills that were to come to Parliament. These bills had been carried forward to this year. These Bills are;

(ii) Electoral Bill

Honorable Speaker, several reforms are expected in our electoral laws that will require some legislative changes. The Electoral Act 2018 will be amended to accommodate these reforms. The Provincial Government Act and the Honiara City Act will need to be amended during this meeting. If the Honiara Amendment Bill has not been tabled in Parliament yet, then it should be tabled in the next couple of days. This is to synchronize the election of the provinces and Honiara City to occur together with the National General Election in 2024. It is expected that this will save cost and make it easier to manage elections.

(iii) Special Economic Zone

Honorable Speaker, it is also anticipated that the Special Economic Zone Bill will be brought to Parliament during this meeting. This is a strategic move by the government to transform the country's investments attraction strategy, which for years had been taking a passive approach. This Bill is now in its final stage of drafting. It will be brought to Cabinet in May, and table in Parliament after endorsement by Cabinet. This Bill will be table in Parliament in this meeting.

Once enacted, it is expected that investors will be attracted to invest in our country because of the incentives that this law will provide. This law is designed to broaden the country's economic base. Our tourism sector will be one of the sectors that will benefit greatly from this law once passed by Parliament.

Other Bills that will come to parliament in this meeting are;

(a) Constituency Development Fund Amendment Bill

- (b) Public Health Emergency Bill
- (c) Mineral Resource Bill 2023
- (d) Electricity Amendment Bill
- (e) Petroleum Amendment Bill
- (f) Education Bill
- (g) Forestry Bill
- (h) Building Code Bill
- (i) Environment Bill
- (j) Pacific Games 2023 Amendment Bill
- (k) Value Added Tax Bill.

All these bills are expected to come to Cabinet by June this year.

Separation of Powers

Honorable Speaker, there is one matter, which I would like to raise at this Juncture. This involves the functions of the legislature as the legislation making body. I have observed that the Bills and Legislation Standing Committee has now, as a matter of practice, embarked on various consultations to the provinces to discuss legislations tabled in Parliament, which is a good thing. However, I wish to take this opportunity to remind the Legislature of its key functions under the Westminster System and the doctrine of the separation of powers. It has become obvious that the Bills and Legislation Committee has embarked upon a policy review exercise through its consultations. That is not the function of the Legislature.

The Official of Opposition, as the alternative government, may conduct such policy review exercise, but not the Legislature, to which the Bills and Legislation Committee is a part of. To do so would involve legislature in policy, a core function of the Executive. This would ultimately be the legislature trespassing into the sphere of the Executive. The functions of the Bills and Legislation Committee is clearly and explicitly outlined under Order 71 of the Standing Orders of the National Parliament of Solomon Islands.

Closing Remarks

Honorable Speaker, to conclude, I want to thank the honorable Prime Minister again for inviting me to address Parliament. It is indeed an honor and Privilege.

Today I have informed the house on the DCGA two main Policy responses that will guide as this year. I have placed the responsibility of updating our people and this House on each Ministers in their speech in reply. I have also outlined some of the Bills that will be tabled in this meeting .

I have faith in all of us to uphold our country's motto, in leading our country by serving it. I would like to acknowledge and thank all our development partners for their continuous support towards our development aspirations.

To the honorable Speaker of the National Parliament of Solomon Islands, thank you. May God guide and bless you as you preside over this Sixth Meeting this Eleventh Parliament.

Thank you honorable Prime Minister for your leadership over the last four years. It has not been easy, but you have stood firm, especially during the COVID-19 global pandemic and the November 2021 Riots. This is the clear demonstration of the backing that you have from your Ministers and Backbenchers, and the people of Solomon Islands. May God continue to protect, guide and bless you as you lead our people and country forward.

The honorable Chief Justice, may God bless you and your fellow brother and sister judges at the National Judiciary as you continue to protect and uphold the rule of law. I thank you all.

Thank you Ministers of the Crown for supporting our Prime Minister in leading our country. May God bless and grant you wisdom. Thank you Leader of the Official Opposition, Leader of the Independent Members of Parliament and Honorable Members of Parliament. May God's blessing be upon you and our people in all our constituencies throughout the country.

To God be the glory great things He has done. God save our Gracious King.

God bless our beloved Solomon Islands from shore to shore.

(Applause)

ADJOURNMENT

The SPEAKER: Thank you your Excellency. Honourable Members, pursuant to Standing Order 7(5) the sitting is now adjourned until 09:30 on Wednesday April 19, 2023.

(The Speaker of Parliament and His Lordship The Chief Justice escort His Excellency the Governor General out of the Parliament Chamber)

(Applause)

Parliament adjourns at 11.10



Eleventh Parliament

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**NATIONAL PARLIAMENT OF
SOLOMON ISLANDS**

Wednesday, 19 April 2023

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

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NATIONAL PARLIAMENT OF SOLOMON ISLANDS**Wednesday, 19 April 2023**

The Speaker, Mr Patterson John Oti, took the Chair at 09:44.

Prayers.

Business of the House

ATTENDANCE

All were present with the exception of the Minister for Fisheries and Marine Resources, Minister for Infrastructure Development, Minister for Justice and Legal Affairs, Minister for Mines, Energy and Rural Electrification, North West Guadalcanal, East Honiara, North Malaita, Malaita Outer Islands, West Makira, Ulawa/Ugi, North New Georgia, Rendova Tetepare, West Honiara.

PRESENTATIONS OF PAPERS AND REPORT

- Report on the Review of the Implementation of the Solomon Islands Family Protection Act 2013, (National Parliament Paper No.8 of 2023).
- Solomon Islands Gazettes from 4 October to 21 December 2022 Vol I: No.4 of 4. (National Parliament Paper No.9 of 2023).
- Supplements to Solomon Islands Gazettes from 4 October to 21 December 2022 Vol II: No.4 of 4 (National Parliament paper No.10 of 2023).
- Solomon Islands Gazettes from 9 January to 30 March Vol. 1 of 4 (National Parliament Paper No.11 of 2023).
- Supplements to Solomon Islands Gazettes from 9 January to 30 March 2023 Vol II: No. 1 of 4. (National Parliament Paper No.12 of 2023).

The SPEAKER: First of all let me acknowledge in the public gallery, Form three students from Betikama Adventist College who are visiting and observing Parliament sitting this morning.

Questions and Answers

LAND FOR HONIARA DUMP SITE AND CEMETERY

#128 **Hon MATTHEW WALE** (*Aoke/Langalanga*)—*Leader of Opposition* (09:47) to the Minister for Lands, Housing and Survey: Can the Minister update Parliament on the progress of securing land for Honiara rubbish dump and cemetery?

Hon ISHMAEL AVUI (*East Central Guadalcanal—Minister for Lands, Housing and Survey*) (09:54): Thank you, Mr. Speaker and I thank the Leader of Opposition and Member of Parliament for Aoke/Langalanga.

On these two sites, there is land and we are working on it. On the rubbish dump, a study was done by the ADB. The site is just above the Mount Austin area. SIWA raised some concerns because of the water catchment in that area. Therefore, we are looking at two alternative sites around the same area, and ADB has also agreed with the alternative sites.

On the cemetery, a land is secured as well. It is 10 hectares. UXO was done on the site. The master plan is done and work on the access road is progressing. The work was done with those from the Ministry of Infrastructure Development and the Ministry of Home Affairs. The security fence was discussed with the Ministry of Health.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: Thank you. With regards to the cemetery, can the Minister to inform the House as to where the location is and how soon or what is the indication of time that it should be ready for use.

With regards to the rubbish dumpsite, in that original identified location, SIWA objected to that and you are looking at alternative sites. For the Minister to confirm whether that alternative sight is confirmed or you have just started to carry out a study on it.

Hon ISHMAEL AVUI: Yes, on the rubbish dump, we are working on the two sites and study is ongoing. On the cemetery, as soon as the necessary works are done, we will start to use it. Access road and fencing will have to be done. Those who live in that area will need to be moved as well. We will use the cemetery once that is done.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: Thank you. It sounds good, but, are we talking about this year? Would it be possible that we will start to use it this year? There is an issue with Kola Ridge as we know. Is it possible that work is done this year and we start using it?

Hon ISHMAEL AVUI: Yes, there is possibility for this year.

Hon CHRIS LAORE: Just to add on to the responses from the Minister of Lands, I think a survey has been done by Azimuth company on the new hospital site. The cemetery is just below it. We are the waiting for the master plan before any progress on the work on the roads. It is just below the new hospital site at Gilbert Camp.

Mr. JOHN MANENIARU: A supplementary question to the Minister on the rubbish dumpsite, we have identified sites for this but we gave them away when development priorities arise or for other interests. I would like to hear from you, how will we secure this place? Just in case you are replaced by a new Minister and he gives away the title to someone else for development purposes. This is an important site. Can the Minister assure the House on this?

Hon ISHMAEL AVUI: Thank you Member for West Are'Are for the supplementary question. This is a priority of this government. This as a high priority. One of the sites will be for the dumpsite. It is a priority of the government and we are looking at it seriously.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: I was just going to ask now that the Minister of Home Affairs said that it is next to the new Referral Hospital site. In regards to those who mount legal challenges on the hospital site, are those matters cleared or do they no longer impede this cemetery area?

Hon ISHMAEL AVUI: The court cases do not affect government's allocation on this site. The government has the right to develop that site for public interest. The court cases do not affect the land.

Mr PETER KENILOREA (Jnr): Just a supplementary question in terms of the rubbish dump. In terms of biodegradable waste, are recycling activities also part of our plans for rubbish collection and disposal in terms of recycling and biodegradable kind of rubbish?

Hon ISHMAEL AVUI: Yes, at this new landfill, the different types of trash that will be dumped there will be separated into those that can be recycled and those that cannot. That is how we will manage it with the application of modern technology.

Mr PETER KENILOREA (Jnr): Just particularly on medical waste disposal, is it part of this site or will it be on a different site? Now that we have the CT Scanner, are we going to dump the radioactive hospital wastes on this site? What is the view of the government on the treatment of medical wastes? There are different standards on the disposal of incinerators. I assume that they will all go in one place.

Hon CULWICK TOGAMANA: As alluded to by the Minister of Lands, the wastes will be sorted, and we are moving in that direction. That is what we are hoping and looking to do on that new dump site. But in terms of hospital wastes, they are not destined for the landfill. We have an incinerator at the hospital that deals with hospital wastes, because these are pathogenic. They have the potential to spread disease. Therefore, we take care of them with the incinerator that we have on site.

Mr. JOHN MANENIARU: Just a supplementary question again. In terms of the displaced community that settled on the rubbish site, how are you going to deal with them? They might be relocated it is almost like a village community and they move to wherever the rubbish dump is. Can you comment on how you address this issue? Just in case they will be relocating to the new site.

Hon ISHMAEL AVUI: Thank you Mr. Speaker and thank you once again Honorable Member for West Are'Are on this very important question. Yes, we have

fenced this new rubbish dump. We will manage it well. No one will enter. We will manage the dumpsite. We will fence the area and there will be tight security.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: I do wish to thank the Honourable Ministers for Lands, Home Affairs and Health for responding to the question.

Although the dumpsite is yet to be done, there is need for a tight security at the Ranadi dumpsite because we are going towards the games and that area is quite full. Of course, this issue with the cemetery is really urgent and desperate indeed. And so it is good that the Ministry gives priority to it to get it open this year.

COMPLIANCE OF BUILDING AND SAFETY LAWS

#129 **Hon MATTHEW WALE** (*Aoke/Langalanga*)—*Leader of Opposition* (10:00) to the Minister of Commerce, Industry, Labor & Immigration: Can the Minister assure Parliament that our laws relating to both building and workers safety are being complied with, while also trying to meet the November deadline for the Pacific Games 2023?

Hon FREDRICK KOLOGETO (*South Vella Lavella—Minister for Commerce, Industries, Labour and Immigration*) (10:01): Thank you Mr. Speaker Sir and I would like to thank the MP for Aoke/Langalanga and the Leader of Opposition for this question.

Yes the Leader himself had clarified himself that the building code or practice belongs to the MID but the Occupational Health and Safety is under the Ministry of Commerce. So I will answer part of it but as far as I am concerned, the contractors are complying with the practice of the Building code.

Just a few updates on the Occupational Safety and Health Unit under the Ministry of Commerce; the Labor Division has conducted two Hazards and Risks Management inspection on three stadium facilities. These are the Telekom field SINIS, Panatina field bottom hills and the main road sites. The unit at the Ministry also carried out two Occupational Safety Health training and briefing sessions with CCECC contractors and workers, on the importance of Safety, Hazard and Risk Management on the entire building structures and venues.

I would also like to clarify here that the unit under the Ministry has carried out major hazardous and risk assessments on all stadiums and facilities to consider possible risks to health and safety of all people at those venues and facilities. finally, I wish to clarify to this honorable Chamber that the Ministry is waiting for funds from the Ministry of Finance to carry out Risk Management Training for Pacific Games staff to be able to carry out assessments and identifications. When we say carry out risk assessment and identification, it simply means to identify hazards and

be able to assess the risks. Also, to be able to control the risks, record the findings and ready controls.

Hon. MANASSEH SOGAVARE: Thank you Mr. Speaker. In terms of compliance with Building Codes and Standards of building, the overall work is supervised by a technical team working very closely with the Ministry of Infrastructure Development. They work very closely with them on a stage-by-stage basis, with the work that they do. So far there is no adverse report that reach me as the Minister responsible for the Pacific Games. Of course, the Minister responsible for infrastructure development in this country is the Deputy Prime Minister and every work done has been done to standard.

We have the Games Council here to look at the facilities and they were really satisfied with the standard of the work done. The last check will be done when all the infrastructures are handed over some time in August. That is when the last checks will be made by the Games Organizing Committee and those responsible for the facilities. They will work with the technical team and the Ministry of Infrastructure Development to make sure that the infrastructures are fit to use before they are certified.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: For further clarification from the honorable Prime Minister. He said they are up to standards. What standards do we apply here?

Hon. MANASSEH SOGAVARE: I think we work very close with the Australian standards. The building that we build here are of the Australian standards.

Mr RICK HOUENIPWELA: Before I ask my question, I want to thank the Prime Minister for his assurances on compliance with the building codes and infrastructure requirements.

My specific question is in terms of the technical capability we have at MID, whether we have people that can do it. I am not only asking about the games facilities but the roads as well. I do understand that they should also check our roads if it complies with the standards that should be complied with. Can the Prime Minister enlighten the House?

Hon. MANASSEH SOGAVARE: Thank you Mr. Speaker. In terms of technical capabilities in this regard, not only on the regulatory side, which is the government's responsibility but it is widespread throughout the system, even our contractors as well. I think the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Infrastructure Development came out and acknowledge that fact. Of course, we have a big responsibility here to make sure we upgrade the standards of our technical people that deal with this matter. In terms of games infrastructure, and of course that is why we have this architectural team on the ground to supervise the stage-by-stage

development of all the infrastructure, we are working very closely with Ministry of Infrastructure Development officials. We acknowledge that there is a serious weakness there. It is something that we need to work on. I think it is good that there was the open day yesterday for Solomon Islands National University. There is great potential there that we can develop that the University address those areas, in terms of those weaknesses.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: If I may oblige the Minister for Commerce, this question was prompted by a number of visits to my office by workers. They said, there are some lapses on occupational safety with issues such as helmets and boots. Some do not have boots. Of course, people could just be complaining, and that is why I noticed the question so that the Minister can tell us clearly. So in those risk assessments, whether the Occupational Safety Hazard Unit of the Ministry noted some of these lapses in worker safety.

Hon FREDRICK KOLOGETO: To the Ministry, safety is paramount. The Labour Division emphasized the fact that safety comes first in any industrial areas. Unfortunately, the safety equipment were supplied by the company. But sometimes the workers do not want to wear the safety equipment. It is sad to say that but, they are not used to wearing shoes or safety shoes. It is entirely up to the company to make sure that they do. But, the Ministry emphasized the importance of enforcing safety measures at the work site.

Mr PETER KENILOREA (Jnr): Just a supplementary question in terms of the building. I would assume that the building reference would also include the sewage system inside the buildings. I just wanted to ask the question, who is in charge of that one? Is it the same contractor, or is it contracted out to specific specialists for the sewage of those facilities?

Hon. MANASSEH SOGAVARE: I will not be able to respond directly to that. I do not really know who is doing that, but we can find out and inform the House. But, work is going on and they addressed those very issues as well.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: I do wish to thank the Honorable Minister for Commerce and the Honorable Prime Minister for responding to all the questions. It is good that the Ministry is keeping a close eye on making sure that there is safety at work. But of course in the long-term, the strength of construction is very important. We have many people coming from overseas and we do not want to see something that does not withstand such pressure.

Just in passing, as the Prime Minister said, he would find out more about the sewage system. I also heard that there was some issues with finding a way out to the sea. Maybe you could find out a little bit more and inform the House.

With those remarks, I do thank the Prime Minister and the Minister.

Bills

THE 'HONIARA CITY (AMENDMENT) BILL 2023'

First Reading

Motions

ADDRESS OF THANKS TO THE GOVERNOR GENERAL

The SPEAKER: Honorable members, Standing Orders 7, paragraph 6, provides for a motion moved without notice for an address of thanks to the Governor General for his speech. The Governor General has delivered the speech on Monday April 17, 2023. Hence, the Motion by the Prime Minister in today's Order Paper.

Hon. MANASSEH SOGAVARE (*East Choiseul—Prime Minister*) (10:15): Thank you Mr. Speaker. I rise to move,

That an address be presented to His Excellency Governor General as follows: "We the National Parliament of Solomon Islands here assemble beg leave to offer thanks for the speech which has been addressed by you to Parliament".

First of all, I wish to offer my sincere thanks to His Excellency the Governor General and the representative of His Majesty King, Charles III, Head of State of Solomon Islands, for delivering his address to Parliament on Monday, April 17, 2023.

The Traditional Speech from the Throne is an important feature in our Representative Democracy and is captured in our Standing Orders. The Standing Orders allow me to invite His Excellency to open each meeting of Parliament with an address to Parliament. His Excellency the Governor General had been doing that since 2019. Inviting His Excellency to open each meeting of Parliament is not compulsory. It is upon the Prime Minister's discretion that His Excellency is invited to address Parliament as we have seen in other parliamentary terms since independence.

The invitation gives the opportunity for the representative of the Head of State, His Excellency, The Governor General, to give an address to Parliament, and in doing so The Governor General is also informing the public of the government's policies and legislative program for this year.

The Eleventh Parliament is the only Parliament which began each of each meeting with an address to Parliament by His Excellency. The Governor General upon my invitation—and I do so because I believe that as a government we must set benchmarks for ourselves. Benchmarks that each Ministry must deliver on and these benchmarks are not for Ministers only, but they are for Permanent Secretaries

as well. As I said in my previous speech in reply to His Excellency's last address to parliament in 2019 and I quote:

Cabinet is responsible to Parliament as provided for under our Constitution and in delivering the speech to Parliament, the Government is effectively informing Parliament and the people of this country on its policy intention and legislative agenda and seeking their support in its implementation. DCGA will continue to responsible to Parliament and the people by reporting back to Parliament at the beginning of its meeting every year on the progress of implementation of Government policies."

As a responsible Government, we will continue to be account to the public on the floor of Parliament. Even if it means that the Government would be criticized for not delivering.

Last year, the Leader of Independent group pointed out that some of the Bills in the Government Legislative Program calendar were there since 2019, and he shared his skepticism if these Bills will ever be passed during the term of this meeting honorable Speaker, those views are valid and I have instructed officials in the Office of the Prime Minister to follow up on these Bills. The DCGA expects these Bills to come to Cabinet by June. Permanent Secretaries as responsible and accounting officers of the government in residence must step up.

Serving our people is not only about the appropriation of and expending of funds on services delivered. It is also about making laws to better promote the interest of our people, protecting their rights and advancing the interest of our country and people. So there must be a balance between the Government policy programs and legislative arm.

Had it not been for COVID-19 and the November Riots, the government would not look too kindly on the lack of progress of its legislative program. That said, I expect these Bills to come to Cabinet and tabled in Parliament in the Sixth Meeting and I expect nothing less.

Having said that, legislations affect the lives of ordinary Solomon Islanders. As a responsible government, we must be sure that any legislation tabled in Parliament goes through a vigorous process of scrutiny and analysis. There are quality control mechanisms that are in place to ensure that this is achieved. Several numbers of delays contributed to these processes. Whilst there is no such thing as a perfect law, it is incumbent upon government to ensure that the proposed laws are just, meaningful, practical, effective and implementation-ready.

We take the concerns raised by His Excellency on the importance of peace, national unity, happy co-existence and respect for authority. We agree that this is a national responsibility. On its part, the government has a duty to ensure that our people fully

understand the policy rationale behind important actions and decisions. The Opposition Group has the duty as His Majesty's loyal opposition to see government's decision through the eyes of reason and understanding and not dirty politics. The Church have a serious responsibility to instill moral principles into the minds of our people through the working of the Holy Spirit. The public of course have the responsibility to protect themselves from being misled by people who only think about themselves in undertaking activities that adds no value to their livelihoods. Now, I will leave that matter there.

On the 2023 Pacific Games, in exactly seven months from today, on the 19th of November 2023, we will participate in the Opening Ceremony of the 17th Pacific Games in our brand new 10,000 seat National Stadium. We will witness 24 national teams from our region march into the National Stadium under their respective national flags.

The population of Honiara will increase substantially during the games. Up to 5,000 athletes and officials from 23 countries will grace our shores to compete. A further 5000 people comprising supporters, visitors and tourists will also be visiting our country around games time. In addition, we can expect thousands of our own people travelling from our provinces to Honiara to be part of the 2023 Pacific Games.

The 2023 Pacific Games facilities have transformed our capital city. The infrastructure represents an investment in our young people and a legacy for our future generation.

A question that could cross our minds is, "will we be ready to host the 2023 Pacific Games in November this year?" Let me say at this juncture seven months out from the games, that I can assure this honorable House that we are ready to host the 17th Pacific Games from November 19th to the 2nd of December 2023.

I am saying this because all the venues and facilities will be completed and handed over to the National Hosting Authority by August 2023. All games villages for the accommodation of athletes and officials will be handed over to the National Hosting Authority by October 2023. The Games Organizing Committee will have all the processes to deliver and manage the games in place before the games.

I have been assured that the road from the international airport to the fishing village will be completed by September this year. The work on the feeder roads in Honiara will start around May/June after the Ministry of Finance completes the compliance check on the tender submission. Sir, we are ready! We are ready to welcome our brothers and sisters from the other Pacific nations to the 17th Pacific Games in Honiara in November this year.

On the infrastructure, the Minister responsible is now in Brisbane, the Deputy Prime Minister, in the Business Conference that is going on in there. Sir, we cannot transform our country without building of game-changing infrastructures. Our economy will remain stagnant if we do not address our infrastructure needs, especially in the productive and resource sectors.

As His Excellency alluded to, the geographical distribution of our islands makes this challenge even more challenging. Climate change has also exacerbated the situation. Rising sea levels in most cases cut off wharves from the land. Roads have been inundated by the sea. For example, there are some parts of the Northern Road in Malaita that the sea has already washed away and there are effects of climate change on our infrastructures.

Climate change is not caused by us but by countries that are big emitters and we bear the consequences of their actions. Therefore, I would like to see these country take more responsibility by helping us to adapt through the building of more climate-resilient infrastructures. Some of our communities and villages must be relocated, but our challenge is the funds to relocate these villages. What is being done now in terms of support by those who cause this is not enough. To add insult in injury, access to climate change funds is very difficult. This needs to change.

However, I wish to join His Excellency in acknowledging and thanking our multilateral and bilateral partners who have assisted us in maintaining our existing infrastructures and building new ones. I want to acknowledge that. We can all see the assistance of JICA happening in Honiara. The Phase 2 of the Kukum High Way is slowly progressing. The usual frequent, and heavy rains are not helping. However, I have been assured that this will be completed by September this year just before the Pacific Games. Now this is crucial because the games organizing committee must have access to the completed roads by mid-October onward. On this note, I wish to thank the Japan International Cooperation Agency and the government and people of Japan for their continued assistance to the government and people of the Solomon Islands.

On SIRAP, the projects under the Solomon Islands Roads and Aviation Program Phase 1 have been completed, which saw the upgrading of bridges in Dala, Malaita. Specifically Bio 1 and 2 core bridges, the routine maintenance and re-gravelling of 21 Kilometers of road in East Malaita which include the 17 Kilometer road from Gwaunaru to Dala design of the Fiu bridge in Malaita and Rawo bridge in Makira is also under SIRAP 1 and carried forward to SIRAP 2. Under SIRAP 2, two bridges along the Northern corridor will be upgraded. These are Kolofe 1 and Kolofe 2. Another two bridges that will also be upgraded are the South road, specifically Su`u and Bira. Northern roads improvement will also be captured under this project.

The other project that is activated is the Land Marine Connectivity Program (LMCP). Under the LMCP, the upgrade on the Honiara International Port has already been awarded to CCECC and I understand that work on this will start soon. A new wharf in Kirakira in Makira and Ha`anga in Bellona will also be built under this project. Also under the LMCP is the upgrade and rehabilitation of the road from White River to Lambi and then Henderson to Mbarande. Work on Henderson to Mbarande road has already started. Work on White river to Lambi road will start after the Pacific Games.

I am also grateful to the Australian Government for the Solomon Islands Infrastructure Program (SIIP). SIIP is preparing a feasibility and detailed design of the Solomon Islands Ports Authority - Noro Ports upgrades. The job entails creating an evaluating options for both the domestic and international wharves and detail design will most likely focus on the international wharf initially. And depending on the land outcomes, the domestic wharf may become part of the project going forward.

SIIP is also assisting in the feasibility study for water supply and sanitation system to serve the tuna processing plant in Bina Harbour and the expanded Bina township. The Solomon Islands Water Authority as the implementing agency for this, will be doing that work. Buala wharf is also another project that SIIP will finance by constructing a replacement wharf at Buala. The current wharf is in poor structural conditions and affected by high sea levels and is operating inefficient and has no land side facilities. SIIP will construct a new climate resilient wharf with landsite passenger facilities close by. Consultations have been carried out and scoping for design will start shortly.

For Taro and Seghe Provincial airport upgrades, SIIP is also co-financing and monitoring the Solomon Islands government-New Zealand provincial airport upgrades at Taro and Seghe. The upgrade in Taro should be completed by September and Seghe upgrade should start around that time.

Furthermore the Ministry of Infrastructure Development is also currently implementing various infrastructure projects under the Development Budget, specifically under the Economic Infrastructure Program (EIP) and Sea Infrastructures and Transport Services Program. These are Buala to Hovi and Buala town roads that is ongoing; the emergency maintenance to 10 log bridges in East road in Malaita Province that is ongoing; the rehabilitation of Lomlom ring road in Temotu Province that is ongoing; the East Guadalcanal road from Mbarande to Mbokokimbo that is ongoing, the East Fataleka roads and bridges in Malaita Province roads and bridges that is ongoing, North East Guadalcanal roads that is ongoing; Monga to Kaoka road in Guadalcanal, planned work should commence in 2023; Okwala to Kilusakwalo road, planned work should commence in 2023; The

Taba'a to Busuone Road, planned work should commence in 2023; Fadila to Masilana inner road, planned work should commence in 2023; the Tulagi ring road in Central Islands Province, the Tulagi wharf has incomplete; the Chea wharf in Western province is ongoing; The Malaita wharf maintenance, the Arabala, Su'u, Kiu, Atoifi, Uhu, Nu'usi and Masupa, those are ongoing as well; Isabel wharf maintenance, planned works should commence in 2023; the Choiseul wharf maintenance, works also start to commence in 2023; Western wharves maintenance work will also start in 2023. The Ministry of Rural Development has also supported infrastructure projects in our constituencies, aided by the Ministry of Infrastructure Development, and in some instances the Peoples Republic of China. These are the East Guadalcanal road project, the Marau/Sukiki/AvuAvu 60 Kilometers of road that is ongoing; the West Guadalcanal road rehabilitation, Marasa to Babanikira Road, Kusumba Road and Naro to Lambi, that is also being looked at and I think work should start in 2023, if not ongoing; the East Malaita Mini Hospital that is ongoing; the Baegu/Asifola road project is ongoing; the East Malaita road construction; the Fataleka Constituency road 35.5 Kilometers; the Small Malaita Constituency road project that is on going. The Gasini market house that is completed; the Constituency Development Growth Center, Coconut Crushing Mill; two staff houses and Police Post, Fisheries Centre and wholesale that is on going in a location in Western Province and the LomLom coastal ring road, that is ongoing.

I will leave it to the relevant Member of Parliament to update the House on these progress of some of these projects.

These infrastructures are important because it helps facilitate the international and regional trade by improving connectivity and gaining access to markets. We need to trade with other countries to earn new foreign revenue for our country. However, we also need our neighbors, such as Australia, to make access to their markets easier. I acknowledge the PACER plus, however the trade imbalance between Solomon Islands remains. And I wish to reiterate the sentiments raised by the Chairlady of the Solomon Islands Chamber of Commerce and Industries in her welcome remarks yesterday at the 12th Australia Pacific Islands Business Council Forum in Brisbane, Australia. She said, 'we need solutions to improve our exports to Australia to mitigate the existing trade deficits. Australia is only three hours away and yet our only export to them is our can tuna from Soltuna. And she said; I asked Australia to put in place a conducive policy interventions to improve this situation".

I say this in support of our private sector and the concerns raised by Solomon Islands Chamber of Commerce and Industries. By the way, under the Pacer Plus agreement, they set aside about AUD\$50 million to help small island states to address the supply side. Until today, I did not see that money.

The government is also actively looking at the opportunities for trade under the arrangement we have with the People's Republic of China to make use of the incentives available under that arrangement. As for the United Arab Emirates, our new friends, we are looking at our copra exports under the new-look CEMA. We are also developing other destinations as well. I will leave that matter there.

On the Federal Constitution, we note the sentiments raised by his Excellency on the way forward to implement recommendations by Eminent Persons Advisory Council and People's Congress on the Federal Constitution. The recommendation is problematic in that it recommends, as a starting process amendment to Section 61 of the Constitution. This is to establish the Constituent Assembly where all Members of Parliament will be part of, to bring the new constitution into force. This recommendation overlooks very important considerations and assumes that the new constitution is ready to go. This process is like putting the cart before the horse in requiring this Parliament to begin the process, without the benefits of appreciating what we will be getting ourselves into under the new government system.

As advised by his Excellency, government will subject the draft to peer review and economic analysis. In the meantime, government will commence the process of empowering provinces through reform of the Provincial Government Act, to devolve more powers to provinces, including financial resources and other logistics as a way of preparing provinces. So we will start work immediately on that matter. As advised by his Excellency, this is not a simple matter. Our future hangs on it. The Government is not taking the advice lightly.

On electoral reforms, His Excellency made reference to expected changes to our electoral laws which require legislative changes, in his speech from the throne. I was informed that the taskforce on Electoral Reform, established by the Electoral Commission to assist the Commission in implementing its Electoral Reform Strategy Framework, has completed its provincial consultations. It is now working on consolidating its report and recommendations for change to certain aspects of our electoral law. One of the major changes is the proposal to hold simultaneous elections in 2024. What this means is that when parliamentary elections are held in 2024, general elections for seven provincial assemblies and the Honiara City Council will be held on that same day as well.

The two provinces that will not participate in this simultaneous election in 2024 will be Choiseul and the Western Provinces. They recently had their provincial elections in 2022. They will, be part of this simultaneous election program from 2028 to 2029.

To facilitate the holding of simultaneous elections, and in order to defer the general election dates of Honiara City Council and the seven provincial assemblies to 2024,

Parliament will deliberate on a Bill to amend the Honiara City Act and another to amend the Provincial Government Act.

The taskforce on electoral reform in conjunction with the Electoral Commission intends to consult with Members of Parliament on the proposed changes to the Electoral Act in May before finalizing its proposal. I am informed that a Bill to amend the Electoral Act will be tabled in this House in June or July 2023.

Big ticket items, such as the simultaneous elections and out-of-constituency (out of country voting) will be discussed at this proposed workshop with Members of Parliament.

Voter registration is expected to commence in July this year. I understand that the Commission intends to also pre-register 17 year olds as provided for in Division 5 of the Electoral Act 2018 this will be done for the first time. When the person turns 17, of course the person's name will be transferred to the final list of electors for the relevant constituency.

It is also important to note that during the forthcoming voter registration exercise, the commission will introduce a new requirement, where eligible voters registering for the first time and those applying to change constituencies need to provide some evidence that enable them to register in the constituency applied for. This will hopefully minimize the so-called cross-border registrations. More information on this will be released shortly so that eligible voters are informed of the process. So that we get it right.

I think I said more than I intend to say and pray each Minister will elaborate further on what His Excellency stated on Monday April 17, 2023.

With that, I beg to move, that we the National Parliament of Solomon Islands here assembled beg leave to offer thanks to the speech which has been addressed by the Governor General.

I beg to move.

(Debate commence)

Hon MATTHEW WALE (*Aoke/Langalanga—Leader of Opposition*) (10:46): Thank you Mr. Speaker and I wish to thank the Honorable Prime Minister for moving the Motion, that all of us can reflect on the words His Excellency made in Parliament on Monday 17th April 2023.

I will be very brief on the things that I would like to say. Perhaps, before I venture my observations on government priorities for 2023, as outlined by His Excellency, I will go back as the Leader of Independent did last year, and has been alluded to by

the Honorable Prime Minister, to look at the life of this House and term of this government, and priorities the government outlined in the addresses His Excellency made to the House in the succeeding years.

At the outset, I think it is important to say that it is a good thing for the government to be ambitious in the things that it wants to deliver for this country to our people. A government without ambition is not worthy of the name. So it is in all of our interests and for the common good that government is as ambitious as it possibly can, within the limits of course, of resource constraints and execution capacity.

Of course, we must all pray, as we all do in every Sabbath and every Sunday. Most Solomon islanders would pray for the success of the government and leadership of the country, and especially the Executive government to make sure that the things government outlined are done and done well, and done in reasonable time with reasonable cost. I am sure Members can remember everything that His Excellency said in past years, but just give me a few minutes to go through, just a few to rekindle our memories.

On the Fundamental Reform Programs 2019, the Independent Commission of Corruption was one of those that was listed. Again in 2020, The Governor General mentioned that appointments have been done. In 2021, that it was up and running. There was nothing in 2022 and 2023. I note that recently the Annual Report of this important Commission Against Corruption was tabled.

The Chairman of that Commission made it clear that under current legislative framework, the Commission does not have a teeth to bite. So, I would urge the government to perhaps, enter into a dialogue with him to look at what sort of teeth he claimed to not have. If it is true that it does not, the Commission needs to be resourced so that it can bite.

The other concern I would like to raise is with regards to the resourcing of this very important Commission. We know, a lot of our integrity institutions had struggled for budgetary resources and lack resources for extended periods of time. It affects their mandate and work they do. But this Commission, given the problems that we face and their mandate, it is very important that they are resourced adequately so that they are able to effectively discharge their mandate.

On the Fundamental Reform Program 2019—the Prime Minister touched on the Federal System—in 2019, His Excellency said that the government will do a cost-analysis to make sure its decision on the Federal System is reasonable and evidence based, in light of the common good. After that, there was no mention of this, but of course, we had COVID in the subsequent years, so the focus of the Government was on COVID. I will make few comments on this later on after going through some of the things that His Excellency raised in the previous years.

The other one is the Electoral Act. In 2019 The Governor General highlighted that there will be a Bill to amend this Act. The House was told by His Excellency that by July of 2020, the Bill will be brought to the House. After that, there was no mention of this in his addresses in 2021, 2022 and 2023. Perhaps again, maybe COVID slowed us down.

Another is the Political Integrity Act. In 2019, The Governor General announced the intention of the government to amend this law. In 2020, His Excellency said that this amendment will come to Parliament in 2020. Then there was no further update in the years that went by.

The other is the Traditional Governance Bill. In 2019 His Excellency announced that government intends to bring this Bill back to the House. In 2020, he said that the Cabinet will approve it in the final quarter of 2020. After that, he did not talk about the submission of that Bill to Parliament in 2020. But then in 2021, 2022, and 2023, perhaps because of the COVID, there was no updates on the progress made on this important Bill. Perhaps the Minister, in his reflections, might update this House on this. Of course, this Bill was brought to Parliament during the last House. It was withdrawn on the recommendations of the Bills and Legislation Committee for further work to be done.

The one that has come through already, and on time, is the Tax Administration Bill, which we passed last year. Another is the Customs and Exercise (Amendment) Bill. As I recall, I think this has not yet been brought before Parliament. I am quite confused with the Customs Validation Bill. I think it is the Customs Validation Bill that already came. Which is a different Bill. But having already been cleared by the Bills Committee, the government has not proceeded on it. So I am not sure of the intentions of the government with regards to that particular Bill.

Another important bill is the Value-Added Tax Bill. His Excellency announced government's intention of bringing the bill to the House in 2019. In 2022, he repeats that intention. And of course, on Monday he stated that the Tax Bill will be brought to Parliament this year.

I think this is one of the most important pieces of legislation that we must pass before this House terminates. It will have an impact on making our economy more favorable to investment and the ease of doing business will really improve with that Tax Bill.

The other one is the Income (Amendment) Tax Bill mentioned in 2019 and also in 2020. Of course, we passed another bill last year, The Payment Systems Bill. This is an important bill and Perhaps the Minister of Finance can update the House on where we are at in its implementation.

As you will no doubt experience, when you write a cheque or even if you do internet banking and you are making a payment or transferring funds between accounts, if it is internet banking, it will take five days. I assume for internet banking, it should be processed automatically with just a click. But, as it is we are just the same as in the 11th century. So it would be important for the Minister to update Parliament on the implementation timeline of this very important legislation.

In terms of Separation of Powers, His Excellency spoke on more autonomy for the legislature and judiciary in 2019 e stated that government will work closely with the Legislature and the Judiciary to review existing laws and create new laws that will realize greater autonomy. I am not really clear in terms of Judiciary, but in terms of Parliament Sir, you have been very instrumental in motivating, driving the reforms that are needed to deliver on this very important policy goal. So perhaps this is a matter that Prime Minister will respond to. It would be great if we can have more in governments thinking on this.

In terms of the justice system, in 2019, His Excellency announced the government's intention to bring the Tribal Land Resolution or Panel Bill to Parliament. Again, as I recall, this Bill has been submitted and the Bills Committee already dealt with it. I think the Bills Committee recommended the withdrawal of this bill for further work. There has been no update in the subsequent years from government, or even in subsequent addresses by His Excellency. Perhaps the Minister for Justice could update the House on governments intentions with regards to this bill.

The Legal Profession Bill, this is an important piece of (proposed) legislation. For those of you who love Lawyers and frequent Lawyers, this one is very important. Of course its importance is greater than that. My brother-in-law is staring at me, but I mean no disrespect to Lawyers. All I say is that it is good for the profession and the public that this Legislation is progressed so that the integrity of that profession is protected and advanced that the delivery of justice in our country is safeguarded by those that engage in this profession. There has been no update on this Bill since 2020. This Bill came in the last House and was cleared by the Bills Committee, I think. Perhaps just a clarity in terms of governments intentions on dealing with it.

Also in 2019, His Excellency announced the government's intention in bringing The Youth Justice Bill. In 2020, he said that it is pending Cabinet's approval. However, there was no update since then. Again, perhaps the Minister for Justice could bring us up to speed on the progress on this.

On Sustainable Economic Development, in 2019 His Excellency announced the commencement of DBSI, also in 2020. In 2021 he announced that DBSI was up and running. This is an important initiative and it is good that it is up and running. I note that they have submitted their first annual report and we will put a Motion on

Notice so that we consider its work and the impact it is having in its early reformation stages.

In 2020, His Excellency announced that the Micro Small to Medium Enterprise Bill (MSME) will be brought to Cabinet in July of 2020. He expected the bill to be laid before Parliament in the last quarter of 2020. gain, we have not had further updates since. So it would be good for the Minister to update us on this.

I note that some of these reappear in his address to Parliament on Monday. Obviously, with the COVID break, perhaps these are now coming back on the radar. But would be good for each of the Ministers to give us more clarity on the status of the Bills.

In 2020, he said that The Trustees Bill would be submitted to Parliament in the last quarter of that year. I am not really clear on what Trustees Bill this is. Perhaps the Minister could clarify that, and whether this is under Commerce, Lands or Justice ministries. It would be good to get some clarity on this.

Also, he announced the NPF Amendment Bill in 2020, that it would be submitted to Parliament in the last quarter of that year. And so it would be good to also get some update on this. Similarly, The Credit Union Act (Amendment) Bill, he said in 2020 that it would be submitted to Parliament in the last quarter of that year. Enterprise Bill was announced in 2022. There were no announcements of it prior to that. Again, an update would be useful to the House.

He also spoke on Tina Hydro in 2020 and 2021. He stated that progress is on schedule. Perhaps the Minister could update the House on whether it is on schedule. I gathered from the media that there were some delays and costs associated with those delays. I thought I read few months ago that the cost up to end of last year from the delays was up to USD\$15 million. It sounds a little excessive, but it would be good for the Minister, including the Minister of Finance to provide an update to see the new timeline for the completion of this project.

Another important one that was mentioned in 2019 is the Coral Sea Submarine Cable. He mentioned in 2019, *'to enable the country to have quality and cheap internet from 2020 and onwards'*. In 2021, he said that it was operational since 1st February 2020. The two things he mentioned, *'quality and cheap internet'* was not fulfilled. Perhaps the Minister for Communication could inform the House as to why our internet is still not what it ought to be, or what we hoped it would have been like.

The Prime Minister touched on the revitalized CEMA and the new markets in UAE. We are very pleased to hear that. New markets are good, that there is interest in our copra. y fear is that we might put too much effort on copra. The future of our economy is in agri-processing and it would be important that CEMA could be a

catalyst for that, so that there are economies of scale and we are not caught up just by demands just by demands of a market that does not add value to our agriculture products. Perhaps it would be good for the Minister to outline the direction going forward on this. There were some views expressed by existing operators in the private sector operators who trade in cocoa, and it would be good for the Minister to outline to the House how that direction will help them to grow as opposed to trampling on them.

With regards to the Russell Islands, in 2019 His Excellency said that the Government was working on finalizing the settlements for the former workers of RIPEL. Then he repeated that statement in 2020. So some updates on where we are on this. This is the largest coconut plantation in the Western hemisphere and it has been mostly idle for far too long when it could be adding more to the country's GDP. So it would be useful to get some updates on that.

On Pacific Games, of course government has been very focused on it these years. His Excellency in all of his addresses, touched on the Games and of course, as Minister responsible, Prime Minister has been keeping the House updated. Of all government programs, I think this is one that I feel I have been fully updated on, which is a good thing. It would also be good for other programs to receive the same level, or at least communicate what government is doing to the same level.

In his 2020 address, His Excellency announced government's intention with regards to the Citizenship by Investment Program. That paper was expected to be tabled in Cabinet later in that month, April or May of 2020, to consider this new and innovative opportunity.

I note from a briefing by a representative of the selected service provider and the Secretary to the Prime Minister that the proposal returned, resurrected post-COVID-19. I am not sure whether this is a matter for the Immigration Minister or Citizenship Minister, the Home Affairs or perhaps the Prime Minister to bring us up to date on government intentions going forward. Just some information.

In the discussions during the briefing, I urged the Secretary to the Prime Minister to consult widely because he stated that a new legislation specifically to deal with this, will come this year. I urged him then and the government now, to consult widely. This is a very important initiative. But citizenship is an emotional issue for us. Sometimes our people can get hang up on the wrong places and on wrong issues, and then it becomes a highly emotive situation that are not even relevant to some of the issues under discussion it would be really useful for the government to consult widely and get our people to feel they are part in the discussions around it. After that government can decide on how it would want to proceed. To come to

Parliament and enact legislation on this particular matter without consultation might not be really good for our people.

On the Sectoral Reform Program on Agriculture, there were some very strong statements made both in 2019 and 2020. We like it. It is a good thing when government makes strong statements of intent. Of course, government must deliver. That is even more important.

In 2019, His Excellency said that the government recognized the value of Research and Technology in maximizing the output quality and yield of agriculture's livestock sector. This is very important. But I wonder Sir, if we want to do all of it ourselves it would be like doing a lot of heavy lifting. We can buy the technology from others who have gone before us, other countries. We can even buy the technical capacity from other countries as well as we are building our own research, technology and capacity. That will help us to be already engaged in increased production, increased yield, better varieties of our agriculture produce and also, adding much more value to our agricultural production.

Therefore, on this matter, I agree the intention of government on research is very good and it must continue. It is a bit slow for my liking, but it must go ahead. But that must not stand in the way of government investing in acquiring the technical expertise and technology required in this very important sector. Perhaps this is an area that CEMA ought to focus on. Of course, it would require financial investment.

Again, His Excellency, on agriculture, in 2020, noted the increase in 52 percent in the agriculture development budget. Now, when we hear increases like this and 52 percent is a huge increase. But when you look at absolute amounts, it is tiny. So having impacts, game changing impact, will probably be mitigated by such small amounts.

Agriculture, of course, I would be preaching to the converted in saying that agriculture represents perhaps our biggest growth sector, and is important for us to invest in it. I would urge the government to look at investing in agriculture in the way that we have invested in the games. It is good that the games will be done this year. Therefore, in the budget for next year government must allocate adequate funds. Of course, not just money. If its only money the Minister will squander the money. So we need a good plan and more money. It must take an all of government approach and CEMA must be an important part in that. In 2019, His Excellency mentioned that government will achieve in its term in office, and this is the final year, the Research Centre and Technology to maximize output, quality and yield. These are all good things. So perhaps the Minister of Agriculture will update us on where we are at on this. His Excellency repeated the same statement in 2020.

In 2020, His Excellency said that Agriculture and Livestock Growth Strategy and Investment Plan for 10 years was being drafted. It sounded like an important plan. So again, perhaps, the Minister could update the House on where this important piece of work is at. Also on agriculture, in 2020, His Excellency announced plans of the government to establish a trust fund to fund the investment plan for the 10 years. So again, perhaps, a bit more information and update to Parliament. Also, in 2020, His Excellency announced plans of the government to establish a National Agriculture Advisory Council. This sounded like it may have been established but there was no update since it was mentioned in 2020. It would be good for the Minister to provide some update.

Also, in 2020, His Excellency said that the government was looking at reviewing the LDA Act. Again, this was an important SOE before it went bankrupt. But it does not mean that there is no need for it. So it is important for the Minister to update the House on where this is at.

Also, in 2020, he announced that an MOU with Kiribati to export our agriculture products was expected to be completed at the end of April 2021. So, perhaps if the Minister could also update the House on this.

With regards to tourism, the National Transport Core Initiative, and the Prime Minister touched a bit on this in terms of connectivity. His Excellency both in 2019 and 2020, elaborated on this. In 2020, he stated that a multi expert team was assembled to do a desktop assessment on the concept with the key Ministries and private sectors. So, perhaps, if some update could be given to the House on that work and what the outcome is on that work, and what directions emerged from that important piece of work.

Again, on tourism, in 2020, His Excellency stated that aggressive marketing and promotion strategies have been ongoing in that year, 2020. Of course, we entered the COVID period for most of that year. So, I am not sure how aggressive our marketing was done, but that was what His Excellency had said.

With regards to Commerce, Trade and Immigration, in 2019, His Excellency announced that a Special Economic Zone Bill will be developed. That was what he said. In 2020, he said it will be brought to Cabinet by the middle of 2020 and laid before Parliament in the third quarter of 2020. I note that it is one of the Bills listed to come before Parliament this year. But again, it would be important for the Minister to update us and give us some confidence in terms of how much work has already been done, so that the House can gauge whether it is realistic to expect it in this year.

Same with the Cooperative Society Act, he stated in 2020 that the Ministry was reviewing that Act. Again, an update would be useful. Also in 2020, he announced

that the government plans to establish a National Youth Cooperative Society to encourage entrepreneurship culture. This sounds important. So, it would be good to get further update on this.

Also in 2019, His Excellency announced that the wage policy must be reviewed. He made that directive and it got me thinking, who he is ordering? But then in 2021, he stated,

...has been reviewed. Our people must have purchasing power to be able to afford a respectable standard of living.

I will come back to this important matter a little bit later. Perhaps if the minister can update the House on this review. What are the outcomes and recommendations, what has government decided to do with the outcomes and recommendations of that review. As you know Sir, wages in our economy has stagnated for a number of years, of course, in the face of cost of living increases. So, this is a very important work to help guide government's responses to this very important piece of policy.

In terms of Foreign Trade, Foreign Investment, and Market Access, in 2019, His Excellency stated that the government will address this through policy and legislation. He repeated much the same wording in 2020. Again, it is important for the Minister to update us on this.

The influx of foreign investors into our country is something we want, we welcome and encourage. Of course, the quality of that investment, that foreign investment is something that we must take care of. That care must be borne by our solemn responsibility to make sure that the various sectors of our economy are not saturated, and crowd out our own indigenous people from meaningful engagement and meaningful participation in the various sectors of our economy.

I echo this over and over again. Business as we know is not really ingrained in our blood. It is not part of our culture. Some people succeeded, others not, but that should not be the reason to allow the various sectors of our economy to be saturated by foreign investment and deprive our own people from those opportunities. So it is a fine balance, but it is a balance that government must work on. Some updates on that would be important. With regards to Civil Aviation and Telecommunications, in 2019, His Excellency stated that government will rehabilitate our airports. In 2020, he named the airports; Taro, Seghe Suavanao and Lata. So we see the allocations in the Development Budget for these and of course, the list that Prime Minister read today has included some of these. It would be good to know when we expect these to be completed. Which are the next airports to go on the list in the next phase of this program?

We note, of course, the completion of this new terminal at Henderson. Of course His Excellency announced that in 2020. The terminal is now completed. Like I noted previously during the budget debate, when I hear the initial plans, I thought it was a very big building. Driving past the place it was just a small building. I do not know how long it will last before we ask for another big building. So, perhaps the Minister could inform the house of the capacity of this new building. They must have some data projecting forward. How many years will it last before we need a bigger one.

And then in 2020, His Excellency announced the new Munda International Terminal and the tar sealing of the runway. Perhaps, an update on the new terminal in Munda and whether it is completed, and whether all the various services, Immigration Quarantine, Customs and so fort are able to be housed there. Additionally, what are the plans going forward for this airport to reopen for international services.

With regards to this tar sealing of the Munda Airport runway, I am quite confused about. We just tar sealed the runway quite recently. Are we going to tar seal it again? So the announcement in 2020 was to be another layer of new tar on top of the existing one? Perhaps, the Minister could inform the House of the problem with the old tar and therefore the need for further sealing of the runway.

With regards to infrastructure development, in 2019, His Excellency said that government is dedicated to mitigating challenges of shipping and air services. So it was a general statement of intent. There was nothing more in 2020, 2021 including this year. It would be useful to the House for the Minister to outline the intentions of the government. This is a sector our own people work and succeeded in it. Of course, recently we have seen that with the declining of forestry and logging, a lot of loggers ended with ships and badges that are not doing anything. So they use the ships for passenger and cargo and the rates have come down. hey are not making money from those operations. The money they are making is from logging. But, I think their strategy is to run our own local operators to the ground, then of course, they will recoup their profits in later years. This is a kind of predatory behavior. It would be good for the Minister to outline government's intention to help our people to remain strong and grow stronger in the provision of shipping services in our country.

Also coupled with this is the fact that a lot of constituencies own and operate ships. This has been a discussion that has been ongoing for probably too long, in terms of ownership of those vessels and what happens to the transfer of ownership if the particular Member at the time of the procurement of the vessel is no longer in office for whatever reason. And also some kind of indication of a more rationalized outlook for this industry going forward. How will this industry look in the future and the role these constituency companies and our own local private sector will

have in this important industry. Of course we are a maritime country of many islands, so shipping will remain a critical part of our connectivity.

With regards to infrastructure still, a number of projects were announced in 2020. The Prime Minister touched earlier on some of them; transformation and modernization of Honiara Central Business District and Provincial Capitals Initiative. In 2020 His Excellency said, detailed work on the concept and 3-D Modeling was being done to assist with decision making.

It is a good thing that Honiara must look much better than it does now so as our provincial capitals. But in terms of its financing, perhaps a little bit more information to the House would be very useful. If we are going to be allocating too much budgetary resources for our provincial capitals and Honiara, it would probably be not a very responsible thing to do. It will look nice and feel nice. But it might deprive the rest of the country where the bulk of our population are, in terms of delivery of development services to them.

On the National Referral Hospital, in 2020, The Governor General said the government is committed to moving this forward. I assume that the idea of relocation to the new site and of course, in the new Health Strategic Plan, the timeline of the relocation way far off. He did not provide any more updates on this. But the timeline, I think with the state of the current facilities at the National Referral Hospital as we all know, it is in a bad state. We all will end up there when we are sick. It would be good that we do both; improve the National Referral Hospital as it is where we must go for now, but also shorten the timeline to commence building of the new hospital at Gilbert Camp. The progress that has been made and the speed with which it has been achieved in terms of game construction is phenomenal. If we gave the same level of attention, resources, push, will, behind this new hospital, it is clear that we can do it. So I would urge the government to do that, but to shorten the timeline so that we can begin soon.

Also on the Justice Precinct Complex, His Excellency said, government is committed to move forward. Such statement as "*committed to move forward*," is vague. So it would be good for the Minister to inform the House on this.

On Infrastructure Authority, I think this accompany's The Infrastructure Bill, so perhaps the relevant Minister will update us on the Infrastructure Bill. If that is the one that is going to set up the Infrastructure Authority that His Excellency announced in his address in 2020, which that time he said Cabinet would deliberate on it in the month of May 2020. Since then there has been no update to the House.

I come to fisheries; In 2019, His Excellency said that government will establish and strengthen national and provincial fisheries governance and institutional arrangements; government will provide opportunities for rural fishermen to

improve their standard of living through the promotion of onshore fisheries processing; to support indigenous owners to establish business management and utilization of their marine resources. He repeated that in 2020. Of course the work that is ongoing in Bina obviously will form a big part toward this policy goal.

But I would like to raise the challenges that we have with the rural constituency fisheries centers, the program that the Ministry tried to roll out over the last two terms of this House. It would be useful for the Ministry to carry out a study on the success of that program to inform an evidence-based replacement program. We know fisheries is very important and this is not a new program. Japan has tried in past, EU tried as well. Now we are trying. But it all seems to have met the same fate. So, perhaps in our rush to roll out what we rightly see as an important enterprise requiring the participation of many people, we failed or perhaps overlooked some of the lessons that we could have learned before the roll out of this program. Sad to say, most of these centers no longer operate. Communal ownership of these infrastructure has been problematic or people made it difficult too. Some 'bigheads' damaged the centres, but lessons must be learned to help inform government policy going forward.

On Lands and Housing, in 2020, His Excellency announced that government plans to produce by the end of 2020 its Land Restitution Policy. Then there has been no updates since in his subsequent addresses. The Minister of Lands could therefore inform the House on this Restitution Policy.

In 2020, The Governor General announced government's plan to establish a Customary Land Reconciliation and Recording Commission. It will be good for the Minister to update the House on this. There is no updates in his subsequent addresses.

With the Mamara Housing Estate, in 2021, His Excellency announced government will priorities and promote development of the program. We know that in 2022 government bought 50 of the first houses that were built under Mamara Development for public officers. Since then, I understand that the houses are empty. Only the MP for Temotu/Nende is there weeding the grass around those houses to keep the mosquitoes away. However, having spent so much money on it with the houses sitting idle is not good. Perhaps some update on government's plans on the houses going forward and when are we going to deal with the allocation of houses to public officers. What policies surround that?

His Excellency also announced in 2021 that three vulnerable communities have been identified by the government for resettlement scheme. Communities affected by sea level rise. It would be good for the Minister to update Parliament in terms of the criteria used to identify those communities. Of course, many communities would

need relocation. For me, almost my entire constituency or at least 80 percent of it will need to be relocated. This is an existential issue for many of us throughout the country. Of course, government cannot all at once address this need for relocation. But as the Honorable Prime Minister stated, we must get those responsible for this to give us far more money than they have been drip-feeding us. Of course, I note the progress made on loss and damaged fund to address the impacts of disasters. Perhaps the Minister of Foreign Affairs could update the House, firstly whether it has been set up and how long we will expect that fund to be set up. What about our own capacity here to be ready to access the funds and what kind level of funding we can access. This will give the House some idea and indication of whether relocation of these communities is something that can be done within a reasonable time. Of course, sea level rise does not wait for anyone, it is ongoing. Every month during full moon, we see king tides and it covers the places where we put our earth ovens. Kitchens on our islands are covered in sea water. So, obviously, this is a matter of some desperate urgency. It is important that the government gives priority to it in terms of securing resources elsewhere, as well as, allocating some of our own budgetary resources. This is better than waiting for disaster to happen before we look around for resources.

In 2020, His Excellency announced that the government "continues" to develop national housing policy. So, it would be useful to see whether this policy work has been completed. He said this in 2020. If the Minister can update us on this. I take it just from the title National Housing Policy, that it will encompass or include all our villages and not just in towns and urban areas that requires planning permit and all these things. But that it offers some kind of guideline for the entire country and our villages.

On Mines and Energy; in 2020 His Excellency said that review of the Solomon Islands Electricity Act will happen to ensure regulatory function is exercised from the service provision function. He repeated this in 2021. Of course, that is included in this year's list of governments' legislative program. This is a very important one and of course in terms of provision of energy, when Tina Hydro comes on line—right now Solomon Islands is the most expensive in terms of the cost of electricity in the world. Once Tina Hydro comes on, the best estimate is that it will drop this cost by 40 percent. But it drops it to the third world most expensive only. So there is still of course need to address the cost element on the provision of energy. Energy is a big determinant for whether Solomon Islands is an attractive investment location. It is attractive for processing factories for example, that uses a lot of energy. It is important that we consider it.

But of course also in its best months, Tina Hydro is projected to provide up to 80 percent of Honiara's power needs. I am wondering whether in these reforms, SIEA in collaboration with the government, finances roof top solar. So that households

do not need to buy the panels but sell it back onto the grid and reduce the cost of the electricity at least to the residences. but that, perhaps is part of the mix in the initiatives to address the energy cost factor.

In 2020 and 2021, His excellency stated that government continues to review with the view to amend the Petroleum Act. So we look forward to an update on this one. Of course, it is listed in this years legislative agenda.

Sir, I am encouraged by the investments government has made in terms of our ministry's lab. Government is now doing tests that it was not able to do before. And of course, I would urge the government to make sure that this lab continues to be equipped and that it continues to have the capacity in terms of human resources and also money and chemicals, the equipment they need to continue to play the important role they played in this particular industry.

Sir, in 2020 and again in 2021 and 2022, His Excellency stated that a new Mining Bill will be submitted by May 2020. It will be tabled in Parliament shortly after. We know that has not happened yet. And so we look forward again to this very important piece of legislation.

Sir, the current legislation, with the awarding of prospecting licenses based on first come, first served basis is totally outdated and counterproductive to our development aspirations. So if there is interest in a particular tenement, the first company to submit its application will be given priority consideration, regardless of whether it has the financial or technical capacity to actually undertake the task.

So it has led to way too much speculation with regards to prospecting licenses, and some *fly-by-nighters* who come and find it easy to get through and get these and obtain access agreement from the land owners. Then, of course, they flog it off and made a lot of money out of it. But for us, none of these projects really get off the ground. So our overall aim must be to have good mining assets in the country, but in the hands of credible tried-operators, not *fly-by-nighters*.

This is of some concern, especially in the light of the migration of those who have been in logging migrating to the mining sector. We must not hold it against them. They see what the law is and they want to operate under it. But the practices of 'transfer-pricing' and 'environmental recklessness' that exists and occurred in the logging industry. When the loggers migrated and form a new company, they are basically the same people. He just covers himself with a new blanket. Therefore, he will bring his same attitude with him under this new blanket. He will continue to deprive our people. So it is absolutely urgent that this piece of work is brought to a conclusion and brought to the house in 2020 His Excellency announced the establishment of a Mineral Advisory Centre to advise our land owners. I note just from reading media recently that some land owners in Isabel complained that some

Ministry activities during their visit to the nickel tenements is leaning more towards promotion of a particular company than to provide advise. It maybe a wrong accusation, ill-informed and miss-informed complaint but it does raise the need for such a capacity at the Ministry to help our people they know their rights. Much more importantly to really protect, advance and maximize their interest. As we know, as for logging, the Akwa tree will grow again after logging. As for the nickel, after they dig the ground its gone. Even if it rains many times, no oxide or nickel will grow again in the ground. So it is important in the interest of our future generations that the mineral resource is appropriately protected.

Regarding water, His Excellency announced in 2020 governments intention to develop a legal framework to manage and administer our water resources. There has been no further mention in his subsequent addresses. We know the issues of customary land ownership which affects the availability of water to development areas. So this is an important piece of work and it would be useful to the house if the Minister can update parliament.

For forestry, His Excellency announced in 2020 that government reviewed the Forest Resource and Timber Utilization Act. Then He announced again in 2021 that this Act will be reviewed. I note from what the Minister stated in the recent past that a lot of work has been expanded on this very important piece of work. Of course His Excellency announced on Monday that this will come before Cabinet in May this year.

I am concerned about this piece of work Mr. Speaker. The Forestry Bill like the Mining Bill has taken, I think too long, unreasonably long to bring these important pieces of legislation to protect our environment, the rights of land owners and the country's strategic resources. This is to make sure that we get maximum returns now if possible, but also for the future of our children. I look forward to the Forestry Bill this year. I am sad because this bill finally come after the Forestry sector is winding down. If it comes much earlier, perhaps we could have gained far more value out of the resource that has gone out of our country, and perhaps protected more of our environment.

Also in 2020 and He has repeat it in 2021 His Excellency said government will support down streaming of Forestry sector very time we allocate budget for down streaming, it is used to buy Lucas mill, chainsaw, chisel, saw and hammer. That is all down streaming of course. It is all processing, it all adds value. But the game changer in terms of GDP, the game changer down streaming processing we must invest in perhaps either through PPP or outright private sector participation but incentive what is happening at the Lunga factory. We need more of that if there is a supply for it. The factory is somewhere at Lunga or Henderson, where they make plywood.

That particular operator complained. He did not secure a sustainable supply because other logging companies do not want to sell to him. They do not want him to succeed. If they to sell to him they will not transfer profits through transfer pricing offshore. Its just part of the crockery in this industry. So it is in our interest to apply much more stringent regulations or laws to make sure that factory receives adequate supply through out the year. This is very important.

The other thing he complained about—he came to me and shared the challenges he faced—the price of energy. He had to set up his own generator. Of course with the price of diesel being what it is at the moment, that drives him to the ground. This is an example of where government should become more interested and more involved.

The other area that he complained about is he could expand the capacity. He wants to expand the capacity of that factory to be produce more but that requires government support so that when factory equipment and supporting equipment lands at the wharf, he does not start paying tax automatically through duty and GST when he has not produce anything. These issues might sound too personal, but this is a typical case of where this economy must move to. But there is failure on our part to recognize it and to support it. Regardless of whether we like him personally or not, but he is a pioneer in the shift of transition in this industry that we want to see. I think government ought to step up in giving him support so that it can encourage other players to become involved in such game changer investments.

In terms of environment conservation, His Excellency announced in 2020 that the Environment (Amendment) Bill will be tabled in parliament on the third quarter of 2020. He repeated the announcement in 2022. It will be useful to see the work being done on this and where it has reached. Of course the State of the Environment Report, 2019 has been tabled before parliament. In fact, the Chair lady of the Environment Committee wants to conduct a committee inquiry into this report, to see whether there are further recommendations that may inform the amendments which government wants to bring in the Environment Amendment Bill or, Climate Change legislation. His Excellency announced in 2020, that work has started to review the National Climate Change Policy. He did not mention it again in subsequent years. So perhaps the minister can update the House on the progress of this climate change legislation and whether this is a stand-alone legislation on its own or a part of other legislations to be amended. Also in 2020, His Excellency announced the National Emergency Operation Joint Warning Center to be built. So, an update on the planning from government on this is important.

On disaster management, when the earthquake towards the end of 2022 occurred, the Minister for Environment only managed to inform people along the roads that there was no tsunami. He told us in this Chamber the next day. It was good that he

did it for the people, but he did not tell the rest of us. There must be a systematic response that everyone is informed. Information during a disaster is critical to people's responses in the various contexts they live. I remember, not just during that disaster, but I remember not receiving any text message. I think this would be the most basic response to inform people that there is no risk for tsunami, or that it has passed, or that there is no risk of tsunami. This is so that our people know how to react, respond, or be careful.

The other area on this issue, in many countries they have public sirens. I remember in the past, when it is 7.30 the siren at PWD would go. It goes again at 4.30. That kind of thing so that people know when to go to work and when to finish off. But when a disaster is about to happen, an early warning system is perhaps what the government must consider. There must be a siren system of some sort, especially here in Honiara because it is more densely populated.

The other issue on disaster management in Honiara relates to the security fences. During the recent earthquake when people wanted to run to high places for fear of a possible tsunami, they got stuck at the fences down there. Not only Parliaments fence, there are other fences down there. This is a problem. If there was a tsunami, a lot of people would probably die just hanging on fences. It is something that perhaps you can think seriously about. Perhaps a law should direct that certain parts should be open. Of course, there are risks why people and organisations put up fences, but it is something that is worthy of consideration.

Sir, in terms of rural development, I note that the ministry almost completes the review of the dormant Constituency Development Act he Permanent Secretary of the ministry invited the Opposition group to a dinner with the Minister at this nice new restaurant at the Capital Park. We were very appreciative of the invitation for the dinner, but we prefer that this is a matter that affects all of us and the constituencies we represent. We prefer perhaps a workshop of some sort so that all of us together to have the benefit of the ministry and the directions they want to take us. We can all have an input. I am not sure whether that has already happened on the government side. But our suggestion to the ministry is to hold a workshop for all MPs so that we all engage in this important piece of legislation.

On social sector specifically the Health and Medical Services, the Health Administration Bill. In 2020, His Excellency announced government's intention to take the Health Administration Bill to parliament which would repeal the Health Services Act. He announced in 2020, government will bring the Medical and Dental Administration Amendment Bill to parliament. Perhaps the minister could care to update parliament on that. Also mentioned in his 2020 speech was the Competent Authority Bill, that government would bring that to parliament. Perhaps an update on any work that has progressed on that initiative.

With Education, he announced in 2020 that government will drive the fee-subsidy initiative. Then there was no subsequent mention in his addresses. The same with the multi-layer scholarship program. The Minister could update the House on this one.

Under National Research Institute, His Excellency mentioned this in his 2020 speech. And of course the big one is the Education Bill. Now, as I understand from the minister's statement last year this bill is at its final stage and His Excellency mentioned on Monday (April 17, 2023) government will look at it in May 2023. We looked forward to this very important piece of legislation that would bring the administration of this important sector up to date and also, provide legal framework for the more recent developments inside this sector.

The role of the churches in education is very important. It is important that government encourage and support it. As we know, many of our churches pioneered this work. They provide most schools in our education system. Of course, government gradually took over the schools through Provincial Government Authority. But the recent growth show churches more interested in schools, of course the increase in our population. This is an interest that we must encourage and support. There must be recognition in the curriculum in terms of spiritual formation. The development of our children must be an important part of our education system.

In terms of Public Service, His Excellency announced in 2020, that the Public Service Bill would be brought to Parliament by end of March 2020. It will be laid before Parliament by the end of second quarter of 2020. Then in 2022, he said that this would be dealt with in the year 2022. Perhaps if the Public Service Minister can update the Parliament on the progress at the moment.

Also, His Excellency announced in 2020 that government will review Public Service Salary Structure and Remuneration. Perhaps the Minister will update Parliament on this. As we know, Public Servants have not had any substantive review of their remuneration. It is important that we recognize the pressures that they are under and the high cost of living. But also of course, the sustainability of wage reviews.

On Provincial Government, and I note earlier statements by the Honourable Prime Minister, as we await the further work government is doing on the federal government proposal, that the Revenue Sharing Bill to allocate more budgetary resources to the provinces will come. His Excellency of course in 2020 mentioned that it will be taken into Cabinet in July 2020 and laid before Parliament in the third quarter 2020. We know that in so far as the Parliament part it did not happen. It is useful for the Minister to update Parliament on where this important work is at. I

note that in his recent statements from Gizo, this is one of the matters that they discussed.

We also note and of course the Prime Minister had alluded to, the review on the Provincial Government Act His Excellency announced in 2020, and repeated in 2022, what would be useful to the House is to see what policy aspects the review is trying to address and how are those going to help in a possible later transition into a federal state system of governance. The idea that we jump from one constitution to a completely new one—it has been done in more complicated jurisdictions, like Kenya—perhaps a process or system of graduation will be more realistic for us. A process of gradual decentralization of powers, resources, functions and so forth so that we know something works then we can carry on with it. This is something for the ministry to consider in that review.

With regards to women and youth, I note that a report being tabled this morning to look at the implementation of the Family Protection Act, I will have to study the report. In 2020 His Excellency announced that government intends to review this act. So the minister could inform Parliament on what the review focuses on, the progress of this review, and when he expects the Act to come before the House.

On traditional governance, His Excellency announced the policy was renamed to National Policy on Conflict Preventions and Victims Rights. He stated at that time that the policy is now in its final stage. That was in 2020. So I would assume that cabinet has finalized this policy. Perhaps the minister could enlighten the house a bit more on this policy and its intention and whether it will still result in the initial proposals that there would be a reparation bill, or, whether it relate to it at all.

Sir, let me make a few observations on His Excellency's addresses over the number of years. Like I said earlier, we must not fault government for being ambitious. We want government to be ambitious. We urge government to be ambitious, of course with a touch of realism given resource constraints, timelines and so forth.

My first observation, as I have noted in His Excellency previous two addresses, and as echoed by the Prime Minister and ministers, that the lack of progress to government progress was COVID-19. 2021 and half of 2022 was the worst. And since 2022 the November 21 riots, so COVID-19 and the riots have had an impact on the lack of progress made on government priorities. These of course as we know, are not unreasonable grounds because these are situations that we come through and we know that secondly, when I look at these addresses from 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022 and now 2023, I see consistency in priorities from one address to another is weak at best, or at worst missing. Some of the priorities that appear in one year did not appear in the other year although nothing has been done, delivered or achieved. Therefore, it requires more explanation or more information to the House. Either

that they are no longer priorities, have been replaced by new and other priorities. This needs to be explained. Either way when one looks at governments budget of the same period we can see, of course in the middle term of this government the redirection of budget resources went to the response to COVID-19. It has consumed a lot of attention and resource focus.

I note that his address on Monday, the priorities that were left of in terms of Legislative agenda in 2019 appear again for 2023.

I like the Prime Ministers sense or resolve and determination to see it through to make sure these Legislations come to the floor of this year before the dissolution of this house. Of course I note too that in the part of the rationale for the extension of the life of this house postponed end of elections although games is the main one but part of the rationale is that some of this key thesis of Legislation must come before Parliament. I would urge government to make sure it pushes officers to make sure they finish that work to enable Parliament to deal with governments Legislative agenda for this year.

Thirdly, the things that have the greatest impact on the lives of ordinary Solomon Islanders seem to be neglected. And if government is pressed for time and has to priorities, the list of 11 bills listed on Monday in His Excellency's address, if that is too much for you to handle this year because focus will be on the games, then at least pick the most strategic. We will then have some guarantee that we will deal with them and we deal with them well. And those I suggest, would have to be the Forestry Bill and the Mining Bill. These are big things that have direct effect in the lives of our people and will safeguard the resource of the country.

So if there is the need—of course it is noble that the Prime Minister wants all the Bills before the house to dealt with before the end of this house—for some reason you are unable to do this, I would urge the government to priorities the most strategic of all the proposed Legislation.

Fourthly, I got the sense that—of course redirection of government budget and expenditures because of Covid-19 situation makes the situation difficult. But looking at the redirection and comparing it against His Excellency's address over these years, looking at the budget papers, I got the sense that there is an element of moving targets. therefore, it affects the continuity or consistency of government public investments in stated priorities.

Fifthly, government priorities may appear to be good choices at the general policy level. And if in the budget government allocates adequate resources on these policy choices, the recent Auditor Generals reports suggest that the priorities tend to be overwhelmed by the devil that is called detail; detail in the procurement processes and I think (we must admit it) the corruption that seem to have prospered even

more over these last few years. If you read the three recent Auditor General reports it makes for a very difficult traumatic reading.

Sixthly, I think there is an urgent need to built capacity of the Auditor Generals Office to conduct performance audits. Economy and efficiency in public expenditure are two very important goals. Value for money in government contracting and delivery must be pursued in the procurement processes. From the various reports of the auditor general, if you read we all know that it is highly likely that government contracts turned to be very excessive and exaggerated amounts. And outputs and outcomes delivered do not often match those stated in the government various policy documents.

These problems turn to be greatest in the ministries that handle large amounts of procurements. The procurement system appears robust on paper when we look at the Public Finance Management Act. The procurement system only looks good on paper, but its practical out working seems to be an incubator. And facilitator of corruption at worst or it become a vehicle or mechanism where some. Not everybody of course, some exploit it at the expense of the government.

Finally and as the prime minister outlines the list of various infrastructure projects around the country. I make the observation that there has been a trend over the last two houses in particular to increase budgetary resources going through constituencies.

Governments around these resources have been a real problem and because we do not have inside the legislative framework. And I am hoping that this is one aspect to the review for amendment to this act.

Further, there has been a lack of robust policy discussion about constituency governance and development within the wider provincial government system. And therefore by default, more and more resources are going through constituencies than through provincial government. And this is not as a result of a well thought out policy direction. But it appears to me—I suppose I am not inside the government so from the outside looking in—it appears to be largely by default and in reaction to the inefficiency of the machinery of government to deliver development services to rural areas. he fact that members of parliament decide budget allocations and also other representatives or heads of constituencies, perpetuates this default position or default direction. And of course, as listed by the Honorable Prime Minister earlier today, I also note with some concern allocation of other additional budgetary resources to certain constituencies. Of course, an argument can be made for economic viability of some of these. But looking at it in terms of government's overall strategic investment overview and how governments scarce resources ought to be invested, I see the case at best as arguable for some of these investments.

So all I am saying is, there is a need for a wider debate around the place of constituencies within provinces, within the machinery of government, in the delivery of services, and what direction is sustainable in the long term.

Sir, I would like to touch on comparatives over the same period where his Excellency's addresses emanate and the budget allocation, to just give a sense of perspective. This is so that when he says something, there is understanding as to whether we know there is adequate funding to implement this thing. That is the picture I would like to give to the House.

I am talking about the Agriculture Development Budget. In 2019 it was \$12.2million; in 2020 it was \$12.1 million; in 2021 it was \$25 million; in 2022 it was \$25 million, and in 2023 it was \$30 million. So there is a gradual increase. Of course, like I said, the jump from \$12m to \$25m is a 52 percent jump. But the absolute amounts are arguable if they are game-changer investments.

Ministry of Education, of course the bulk of their budget is in the recurrent expenditures. The development budget reflects more of the SINU contribution; but it goes from \$58million in 2019 to \$24.3million in 2020; \$10million in 2021 and \$65million in 2022, and \$66million in 2023. Again, SINU makes up a big part of MEHRDs development estimates. As we know, the initial commitment SIG made for SINU is for at least \$100 million in support per year. Perhaps once the games are out of the way, government can restore or go back to that noble intention, to make sure that SINU has the resources to attract good teaching talent, also to conduct good research to build up its reputation ministry of Tourism, of course this industry was severely affected by COVID-19. It goes from \$78million in 2019 to \$6.3million in 2020, \$10million in 2021, \$10million in 2022 and \$10million in 2023. This one is obviously an industry that represents an immense growth potential post-COVID and it requires some innovative initiatives to realize or unleash its potential.

Ministry of Communication and Aviation it goes from \$14million in 2019 to \$20million in 2020; \$24.8million in 2021 and \$30.4million and same for 2023. Some of the most important infrastructure initiatives are happening under this ministry.

If I look at the traditionally - productive sector such as agriculture, mining, forestry, fisheries together, the investments over that same four year period, allowing for the redirection of government expenditure in COVID period, still paints a picture of lackluster investment. Therefore, I would urge the government for next years' budget and of course a new government will come and would need to stamp its mark on it. But it does not stop this government from laying the ground work for increased investments in this key sectors. Even though a new government comes, it will be the same. They will not become less important. Their importance will remain the same or even more urgent. There is nothing stopping the current government

from putting more resources in that budget that will come. Of course the budget for next year will focus on the recurrent estimates to keep the machinery of government going. Even then it is important that important initiatives in these sectors are carried forward and on going.

When we look at the comparative budget figures, the picture becomes more clear on where the government's money is going. We know also from (not many of them unfortunately) the expenditure reviews that have been performed shows that just because something is in the budget does not mean that that is where the money will be actually spent. This is an ongoing problem and challenge that undermines government's own priorities as well. It is a struggle each time the budget comes. Of course right at the outset, if government states the priority but it is not in the budget it is unlikely that priority is a priority at all. In the second instance, if that priority is in the budget but the money is spent elsewhere and not on that priority, that undermines the priority and the credibility of government's budget.

Basic services in education, health and infrastructure have continued to deteriorate over the last few years as the cost of living has worsened. I note the list of infrastructure investments Prime Minister announced or explained today including investments by Australia and other donors. In an economy based on the unsustainable exploitation of natural resources is reeling, I think, from years of recklessness and corruption. Education has become more expensive with less classroom space over this period. Scholarship program for tertiary level is been in a state of flux. We seem not to be really certain on this. Probably it is part of the move of bringing SITESA into operation. But it has been in that sort of confused state for too long. Some decisive action needs to be taken to clarify how we move forward. The risk is that education, rather than being a right for all Solomon Islanders, becomes another economic good only for those who can afford it. The haves will get more education and the have nots drop out and continue in a cycle of poverty that is difficult to break.

Health is another area of great concern. Although budget allocation for that sector have gradually increased since 2019, Health outcomes are not where we want them to be. Of course, we know that COVID has been a challenge of immense proportions, where the health sector is the primary responder. So the cost of that in resource allocation has also been immense. However, the level of overcrowding in the hospitals, especially at the Referral Hospital and in the Emergency Ward, the shortage or lack of some of the essential drugs—I was talking to one of the senior staff at the Emergency Ward the other day I visited a relative, this doctor said they were out of at least 13 drugs that they need. It is quite concerning. This seems to be a recurring cycle but it need not be.

Of course, I note the media statement by the Secretary to the Prime Minister that it is a cyclical problem caused by shipping and other supplier concerns. But this is an area that needs decisive action, a lot more forward planning and the procurement system to be a little bit more responsive. At least two suppliers of drugs have complained to my Office that their invoices are not being paid for months. One supplier said it is been 12 months. They are have received new orders. So, I do not know on what would cause such delays. Whether the delay is at the Ministry of Health or the Treasury. But for us to run out of medicine without giving any sense of urgency on this to me is unreasonable.

The issue of staff welfare for medical staff, nurses in particular but also paramedics and supporting staff is an ongoing issue. I think it is important that the Ministry is proactive to enter into dialogue with them to see which of those welfare issues government is able to respond to within its resources. Sir, in terms of infrastructure, of course by its very nature, infrastructure requires a relatively large budget allocation. I note the list that Prime Minister read on infrastructure projects. However, the outputs and outcomes in this sector do not seem to match the level of expenditure. Poorly constructed infrastructure seems to have become the standard, the norm, not the exception. Wharves that stand out at sea, not linked to land, bridges that stand awkwardly in the middle of rivers, roads that have received millions—

The SPEAKER: Point Of Order!

Honorable Leader, I intend to suspend the sitting at 1 o'clock. So can you quickly summarize your contribution please?

Hon MATTHEW WALE: Yes thank you Mr Speaker. We allocate a lot of funds on roads, but potholes are mostly what we are seeing. So whether these funds are better spent if the specification and design of these roads are a bit more expensive but are longer lasting infrastructures. The issue of exaggerated excessive contracting particularly affects this sector. It is good the government to look at this.

The recent Auditor Generals report of course opens the widows for us to look at this matter. There needs to be accountability. Some of the matters that it reports on is outright negligence, recklessness, but some of it could be worse. It is important government hold those responsible to account. Otherwise, the picture that we give is that it is bad, but no one responsible for it therefore no one accountable for it. Hence, when we get to the next disaster or crisis or emergency situation we see a repeat of this.

With regards to cost of living, families and households are suffering at this time. Many families really struggle to put food on the table, at least one meal a day. As I earlier stated, wages remained stagnant, there are not as many jobs and of course

opportunities for indigenous Solomon Islanders are increasing becoming scarce. So these are important consideration government needs to keep its eye on. Sir a few of those who are prospering in Solomon Islands are indigenous Solomon Islanders. This must be a concern to us all.

It is good and we are grateful for the jobs that are provided by the construction phase of the games facilities. And we grateful too off course for Australia and New Zealand Labor Mobility which absorb most of our young people. However, in the long term it is important that our young are employed in the Solomon Islands, earning a decent income in Solomon Islands, building Solomon Islands. Government has an important responsibility that it must not abdicate in this matter.

In terms of environment, we look forward to the Environment Bill to see where the burden of conservation will fall. We have suffered off course the effects of reckless, uncontrolled and often illegal logging which degrades our environment although it is late, it is better late than never. The weight should fall on the part of conservation so that our future generations can enjoy the benefits of resources of this country.

In closing I want to say that, I would contend that governments reform priorities should be focused on the economy, creating sustainable jobs with living wages the target. The target will determine growth sectors and the fiscal policy needed to induce that growth and creating the enabling environment. The second focus should be on the environment. As I stated, conservation of our environment and of course, relocation of vulnerable communities is urgent.

The third focus should be on education in particular on stem and skills education to support an economy based on processing and manufacturing. I would urged government to look at how education could be fully publically funded and be totally free for an entire generation. It is not an easy thing, but we must look at how to finance education to produce skilled human resource the economy needs to grow.

Fourth in terms of health, primary health should be the focus to reduce the burden on secondary and tertiary subsector of the Health Sector. That should be the target.

Fifthly, decentralized governance; we talk about State Federal for almost 20years now. This is unreasonably long. It taken too long. Of course there maybe good reasons for this delay, but it simply has been too long for government to decide on this important matter. I note the comments and difficulties Prime Minister mentioned earlier about Section 61 of the Constitution. Of course the work on whether our economy is able to support this new system of government. I agree those are very important considerations and Parliament should not be placed in a position to make decisions where it does not have information and appropriate data and advise on.

My point is, it has taken too long. Of course we had COVID but even when we make allowance for COVID the length of time has been unreasonable. Of course our people have been asking for it and can not understand why it has taken so long with so much money being spent on it. It makes our people not to trust us the leadership. They feel as though we are lying to them, or we do not get that as important as they thought. I would urge government to devote resources and expedite these studies or assessments that need to be done so that, perhaps, the next house could bring it to conclusion to some decisions. But I believe, we do need to be responsible in the way we handle it. Decentralized governance and government is key to keeping this country together. It is important that we pursue it.

So I will rest my case there. I thank His Excellency for having graced and addressed this house.

(Parliament is suspended at 1.03pm)

Parliament is resumed at 2.35pm

The SPEAKER: I know we left off before the suspension this afternoon, the last speaker was the Leader of Opposition. Is there any others who want to speak to the motion?

(No member wishes to take the floor)

The SPEAKER: I see there is none.

Hon. MANASSEH SOGAVARE: I beg to move, That the debate on the question be adjourned to the next sitting day.

Question put and agreed to

(Debate on the question adjourned)

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. MANASSEH SOGAVARE: I beg to move that this House do now adjourn.

Question put and agreed to

(Parliament adjourned at 2.37pm)



Eleventh Parliament

Sixth Meeting

**NATIONAL PARLIAMENT OF
SOLOMON ISLANDS**

Thursday, 20 April 2023

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

NATIONAL PARLIAMENT OF SOLOMON ISLANDS**Thursday, 20 April 2023**

The Speaker, Mr Patterson John Oti, took the Chair at 09:47.

Prayers.

Business of the House

ATTENDANCE

All were present with the exception of the Minister for Aviation and Communication, Minister for Infrastructure Development, Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Traditional Governance and Ecclesiastical Affairs, Minister for Forestry and Research, Minister for Environment Climate Change Disaster Management and Meteorology, Minister for Public Service, Minister for Mines Energy and Rural Electrification and Members for Marovo, West New Georgia/Vona Vona, South New Georgia/Rendova/Tetepare, East Makira, West Makira, Ulawa/Ugi, North Guadalcanal, North West Guadalcanal, Central Honiara, West Honiara, North Malaita, Small Malaita, Malaita Outer Islands, and East Are'Are.

Questions and Answers

MAMARA TASIVARONGO HOUSING PROJECT

#130 **Hon MATTHEW WALE** (*Aoke/Langalanga*)—*Leader of Opposition* (9:46) to the Minister for Commerce, Industries, Labour and Immigration: Can the Minister update the House on the current status of the Mamara-Tasivarongo Housing Project?

Hon FREDRICK KOLOGETO (*South Vella Lavella—Minister for Commerce, Industries, Labour and Immigration*) (09:49): I would like to thank the honourable Member for Aoki/Langalanga and the Leader of Opposition for the question.

The answer will be brief. If the question refers to the Solomon Island Government Public Servants Housing Project, there is no further houses built for public servants apart from the 50 houses that were previously built and already purchased. On that note, the Public Service Housing Committee is currently working on the policy to effectively administer the sale of the properties to the interested public servants.

I would also like to put clear here in this honourable House, that the developer has built further 24 houses that are now available for sale to public. Those interested to visit the fully completed houses can arrange with the developers administration team, at its administration office at Mamara.

To further update the Honourable Chamber, Mamara Tasivarongo Mavo Council held its 12th Council Meeting on the matter on March 2023. Purposely to consider a hotel construction. The impressive high end hotel and bungalow complex will contain 20 rooms capacity. Construction aims to complete 100 rooms before the Pacific Games commences. The remaining project will be completed in mid-2024.

To further elaborate on the development, the Mamara-Tasivarongo-Mavo Secretariat in collaboration with the company commenced coordinating lands topography and cadastral survey of approximately 10 hectares. Indigenous Solomon Islands-owned firms were engaged to carry out these tasks.

UXO clearance on the site for hotel also commenced in the second week of April. A total of five hectares has been cleared on UXO. The approach is to work on the portion that construction will take place and progressively move to the other section of the land.

To conclude, the company is in the process of finalizing a team to commence the environmental impact assessment which are important for the undertaking. These activities requires a lot of financial commitments, hence they are categorically one in this steps.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: This was specifically to do with Public Service Housing but the Public Service Minister is not here. Whether there are any plans by government to further purchase additional houses or to enter into a scheme for public servants to buy houses.

Hon FREDRICK KOLOGETO: At the moment the government have no intention to build further houses for the public servants. It will look at that issue as soon as work on the policy is available, for the effective administration of the sale of properties to interested public servants.

Hon. MANASSEH SOGAVARE: Going forward in light of the restructure of the government system, the Federal System that we are still working on and if we further go down that path and even if we do not adopt it in the way it is recommended to us, in the future we will see provincial government growing. That is where real growth should happened, not to National Government.

The aim looking down the line is to see a very small National Government that focuses more on regulations and regulatory work. It may keep things like foreign affairs, fiscal monetary policies and things like that. But in terms of the actual delivery of services in the productive services and resources sectors, we are looking at growing the Provincial Government system.

The review will entail that we will actually deploy public officers to the provincial level. The thinking is that, where houses should be really built now is at the

Provincial level and not here. This city is in danger. It might become a city of residences, where we only build houses to accommodate people without jobs. That is the thinking down the line. So we will be guided by that kind of thinking in light of the demand for the Federal System. So, the area of growth will be at the Provincial level. So that is where we will look at that kind of infrastructure.

Mr PETER KENILOREA (Jnr): Just a supplementary question with regards to the project. I recall during the opening or the ground breaking, the overriding theme was Private Public Partnership (PPP) in terms of this particular project. Can the Minister confirm that this is still the case or is it moved into something else? Thank you.

Hon FREDRICK KOLOGETO: The answer is yes, it's PPP. It is the government, the investors and the people that own the land. All must be part of this development.

Mr PETER KENILOREA (Jnr): Thank you Mr. Speaker and thank you Minister for confirming that it is still a PPP arrangement. I would just like to ask in terms of the hotel development. Where is the public part in that partnership? Because it seems to me that it is very much a private investment, not necessarily a public component in that particular hotel construction as we just heard. Where is the public component in this hotel construction?

Hon FREDRICK KOLOGETO: The land itself is a registered land and when the hotel is developed, the committee have indicated the sharing percentage. When it becomes operational, there is a certain percentage for the landowners. The company is also prioritizing the landowners to work on the site. So everybody around that area are part of that development.

Mr PETER KENILOREA (Jnr): We understand that shareholding and those kinds of arrangements are very much part of private. I am asking about the public aspect of it in terms of, what is the public side of the partnership that we are talking about here. Knowing that PPP is usually for public utilities and big projects like bridges roads and such. I am asking in particular for this hotel which seems to be a very much a private investment. I am looking at what the public side of that in terms of the whole PPP arrangement as has been confirmed.

Hon FREDRICK KOLOGETO: On the sharing of rents, Guadalcanal has a share in it through the arrangements with the Guadalcanal Province. The landowners will get their share. There is a certain percentage which the Guadalcanal Province has indicated for the land owners from the development of the Mamara-Tasivarongo-Mavo Project.

Mr. JOHN MANENIARU: I want to ask about the committee. Is there any indication that the sale of the 50 houses will be done this year? There will be depreciation in the value if the sale of the houses are delayed and we might sale at a lower price than what it costs the government. If the Minister can inform the House on that?

Hon FREDRICK KOLOGETO: The policy that I have mentioned should come to Cabinet, hopefully, next month and the government will go forward from there. In fact, a lot of public servants wanted to move into the houses. There is a lot of interest by public servants to move in but the government has to make sure that the policies are done properly so when government sells the houses, public servants are secured when they move into the houses they buy.

Mr DOUGLAS ETE: Thank you Minister for doing a good job. My question here is that these houses range from \$500,000 to a \$1million. With the good intentions for government to house public servants, it would be too expensive and public servants do not have the collateral to go for a loan. I am asking, whether that is the government's intention through some kind of a policy. The policy came a little bit late. It should have been done earlier. Whether some sort of a guarantee would be granted to public servants when they get the mortgages. You cannot buy them off. You have to go for a loan somewhere. That is my question.

Hon FREDRICK KOLOGETO: The government's intention in the policy is for public servants to rent to own. That is where the Public Service ensures that policy is done properly in order to effectively administer the sale of the property as I stated earlier.

Mr DOUGLAS ETE: Yes, rent to own. Does it mean they will pay it out from their pockets or the government is going to finance the rentals?

Hon FREDRICK KOLOGETO: Rent to own is from their entitlements, under the Public Service Rental Scheme. That is where the Public Service Housing Committee tries to look at the policy in order to avoid any stress on the public servants that move to the houses.

Mr PETER KENILOREA (Jnr): Just a follow up supplementary in terms of the rent to own scheme for housing. Why is that not the case in terms of rent to own to the builder, the investor? We note that Public Private Partnerships take quite a long time. some of the investors retrieve their money after 30 years, or 20 years. Why don't we put the rental to the investor over a period of time in order to recover his money before the houses is handed to the government? That, for me, would be a Public Private Partnership in the sense. Why did the government buy the houses before we look at rent to own? Is there a policy behind the decision that was taken? That is the question that I wanted to ask.

Hon FREDRICK KOLOGETO: That is a very good question to clarify. So the government made the decision to buy 50 houses. And that comes back to the PPP, the Public Private Partnership.

But that is a very good point raised by the Member for East Are 'Are. The government will consider that. But for the 50 houses the government decided to buy the houses and then public servants can rent to own.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: I want to come back to the 50 houses. What is the longevity of the houses? What is the economic life of the houses?

Hon FREDRICK KOLOGETO: According to the developer, the houses can last up to 50 years. But anything can happen. We are prone to earthquakes and cyclones and that is how it is. But 50 years is the lifespan of the houses.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: I do wish to thank my best friend, the Minister for Commerce. This is a very important development. But what is clear is, it is a situation of cart before the horse. All of these policies that you are holding back on are policies you should have done first before such a sizable purchase. Even that payment is not featured in the budget. You rushed it through other means to get it through. That is a perfect example of how not to do this kind of thing. In the Kwara'ae dialect, we have a saying that goes, "*Kul akul*". We just rush to do it. It is an important project and let us do it properly.

The longevity of the houses, if it takes 20 or more years to pay off the loan, it would be good to reflect that in the policies that you put together.

PROTECTION OF INDIGENOUS BUSINESSES

#131 **Hon MATTHEW WALE** (*Aoke/Langalanga*)—*Leader of Opposition* (10:11) Can the Minister inform the House of any plans to protect our indigenous businesses in view of the current influx of foreigners to operate retail shops in the country?

Hon FREDRICK KOLOGETO (*South Vella Lavella—Minister for Commerce, Industries, Labour and Immigration*) (10:11): The interest of our people is paramount in the policies of the current government. In saying that, the Ministry is putting in place the implementation of the SME or the Small and Medium Size Enterprise policies, the review of the Immigration Act and the Foreign Investment Policy review of the Foreign Investment policy and there is also the data collection on employment needs currently undertaken by the Labour Division. All these are very important under the microscope of the Ministry.

Recently, the inspection comprising of all commercial divisions within the Ministry took place to look at the reserve lists. Many times foreigners came in without us knowing. They have been doing their compliance checks on every sites of the

streets. The reserve business activities was upgraded in August 2020. The bigger question is whether our people are taking advantage of this reserve business and enter into commercial activities in the areas that government reserves in agriculture, fisheries, and the retail shop. Are Solomon Islanders willing to work like the foreigners? It is a big challenge for us.

Also on that note, while we do note the inclusion of dual citizenship in carrying out commercial activities in the Solomon Islands government is committed to the inclusiveness. Some foreigners are present in the country for quite a period of time and when they apply, we give them citizenship under the new policy in 2018. We cannot say anything because they are part of our nation and our national identity. They choose to become Solomon Islanders.

Our departments within the Ministry are working very hard to create and provide a conducive environment for our indigenous people. One area that we support is the CBSI Guarantee Scheme. The Ministry puts money in DBSI for our people to access to do business and not to roam the streets of Honiara. I encourage my friend, the Leader of Opposition to run a business to help engage and teach his people how to run business. That is what we want, to teach our people how to run business.

Also, the growing number of intermarriage, particularly with our young children also creates space for foreigners to run business. They are married our children and they are here to feed our people. That is one of the reasons for the increase in the numbers.

Hence, it is important to quantify the call that there is an influx of foreign nationals taking up activities that are reserved. Most of the retail shops in operation within Point Cruz and the outskirts of Honiara are owned by naturalized Solomon Islanders and dual citizens. The Ministry is working hard to ensure that reserve business are run by citizens. If you go around the streets, only Solomon Islands citizens run the shops. s previously reiterated, the Ministry opened up the retail business during the ethnic tension period, but that window had already closed. There is no new retail shop. It is not opened for any new foreigners to come in and run retail shops.

I would also like to make it clear on the floor that the laws of the country do not differentiate indigenous and citizens. Once a person becomes a citizen, he or she is the same as an indigenous. He or she is also a citizen. He or she meets all the criterias to run business activities, reserved business activities. That is the way it is. If you go from White River to Lungga, it is the citizens of this country that run most of the shops. The Ministry stops foreigners from investing in retail shops.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: Thank you for the informative response. So, he said most in the retail sector are Solomon Islands citizens. Do we have data? Most does not mean all. What per cent is left that is taken up by foreigners?

Hon FREDRICK KOLOGETO: That is a very good question. I do not have those data with me at the moment, but I will surely provide to the Leader of Opposition and other Members of the Parliament. This is so that they know, and they will be surprised, honestly, because foreigners are only few.

Mr. JOHN MANENIARU: Thank you Minister for the answers. I was listening to your answers and I already give up. It is true, indigenous and citizens. Therefore, it will no longer be a conducive environment if we are talking about indigenous, because these foreigners marry our locals for the sake of running business.

Is there going to be a policy review so that we review the list? Reserve business does not mean anything anymore, citizens and indigenous, as you rightly explained. I just want your comments on that.

Hon FREDRICK KOLOGETO: That is a very valid point. The Ministry and the government is very cautious of international law. We must treat everyone as the same on some things. We must also be careful on discrimination. Thank you for the comments from the Member of West Are'Are. I take note of it.

Mr DOUGLAS ETE: I would like to thank the hardworking Minister. In my hearing, he raised a very good point that the government had already reviewed the list in 2020. I thought they reviewed the list from the 2006 Foreign Investment Regulation. I would like to ask the Minister what changes they did to that indigenous business listings. If so, can the Minister inform Parliament as to the kind of changes that happened in the review?

Hon FREDRICK KOLOGETO: Yes, the amendment to the list took place in August 2020. The list basically includes agriculture, for example farming. A foreigner must not farm and sell domestically. In fisheries, a foreigner must not fish to sell at the market. So actually, the government increased the list from 14 to 21. A copy of the reserve list is here with me. I can photocopy and distribute to colleagues to see.

Mr. JOHN MANENIARU: In terms of the list, can a foreigner married to a Solomon Islander be included in the reserve list for those activities? The foreigner runs a reserve business because he marries a local woman because the business can be registered under the name of the local woman? That is my understanding. Correct me Minister.

Hon FREDRICK KOLOGETO: A foreigner who marry a Solomon Islander, if the wife registers a business, that is okay because she is a Solomon Islander. The Ministry must be very careful and make sure that the wife is also the signatory to

the bank account. Other the foreigner withdraws the money and leaves for another country. The ministry is monitoring those loopholes carefully. If the wife registers the company then she must also be a signatory to the bank account.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: If that is so, how does the Ministry make sure of that? If a business is registered under the name of the wife, she too is signatory of the cheque book to withdraw money. Do you go to the bank to monitor that?

Hon FREDRICK KOLOGETO: Most of these duties and responsibilities are inter-sectoral. So it is the duty of the Company Haus to make sure they check that the data that they are in line with Inland Revenue and the banks. It is the duty of the Company Haus under the Ministry.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: Just for further clarification on that. So there is a requirement under our regulations that the Company House requires bank to ensure that the signatories reflect the registration? Is it entirely a matter for the bank and we hope that they comply? Is there a law in place for that?

Hon FREDRICK KOLOGETO: The government is seriously looking at that. Despite the fact that they are doing compliance checks, there are others who still find a way around how to withdraw money. The Company House is seriously looking at putting things in place. There is a continuous monitoring of foreigners marrying locals.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: So, in other words, at the moment, we still do not have any law for it, is it? So we do not have a law for it and so we cannot legally do it, and therefore we do not do it?

Hon FREDRICK KOLOGETO: Within the Ministry of Commerce, we have the BM Jack. That is a group for compliance. Not only in Commerce, we also have the Police. If they go to logging we have Forestry, if they enter mining we have a team in mining. For the Company Haus to do the monitoring themselves, currently the com still ongoing on that. At the moment BM Jack is doing the monitoring on these things.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: I do wish to thank the Honourable Minister. If there is no regulation for it, when foreigners sign bank accounts they are doing nothing illegal. So it would be misleading to say that you will stop them from signing with only the wife to do withdrawing. So I think it is important to have that law in place to ensure there is compliance. So that when you talk about police and other law enforcement, you actually have a law for them to enforce. That is very important.

I appreciate that the government's disposition is inclusive. We must include them. Even if the marriage is not for love but just to set up a business, we cannot say anything. They become our in-laws. We have a custom. We can only do something

about it when the in-law does something wrong. We are a very accepting people, and therein lies our weakness. We can be taken for a ride and abused. So there is need for legislation. But sensitivity for inclusivity is a very good thing.

However, in terms of citizenship and indigeneity, I do not think that we should be overly cautious on this. The caution should be to indigeneity, the interest of our people. And that, I think is more from the point of view of stability of our country.

As different sectors in our economy become saturated, even with naturalized citizens, but not indigenous, it might cause civil strife amongst indigenous population, the vast majority. So there is need for sensitivity on that one whether in the law, if not in the law, in policy. There needs to be continued efforts for strengthening the hands of our indigenous people in the economy, in business. This is something you can think about and see how you advance it.

With those comments I do wish to thank my best friend, the Minister of Commerce, for his hard work in advancing these courses. Thank you.

Motions

ADDRESS OF THANKS TO THE GOVERNOR GENERAL

The SPEAKER: Honourable Members, debate on the Motion moved by the Prime Minister continues today.

(No member wishes to speak)

Hon. MANASSEH SOGAVARE: I move that the debate on the question be adjourned until the next sitting day.

Mr. Speaker, from the government side, Permanent Secretaries are still preparing documents for Ministers. We also have engagements to attend to today.

The SPEAKER: Thank you honorable Prime Minister. On that note and because of the engagements by both sides of the House today, I will now—I beg your pardon, I think I was going to suspend Parliament and reconvene after the various engagements by both sides of the House, with the visiting British Foreign Secretary. That might demand the squeezing of the debate.

I will therefore allow the motion by the Prime Minister to move adjournment of debate for today.

Question put and agreed to

(Debate on the motion adjourned)

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. MANASSEH SOGAVARE: I move that Parliament do now adjourn.

Question put and agreed to

(Parliament adjourned at 10.33)



Eleventh Parliament

Sixth Meeting

**NATIONAL PARLIAMENT OF
SOLOMON ISLANDS**

Friday, 21 April 2023

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

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NATIONAL PARLIAMENT OF SOLOMON ISLANDS**Friday, 21 April 2023**

The Speaker, Mr Patterson John Oti, took the Chair at 09:42.

Prayers.

Business of the House

ATTENDANCE

All were present with the exception of the Minister for Infrastructure Development, Minister for Traditional Government and Ecclesiastical Affairs, Minister for Mines, Energy and Rural-Electrification, Minister for Justice and Legal Affairs, Minister for Aid Coordination and Member for Marovo, North West Guadalcanal, East Honiara, North Malaita, Small Malaita, Malaita Outer Islands, South New Georgia/Rendova/Tetepare, North Guadalcanal, Ulawa/Ugi, Rannoga/Simbo and West Honiara.

Questions and Answers

Mr PETER KENILOREA (Jnr): Point of order.

On the issue of quorum for today. Given it is a government business that was requested for today, just to check for quorum.

(Member calls for quorum)

The SPEAKER: I will allow 15 minutes for Members of Parliament who are not in the Chamber to be ushered into the chamber for purpose of the quorum.

The SPEAKER: Thank you. I think we have reached more than half plus one, so we so we will proceed with the business for today. Therefore can the Leader of Opposition ask Question 132 to the honorable Member, the Minister for Commerce.

SUAVA BAY AND BINA HARBOUR PROJECT

132 **Hon MATTHEW WALE** (*Aoke/Langalanga*)—*Leader of Opposition* (9 :47) to the Minister of Commerce, Trade, Labor and Immigration: I note that question 132 goes to the Minister of Commerce but also part of it will be for the Minister of Fisheries. So they can collaborate on that.

Can the Minister provide an update to the House on the progress and plans on Suava Bay and Bina Harbor Projects?

Hon FREDRICK KOLOGETO (*South Vella Lavella—Minister for Commerce, Industries, Labour and Immigration*) (9:48): Thank you Mr. Speaker Sir. As the Leader has rightly stated, the Bina Harbor Project is administered by the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources and the Minister might be there to clarify on that issue.

But on the Suava Bay Economic Growth Centre, just to update the House, that the back-filling of the site has started by Exodus Trade Development Limited. It is a locally owned company. It is 95 percent to completion. On that note as well, the other projects that are supposed to be on the Suava Bay included the market house, concrete pouring on strips are almost completed and compacting of slab house has started. On that note, the other projects and activities that are supposed to be on that site, the Suava Bay, include the ablution block and the cocoa and copra shed.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: On Suava, I would like to know how many hectares there are in total for this project?

Hon FREDRICK KOLOGETO: The initial back filling would be 300 by 300 square meters, and so far, what has been back-filled is 200 by 80 square meters.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: Yes, just a clarification. So that is for back-filling, but the entire project, how many hectares for the total project? What you had mentioned, is that for the whole project or much more land that the government had taken for this center?

Hon FREDRICK KOLOGETO: The total equivalent is 1.6 hectares.

Hon. NESTOR GHIRO: Thank you Speaker. I wish to thank the honorable colleague for Aoke/Langalanga for the question currently, the Ministry is undertaking three issues on Bina Harbor. They are land, water source and the coast. These three issues have been done concurrently, which means we are doing those issues together. Regarding the land, it is about to settled. Water source and sea coast are ongoing.

These programs are being assisted by donors to help us achieve the final resolutions on these issues. We have been assisted by the New Zealand Government to its funding through the Ministry . The other donors are Australia, and they have an interest help us secure the water source and waste management on Bina Harbor. The others are JICA and IFC. They also assist us through their funding for the Bina Harbor development. Otherwise the government is committed to this project.

Mr CLAUDIUS TEI'IFI: Thank you Speaker and thank you Minister. Can the Minister explain the model set for Bina Harbor? Is it going to be a town of its own? Is it going to take the same PPP model of Tasivarongo?

My second question is in terms of the feasibility studies. So far, is it going towards implementation or not yet?

Hon. NESTOR GHIRO: I did not properly get the first question, but in terms of feasibility studies, this is close to implementation. At the moment, World Bank will be funding Bina Harbor project in Auki, which will manage the whole system on Bina.

Mr CLAUDIUS TEI'IFI: Like Honiara town has a City Council, a City Mayor and its own governance. My question is that, is Bina Harbor going to be a town of its own? Like Tasivarongo has its own governance to look after its own town.

Hon. NESTOR GHIRO: That is correct. Bina Harbor will be set up as a town of its own.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: Just the total land area this project will be covering. The Honorable Prime Minister made mention in his response to the address of His Excellency. If the Minister can outline how many total hectares the Government is looking at on this one. Initially, it was only 10 hectares, but I understand that the Government is interested in more land.

Hon. NESTOR GHIRO: I want the opposition leader to repeat the question.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: Just a clarity from the Minister as to the total land area the Government is taking or interested to take for this project.

Hon. NESTOR GHIRO: I do not have the actual hectares for the area of Bina Harbor, but according to the plan of Bina Harbor, there are two sites. One is for the factory itself and the other is the township itself.

Mr. JOHN MANENIARU: According to the old plan that we have been following, in twelve months time, the first canned tuna in Malaita should be processed. I understand the challenges, that you have handled very well, resulted in the changes and adjustments to that plan. How soon will the first canned tuna be processed from the Bina Harbor project on Malaita? Thank you.

Hon. NESTOR GHIRO: Before I respond to the question, I would like to thank the Member because I took over from the good works he did. Due to the challenges we faced, the Ministry is anticipating mid 2025. In fact, the Bina Harbor Project will undergo tuna Loining and then later into cannery. So we will expect the first canned goods to be processed from the Bina Harbor Project by the middle of 2025. Thank you.

Mr. JOHN MANENIARU: In terms of this project, our people there should have already signed all the documents in terms of partnership on this major project. I

understand that this has been processed. Has this already been fully concluded, or are some partners, like resource owners, still left out?

Hon. NESTOR GHIRO: The Land Trust Board entity is already sorted out. It is just a matter of time until the High Court clears the Court case.

Mr PETER KENILOREA (Jnr): Just a supplementary question with regards to tuna Loining. I just want confirmation if this is for exporting. Thank you.

Hon. NESTOR GHIRO: This is for exports and food security. Thank you.

Mr PETER KENILOREA (Jnr): Just a follow-up question on the previous one on Suave Bay in terms of partners. Just like Bina, the Minister of Fisheries mentioned the partners. Are there any similar partners for Suava Bay?

Hon. NESTOR GHIRO: The arrangements are underway to establish an authority with the Malaita Provincial government, communities, and resource owners to manage and look after the assets. Once this is completed, it will be for the betterment of the people. After that, they will look for investors. So, work is ongoing to establish this authority as I have stated earlier. Thank you.

Mr. JOHN MANENIARU: In terms of the original plan of the Ministry and Government policy, the investor into the loin processing will be tendered internationally. Is this still the same policy, or have you already picked an investor?

Hon. NESTOR GHIRO: Thank you Sir and I thank again colleague MP for the question. There are two investors that are interested in Bina. These two are the world's largest tuna producing companies. We will yet to confirm with them, but there are two investors that are interested in Bina.

Mr PETER KENILOREA (Jnr): Thank you Mr. Speaker. Just two supplementary questions in terms of my initial question, just for clarity.

So, the partners currently for Suava Bay are the Province and the land owning groups, and perhaps an investor. I was asking about development partners and if there are others, just like Bina, if they are also involved or looking to be involve in Suava.

Hon FREDRICK KOLOGETO: At the moment, not yet. Hopefully, the Ministry will be looking at best investors to come and serve our people of Malaita.

Mr CLAUDIUS TEI'IFI: My question is about Bina Harbor project, which is locate at Bina. Bina has big villages with lots of houses. If the Minister can provide some clarification as to whether there will be repatriation of people from where the cannery will be built.

Hon. NESTOR GHIRO: Yes, that is the next program of action. In fact, it is at the tip of the most populated area. So there is much less populated area that we are dealing with.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: Just a follow up on that, in terms of relocation of houses from the main village. So, an alternative site has already been identified? Are they moving back to the customary land or to land acquired by the Government?

Hon. NESTOR GHIRO: Yes, negotiations are still under going.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: Negotiations on what? For acquiring of land for the township or negotiations for the people to relocate to their own customary land?

Hon. NESTOR GHIRO: As I have said earlier, Bina township will involve two sites. One for the factory itself and one for the housing estate. So, those are the options available .

Hon MATTHEW WALE: I do wish to thank both the Ministers, my best friend, the Minister for Commerce, and another best friend, my brother, the Minister for Fisheries, for very able in answering questions on these two very important projects, not only from Malaita, but of course for the whole country, and especially eastern part of Bina. It will have an impact on the eastern part of the country and it is important that we have a good employment catalyst kind of project in there, and I am very encouraged by the Ministers push and sense of urgency to see this projects coming to fruition. So, with those remarks I thank both of them. Can I move to the next one?

MALARIA MEDICINES

141 **Hon MATTHEW WALE** (*Aoke/Langalanga*)—*Leader of Opposition* (10:07) to ask the Minister for Health and Medical Services: What plans are in place to procure R21 Malaria vaccines for the country?

Hon CULWICK TOGAMANA (*Maringe/Kokota—Minister for Health and Medical Services*) (10:07): Thank you Mr. Speaker, and let me thank my dear brother, the Leader of Opposition and MP for Aoke/Langalanga for this very important question. This also shows science continues to prevail to look at new innovative ways to treat one of these daily killer tropical diseases, which is Malaria. And this moves on to vaccines, which is quite important in that regard.

Currently, there are no plans in place, yet, to procure the R21 Malaria vaccines. Simply, because World Health Organization is still assessing the safety and effectiveness of this vaccine. Nevertheless, we are in close communication and consultation with WHO on the procurement or on this regard, in relation with this vaccine.

At the global level, only Ghana is the country that has already approved this new malaria vaccine for usage. However, its approval is quite unusual as it comes before the publication of the final stage trial data. So, until all is verified, approved, and advice from WHO is received for us to proceed to procure, we will then work on the plan to procure this Malaria vaccine.

It is very encouraging to know that there is a vaccine for Malaria in the pipeline for us to use.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: I appreciate that. It is important. Malaria is a killer around the world and of course to us. And right now it is on the rise since middle of last year. So this is specifically for children, 5 years and under. It good to protect them.

We rely on remedial medicine, where, if you are sick, you can go and get Chloroquine or Coartem or whatever, but getting vaccines would be grateful.

There is another vaccine that has been approved in many countries and it has already been used. But I am not sure whether that has been the case for us. I have not heard of a rollout of a Malaria vaccination program. It is a direction that we must take now.

Does WHO actually approved these kinds of vaccines? before our technical group approve them? I did not think that WHO actually approves medicines or vaccines but each regulator of each jurisdiction gives approval. Just to clarify that.

Hon CULWICK TOGAMANA: Yes, I fully agree with the statement by the Leader of Opposition. Generally, WHO does not approve drugs, but they do endorse those.

In our country, we have the Drug and Pharmaceutical Board that is responsible for approving of drugs that we use in the country. hat Board normally seeks advice from World Health Organization, because this is the global organization that deals with global health, and therefore we tend to get technical advice from them before we make decisions, the Pharmaceutical and Therapeutical Board to approve the drugs. So yes, I agree with my dear brother, that World Health Organization does not approve them before we used them. Even if World Health Organization approves it, it still comes down to this Board that I mentioned to approve its use in the country.

Mr. JOHN MANENIARU: Last night I received an update from home, that the number of Malaria cases in one of the villages is going up. I think it is because of the rainy season in that part of Malaita. It rains almost every week and so Malaria cases are increasing and that is the report from the clinic.

Whilst we are waiting for the endorsement from World Health Organization, can you assure the country on the stock, that there is sufficient stock that can get to those Malaria patients, particularly in the remote clinics throughout the country?

Hon CULWICK TOGAMANA: Thank you for that very important observation in relation to the resurge in Malaria, and the other part of this supplementary is to deal with the adequate availability of Malaria drugs that we use to treat cases.

A recent mid-term review of the Malaria program showed that Malaria has increased since 2015. Despite this increase, the number of deaths reported due to Malaria is quite low; only 9 in 2021 and also in 2022, and these are reported cases of Malaria.

The resurgence of Malaria is caused by multiple factors. The stop or end of this residual spraying in 2015, the decline of funding to the Malaria program, as well as a more rapid than expected decline in the insecticide due to the availability of long-lasting insecticides being distributed in 2015. And of course, like my dear brother mentioned, the stock out of Malaria commodities. With the use of the bed net that we rely on, it is very effective. People sometimes forget to reactivate the bed nets. Once you use it for a while, the insecticide that is soaked into the net will eventually wear out. So it is important that it be done.

I will address the availability of medicines and consumables as part of my response to the Motion. But yes, the availability of Malaria drugs will run out because we use them, and the information on the stock that we have is handled by the National Medical Store. And so when the availability or percentage drops to almost 85 percent, we will have to make orders again. And there are issues in relation to the COVID that we faced—logistics for the shipment and procurement take time t takes time. There are challenges that we face in replenishing stock. We also face challenges with the disbursement of these drugs to where it is needed. I will elaborate on this when I come to that.

I do acknowledge that we do face shortages of these on certain areas in the country due to usage. But with the availability of stocks, we always maintain, not below 85 percent at the Medical store.

Mr. JOHN MANENIARU: You have touched on another area in, which during the Public Accounts consultation inquiry with the Ministry recently, they informed the Committee that distribution and delivery is huge problem. It resulted in stocks not being available in the remote clinics. They assured PAC that the Ministry will address the distribution issue. The ship owners do not accept freighting. They want the Ministry to actually make the payment. Where are we on this. This is important. We may have stocks here but if we do not disburse them to the remote clinics in the provinces, they will have no medicine. Can the Minister update the House?

Hon CULWICK TOGAMANA: Let me thank my dear brother for raising that logistical challenge in relation to disbursement of vital drugs from the Medical Store to the wharf or to the airfield and then eventually to where it is supposed to end up.

As you know, we are still facing that problem in relation to procurement, to pay for the freights. On that, it is the Ministry of Finance that is also involved in this. And so we have done our part. We get the medicines to the ships at the wharf, and sometimes, as you have already mentioned, those ships saw that the stocks are from the Medical Store, and realized that previous consignments have not yet being paid for, and they refuse to transport the medicines. We have discussed this in terms of a way forward.

I think it is important that we will not bypass the normal procedures or compliance within the Ministry of Finance.

We are working very closely with them, even to the extent to have a sizeable imprest to deal with the freighting, so that we quickly address the payment, rather than having to go through the procurement system, which is quiet slow, and of course, really affects the shipping operators on their normal revenue collections.

That is what I would like to add on to that. Let me thank my dear brother for that very important question, which a real challenge for the Ministry.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: With regards to the bed nets. When they wear out, where do people take their bed nets to be treated with chemical? Do we have centers for those through out the country?

Hon CULWICK TOGAMANA: We will not advice that the chemicals for treating of bed nets are available just any where. t has to be with the trained staff within the Ministry. It is normally the Malaria technicians that are trained by the Ministry and are stationed in the rural areas. It is not just done in any other places. It has to go back to the Ministry. That is a challenge in itself, that people have to return the bed nets for reactivation. That is a challenge. In most cases people simply just become negligent and ignore it. That also contributes to the failure of the reactivation of the bed nets, and so that remain useful to control mosquitoes at night when people are sleeping.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: I do wish to thank the Honorable Minister. On the principal question, it is important that we move in the line of vaccination, and given that the other vaccinations are already approved in other countries. I forget about the other one, but maybe Poisons Board should start looking at approving that and then the Ministry can plan the rollout of it. When this becomes available, it is said that the efficacy rate of this is 80 percent. It is developed by Oxford University and I think we can trust it, but let it go through the scientific processes. It is good for us

to approve and procure it. Malaria is a huge problem for us. It affects the productivity of the economy, and of course the health of our people. It is good that we do this.

The other issue with this resurgence is that it seems to be a cyclical issue, and I think there is need for some rethinking in terms of how we can take on Malaria and now dengue, which makes it even worse. Do not give up on the idea of eradication. Given climate change and global warming, if we do not do, it can only get worse and so some really big funding investment on it is needed.

With those comments, I do wish to thank my colleague brother for his responses.

STATEMENT OF GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Motions

ADDRESS OF THANKS TO THE GOVERNOR GENERAL

Hon. STANLEY SOFU (*East Kwaio—Minister for Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management and Meteorology*) (10:27): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me this opportunity to take the floor and to make the first debate on the Speech From The Throne, that was given by His Excellency on Monday this week.

But before I do that, let me first of all thank those who visited me in the hospital when I was critically ill and admitted there. The Prime Minister and his good wife for calling in at the hospital when I was sick, the Speaker of the National Parliament and your wife, the Minister of Planning and the Minister of Health. And I wish to thank this opportunity to thank the Minister of Rural Development for taking care of the Ministry during my absence. Also, I thank the Secretary to Caucus and members of Caucus for their time and effort in coming to the hospital to visit me.

I would to also like to thank the constituents, the pastors, and others that came and offered prayers for me and also my relatives as well.

I will now go back to the Speech From The Throne that was delivered by His Excellency on Monday this week on the Floor of the Parliament, that reads 'That an address be presented to His Excellency the Governor General as follows: We, the National Parliament of Solomon Islands, here assembled, beg leave to offer thanks for the speech that has been addressed by you to Parliament'.

I wish to contribute to the Speech From The Throne delivered by His Excellency. I thank His Excellency for reminding us of the challenges that we have come through and the need for us to remain united for this country. Let us give glory, honor, and thanks to the God almighty for his unwavering guidance to the Prime Minister, Cabinet, and Members of this august House to lead us through these challenging events even if we do not see eye to eye on some key issues affecting our country.

I commend all leaders of our provinces, churches, tribes, villages, and the private sector for their resilience, leadership, and commitment to our people, the men, women, youth, and children of this country. And the support of the public servants, development partners, and non-governmental organizations in the endeavors of the country that keep us together as one people.

I commend the Prime Minister and the Cabinet for their strategic approach to managing COVID-19 and keeping our economy afloat. Whilst there had been many hiccups, dead ends, moments of uncertainty, the government has never failed to strategize, reorganize, restart and continue the fight against COVID-19 and address the November Riot of 2021 e have taken seriously the recommendations of the Audit Report on the use of Covid-19 Funds. We have developed a procurement process with appropriate checks inline with the financial Instruction (FI) and the Procurement and Contract Administration Manual.

The draft process has been shared with the Ministry of Finance and Treasury for their vetting. Once that is done, we will conduct training of all officers and implement it. Nevertheless, the Ministry is also of the view that there is a need for a dedicated procurement service for state of disasters and emergencies that is complaint with FI and PCAM. At that same time, we organize with the circumstances that are associated with such events. As regards any misconduct that might have arisen from this, we will leave that to the appropriate authority to deal it.

I cannot agree more with His Excellency regarding the impacts of Covid-19 and November Riots on the legislative program of the Government but also on the overall programs of Government, including MECDM, that is my Ministry.

One of the priorities of the Ministry is the Environment Act, Amendment Bill. It was mentioned by His Excellency in His speech. It has been with the AG Drafting Section since 2018, but I am pleased to report that we now have the finalize draft Bill.

The amendments and new inclusions are substantial and it is vital that we conduct proper public consultations, including at the Provincial level. Realistically speaking, this will take us to early 2024.

As for the Climate Change Bill, we are conducting public consultation on the draft Climate Change Policy, which anticipate bringing it for Cabinet's endorsement by the third-quarter of this year. From this the Ministry then proceed with the development of the Climate Change Bill in 2024.

MECDM working is supported by our deliberate focus on developing partners with the Government, as well as with the developing partners, regional and international organizations and NGOs.

Let me touch on some examples of this partnership in action. With the support of the Government of Australia through the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), their construction of the meteorological forecasting office ongoing at our upper air Vavaya Ridge station through the support we have been given by UNDP for the construction of the Social Professional Emergency Operation Center. The Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Program is supplementing our development budget programs to implement key activities required for 2023 South Pacific Games, including the regulation to ban some categories of plastic, provision of reused water bottles, reuse of shopping bags, portable water filtration systems and environmental awareness campaigns.

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) is working with the Ministry and Honiara City Council to improve solid waste management in Honiara. This builds on top of Technical Capacity Development for Solid Waste Management done by the Japanese Government and efforts by the MECDM to support Honiara City Council to improve solid waste management in our capital city.

My Ministry, with support from the Ministry of Finance and Treasury, the US\$15 million, US\$10.5 million by way of grant and US\$4 million, US\$5.5 million by way of a concessional loan. ADB has given us a date for the identification of landfill site by the third quarter of 2023. And failing that, we will lose the US\$10.5 million grant and potentially overall support for a new sanitary landfill for Honiara and surrounding areas. We need a minimum of 40 hectares for the sanitary landfill, which will serve Honiara and surrounding areas for up to 40 years.

We are working with the Ministry of Lands, Honiara City Council, Ministry of Home Affairs and Guadalcanal Province too ensure that a proper landfill is identified in time before the ADB deadline.

I wish to also highlight a new partnership we are currently working on with the Ministry of Provincial government and our 9 provinces to mainstream Climate Change Action and Disaster, Risk Management at the provincial and ward levels, utilizing the Provincial Capacity Development Fund (PCDF).

I acknowledge our partnership, including the World Bank, Least Developed Country Fund, UNDP, United Nations Capital Development Fund, and the New Zealand Government for their support to the Ministry of Provincial government to implement locally, determined, and prioritize climate and disaster risk management actions.

It will be remiss of me not to cover the significant contributions by environmental NGOs, internationally and locally in the broad area of Biodiversity Conservation and Protected Areas Management that partnership with NGOs was instrumental in

the advances that have been made in the past decades. I thank the NGOs and their financiers for their support, especially at the rural community level.

I would also acknowledge the support from Food and Agriculture Organization, US Millennium Challenge Corporations and International Union for Conservation of Nature, which are contributing to protected areas management under the Protected Areas Act and catalyzing landowner interest in volunteering carbon market as a means of payment of ecosystem services.

The Ministry also started discussions with the People's Republic of China through the Embassy for support to some key areas in disaster management and early warning that the Leader of the Opposition raised on the floor of Parliament, a system, including a proper and safe national emergency operation and joint warning center. This is an important need for a disaster prone country such as the Solomon Islands. Meaningful, durable and equal partnerships are critical to the aim and development of this country and a united Solomon Islands

Before I close, it would be remiss of me to forget the visitation by the Embassy of the People's Republic of China to me when I was sick at the hospital and the Permanent Secretary and some staff of the Ministry and the Undersecretary, and administration. They also came to the hospital to visit me when I was sick. So, please accept my sincere word of thanks. I also thank everyone who prayed for me from their houses when I was sick. I value your prayers. Despite you not visiting me, but you prayed.

Thank you Mr. Speaker and I wish to thank the His Excellency the Governor General for the Speech From The Throne, delivered here, on the floor of Parliament on Monday this week.

With these few remarks, I support the Speech From The Throne.

Hon ROLLEN SELESO (*South Guadalcanal—Minister for Provincial Government and Institutional Strengthening*) (10:46): Thank you for giving me the floor of this House to contribute and to acknowledge the speech presented by His Excellency the Governor General on April 17, 2023.

Firstly, as a Minister of the Crown holding the portfolio of Provincial government and Institutional Strengthening, let me on the outset congratulate his Excellency for his commitment and dedication to the people of this nation. Let me also acknowledge the willingness and sacrifice His Excellency has consistently demonstrated. Be assured of my support as a minister and as a member of parliament representing the people of my constituency.

In the same connection, let me also thank the Prime Minister for your able leadership during our toughest times since last year and early this year. s

highlighted by His Excellency, we will continue to assist in the driving of the policy of the current government to effectively deliver services to our people.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you for allowing me the floor of this House to contribute and update Parliament on the issues and development confronting our provinces to date. In so doing please allow me to draw a bit more on these issues as part of my contribution on the Speech From The Throne.

On Provincial Government Grant and PCDF, firstly, let me thank the honourable House for the passage of 2023 Budget last year. Colleagues in this House, our provincial governments will agree that our country has indeed gone through difficult times in the past years. However, let me thank the Government for its continuous support to ensure services are still delivered to our communities at the Provincial government level.

Again, as part of the National Government's service delivery responsibility, the Service Grant to our 9 provinces and capital funds for infrastructure development will still continue. Service Grant are very crucial as they deal with the normal operations of our provinces, including the payments of bills, wages and other annual programs and work activities carried out by our Provincial governments.

Provincial governments are hard hit in revenue collection, despite improve revenue collection strategies. Issues such as logistics, infrastructure support, manpower, including closure of some of the businesses and investments due to the recent pandemic, also hinder the collection of domestic revenue. However, we are working tirelessly with our provinces to address these challenging issues.

In addition to the Provincial Grants, you will appreciate that the allocation of the Ministry in terms of its Development Budget is \$13 million for this year 2023. Again, let me thank Parliament for its support and approval of this funding. This \$13 million is allocated purposely for the Provincial Capacity Development Fund or the PCDF. As I had mentioned in many occasions, this program is fully funded by the National Government and its operational in our provinces with huge positive impacts in our communities.

Again, since the inception of the program 15 years ago, our communities have received nearly 1,600 infrastructure projects and employment of around 10,000 jobs with annual support from the Solomon Island Government over the years. More than \$300million have already been spent on PCDF Projects, with the majority of infrastructure investment in the health, education and administration sectors.

This program is performance-based and has strong impacts in our communities and truly attracts the attention of our development partners. That is why the World Bank and European Union are willing to provide assistance in this regard.

On our donor partner support, the World Bank Integrated Economic Development and Community Resilience or IEDCR Project, has so far injected \$10million into the program as a top-up on the 2022 PCDF allocation and will inject an additional \$18.5 million for this year's programs e have launched the program in November 2022, and I am very grateful for the support the World Bank has invested for the social, economic and climate related infrastructure projects in the provinces. The program which will be implemented for the next five years with the cost of USD\$23 million, including the funding for PCDF projects, economic projects, and climate resilience program. My Ministry, along with the Ministry responsible for Environment, Climate Change and Disaster Management, are the key implementing partners in this program.

The World Bank and the European Union through the UNDP will also provide support for PCDF program with the total of SBD\$78 million for the next three years. This funding covers the education sector, health and administration for 2023. The European Union through UNDP will also support the program with an amount of \$10 million for the health and education sectors. A further \$15 million is also been provided by the New Zealand Government through local and UNCDF for the disaster resilience and climate related programs. Again the Ministry will use this fund in collaboration with the Ministry of Environment, Disaster, Meteorology and Climate Change to advance climate related infrastructure and disaster awareness programs through PCDF.

As I have mentioned earlier, the willingness and confidence of these development partners truly reflect the commitment that the National Government has demonstrated over the years. The Government has constantly ensure that there is transparency and accountability in the implementation of this PCDF projects for nearly 15 years.

On the Provincial government Act Review, as highlighted by His Excellency in his speech, that one of the policy programs that the Government is undertaking is the review of the Provincial government Act 1997. The review should bring clarity on the governance aspects, provincial government s, outline responsibilities among the administration, executive and assemblies as their relation to other stakeholders. This will consequently help promote stability and good governance at the Provincial government level. I believe what the Provincial government s strive to achieve revolve around access to resources, access to mandate functions and responsibilities and the capacity to deliver their services to our populace.

Two weeks ago, my Ministry, in collaboration with the Prime Minister's Office, convene a Premiers Workshop in Gizo. This is to clarify to all Premiers the current status of the review of the Provincial government Act in conjunction with the Draft Federal Constitution, which has handed over to the National Government in 2019.

The workshop concluded with the signing of the Gizo Communique by our Premiers and the City Mayor. Parts of the communique included

- (i) to support pursue of any review of the Act and its submission to parliament this year, 2023
- (ii) to relook at revenue sharing arrangement and its implementation, taking into consideration the recognition of its provincial economic contribution into the national domestic revenue basket.
- (iii) the additional devolution of certain legislative functions to our Provincial Assemblies in infrastructure development investment, human resources capacity, scholarships, energy and preparations for the adoption of state government of Federal Constitution in the longer term.

The review of the Provincial government Act in collaboration with the draft Federal Constitution is an ongoing process since 2014. As a measure to address the issue raised by premiers, my Ministry, in collaboration with the Prime Minister's Office, will engage in preparatory work to analyze these peer review studies and investigations. The scope of responsibilities and the cost involved when devolving certain functions to our provincial government s. By this, I mean analyzing, assessing, and ascertaining certain functions under the central government agency that can be devolved to our provinces.

In addition to that, we will also assess the cost and capacity involved in these functions. After all, we would require decentralizing functions that will also go along with resources, capacity, and the capability to deliver these services. In this context, the revenue sharing arrangement will also be included in the review.

A draft PGA Bill is already with the AG Chamber, and we will carefully work on it to ensure that this main Bill is submitted later in the year. However, as highlighted by his Excellency's Speech From The Throne, my Ministry will also introduce and submit an urgent amendment to the Provincial government Act 1997 in this honorable House for the synchronization of the Election in 2024.

As we are all aware, an amendment will be tabled either in this sitting or in June Parliament sitting for our provinces, including Honiara City, to have their election at the same time as the National General Elections in April 2024.

I understand that the Honiara City Council amendment will be tabled in this sitting, and the PGA Bill will also be tabled shortly. This will be an exciting time and will be the first time that there will be a combined election at the national and subnational government levels will take place. Provisions are made for Western and Choiseul province to join in the combined election at a later time.

On capacity building program, despite the current financial challenges faced by our country, my Ministry still endeavors to carry out capacity-development programs for our provinces. This means training and skills building programs for our provincial legislatures and workforce, as well as stakeholder consultation in areas of governance, cooperation, infrastructure development, and other service delivery mechanisms.

Capacity building and development programs are very important components for effective service delivery. Subsequently, I call for further coordination and networking among our different stakeholder groups, different sectors, and different levels of government for us to work together to combine our resources to deliver services to our people.

In concluding, let me assure the government and the people of the Solomon Islands of my support to work diligently and within my capacity as the Minister of the Crown. I pledge to fully provide support in meeting the policy and development objectives of the National Government.

I would also like to render my assistance and support to our Provincial Premiers, chiefs, church leaders, women, youth, and community leaders, as well as our development partners, who are supporting the current Government in delivering services through my Ministry. Let us continue to support one another in the development of our nation Solomon Islands with this few remarks, I wish to thank His Excellency for His speech, for setting the sense in our work program for this year, 2023 and I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to contribute, and I do here by resume my seat.

Hon CULWICK TOGAMANA (*Maringe/Kokota—Minister for Health and Medical Services*) (11:02): Thank you Mr. Speaker Sir. I thank you for giving me the floor to contribute to the debate on the Motion moved by the Honourable Prime Minister:

That an address be presented to His Excellency the Governor General as follows:
We the National Parliament of Solomon Islands here assembled beg leave to offer thanks for the speech which has been addressed by you Parliament.

I make this intervention representing my good people of Maringe and Kokota in Isabel and also as Minister responsible for Health and Medical Services.

At the outset, let me acknowledge the wisdom of the Honourable Prime Minister for inviting His Excellency the Governor General to deliver the Traditional Speech From The Throne, a rare opportunity to inform the public of government policies and legislative programs for the year.

I fully concur with the Honourable Prime Minister that, as a government, we must set benchmark for ourselves and that each Ministries must deliver and that Cabinet

is responsible to Parliament by informing the public of its policy intentions and legislative agendas.

With this in mind, my intervention will be confined to policies and legislative reforms proposed and implemented by my Ministry. I am obliged to inform Parliament of some major infrastructure developments in Honiara as well as throughout the Provinces that are aligned with the Role Delineation Policy to achieve universal health coverage, 'leave no one behind'.

The Role Delineation Policy defines the level and type of services that are rendered at each level of health services provision in the country. It is aimed at ensuring appropriate health care services are provided closer to where people live, so that people can access services without financial hardship. Classical example of this is the handing over of the Afio Area Health Center, located in Small Malaita, fully funded by the Solomon Island Government to the tune of \$17 million. Our people of Small Malaita need not travel all the way to Kilu'ufi. At least there is a health facility where they can access some important and essential health services closer to home, and therefore it cuts down on cost of travel, as well as in accommodation for our people. That is what Role Delineation Policy of the Ministry of Health has come to.

There are six levels of health care services under the Role Delineation Policy, which I will not endeavor to elaborate further, however I would encourage the listening public to refer to our Role Delineation Policy available in print as well as online to get more details of the level and types of health care services one can obtain or is expected to receive at each level.

In the past, anyone or organization could build a healthcare facility. However under the Role Delineation Policy, health facilities will need to be formally registered to be eligible to receive support through government systems, for examples, staffing, drugs, medical supplies etc.... So I would like to inform Honourable colleagues, especially if you would like to build a clinic or a health facility in your constituency, it is important that you liaise with my Ministry so that we can align that facility with the existing other health centers so that we can support it as well. So new facilities should only be established with the approval of the Ministry of Health and Medical Services.

At this juncture, let me acknowledge the importance of partnership in providing healthcare services in our country. The National Government is not the sole deliverer of health care services in our country. And therefore the Government is grateful to both the faith-based and commercial organizations that play a pivotal role in delivering the same in our country.

The arrangements for these partnerships are rarely documented and the National Health Strategic Plan includes an objective to improve partnership coordination. This refers to existing formal partnership arrangements with donors but it also refers to the informal partnerships that exist with other service providers, with communities, churches and non-government organizations and with the private sector.

I do agree with His Excellency the Governor General, that the tenure of the 11th Parliament has been marred by natural and man-made disasters that truly tested our limit of endurance and resilience to remain united as a country, and also test our adherence to the principle of representative democracy and respect for the rule of law.

My Ministry, together with other government line Ministries, with support of benevolent bilateral and multilateral donors, have successfully managed the preparation and responded well to COVID-19 community transmission in early January of 2022. And on this regard, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the honorable Prime Minister for his leadership during this testing global pandemic that we have been through.

The latest COVID-19 at the epidemiological report for the Pacific region for the period of 27 March to 2nd April 2023 record zero positive or hospitalization cases for Solomon Islands. The cumulative number of pandemic cases for the country remains at 24,575, with total cumulative deaths of 153 related COVID-19 as of 31st December 2022.

The availability of vaccines was instrumental to our preparedness for COVID-19 infection. However, I am sad to reflect on the high rate of degree of vaccination hesitancy displayed by all sectors of our community. And so less than 50 percent of the eligible population had been fully vaccinated.

I now refer to the key policy documentation and legislation. In terms of the policy documents and legislation, I am humbled to inform this honorable House that His Majesty Cabinet had approved the Ministry of Health and Medical Services National Health Strategic Plan 2022-2031, that was officially launched in November 2022. The Disability Policy and rehabilitation strategy and the Mental Health Policy. Work on legislating the policy documents is ongoing in collaboration with key stakeholders.

My good friend, the Leader of Opposition and MP for Aoke/Langalanga in his intervention, rightly inquired about what progress, if there was any, with regards to the Health Service Act, Health Administration, Medical and Dental Administration Amendment Bills and competent authority, which were announced by His Excellency the Governor General in 2020 to be brought to Parliament.

The Health Service Bill is a major key legislative reform of the Ministry of Health. The current Health Service Act 1998, has so many gaps, which include limited governance and administrative mechanism. No standards regarding quality, safety or other regulation of private medical service and uncertainty regarding fees and provision of private services at public facilities.

The Ministry's current status on the Health Service Act is that, with support from WHO, a team from Manila came and did consultation from 13 – 17 March, 2023. A draft policy document had been produced prior to COVID-19 outbreak. The policy development process has included extensive stakeholder consultation processes. Since the development of drug policy document, there have been a number of developments in the health sector, including the launching of the National Health Strategic Plan 2022-2031. The National Health Strategic Plan is the guiding document outlining the national strategic directions for the Solomon Islands Health Sector over the next 10 years. It emphasizes the importance of implementation and safety of practical and achievable targets.

The recent review done, with support from World Health Organization, pick up the work relating to Health Service Act and aims to provide a statutory basis for a more effective countable, equitable and efficient health system consistent with the priorities of the Ministry.

With regards to Medical and Dental Practitioners Act. The Medical and Dental Practitioners Regulation has been gazetted on 28th March 2022. The Medical and Dental Act is still under review this year. This Medical and Dental Practitioners Regulation gazetted, in a way, has already strengthen the function of the Medical and Dental Board.

The Public Health Emergency Bill has been stalled for over a year. However, this Bill will be tabled in this Parliamentary sitting, now that the Bill and Legislation Committee has finalized and endorsed its report.

In regard to the Competent Authority, the Environment Health Division is working on making a request to the Ministry of Public Service to request additional acquisitions for the office of Competent Authority. The government recruitment freeze has slowed down this process. The human resource team is currently working on all necessary forms to submit with the concept notes to The Ministry of Public Service.

Allow me to respond briefly to the reflection by the Leader of Opposition on increase resource allocation to my Ministry, because of COVID-19 and yet the level of overcrowding in the hospital, especially at the National Referral Hospital and Emergency Ward, the lack of some of the essential drugs continue to escalate unabated.

I will respond on the shortage of drugs at the later stage, but the Ministry has responded in implementing of the following measures to ease overcrowding, especially at the National Referral Hospital. The current mechanism to reduce uncontrolled crowd from entering the premises of the National Referral Hospital is the installation of electronic doors, that you have to have a code in order to punch in on the keys before the door is opened. Sadly, many people can still work their way around this and can still enter the hospital premises. We also have security guards but people never listened to them, and restricted visiting hours but people never respect the allocated visiting hours.

Other measures soon to be implemented are erect of new internal ticketing fencing, repositioning securities at certain points of the internal fencing, strengthening external fencing and recruit specific ward securities and recruit new ward clerks to manage visiting hours and patient care amenities.

At the National Referral Hospital, for one patient he will have minimum of even five relatives. So it makes the place really over crowded.

The overcrowding at the Accident And Emergency Ward has been the occurrence for over two decades and this unfortunate scene will remain so long as Honiara City and Guadalcanal Province do not have dedicated hospitals. We have liaise with the health authority of the Honiara City Council to extend the opening hours to 10pm, for the health facilities that we have at Kukum, as well as Rove.

The situation remains acute for National Referral Hospital also because we cannot increase the number of beds with the current infrastructures. So when we have admissions done at the Accident And Emergency Ward, until there is a bed that is made available at the other wards, we cannot admit these patients, and therefore, they will remain at the Emergency Ward. here has been several articles, which call for intervention to improve the supply and availability of essential drugs and other essential non-consumables at all our hospitals and clinics throughout the country. The learned MP for Aoke/Langalanga and my dear friend the Leader of the Opposition also made reference to the matter on the floor of this honourable Chamber.

The current availability of medicines at the National Medical Store is 79 percent and consumables at 89 percent. The availability of medicines consumables might be low, however, more items are currently being processed for release at sea port and the airport.

Our consumption rate is also high due to increase in population, exerting higher demand on services, and thus items will continue to be used as they come and we are making every effort to ensure we meet the demand in terms of medicines and consumables.

We do face challenges with delaying international logistics and out of stocks are currently being experienced overseas, which is something that we have control of.

Our system of payment to supply is we pay upon receipt. Our financial systems can be lengthy, but we understand the importance of compliance that has to be done at the Ministry level and the Ministry of Finance to ensure transparency, accountability and value for money. We are currently initiating a supply chain assessment starting with the whole procurement system from international suppliers down to the lowest health facility.

Let me just touch on the National Referral Hospital. The Leader of Opposition also made reference to debilitating condition of the National Referral Hospital and lamenting on the timeline provided on the Health Strategic Plan for the location of NRH from the current site to Gilbert Camp. At least for now, we have identified a site where we will have or relocate the National Referral Hospital and that is at the Gilbert Camp. It is a 100 hectare and the title has already been transferred to the Commissioner of Lands and we are grateful that 40 hectares of that 100 hectares is given to my Ministry, where we are going to relocate the National Referral Hospital and also other important facilities, such as the Medical Store, so that they are located in places where natural hazards such as flooding, tsunami and others is greatly reduced.

The relocation of the NRH is a top priority for my Ministry. The Ministry of Health and Medical Services is embarking on a two-fold approach. The first being the concept design and the detail master plan to include the architectural and engineering details. The second being the actual construction.

On this note, we have a very important facility that is going to be built, the Medical Complex that will be fully funded by the PRC. I did made a suggestion to His Excellency if we could build that facility within the new site at the Gilbert Camp. There was a talk on that and the issue here is, if we put it to a new site, it will be a new project and we may lose that funding. So, what we have decided is that the Ministry is in consultation and discussion with potential partners, DFAT and others, to secure technical support given that the development of such an infrastructure requires careful meticulous planning and design as it is no ordinary building and infrastructure.

I am grateful that DFAT, when we had the handing over of the Molecular Lab, His Excellency the High Commissioner of Australia was very supportive in providing technical support so that they can support in the actual design. f we have a full architectural and structure design of the complex, then we can build stage by stage. I think that is quite important. Thus, I am really pleased that they are going to assist us in that endeavor.

As for the NRH, we are not simply just living the National Referral Hospital. There are major improvements that are currently undergoing at the NRH. One is the strengthening of the infection control. In this, we are tracking and monitoring the infection in the ward, and also trying to reduce people from simply just coming in and out of the hospital and causing overcrowding.

Recently, we did not have an incinerator that deals with the biological waste functioning. I am glad to inform Parliament that we have taking delivery of a new incinerator that is funded by DFAT, and should assist us in dealing with any waste and none of this will go to any municipal landfill, such as Ranadi. So I am glad to inform Parliament that we have taken delivery of that incinerator.

There are renovations that are done at the NRH as well. We are doing the repairing with vinyl for all the wards. This is quite important so any fluids that go into the floor should not remain and easily cleaned.

Of course there are improvements at the hospital environment, such as beautification and landscaping work. There are new services that are opening soon. We have the China Medical team specialist that are on the ground to provide training and support for this new services. The Chinese Medical Team should be able to assist people with heart problems, kidney and urinate problems.

On the floor of this Parliament there have been complains about the lack of mammogram at the National Referral Hospital. I am glad to inform this Honorable House that we have taken delivery of that mammogram, funded by the Solomon Islands Maritime Association. We are grateful today. That mammogram machine is here now, and also we have two x-rays that have been delivered, that will support the imaging service at the National Referral Hospital.

There is also a support, which I will also mentioned, at the National Referral Hospital, the Acute Medical Ward has been converted to a High Dependency Ward and that will probably open next month, fully funded by Australia. It is almost like an ICU, an Intensive Care Unit. It is a 12 bed in that Ward. We are grateful. These are improvements that are happening at the National Referral Hospital.

Of course, we are facing usual problems such as absenteeism and we are working to improve key services at the hospital, especially for our staffs that are facing problems with transportation that leads to this.

At the Eastern end of the NRH, there is the site clearing for current hospital service expansion. We are grateful, because for a number of years we used to have this eastern end with people occupying and there is no way of removing them, and now they have all gone. Therefore, we are going to have a comprehension medical center featuring the NCDs, including heart and renal disease TB Ward complex to be

funded by the People's Republic of China. also, the space will be a main central store for the NRH. You will appreciate, that to the east of the headquarter, we have cleared that space for the development of the office of the headquarter of the Ministry, which will be very useful during the Pacific Games. We will render that space available for packing when we have that event at the end of November to early December.

The Leader of the Opposition has raised the issue of staff welfare for medical staff, nurses in particular, but also paramedics and supporting staff. The Government has invested in the welfare of health workers by proving schemes of service, negotiating with the professional associations, which are the Solomon Islands Medical Association, the Solomon Islands Nurses Association, and the Solomon Islands Allied Health Association. However, COVID-19 has taught us to strengthen the protections of its human resources during emergencies. One of which is, of course, staff welfare.

With regards to the nurse, five years ago, the Government, through the Ministry of Public Service, the Ministry of Finance and Treasury, and the Ministry of Health and Medical Service, signed a memorandum of agreement with the Solomon Islands Nurses Association for the Government to provide a posting allowances, increase multi allowances, risk and duty allowances. The Solomon Islands Nursing Association is currently having their election of new office bearers as a requirement of the Registrar of Trade Unions in the process of instatement for suspension. This will also allow further collaboration between the Government in its ongoing support to its members.

Under the new National Health Strategic Plan, objective one, which is Better Governance of the Health Sector, the Ministry will develop its National Health Workforce Strategy. An important area in this development is for the government to invest in and protect its health workforce. The Ministry has started this and hopes to collaborate more with important stakeholders to ensure that staff welfare is addressed as a way of strengthening human resources for health.

Allow me to touch on some very important infrastructure developments that had happened in our country. In terms of Solomon Island funded infrastructure projects, we have one in Manuopo worth \$11 million, funded by SIG and is 95 percent complete.

- Namuga Clinic and Staff Houses in Kirakira, Makira Province, costed at \$900,000. It is already completed.
- Taro Hospital T.B. Ward Project for \$900,00.

- Tukutaunga Area Health Center 1 in Tikopia worth \$16.9million. This started last year and should be completed by March 2024.
- Ganotae Rural Health Center in Fataleka, North East Malaita, worth \$5.2 million. This is funded by the Solomon Islands Government and should be completed by the 30th of March 2023.
- The Kilu'ufi Hospital Extension Project worth about \$2.6 million. This is a project between the Solomon Islands and JICA for the new Kilu'ufi Hospital extension.
- Konede in Hograno-Kia-Havulei Constituency, Area Health Center with a budget of \$19.6 million. 95 percent of the material is already on site.
- Dede Rural Health Center is \$4.6 million. A project funded by the Solomon Islands Government.
- Leona rural health center in the Western Province for \$4.6 million.
- Sulufoloa Rural Health Center refurbishment in Baegu/Asifola for \$1.5million.
- Wagina Area Health Center Project for \$13.5 million in Choiseul Province.

These are projects that are funded by the Solomon Island Government through its Development Budget through the Ministry of Health. We also have funding assistance from bilateral partners. I would like thank DFAT for the project in Nila for fencing and solar power. We have the National Referral container morgue as well. There is also a morgue in Gizo, Kilu'ufi and Munda funded by DFAT.

Just recently we received the new molecular lab at NRH worth \$1 million, funded by DFAT. This molecular adds a new capacity and dimension to the National Referral Lab. It is very useful in surveillance, for instance, if there is an outbreak in dengue, you can identify the strain of dengue. We have that capacity also built in our Provinces.

His Excellency was quite excited and told me that he wanted to invite the Honorable Prime Minister to open the molecular lab at Taro. I am looking forward to that.

There are these new developments happening. I mention this because there are sentiments raised in parliament that so much funds under COVID were allocated to my Ministry and we do nothing with it. There are improvements to our hospitals and the capacity of the molecular lab including isolation wards in our Provincial Health Facilities. I will not go into details on this.

Let me conclude by providing a brief on the collaboration and partnership with bilateral partners.

In partnership with MFAET, the Ministry of Health and Medical Services entered into an MOU with the government of India as well as an MOU with the government of Philippines. The two MOU are purposely to look at referrals of patients particularly to the Philippines where cost are cheaper than Australia. It also looks at possible areas of mutual exchange of specialist training and attachments and improvements of the NRH information system and procurement of medical supplies, particularly in India. With Australia, we have the design country program for the next 8 years of Australian support for the Ministry is currently ongoing.

In preparation for the Pacific Games, the Ministry of Health and Medical Service is collaborating with the US government on the planning and the coordination for the use of the Mercy Floating Hospital. We are grateful that the Honorable Prime Minister gesture in welcoming the ships sailors at the Unity Square. They are willing to come and we are so grateful for that.

With this remarks Sir I support the motion I beg to resume my seat.

Hon FRED A SOR IACOMUA (*Temotu Vattu—Minister for Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs*) (11:36): Thank you Mr. Speaker for giving me the opportunity he Honorable Speaker of National Parliament of Solomon Islands, the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, colleague ministers, Leader of Opposition, Leader of Independent, and members of parliament, as the Member for Temotu/Vatud and Minister for Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs, I wish also to contribute to the speech made by His Excellency, the Governor General, in Parliament on Monday 17th April 2023.

Firstly , I wish to take this opportunity to profoundly thank His Excellency the Governor General, also the representative of His Majesty King Charles III, the Head of the State of Solomon Islands, for delivering the speech and address to all of us in Parliament on Monday.

I wish to also thank Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare, to use his discretion to invite His Excellency to address all of us and simultaneously set the pace of our 6th Meeting of the Eleventh Parliament on Monday.

His Excellency reminded us of our mandate and functions as members of parliament and ministers to be vigilant to serve this country with dignity based on Christian principles, which he also stated in his address in Parliament in 2020. The Governor General reminded us to serve the country faithfully as servants and redirected us as leaders to our country's motto, 'To Lead is to Serve'. That we must

be active agents of positive change to foster unity, which is an essential building block of our country.

I wish to express sentiments echoed by the Governor General relating to the Prime Minister's leadership of the DCGA government. The government stood unwavering during the COVID-19 pandemic up till now. Thank you Prime Minister and the DCGA government. It has been four years since we stood together and brought changes to Solomon Islands.

The Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs is focused and always stands ready to implement legislations and policies, purposely, to make a difference in the lives of our children, youth, women and men of Solomon Islands.

This year, the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs does submit any bills to Parliament. However, our review report on the Family Protection Act 2014 was introduced in Parliament and awaiting Parliament to deliberate on it soon.

There are 43 recommendations that we need to adopt in order to effectively reduce violence against women and girls in this country. Eight of the recommendations are for my Ministry. Most of the recommendations are for the Ministry for Police and Correctional Services. Few are for other Ministries. Twelve of the recommendations are for the amendment of the Family Protection Act 2014.

The Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs and Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs are working on a Youth Bill to be tabled, probably in 2024.

This country is a youthful nation, with 70 percent of our population or half a million are youths. As such, all of us, government ministries, development partners, NGOs, civil society and faith-based organizations need to wear the lenses of youths, to recognize their needs and potentials and to empower them in all aspects of their lives. They must participate in decision making and involve more in the development of our beloved country, Solomon Islands.

Needless to say, if we neglect them, they might become a time bomb. That is what we witnessed during the riots in 2021. The riot devastated Chinatown, which has a great impact on our economy.

So DCGA recognizes the needs of Solomon Island youth. The Ministry of Women, Youth, Children, and Family Affairs is building four youth and children centers in four provinces. These are Temotu, Western, Isabel, and this year, Malaita Province.

Since 80 percent of our youth are based in rural areas, we want to give these youth and children hubs to them to empower our youth. The ministry and DCGA government anticipates that within five years time, we will be able to build youth and children centers in all nine provinces.

As the ministry responsible for youth in Solomon Islands, I am pleased and again would like to thank the DCGA government under the leadership of the prime minister for forging this friendship with China. This is the first time we will provide world-class sports infrastructure for our youth. It will empower youths in many ways and contribute to the development of our country. Thank you China. We are "Friends To All, Enemy To None". We always say it, now it has come to fruition.

My ministry will engage in building care centers to provide shelter for our victims of Violence Against Women, including girls and children. We will help them as well as the perpetrators to live a normal, happy life.

Our revised policies for the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children, and Family Affairs, the National Gender Equality and Women's Economic Empowerment Policy 2021–2027, and Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Policy 2021–2027, are tabled in Cabinet, awaiting the approval. These two policies created by the Women's Development Division are results of effort put by all stakeholder groups who work in the space of "Women's Development" in the Solomon Islands to revise and upgrade it to be more comprehensive and inclusive.

Further to that, a Cabinet Paper on Affirmative Action Strategy has been submitted to Cabinet. This is an extract from our country's policy on Gender Equality And Ending Violence Against Women And Girls, particularly to empower women in different sectors.

Solomon Islands is one of the first countries in the Pacific to have counseling guidelines and framework. We formulate a registry of counselors and we will be training counselors who will be counselors to the victims of violence against women and girls. We will have an electronic registry in the ministry and it will be accessible free of charge to the provincial centers and the public. Thank you DFAT for your support and for funding our counseling guidelines framework.

Fifty babies are born each day in the Solomon Islands, which is like two full classrooms a day. Therefore, I call on all of us to work together to support our many children in the country by providing essential services, protection, respect, and support to them.

My ministry has a revised Solomon Islands National Child Policy for 2023–2028. It is the outcome of collaboration by multi-sectoral efforts. It is based totally on promoting, protecting, and respecting the rights of our children. In addition, all children in Solomon Islands must enjoy the highest standard of health and wellbeing through quality, child friendly and inclusive information service support eleven children in Solomon Islands must be safe and protected from physical harm, emotional stress and exploitation. All children in Solomon Islands must have equal access to learning and education opportunities to reach their full potentials and

open up to future development opportunities for themselves. And that all children in Solomon Islands are given opportunities in social, economic and political sectors to contribute meaningfully to decision making and development efforts.

This revised Solomon Island National Children Policy 2023-2028 will be tabled in Cabinet in one or two weeks time. After endorsement, multi sectoral members will start implementation, monitoring and evaluation. We have the Child and Welfare Act 2020, to discipline perpetrators who abuse children.

Currently, the ministry through the Children Development Division is anticipating working closely with Save the Children, the NGOs and government ministries to strengthen the Social Protection Committee, which will eventually work towards formulating the Solomon Islands National Social Protection Policy.

I wish all of us to work together as one nation for our upcoming Pacific Games so that Pacific island countries that come to participate will enjoy the happy isles. We hope to give them the hospitality that they will not forget.

God bless all of us and I resume my seat.

Hon. NESTOR GHIRO (*Central Makira – Minister for Fisheries and Marine Resources*) (11:49): Thank you Mr. Speaker. I rise as the Minister responsible for Fisheries and Marine Resources to join the Prime Minister in thanking His Excellency the Governor General for the Speech From The Throne on the occasion in the opening this 6th Meeting of the 11th Parliament.

The Prime Minister has moved,

That an address be presented to His Excellency The Governor General as follows:
We the National Parliament of Solomon Islands here assemble beg leave to offer thanks for the Speech which has been addressed by you to Parliament.

As expected of the ministries to provide updates on the implementation on the Development Budget following His Excellency's Speech From The Throne, I now do so, providing the updates on key transformative projects that the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources, of which I am responsible, are currently implementing. These are normally, the Bina Harbor Processing Plant project; the Tilapia Aquaculture Project; the Sea Cucumber Aquaculture Project, and National Seaweed Program.

Let me first provide an update on Bina Harbor Processing Plant Project in West Kwaio, Malaita Province. For further clarifications, added to the supplement answers provided this morning, after some seven years of work by the Ministry of Fisheries in engaging in respectful and participatory dialogue with *Bina-Talifu* area landowners, some 172 hectares were registered for the Bina harbour development.

Out of this 172 hectares, 20 hectares is for the Bina processing plant, and the rest is for the Trust Board commercial activities his parcel is now held by the Commissioner of Lands on behalf of the Bina-Talifu Charitable Trust, which was incorporated earlier in 2022. A master lease between the trustees and the Commissioner of Lands is now being drawn up, and subsidiary leases between the Commissioner and constituent entities of land holding groups will be made as land is identified.

Subsequent to this national achievement, my Ministry is rounding its engagement with outlying Bina communities and the people of Langalanga lagoon to secure sustainable access to the Harbour and fresh water required for the development activities. These two major undertakings are currently being addressed.

The Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources has an MOU with the International Finance Corporation (IFC), which provides for IFC to act as a Government Transaction Advisor in the investment required to establish a tuna processing plant at Bina. This follows on from IFC sponsoring port and Tuna Processing Plant three feasibility studies in 2019.

IFC senior management has recently approved extended support for the project. These arrangement is framed in the Financial Advisory Services Agreement signed in February 2022. Under the agreement the IFC is working with the Ministry of Fisheries to support environmental and social baseline studies for Bina, and develop the legal and financial model for an investor to operate a Tuna Processing Plant at Bina. Further, define technical and financial model for a viable tuna fishing trading and processing of operation and develop a cost-benefit analysis of the Bina project for government consideration.

Together, my Ministry and IFC have identified and engaged two of the three largest and most reputable tuna industry firms globally. To our expression, what appears to be genuine interest in the opportunity to invest in establishing a Tuna processing plant at Bina Harbor.

IFC management has indicated that IFC will continue its support for Bina to the conclusion of the concession arrangements with the global Tuna industry operator to a public gather partnership with the Government. The value of IFC commitment to date is around SBD\$5.4 million.

The MOU between the Ministry Fisheries and Malaita Provincial government remains in full force with ongoing technical consultations, joint field missions and Malaita Provincial government participation in the project steering committee and technical working group. Both of these bodies were set up in 2021. These arrangements aim to ensure that development aligns with and contributes to planning, policies and goals.

The New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade has made strong long term commitment to the Bina Harbor project. It has financed studies and support the Foundation Bina Harbor project team with in the Ministry at the cost of some SBD\$10.8 million. It is a very significant boost to the project.

The MFAET has recently aligned with the Ministry of Fisheries to engage a contractor to manage the Bina Harbor project office which is now operational in new offices at Kukum. The well resourced project office manages the complex planning and contracting required to see the seaport and supporting infrastructure built. It also coordinates engagement with Bina project development partners and government entities responsible for the provision of the utilities that the Bina development will have such as Solomon Water and Solomon Power.

The MFAET provision for the Bina Harbor project is around SBD\$40 million New Zealand is also financing a community engagement and mentoring unit within the ministry.

The Bina Regional Arrangements Governance (BRAG) is responsible to implement a participation model that the Ministry of Fisheries adopted to ensure that the rights holder to the land, harbor and fresh water sources required for the development, have direct opportunities for jobs, businesses, improved utilities, and lease payments. To achieve this, the BRAG team will assist the communities in establishing and maintaining legal entities that can derive social and economic benefits from the project. New Zealand's support for BRAG represents a further SD\$11.6million commitment, bringing New Zealand's total funding support to date to SBD\$63 million.

Support for the Bina Processing Plant also came from the Solomon Islands Infrastructure Program. In 2022 SIG approved financing of a technical study to scope the water supply and waste water management needs for the tuna processing plant and emerging Bina township. Solomon Water is overseeing this work at the cost of around \$3.5 million provided by the Australian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

USAID is also expressing interests in supporting the Bina Harbor Project, potentially through its present activities in Malaita on water catchment management under its SCALE natural resources management activity. As effective management of the catchment is crucial to the sustainable supply of suitable water, this is a welcomed convergence of interest and activity. Alongside these financial contributions, Solomon Islands has contributed to the development of Bina Harbor Processing Plant with SBD\$2million to SBD\$4million each year since 2016 from its limited resources to support the project. If things go well according to our current

time frame, we can see the actual work on the ground towards the end of 2024 or midway through 2025.

The other government flagship project is the Tilapia Hatchery Project. Let me provide updates on the Tilapia Aquaculture Development Projects, which is at Aruligo, West Guadalcanal. The project consists of tilapia infrastructure with a supporting pond grow-out systems. When these facilities are functional, they will be responsible for the management of Tilapia, brood stock, Tilapia breeding, juvenile grow-outs, and farm transfers.

As I reported in my budget speech at the end of last year, the good progress seen with these projects is only made possible due to the annual funding support received from New Zealand government and its people—I sincerely acknowledge this—together with annual funding from our own development budget.

The Tilapia aquaculture facility consists of the following components:

- (a) hatcheries and office buildings,
- (b) grow out ponds,
- (c) water supply installation,
- (d) off grid-connected solar power,
- (e) staff housing and
- (f) post-quarantine facility for import of brood stock.

The completion rates to-date:

- (a) The Hatchery and office building are 100 percent completed.
- (b) The construction of grow-out ponds is 98 percent completed.
- (c) Off-grid solar power installation is 100 percent completed.
- (d) Water supply and installation are 80 percent completed.
- (e) Staff housing- two out of six houses are now being built, and a post-quarantine facility will be allocated at the SINU Kukum campus. The building contract has already been awarded, and construction work will begin soon

It is our aim to have these main components completed by December 2023 and the Hatchery program functional in 2024.

The sea cucumber hatchery project. I now wish to turn to provide a brief progressive report on our sea cucumber hatchery project. This project is funded by the government and the people of Japan through its overseas Fisheries Foundations Cooperation.

As reported in my last update in Parliament in 2022, the achievement to date by our research team is paralleled to the best elsewhere in the world. We have successfully

reared juvenile sea cucumbers in the hatchery from eggs to settlement. This means we have closed the larvae rearing cycle of the species of bechedemer we are working with. This took us more than three years to perfect our standard operating system. At the end we have prevailed. We have determine quality feed during larvae stages of growth that enables high rate of settlement and juvenile survival. We have successfully produced a large number of juvenile during our spawning and lava rearing runs and these are ongoing.

Our current work now focused on running trials on the reefs to test survival rates of the hatchery breed juveniles in the wild. This we have done throughout 2022. This is the last piece of research work before we close the project. Our initial reef trials have produced good results with high survival rates but we will continue the trials until we are fully satisfied with the survival data on trials produce.

I will touch on the seaweed program.

Whilst our seaweed program is not infrastructural in nature, it is our belief that the socioeconomic benefits that the program offers to our coastal communities are equal or even better to our traditional customs. The direct economic benefit our rural farmers received from farming seaweed has reached about SBD\$39million against a total export production of 12 thousand tones by 2021. To receive such at the village level, that indeed improves the livelihood of our people.

Our national seaweed program is fully funded by the government under our Development Budget. To date, we are the leading producer of seaweed in the region. Our annual country production is growing. We have an estimated total of 350 household farmers across the country, but the number is growing. This is because seaweed offers a shorter life cycle of only six weeks on average, from planting to harvesting. This makes seaweed farming a speedy cash crop for our local communities.

To ensure the sustainability of this emerging industry, my Ministry is promoting the Public Private Partnership to expand seaweed farming to our rural people. We are working actively with private business houses to take this industry forward. It is pleasing to know that many of our honorable colleagues are promoting seaweed farming in their constituencies and I wish to encourage us all to do that. If there is an alternative livelihood that will allow active engagement and participation of our young population in money making endeavors, then seaweed farming is the alternative. Let our constituencies benefit from this simple algae plant.

Our seaweed program has been supported by the New Zealand Government, the World Bank and SPC. I sincerely thank these development partners for their support. The progress of all our projects are made possible with the great support of our development partners, which I have named, and I am pleased. I wish to

assure our development partners that my Ministry will continue to work together with you to bring to fruition these transformative projects in our endeavor, to improve the lives and wellbeing of our people.

In conclusion, in the Speech From The Throne, His Excellency made a statement; For us to be together as a nation to move forward he launched of Safe and Green Games by the Prime Minister, and then here comes the Speech From The Throne. If you look at these statements, they are very community approach, particularly for us the residents of Honiara. That is for us to be together as a nation, as residences of Honiara. And we must respond positively. Therefore, I wish to call on my good citizens of Central Makira Constituency who reside in Honiara to respond positively. Let us be together as a nation and we are part of Honiara and we must respond positively. I call on my people to participate in any cleaning up programs organized by responsible institutions in Honiara, the churches, civil society groups, private sector and schools. Please respect the initiatives and let us be together with all the people who are engaged in these initiatives. Honiara is always our home and will be our home for education, medical, business, travel and you name it. We must participate. Most of all, Honiara is the center that flies the flag, that flies our pride to the world. We must treat Honiara as our home. If this is our home, then let us treat it like our own home.

With these few remarks I support the motion and resume my seat.

Parliament suspends at 12.10

Parliament is resumed 2.07pm

The SPEAKER: Before we left this morning, if there are any member who wish to contribute to the motion, the floor is open. If there is none, I will leave it to the Prime Minister to continue with the business.

Hon. MANASSEH SOGAVARE: I move that the debate on the question be now adjourned until the next sitting day.

Question put and agreed to

(Debate adjourned)

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. MANASSEH SOGAVARE: I move that Parliament do now adjourn.

Question put and agreed to

Parliament is adjourned at 14.09

[Edited]



Eleventh Parliament

First Meeting

NATIONAL PARLIAMENT OF SOLOMON ISLANDS

Monday, 24 April 2023

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

(Subject to Revision)

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NATIONAL PARLIAMENT OF SOLOMON ISLANDS**Monday, 24 April 2023**

The Speaker, Mr Patterson John Oti, took the Chair at 09:49.

Prayers.

Business of the House

ATTENDANCE

All were present with the exception of the Ministers for Fisheries and Marine Resources, Commerce Industry Labour and Immigration, Home Affairs, Infrastructure Development, National Planning and Development Coordination, Justice and Legal Affairs, Provincial Government and Institutional Strengthening, Women Youth Family and Children Affairs, Health and Medical Services, Mines Energy and Rural Electrification, and Members for South Choiseul, East Are'Are, North East Guadalcanal, East Makira, Ulawa/Ugi, West New Georgia-Vona Vona, West Honiara, North Guadalcanal, Malaita Outer Islands, Central Honiara, North West Guadalcanal, and Marovo.

Questions and Answers

US COAST GUARD SURVEILLANCE AGREEMENT FOR IUU FISHING

#140 **Hon MATTHEW WALE** (*Aoke/Langalanga*)—*Leader of Opposition* (09:50) to the Minister for Foreign Affairs: Can the Minister inform Parliament why the Government does not want to sign an agreement with the US Government Coast Guard to conduct surveillance in Solomon Islands waters for Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing?

Hon. JEREMIAH MANELE (*Hograno/Kia/Havulei*—*Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade*) (09:51): The question of Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing. First of all, let me clarify that this refers to illegal fishing across four categories:

- (a) Unlicensed or unauthorized fishing in our waters,
- (b) Misreporting by licensed boats,
- (c) Non-compliance with other licensing conditions, example; shark finning,
- (d) Post harvest risk or illegal transshipment.

So when we say IUU fishing, it basically covers these categories.

In terms of surveillance on IUU fishing, IUU fishing of course is a challenge, and collectively we deal with this through our regional framework, the FFA. For example, FFA has a 24 hours surveillance unit which, tracks movements of boats through the vessel monitoring system on licensed fishing boats. The FFA has surveillance planes. Beside each of the pacific states, we do have national assets to respond and investigate suspicious activities within our waters.

We do recognize the huge ocean space. Hence, during COVID-19 period for example, the FFA surveillance regional team were given exemption in terms of their surveillance activities.

It is also important to note that we are seeing more NATO gun boats entering our waters from three countries. We have dealt with the countries bilaterally and do not involve ourselves in any alliances.

The US request by the Coast Guard to enter our waters is facilitated through our existing and national frame works. These are working fine. The Government believes that at this time, it is not necessary for us to sign the agreement that the US requests us to sign. The Solomon Island Government, as I have said, has also in place an effective guideline for the approval and clearance of military and naval vessels entering our air space and waters. For the first three months of this year alone, we cleared 28 military aircrafts and three naval vessels. Of course, we are seeing more naval ships entering our waters.

The guidelines provides a process and timeline requirements for any naval or military aircraft to enter our waters, including United States aircrafts and naval ships. We have had cases where foreign naval vessels have entered our territory without our permission. The Safe Guideline and FFA Surveillance Arrangements, which include foreign naval vessels, continue to serve us well.

We do not wish to outsource the safeguards and the protection of our sovereignty, resources and future to another state at their timing and terms. We have had cases, as I have said, of foreign naval vessels entering our territories without our permission. The Safe Guideline and FFA Surveillance Arrangements, as I have said, remain and are working very well for us at this time.

Our position is for all partner countries, including the United States, to build our national capacity in-country to support our Maritime Authority to police our waters. Of course, under our National Security Strategy, the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force is charged with keeping law and order and so as the Maritime Division in terms of this question.

As you may be aware, the Pacific Region is a highly contested region with increased naval militarization in our region and waters. It is important to note that the world

is divided along geo-political fault lines that sadly targets the third countries as a response to the shifting international system.

The United States has been clear on its partnership with the Pacific. This is driven by the Pacific relations with China. Sadly, we are at the day and age where international principles of respecting sovereignty and territory integrity is not universally applied by some powerful States. We see the increasing risk of confrontation and uncertainty in our wider Asia-Pacific Region, which has implications for having a formal agreement with US. We do not want to see powers define global order and continue to work with multilateralism and under international law.

Solomon Islands has adopted a position of not aligning ourselves with any alliances or will not be coerced or influenced to choose sides or sign agreements that has other dynamics and implications. We do not wish to participate in power-politics, hence the timing of such an agreements does not serve our interest due to our standing position of getting all our partners, including the US, as I have said, to build our national security capacity and address other issues, such as UXOs and our development agenda. We have faith and trust in our regional framework.

Finally, as a big ocean State with more than 1.5 square miles of ocean, we must remain in the driver's sit on any offer and work with frameworks, which we are comfortable with. Solomon Islands is part of the Pacific Ocean continent that covers 20 percent of the earth's surface. I believe our system is working and will continue to facilitate US and other naval vessels as long as all our requirements are observed and met.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: Thank you. It is very informative response so far. Just to confirm, so the Coast Guard Vessels are treated as military naval vessels as well?

Hon. JEREMIAH MANELE: The FFA, in terms of the region's surveillance work of monitoring IUU fishing regarding the guidelines, military vessels and aircraft, are covered under our guidelines, which the Cabinet has already endorsed. This makes it much more clearer in a coordinated manner. Because we have to work with a number of Ministries, including Foreign Affairs, Police, Customs when it comes to requesting such clearances before the Prime Minister's Office can grant clearances. This also covers US Coast Guard vessels.

Mr RICK HOUENIPWELA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank the Minister of Foreign Affairs for a very clear explanation of what is happening with the surveillance of unregulated fishing in our region. More especially for us in the country.

I want to know about this regional framework which the Minister has just explained. FFA is carrying this out on behalf of the member countries. What does this surveillance work involve? Is it satellite systems, military aircraft, and patrol boats that do the work?

Hon. JEREMIAH MANELE: The FFA is a 24 hour surveillance unit that tracks the movements of boats. That is the vessel monitoring system. If you visit FFA, they will show you how they do the work in terms of monitoring licensed fishing boats. They can also catch or monitor vessels that may not be licensed but appear on the system. That is what the FFA has been doing and it really helps FFA countries including Solomon Islands in terms of the security of our waters.

Let me also add in responding to the original question that we are not in a position to sign the agreement because of the reasons that I have alluded to. We would like to build national capacity in terms of our RSIPF maritime capability and capacity. The agreement will also require us to implement certain obligations that are covered by other UN Conventions that we have yet to ratify. For example, the UN Conventions dealing with the illicit trafficking of narcotics, transnational maritime activity and organized crime. Solomon Islands have not acceded to these conventions and it is important that we accede to these, and ensure that we have the capacity and capability to implement them before we can look at signing this agreement.

Basically, it is a question of timing and probably later on, when we review the arrangement and are satisfied that we are ready, we can then review this agreement.

On the supplementary question raised by the Leader of the Opposition is, whether the other countries have signed on to the agreement, of course they have their own reasons. The security context in those countries is slightly different from ours. Some of them have special relationships with the US in terms of our friends from Micronesia which the US looks after their defence and security. So they have their own reasons as well.

ATTORNEY GENERAL (10:04): The regional framework is called the Niue Cooperation on Fisheries Surveillance and Law Enforcement in the Pacific Region. It is signed by 17 Pacific Island countries which include, Australia, Solomon Islands, Palau, PNG, Cook Islands, FMS, Tokelau, Fiji, Kiribati, Tonga, Tuvalu, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Vanuatu, Samoa, New Zealand, and Niue.

This regional framework deals with cooperation in surveillance and exchange of information, law enforcement, cooperation in prosecutions, and enforcement of penalties. FFA is the lead agency. Any other countries that may come in to help implement the Niue Treaty, FFA can sign them on.

Recently, we heard that we have conducted operations like operation Kurukuru in which France and the USA intervened to help us in terms of surveillance, overflights, and incoming vessels. So those are part of the surveillance mechanism that we signed on to and is implemented by FFA.

One of the things that the Niue Treaty also looks at is the harmonized terms and conditions of access. Where each country around the Pacific harmonizes access terms and conditions to help FFA in their surveillance. If FFA is suspicious of any vessel that comes in, they can send out information to the countries the ship enters their territories, which will trigger a domestic response.

Mr PETER KENILOREA (Jnr): Just a supplementary question with regards to capacity building in terms of the arrangement with the US. As I understand with other countries, this is also a component of their program. In other countries, allowing personnel from other countries to be part of the sail, in terms of their capacity building kind of contributions, is also part of this particular program. Capacity building that could allow our officers or authorized people to be able to sail together with other Pacific Islanders in a US Coast Guard boat?

Hon. JEREMIAH MANELE: Yes, that is also part of capacity building. But where we would like to see the emphasis on is our infrastructure building. The RSIPF in terms of improving, for example, additional help in terms of logistics and support on Maritime Authority. That is in addition to allowing our officers to be part of the crew on some of the ships.

Mr RICK HOUENIPWELA: I want to thank the Attorney General and the Minister for their explanation. It seems that this work begins with fishing and now moves to human beings. This issue about capacity seems to be a serious issue. The last time I visited the surveillance monitoring center at FFA I was told that they can identify foreign ships and that they are going to be reported to Solomon Islands. But there were no responses. So I am wondering what the situation is now, because the surveillance center at FFA is really good. They check every minute of the day and they report to us.

My question is our capacity. So I want the Minister to assure the House where we are with this?

Hon. JEREMIAH MANELE: Thank you Mr. Speaker let me thank my good friend the MP for Small Malaita for raising that important question in terms of the capacity challenges that we are facing.

Capacity building or capability is an ongoing work. It will not be done over night. These are challenges that we are facing. Line Ministry's such as Police for example,

work is underway. It is ongoing. So we will not be expecting capacity building and capability to be done overnight.

That is an important challenge and I do agree with you. That is a priority for the line Ministry and in this case the Ministry of Police. That is why we are requesting all our partners including the US to continue to help us to build capacity of our agencies, including the Maritime Authority.

Mr. JOHN MANENIARU: I want to follow up on the supplementary question that the AG just provided information for, and the work they did really well, in terms of the understanding and cooperation in the region under FFA. Under this program of 24 hours surveillance are programs like the Operation Kurukuru, which the Attorney General talked about.

The capacity we have cannot match the rising issues of illegal fishing. FFA is setup, but again, as the Member for Small Malaita said, comes back to us. If we have the capacity, we can align and match with FFA. But I understand that even in the past, the knowledge I have is that we cannot catch up because we do not resource our Police. When there are sightings we cannot do anything because cannot afford to go out.

Hence, my question is on the complimentary program like operation Kurukuru, it comes to the Ministry. If there is a complimentary work where one of the countries involved in this operation go carryout their own activities then that is an advantage. FFA can consider that. Is that the case where we can facilitate?

Hon. JEREMIAH MANELE: As I have said in my initial response, we are working with all our partners including the US Government to continue to build our capacity. I will ask the colleague Minister for Police and National Security to elaborate on the details, as to what exactly do we mean by capacity or capability building of the RSIPF the Maritime Authority, for example.

Mr. Speaker, if you could allow that.

Hon ANTHONY VEKE: Thank you Mr. Speaker and thank you colleague Minister of Foreign Affairs for that. As we are all aware that the work to provide surveillance for our high waters rests within RSIPF's Maritime department. Apart from those multi-lateral arrangements, we do have bilateral arrangements as well. This will support Maritime Department to do capacity building at the same time provide surveillance on high waters for illegal activities. Not only illegal fishing but other transnational trafficking that is also happening around the world at the moment.

You might be aware that we have this Defense Cooperation with Australia. The major partner for the Maritime Department is Australia under the Defense Cooperation. They do support us with Guardian class patrol boats. These patrol

boats provide surveillance. They have a program that the patrol boats go out and do surveillance on the high seas. They go out to do surveillance every month for 21 days.

We have that capability and it is running at the moment. But that is not to say that we do not need capacity development on our side. We still need continuous capacity development of Maritime Department.

We welcome engagements with other partners, as the Minister of Foreign Affairs expressed. But that is the level of capacity we have. We man the borders, our high seas with the support of other partners.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: Just perhaps an indication of the robustness of the capacity to respond. The Minister of Police may not have that detail on him but, for example, how many calls does Police receive from the monitoring surveillance center at FFA? How many of these calls are we able to effectively respond to so that we see if there are gaps in our capacity to effectively respond? If he does not have it, he could supply that information later.

Hon ANTHONY VEKE: I will get the details and furnish to the Leader.

Mr PETER KENILOREA (Jnr): I think it is clear in terms of the government policy on this particular issue of building our own capacity, that is clear in terms of the responses we have been hearing. But it is available publicly, in terms of which countries have already signed these Ship-Rider Agreements. I think for the Melanesia group, we are the only ones who have not signed with Papua New Guinea signing late last year for this same Ship-Rider Agreement.

That means that not only those in the Western Pacific or Northwest, but this is region-wide in terms of Polynesia, and now Melanesia. We see that it is an important block.

While I understand and I take the policy that has been explained, is it really government policy that you will not be considering this at all and just waiting on our own capacity however long it will take? Or are you still keeping this alive, knowing full well that all our neighbors have already signed? And what is really the reason behind us not signing?

I am sure all of them have the same issue in terms of the same issues that are raised here, in terms of the government policy. But I just wanted to ask, is it really true that you will not consider this? Or is it still something that you will consider and continue to look at in terms of how we can work with this in line with the policy that has been outlined by the government. Considering, especially the long term impacts and what we can learn with our capacity and allowing our sailors, our

authorized officers, to be onboard and continue to train along with US and other Pacific islanders.

Hon. JEREMIAH MANELE: Thank you for that important supplementary question. As I alluded to earlier, we will continue to work on this. We believe that the timing is not right for us at this time. We feel that it is not right for us at the moment. We would like to continue to use existing frameworks, both national, in terms of the guidelines and the regional frameworks that we have alluded to earlier.

The other countries have signed on to it, and I am aware of that. Of course, they have their own reasons for that as well. As much as we would like to work with the region and with other countries, it is also important to note and take into account that we do have national interests that are quite peculiar to us, and we would like to at least have that flexibility in terms of looking at these dynamics and factors.

So, it is not that we are not going to sign at all, but it is something that we continue to dialogue with the US Government on, and including the recent visit by the US delegation, this was raised, and we did have some discussions on this in the bilateral meetings. I am sure that raised this matter with you as well when they called on the Leader of Opposition.

So it is a matter that we will continue to engage with the US on, because we would like to be comfortable when we sign these arrangements, that we do not put ourselves in a position that we are choosing sides, but we find ourselves the difficulty of actually monitoring their coming in as well.

Although it is easy to sign, for example, it will be difficult for us. They could use it as a blanket approval for them to come in at any time, undermining the guidelines that we have in place now.

So these are the dynamics, the arrangements, that we are currently looking at. It is not that we are not going to sign, but we will review the arrangement along with the developments that we have regionally, but also importantly, nationally as well.

Mr. JOHN MANENIARU: IUU, as you alluded to, is our biggest fight in fisheries, and fishing is one of our resources. A lot has been involved under this heading, and the fight is costly. The supporters and partners of FFA, one of which is the US, and even in the past, US budgetary support also came to the FFA members. I do not know this is still ongoing, because it was under review. The non-signing, does it not affect the support under the current legal framework that FFA has with its partners? Does it not affect them or US in their contribution and continuous support to our FFA work?

Hon. JEREMIAH MANELE: The answer is no. The US support continues to all the regional organizations.

Mr PETER KENILOREA (Jnr): Just on the statement, the initial response to the question, there was an alluding to some unauthorized vessels coming into our territory or EEZ, but the idea is that we wanted to find out which vessels that have been breaching what seemed to be our laws or even international laws. I just want to find that out from the Minister the specifics as to which vessels have breached this.

Hon. JEREMIAH MANELE: Thank you the MP for East Are 'Are and the Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee for that supplementary question. Yes, actually, there were three cases. They were actually in our waters before they requested for permission or for clearance. It is that sort of situation that we are trying to manage.

The new guidelines that we have now in place will help us as we try some to address some of those requirements. They have to give us their request in time and we will assess those request working in consultation in coordination with other line Ministries.

I am not able to give you the details as to when and from which countries, but there were three cases of ships or naval vessels in our waters without permission and they sought permission after they entered our waters.

Mr PETER KENILOREA (Jnr): Thank you again. Just on that one, when you say our waters, is this territorial water or EEZ? Do you have those specifics and details?

Hon. JEREMIAH MANELE: They have actually come into our territorial waters.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: I thank the honorable Minister. I suppose the key for us is if there are gaps in our surveillance capacity. Yes, there are gaps. I did not really get a good quantified data but FFA raised some complain that request for domestic capacity for us to respond does not meet the need. So, obviously there is a gap there. Any delay in meeting that need is money that should be coming into the economy and into Government revenues, if there is illegal fishing activity going on but we are not taking any money from it. The weight must not be unreasonable, there must be searches to supplement and make sure our capacity deals with this gap.

I hope that the Government can look at these issues and expedite the issues that are held up, resolve them, so that with the rest of the region, we can benefit from this cooperation with our partners.

With those comments, I do wish to thank the honorable Minister.

COVID-19 UPDATE

#142 **Hon MATTHEW WALE** (*Aoke/Langalanga*)—*Leader of Opposition* (10:27) to the Supervising Minister for Health and Medical Services: Can the Minister provide an update on the COVID-19 situation in the country?

Hon FREDRICK KOLOGETO (*South Vella Lavella—Minister for Commerce, Industries, Labour and Immigration*) (10:27): Thank you Mr. Speaker. I take this opportunity as the Supervising Minister of Health to answer this very important question from my good friend the MP for Aoke/Langalanga and Leader of Opposition.

The update in terms of number of cases, a total of six COVID-19 cases have been detected in Honiara between January and April, which is this month. One case was detected on the 14th of January, two cases were detected on the 27th of March and most recently, three new cases were detected on the 12th of April. The cases picked up mainly in Honiara. One was from pre-departure testing that was requested, and five at the NRH and HCC clinics. There were no positive cases detected at other sentinel sites across the country during this period. It is good for us, the Members of Parliament, to have a test to see if we are carrying COVID. Maybe the Leader of Opposition can start off with the group.

As we all know, the COVID-19 situation has improved, and so testing is mainly done on persons presenting to clinics and hospitals with flu-like illnesses. The recent increase in flu-like illness in the capital Honiara and parts of the country is due to influenza H1, which was detected in March last year as per NRH molecular laboratory testing.

As per updated data, it is still increasing in the month of April. This influenza H1 can cause people to feel sick with a high fever and involves an itchy throat and coughing, headaches, and nausea, similar to COVID-19 symptoms. It can be life-threatening to people with asthma and other respiratory illnesses, as well as underlying health conditions, such as diabetes and etc.. Therefore, it is very important that similar COVID-19 measures, such as frequent hand washing, coughing into elbows, wearing of mask in public or crowded places, and avoiding close contact with persons experiencing flu-like symptoms can all help to stop the spread of influenza H1 and help us stay protected against this flu.

The Ministry has stepped up its testing with collections of samples from sentinel sites from persons presenting with flu-like illnesses.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: For those who want vaccinations, are they still able to access the vaccination?

Hon FREDRICK KOLOGETO: The answer is yes; you can do that at NRH and also at the hospitals in the provinces and the clinics around the suburbs.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: Are there no deaths with cases detected and recorded?

Hon FREDRICK KOLOGETO: There is no such thing as dead. The cases are cold cases, and testing is also reduced. It is not really a threat, and it is very important to take precautions in case it beefs up.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: Just in terms of variants in the cases detected, which variants are recorded?

Hon FREDRICK KOLOGETO: With the data here, unfortunately, I do not have the variant. I will ask the Ministry to provide and it is made available in the pigeonhole for all Members of Parliament.

Mr RICK HOUENIPWELA: This influenza H1, which the Minister is reporting to us, it seems that cases of COVID are going down, but this has increased. If the Minister provide an update on these three things?

1. How fast is the increase in cases?
2. Do you have records of cases around the country?
3. Had there been any deaths resulted from this influenza?

Hon FREDRICK KOLOGETO: Unfortunately, there is no data on how many people are infected by the H1 virus, but I will ask the Ministry to provide that data for us.

Also, in terms of the second question, there are no cases of death. It is less severe than COVID-19. That is what the Ministry says. But we just need to be careful of ourselves if we have underlying sickness in our bodies.

Mr. JOHN MANENIARU: This is a supplementary question for the Minister. You did mention handwashing. These rules are slowing down because COVID is slowing down as well, which is good. Just in case it comes back. The Government supported the hand washing program. Where are we now on that? The hand wash project funded by the government was rolled out to schools. Can you update the House on that Minister?

Hon FREDRICK KOLOGETO: The program for basic practices is ongoing, and it is also best practiced at home in keeping clean and washing hands.

So as far as the Ministry is concerned, this program is still ongoing, and how much the Government invests in it is not available. However, the Ministry

continues to encourage people to practice basic handwashing practices, as we have done in COVID-19 cases.

Mr RICK HOUENIPWELA: As the Minister explained earlier, the H1 influenza has covered the whole country. Can the Minister provide the House with some assurances of what the Ministry is doing, especially what has been happening in our rural areas, especially in terms of medication and treatment to address this?

Hon FREDRICK KOLOGETO: According to the Ministry of Health, the prevention is the same as COVID-19. It is also important for us to know that this H1 influenza virus does not have a cure. So preventive health measures are important for us to take. But as the Ministry is aware, assuming we have the COVID vaccination, it should boost our immune system.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: Yes, I do wish to thank the honorable supervising Minister of health, who is a very healthy man himself, for his very healthy answers to this unhealthy problem. This is something that the Government must keep an eye on to make sure that it does not come back. I see the Deputy Prime Minister came back and is very healthy too, from the one week of break and engage more healthily in those discussions. I do thank the Honorable Supervising Minister.

Bills

THE 'HONIARA CITY (AMENDMENT) BILL 2023'

Second Reading

Hon CHRIS LAORE (*Shortlands—Minister for Home Affairs*) (10:39): Thank you Mr. Speaker. I move that the Honiara City (amendment) Bill 2023 be now read a second time. I am honored and privileged to present to this House the Honiara City (amendment) Bill 2023 on behalf of the Democratic Coalition Government for Advancement.

This Bill represents the major and decisive step forward towards implementing our policies and mandates on behalf of the people of this nation. This Bill is consistent with the government stated policy to review the Honiara City Act of 1999 to allow for the synchronization of election dates in the year 2024, when the National General Elections and the Honiara City Council Ordinary Elections will be conducted on the same date.

This government flagship policy initiative has been widely consulted and warmly welcomed by citizens living in the provinces and urban centers, including Honiara City. The current practice where the National General Election and the Honiara City

Ordinary Election falls on different dates has caused hardships and difficulties for the election managers and administrators and the public over the past decades.

The amendment of the Honiara City Act of 1999 was conducted by a taskforce established by the Solomon Island Electoral Commission. The taskforce comprises of senior officials from the Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs, Ministry of Provincial Government and Institutional Strengthening and the Office of the Prime Ministers and Cabinet. It produced a draft consultation Bill for consideration by stake holders and Communities.

The taskforce undertook tour to nine Provinces to ensure that the proposed Bill is appropriate and demonstrates best practices. The Provincial tours provide a valuable opportunity for officers to meet with their counterparts in the nine Provinces and obtain the views and advises of implementing the synchronized election system.

The taskforce also held a series of consultation workshop in Honiara for Stakeholders, Government agencies and community members. Both the Provincial and the Honiara Consultation meetings held successful with favorable outcomes. This Bill amends the Honiara City Act of 1999 by empowering the Minister to extend the term of current Honiara City Council for purposes of holding synchronized election in 2024.

The amendment provides for a cheaper, just, transparent and equitable process for elections to happen in the year 2024 and into the future. This Bill amends the Honiara City Act of 1999 so that the dates of an election is to be fixed by the Minister on the advise of Electoral Commissions to ensure that the Electoral Commission is ready to hold election on the date fixed. It also highlight the term Electoral Commission as establish under Section 57 of the Constitution.

This Bills amends and repeals the Section 17 of the Honiara City Acts of 1999 and replaces it with new section that provides for a persons eligibility to be registered as a voter in election of the Members of the City Council. It also empowers the Electoral Commission to register voters and conduct elections of the Honiara City. It further makes it very clear and accessible by providing accompanying notes, highlighting the relevant sections of the Constitution.

This Bill also empowers the Minister to make appropriate regulations in accordance with the advice of the Electoral Commission.

The Government identified the acceptance of synchronized elections or simultaneous elections as a major policy priority. The Ministry has demonstrated its commitment to implementing the Government policy in the proposed amended

legislation by amending the outdated legislation with amended laws that provide for a cheaper, just, fair, and transparent approach to elections of our nation.

The policy to allow synchronization of elections has benefits, including logistics and administrative expenses, which will be significantly reduced because we will have one joint election instead of two separate elections.

The Political Parties, most of which are relatively young and not well-established at this stage will now have the opportunity to make some real impact at the City Council level, while supporting their candidate at the National Parliamentary level.

Political party expenses will be reduced significantly if they are to be involved with City Council elections. There will be higher turnouts for City Council elections. It is normally low to the City Council elections. There will be a high turnout for city council elections which is normally low compared to the parliamentary elections.

Destruction to the work of civil servants will be minimized because teachers and other civil servants will be away from the day-to-day work to work in General Election just once as opposed to twice in every four years. And it will reduce potential voter fatigue because voters will go only once to the poll and not twice.

There is a world trend towards the acceptance of simultaneous elections because it enables practical participation in elections. Implementation of simultaneous elections is a significant step toward a better election system that will save costs and easier to manage.

The Government should be rightfully proud of this Bill and the contribution it makes to the betterment of our nation. I believe that with this Bill, this Government has not only met but has exceeded those high expectations we have delivered on our provinces to our people and to our nation.

With those remarks, I beg to move.

The SPEAKER: Thank you, honorable Minister, and honorable Members, it is proposed that the Honiara City (amendment) Bill 2023 be now read a second time. According to Standing Order 48(5)(b), debate on the question is now adjourned.

Motions

ADDRESS OF THANKS TO THE GOVERNOR GENERAL

Hon ISHMAEL AVUI (*East Central Guadalcanal—Minister for Lands, Housing and Survey*) (10:48): Thank you Mr. Speaker. I would also like to contribute on the Motion moved by the Honorable Prime Minister. The Motions reads, "That an address be presented to His Excellency the Governor General as follows: We the

National Parliament here assembled beg leave to offer thanks to the Speech which has been addressed by you to Parliament".

On behalf of my people of East Central, I wish to give thanks to His Excellency the Governor General for the speech delivered on Monday, April 17, 2023. The speech was delivered on behalf of King Charles III, who is the Head of State of the Solomon Islands, as prescribed in the Constitution of this country.

His Excellency mentioned in his Traditional Speech from the Throne, that was his last address to the 11th Parliament. He mentioned that, he said that would be his last Speech. I was quite unsettled when he said that. It reminds me of a lot of good things that was done together during the 11th Parliament. We will leave this 11th Parliament with pride, with our heads up. We will say 'we have done our best amongst the toughest of times.

We never knew we will ever come out victorious, but our good Lord is always on our side, and we did what we did. We went through the global economic crisis, the riot, COVID-19, and then another riot, and now the geopolitics. Like His Excellency said in his speech, thank you honorable Prime Minister, and the government.

I also heard His Excellency mentioned that we are now closer to the 2024 General Elections. We must learn to stand together, that was what he said, and be united in our vision to help our people and country grow and prosper.

So, we have this challenge, and I direct it to my people. I would like to say to my people of East Central, the church leaders, chiefs and all the youth leaders, that we all must be agents of change. We must not just sit down and watch. We must be agents of change, we must work, we must sweat so that we eat and have money, and not just to complain. We must work. We must be building blocks of our constituencies, our province, and our country.

I want to tell my people, that it is only over the last eight years that you have seen positive things happening in our constituency and rural areas; no at any other time beyond those eight years. No! I did not see it! It is only over the last eight years in East Central, that we have seen positive changes happening. So I would like to say this to my people, that you think wisely for 2024.

I am very happy that His Excellency mentioned the need to prioritize infrastructure in strategic locations in our country. I want to mention again the importance of linking Honiara to Marau. I am very happy that the Governor General had mentioned the need to prioritize infrastructure in strategic locations in the country, that road is in strategic location. It links Temotu. When you come from Temotu, you do not need to spend two days or a whole day after you had arrived in Marau. You can go down to Marau, get your cruiser and come to Honiara. You do not need to

waste your time sleeping in the ship cabins. It is a strategic location of road linking Temotu, Makira, Afio, Are 'Are. I say thank you to His Excellency for mentioning the importance to prioritize infrastructure in strategic locations in our country.

I am really happy with the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Infrastructure for allocating for the road. The tender for this will go out soon to start work on this road. It is not a lot of money, but at least to start working slowly on this because there are a lot of us. This road is a strategic one, as I have said. It is a main road that will lead to circumnavigating the island. It is not a feeder road. It is a main road. It is not 1km, 2km, 5km, 10km, 20km, 30km, 50km, but a 70 kilometers road. So, it is not a feeder road, but a main strategic road. It is an economical road.

Additionally, I would like to tell you, my people have complained on the funding of the Moga to Aola road. I would like anyone in here to travel to Aola. You will never go through. There is a place called Vavala. You will stuck there. My people have complained but I would like to advice my people to calm down. I know you are frustrated as the travelling public, but we a lot of priorities in the country. Money is still not available, but I can assure you that I have talked with the Director on the Road and Bridges already. This afternoon, we will meet and discuss. A bit of money might come from that meeting to repair this road. So, Minister of Finance must prioritize this payment because it is urgent.

His Excellency also mentioned the need to prioritize strategic infrastructure and he welcomed the funding from bilateral and multilateral partners. I have a big trust on them, not only PRC but America, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, England and all of them. They are all valued. They have done their best. They contributed a lot in this are and the various sectors in our country as well. I am sure and certain that they can do more on infrastructure. It is what they are good at and we will remember them if they can continue to do it more on that area of developing our infrastructure in the future. Now, I wish to briefly turn my attention to what His Excellency mentioned, which is the State Government. His Excellency mentioned the process involved to get the State Government system in place and the commitment by the Government to do the peer review and the economic analysis to determine the economic viability and sustainability of the system.

This is the aspiration of our people. It was already a matter in discussion before this country was born. It was in the manifestos of many Political Parties and many work plans of past Governments and Ministries. Many commissions and committees were formed, and millions of dollars have already being spent on this call by our people to have a State Government in the Solomon Islands. Even blood was spilled to demand it. Our past actions have showed that this matter touches the very fabric of how our Government system was designed and institutionalized and touches

every ethnic grouping in the Solomon Islands. They like it, and discussed it. Some of us doubt it and say otherwise, but the majority of this country wants the system.

I am happy that His Excellency mentioned that very cracks of the matter, which is the readiness of the provinces to adopt the new Federal System of Government. He said that we must now progressively devolve power, together with the necessary resources to the provinces to implement their plans and programs in the transitional Federal System of Government. I thank the government for that assurance, that in the next few years the Federal System of Government will be declared in all or perhaps some provinces in Solomon Islands.

I see no other Government capable enough and have the political will to make sure we have a State Government in the Solomon Islands. Time is not on our side, and His Excellency mentioned some timelines, which are in the next three years. The only Government that is capable enough to deliver the impossible thing is this Government, and no other Government. My people of East Central Guadalcanal and the Solomon Islands, there is not other Government. The only that we that we have witnessed can do impossible things is this Government.

Three years is a very long time, but we must start working now for the transition work plans for the next three years as we transition to the new Federal System of Government. How to operationalize the transition is another thing. We need to be clear and have blueprint in place. That is my view, but others maybe thinking otherwise. This is my view and not of the government. There is need to approach the implementation Federal System using the minimum requirement strategy. That is what we should be using and is this is known to all of us. It is a good practice and is applied by the Ministry of Provincial Government to their PGSP. If you meet the minimum requirement, you are qualified for something. On the international stage, the UN applies this as well to graduate the Least Developed Countries. That is the approach we should be applying, the minimum requirement strategy, so that we do not hold back but move forward and we can assess it after ten years. In that case, only the provinces that meet the minimum qualifying requirements can be assisted within the transitional period. Those who do not meet the qualifying requirement will still be looked after by the Central Government and be assessed again some 10 years later. Otherwise, we will be wasting our resources on an exercise that will be futile for some of our provinces. We do not have money, so we must manage it properly, because not all provinces will pass this.

What we need to do now is identify those minimum qualifying requirements, make a current status report of those factors or requirements, and during the transitioning period, work on the capacity action to fill in the gaps, especially when it comes to income generation, human resources capital, necessary tools and equipment, and infrastructure development, to mention a few.

So it is good that His Excellency has mentioned that the State Government be adopted in the Solomon Islands. The State Government is unavoidable and is going to come, as it is what the people want. Give this to the people. This is what the people want. If you do not give them, then you are against the democratic principle of majority rule.

Before I conclude, I would like to briefly mention on the floor of Parliament some references made by the other side. Firstly, by the Leader of the Opposition and Member for Aoke/Langalanga on the land reform program implemented by my ministry.

Let me update this House and the Leader of the Opposition that the Government has implemented two land reforms, the return of alienated lands and recording of customary land.

Customary land recording records customary land holding groups and two assets that the tribe owns. The two assets are the genealogy of people and their families. The second asset is their land and their land boundaries.

The record, once completed, will go into the formal registry system of the Government, in the Ministry of Lands. Also, it is important to note that customary land recording follows a legal process and is implemented by the Land Recording Division of my Ministry.

Once the process is completed, the tribe is issued a certificate of completion to certify the legal ownership of the land by the land holding group to show that the tribe owns the land, whatever the number of hectares, 10,000 or 100,000. The timeframe is 12 to 14 months. We not only record land. We also work on business cases for tribes. We work on business case once the land is recorded. The tribes determined the suitable development for their land the kind of investment that they prefer, maybe Tourism, Fishery, Agriculture, Commerce and services like Private school facilities on their land.

We also do feasibility studies on the lands that we recorded. We also did land use plan on the land. We also value the land. We will give the value of the land to the tribe, what it means to them. It is not just a worthless piece of land, but they will see the value of it. We also do land development and construction. If they want town we will draw it. My physical planners will draw up a plan for road, electricity and water. If you want this to be done in Lata, we can come and do the recording. It can be for tourism or township. We can do it. We will run the utilities on the land.

As I have said, once it is recorded, our records will be kept in the Ministry of Lands, as well as in the Provincial Governments. So records of land in Buala, Auki on Malaita or the Provincial Headquarter of Guadalcanal.

Once the land holding groups are identified, it is very hard to sell that land, but easy for investors to come in and invest in such recorded land for at least 10. Once the 10 is lapsed, it can be renewed or terminated and the landowners can look for another investor.

In terms of the progress in each implementation, we have commenced implementing the Act since sometime ago already 2017 and have received about 40 applications. We have done some land recording in Isabel, Western Province, Malaita, Guadalcanal and Renbel. About 40 applications are still outstanding and are in our pipeline. There is no funding. I thank DFAT. They really helped us. Big thank you to Australia. I am really happy. They see the need and they give some money, which we used for the recording the customary land. So Australia, on behalf of the Solomon Island Government, I want to say thank you so much to you. I think we are yet to cover other places.

In terms of Alienated Land and Land Restitution Policy, it is already passed by Caucus and Cabinet already approved the Restitution Policy, which seeks to reward original landowners with long term sustainable financial benefits. This requires the landowners to organized themselves into legally registered trusts to hold trust accounts to enable land rents to be paid to them on a land rent sharing basis. This is non-taxable.

There are some challenges to work through before implementing the Restitution Policy, such as, how can we confirm who is the original land holding group and their boundary. That is one of the challenge. **Also, the second one that we challenge is that for most of the lands, the likely revenue generated will be zero, except for Honiara, where the rental revenue can be shared with the original landowners. For many, rentals are zero. There is no activity on them. It is zero for other provinces. Only places like Honiara and Auki will receive some rental. these are the two challenges we see.**

As it is now, Solomon Islands can accept applications from land-holding groups or tribes, who wish to either have their alienated land returned to them or wish to obtain a share of the revenue from land rents of alienated land. The Land Board can then enquire with Solomon Islands Government Ministries as to whether the land is required by Solomon Islands Government or whether there is already a registered FTE of the land. Either way, the Land Board can hold a public inquiry to determine who the genuine original land-holding groups are and where their boundaries are.

Where there is scope for restitution rather than return of the alienated land and where the outcome of the public inquiry is clear and undisputed the group will need to be registered as a trust and be subject to rules governing their decision.

So rules are there. Whether you want to return or you want to rent, there are rules to follow.

Where there is scope for the return to unused alienated land, the Land Board policy on granting FTE of unused alienated land shall be adopted as the mechanism for accepting and assessing applications for the return of Government land.

There are policy guidelines currently used by my Ministry. However, I wish to inform Parliament that my Ministry is vigorously doing consultation on the proposed Land Restitution Bill, which will be brought to Parliament either in this 11th Parliament or later, if delayed. But definitely in the 12th Parliament, but we are working our best. I would like to bring it during this Parliament.

That is all I want to say. I, on behalf of my people, thank His Excellency for the Speech from the Throne and also thank the Prime Minister for the Motion.

With those few remarks, I support the Motion.

Hon DICKSON MUA (*Savo/Russells—Minister for Forestry and Research*) (11:17): Thank you Mr. Speaker for giving me the opportunity to contribute briefly to the Speech from the Throne, delivered by His Excellency the Governor General on the opening of the 6th Meeting on the 11th Parliament, on 17th April 2023.

May I from the outset, also thank you sincerely for the opportunity just to make general remarks on the issues and matters, which have been raised by His Excellency the Governor General in his Speech from the Throne.

On this note, I congratulate and want to register my gratitude to His Excellency the Governor General, on the Speech from the Throne. That speech was timely and straight on to remind us especially on the DCGA mandated policies and the intension posed at the beginning and during each political term in office. The speech highlighted the economic development, social environment, health outcomes, and aspirations of our beloved nation.

First and foremost, I join my other colleagues who have spoken before me, and I wish to thank the honorable Prime Minister for a well-prepared presentation through his speech in response to the Speech from the Throne by His Excellency the Governor General; hence, this Motion invokes our responding contributions.

In his speech, the honorable Prime Minister highlighted that the DCGA had created the much-needed enabling and conducive environment for the policies to be implemented in its political term, of which I will testify on my Ministry's contribution.

The policies outlined should have been implemented and would only be executed and utilized by the rural populace if we implemented them accordingly, as honorable leaders of this nation free of bias, nepotism, and corruption and maintained the integrity of the offices we are in charge of. This was always reminded of by His Excellency, the Governor General, and further, we are to be the building blocks of this beloved nation.

I believe, this time, the policies should have improved the standard of living, infrastructure, and small and medium enterprises, that ensure the rural economies in our various constituencies are thriving to be enhanced in the next government in 2024.

His Excellency the Governor General has encouraged us and challenged us to deliver with honesty and fairness right from the start of this 11th Parliament so that all citizens can have fairly improved livelihoods and maximum benefits from Government services.

Each constituency can testify to this call because we are already at the end of the political term, which is four years. However, we are lucky to have the additional opportunity of one year to deliver further.

Over the DCGA political term, I believe the mandated policies have enhanced revenue generation to support our economy, provide Government services, and improve livelihoods in rural areas and urban setups. In some forms, I believe we have provided for the intended reforms that have enabled better provision and streamlined development and services where most needed. Evidence of development and services delivered had supported our growing national economy, which progressively ensures a prosperous and healthy nation.

On this note, I can confirm that the funds allocated to my Ministry, as the Ministry of Forestry and Research, have been well-spent to deliver the mandated policies on resources that supported the development and rehabilitation of forest resources, downstream processing, and adding value, utilization, and sales during our political term. The sales of round sawn timber are currently benefiting the resource owners who have affiliated with the Valued Added Timber Association (VATA), established by my Ministry to drive the Downstream Processing Policy with forest resource owners and make liquid cash circulated in the rural economy. My Ministry has established trial marketing of natural forest hardwood timber and plantation timber into New Zealand and Australia Timber Markets. This is mostly to benefit the resource owners across the country, to benefit themselves from their own forest resources. Solomon Islands timber have introduced into the niche market and continue to develop its market shares in New Zealand and Australian Timber Markets, something that I am proud to highlight and that the DCGA we have

achieved as a Ministry working with Solomon Islands Timber Processing and Export Association and Value Added Timber Association (VATA).

Today, we are looking forward to better utilization of the 2023 Budget. It is aimed at enhancing economic growth and service delivery under the macro economic policy, one of the two main policies of DCGA Government.

On that note too, I acknowledge the support of my fellow colleague Ministers and Members of Parliament on the 2023 Budget. This year's budget, in my view, has a sensible approach. I congratulate the Government to produce a budget that continues to aim to achieve what it had set out to achieve under its policy framework, knowing very well that we have at least only six to seven months for final implementations of the DCGA policy areas under my Ministry.

I am proud to see that my officers and our stakeholders are seriously embarking on reviewing the commodities that can be exported from the natural forest. It has mentioned in papers and media that our forest resources have been harvested unsustainably. This rumors have not gone passed unnoticed. We have tried our best to address it through the Sustainable Logging Policy and amendment of the Forestry Regulations and review of the Forest Resources under the Timber Utilization Act. We are currently committed to deliver the Government's commitment through this year's budget to further building our nations resilience to enhance economy growth and service delivery reaching rural areas across the country.

The Government must continue to strengthen Government institutions and structures as well as rural economy to continue deliver on the Redirection Policies which have been highlighted in this House by our Prime Minister. The Government must be seen responsible in encouraging everyone to live a better life and improved livelihoods in all settings across the country.

As highlighted by His Excellency the Governor General on his Speech from the Throne, my Ministry has two Redirection Policies to contribute to the DCGA Government's Policy Framework to address the need to sustain and utilize our forest resources to progress and support and maintain the economy of our country and continue to maintain a healthy nation.

My Ministry is currently implementing the two Redirection Policies area objectives for 2023 which will contribute to the national economy and revenue generation to support the Solomon Islands Government Budget and as it continues to address the rural livelihoods and the health of our people. The two Redirection Policies under my Ministry are, the Downstream Processing Program and the Sustainable Logging Development Program.

I concur with the view made by His Excellency the Governor General on the policies of my Ministry. We will strive to achieve the outputs of our mandated policies. The Forestry Bill is in its final drafting stage, while Forest Regulations are currently on review and new ones are being developed and submitted to the Attorney General's Chamber.

Our role and priority is to develop and rehabilitate our forest resources so that the forestry sector can continue to contribute sustainably to our national economy and the development of our nation and rural settings. The two redirection policies were progressively well implemented and are having greater impacts on generating much-needed revenue and the progressive development of forest resources for the resource owners, the Solomon Islands Government, and other stakeholders.

The maximum utilization of forest resources in certain tribes and communities have improved the livelihoods of our people and provided services that our people continue to enjoy. Such development and initiatives have laid the much-needed foundation for future growth in rural settings, and that will continue in supporting our economy.

My Ministry will continue to implement its vision and policies mandated by the DCGA until the end of its political term, so that the intentions and improvements mentioned by the Honourable Prime Minister in his speech be realized and provide benefits to our rural populace across the country. As the main revenue earner for the country, the national economy has long relied on the forestry sector, which, in my view, should be well supported so that the forestry contribution into the future is sustained.

Going forward, my Ministry needs the financial support to implement, monitor, and compliance with the forestry law and regulations, which must be continuously addressed to support the rehabilitation and development of forest resources as they are sustainable and renewable resources.

We will continue to improve our monitoring and compliance in promoting better logging operations with reference to the Solomon Islands Code of Logging Practice. We will raise awareness that uphold no logging operations above 400 meters altitude.

We are currently looking at amending and developing forest regulations that promote sustainable use and management of our forest resources. We are looking forward to benefiting from an additional forest commodity, which carbon, and its policy and regulations are currently our discussion and development. This will

bring new revenue strength into our national economy, which will address the low timber revenue that we currently face within our national economy because of reducing commercial sizes of round logs from 22 percent of the production and accessible national forest of approximate maybe 90 percent of the national vegetation cover.

In conclusion, let me register my thanks to His Excellency the Governor General and the Honourable Prime Minister, for demonstrating the policy framework of the government, development partners, and my honourable colleagues in this House at this meeting. I am proud of the achievements that have been transpired so far in my Ministry and will continue to press on until the political term of our Government ends on December 31st, 2023.

I am looking forward to continuing the good work to achieve the redirection policies that contribute to the overall government policy framework to address and achieve mandated policies that would translate into long term benefits, improvement of livelihoods, and sustained and increased revenue and maintain unity in our country in the remaining months of this year. I thank my Prime Minister for bringing this Motion before Parliament in response to the Speech from the Throne.

With these few remarks, I support the Motion and resume my seat.

Hon HARRY KUMA (*North West Choiseul—Minister for Finance and Treasury*) (11:34): Honorable Speaker of Parliament and Honorable Members of Parliament, Honorable Prime Minister, fellow citizens and residents of our beloved country, Solomon Islands, ladies and gentlemen

First of all, I wish to thank you for giving me the opportunity to join other honorable colleagues to briefly contribute towards the Prime Minister's Motion to thank His Excellency, the Governor General, and the representative of His Majesty King Charles III, Head of the Solomon Islands, for his address to Parliament on 7th April, 2023.

While the Prime Minister's invitation for His Excellency to open each meeting of Parliament is not compulsory, I think it is good practice that His Excellency is invited to address Parliament. As a young democratic country, such a practice must be promoted, as it is a transparent means of effectively informing our people and Parliament of Government policy intentions and the legislative agenda for the period ahead.

As we all know and have experienced over the last forty years since independence, the implementation of Government policy very much depends on available

resources, capacity constraints, and the prevailing socio-economic and security conditions in the country.

When the DCGA Government issued political office after the 2019 General Elections, it recognized that many of its socio-economic development challenges that had beset the country since independence had not been successfully addressed.

As a nation, we must learn from our past development experiences and map a development path that is inclusive, workable, robust, and transparent in implementation. More than 40 years of looking after ourselves was enough time to show where we have gone astray in developing and supporting the primary needs and development aspirations of our people.

His Excellency was correct in saying that all Solomon Islanders desire peace, progress, and prosperity throughout the country. Traditionally, our prosperity has been based solely on the nation's macroeconomic indicators, such as the country's income levels. However, as most people would agree, prosperity is more than just the accumulation of material goods. It is also the joy of everyday life and the prospect of being able to build an even better life in the future.

In other words, prosperity enables people to gain meaningful employment, pursue the opportunities they desire, live productive lives, and build a better future for their families and children.

As all honorable Members would agree, our efforts to ensure a peaceful and prosperous society over the last 40 years have not been very encouraging. While natural disasters have severely impacted on our efforts, but we must admit that our own selfish and decisive actions have also led to undesirable outcomes over the years.

Before I respond to matters under my portfolio that the Leader of the Opposition addressed, let me first comment on some of the key issues that His Excellency had raised.

As His Excellency rightly stated, lack of strategic and transformative infrastructure has been one of our key development challenges over the last 40 years. In infrastructure affects growth through several supply and demand channels. In addition, infrastructure can also reduce the cost of delivered goods, facilitate the physical mobility of people and products, remove productivity constraints and increase competitiveness.

While we have made some progress in terms of increased infrastructure investments, I remain hopeful that with the support of our multilateral and bilateral development partners, we can achieve more in the years ahead.

With regards to the proposed restructuring of our Government system under the Federalism, I agree with His Excellency that the Draft Federal Constitution must be subjected to an independent peer review and economic analysis, not only to a certain viability and sustainability of the proposed system, but also ensure that the proposed Federal System does not undermine our national unity and therefore cause increase in security among our people.

Let me now respond to some of the issues that the Leader of Opposition has raised in his response to Speech from the Throne by His Excellency.

As His Excellency correctly stated, it has not been an easy four years of our country since the DCGA Government resume the mandate to lead the country after the 2019 National General Elections. The Government had a ambitious plan and reform agenda to address our major development constraints to growth, was fully committed to institute structural measures to improve the quality of public investment to support private sector growth and diversify their export base.

Just when the Government was ready to implement its policy objectives as outlined in the 2020 budget, an unexpected COVID-19 global outbreak entered our doors and totally destructed government physical plans in 2020. The situation was made worse by the political driven civil unrest in November 2021, COVID community transmission of 2022 and the Ukraine War in 2022.

I already discussed how the COVID-19 and social unrest had adversely affected the economy and Government finances in my previous budget speech over the last three years. So there is no need to repeat them again.

However, I wish to emphasize that loses suffered as a result of the destruction during the riot is still felt today. The impact on Government's physical operations include ongoing annual revenue losses estimate at \$200 million. The Russian and Ukraine War has also adversely affected Solomon Islands through high global oil and commodities price and lower external demand for Solomon Island export.

Solomon Islands faces negative terms of trade shock with the increase in increase in energy and food import prices, only partially offset by higher prices for each commodity's exports, i.e. copra , fish and palm oil. The overall impact will depend on the magnitude and persistence of the oil price shock, which remains highly and certain.

As regards to the sectorial impact output in the primary sector, it is expected to be impacted by weaker external demand for logs and fish exports and the increase in price of farm inputs such as fertilizers will negatively impact domestic production of fruits and vegetables.

In response to the rising impacts of the health and economic shocks, the Government acted swiftly instead at its physical economic and health measures. These measures include the followings; re-prioritizing of the annual budget inline with the policy redirection, implementation of the economic stimulus package to ensure business continuity, prevent economic from further deterioration, boost economic recovery, promote medium to long term growth, roll out of vaccination and setting up of quarantine sites, providing of economic measures in the short, medium and long term basis to mitigate further deterioration of the economy and to promote economic recovery across all sectors of the economy, including trade and investment. For Example, import duties, goods tax exemptions for building materials, tax concessions etc. Let me now highlight some of the major achievements of the Ministry of Finance and Treasury over the last year or so. As I have stated in my opening remarks, Solomon Islands has gone through the most difficult and challenging times in our history.

Solomon Islands has faced two key events, the COVID-19 pandemic and November riots that would go down in our history. Our resilience and our efforts towards recovery is strengthened by strong support from the Government and our development partners.

Our economies real GDP growth for 2023 is projected to be around 2.8 percent. This positive rebound from a negative growth of -4.5 is a result of efforts taken by the Government to support growth.

The fiscal and economic response grant by the Government have proven to be effective and have shown how resilient if we are to collaborate. Our collaborative efforts should not stop as we have a long way to recover and rebuild this nation. We must build a broad base economy if one lesson is to be drawn from our experiences from the past events as is to build our resilient economy.

The Government has maintained positive performance in 2022. The total domestic revenue receipts collected was 96 percent of the revised revenue estimate of \$3.1 billion. On the expenditure side, the Government expedited 87 percent of the total SIG expenditure of \$4 billion. These includes 90 percent execution of the current budget and 76 percent development budget.

Further, the Government closed with a positive fiscal outcome. Despite on the ongoing fiscal challenges faced by government in 2022, the government was able to deliver on most of its key policy priorities and closed with more than \$200 million to assist Government to meet its payroll and other urgent pressures in early 2023.

In line with the Government commitment to protect its citizens for the COVID-19, the Government was able to protect its citizens from COVID-19 compared to the other countries in the region. There was only 153 beds or 0.6 percent of the total

confirm cases of 24,575. Solomon Islands was able to control the community transmission within six months and borders were opened in July 2022.

You will notice that critical and essential Government services continued to be provided during the peak of the pandemic. This is because the Government has invested in the ICT infrastructure to support the Government in its COVID-19 preparedness and response plan, mainly during the preparedness phase.

The following investments were made together by my ministry; support the connectivity set up to Kulitanai, Harapa, Nila and Kariki in the Shortlands Islands. This includes equipment and deployment of technical staff at approximately \$150,000 for equipment, excluding cost to deploy technical ICT staff. Development of custom work from homes loosen for SIG usage charge to the Ministries, Upgrade of internet broadband, CS2, that is Viber bandwidth and Pacific satellite to support video conferencing. Approximately \$50 million per year for all of Government, including provincial centers. Zoom license for years 2020, 2021, 2022 appropriately \$41,559 per year support from UNDP, Deployment of high-speed Viber connectivity to 24 SIG Ministries at approximately \$1.5 million, Deployment of connectivity to identify quarantine sites and video conferencing equipment to 95 hospitals in the Provinces and Ministries in Honiara.

To further boost the Ministry's operations, the Ministry of Finance and Treasury also currently embarking on a major infrastructure development project to support its modernization and its structuring initiative, mainly for Customs and Exercise and Inland Revenue Divisions. New IRD office building is at the design stage. The tender for design work is completed and opening of tender technical component bids and evaluation completed and now pending CDB opening of financial bid. Design work is anticipated to commence work in early May.

New MoFT office building at Noro is at the construction stage. Tender for construction of the office building is completed and CDB had awarded the contract for construction. The contract agreement for the construction is now with the Treasury for review before construction work, which is anticipated in May. Custom staff house at Noro, construction work is currently in progress.

In our efforts to reform and improve the business environment, my Ministry also plans to introduce the Value Added Tax (VAT) Bill to Parliament in 2023. This is a new tax to be introduced in the Solomon Islands and it is purposely to remove distortions and raise revenue more efficiently. Solomon Islands tax system is outdated, complex and discourages growth.

As highlighted by the Speech from the Throne, these initiatives by the Government to address the barriers to trade and economic growth will attract investments to our shores.

With the implementation of that VAT, the proposed VAT system will replace the existing consumption taxes, goods tax, sales tax, stamp duty, accommodation levy and import duty, except for alcohol, tobacco, fuels, and motor vehicles.

I would like to also highlight other financial policies that we plan to implement in our efforts to strengthen the financial sector. These include the Financial Institutions Act review, the existing Financial Institution Act was enacted in 1998 to provide for the regulation of the banking businesses and for licensing regulation and supervision of financial institutions carrying on banking business in the Solomon Islands. The FIA review is important to reflect current international standards and modernizing Solomon Islands financial sector.

The Insurance Act Review, the current Insurance Act contains deficiencies and ambiguities. It is also not keeping pace with the current market practices and there is an absence of a requirement for proper regulatory and supervisory framework to promote beneficiary competition and protect policy holders and harmful competition.

The new Insurance Act will provide adequate legislative framework for the prudential supervision of the insurance industries to ensure the protection of interest of the policy holder and correct the deficiency and clarify ambiguities in the current legislation.

The review of the SINPF Act will address the weaknesses identified in the current legislation and assist NPF to become a modern and efficient funds management operation working in the best interest of its members.

I also would like to commend other Ministries in their efforts to progress some of the Bills that will be tabled in Parliament later this year.

Let me briefly say something about Tina Hydro project. Power Purchase Agreement signed in December, 2018 between Tina Hydro Limited and Solomon Power was done under the PPS project commercial operation date to occur 57 months from the closing date being 12th September 2024. However the project has been behind schedule for its original schedule. The delay, as all will be aware, is mainly due to none-finalization of environmental and social management plans by Tina Hydro Limited, which are subjected to review by the lenders.

The preparation by Tina Hydro limited review and approval by World Bank is in Development Bank, the Ministry of Mines and Energy and Ministry of Environment, and contractual requirements, which must be met by the Tina Hydro Limited. The project also suffered impacts due to COVID-19 restrictions, whereby experts were enabled to travel to Honiara. The delay has also attracted significant costs to continue implementing the project. A consolidated claim was provided by

Tina Hydro Limited to Solomon Power in October 2022. Delays of the claims are as follows; the delay claims totaling to 780 days, which is 26 months, cost claims associated totaling to USD\$25.6 million.

Solomon Power has engaged external advisors, **Chapman Tripp and Hedge Belden** assessed the consolidated claims and highlighted that delay cost associated claims should be 615 days, which is one and half years and the Tina Hydro Limited should only be entitled to USD\$4 million as opposed to the \$25USD million.

Based on the outcome assessment from external advisors, Solomon Power and SIG will do a round of negotiation with Tina Hydro Limited based on the contractual agreements. Other costs not included in the Tina Hydro Limited consolidated claims are operating expenses of the Tina Hydro Limited due to extension of time until the PCOD. This costs is around \$10 - 15million.

SIG stakeholders are to make formal response on the claims. There is on going discussion between SIG and Solomon Power on this. Solomon Power needs to get approval from their Board to negotiate with Tina Hydro Limited. Negotiation with Tina Hydro Limited should begin 8th May 2023.

As a Minister of Finance and Treasure, I also commend other responsible ministries and their respective staff in the efforts to bring to Parliament the Mineral Resource Bill and the Forestry Bill. These sectors have the potential to contribute extensively to the development of the country and it is important that both the Forest and Mining sectors promote good governance, best practices and to ensure that the Government and our local resource owners receive maximum benefit from their resources.

On human resources, our education system is the foundation of this country. This, I also would like to commend the Minister of Education on the work to bring this Bill to Parliament this year. This Bill once enacted would ensure that our education system is well adjusted to our current environment, expanding access and improve the quality of education, especially in our rural communities.

I also wish to commend the Government for bringing forth the Constituency Development Fund Amendment Bill. As a responsible Government, it is important that we strive to improve the social and economic livelihoods of our people. We need this policy to promote the development needs of our people.

Our challenges remain and should be acknowledged. We have a very narrow based economy. Over the past years, our country has been heavily dependent on few productive sectors for growth. It is now time that this economy broadens its economic base to achieve a broad based growth.

We lack the necessary infrastructure that promotes private sector growth and encourage investment.

As highlighted by His Excellency The Governor General, Solomon Islands is one of the most vulnerable countries in the world. Climate Change causes a great threat to our islands, our people and our environment. The recent Cyclone Judy showed how vulnerable we are to these changes in weather patterns and severe weather conditions that we have faced.

On top of this, the geographical spread of our islands is a challenge to bring development to our shores. Nevertheless, in spite of these challenges, it should remain our priority to build an economy we can foresee and adapt to changing conditions to our advantage.

With the economic recovery in place, it is paramount that our focus should be on prioritizing our sectors that would promote sustainable growth. The government will also focus efforts on reforms to improve business environment in Solomon Islands. Infrastructure led support to stimulant economic activity and improve the condition for growth in the country by supporting and broadening of our economic base to ensure sustained inclusive growth and development across Solomon Islands. Encouraging opportunities for value-adding activities in the agricultural and fisheries sectors and ensuring that infrastructure and the regulatory environment assist in improving access to markets, enabling alternative sources of growth.

Despite the ongoing fundamental improvements made, there are still some areas of growth that are critical to encourage the Government to seriously look into. These are registrations of land in order to encourage land-owning groups and individuals to register their land to encourage development on their land. This will also require registering collateral or mortgage requirements by commercial banks, the quick facilitation of Court decisions on loan properties and certainty of Courts to facilitate decisions for property owners who are unable to pay their loan repayments, establish a quick one-stop shop service for interested foreign investors, need to review the Immigration and Labour Act to address bottlenecks in the administrative process by streamlining the process to encourage quick one-stop shop services for interested foreign investors, which is very important, the government continue to support hotel and accommodation owners to build and increase the number and standards of rooms and facilities to meet international standards.

Before I conclude, I would like to thank the Prime Minister again for the opportunity to contribute to the Motion. I wish to thank colleague Members from both sides of the House for their contributions. In this regard, I would like to

thank the leaders of our various churches and their respective congregations for their continued support of the Government through prayers. I would also like to thank our business communities for supporting the Government, especially the Chambers of Commerce.

To our bilateral and multilateral development partners, our partnership of the last four years has been very fruitful, and we would not be where we are now without your great support in terms of finance, technical assistance, medical, and health needs, especially during the heat of the COVID-19 pandemic. Thank you to all of you for your continued support.

To our hard-working public servants who have stood fast during the last four years. I thank you for supporting the Government in ensuring key essential services continued to be provided to the people of Solomon Islands.

With these brief comments, I wish to thank His Excellency the Governor General, once again for the Speech from the Throne, and I resume my seat.

Hon CLEZY RORE (*North Vella Lavella—Minister for Justice and Legal Affairs*) (12:02): Thank you Speaker Sir, for giving me this opportunity to contribute to the Motion moved by the Honourable Prime Minister to thank the GG in addressing parliament.

I will be briefly touching base on certain issues raised in relation to my Ministry, the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs.

First, the Tribal Land Resolution Bill. This Bill was initiated by the Honourable Chief Justice. It was brought to the Bills Committee. However, it was withdrawn on CJ's advice since he wants to make a more inclusions that were not considered during the initial drafting stage. This has been attended to, and the Bill is now processed for resubmission to the Bills Committee.

The Legal Profession Bill is another Bill now under process and to be tabled in Parliament. The Family Protection Bill Review is another Bill cleared in Cabinet and now under drafting for presentation to Parliament. The Family Protection Bill was passed and implemented, and it is now under review after three years of implementation. The review is jointly carried out by the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children, and Family Affairs and the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs. The review is necessary to address loopholes observed during its three years of implementation. According to recommendations brought forward by the committee that reviews this Bill, and this will come to Parliament as soon as the

process is done. The Youth Justice Bill is also carried out and to be approved by Cabinet before being processed to the Bills Committee.

Other Bills that my Ministry wants to address before the current house dissolves is the Public Offense Bill. Work has started and to be tabled in the cabinet soon.

The Financial Intelligences Act is on reviewed again, and this was a recommendation from the IMF, and my Ministry is seriously taking this review to address loopholes before we are branded under the gray flag for non-compliance. The Ministry intends to pass this Bill to dissolve the current House dissolves, and the work is progressing under my Ministry and the Financial Intelligence Unit in the Central Bank of Solomon Islands.

Another Bill that the Ministry wants to get it through is the National Judiciary Bill. It is the intention of the Ministry to get the Judiciary to become autonomous. The work on it is progressing with the technical expertise that has been engaged to get the Bill through and then to Parliament.

These are some Bills that my Ministry is working on, and I am happy to inform this House of their progress. Without taking much time, and since lunch is on the way, I support the Motion and resume my seat.

Parliament is suspended until 2 p.m. Parliament is resumed at 14.07

Hon. MANASSEH SOGAVARE: Mr. Speaker I moved that the debate on the question be adjourn until the next sitting day.

Question put and agreed to

(Debate on the motion adjourned to the next sitting day)

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. MANASSEH SOGAVARE: I moved that Parliament do now adjourn.

Question put and agreed to

Parliament is adjourned at 14.10

[Edited]



Eleventh Parliament

First Meeting

NATIONAL PARLIAMENT OF SOLOMON ISLANDS

Tuesday, 25 April 2023

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

(Subject to Revision)

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NATIONAL PARLIAMENT OF SOLOMON ISLANDS**Tuesday, 25 April 2023**

The Speaker, Mr Patterson John Oti, took the Chair at 09:48.

Prayers.

Business of the House

ATTENDANCE

All were present with the exception of the Minister for National Planning and Development Coordination, Minister for Justice and Legal Affairs, Minister for Provincial Government and Institutional Strengthening, Minister for Health and Medical Services, Minister for Mines Energy and Rural Electrification, and Members for Marovo, North West Guadalcanal, North Guadalcanal, Ulawa/Ugi, Rennell/Bellona, West New Georgia/Vona Vona, Central Honiara, North Malaita, Malaita Outer Islands, West Honiara.

The SPEAKER: Before we ask the Leader of Opposition to ask his question, let me acknowledge in the public gallery, Politics And Governance students from the University of the South Pacific who have come to observe Parliament Sitting as part of their assessment. Please welcome them.

(Applause)

Questions and Answers

SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT LIST DELAY

#138 **Hon MATTHEW WALE** (*Aoke/Langalanga*)—*Leader of Opposition* (09:51) to ask the Minister for Education and Human Resources Development: Can the Minister inform the House on

- (a) why there was a delay in the scholarship recipient list for 2023?
- (b) Inform the House on whether the Government is doing anything to address any adverse effects students might face given the this delay?
- (c) And for assurance, inform the House on whether steps are being taken to ensure that this problem does not recur?

Hon LANELLE TANANGADA (*Gizo/Kolombangara*)—*Minister for Education and Human Resources Development* (09:55): Thank you Mr. Speaker and I would also like to thank the Leader of Opposition and Member for Aoke/Langalanga for raising the

question. I would like to inform the House and the honorable Leader for Opposition that the scholarships recipient listing of successful candidates was posted online on the portal of February 8th 2023 and successful candidates were notified and those that programs were commencing semester 1, 2023 have commenced study, while those with programs to commence in semester 2023 would commence in semester 2, of 2023.

The purported delay in the completion of the 2023 scholarship processes was due to administration of the award letters, including late submissions by successful candidates to submit the required documents in SITESA, NSD before an award letter was issued. This includes admission letter from the universities where students had applied to do their studies, medical examination reports and police clearance. What normally happens is student who receive in their portal their provisional offer and another process is the requirement by SITESA though NSD that student will have to do police clearances and medical clearances. For a few of those programs, they will have to have their second semester results and also admissions. Those are the reasons for the delay.

I would also like to assure the honorable Leader of Opposition that students offered and awarded scholarships in 2023 under the merit-based selection process and who did not commence their studies in semester one will begin their studies in semester two, and others who missed out will wait for semester one in 2024.

The second part of the question requires me to inform the honorable House on whether the Government is doing anything to address any adverse effects students might face given this delay. SITESA has an established process in terms of how it manages the Solomon Islands Government-funded scholarships, and that includes a scholarship plan and budget determination of the labor demand and scholarships required in a year, and also advertisement of available scholarships. And then we have the assessments of applications, selection of successful candidates, and then the awarding and notification of scholarships to the successful candidates.

The 2024 scholarship opportunity list for the Education Training Plan is being devised and will be advertised commencing in May 2023. The period for scholarship applications to be received by SITESA and NSD for the 2024 scholarships will be from mid-May to July 31st, 2023, and then SITESA and NSD plan to release the 2024 awardee list by December 2023.

And the third part of the question requires me to respond to the following question, for assurance: inform the house whether steps are being taken to ensure that this problem does not occur next year. The consultation for the 2024 cycle of scholarships has commenced, and the Education Training Plan will be published in the months that I have indicated, from mid-May to July 31, 2023. This is to allow for applicants

to make timely and quality submissions of applications, and a Control and Quality Assurance Committee will be established to ensure that the scholarship processes meet the targeted dates as well as to ensure accountability on the part of the staff who assesses the applications and selects the successful candidates based on the selection criteria used.

Notification and awarding of scholarships will be done in phases. This should ease congestion during signing and awarding. For instance, notification of successful candidates for skills and in-service categories, those that do not require submission of second semester transcripts, will be posted as soon as results are ready. For preservice that are school-based Form 7 and current Form 6 and self-funded applicants, will still need to submit their final transcripts for semester two before the final selection.

Apart from the scholarship processes, there are plans underway to conduct two important reviews. The first one is to do with the review of the Solomon Islands Tertiary Education and Skills Development. The primary purpose of the independent SITESA review is to provide an evidence-based assessment of how well the authority is strategically meeting the expectations of the Solomon Islands Government and the Ministry of education and Human Resource Development in terms of the SITESA Act 2017 Aims and Objectives and the intent and related outputs and outcomes as detailed in the policy and other documents. And the second one is a review of the SITESA Act 2017, with the intent to amend certain sections of the Act. Concerns have been raised about the autonomous status of the SITESA. The amendment will provide clarity in terms of the functions of SITESA, the roles and duties of the Chief Executive Officer, the supervision of the CEO, composition of the Board, the roles and duties of the Minister and Permanent Secretary in SITESA affairs, and the relationship of SITESA, which is mandated to oversee the growth or development of tertiary education in the country, and the Ministry Of Education and Human Resources Development.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: Thank you for the very informative response. What about the Constituency Scholarships? Are they included in that same general administrative reasons that caused the delay? It took a while, and in some cases a direct email from the Minister before we can sort out those things rather than SITESA getting on with it.

Hon LANELLE TANANGADA: Constituency Scholarship is also one of the categories in the different categories that we have within the scholarship. As you have rightly acknowledged, it takes time. What happens is, the Ministry, through my supervision and the Permanent Secretary, we also play an oversight role for SITESA so that we can administer some of the concerns that were raised. That also causes delay.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: I gather that, and the Minister may correct me on this. SITESA stands on its independence and even that independence against is the Minister and PS, in terms of receiving policy directions from the Ministry, perhaps not so much directions in terms of detail. I am wondering if the Minister can inform the House how that matter has now being resolved while awaiting the review and any potential or possible amendments to come.

Hon LANELLE TANANGADA: In my intervention, I mentioned that SITESA, through the Ministry, we are working on the two reviews. While the review is in progress, the Minister also takes an oversight responsibility. I note the concerns that are raised.

Mr. JOHN MANENIARU: Thank you Minister for the answers that you had given. I am particularly thankful on the assurance that you had given the House. The problem with the scholarships has been happening for many years now, we continue to face the challenges. Thank you for that assurance. I hope that by next year things should work out better, based on your assurances.

My supplementary question is on the role of SITESA. We need a substantive CEO in office. I understand that there has been Acting CEO at SITESA. There are important programs that you are now pursuing in terms of the legislative review and the scholarship. If you can inform the House, if the issue of the CEO is already sorted out and you have appointed a substantive CEO to SITESA.

Hon LANELLE TANANGADA: The substantive CEO is acting when our CEO was on compassionate leave. We do have a CEO at SITESA. She is also party or responsible to the SITESA Board that oversees the Act.

Mr. JOHN MANENIARU: A further supplementary question. On our Form 7 students in the past years, in terms of scholarship, did everyone who were supposed to receive scholarships receive them or some are still queuing?

The second part of the question, is there any policy regarding the scholarship for medicine at UPNG? I understand that this year, the Government did not sponsor the scholarships for medicine at UPNG. Is that a policy?

Hon LANELLE TANANGADA: Form 7 students will be the same with every others that had applied. Not all of them that reached Form 7 will be eligible to receive a scholarship. They also have to go through the same process to attain their scholarships and it is merit-based.

With the next question, you will find in the scholarship that we do not include institutions in Papua New Guinea and some institutions in Fiji. We sent students this year to only a few institutions overseas again this year. We just opened up sending students after COVID-19. For two years, we hold back students to study in-

country. That is a slow process of opening up students to going back overseas to tertiary institutions. So we will do that in our scholarship plan for 2024.

Mr PETER KENILOREA (Jnr): I have a question, but I just want to preface it by thanking the Minister for her answers and particularly looking to address the law where there is perceived deficiency. I think these kinds of reactions are welcomed, in the sense that if there is something wrong with the current Act, then we must try and correct it. I commend the Minister for taking that action.

I have also been advised that on the side of the constituency, the list of the scholarships, we have to get that from the Minister. I have been to the chatting to the Minister and I am still awaiting that to come for us in East Are'Are and looking forward for that list to come.

My question is about the idea of merit-based scholarships, which is something all of us appreciate, but then we keep hearing stories about deserving students not getting scholarships and telling us about some of their friends who they know do not get the marks they have but they do get scholarships. I want to know what other considerations there might be beyond merit-based.

Hon LANELLE TANANGADA: With students in terms of merit-based scholarships, this is one of the categories in the scholarship process when students apply. I note the concern that is raised in terms of what other students might have raised. What happens with the scholarship is that it has different programs that students applied for and they have different entry points in terms of their grade point average (GPA). For the skills, their GPA would be different from those that are applying, maybe MBBS programs. We also have an avenue where students can raise their concerns through the Appeals Committee or even to SITESA or the Ministry, where the Permanent Secretary and myself also play an oversight role, so that we can also determine what happens.

What also happens with the scholarships is that we have a large population. For example, we only have a limited number for MBBS, but many have applied, and so even if they score a grade point average of 4 or above and someone scores much higher, they get considered for the scholarship.

Hon. JOHN DEANE KUKU: One of the issues that causes problems with the scholarship is the application form. I do not think the merit and constituency scholarships should be on one application form. It causes some difficulties.

Applicants can only tick or write which constituencies they come from and none of those at SITESA knows whether that is true or not. At the end of that application form, they sign a declaration, that if they give false information, the scholarship can

be taken back, but those false information have been taken on with the scholarship. and that is one of the problems I see. Can the Minister assure us on what the Ministry can do to improve the application process?

Hon LANELLE TANANGADA: I acknowledge what the Leader of Independence have mentioned in terms of the constituency scholarship category. SITESA has allocated 200 scholarships for our 50 constituencies.

I note your concerns and I will bring to the administration level of SITESA and the Ministry to look into the suggestions that you have made on the floor of Parliament.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: According to the previous response by the Minister, on the example of MBBS. I had some experience on this with some students because there are limited scholarships on offer to do medicine. Although their GPAs are 4 and above, obviously for the limited ones, they pick from the highest ones, like 4.4 or 4.5. So even if a student has a 4.1 or 4.2 GPA, they will definitely miss out on the scholarship. It is not good seeing them roaming the streets of Honiara. They are some of our best students.

In terms of the link that should exist between SITESA and guidance counselors in our school systems. Firstly, does this guidance counselling still exists in our secondary schools? Secondly, if that link ensures that counseling is available? It should not be a dead end if there are only five, but there are 20 people, 15 who are above 4, but missed out, they should all get something else, if they wanted to, in a medical field and so forth, if there are other scholarship, but guidance counselling would help and even if to have similar capacity like that in SITESA itself.

So it is not too late; once they submit the forms and missed out, then there is a second option for the cream of the crop to make sure that we are sending them for further education.

Hon LANELLE TANANGADA: Thank you very much, Leader of the Opposition and Member for Aoke/Langalanga for your suggestion. I note that, and that is something that SITESA will have to look into, to include that as part of the Ministry.

I think I have mentioned in my intervention that we will have a Control And Quality Assurance Committee, and I believe the committee will also look at the of the cream of the country that do not get scholarships. There can also be other ways that we can look into in order to support those students so that they do not get left out totally.

Mr PETER KENILOREA (Jnr): I just want to ask about the in-service scholarship criteria. There have been reports of people already or initially being accepted for a program for in-service, then later on, for whatever reason, being cancelled out again

from that program. Can the Minister explain what might be the issues in that in-service scholarship application that might cause this scenario to arise?

Hon LANELLE TANANGADA: I note the first part of your question regarding in-service scholarship, but can you please repeat the second part of the question?

Mr PETER KENILOREA (Jnr): This question is about the process for in-service scholarships. I have received reports that people have already been selected and earmarked for that, but when the final award comes, they are not there in terms of their initial selection and there seems to be some discrepancy in this process. What are the reasons behind this kind of situation?

Hon LANELLE TANANGADA: For the in-service category, they also apply but they come through the Public Service for Public Service officers. For the in-service of teachers, they come through the Teaching Service Division. I acknowledge that you mentioned that there are some who are already being enlisted but then when they applied, they missed out. There might be a mismatch in terms of the recommendations that were put forward to SITESA through the scholarship or there might be some criteria in the scholarship that they do not meet, although they have been recommended. But there is a process that they can get their voices heard. We also have an appeals committee that they can channel back through their application and their concerns.

Hon. JOHN DEANE KUKU: There are a number of students who have been offered scholarship well after the institutions start already started their academic year. They are offered this scholarships to do studies. Some to do studies at the University of the South Pacific, Solomon Islands Centre. These students cannot go to the Solomon Islands Centre because, firstly, the semester has already started and they cannot enroll, secondly, and the most important, the courses are not available at the Solomon Islands Centre. Can the honourable Minister assure the students that they can be considered to go on campus in the second semester?

Hon LANELLE TANANGADA: In my intervention, I mentioned that some of them that have missed out in starting their classes in the first semester, we will consider them in the second semester. If they missed out in the first semester, then it would be semester 1 2024.

With the programs that students will really need to be on campus because it requires them to be physically present, we will definitely send them for study, if it is USP or whichever institutions that are in the SITESA plan for this year.

Mr. JOHN MANENIARU: Minister, thank you so much for your assurances. Mismatch in scholarships and the administration of it, the story that some of us

received is different. I encourage you to work a bit more hard to find out the root causes of the scholarship flow in SITESA.

My supplementary question is with regards to the merit-base scholarships and constituency scholarships. The experience and encounter of the West Are'Are constituency is that I was given the list, and then out of that list, it is merit-based. The students are already awarded scholarships. That same list was given to me to pick four students from for West Are'Are constituency. I understand that these two different categories of scholarship. If that is already a change of policy or if the problem is just with my constituency. If the Minister can provide some clarification on that.

Hon LANELLE TANANGADA: I understand that every 50 constituencies, you have received a list from SITESA with the names of the students that have been successful in the process of scholarship applications. All of them are merit-base. Inside that one whole list are students that apply under the constituency category and also students that apply under the pre-service category, but then when the students apply, they indicated which constituency they come from, for instance, West Are'Are or Aoke/Langalanga constituency. What happens is that when the list comes to you, you just indicate the names that will come under the constituency and the ones that will come under pre-service when scholarships are offered. So the list that you have contains the students that applied and successful. The constituency category is also a category in the scholarship, which is a merit-base process.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: Just a supplementary follow-up on this. I am using an example of two of my applicants. Both were awarded under constituency category the year before SITESA commenced. When SITESA was established, and for various reasons, they were asked to defer, but they were only told verbally. Since the commencement of SITESA, they have not even made it into the successful list, but I do know their GPAs are well above, that they should be on the list.

I have been asking why they are not on the list and I have not had any response. There is no accountability as to internal processes to say whether they are not successful to get on the list. There is no transparency. We do not know what criteria have been used and why certain students are on and why others are not.

So I think this is specifically to constituency list. Perhaps one criteria in the review that you need to look at, that only one criteria should apply, and that is they should make the GPA cut, once SITESA is satisfied. Once they make the cut, they should then be referred in its entirety for the constituency to make those choices, as opposed to rejecting some applicants and not knowing the basis for the rejections .

Hon LANELLE TANANGADA: Thank you Mr. Speaker and thank you gain Leader of Opposition and Member for Aoke/Langalanga for the suggestion. I take note of that. I do not have a direct answer for you at this time, but it is an administrative matter that SITESA will need to look through and SITESA Board will also deliberate on it.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: In thanking my dear sister, the honorable Minister for Education, I would like to say that SITESA is a good response, very constructive, good robust policy response. We have come from a situation where scholarship was in a mess. We, also of course had corresponding high failure rates. So SITESA helps to bring more structure and more direction and more clarity to scholarship selections and awards. It seems to have swung too far into the other direction. That made it difficult for even the Minister and PS to give direction to it. We do want some independence for SITESA, so they get on with it without undue political interference, like what the Member for Lau/Baelelea did the last time. He has to stop. He does not want to laugh but this is the truth.

But anyway, the pendulum has swung too far to the other extreme and I think we do need to regain some balance. So I do appreciate that. With those remarks, I do thank the Minister.

REINTEGRATION PLAN FOR SEASONAL WORKERS

139. **Hon MATTHEW WALE** (*Aoke/Langalanga*)—*Leader of Opposition* (10:22) to the Minister for Education and Human Resources Development: Can the Minister inform the House of any reintegration plan for seasonal workers?

Hon LANELLE TANANGADA (*Gizo/Kolombangara—Minister for Education and Human Resources Development*) (10:23): Thank you Mr. Speaker, and I would like to sincerely thank the Leader of Opposition and Member for Aoke/Langalanga for the question. That is a very important question and I can say that reintegration can mean a lot of things here. I will respond in terms of what is under the Minister of Education through SITESA. Currently, there is no discussion from the Ministry that I am aware of, between my Ministry and the Ministry of Commerce, Labor, and Immigration, as well as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade, regarding the reintegration plan for seasonal workers. The individual Ministries have their own plans, and my colleague Ministers will answer to that.

Nonetheless, the opportunities that the seasonal workers are given to work in Australia and New Zealand have the potential to upskill them in their selective fields of work. So, the seasonal workers experiences and new knowledge or skills acquired may help them in their new job on their return to the Solomon Islands.

What we do not know is whether the seasonal workers will be issued formal certificates of achievement for recognition of their work-related experiences in Australia.

The strategic aim and function of SITESA is to provide leadership to facilitate higher-quality tertiary education and vocation skills delivery designed to meet the future needs of Solomon Islands **for a highly** skilled and productive workforce.

Additionally, SITESA is responsible for the promotion, planning capacity, development, and coordination of the tertiary education and skill sector, ensuring the country has a high-quality and internationally respected tertiary system.

SITESA, as we all know, is a regulatory authority, mandated by the SITESA Act 2017, and that is provide for quality assurance of tertiary education and skills development and the relationships between tertiary courses and tertiary qualifications by performing the functions assigned to it under part three of the SITESA Act. That is the preparation and adoption of the Solomon Islands qualifications framework, quality standards and supporting policies, accreditation of tertiary courses, and registration of providers of accredited tertiary courses.

Most importantly, one of the key roles of SITESA is to promote the recognition of tertiary qualifications obtained in the Solomon Islands, in the region and internationally. In this regard, should the need arise to facilitate the new formal qualification attained by the seasonal workers, SITESA should be able to support the recognition of the qualifications obtained by using a set of standards, including quality assurance mechanisms and accreditation facilities.

I will also allow my colleague, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade, to further answer your question.

The SPEAKER: Before we ask for supplementary questions, I think the are the two Ministries who may have also to wish to contribute firstly to the principle questions before supplementary questions can be asked.

So first, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade and thereafter the Minister Commerce, Immigration, Labor and Industry.

Hon. JEREMIAH MANELE: I will respond as far as some of the initiatives that the Labor Mobility Unit within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs take with regards to the question. Our Labor Mobility Unit has started initiatives to assist reintegration of return workers back into the country. Currently the Unit is conducting a number of initiatives;

Firstly, debrief sessions for returning workers. This involves conducting a survey to understand workers plans and experience. Also we have an open Q and A session

where returning workers discuss their experiences and highlight areas which the LMU, the approved employers and other partners can support them in and improve the program.

Secondly, in terms of superannuation kiosk, the LMU currently supports workers who have returned to apply for their superannuation in Australia. The support started back in 2019. The superannuation kiosk has helped over 75 percent of workers who applied, gained access to their super funds and allow them to support their families and loved ones while they are in the country. Unfortunately, the LMU only support the workers who had applied for the superannuation deals. We are not privy to the exact amounts that are being applied for. The LMU, however, does understand from previous work with employers in Australia that for a farm worker who works in Australia, for example, for six months, they have access to a total of over AUD\$1600 after tax by the Australian Government.

Although the LMU does not have the exact amount in terms of figures, in terms of what has been remitted through the super kiosk, it is estimated to be quite a significant amount of money, which should help workers in terms of integration initiatives.

Thirdly, the Integration Strategy Document. The LMU in partnership with Pacer Plus Implementation Unit and the Pacific Labour Facility have conducted a study in February to identify areas where the LMU and local partners can work together to support our returning workers. The LMU expects to have the final draft of the document before June. This strategy document will highlight areas of interest based on interaction with return workers, as well as willing partners, who have indicated their interest to work together with the LMU and its partners.

Some of the highlighted areas, which the LMU expects engage returning workers in are; financial literacy training, business management trainings, partnership with training institutions like the APTC, the RTCs and of course SINU through SITESA as we have heard, partnership with business houses and access to commercial banks.

The Re-integration Strategy, once endorsed, will form part of the guidelines in our labour mobility is implemented, especially in terms of how we engage and work with return workers from our labour mobility schemes.

Fourthly, LMU discussions are also underway with partners in country. For example, discussions have already started with the number of potential partners, such as *Strongim Bisnis*, SISBEC, APTC and YECSI and others being lined up for further discussions to start working together to help return workers reintegrate and help in sustainably participate in the local economy.

I am sure my colleague for Commerce will also enlighten us as to what are some of the initiatives that his Ministry is or will be undertaking in this regard. But, there is need certainly for collaboration and coordination among different line agencies in the Government to assist in terms of the Re-integration Strategy. I hope to share more details on this strategy once that document is ready in June.

But I guess, the question will require a whole of Government approach, a whole of private sector approach and even the involvement of constituencies as to how we can involve and assist our returning workers.

Hon FREDRICK KOLOGETO: The recent retreat held by the Heads of Divisions under the Ministry have highlighted the importance of our framework on how we can tackle this issue. Currently, under the Labour Division in the Ministry are working on formalizing the first ever National Employment Policy, a policy that will complement the implementation of labour administration in the Solomon Islands.

The goals of this policy are to; increase decent and productive employment opportunities, enhance skills and human resource development, enhance labour market governance in Solomon Islands.

It is also to acknowledge the technical support offered by the International Labour Organization that is willing to support this policy guideline. In saying that, the overarching importance of this labour mobility in Australia and New Zealand, it is really good for people to go and work. The Ministry sees it as an opportunity for our young men and women to learn new skills. If they are good enough, they can be new entrepreneurs when they come back to this nation and build it, rather than just going to work.

Moreover, I would like to encourage those labour mobility people who are selected, to go there not just for the work, but to learn the whole lifestyle of a good citizen, to come back and develop this nation.

On the Ministry level, the Labour Division will work with the Commercial Department to formalize a framework that will cater to the people who are going out to work.

With those few remarks, it is important for the Ministry to address this issue. I think, as the Minister has stated, it is a sectoral issue, and everyone at the Ministry needs to work together to put things into the right perspective.

Mr PETER KENILOREA (Jnr): I want to ask with regards to the reintegration process. I think it is fair to say that this is a neglected part of our focus. We always focus on sending as many people as possible, but the return is perhaps not yet the

focus of our work, and it is understandably because we want to send people to earn money but not follow up, perhaps there is need for extra resources and man power to the follow up. I think it is worth doing.

I want to ask if it is indeed the Government's intention to follow through with this more seriously, just like ANU has released reports, for perhaps Vanuatu, who have been on this perhaps longer than us. I think there is some potential there that we can learn in terms of lessons. I think it is important that we can do our own. Instead of going to ANU, I would like to ask whether the Government might want to partner with SINU to do a study that would help the Government in shaping the policy for returning workers overseas, and that could inform the Government into putting into place a proper response policy.

I just want to ask the question, whether this could be something that the Government would consider in partnering with SINU to carry out a comprehensive study on returning workers to allow the Government to formulate policies to respond.

Hon LANELLE TANANGADA: The Ministry, through SITESA, has already begun an initial dialogue with SINU. We are still waiting for them to give their feedback to the Ministry before we can inform the public.

Mr DOUGLAS ETE: Going to Australia is not a new thing, but an old thing. Lessons could be learned from the last 100 years. It only requires the Government's political will to do to ensure the physical sustainability of our economy. I think that is basically the question here. Some went to Queensland to the Sugarcane Plantation as indentured laborers. After 1901, when they returned, they established a huge plantation at Rere. They took all the indentured labors down to Baunani. Some of my relatives from Guadalcanal are still there. Some Malaitans are at Rere as well. This was to sustain an ailing economy.

I am thankful to the Minister of Foreign Affairs for initiating a policy that will be put into a report.

In my hearing this week, I heard the Minister of Commerce talked about the Foreign Investment Regulation 2014 Amendment. I am glad that he raised it on the floor of Parliament. In this regulation, establishing huge commercial farming in this country is not for foreigners, but for indigenous Solomon Islanders.

Is the government serious about fixing this economy through the reintegration of those that travelled to work under the Labor Mobility Scheme or not? The report will be here by June, and I am excited about the report, but I want more on that. This is so that we if they are going to work on the pineapple plantation in Malaita

or do a Sugar Plantation there. That is what I have not heard on the floor of Parliament.

Hon. JEREMIAH MANELE: Thank you, honorable Speaker, and let me thank the MP for East Honiara for his comments and of course, his supplementary question. I will try to go back to the first supplementary question asked by the MP for East Are'Are and chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee.

The Government has not neglected the need for a reintegration policy. Actually, the focus over the last five years under the 2019–2023 Labor Mobility Strategy has been trying to send as many workers as we can. Tonga, Vanuatu, and Samoa have joined the scheme much earlier than us.

We are aware of the reports by the ANU on those schemes in Tonga, Samoa, and Vanuatu. Certainly there are lessons to be learned.

Yes, it is important that we undertake our own study and assessment of how the scheme has been working so far for Solomon Islands, hence, the reintegration strategy or document that is referred to earlier will involve consulting with a number of stakeholders, including the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Commerce, and SINU, to come up with such a strategy, which is important. This will be the focus of the Ministry, as we will review the current Labor Mobility Strategy to ensure that it takes onboard the emerging issues and trends, while also learning from other experiences in other places.

With regards to the supplementary question by the MP for East Honiara, yes, the Government is serious in terms of how we create employment opportunities in our country. That is why the focus is on the productive sector.

It is important to acknowledge and recognize that the Labor Mobility Scheme is just a temporary arrangement, which is helping us to address the youth bulge and unemployment challenges that we facing. The task of creating permanent jobs so that our people can have incomes and employment opportunities is in country and the Government is cognizant of this fact.

Mr. JOHN MANENIARU: My supplementary question goes to the Minister of Education. I understand our young people studying in SINU and also those that have graduated are attracted and travelled to work under the Seasonal Workers Scheme. Some have not completed their studies. They are still under scholarships while they travel to work under the scheme to look for money. Upon returning, will they still be guaranteed and assured that their scholarships can be taken up? If the Minister can inform the House.

Hon LANELLE TANANGADA: Once a student is awarded scholarship he or she signs an agreement with SITESA through NSD, that he or she has to complete

studies within a period or number of years, unless for very special cases that a student has to defer the scholarship for another academic year.

When it comes to them attaining a scholarship and then decide to go for work under the Labour Mobility Scheme, it is simply a self terminating of the scholarship. Once a scholarship is terminated, the student will have to go through the normal process to get a new scholarship.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: I do wish to thank the three Ministers in responding. It is still early in the piece and it is good that the Government is wide-eyed about this very important need, which cuts on both sides. We stand to benefit from you know the returnees bringing back skills. I know, it is a different kind of perspective, having been to a more cosmopolitan culture and work ethic and area which is also good for us too.

Of course the challenges in education, and as the Minister of Foreign Affairs said that the solutions long term to job creation for our people is in our hands, in the Government and in the private sector. That must continue and be very strategic to answer the issues raised by Member of East Honiara.

I hope the Labour Mobility is not just short term, nor temporary. The need in Australia and New Zealand will continue to be there for a long time and we should see how much of that need we can meet and also our population policy.. We need more people. They will build our country and also other countries.

I am sure supervising Minister of Health is well on his way on this matter, in looking at a policy on population.

So with those few comments, I do wish to thank the three Ministers, my three best friends.

Motions

ADDRESS OF THANKS TO THE GOVERNOR GENERAL

Hon FREDRICK KOLOGETO (*South Vella Lavella—Minister for Commerce, Industries, Labour and Immigration*) (10:47): Thank you Mr. Speaker Sir for giving me this opportunity to make a brief statement in respond to the Speech from the Throne by His Excellency the Governor General. On this note, I will like to thank His Excellency for sharing the greetings and special well wishes from His Majesty King Charles III, and as the constitutional representative of His Majesty.

I do acknowledge and appreciate His Excellency's appeal to all Members of the National Parliament and Provincial Assemblies, church leaders, chiefs, women, men, youth, boys and girls, to remember our national motto, and that is, "To lead is to Serve". We must be active agents of positive change and unity in our various

communities. We must be the building blocks of our country, our nation Solomon Islands.

His Excellency the Governor General has rightly stated in his speech that we must overcome any divisive forces that can threaten our unity. I therefore, would like to further reinforce and reiterate the importance of oneness and to be considerate to each other. I truly recognize that we have a duty to leave behind a legacy of peaceful, prosperous, safe and secure country.

I know that all of us in this honorable House is well aware of the value and potential of our people in our rural areas. I need to participate more actively and meaningful in the development of this nation.

Obviously, there is a need for change of attitude and focus in our approach towards the entire growth of this nation. Without this, we are bound to repeat the same slow and poor rate of implementation of the national development priority project.

As I have stated earlier, my intervention will be brief. I would now move to the programs of the Ministry. In the speech in 2020 by His Excellency, he highlighted the major programs and reforms under the fundamental reform program and sectoral reform programs under my Ministry, and I will highlight a few of those.

The first is the Special Economic Zones. The Bill is in its final drafting and should be tabled in Parliament during this meeting. Also on that note, there is the Industrial and Commercial Estate Development Policy. I do agree with the MP for East Honiara on what he mentioned earlier today, as to what the Government do for the reintegration plan for the seasonal workers?

I will highlight a few of those in the Ministry. The first one is the cocoa factory in Kirakira. The construction of a building is in progress and should be completed in the fourth quarter of 2023. And that would be a very big boost for our people in Makira, and also for the national Government. The other commercial estate development is at Gozoruru in Isabel Province. A public hearing on the environmental impact analysis has been completed. Third is the Auluta Basin Rice Development Farm in East Malaita. The Ministry is prioritizing that for 2023. And also, not forgetting the Vella Oil Palm Project in Vella La Vella.

On the note on the Bonale Pineapple Project, that project has been taken up by the SCALE Program, and consultation with the Solomon Islands Government and SCALE is underway for the funding to support the construction of the building.

On the Economic Growth Center, Suava, Kibiri, and Tuha are the three main ones for this year. As I stated earlier in my questions and answers, the Suava development has progressed to a different level. The construction of the market

house has started, as has the construction of the other infrastructures that will be in place for that Growth Center.

I would like to highlight here, under my Ministry, that under the Downstream Processing for the year ending 2022, we have supported 119 Small to Medium Enterprise business owners in the Solomon Islands in sectors of agriculture, fisheries, tourism, and youth innovation.

On the Small and Medium Enterprise legislative update, very little was done due to COVID-19 and the capacity of the Attorney Generals Chamber until 2022. The first draft was completed in September 2022. We are scheduled to submit the Bill to Parliament in October of this year or early 2024.

On the Corporative Society Act review, the SCALE US program has taken onboard the review of the Corporative Act, and within that review, the Ministry is hoping that the National Youth Corporative Policy will be developed as well.

With the MSE, the Macro, Small and Medium Enterprise development, there are two financial assistances programs that were created under the Ministry of Commerce. They are the Credit Line with the Development Bank of Solomon Islands and the Credit Guarantee Scheme at the Central Bank of Solomon Islands. Those schemes are entirely meant for local people, indigenous people, to get a loan or financial access, so that they can start their business of interest.

On the review of the National Wage Policy, which was mentioned earlier by the previous speaker and I knew the Opposition Leader mentioned that in his address. I would like to clarify the issue here in this chamber, that the review of the National Wage Policy, rightly referred to as the Minimum Wage Review, the Ministry has started looking into that. The Solomon Islands National Advisory Board intends to undertake a Minimum Wage Review pursuant to Part 3 of the Labor Advisory Board Rules established under Labor Act Cap. 73. And the DCGA Government intends to develop a broader national wage policy as well. At the moment, the Ministry is putting information to the various stakeholders to submit their nominees to be in the Board so that a review can begin.

Also, the ILO has advised that the technical support for the Wage Policy formulation will be provided and consultations to develop this document is under way.

Practically, the review is supposed to be at the interval of two years after the order was published in the Gazette. The latest review was done in 2019. So it is due for review at the moment. The good news is that the exercise of reviewing the National Minimum Wage will be executed this year, once the board membership is finalised.

On the National Employment Policy, as I have stated earlier under the Labour Division, the policy that will compliment the implementation of labour administration in Solomon Islands in underway. The goal, as I have stated earlier, is to increase the decent and productive employment opportunities, enhance skills and human resource development to enhance labour market governance in Solomon Islands. Those are some of the very important issues or policies that the Ministry is undertaking.

On the Foreign Investment Trade and Market, the Ministry had reviewed the Foreign Investment Policy Guideline established since 2000, which was lapsed in 2020. This follows a review inspection and audit of the approval issued under the Foreign Investment Banner.

On the Marketing and Export Promotion, the access on market issue is addressed under the policy. However, with the Trade and Export program, there are few milestone landmarks in the Ministry. The first is the Kava Export, the assistance to Kava exporters in the Solomon Islands as well as the CEMA and the Copra Cocoa Subsidy.

On that note, I would like to clearly state here that the Ministry is quite huge though. The Ministry housed nine technical divisions. It is quite huge. The divisions including the Foreign Investment, Marketing and Export Promotion, Industry, Business and Cooperative, Company Haus, Trade Dispute Panel, Labour and Immigration. On that note, the Ministry is also looking at ways, if there is any possibility of restructuring the Ministry itself to be more efficient and effective to enable this nation to grow and prosperous.

I would also like to inform this honourable House that the newly established division has been established under the Ministry, and that is the E-commerce and Implementation Division. E-commerce is doing business online. We have been doing it, but to ensure sure the Government has a policy right so that things are done properly. If you want to sell bananas, you can just put up on the market. You can advertise your coconuts online for people to buy.

The Ministry is trying its very best with the limited resources to put in place all the things that are possible so that Solomon Islands will prevail and endure in this nation. To conclude, the outline priorities of the Ministry for 2023 are to enter this local entrepreneurial space for Small and Medium Enterprises and encourage public-private sector partnerships, also there are investment incentives to broaden financial investment in Solomon Islands to create a conducive environment for foreign investors, also to improve national security and meet international obligations.

I would like to clearly reiterate that, to make this nation grow, everyone must take part in it. My best friend, the Member of Parliament for East Honiara, who is not here, but I want to tell him that the Government is trying every effort to put in income-generating activities or farms on the land, but when the Government bought a piece of land, some people already bought the entrance to the land to block the road access. Some registered the land in front of the wharf. There is no one to blame in this nation. We have to blame ourselves for making things harder for ourselves. Why do we have to ask outside donors to come and help us when we do not help ourselves?

This nation needs to come to its senses about how we can help ourselves. We are tired of hearing the Government not doing this and that, but you are stopping the land? This is very detrimental to the growth of this nation. We cannot go anywhere. We may want to build a wharf, but someone already bought that land. The same for airport and Solomon Power. For who? It is for our own benefit. The people of this nation must understand that we must allow land. As the Bible states, that we are just custodians of this land. We do not own it. We are keeping it for the betterment and using it well for all of us.

On this note, I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge His Excellency Sir David Vunagi, the Governor General of Solomon Islands, for the Traditional Speech from the Throne and also thank the Honourable Prime Minister for his unwavering leadership during these trying times. Also, the Right Honourable Chief Justice. May God bless your families. And to you Mr. Speaker, for leading this Chamber proper and directing us in our debates in this honourable House. Also my colleague Ministers of the Crown for your untiring effort in leading your Ministries and your constituency. I also want to thank the Leader of the Opposition for his continuous guidance in his job, the Leader of the Independent and Members of Parliament. May the good Lord bless all of us.

I support this motion, and I resume my seat.

Mr SILAS TAUSINGA (*West New Georgia/Vona Vona*) (11:07): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to contribute to the Motion in respect for the vote of thanks from the Speech from the Throne delivered by the Governor General on Monday, April 17, 2023, last week.

Firstly, I would like to offer my sincere acknowledgement on behalf of the good people of West New Georgia/Vona Vona Constituency, to His Excellency the Governor General of Solomon Islands, for his address to this legislature.

My remarks will be very brief, knowing that other honourable colleagues are keen to respond to the Speech as well. The Governor General, in his address to Parliament, has highlighted the lack of strategic and transformative infrastructure

that is important in driving economic growth in this country. I believe this is a true statement and a concern that illuminates the inadequate visionary leadership that this country has been facing since independence.

His Excellency has shared a genuine concern that calls for a policy in redirection that requires proactive planning and priorities to help increase in economic activities.

The Government, Since independence, has been partners and ventures through ICSI, the likes of Maruha, now Soltuna, Solomon Airlines and others. However, the Government had never explored possibilities to partner with resource owners on commercial and economic ventures. Yet we legislate it to give away logging rights to extract timbers, for example, but we have never legislated or put in place schemes or mechanisms to be partners with our own people. Perhaps we need to explore these ideas to pave a way for the Government and the people to be partners in development, especially in the resource sector. We tend to always look to outsiders to develop our resources, but we fail to explore the possibilities of being partners with our own resource owners.

Physical infrastructure is important; however, the distribution of infrastructures is dictated by the concentration of economic activities and commerce in the urban centers. It gives rise to a trickle-down economy in the rural areas, and it is not supportive of the overall development of the country.

The telecommunication network of the country is a vital infrastructure that enables connectivity and telecommunication services in this country. However, the network services in many parts of the country still need improvement, as parts of the country still have towers that are either not operational or uneconomical. The telecommunications sector in the country, although proven to be a resilient sector in the country, continues to face immense challenges in terms of providing reliable services. The country's rural setting and its geographical make-up are some of the main challenges that hinder significant investment in our telecommunication infrastructure. On that note, we hope the new Huawei Tower project will eliminate this problem.

There have been a lot of criticisms surrounding the Huawei project, that questions the policy judgment and the value of the money to be invested in the project, but only time will tell.

There are other examples of lack of strategic and transformative infrastructure to drive economic growth, but to continue in detailing would take up time. So I will leave other MPs to elaborate on this.

We need to rethink and re-direct the path that we are on and work on policies and priorities that are essential and workable in our context.

That said, I would like to acknowledge the donor partners through the Government support of the Noro town road upgrade and the Noro international and domestic sea port upgrade initiative in my constituency.

These are important economical infrastructures. However, the Noro upgrade is still on paper work, and it will only look good on paper, unless the project comes to fruition, that we recognize the importance and impacts it will have on the economy of the country.

With the millions of dollars spent on infrastructure for the Pacific Games, I am yet to be convinced that these infrastructures are not liabilities to the country. I believe they have no economic benefits after the South Pacific Games or will not boost economic trading and growth in this country. The last thing that this country wants is to leave a legacy of white elephants that cannot be maintained in the future.

If the same political will and push can be given to drive such infrastructure project given to boost economic importance, this country will have a better chance in supporting the economic and commercial activities of this country. On the Legislative calendar, I also note that the Governor General speech on the governments legislative calendar for 2023. Amongst the Bills that will come to Parliament in this Meeting, I acknowledge that I have a great interest in the Constituency Development Fund (amendment) Bill. I understand that the Government, through Cabinet, had endorsed the new Solomon Islands Constituency Development Policy 2023 to 2032, a key policy framework that aspires to lead to the amendment of the Constituency Fund Act 2013 and Regulations. I understand that the policy is a 10-year cross-sectoral roadmap that is expected to monitor CDF development in the rural constituencies.

I applaud the Ministry of Rural Development for establishing the CDF framework. The implementation and the commitment from Members of Parliament has always been the challenge. Any amendments of the CDF to address accountability and auditing of constituency funds should be welcomed by this House. However its implementation is always a challenge when there is a lack of commitment by us MPs.

In 2012, when I was the Minister of Provincial Government, I brought a paper to Cabinet on participatory planning and ward committees. The initiative was to allocate fund from SIG support to constituency development to separate ward development committee accounts and to be administered through the Ministry of Rural Development and the Ministry of Provincial Government. I applaud the Ministry of Rural Development an the Ministry of Provincial Government for

partnering with my constituency since 2021 under this initiative. I am encouraged that both Ministries recognized West New Georgia/Vona Vona as the role model constituency under this rural development partnership and it has been proven effective and beneficial to my people.

As part of the initiative, my constituency office has also pledged \$1 million from the CDF for a new out patient ward at the Helena Goldie hospital to replace the old outpatient building which has existed long before I was born. I have already met with the Ministry of Health and Medical Services to spearhead the design of the new outpatient. I understand that an MOU on that project is currently being worked on by the Ministry. It would be noble if the Ministry prioritizes and move forward with all the necessary paper work quickly. Thus, I am also appealing to my colleague MPs from North New Georgia, South New Georgia/Rendova/Tetepare, Gizo Kolombangara, and Marovo constituencies to assist in one way or the other with a new outpatient at Helena Goldie Hospital.

This is a hospital that provide health services to hundreds of our people, not only this constituency, but throughout Solomon Islands who resides in the Western Province. We cannot wait for the Government to do everything for us. Sometimes we need to work together to take the responsibility to help our people. This is the kind of approach that we need to embrace and that MPs working together through our constituencies for the betterment of our people, not only for the Western Province, but all of the Solomon Islands.

Another concept that I am interested in is a micro financing scheme, a simple banking arrangement that allows setting up of learning and financial institution within the constituency owned by the people of the constituency using the CDF to finance. That is a revolving fund. You will agree that the banking industry in the country is not for the rural people. The minimum loan amount and the interest rates are unaffordable for the simple rural men or women, who might need support for his or her business for a thousand to a \$1,000 to \$10,000 at an interest rate and other affordable and payable six months at minimum, depending on the amount borrowed. The scheme is for the rural people in the constituency to help small businesses. The money remains in the microfinancing systems of the constituency. Discussions on the idea has already been progressed to the Ministry of Rural Development, as well as the paperwork in Central Bank. We have already completed this and are ready to go. Perhaps the concept or the implementation proves successful, I hope the Government considers its inclusion as a future amendment to the CDF Act 2030.

The Pacific Games, as the Governor General alluded to in his speech, we will be hosting the 17th Pacific Games in November this year. It will surely be a historic occasion. Yes, histories are memories but not all memories are good. Some also sad

ones. I am hoping against all hopes that the history is not only on the performance of the competitors or hosting the South Pacific Games but also on another economic benefits that we will get from the infrastructure, which has committed millions of dollars.

Other Pacific countries have hosted the Pacific Games before and have shared their own share of problems before and after the games. And I hope this is something that the Government already anticipated and prepared to deal with. As much as possible we should not repeat the same mistake we did with the Festival of Pacific Arts in 2012, incurring millions of dollars of unpaid bills after the event.

Nevertheless, I must acknowledge the Prime Minister and the Minister responsible for the games, for making sure that we are committed to delivering a memorable event.

We have committed huge financial expenditure towards the games and it is my hope that the preparatory work on sporting facilities, roads and accommodation will be ready by November this year.

In conclusion, I wish to take this opportunity once again to thank the Governor General for his vision, as stipulated in his address and the words of encouragement to all citizens to always embrace unity and uphold peaceful and prosperous Solomon Islands.

I also wish to thank the Prime Minister for the vote of thanks to the Speech from the Throne, thus enabling us MPs to contribute to the Motion. To Cabinet Ministers, Backbenchers for your continuous understanding in the debates, the Opposition Leader, Independent Leader and fellow colleague MPs, who have kept to your roles in alerting the Government of its mistakes.

Lastly, to the hardworking public servants and those in the private sector, the country depends on you. Thank you very much indeed.

Mr. Speaker, I respect and thank you also for your understanding and guidance with respect to the conduct of the meeting.

And lastly to the good people of my constituency West New Georgia/Vona Vona, thank you. We will continue to work together. *Leana hola* (Thank you). May the God Lord continue to grant us wisdom as we venture through this year 2023. May God bless Solomon Islands.

I support the Motion and I resume my seat.

Hon. MANASSEH MAELANGA (*East Malaita—Minister for Infrastructure Development*) (11:22): Thank you Mr. Speaker for giving me this opportunity to also speak in response to the Speech from the Throne.

Allow me to thank His Excellency the Governor General for the speech from the Throne delivered in this honorable Chamber. And I wish to thank the honorable Prime Minister for moving the Motion, that parliament can reflect on the words of His Excellency made in Parliament on Monday 17th April 2023.

Before I proceed, I know you have noted my absence from Parliament last week. As I have attended to the 12th Australian Solomon Islands Business Forum held in Brisbane. I did have the chance to meet with the Australian businesses that attended the forum and also share with the Solomon Islands' businesses that attended. I believe such an initiative is important as we encourage business relationships between our two economies.

I have received the scripts of His Excellency the Governor General's Speech from the Throne, and I believe it is very informative and contains a broad aspect of our developmental aspirations. As such, it has attracted critical comments from the Opposition Leader and others who have responded to the speech, which I believe is fruitful for the purpose.

I further acknowledge the sentiments raised by the Prime Minister in his response to the Speech from the Throne. In today's world, most developing nations aim to achieve sustainable development, improve service delivery, and develop a national development plan and strategy that serves as a roadmap to accomplish social and economic goals. I think Solomon Islands is no exception, and the ongoing efforts shared in this Chamber all point to the fact that we want development and to improve our economy and social services.

At this juncture, I would like to briefly comment on the practice of delivering the Speech from the Throne in this Chamber. I think it is a good function to be able to systematically debate matters of national interest and goals. This Speech from the Throne enables all Members of this House to be able to measure the actions or inactions taken in each and everyone's respective roles, colleague Ministers, Opposition Members, and Independent Members alike. Parliament is our oversight function, and checks are made in this respect, which I fully support and applaud the Governor General for in this Speech from the Throne.

We have journeyed together for more than 40 years, and we have yet to define a fitting development paradigm or a comprehensive infrastructure investment plan. Indeed, we have developed a national development strategy, and we have attested to international development goals, such as the Millennium Development Goals. Therefore, we need to set basic priorities and identify key areas that require

investments and attention. A well crafted infrastructure investment program is critical for our development aspirations.

I fully believe that it is important, that as a Government and country, we stick to a simple well-crafted development plan. I further believe that our infrastructure investment plans should be based on the availability of our resources to fund and implement them. This helps to ensure that our economic growth is inclusive and sustainable, that infrastructure investment is coordinated in an efficient manner, and that social services such as education and health are of reasonable standards.

Our country is a developing one, and as of today, we have broad policy objectives that the Government has undertaken, that is to develop and enhance economic infrastructure, for example, the rehabilitation of CEMA infrastructure, rehabilitate and maintain social service infrastructures, the national and provincial roads, and wharves and bridges, enhance infrastructure in transport services, and also review and legislate infrastructure-related legislations. In relation to this, is the development of new or improved infrastructure is also part of the policy that will help social objectives and economic activities.

Allow me to elaborate on the motion of economic infrastructure. Generally, economic infrastructures refers to the physical structures and facilities that are necessary for economic activities to take place, such as roads, Ports, airports, power plants and telecommunication networks. Therefore, the general theory is that development economical infrastructures can create positive changes and growth. That, I will leave for the economists to discuss and analyze. As far as I am concerned, one of the broad policy objectives by Government enhance sea infrastructure and transport services.

In this regards, the Chea-Kuila Wharf in Marovo is near completion and the Ahanga wharf will commence this year, together with the Kirakira wharf. I had launched the Tulagi wharf, which had already opened, and the Prime Minister had launched the Malu'u wharf, which is opened already. Also, the ring road in Temotu Pele is about to complete. Okwala to Busuone is now on, which will be heading to Auki, which makes it a short distance for the people of East connecting to East Kwaio. Taba'a to Busuone will be starting very soon.

The Government of Solomon Islands, in the last four years, has embarked into building economic infrastructures around the country. Even though we are struggling with our economy, we continue to deliver on these policies and build these infrastructures. We believe these infrastructures will expand current business opportunities or even develop new businesses into the future.

Today, I wish to reiterate that the development of economic infrastructures are either locally funded or by donor funding. If it is a donor funded project, the

Government of Solomon Islands will help to support this particular project. There is a considerable amounts of funds that will be injected into mega projects to support them. This is usually reflected in our National Development Expenditure. In 2023, we have budgeted for an estimated \$12million to support these projects. This includes our ongoing commitments under the Sustainable Transport Infrastructure Investment Program, the Kukum Highway Upgrade Phase 2, SIRAP 1 and 2 and Land Maritime Connectivity Project(LMCP).

Other new interventions, such as Community Access and Urban Employment Program Phase 2, known as CAUSE is also factored in this support provision. The Government remains committed to supporting these mega projects and ensure it is successful and implemented.

Economic infrastructures such as the Honiara International Airport and the Honiara Main Road Upgrade will definitely boost economic activities and ease the traveling public.

As you come from the airport, you will notice the road is being fixed and ready to be sealed. Our engineers had advised that the road will be completed before the Games in November 2003. I have taken the advice of our engineers seriously and therefore is adamant that the road will be ready before the Games. The contractor had commenced the asphaltting works on the 10th of April 2023, commencing from Honiara Airport Junction hopefully to complete up to Lungga Area by end of May 2023, and they will continue with the asphaltting works on the other side of Lungga Bridge in June 2023.

All work is expected to be fully completed before the Games in November 2023, except for the east bound lane from the Ministry of Fisheries to Ranadi Roundabout due to Solomon Water on going works. This is basically the road from Fishing village right up to Ranadi roundabout. There is an ongoing construction of sewage trenches being constructed across the eastward main highway. This is the Phase 2 of the JICA. Therefore, under the current works, the eastbound lane will not be upgraded until Solomon Water, SIWA lines are completed. At the moment, Solomon Water is currently working on crossings to connect to the main SIWA lines on the eastbound lane. Solomon Water is expected to commence the evacuation on the eastbound lane in mid-May 2023, and hopefully to reinstate their excavated section a month before the Pacific Games. They will then resume their work soon after the games is completed. According to our engineers, the work will be handled professionally, work will continue smoothly and the road will be useable during the days.

Then we have the potholes. Like many of you, but also as the Minister responsible for the roads, the fixing of potholes has become a daunting challenge. I have noted

the sentiments shared in this House. We are all concerned on the state of our Honiara roads. In fact, as we enter into this new year, the state of the potholes was worse than ever. This was further worsened by our changing weather patterns and heavy rainfalls in this part of the year. Nevertheless, we are putting all efforts to ensure traffic ability is addressed as we pursue to repair and maintain our Honiara roads.

To date, three contractors were in place for three months only to address to situation. Two on the main road from Henderson to White River bridge and one on the Vura road. Some of the main feeder roads will be captured under Land Maritime Connectivity Project(LMCP), maintenance components which is funded by ADB.

To date, one package of the road, sealed feeder roads, was already public tender and closing mid next month. Other packages hoping to go out to public tender after getting reviewed by ADB. Hopefully, all tenders to be awarded and contractor on the ground to carry out the maintenance work soon.

Just on the LMCP project, which is funded by ADB and just to let everyone know, is from Town Council to White River. If you drive beyond Henderson, you will see work is going on and that is under LMCP project, which is funded under ADB. After Henderson you will see tar sealing from Henderson to Tenaru. They will work on it now and will be completed before the Games, but for Town Council to White River will be in 2024, because we cannot make it to avoid any disturbances to Pacific Game traffic. It will be worked on next year, 2024.

The fixing of the pothole is ongoing. It is important that for us the infrastructure will continue to ensure that safe and efficient transportation continues.

Let me further state that there options that Government could undertake to effectively address the issues. One is to increase funding. The Government to allocate more resources to fixing the potholes, the Government to increase our efforts on monitoring, inspection and maintenance. This is anticipated under the propose reestablishment of the Public Works Department to be revitalized under my Ministry as endorsed by Cabinet. Regular inspections can identify potholes early and ensure that they are fixed before becoming risk to users. It is possible that we can increase the number of officers on the ground to monitor the state of the roads and address it. We may also introduce automated technologies such as drones for this task in the future, if it is going to help us maintain our roads.

I had ask our engineers on the use of other innovative roads construction materials and technics to help reduce frequency of the potholes and to extend the life span of the roads. However, the advice is that the cost of improved or other use of materials will be a lot expensive than what we are currently using.

The Speech from the Throne and due responses thereafter cover the legislative calendar of the Government. The progress of our legislative calendar under my Ministry is captured under our broad policy to review and legislate infrastructure related legislations. Therefore, the following legislations are being developed by my ministry: The National Building Code Bill will come to Parliament this year. This is an important Bill that has been in the making for some time. Work on this started a few years ago; however, today we do have a draft and the final touches to the draft. My Ministry will hold consultations on it with key stakeholders. This will set the pace for the Bill to come to Parliament in the next sitting. The Road and Drainage Bill will also be pursued and taken to Parliament later this year. I have yet to table the Policy Concept Note on this, but it is optimistic to do that soon.

Our legislative calendar is an important guide to our development. We must continue to analyze the on-going issues that we face and initiate policy discussions and proposed legislative mechanisms to address these challenges. I will therefore ensure that these legislations will come before Parliament as soon as practicable. I do share the same sentiments that our officials must be on top of this and ensure that these Bills come to Parliament periodically.

Nevertheless, in concluding, our focus on infrastructure development investments also serves to address global challenges, such as poverty and inequality by setting clear targets and strategies. It can help us as a nation transition towards a low-carbon economy and promote social cohesion.

Before I resume my seat, I want to thank the donor partners who are continuously supporting my Ministry in their continuing support to infrastructure in this country. I would also like to thank other line Ministries that continue to work together with the Ministry of Infrastructure to continue implementing infrastructure programs in our country. Also, I would like to thank His Excellency, once again, for the Speech from the Throne. I would also like to thank the Prime Minister for moving the Motion. I would also like to thank you, Mr. Speaker, for sitting there and continuing to preside over the meeting.

Also, I would like to thank my colleague Ministers, Backbenchers and also the Leader of the Opposition and the group of opposition, the Independent Leader, and his group for our debate on this Speech from the Throne.

Once again, I thank you, and I resume my seat.

Hon. DUDDLEY KOPU (*Temotu Pele—Minister for Rural Development*) (11:36): Thank you Mr. Speaker, for giving me time to contribute to this Motion.

First of all, I would like to thank His Excellency the Governor General, Sir David Vunagi, for delivering this Traditional Speech from the Throne.

I would also like to thank the honorable Prime Minister for moving the Motion to allow MPs to contribute on the Motion. As Minister responsible for the Ministry of Rural Development, that oversees the implementation of the Constituency Development Fund program in all 50 constituencies and custodians of the CDF Act 2013, welcomes the Speech from the Throne from the Governor General.

The Governor General in His Speech from the Throne has mentioned the legislative reform on the CDF Act 2013, which my Ministry is currently working on. I am therefore very pleased to update the honourable House and the people of Solomon Islands on the progress made to date regarding the reforms by my Ministry.

Since August last year, my Ministry has taken on the mammoth task of reforming the CDF Act 2013 to improve the governance and management of the Constituency Development Fund.

CDF has transformed many communities and contributes a lot towards the education sector through provisions of scholarship and school fees, constructions of roads and infrastructures, building of market facilities, church buildings, new homes and solar lighting, transportation and income generation, repatriations of loved ones, settling disputes and conflicts, water supply and sanitations, school classrooms and many more.

Everyone has benefitted directly and indirectly from CDF through the provisions of this services. If CDF is redirected more towards the economic subsectors in the resources and productive sectors and its governance is strengthened, it may become a reliable tool for growing the economy of Solomon Islands. It is with this understanding that my Ministry embarks on reforming the CDF Act 2013, which will eventually see an Amended Act come to Parliament this year.

Since the establishment of the Ministry of Rural Development and the CDF program, the Ministry never had a development policy to provide a framework to review the CDF Act 2013. So, my Ministry embarked on a nationwide consultation last year to consolidate the views of our rural people and the Solomon Islands Constituency Development Policy was formulated. On 2nd March of this year, the policy was approved by the Cabinet of Solomon Islands Government.

The Ministry, for this very first time, now has a Development Policy that will provide guide, not only on the implementation of the CDF but also on the overall development of our constituencies. This policy provides a frame work to improve the governance of CDF program by strengthening the CDF Act 2013 through regulations.

The Solomon Islands Constituency Development Policy also seeks to improve the delivery mechanisms of the CDF program, which will become effective in the 12th

Parliament. I want to make mention here that no other successive governments has ever produce a policy on the CDF, neither development of constituencies, and DCGA is the first government in the history of our political independence to have produced the first Solomon Island Constituency Development Policy.

As the Minister responsible for the Ministry of the Rural Development, I want to sincerely thank my colleagues in the DCGA, both in Caucus and Cabinet, for supporting this new policy. I also want to thank the general public and all of you who have contributed your thoughts to the formulation of this new policy. This policy will be the basis for which CDFs are allocated, programed and implemented going forward. Let me further update this honorable House that after the approval of the policy by the Cabinet of the Solomon Islands Government, a newly proposed draft CDF Act 2023 was introduced through accountability and integrity institutions and Members of Parliament for their input. As a result of their input, a clean draft was produced and is now being internally pre-checked by my Ministry.

The clean draft of the newly proposed CDF Act 2023 will be introduced to all fifty Members of Parliament in the first week of May 2023, through a workshop currently being arranged. After that, it shall go to Cabinet for approval, to be followed with drafting instructions by the Attorney Generals Chambers for the drafting of the CDF Act 2023 (amendment) Bill.

Reforming the CDF is a policy priority of the DCGA Government to be achieved this term. And this is aligned to the Sustainable Development Goals, the DCGA Policy Redirection on Rural Development and the National Development Strategies 2016 -2035. Therefore the CDF Act Amendment Bill will go to Parliament in the current sitting before the House dissolves in December.

The newly proposed CDF Act is a much improved version of the CDF Act 2013 with the following proposed amendment changes:

(i) appointment of constituency officers shall be on merit and through the Public Service Commission. The process will be like any another servant. Members of Parliament will have a very limited say in the appointment of constituency officers.

(ii) Constituency Development Growth Centers. Constituencies, through the Ministry of Rural Development are obliged to establish a constituency Development Growth Center in their respective constituencies. These centers will host officers from other Ministries that are relevant to their constituency.

(iii) Signatories to constituency bank accounts. Members of Parliament will no longer be signatories to the constituency bank accounts.

(iv) Constituency Development Committees. Constituencies are required to formalize Constituency Development Committees as a prerequisite to qualify for CDF assistance.

(v) Accountability measures. They are more accountability measures to ensure proper compliance with the Act in terms of how CDF is used. Anyone breaching these accountability measures are liable for prosecution. This includes Members of Parliament, constituency officers, public servants managing the funds, suppliers and recipients.

(vi) Stationing of constituency officers. Officers of the constituencies will remain in their constituencies when the Constituency Development Growth Centers are established.

(vii) Property ownership. All assets including machineries and properties purchased through CDF shall remain the property of the Ministry, for continuity and sustainability purposes.

(viii) Vulnerable groups. Women and people with special needs shall not be neglected, nor ignored by constituencies.

(ix) Audit of annual reports. Auditing of CDF shall be done annually and reports to be presented to constituency through an annual constituency conference and in Parliament as efforts towards transparency and accountability.

(x) Resources allocations. The new act will oblige the Government to allocate its CDF resources according to the following breakdowns:

- Productive and resources sector - 45%
- social services - 20%
- gross sectoral - 20%
- social and accountable obligation - 15%

The newly revised CDF Act 2023, once enacted, will ensure the Government of the day embraced an integrated approach and redirect its resources more towards their resource and productive sectors, and most importantly encourages centralization. In conclusion, I want to thank the honorable Prime Minister for his steadfast leadership in maintaining a very strong political leadership and for allowing us to respond to the Speech from the Throne delivered by His Excellency the Governor General.

My Ministry extends our sincere appreciation to the Government of the People's Republic of China for supporting the rural people of Solomon Islands through the

CDF. The People's Republic of China is the only donor partner that provides support to the CDF program, hence our profound gratitude to the ambassador of the People's Republic of China and the Government of PRC in Beijing.

I also thank all the Members of Parliament for continuing to serve our people through the CDF program of my Ministry. The success of this CDF program relies on the support of everyone, especially our communities, churches, and leaders.

So on this, I want to share the appreciation of my Ministry with all the churches, communities, and leaders in the 50 constituencies for assisting all 50 Members of Parliament in delivering much needed services to our communities through the CDF program.

I further thank the staff of the Ministry of Finance and Treasury for processing the CDF payments, as well as staff from the Ministry for facilitating the CDF. My Ministry of Rural Development looks forward to the passing of the amended CDF Act 2023 and much improved delivery of the CDF program in the very near future. Thanks to UNDP for seeing fit to provide finance towards this reform.

Before I resume my position, I want to strongly remind all Members of Parliament and their constituency officers to quickly submit their CDF acquittals for the financial year 2022. Those who have not submitted are ineligible for funding.

Since this is the final year of the 11th Parliament, I strongly encourage all constituencies to quickly submit their CDF applications for Cash Grants of \$2 million and project materials under Prepared Supply Arrangements. The Central Tender Board has issued award letters to 68 suppliers as of this week. So my Ministry, along with the Ministry of Finance and Treasury, are expected to sign contracts with the suppliers any day from now.

Finally, I want to announce to all Members of Parliament that there is a new donor partnership development program managed entirely by the Ministry of Rural Development. This program is funded by the government of the People's Republic of China, and is called the Rural Sustainable Development Program. This new program is not a CDF program. So, it has a very different and strict approach to it. The Ministry is now calling on all 50 constituencies to start submitting their project applications according to the project format, which I believe has been distributed to all of us.

Since it is a new program, different from CDF, it is very strict in terms of the requirements that each constituency must meet in order to qualify for funding. All necessary information can be found in the information handed out to all 50 constituencies.

I believe I have responded sufficiently to this Speech from the Throne, and with that, I support the Motion.

Parliament suspends for lunch at 11.57

Parliament resumed at 14.11

The SPEAKER: Thank you, before we begin on where we left off this morning, let me first of all on behalf acknowledge in the public gallery the Social Science Teachers from Central Province, who are here for the Parliament Teachers Resource Book Workshop this week. Please welcome them.

Hon MAKARIO TAGINI (*Mbaegu/Asifola—Minister for Public Service*) (2:12): Thank you Mr. Speaker. Please allow me to thank the honourable Prime Minister for moving the Motion to allow Members of Parliament in leave to offer their thanks to His Excellency the Governor General for his Speech from the Throne.

I, on behalf of my people of Baegu/Asifola, and also on behalf of all public servants in this country, wish to thank His Excellency for such a wonderful and very eloquent speech delivered on the floor of Parliament on the 17th of April 2023.

As we know, the Speech from the Throne outlines the Government plans, intentions, its policies, and of course reforms, which are intended to be implemented by the Government of the day. That is basically what His Excellency has outlined in the Speech from the Throne.

As we reflect on that speech, one could tell that we have success and failures as well. We may have good plans. We may have good intentions. We may have good policies, but in reality we cannot achieve 100 percent of it. That is the reality. We may reach 50 percent, we may reach 75 percent, but in real life, we cannot achieve 100 percent of all those intentions. That is important in light of the Speech from the Governor General. Those outlined are intentions, are policies; they may not be achieved now but maybe in the future.

Even our individual life, we may have good plans, you may have good plans for your family, my family, but we cannot achieve what we aim to do 100 percent. I am comforted by the word of God in Proverbs. Proverbs says "Many are the plans in a man's heart but God's purpose will prevail". We may have good plans, the government, but I am convinced that whatever is implemented is according to God's plan and purpose for this Government. That is my conviction, and I believe we have tried our best in implementing the policies advanced by DCGA Government.

Please allow me to touch on few matters or issues raised by His Excellency. One is in respect to my Ministry. First of all, let me register my thanks to all public servants,

who have come out on every Friday afternoon to help clean our home and the Honiara City. My big thanks goes out to all public servants as your Minister to thank you all for participating and initiative that we have taken as we prepare for the 2023 Pacific Games. Your contribution by coming out from your offices on every Friday afternoon is important. It is vital and I, as your Minister, thank you very much indeed for the job well done in this country.

There are concerns raised on the Public Service Restructuring Policy. I am happy to inform this House that the policy have started implementing already within the Ministry of Finance and Treasury, in particular the IRD and Auditor General's Office. The implementation is carried out already, of course sanctioned by Cabinet. The Ministry of Home Affairs will be in progress at this point in time and other Ministries will follow suit. Let me assure this House that we are doing well and progress with that policy. That is on Public Service Restructuring.

Moving on to the legislative reforms, the His Excellency has made strong statements and has made statements on respective proposed legislative reforms. In respect to my Ministry, we have the Public Service Bill coming up. I wish to inform this House that we are 99 percent to completion. The only issue that is outstanding is the negotiation between the office of the Prime Minister and the Public Service Commission as to whom is responsible to assess and evaluate performances of the Permanent Secretaries. Once that is done, that Bill will come before this House for passage.

The other reform coined by His Excellency is the proposed CDF Amendment Bill. I would like to thank the Minister responsible for MRD and also his team from the Ministry who have made and carried out wide consultations on this proposed Bill. The proposed CDF Amendment Bill is crucial. I, on behalf of my people of Baegu/Asifola, support the proposed Bill.

The Bill proposes a regulatory system, where all public funds has to be governed properly, so that acquittals and authorizations of public funds are made in parallel with the Public Financial Management Act. That is important in my respective view. So that proposed Bill carries my people's support, and we will support it until it is passed on this floor of Parliament.

The Electoral Reform is a good one as well. The Electoral Reform will allow one of the major reforms that is coming up, which is the consolidation of both the national and provincial elections. That is important to cut down on expenses. Not only that, but it allows one particular moment in time for people to exercise their constitutional rights, such as the right to vote. Not only that, but the turnout will be good because both the national and provincial elections are consolidated and will

be carried out at the same time. So, again, that receives my full support and the support of my people.

The Electoral Reform will cover a lot of things as well. But as somebody who comes out from background , as a lawyer, I want to share my observations, and I hope, maybe not now, but the next reform will consider that. This is crucial in light of the election petitions that normally comes out after the election results.

Currently, we have the High Court as the final Court to determine election petitions. My proposal is that, why not we allow the Court of Appeals to decide as the final Court. That is important because we need clear precedence that is handed down from the highest Court of this land.

At the moment, I am not criticizing the High Court, but you will see that the judgments are inconsistent because the High Court Judges are not bound by each other's judgments. And that is why it is important to go to the highest Court so that they lay the proper foundation or guidelines as to the offense of election. So that is my observation, and I note that it may not come on this reform, but I am hoping it will come next time.

On the reform of telecommunication, that is an amendment that was passed one or two years ago that is related to the registration of sim cards. I am hopeful that this Act will be implemented, enforced, and executed soon. Why I raise this is because it is a major concern, not only to me, but to everybody in this country, that people are using the media to abuse each other. This is a very big concern, and I believe the responsible Minister and Ministry, will, as soon as possible, enforce the law.

Let me remind those who abuse the media, especially Facebook, attacking each other and swearing at each other, two things you need to know; you may have the right of expression and the right of speech as guaranteed by the Constitution, but your right is limited to other people's rights as well. That is why it is important that we must take note of that. We must respect each other in the Facebook, and I am appealing especially to my people of Baegu/Asifola, who have always come to the Facebook, abusing each other. That has to be stopped Please stop that! please stop that! I will not answer you in the Facebook. I will answer you on this floor of Parliament.

So, this is important and I beg that we enforce this law so that people who are responsible for this will face the full force of the law.

His Excellency has also pointed out that it is the Government's policy to build strategic infrastructures in locations which are important. And on that note, please allow me to thank the DCGA Government for two important projects which was built for my constituency and in my constituency.

One, which is the road, and I thank the Honourable Prime Minister when moving the Motion, the Baegu road is also mentioned in there. Thank you DCGA Government for your support to my people. That road is the short cut to Auki. The current road from Fouia to Auki is 112 kilometers. The road that I am building is 56 kilometers. That is why it is important and it is crucial for my people and I thank you DCGA for your support on that. It is big project. We will not finish it this term. Anyone, who may defeat me, you can continue in the next term. Otherwise, I will come back and complete it.

The school, I thank the Minister for Education on that, for the support and funds given to the school. Last week, we just had a team from the Ministry of Education, they came to do the final inspection assessment of the school. They have assured me that my school has passed all criteria and will be in operation next year for Forms 4, 5, 6 and 7. Thank you Ministry for that. Thank you so much for your support. Thank you DCGA Government for a fine achievement you have done so far.

As I said, I would not be long. This are my few comments and my contributions, as I limited my time to the speech delivered by His Excellency the Governor General.

With this few remarks I support the Motion and I beg to resume my seat.

Mrs ETHEL CLAUDIA LENCY (*North East Guadalcanal*) (2 :29): Thank you Mr. Speaker for recognizing the Member of Parliament for North East Guadalcanal. First of all let me thank the Honourable Prime Minister for tabling and moving this important Motion, "That an address be presented to His Excellency the Governor General as follows: We, the National Parliament of Solomon Islands here assemble, beg leave to offer thanks for the speech which has been addressed by you to Parliament".

I am humbled to make a response as the representative of the people of North-East Guadalcanal. The Parliament took the time to express our gratitude towards the Governor General, Sir David Vunagi, for His leadership and service to the country. His emphasis on unity, peace and prosperity was evident throughout His speech. On Monday 17th April, our Governor General highlighted the importance of tackling corruption, improving infrastructure and investing in education and healthcare. His emphasis on empowering the youth and women was commendable, as it is crucial for the sustainable development of the country. His vision for a peaceful and prosperous Solomon Islands was inspiring. And it is now up to the Government, private sector, and the people of Solomon Islands to work hand in hand to achieve it. I repeat, it is now up to the Government, private sector, and the people of Solomon Islands to work hand in hand to achieve it.

What the Governor General said was, first, it is now up to the 50 MPs, as leaders and legislatures, to the private sector, the people, the business people of Solomon Islands, the landowners of Solomon Islands and the youths of Solomon Islands.

I will only comment on one issue and then I will take my seat, which is the introduction to the Landowner's Resources Bill. I am one of the landowners of Suma-Kolosori Nickle Tenement. From the outset, I would like to thank the DCGA for introducing the Bill. In 2019, there was a Cabinet Paper to fast-track the minerals for mining. I believe the Bill aims to address the concerns of landowners, who feel that they have not been fairly compensated for the resources extracted from their land. Many landowners have been left out of the economic benefits of the mining activities that take place on their land.

The DCGA Government has recognized that the previous mining law did not adequately protect the rights of landowners and that a new approach is needed to ensure that resourced distribution is fair and equitable. The landowner's Resources Bill is seen as a step in the right direction towards addressing this issue. Thank you DCGA.

I want to say that the company that has the interest to come and mine at Suma Kolosori has to (i) compliance with landowners' letter of intent and (ii) compliance with the Ministry responsible.

Just to remind us that the Central Bank of Solomon Islands, on Friday 18th November 2022 conducted a workshops for mineral exporters and stakeholders. Minerals export is now processed under a specific authority to export. Therefore, the Central Bank of Solomon Islands on Friday, 18th November 2022, conducted a one-day workshop on exporting minerals under specific authority to license mineral exporters and stakeholders.

The aim of the workshop was to provide an opportunity to each agency involve in all minerals exporting activities to inform and clarify each stakeholder roles and responsibilities in carrying out minerals exporting assessment and information sharing on the different roles they played in the mineral industry exporting activities.

Everyone must comply. Remembering the speech by the late Prime Minister Hon Solomon Mamaloni, which says, 'we are a nation conceived but never born'. I agree with that. This means that the placenta is still there, the 1978 political independence, DCGA landowners, resources builds road for economic goal independence.

Let me repeat what the Governor General, it is now up to the government, private sector and the people of Solomon Islands to work hard, hand in hand to achieve it. Unity with all of us. You must stand in unity for development.

With these few remarks, God bless Solomon Islands and I resume my seat.

Mr PETER KENILOREA (Jnr) (*East Are Are*) (02:37): At this juncture, I would like to thank the Prime Minister for moving the Motion and allowing us to also make contributions to the Speech from the Throne, traditional event that I also recognize the Prime Minister brought into this particular Parliament, the 11th Parliament.

That was quite a historical speech, in the sense that it was the first time it was delivered, representing the Head of State, King Charles III, following the demise of Queen Elizabeth II. That in itself was a very historic speech that was delivered here, given that we are a constitutional monarchy and we continue to be so.

There were some reflections that the Governor General shared in his remarks that I would also like to elaborate on, support, and give some of my thoughts on.

I note that there were some concerns that he has for us, as leaders of this nation, representing our people here. I noted him saying that, yes, he has repeated this often enough that I think we should know by now. I think that is a fatherly kind of advice that comes to all of us leaders, especially national leaders here in this House, that we find ourselves sitting in these 50 seats and representing our people. It is always timely to remind us of that.

There was one particular reference he made in terms of the challenges that we face in his reflections, that we cannot continue to claim to be a democratic country when we do not respect the rule of law and the principles of representative democracy. That is very true indeed. In this context, it is for us to be reminded that when we talk about the rule of law, we are not just talking about rioting and those that are engaged in criminal activities. That is included of course. But we are also talking about ourselves. We know full well that no one is above the law. No one, including those of us who are privileged enough to sit in this august body to represent our people. The rule of law must be respected across the board by every single citizen of this country.

In this regard, the work that continues on anti-corruption is one that I would like to highlight. That needs further support to ensure that framework is set up so that we ourselves, as leaders, are held accountable to our people who put us here in the first place. We should never forget that the rule of law is the foundation of our nation. We should not point fingers at criminals when we ourselves might be involved in actions that are perceived to be corrupt, at the very least. Indeed, with our position, it is incumbent upon us, I believe so, to raise the standard so that those that look up to us, that we represent, are impacted by the way we conduct ourselves, officially and perhaps personally.

The Governor General also quoted our National Motto, 'To lead is to Serve'. The one that is always behind you, Mr. Speaker, the Coat of Arms, that all of us here in Parliament can always be reminded every time we set foot in this August Assembly, leadership of servanthood is what we are destined to do as leaders of this nation. Servanthood leadership, I humbly submit, is best shown to us through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. While it is a task for us to try to emulate and copy, it is always an inspiration through the Holy Spirit within us to try and live up to that lofty expectation of servanthood leadership, for our people. I agree, as he said, that this must be the building block of our country.

He also mentioned and quoted portions of our National Anthem in his reflections; 'Joy, Peace, Progress and Prosperity'. These are hallowed mentions and words that themselves are loaded for us to unpack.

I think, these days it is much more incumbent upon us to instill upon our people, when they see our National Anthem, to really feel joy, to really feel peace, to really feel that there is progress and to really feel prosperity. These words in themselves, when applied, I think can be very meaningful. When each of Solomon Islanders sings the National Anthem, there will be a tear in the eye, because they will know this to be true. And I think this should be our aspiration as leaders, to continue to give that hope to our people.

Yes, some of us are being accused in the past, perhaps, of giving too much hope to our people, that we may have misled them in terms of the hope that we have not managed. But, it is the role of a leader to aspire, give hope and it is the role of managers to manage expectations. Let us continue in this House to give hope to our people, that if anything, can be at least that they expect of us. By giving hope, we are in no way misleading any of them.

In the Governor General's speech, there was mention of the cushioning effects of the construction of infrastructure for 2023 Pacific Games. That cushioning effect in the context of the speech was made in the sense that, had it been for this cushioning effect, we would be in a further worse-off situation. That in itself highlights what this Government sees as the priority for this particular year in terms of the games. To a certain extent, it is a big priority for the Government to deliver and also for the nation as a whole to host this event. But I was listening out for more details on this particular issues. What value will it be or would it be or would it estimated to be in terms of cushioning effect for us as a nation moving forward.

So much egg is put into one basket, the Pacific Games. As we head into it, it only takes the basket to drop for all the eggs to disappear. So given that, it is so important such a priority. I would have expected a little bit more, including from the speeches

and the contributions on the floor from Ministers, on what they are the estimates that we are gaining from this infrastructure currently and even from the Games.

Reports have it that the stadium and the cost of the stadium is valued up to some USD\$70 million. That is a cost that is borne by our development partner. It is not a cost that we are responsible for. We understand that it is a gift. Yet we know that nothing is for free. The taxpayers of China will foot that bill for that stadium. It is not entirely free. Therefore, it will be good to hear more about the estimates and the numbers from these games. That is if we are to really buy into this notion, that it has and will be a cushioning effect for us.

The real GDP growth, as mentioned in the speech, is projected to be around 2.1 percent for 2023, which is a rebound. That is expected to be supported by key sectors, including in the primary industry and service sector. That is very encouraging and we look forward to policies that would enhance that growth moving forward.

The infrastructure for the Games form a great portion of the statement from the Governor General. This simply reflects the importance that DCGA placed on the Games. He says, we will be welcoming some 5,000 to 10,000 visitors in the next seven months for the Games. Infrastructure for where they will be staying is also important. In here, if I may suggest, with other relevant and similar governments around the Pacific, the use of ocean liners have been quite successful in complementing the on land beds and accommodation. I am sure the government is also looking into this, if indeed we are looking to get 10,000 visitors to our shores.

This has been a practice, including in the Samoan Convention, the UN Convention and the Small Island Developing States, where a donor funded Cruise Liner to be moored at the wharf and allowing people to stay in that particular Cruise Liner thereby alleviating the pressures put on hotels, motels and beds and meeting a certain standard that is expected by our visitors. That is a suggestion and I am leaving it here for consideration, if indeed it warrants one.

The infrastructure projects that were outlined by His Excellency are also very welcomed. I do question the reference here, and perhaps we might hear clarification from the Prime Minister, in terms of Solomon Islands as the second most vulnerable country in the world. That is a very big statement to make and I am sure it has some basis somewhere, but that could be something that I am sure can be elaborated on as the Prime Minister winds up this debate, and I look forward to that. It is such a strong statement that it needs, in my view, some justification as to why we are ranked the second most vulnerable country in the world.

The references to the road's programs, the aviation projects, and the maritime connectivity projects that we have been hearing about, as the Prime Minister points

out, perhaps he is still waiting for them to be effectively implemented. With Tina Hydro, we have heard that there are some delays there as well that has impacted on the cost for that particular program. The telecommunication towers, which I gather, are the ones that the Government will be getting loans to allow them to be built. These are all very important. The Bina Harbor Project as well, that continues to be a focus for many of us.

On Tina Hydro, it is concerning that the delays are beginning to bite in terms of our own budget and our own commitments and agreements that we have signed. I was very concerned after hearing some of the numbers the Honorable Minister for Finance and Treasury was mentioning in terms of the additional costs put on to this particular project. I also thank him and his team for, perhaps, mitigating some of these costs already. But I can only imagine and assume that this will continue to be a cause for concern for the Government as we move forward to try and bring this Tina Hydro Project into fruition.

The telecommunication towers is one that is also a big concern for some of us. We are hearing that it is going to cost around USD\$70 million. This is going to be a loan that we will be getting. That is something we are very concerned about in terms of the sustainability for us to repay the loan that we will be getting for these towers. Sure, it is a very important project, but the concern, and I am sure the Government is already well aware of this, which is the loan aspect and how it can be repaid.

I know, having been in conversation and listening to presentations by our telecommunication companies, that really they are subsidizing many of our towers in the rural areas by the towers in the capital Honiara and other provincial centers. These subsidizing of the service is something that I have heard time and again from the providers of telecommunication. Really, where they take their money is really in Honiara, where the population is here, and some of the other provincial administrative centers. But really, for many of our rural communities, they are in fact running break-even or even at a loss and being subsidized by their services in the city.

That in itself shows that our people are finding it hard to really enjoy the services provided by our telecommunication companies. This comes back to the point of the loan, how it will be repaid, and who will be repaying it. I am aware that Solomon Islands Telekom is also involved in this program, having contacted myself and my constituency office to travel to our constituencies to start the survey of the land to which these towers are to be built. There needs to be clarity in the role of Solomon Telekom in this particular venture, because we have heard that there will be another State-Owned Enterprise body that will be looking after these towers. But, I think it should be made clear so that we are aware of the role that our Telekom company will play in addition, in this particular issue of telecommunications tower.

Mr. Speaker, as we move on in terms of our last few months as sitting Members of this Parliament, it is also heartening to hear perhaps a bit late the review of the National Development Strategy. That is also coming. This is a document that is very important for us in moving our nation forward, in terms of a strategic document outlining where we should be focusing.

One of the key issues outlined by Governor General is our graduation from LDC. This is something that is very, very important for us as a nation. There are definitely advantages for being an LDC. Despite the labelling of Least Developed Countries, there is advantage that comes in a form of trade, that comes in the form of Aid, that the countries that are blessed or more developed should help those that are Least Developed. On the other hand, there is also advantage on getting rid of the Least Developed Country status. Investors do not usually go to countries that are labelled Least Developed. It is not an attractive place to go and invest your money. That is one of the big reasons why countries want to get out of this category, to forge a part forward with confidence with partners. That is something that perhaps we should look into more seriously.

While we benefit from ODA from preferential treatment and trade with the World Trade Organizations everything but arms trading advantages that gives to LDCs we should weigh that. Without a positive gains we might have from Least Developed Country status graduation. I would like to encourage the Government to be bold even in the face of challenges to aim at graduating as soon as possible from this label.

I say that knowing full well that when it comes to aid as examples have been shown in the Pacific Islands that have graduated the aid to these countries have not slipped. We are blessed to be in a country in a region where our developed neighbors are only three hours away by plane. Not many other LDCs can claimed to have that proximity to an industrialized country. They fly three hours and they land in another LDC. For us we are blessed in the sense that three hours time we are in one of the most industrialized countries in the world. That proximity should mean something for us. And I know that, their programs when it comes to aid will not shift lower based on our graduation. Mr. Speaker Sir I think it will be the opposite.

We should be bold. While we recognize the challenges we should be bold. We should be bold because there is smooth transition on this particular issue. Smooth transition meaning our donors, our partners, the UN system would want us to transition smoothly over a few years. Depending on the Donor, you can negotiate from three years to seven years. They will not drop us like a hot potatoes, it is in the global interest that countries that graduate from less develop country status are successful. United Nations has agreed that. We are all in this together. So I would like to encourage the government. It will put us in a part that we work hard. We are

focused. It will align with all that we are saying here in this parliament, all the plans the government said in this parliament. I think for the people of Solomon Islands, getting rid of a least-developed country status would bring even psychological change in how we operate, how we move, how we relate to each other and how we move forward with confidence.

One of the other issues that was brought up by the governor general is one that has been long outstanding. That is the issue of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Indeed the report itself has been tabled as the Governor General rightly noted. At the same time, there is going to be a "sensitized summary". That is the word that His Excellency the Governor General used here; a sensitized summary of the five volumes of the TRC report.

We can all read into what it means to be sensitized, sanitized. It would seem to me that it will be a summary that is sensitive to the context that we are in. And that is understandable. But, at the same time it also deprives us of deep dives or even deeper dive into the Truth and Reconciliation Reports. Look into the five volumes. Treat this report with the dignity and respect that it deserves. Having this report being born out of one of the darkest if not the darkest period of our young nation. I am concerned that by rushing over and looking and considering an executive summary report might deprive us of some of the substantive matters that we need to also delve into and deal with.

The federal system is one that has been ongoing for a while now. The Governor General also mentioned in his statement this very fact, that the final draft of a proposed federal constitution was handed to the prime minister in 2019, right at the beginning of this house. Of course the constitution is subject to peer review and economic analysis. There are views in our country already on this issue. Some of these views are very deep. Some of these views are based on outcomes of peace agreements that warring factions signed to stop hostilities. So this has connotations. This particular issue has connotations for our national unity, security and our happy co-existence as the Governor General puts it. I agree with the Governor General that we must tread this part very carefully. And the statement that he makes, that the future of our country and the next generation is at stake, I do not think is an exaggerated statement at all. I think it reflects the weight that this decision might have on our nation. Particularly the unity of our nation. The respect that must be given in how we deal with this process moving forward, that is somethings that we all need to pay attention to very carefully as national leaders.

Yes, we know that the Federal Constitution has been on the lips, hearts, and minds of our people, for us on this side and the United Party, we want to focus on decentralization. Whatever that means, in terms of a label to give it, whether it be a federal system or a nation of autonomous regions, the focus should be on

decentralising. Decentralising government to people, services to people is important. As we know from our constitution, decentralization for the unity of this country is already in the preamble of our constitution. I think that should be our aim, to focus on decentralization. I would not want to label what that might end up looking like. Because I think that automatically boxes us into a system of government that we might want to, for better phrase, copy and paste from other jurisdictions. Those systems might work for them, but they might not work for us.

The federal system, as we all know already, is one designed in a classical sense by provinces who got there, form their own governments, and like in the United States of America, had their own money and currency. And then later on, they cede sovereignty to a federal government. What we are trying to do here is the reverse of that. We already have a national government with provinces and we are trying to do the reverse by giving sovereignty back to our provinces. This is the exact opposite of what the classical sense of a federal system that the world is running now has been running on, where states themselves become so powerful that they begin to negotiate among themselves to give power back to a central government. That is very different from our particular situation here.

So I would like that when the discussion does come, despite the work that has been going on already and focusing on a particular model of a decentralized government, that we do not get caught up in terms of those labels but focus on the bigger picture of decentralization of power. And in this regard, I also note and indeed, welcome the Governor General's statement here when he says that, *we simply, now, need to embark on a path that will progressively devolve powers*. That can be done even now, I believe.

A devolution of powers to the provinces, with key areas well-negotiated and well-planned with the central government is the way forward, whether that ends up being a federal system or a country made up of autonomous regions. As you know Mr. Speaker, one of the biggest Kingdoms that has their separate countries in it, which is the United Kingdom, is not even a Federal System. The United Kingdom only has one seat at the UN. Yet they represent Scotland, Wales, Ireland that have their own parliaments and operate as their own countries. That in itself is, they are not a federal system. But the autonomy and power that Scotland has, I would say is quite powerful. I would like to see perhaps our focus on those kinds of devolving powers than us getting caught up in labels of systems that in the end might not be what we looking for.

I also welcome the outline of the legislation that will be coming to Parliament. As is the case with these traditional Speech from the Throne, it outlines the government's intentions and bills and programs that they will be bringing in. These are very, very important for us as parliament to consider. And we look forward to that. The

Electoral Bill in particular is one that is of deep importance for us this year looking towards next year's elections. The reforms there need to be given due consideration at the earliest convenient time for Parliament to meet. We would like to welcome this Bill at the next Parliament meeting, perhaps in the middle of the year so that we can really debate it and deal with it in a manner that shows respect to this important Bill.

And as outlined by the Honourable Prime Minister, there are some important bits in this Bill that will need for us to engage meaningfully with. These include those that are overseas, to vote. This includes the elections of both the national and provincial government happening on the same time. We have heard already in this House that the cost effectiveness of having those elections together is perhaps one of the biggest drivers behind having elections on the same day. But at the same time, I would like to caution here as well, What I feel is there could be a gap in power as both the national and provincial governments are on campaign mood. There is the possibility, a potential for a gap. Who is actually in power as everybody is in caretaker mood. Being in caretaker mood for six weeks of campaign might not be the ideal situation that we are in. God forbids something arises in the nation that requires full hands on during that period. Those considerations I am sure are also taken by the government in this policy that we are looking to enact into law. I would just like to caution here that we should not forget this gap, the power gap, during the time parliament dissolves and the time the election takes place. Just something to think about.

Other countries have adopted what is called 'staggering of elections. Staggering of elections meaning the elections same terms but they were staggered. In a way our provincial elections at this time already can be argued as already being staggered. That has advantages as well in terms of continuity of government. We know the relationship between the two in terms of national and provincial. As we move on further, into further decentralisation, how that might panned out for us is something that I also would just like to caution at this time and we also think about that beyond obvious advantages of cost effectiveness. I also see deeper politics being involved now at the national and provincial levels. That in itself is not necessarily a bad thing. In fact that should be encouraged, that parties be allowed to run both at national and provincial levels. At the same time the cause for division that election bring, might be, I say might because we do not know because we are yet to go into it. But just for my own experience having run elections and the vitriol and personal attacks that happen at that level are now going to be doubled even on provincial levels.

Our politics is not yet matured enough for people to vote purely along party lines. It is always going to be personal attachments. I think we will never get rid of this just because of the makeup of our country. We have tribal people links and blood

and people use that for politics. That is the reality. We are very different in terms of how our politics is run from other western countries that do not have that deeper connection between the elected and the electors or constituents. That is another concern that I would just like to flag here, when it comes to provincial and national elections now happening on the same day.

Another issue that was raised by the Governor General is on the special economic zones. He said that this is a strategic move by the government to transform the country's investment attraction strategy. This perhaps is a part of it. I would say that much of a strategy for attracting investors also deals with how we ourselves sell ourselves, how we put laws into place that are predictable for investors when they come in, they know. That our judiciary will be one that is reliable, fast in terms of their decisions and predictable in their outcomes. Those are even more important.

The political stability is perhaps the number one area that investors look at. The special economic zones are just a part of it. I would say that there are bigger things and issues that we can deal with that would address this idea of attracting investments into our country. The graduation from LCD, that sends out a message loud and clear that we are ready and open for business.

The other concern I have about special economic zones is the potential for those zones to be a law unto themselves in terms of the application of the wider laws of Solomon Islands in this special economic zone. Which laws are exempted, which laws are applicable? These are issues that countries that have special economic zones deal with. I am sure we can find examples where they have work well and also where they have not work well. However, the idea we are in Solomon Islands and the law of Solomon Islands must apply to the fullest extend is something that is worth protecting. When we talk about sovereignty of our nation, that is sovereignty protection. Making sure that whatever we set up, zones, parts and jurisdiction of the country respects to the fullest extend possible the laws of the country that the rest of us and our citizens have to abide by. Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, there are other issues that we can deal with that are within our own capacity to deal with. And they are more important than our political stability. We cannot have elections then after elections, riots. We need to deal with these issue. As leaders we need to be allowed to engage in a fashion that diminishes these kinds of actions and activities. That no political points scoring comes out of these kinds of criminal activities. Mr. Speaker, let us start there.

As I have mentioned, it is important. But special economic zones, in my view, are only part and partial of the bigger picture. If we really want to engage with and attract credible investors and not fly-by-night investors, but investors that are serious about following the laws of these countries. Investors that are willing to

invest their money to make a profit for sure and at the same time ensure that services are delivered to our people and this nation.

Mr Speake, in terms of the bills that have been outlined and the programs that we are expecting to come in this year, we know that time is short. I want to take my hat off to all government ministers and ministries. You will be working very hard to ensure that these bills are brought before the house. For some of us who are members of the Bills and Legislation Committee, we are looking forward to receiving those bills and working with them

But at this time, the comment by the Governor General in terms of the policies that are attached to those bills, and the argument made that it is very much an executive privilege to have policies, I would humbly say that perhaps that is not the right way to see this. Our laws come to us not in a vacuum. Our laws come to us in context. And what shapes that context is our own nation. As the executive, you are privileged to come with laws that you have assessed to be worthy of bringing to Parliament. You come with laws with your policies that are going to be put in black and white and endorsed and adopted in this Parliament as laws. They do not only remain as policies but are transformed into laws. And this transformation is done only here in Parliament, Mr. Speaker. The policy might be DCGA, but the law that comes out is the national Parliament of Solomon Islands. This includes all Parliamentarians here in this house. All laws that are passed here, whether some of us like them or not, we might say, No! But it has passed, it has passed also in that process.

So, Mr. Speaker, when we look at laws and deliberate on bills that come through, we have to look at the policy behind them. Questions will need to be raised as to why we have this law in the first place. That in itself would allow committees like the Bills and Legislation to also question the government ministries officials who appear before us about the policy behind these bills they bring to us. I for one do not want to simply be a proof reader for Bills that come. There is more substance, more context, and the policy background gives us at least myself a good sense of what it is the government wants to do with its law. Who it will impact, all of us, some more than others, how it can be implemented, whether it can be effectively be implemented. These are issues that as law makers and Legislators we are duty bound to deliver upon.

Mr. Speaker, on this note I would like to announce here as well and taking the queue from the Prime Minister a few meetings ago, where he was looking towards us to contribute to this issue. In contributing we are looking to bring a bill before this house at the next meeting through the private Members Bills privilege. That Bill should not be a controversial one. We believe it is one that all of us can stand by and support. That Bill comes from the United Party's first pillar of *"One Nation, One*

People under One God". And it has to do simply with our flag. We know that there is an Armorial bearing Act that looks after the coat of arms. But we find that there is still a gap for our National flag. We will bring in this Bill to introduce here, for our deliberations, A simple Act but one that we believe has powerful repercussions.

The flag is a symbol of our nation. At the end of this year we will be having a lot of these flags being waved around these brand new stadiums. I am reading in the newspapers that shops are being checked upon making sure the trademark for the games are not violated. Yet we do not have a law that looks after our own flag.

We will be bringing that in. We believe it does not have any budgetary implications but it is a law that we feel from the United Party, important for our nation and we look forward to bringing it and discussing it here in Parliament through the processes that needs to be done. We understand that this is a rare process, that perhaps has not been done much. But we looked forward to be guided by yourself Mr. Speaker the Clerk and of course the very abled Staff of this our National Parliament of Solomon Islands, to help us. We will look to be consulting with the relevant Ministry in terms of the responsible Ministry for this. But we look forward to taking this bill forward to this house and to have it deliberated upon here. A simple bill but one that we feel is profound.

Mr. Speaker Sir on behalf of my people of East Are'Are I would just like to thank the Governor General well for His tireless service to our nation. He did say that this was his last speech from the throne for this Parliament. We would like to thank him for the service that he has rendered tirelessly. We continue to support him in all that he does. We continue to pledge our support to his office.

Mr. Speaker, we continue to stand just as our people are in praying for our government of the day, the prime minister, cabinet ministers, your awesome responsibilities in terms of our nation and our government. We continue to pray, the people of East Are'Are continue to pray for all colleagues in parliament. Members of parliament you are leaders of your own people, we continue to pray for you as well. And Mr Speaker, your good office and yourself. You are also in our prayers as we continue to move ahead and advance our nation forward.

With this few remarks I support the motion and I resume my seat.

Hon. SAMUEL MANETOALI (*Gao/Bugotu—Minister for Traditional Governance, Peace and Ecclesiastical Affairs*) (03:31): Thank you Mr Speaker for recognizing the Member of Parliament for Gao Bugotu Constituency, the Minister of Traditional Governance, Peace and Ecclesiastical Affairs to join colleague ministers and rest of members of parliament, to deliver a reply to the Speech From The Throne delivered to parliament on the 17th April 2023 by His Excellency the Governor General.

Firstly, let me thank you for granting me this moment to add my voice to what is deemed the last address by His Excellency the Governor General to this Eleventh Parliament. Similarly, to the Honorable Prime Minister for moving this motion so members of parliament can offer thanks to His Excellency the Governor General, for this traditional speech to the Eleventh Parliament.

Mr Speaker, given that the address by His Excellency the Governor General was to be his last address to this Eleventh Parliament, in demonstrating my unbounded respect, it is only appropriate that my response of thanks to His Excellency, is to firstly give an insight to parliament of the key significances of the speech. In so doing, I will highlight the importance of peace building in the country. Secondly, I will inform parliament on the DCGA major policies mandated to my ministry and its implementation over these years. Additionally, to highlight challenges faced which have direct impacts on the implementation of my ministry programs and activities over these years.

The speech from the throne by His Excellency the Governor General is a traditional attribute of our representative democracy, in having His Excellency in parliament to begin each of its meeting in this Eleventh Parliament. The speech from the throne by his excellency captures the DCGA recognition to representative democracy.

In addition, the most inspiring of all this is that, His Excellency had wittingly and eloquently resounded to us political leaders, the importance of the principals of representative democracy, displaying the practical values and principals of Christianity in the country, despite the many challenges we are face in the past four years. Let alone the continuing effects of COVID-19 and the November riots in Honiara. Such reflections from His Excellency is indeed embracing and comforting. One of which speaks volumes about a strong devotee and the importance of our diverse ethnicities and national ideals, and in endeavoring just to see the efforts in freeing our country from territory violence and disharmony and in building legacies of peace, prosperity, and a safe and secure Solomon Islands for our future generations.

This reflective view is irrevocable as it constituted an inward look of respect to the authority and similarly denotes the need for a national collective effort and responsibility at the local and national levels, that is inclusive of the Government and each agency, communities, church institutions, and all citizens of this country.

The Speech from the Throne is also seen as a given opportunity, whereby citizens of the country are being informed through Parliament regarding what the Government is doing since coming into power in 2019 in social and economic development endeavors, the challenges encountered along the way and what it continues to do ahead.

In essence, after having a new political leadership in 2019, DCGA does not put out of sight its national and political commitment to the peace-loving people of this country. Despite the social and economic challenges that the country faces to the extent of being accused of not doing enough, as it may have been alluded to.

DCGA in all its forms continues its responsibilities to the Parliament and to its citizens by progressively implementing its policies that are central to the wellbeing of its citizens and the economic growth of the country through the Government Ministries and agencies. His Excellency the Governor General had also reiterated the importance of being foresighted and nationally futuristic. A timely call appealing to National Parliament, Provincial Assemblies, Honiara City Counselors, church leaders, chiefs, community leaders, and the rest to be in collective efforts in order to be able to collaborate outlast cases of socially, economically, and politically orchestrated severances.

I join this call by His Excellency, because in a few months we will be at the forefront of the major regional sporting event in November 2023, the Pacific Games, and the 2024 National General Elections. By means of the benefits that come along with these events, and making the fullest efforts of such a call by all citizens and leaders at all levels will indeed enable our quest for positive change and unity in our societies.

I will now turn to my Ministry's functional obligations and our journey of implementing Government policies in 2023, while also reflecting on 2019. When DCGA assumes its political office in 2019, the following policies will apply:

- i. recognizing, strengthening, and empowering traditional governance systems and structures.
- ii. the continual persuasion of the TRC final report with recommendations and stakeholders
- iii. promoting national consciousness, identity, and unity
- iv. support and engagement with relevant institutions in peace education
- v. support and engage in partnership with peacebuilding stakeholders.
- vi. recognizing and supporting the role of ecclesiastical institutions that are mandated to my Ministry for implementation purposes.

I can safely resound on this floor of Parliament that the levels of implementation of these said policies by my Ministry are reachable and can be met at respective levels over the years.

In this, I note that the Leader of Opposition is making reference to the Traditional Governance And Customs Facilitation Bill quietness since His Excellency's announcement in his 2019 and 2020 Speeches from the Throne during his response contribution to this Motion. The said Bill is not that quiet, as alluded to. In fact my ministry is taking an all out behind the scenes responsive approach to the recommended commitments of the Bills and Legislation Committee. Since 2021, my Ministry had convened a nationwide consultations in Central, Isabel, Makira and Ulawa, Renbel, Temotu, Western Province, Honiara City Council Stakeholders and Russell Islands Communities on the said Bill. In 2022, my Ministry held a consultation in southern region of Malaita, South and West Guadalcanal and Choiseul Provinces respectively. In 2023, the most recent one, my Ministry held a sessional on this Bill. With those attending are Members of Parliament at the Paul Tovua Complex. The Northern and Central Region of Malaita is proposed to be next, including the Central, North and North West of Guadalcanal to be followed suit.

Also, already in our disposal on this Bill is a detailed consolidated views and opinions of our women of this country. Their perspective to this Bill was officially handed to the Ministry and also our youth version to the Bill. In that anthropological study, mostly derived from literature review analysis on a societal cultural dynamism was also handed to the Ministry from a local engaged short term consultant. However, the further we extracted and delivered these findings and views as per recommended by the BLC in 2019, the more deeper in size to this extent.

Having made these, simply because of a strong societal cultural diversities and dynamism. This is seeing as productive to the Ministry because it enables the Ministry to settle for a more conscious approach to the Bill, i.e., how would this Bill be framed or tailored in order to enable a more stronger national consciousness, identify and unity and equally empowering of traditional structures and systems and yet not able to totally determine societal diversities and dynamism.

In 2022, my Ministry had goals on the commencement of the national review and nationwide consultation of the country's National Peace Building Policy. Ministry officials had held consultations in Honiara with the specialized institutions and bodies, such as those from the media, academia and sectors of Government, civil society organizations and Honiara based Community leaders, youths and those from the sporting organizations.

In 2023, the Ministry target is a rollout to the provinces, more particularly those that extractive industries have occurred in them. My Ministry has taken yet another, approach on the review of this policy in order to best underscore the state of the art of our peace, landscape and environment in the country and to anticipate the

probable dynamics that may have an influence to our anticipated peace building environment, especially, that the current review of National Peace Building Policy was developed yet in 2012, by which time there is sure a major paradigm shift in our peace building context.

On the current National Justice Policy relative aspect in this country, more particularly the final TRC report with recommendations, I wish not to make detail inspections for now, just because there is already a filed notice of Motion on this, with the subject policy matter that will be later deliberated in detail in this floor of Parliament in the ensuing days.

For this, I resolve to just minimally re-emphasized that there is a great extent the of commitment already being exerted at the Ministry and Cabinet levels in fronting the practical addressing of this said policy as according.

Permit me to just briefly state few reflections on the policy and recognition and support relevant to our Ecclesiastical affairs institutions in our country. In 2020, my Ministry had convene for the first time after this Ministerial Portfolio was transferred from Home Affairs to my Ministry a National Symposium for all Head of Churches under SICCA and SIFGA with the targeted objective, which is to finding a balance but yet workable common ground between the government and the SICCA/SIFGA churches, knowing too well that they are equal partners in the country's social and economic developing endeavors. In this regard, our ecclesiastical affairs institutions do also compliment Government policies pretty much at the sphere that is unreachable to the Government, especially that our churches do command the critical mass and they have own a vast spread of networks and linkages right to the village levels in the country.

Realizing the need to cement this policy potentials in 2021, the Government established the Solomon Islands Government and Solomon Islands Ecclesiastical Institution Strategic Partnership Framework 2021-2025 and with five key priority areas under the said framework are actionary areas that this aspect of the policy will be delivered. These five key priority areas covers leadership and governance, infrastructure and institutional developments, engagement and partnership, human resource development and law reform, financing facility move the constituency church support and through the oversight association, that is SICCA-SIFGA exemplary initiatives that the Government, through my Ministry, that had financing rendered in fostering the effective implementation of the said framework. Hence, the substantial policy in recognizing and supporting this ecclesiastical affairs institutions in the country.

I will make further mention, aside of those that I have just delivered, though from the outset, are similarly expressed by colleagues in their response speeches. The

journey of DCGA and to a larger extent, the Ministry, since assuming political leadership in 2019, is not a linear pathway. The advent of an immediate riot after the elections, that of the Covid-19 in the later part of 2019, and into the whole of 2020 and 2023 and the November Riot 2021. All these, couple together, had in practical terms downtrodden the opportunities to grow our economy and survival of all citizens.

Mirroring in this context, it is indeed inescapable of a Government to demonstrate to the best of its ability and one that will fully accomplish the substantive policy, intentions and expectations for its citizens. However, one thing is for certain, that despite it has not been an inescapable route of which to take the tolerance of taking firm stand to this committed recommendation for more levels of the Government had indeed enable the political survivability of DCGA and its policy intentions, programs and activities through past years and will be in the ensuing days and months.

In so doing, His Excellency the Governor General for seeing fit to deliver this Speech from the Throne in this 11th Parliament on April 17th, 2023 and the Prime Minister moving this Motion to allow all Members of Parliament the opportunity to provide debates and comments to the Speech from the Throne.

I sought to support this motion and I beg to resume my seat.

Hon. JOHN DEANE KUKU (*North New Georgia*) (03:49): Honorable Speaker, thank you for allowing me this opportunity to join the honorable Prime Minister and other fellow honorable colleagues to express our appreciation to His Excellency the Governor General for the speech he delivered to Parliament on the April 18th, 2023.

Let me at this juncture, thank all 50 Members of Parliament from all political divide, the Government, Opposition and Independent group for agreeing with me and supporting me to elect the His Excellency the Governor General unopposed.

His Excellency said in his opening remarks, that was to be his final address to the 11th Parliament, and in thanking, the honorable Prime Minister for inviting him to open the 6th Meeting, he also reminded us of our mandates and responsibilities and highlighted the significance of the positions we hold as Members of this honorable House. This also marks the fourth time and occasion where he emphasized our national motto, "To Lead is to Serve", as well as the words of our National Anthem, "Joy, Peace, Progress, and Prosperity", envisioning a nation where "all men should brothers be, makes nations see".

His call for citizens to respect the rule of law and democratic principles is a positive step towards addressing the underlying issues that have led to the riots and public unrest. By acknowledging the shortcomings of the democratic process and asking

citizens to accept it with humanity, the Government is demonstrating a willingness to engage in dialogue and work towards improving governance and service delivery.

Sustained efforts will be needed to address the root causes of the unrest and build a more inclusive and equitable society in Solomon Islands. On that note, I sincerely thank His Excellency for his reminders and message in urging us to overcome any devising force that threatens our unity as a nation.

We were told again that the two major causes of our economic downturn are the combined impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 and the November 2021 Riots. These events are now part of history. It is imperative that we should learn from them and move forward in our pursue of development progress and growth. Our economic challenges are being compounded by the persistent and increasing issues of financial mismanagement, resource misallocation and a lack of discipline.

These challenges are becoming more complexed and demanding, yet by design, we have chosen to deliberately ignore them. Our careless approach to granting tax exceptions and remissions, offering contracts with substandard products and neglecting to regulate areas where our national resources are being exported by foreigners before our very own eyes is a result of our disregard for duty and service to our people and country.

However, it is time to move on from the past and learn from our mistakes to pave the way for a better future. Let us acknowledge the errors of our ways and forecast on charting a new course for progress and development.

In his remarks on the infrastructure project, His Excellency highlighted the lack of strategic and transformative infrastructures as a major challenge since independence. I also note the Government's proposal to work with bilateral and multilateral partners through this strategic use of concessional loans for infrastructure development. And I wish to thank the Government for taking these initiatives because they it is a sound strategy for promoting positive partnerships, economic growth, and social development.

Investing in critical infrastructure, such as roads, bridges, and ports can help create jobs, increase access to markets and services, and improve the overall quality of life for our citizens. However, let me remind all of us that it is essential to ensure that these investments are made responsibly with a clear plan for managing debt and minimizing future repayment risks. Overburdening the country with debt repayments could create significant challenges for the Government and compromises our ability to meet the needs of our people in the long run.

Therefore, I urged the Government to be cautious and implement a comprehensive debt management strategy to ensure that the strategic use of concessional loans results in sustained economic growth and development for the country and not in unsustainable debts.

I support the Government's decisions to review the National Development Strategy, which should include all National projects. The responsibility of implementing the National Development Strategy, including funding, timing and strategy lies with any Government of the day. To ensure successful implementation, the National Development Strategy should consider policy changes, for example; modifying the logging license conditions, to facilitate the construction of new roads in rural areas. Under this proposal, the company should be required to construct one meter of road for every cubic meter of logs harvested. If the company is to harvest 10,000 cubic meters of logs, that company must construct 10 thousand meters of road.

It is how we make our policies that can help us. We are ones that need to look at ways to help ourselves. The roads must be built according the plan of MID. In the end, they will be the ones that we will improve on and connect the whole of Solomon Islands, I mean the Islands in Solomon Islands.

This proposal represents a partnership between companies and resource owners and I do not think it is a big task. With thoughtful and compassionate and robust political will, policy shifts can make the National Development Strategy achievable and effective.

In 2019 a total of 30 legislative agendas were announced by His Excellency. To date there are about 64 legislative agendas. When I say legislative agendas, it includes Bills, Reviews and amendments of existing laws. Some of the legislative agendas were announced once. Some repeated twice, three times and even four times. Out of the 64 legislative agendas, less than 10 were tabled and passed to become laws. The Ministry of Health and Medical Services has six Bills to present to this House. One was tabled, but yet to be debated. For us teachers, that is zero out of six. The Mining Bill, the Provincial Government (amendment) Bill, repeated three or four times. We hope to have them successfully debated and passed through this House this year. Overall, the failure rate overweighs the success rate.

All the government Ministries have a legislative agenda over the four years with the exception to the Ministries of Fisheries and Marine Resources, Agriculture and Livestock Development, Foreign Affairs and External Trade, Culture and Tourism, Police, National Security and Correctional Services, and National Planning and Aid Coordination.

I join the Honorable Prime Minister in his call to all PSs to ensure that the legislative agendas for 2023 be submitted in good time. I would like to help the Prime Minister

to call on the respective Ministers too, to take leadership and ownership in this important national agenda's, not just the PS; assist the PSs to bring the agendas into Parliament.

Bills usually and rightly so, emanate from Government policies. This provides the bedrock of what is to become the Government's legislative agenda. Sadly, there must be some significant mismatches between policy and Government stated legislative agendas. This could be the reason or a reason for the delay in the presentation or the tabling and the passage of the Bills.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report and the Federal Constitution are two reasons why we delayed elections and extended Parliament to 31st December 2023. It is to give us time to consider these reports. Just do what we had promised the people.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission Act 2008, established the commission and sets down the rules for its functions and responsibilities. Its ultimate aim was to produce a report that is to be laid before Parliament and be made available to the public.

On that note, I wish to express that the Truth and Reconciliation Report aims to provide an impartial historical record of violations and abuses suffered in the country and to prevent their repetition by making recommendations for legal, political, administrative or other reforms. The report also seeks to address impunity, respond to the needs of victims and promote healing and reconciliation.

The responsibility of Government under the Act is to implement the recommendations of the TRC report to the extent possible. To ensure the implementation, the Government must appoint a person or a body to monitor and facilitate the implementation of the recommendations and to provide the necessary resources for this purpose.

Therefore, it is essential that the TRC Report be presented to Parliament in its original form, as created by the Commission. This will enable Parliament to determine the next steps for its implementation.

The successful transition to a Federal System required careful planning, effective implementation and the cooperation of all stakeholders and a political will. We must all work together, address the challenges and to ensure the smooth functioning of the new Federal System. This is the desire of our people, of how they ought to be governed. We must listen to them because that is what they wish. Further prolonging its implementation should not be allowed from all political divides. Let us prepare now and have the Federal System implemented into 2025. I agree with the honorable Minister for Lands and MP for East-Central Guadalcanal

that we require minimum standards in order to start. In Australia, not everyone is a State. Two are still territories. We can do that too.

The West, when I said West, it includes Choiseul and Western Provinces, was ridiculed by a poem "The West Wind". They put a song for independence and said that some do not understand, some want to breakaway. This is because we called for more autonomy for state governance. Now everyone understands and wants state government. We have not changed our position. Our resolve is strong as ever. Our people have repeatedly called upon this Parliament to consider that report. Let us listen to their call and act accordingly.

Looking ahead to the games in November, it is a great occasion that many Solomon Islanders eagerly anticipate, including myself. While some will have the opportunity to attend in person, the vast majority will be unable to do so, despite having given up resources that could have been helped improve their livelihoods.

It is important that we express gratitude to all Solomon Islanders for their sacrifices. As a gesture of appreciation, I would call on the very good and hardworking minister for Communication and Aviation to speed up the construction of the towers, so that they can be operational by the end of October, so that our people will be able to join us in watching the games.

Indeed we have successfully hosted the 2012 Festival of Pacific Arts. However it is concerning that we have yet to fulfill our financial obligations to the contractors, participant groups, and others with whom we made prior commitments before the festival. Fast-forward to 2023, the upcoming event requires significant financial support from our donor partners and we must uphold the commitments we made before the games to ensure that we have adequate time to settle all outstanding financial obligations, so that we do not repeat what we had in 2012. I recommend that the proposed Pacific Games 2023 amendment Bill include a provision allowing for a three months period to settle all outstanding contractual financial obligations after the games, so that we do not carry it for over 10 years or many more years. I urge the Government to take heed and avoid repeating the same mistakes we made during 2012 Festival of Pacific Arts. I am pleased that the Solomon Games.

I am pleased that the Solomon Games held recently was a resulting success. It gives us more confidence that we will achieve our goal of winning 40 gold medals.

Notably, the fastest runner in the Games came from Isabel Province, a male participant and the female from Makira. It is a clear sign that the world of untapped talent is in our provinces, and not in Honiara. If we go out there searching for these athletes, our aim will be closer to us and be achievable.

I would like to express my gratitude to the Australian Government for providing training to our athletes in Australia. I would like to say this and I stand correction, what about our fastest boy and our fastest girl. Did they join the group going to Australia? Or after the Games, one returned to Isabel and the other to Makira? Who went to Australia for training? Those who came behind them? No! No! That is not how we train to get medals.

In volleyball, it is Western and Choiseul provinces that end up in the final all the time. Where are all those other players? Did they go as well? Or they went back to Titiana and Wagina?. Who are we sending for volleyball training?

In netball, the finalist in the recent Solomon Games are Temotu and Rennell and Bellona. Where are they now? In my opinion, our approach to preparing for and participating in the Pacific Games lack seriousness. Instead of selecting and training the best, we seem to overlook our best. This is likened to our students with higher GPAs not receiving any scholarships but students with low GPAs take scholarship. It seems to be the same case.

There is still opportunity and I would like to urge the Prime Minister to take control and instruct the very responsible people who look after the preparations to train our athletes well. We are the host and we should strive for excellence and demand more rather than settling for less. I am very serious on this, because to all of us, or to some of us, this will be the only Pacific Games that we will witness in Solomon Islands. Maybe the next Pacific Games will be in 40 years' time or 20 years' time. So, let us do a better work. Let us do a better job. Let us do something good for us so that we will part of history. His Excellency also mentioned athletes enjoying world class sporting facilities during the Solomon games and I commend the Government and donor partners who have invested time and resources into building those wonderful facilities. On that note, I wish to remind us that it is important to carefully plan and manage our facilities and in a sustainable and responsible manner, both before and after the games. This requires a long term perspective and a commitment to ongoing investment and maintenance to ensure that the facilities continue to serve our people for years to come. Additionally, those facilities must only serve their intended purposes. We do not want to see another case of our Town Ground Rugby Stadium, where all sorts of things spring up from the stadium. If it is a sport stadium, let it be for sports, and if it is for shops, let it be for shops. Do not mix things, because that will affect our sporting facilities. We have an example right in front of our eyes.

I want to touch on the separation of powers. We have heard so much from this honourable House and also from His Excellency the importance of the Doctrine of Separation of Powers, an important doctrine under the West Minster model of government. In our Constitution, our fore fathers have accepted this doctrine but

went further, by including it in the Constitution three important institutions that would exercise the functions in accordance with the doctrine of separation of powers.

I had attended every sitting of this honourable House where His Excellency delivered the Speech from the Throne. April 18th, 2023 was no different. At the sitting I noticed besides His Excellency at the Speakers bench, were the Constitutional heads of two arms of Government, the honourable Chief Justice, head of the Judiciary and the honourable Speaker, head of the Legislature. They listen attentively to His Excellency delivering his speech outlining plans by the third arm of Government for our people and country for this year.

There were mention of Parliament autonomy, the autonomy of the Judiciary. I seem not to find anything to advance what has been said. We as Members of Parliament and the Executive, have we ever paid any attention to what the head of Judiciary is telling us? Do we expect the Judiciary to protect and maintaining the rule of law and be an independent Judiciary? Exactly three months from yesterday, on January 24th, the head of Judiciary, the honourable Chief Justice, also delivered his speech on the opening of the legal year. I noticed something very important in his speech. He also talked about the three arms of Government and the importance of the independence of the Judiciary. The honourable Chief Justice also mentioned about the challenges first by the judiciary.

Allow me to quote from part of the speech by the head of the Judiciary, when he opened this year's legal year. I quote:

I wish to briefly set out an important constitutional aspect of why judicial independence is in the context of our democratic state. The starting point is always the constitution, which sets out the position of the Judiciary in the country. The position, however, continues to be misunderstood and misapplied, and thereby denying the Judiciary the much needed support that it required to enable it to discharge its duties effectively and efficiently, but also maintained the balance of good and responsible governance in our country.

The Solomon Islands Government is made up of three distinct pillars, the Legislature, the Executive, and the Judiciary. While we are more familiar with the other two arms, the Judiciary continues to remain in the shadows. I have said many times that we are not loud and noisy. We are the weakest branch. We do not hold the power of the purse nor the sword. Our power lies in our judgments and decisions that we deliver according to law and public confidence and trust. We do, however, exercise a crucial function in the overriding role of maintaining peace, stability, stability and good governance in the country through the administration of justice.

One of the hallmarks of judicial independence is financial independence, or security. This issue sadly continues to be misunderstood, so the judiciary continues to lag behind when it comes to budget support

I have quoted parts of the speech by the Chief Justice to illustrate the point that whilst His Excellency can thank the Judiciary for protecting and maintaining the rule of law, it does so at a cost . The proper financial support for the Judiciary is crucial for the maintenance of peace, order, and governance, something our nation so desperately needs.

I am saddened to note that apart from His Excellency's usual congratulatory language to the Chief Justice and the Judiciary, His Excellency outlines plans by the Executive Government but did not include any plans in relation to the Judiciary and, if I may add, the Legislature.

Finally, I would like to conclude by highlighting and appealing that when we consider Bills before us in this Sitting, I would like to ask the Government to bring the Honiara City Bill, the Provincial Government (amendment) Bill, and the Electoral Bill together. They should be prioritized because of their interconnectedness and the timing factor.

I thank His Excellency for his inspiring speech and words of motivation as we lead and serve our nation and people. I also extend my appreciation to the Prime Minister for proposing the motion that allows us to convey our thanks to His Excellence for addressing Parliament.

I support the motion.

Hon. JEREMIAH MANELE (*Hograno/Kia/Havulei—Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade*) (4 :25): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for recognizing the Member of Parliament for Hograno-Kia-Havulei Constituency to take the floor and to join other honorable colleagues who have spoken earlier to the debate on the Speech from the Throne. At the outset, let me on behalf of the Chiefs and people of Hograno-Kia-Havulei Constituency to acknowledge and congratulate His Excellency the Governor General for delivering the Speech from the Throne, outlining the legislative agenda and policy direction of the Government and highlighting key undertakings of the Government over the years and looking ahead.

On the same note, let me also sincerely thank the Honourable Prime Minister for moving this Motion, allowing us to debate the Speech from the Throne.

I will briefly reflect on a few areas highlighted by His Excellency the Governor General in His speech and then I will move on to focus on outlining some of the activities undertaken by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade.

First, I wish to acknowledge His Excellency's call and reminder for us leaders at all levels to be guided by our National motto, "To lead is to Serve". As leaders, we have an opportunity to serve and a responsibility to be accountable for our actions and decisions.

As we can all appreciate, these are challenging times. These are times that require strong leadership, unity and solidarity for us to be able to progress forward as a country.

I wish to commend, on this note, the honourable Prime Minister for his strong leadership during this difficult times and I thank Him for the trust and confidence on the opportunity to serve as his Foreign Minister, a responsibility I take very seriously.

His Excellency the Governor General alluded to the importance of hosting the 17th Pacific Games and previous speakers and colleagues have also made reflections and observations on this. This is indeed an opportunity for us as a nation and as one people to demonstrate that we too, like our neighbors, can successfully host such a huge event, building on our past experiences, which others have alluded to as well.

It is an honor and privilege for us to host the participating countries, officials and other visitors at that time. Let us warmly welcome them to our shores come November 19th or days before that but let us also prepare well to win as many medals as we can. As others have said, I think we have set a target for ourselves, a target of 40 gold medals.

Furthermore, the games will certainly leave a legacy for our people especially our youths in terms of modern sports facilities and also our students in terms of new and additional education infrastructure, such as the new dormitories for SINU, which the Athletes will use, but after that our students will use. I am sure the honourable Prime Minister will respond in detail to the other benefits of hosting the games in terms of the economic benefits and the financial gains going forward.

Thirdly, I joined previous Speakers to acknowledge the Governor Generals emphasis on building economic infrastructures, such as roads, wharves, airfields and telecommunication networks in a strategic locations that can spur economic growths and diversify our economic base.

While the focus has been on bigger provinces, it is important to also capitalize on the economic potentials and comparative advantage of middle and small provinces. Above all, our challenge is to turn the potential of our provinces and people into prosperity.

As a maritime State, shipping services too will continue to be crucial for our people and the economy. On this note, I wish to thank the Government, again, through the

Ministry of Infrastructure Development for helping my constituency to get an old vessel. It is worth about \$2 million, among the cheapest, but which is now serving the whole of Isabel Province.

In addition, our rural communities continue to need social infrastructure, such as housing, health, education facilities or buildings, churches and other community buildings. On this note, I wish to thank the Government through the Ministry of Rural Development and the Peoples' Republic of China for their ongoing funding allocations to all our constituencies, which helps my constituency to address some of the above rural needs and services.

Proceedings interrupted at 4.30pm

(Leave is sought and granted by The Speaker)

Hon. MANASSEH SOGAVARE: I move,

That Standing Order 10 be suspended in accordance with Standing Order 81 to permit the continuation of business until adjourned by the speaker in accordance with Standing Order 10 (5).

Question put and agreed to

(Debate continues)

Hon. JEREMIAH MANELE: Let me also acknowledge the Ministry of Health and Medical Services for funding the construction of the new Konide Area Health Center and Dedeu Clinic in my constituency. These were highlighted by the colleague Minister of Health and Medical Services in his intervention earlier.

On the same note, I am also grateful to the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, with donor support for funding various school facilities in my constituency, such as the Lilika Community High School Science Lab, which has been handed over recently. And of course, for the Government's initial funding for the Katova High School Dining Hall Project, which is in this year's budget.

Let me also at this juncture inform and remind my good people of Hograno-Kia-Havulei Constituency, that is due to funding limitations in any given year, it is not possible for us to address every request for projects, such as housing materials or transport that are submitted to the constituency office. 8 years or even 12 years or 16 years is not enough, as we have a lot of people and new families join the list to queue every year. The level of funding does not always correspond to the increasing number of requests or needs and wants.

However, I wish to assure you that, as your MP, I will continue to do my best to serve you and to continue the positive change that we started together eight years ago.

Above all, let me also join previous speakers to thank and applaud all our development partners, both bilateral and multilateral for their ongoing support towards our country's development and aspiration and endeavors.

I will now turn to matters relating to Foreign Affairs and External Trade. We live and operate in a fast-changing international system characterized by declining powers and emerging ones. Sadly, the world is divided along political fault lines. The Solomon Islands has adopted a position or policy of not choosing sides. We have adapted to the changing internal system by engaging with all and will refrain from supporting any externally-driven agendas that divides the world or target any third country.

Interest in the Pacific has seen various visits from our partners, which we warmly welcome as we try to collaborate smartly and innovatively in addressing our development agendas. Last week alone we welcomed the Deputy Prime Minister of New Zealand, the UK Foreign Secretary and the United Arab Emirate Ambassador. We also had bilateral discussions with Papua New Guinea, which was concluded last Friday. Last month the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Japan also visited our country and during the same week, a delegation from the United States was also in Honiara for discussions with the Government and the Opposition. Apart from high level visits, we also have meetings with other officials from other countries to discuss bilateral issues and areas of corporation.

Our region and especially our country has become a place of interest for our friends near and far lately. Therefore, it is important to manage our relations well with our friends and this is a responsibility that my Ministry continues to undertake seriously.

The Governor General in his speech made reference to the review of the National Development Strategy 2016 to 2025 and undertaken or led by the Ministry of National Planning and Development Corporation. This review is critical in terms of assessing how we are performing in terms of achieving the sustainable development goals and targets as far as we are concerned as a country and as it relates to us, but it is also critical in helping us to inform and prepare for a smooth transition strategy towards our LDC graduation. As you are aware, we are scheduled to graduation in December 2024. We have, however, requested United Nations to delay our graduation for another three years. That means graduating in 2027.

Our request to defer our graduation is also presented during the recent United Nations Conference on LDCs held in Doha, Qatar. The reasons to defer graduation is basically due to changes in our current situation following the impacts of COVID-19 on our economy and finances, the negative impacts of the November 2021 Riots on Government revenue and business houses, the ongoing impacts of climate change and natural disasters and also the uneven social and economic development among our provinces.

I note the observations made by my brother, the Member of Parliament for East Are'Are and the Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee on this matter and that we should be bold in terms of welcoming and accepting graduation. Yes, the Government is bold and we can be bold, but I think it is also important that we are realistic in terms of our assessments as to whether we are ready to graduate or not.

The additional time, the three years that we are given, hopefully formally by the UN towards the end of the year, we hope that this will give us sufficient time for us to develop a smooth transition strategy to ensure our graduation is sustainable, resilient and irreversible.

I would also like to reflect on the comment made by my dear brother and colleague Member of Parliament for East Are'Are said that graduation could help us to draw investors into the country, probably because the stigma attached to being an LDC, as he said may not attract investors. I beg to defer for that observation. I think and I believe investors, and I think this is a point that he has made later on in his intervention, I believe that investors are drawn to any country because of a number of conditions, and one of course is political stability, a point that he has raised, but also the existence of peace and security and also the existence of infrastructure services in that particular country, and of course laws and regulations that attract investors. So, my point is that the stigma of being an LDC does not attract investors and I beg to defer from that observation. As part of the strategy to graduate, the government has put in place trade arrangements with United Kingdom, European Union, the Pacific(???), the MSG and China as you are aware.

Now this, let me now turn to update Parliament on the work and achievements we made under the External Trade Portfolio of my ministry. The External Trade Portfolio with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs covers three main areas: Trade negotiations, Trade development and labour mobility.

The trade negotiation front, I am happy to inform Parliament that Solomon Islands is now in a better position in terms of accessing international markets through the different trade agreements and arrangements my ministry have negotiated and concluded over the years. These trade agreements provide preferential market access for our products and services to many countries. As you are aware, at the

sub-regional level, we have the Melanesian Spearhead Group Agreement and under this agreement of businesses and exports of our local products to the MSG block countries with duty free access for products except for alcohol, tobacco, fuel and sugar. The MSG Trade Block has a market size of 11million people.

In the regional level, Solomon Islands is party to the Pacific Islands Countries at trade agreements. Our local businesses and exporters can trade under these agreements and receive duty free access to other Pacific Island countries markets. It has the market size of 12.5million people.

On PACER PLUS, with Australia and New Zealand, the PACER PLUS chapter on development assistance commit Australia and New Zealand to provide implementation assistance. The quantum of funding is specified in a MOU level implementing agreement on development and economic cooperation. The implementation of the debt work program is administered by the APIA based PACER PLUS Implementation Unit. Some of the recent support to Solomon Islands through PACER PLUS includes the following: Recruitment of PACER PLUS National Coordinator just done in 2022. Trading to the private sector on Custom requirements, also completed in 2022. Support to update Customs Tariff Schedule which is in progress. Productive Capacity Building on SPS Training on fumigation treatment and accreditation scheme is also in progress and also vital capacity building with Bio Security Training was held in October 2022 and another will be in April 2023. The upgrade of Bio Security Treatment Facilities discussions are in progress with our Bio Security Authorities. Discussions are also under way on procurement of an incinerator for Bio Security. Also discussions in assistance for farmers and producers to promote products and marketing are also under way.

At the international level, as you are aware. Solomon Islands has already entered into an economic partnership agreement with European Union. A block that comprises of 27 countries with combined market size of more 400 million people. Solomon Islands is exporting fish and palm oil to the EU Market. According to 2021 data, we have exported tuna loins worth SBD\$317.7million and crude palm oil worth SBD\$143.3million to the EU Market. There is potential for these exports to grow.

In terms of trade with UK, MFAET has established a bilateral trade arrangement with the UK through its UK Pacific Economic Partnership Arrangement. We are exporting crude oil, tuna and cocoa beans to the UK Market. Again, according to 2019 data, our crude palm oil exports to the UK is worth SBD\$27million, tuna exports of SBD\$2.8million and cocoa beans worth SBD\$0.18million. There was no tuna or cocoa exports in 2021 apparently due to COVID 19. Again, there is potential for our exports in the UK Market to expand. On China trade, following the signing of a Duty Free Quarter-Free Market Access Agreement with China, my Ministry

had been working with relevant line Ministries to come up with the necessary regulations and protocols to facilitate our exports to China.

For exports of agriculture and fisheries products to PRC, a sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) protocol is required. The Ministry is currently at the stage of exchange of information on Solomon Islands product specific SPS related institutional and regulatory frameworks, which will assist us in gaining recognition of our certifications. This will be followed by negotiation of the SPS protocol process for completion of a finalized protocol which will take up to two years, giving the extension work to be done. My Ministry is committed to this task is that we can capitalize and get opportunities provided by the \$1.4 billion Chinese market.. Industrial products are not require the process of the SPS protocol and may commence exports immediately.

At the global level, Solomon Islands can trade with the rest of world through different generalized system of preferences and the most favored nation treatment rule of the WTO. My Ministry will continue to look for market access opportunities to ensure our country secures better trade deals for our people in different markets.

I took the liberty of highlighting these different trade arrangements, again, to show that indeed Solomon Islands is in a better position now when it comes to accessing international markets on a more favorable condition for our goods and services. The onus is now on our side to utilize and take advantage of this trading arrangements. How do we do that? Of course by developing our surplus side capacity to produce goods that meet international markets standards and volumes, which we can sell to other countries. This would require strong collaborative and coordinated approach by both the public and private sector if we are to implement our trade policies.

My Ministry has done its bit to contribute to developing our domestic surplus side capacity to trade and utilize this trade arrangements. With funding support of USD\$1.5 million provided by the WTO through the Solomon Islands Enhance Integrated Framework Program, my Ministry has delivered a number of trade related assistance to support the development of our agriculture sector.

Through collaborative efforts with the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, my Ministry have implemented the Enhance Capacity for Agriculture Trade, ECA Project, where we provide EIF funding assistance to local farmers and entrepreneurs to develop our cassava and taro sector by supporting them with agriculture trainings, farming tools and equipment, such as tractors and ploughing machines. We also provide funding for the procurement for cassava processing machines for downstream of cassava products.

On this note, just recently, I had the honor to visit Malaita Province to officially hand over a brand new taro pack house building worth \$1.5million. This Taro pack house

is aimed at encouraging rural farmers to cultivate their land and sale their products to this facility where they will be processed and sold to both domestic and international markets. My Ministry plans to established similar facilities in other provinces to encourage agriculture production.

As you aware cassava and taro are two agriculture crops that are grown in all provinces, where the majority of rural people are engaged in cultivating for income and food security. We would like to see that even small family based farming can contribute to producing the volume that we can export to international markets if proper coordination is put in place.

To ensure our local products meet international markets standards, my Ministry has set to fund some priority activities of a national public health laboratory so that our national lab can become an accredited institution that can test and certify our exports in the future.

Through the ECA project, we are provided \$1.3 million for the construction of the new office building for the national public health laboratory, which has already been handed over to the Ministry of Health. Let me now move on in terms of the diplomatic front. On the diplomatic front, and as by the DCGA foreign policy on pursuing opportunities on South-South Cooperation and partnership and embarking on a Look-North Policy, the Government, through my Ministry, is taking positive steps to ensure this foreign policy objective came into fruition. On this note, I am pleased to inform the honorable House that we are in the process of establishing our High Commission in New Delhi, India. An officer is on the ground to work on establishing the office, and will look after it while the head of mission is deployed later.

The establishment of our High Commission in India is important for us to enhance our bilateral relations and cooperation with India. India, as you know, is the 5th largest global economy in the world. Their assistance and support to the developing countries, including Solomon Islands, falls under the South-South cooperation framework. We have more to benefit from and gain from our engagement with India, and our presence in New Delhi is critical in this regard.

Focusing on Asia as well as the Middle East, especially the Gulf States, the Government is working on establishing an embassy in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). In the coming months, the Ministry will send a team to work on establishing our embassy in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. Our presence in the United Arab Emirate will help to boost our trade and investment opportunities in the part of the world. For the information of the House as well, the Government has decided to close its Savanah-based post and will use resources allocated to this post with the opening up of the embassy in the United Arab Emirates.

In China, sadly, our ambassador to the People's Republics of China passed on last year. We will be appointing a new ambassador. Formal announcement will be made in due course. The embassy in Beijing is expected to be officially opened by our Prime Minister during the course of this year.

Let me now move onto labor mobility. The Governor General has made reference to the Labor Mobility Scheme. On this note, I am proud to inform the house that Solomon Islands is well on course to reach the target that we set for ourselves in our 2019–2023 Labor Mobility Strategy.

In the Five-Year Labor Mobility Strategy, we set a target to secure employment for 5,550 Solomon Islanders to work under the Labor Mobility Schemes in Australia and New Zealand by the end of 2023.

To date, we have mobilized and sent a total of 5,470 workers. There are currently 4,728 workers in Australia and 742 workers working in New Zealand.

The Labor Mobility Unit of my Ministry is working aggressively to ensure benefits derived from the Labour Mobility arrangements are maximized to the fullest. Hence, the LMU is now working on two important initiatives with our partners: to conduct a study on remittances and to develop a policy framework for economic integration. These two initiatives will help guide our approach in maximizing the benefit from the income our workers earn overseas. We are looking to send more workers this year. We are optimistic that we will see the numbers rise further this year to more than 6,000 to 8,000 workers.

Looking ahead, my Ministry is working on reviewing our current Labor Mobility Strategy to accommodate the changing environment, the emerging issues and trends. We have made some initial projections on how we want to take this scheme forward.

Our projection is that for every calendar year for the next five years, we want to send 3,000 workers, and by 2028, we should have 16,000 Solomon Islanders securing jobs overseas under this schemes. I appreciate the contribution from the LMU to the economy. Solomon Islands is one of the stake holders that has benefited from the industry. Our Public Health System has also received support. More of our Nationals are getting documented in terms of having passports. In the last recruitment drive conducted we received more than 15,000 applications. We are processing these applications with candidates interviews and screening already underway. We have also visited Provinces that have low participation rates to do direct recruitment drive. We are working on the suitable means to do recruitment in our remote communities, so that they too can join and benefit from this scheme.

Mr. Speaker as I have alluded to on a number of occasions, Labour Mobility should be considered as a temporary solution to the higher unemployment rate we face in the country. The real long term jobs must be or should be created back here in our country to absorb the skills and experience gained while we are working abroad. This is an area that the government is fully aware of, hence our emphasis is to invest more in the productive sector.

Let me also take the opportunity to inform the Honourable House that the government has established a protocol guideline to grant clearance for Military aircrafts and Naval vessels. I think I have touched on this matter when a question was raised earlier this week relating to this particular matter.

The guideline is necessary to ensure we manage the influx of requests for clearances of Military aircrafts flying over our airspace and land or Naval vessels visiting our shores almost daily or regularly. We have been inundated with gun both Diplomacy and Military aircrafts entering our space. Last year more than hundred request was facilitated. There were even incidences where Naval vessels enter our territory waters without prior approval. To avoid such incidents and manage the request the guideline provides specific timing to submit requests and clearances to be done by various agencies such as Police, Customs, Aviation, MFAET and the Prime Ministers Office. This is very important so that we manage and protect our territorial sovereignty from militarization of our air space and gun boat diplomacy.

Solomon Islands takes its global responsibility seriously. On this note we have concluded all our Maritime Boundaries. The last one was with Fiji, signed off last year. As it stands we now have Maritime Boundaries with Fiji, Vanuatu, France, Australia, and Papua New Guinea. We have also acceded and ratified a number of conventions including the Born Convention, The World Intellectual Property Organization or Arrangement and the ratification of the NAGOYA Protocol, The International Convention on Civil Liberty for Bunkers and oil pollution.

This year alone we have acceded to the optional protocol to the CRC on the involvement of children in war or conflict. We have also acceded the World Customs Organization and then ratified the convention on the rights of persons with disability.

We now have Diplomatic relations with about 125 Countries. Last year we established relations with Bahrain and the Barbados. This year we are making outreach to more Countries.

Let me take the opportunity to finally to thank my Permanent Secretary and the Staff of the Ministry including our Ambassadors and High Commissioners and their Staff abroad for their support for their work in continuing to promote and defend Solomon Islands National Interest abroad, and of course in Country.

I would like to assure you that my Ministry will continue to work very closely with the Government with all line Ministries to ensure that we capitalize on the opportunities that we have before us.

Work closely with all stakeholders and our development partners.

With these few remarks, let me once again congratulate and thank His Excellency The Governor General for the speech from the throne. To the Prime Minister, thank you for moving the motion, to allow Parliament to respond to the speech. We will continue to do our best so that we ensure that we leave no one behind.

With these remarks, I support the motion and resume my seat.

Hon. MANASSEH SOGAVARE: Thank you Mr Speaker, I move that the debate on the question is adjourned to the next sitting day.

Question put and agreed to

(Debate on the question adjourned)

The SPEAKER: Honourable Members, according to earlier resolution of the House, Parliament is now adjourned.

Parliament adjourn at 5.00pm

[Edited]



Eleventh Parliament

First Meeting

NATIONAL PARLIAMENT OF SOLOMON ISLANDS

Wednesday, 26 April 2023

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

(Subject to Revision)

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NATIONAL PARLIAMENT OF SOLOMON ISLANDS**Wednesday, 26 April 2023**

The Deputy Speaker, Mr Commins Aston Mewa, took the Chair at 09:56.

Prayers.

Business of the House

ATTENDANCE

All were present with the exception of the

Motions

ADDRESS OF THANKS TO THE GOVERNOR GENERAL

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Honourable members debate on the motion moved by the prime minister continues and concludes today.

Mr CLAUDIUS TEI'IFI (*West Kwaio*) (09:59): Mr. Speaker, thank you for giving me the floor to contribute to the motion moved by the Honorable Prime Minister on the Speech from the Throne by His Excellency, Governor General of Solomon Island on April 17th, 2023.

This is my sixth month in parliament. I am so glad, so thankful and I appreciate my people for entrusting me this opportunity to become their leader than a member of this honourable House.

I recall back around this same time last year, still a humble and village elder and a member of Malaita Provincial assembly and grass root adhere of never dream of becoming who I am this soon. Sir, however, I believe nothing comes by accident. Everything works for good to those who love the Lord. I thank our God Almighty for giving me this chance to be a vessel and a mouthpiece for my people and a leader of our beloved country.

Mr Speaker, I want to begin by extending warm greetings from my good self and my good people of West Kwaio to His Excellency, the Governor General of Solomon Islands, the Prime Minister, ministers of the crown, the Leader of the opposition, the Leader of the independence group, fellow colleagues, ladies and gentlemen.

His Excellency's address last week was my first and last in this eleventh Parliament, and it is indeed a pleasure for me to receive an address directly from His Majesty the King of England's representative of the Head of State of Solomon Islands.

I would like to begin with my sincere appreciation and thanks to my predecessor, Titus Fika (deceased), for his leadership over the first two years of this parliament, for all his contributions to government business and for his contribution here in this chamber. Had it not been for his passing, he would have stood here to reply to his Excellency's address on behalf of our people of West Kwaio. But our good Lord called him home before he ended his term. Today I stand here to complete the work where he had left

Mr Speaker, my limited understanding of His Excellency's traditional Speech From The Throne is that, it is an annual occasion where our Head of State delivers his speech in person, explaining to Parliament the reason he was summoned. His Excellency's speech also set out the sovereign's policies and objectives for the new parliamentary session.

I note the speech outlines government's plans for the coming months. It is structured into seven objectives or themes. They are:

- (a) His reflection
- (b) The Pacific Games
- (c) The infrastructure projects
- (d) Policy programs to 2023
- (e) Legislative Calendar 2023
- (f) Separation of Powers
- (g) Closing Remarks

Sir I would like to touch on few of the seven key objectives briefly before I resume my seat.

Mr Speaker, I have this picture in my mind where a father, the head of his household calls his sons and daughters to gather at his house for a family reunion. Where he recall to them some important happenings that they have been through as a family and how they were able to overcome the difficulties. In the end he gave them counsel, advice and reminders on how they should go about continuing their lives and families.

The father counsels his children that he need not remind them again since they are adults and are well versed with their duties, professions and how to go about, managing their growing families, the challenges and opportunities they would face. Mr. Speaker this is my understanding on His Excellency reflection in a simple way. We all can agree the last three years had been tough for everyone due to things

beyond our control, such as the global COVID-19 pandemic and others of our own making such as the riot in 2021, the ongoing differences in government Policies, the agitations by some leaders against the ruling government.

All these happenings made life difficult for all of us and the people we lead. However I believe nothing last forever. All ill feelings hatred and differences have an end. With our combined efforts we will be able to overcome our challenges as a nation. We may be having differences for whatever reason as Leaders but with love and humility in our hearts, let us take a low stance and show the true spirit of Leadership to our people.

Sir on the Pacific Games, I support His Excellency's call for us to be gracious and respectful host to our fellow Pacific brothers and sisters. We are only seven months away from the opening ceremony and I take this chance to thank the ruling government and our Development Partners for their leading roles in building this infrastructures in preparation for the games.

We never host any event of such a huge magnitude and games in November will set a new benchmark for major events in the future. The games have transformed our sports facilities and athletes and the entire city in a general. Many of the major sporting facilities have not been in place the last 45 years. Their availability will enable our athletes access to modern sporting facilities. The event will see up to 10 thousand visitors in the country. A challenge I hope we will be able to handle. I am calling on everyone to join our hands together in making sure the game truly signifies our unity as a country of diversity.

I would like to encourage all of us to take ownership of the game. It should not be an event for residence in Honiara but it must cover the whole country in all Provinces. Whilst we all look forward for the games in November I would like us to also look beyond after the games.

The building of the massive infrastructures come at massive prices and the country definitely will not have the capacity to utilize and maintain them. These are public properties. They be will opened for public enjoyment. I note from the experience of how public assets like toilets, playgrounds, and sport facilities were managed. They were small yet we cannot look after them. A sudden increase in these infrastructure will pose greater responsibility on us, to maintain them. And we do not want to stand a chance to see that same of these facilities are decommissioned not long after the games due to poor management and lack of funds to sustain maintenance from normal wear and tear. On the Infrastructure project, I support His Excellency's call for building strategic infrastructure in strategic locations. This is a matter for parliament to consider. I have been here for only six months. However, the major problem I see with these issues is on challenging government policies.

Infrastructure planning and implementation across the country revolve around the policies of the ruling government of the day. Whenever a government changes, their policy changes so as the priorities placed on planned infrastructures.

The other challenge I see is the interest of our bilateral partners. The roles they performing in the selection of types of infrastructure project to implement, contributes to the challenge. They are only interested to support projects that are in line with their foreign policy objectives. These are some reasons why we still could not transform our economy with the level of investment in our infrastructure.

On this note, I want to highlight in this honorable Chamber that my people of West Kwaio, West Are'Are and traveling public using the South road, are suffering for the last three months without any attention or affection by the government of the day to repair the damaged culvert at Aonakinaki in West Kwaio. Aonakinaki is located within the area of Bina harbour where the government and aid donors poured millions of dollars to develop. The damaged culvert cut off the connection from the South to Auki causing so much frustration and expenses to the traveling public and more so market vendors of the sweet pineapple, copra, cocoa and timbers my good people have depended on for their livelihood. They are contributing to the socio-economic development of their families, the province and Solomon Islands at large. I do not think the repair of that culvert would cost millions of dollars. Yet it is a burden. Today no action has been taken to repair the damage.

I would like to offer a suggestion as a way forward on the infrastructure project development. Government might have already identified its strategic locations. And might have a place already with human capital to lead this process. I believe legislating for strategic infrastructure would enable immunity from interference by government of the day.

The planning, designing construction and management of infrastructure projects are mandated by an act of parliament. Therefore whenever a ruling government comes into power or changes, they cannot change the long-term plans. However they should align their policies to achieving plans set out in the legislation. This ensures the commitment and responsibility over this project continues. Any recommendation for change by government can be put as a motion for approval by the two-thirds majority in parliament and not at executive or policy level. Such would hold government accountable and to be committed to this cause from start to finish. His Excellency highlighted two main policies the DCGA government drives: the COVID-19 community transmission policy and the financial, fiscal, and macroeconomic response policy. I observe that there is already a shift of focus and priority for these two main policies. This year, for the Pacific Games 2023 and probably in preparation for the 2024 National General Election, that everyone in this

honorable chamber have vested interest, to be re-elected despite our respective performances to our people.

We have overcome some of the challenges paused by the COVID-19 pandemic last year. However, the challenges and frustration caused by a lack of basic drugs from the hospital, clinics, and rural health centers remains an issue. It is becoming chronic as I speak. This is not a matter of policy but an ongoing commitment and priority that any government of the day must ensure that it delivers to its people. It is a basic necessity that cannot be traded off with any other policy priority of any government. We might not have the basic infrastructure, provide employment, or provide adequate income generating opportunities to our people. However, the provision of basic drugs and medicine to our people is a must that we cannot continue to prolong. It is not different from committing a crime or treason on our people, who rely on these basic drugs for their health and wellbeing. I beg the government of the day to address this matter as soon as possible.

On the review of the national development strategy, it must be inclusive, practical, to our localities. The amount of resources that are available to us or vested in our hands on our discretion as national and elected leaders. The CDF grant must be strongly attached to discourage the handout mentality that all of us leaders are practicing to this day.

On the truth and reconciliation commission report, I fully support his Excellency's recommendation to the nation that the summary report of the TRC must be tabled in parliament so that the government can be questioned and held accountable for what it has done so far, in addressing the recommendations in the TRC report.

On the final draft of the proposed federal constitution; I think there is no urgency in implementing the proposed federal constitution. However, as rightly stated by His Excellency, the issue is the readiness of the programs to adopt the federal system of government. In preparing provinces for the federal system of government, the government must exhaust its support to the province through the PCDF program and bring the long standing Revenue Sharing Scheme Bill to this chamber for enactment, as a way of empowering the provinces in their preparations and where they assessed or appraised on their readiness for adoption of the Federal System. As a matter of fact, constituencies receive more in terms of government funding than the provincial grants which is based on a sound distribution matrix for fair and equal distribution, just like the PCDF grant paid to the provincial governments each year. The on going practice of equal distribution of CDF to constituencies has denied constituencies with large population, the opportunity for equal participation in economic and livelihood development. This has to be reviewed. I hope the review of the CDF Act takes this into consideration.

I concur with His Excellency that important bills and reviews he mentioned of the Acts must be brought to parliament this year. This is to enable us to exercise our mandated role, to review and to make laws that are important for this nation. Some of those laws have outlived their relevance and need immediate reviews.

On the separation of powers, we must not turn a blind eye on the current practice with CDF and other line ministry grant to constituencies including scholarship awards. As clearly stated by His Excellency under the Westminster system and doctrine of the separation of powers. Our role is to legislate. It is separate from executive function. I hope the review of this CDF Act will take that into consideration and come up with a robust system of accountability on that matter.

Before, I resume my seat, I would like to thank His Excellency, The Governor General of Solomon Islands for the Speech from the Throne, the Prime Minister for moving the motion and Speaker for the opportunity to contribute to the debate, Ministers of the Crown for supporting the Prime Minister in leading our country, The Leader of Opposition for the insightful questions that were asked to the government, our development partners, public servants, law enforcement agencies, grassroots people, farmers, fishermen and my good people of West Kwaio for all the support in one way or the other.

With these few remarks, I support the motion.

Hon. AUGUSTINE MAEUE (*Lau/Mbaelelea—Minister for Agriculture and Livestock*)
(10:25): Thank you Speaker and I want to thank you for recognising once again the MP for Lau and Baelelea.

I would like to thank the Speaker of National Parliament, The Chief Justice, The Honourable Prime Minister, cabinet ministers, the Leader of Opposition, The Leader of Independent and honourable members of parliament, Provincial Premiers and members of the provincial assemblies, Heads of missions and members of the diplomatic corps, church leaders, constitutional post holders, permanent secretaries, traditional chiefs and leaders, the good people of Solomon Islands, ladies and gentlemen. I wish to acknowledge the sovereignty of almighty God who is the divine sustainer for all things. He is the one who choose one to rule and not to rule.

I want to bring joyful greetings from my good people of Lau/Mbaelelea Constituency and would like to thank the head of state, Governor General who is the constitutional representative of His Majesty the King. The Head of the State of the independent democratic state of Solomon Islands presented the traditional Speech from the Throne on the floor of parliament.

It is my humble duty to represent my good people of Lau/Mbaelelea Constituency in responding to the traditional Speech from the Throne. It is a very sincere speech to remind all of us of our duties, past performance and what is expected of us members of the Eleventh Parliament, to do before our term lapse in December 2023.

I wish to appreciate the Prime Minister and Democratic Coalition for Government Advancement, for the bravery to face the many challenges till we reach the sixth meeting of this parliament. I also wish to thank those on the opposite bench, the Leader and the members of the Opposition group and the members of the Independent group for their contribution, to ensure we are guided by our constitutional rights.

This is Solomon Islands, a democratic country and that we must at all times respect the rule of law and principle of representative democracy. As national leaders we need to stand together and serve the interest of our people, so that they can enjoy love, joy, peace and prosperity.

I am so shocked as a leader to see symptoms of division in our beloved country. Let us be reminded that we are duty bound to ensure Solomon Islands stands united and prosper from shore to shore.

The past four years we have encountered number of challenges which I believe have affect our economic stability. The global COVID-19 pandemic and November 2021 riot have cost our country's economy.

There are bills that need to be deliberated on the floor of parliament before the Eleventh Parliament dissolve. May those responsible ensure all these reviews on bills are prepared in good time and in compliance with the democratic process.

The ongoing activities in the country which came as a result of our multilateral and bilateral relationships must be appreciated. The DCGA led by the honorable prime minister is committed to see our beloved Solomon Islands stands united, recover economically and build resilience. Together we stand, united Solomon Islands.

Let me make my brief contribution on two points in this House as the Minister for Agriculture and Livestock. Agriculture is steadily progressing after we have a new permanent secretary this year with a new redirection strategy. The ministry is also affected with a huge cash flow problem to implement some of its programs. The ministry is also liaising with the Ministry of Commerce in its efforts to improve services targeting rural livelihoods in rural areas. This began last year after the ministry had its new permanent secretary, towards the end of last year.

Mr. Speaker, agriculture represents the biggest growth sector. I can assure you that the government is prioritizing agriculture. We expect that it will not be another RCDF. Should we make good use of the RCDF by prioritizing agriculture, it is

indeed lifesaving for our people which is not a waste of funds. Should there be more funds being invested in agriculture, I would distribute them fairly to the hard-working farmers of the country. You might not see and feel it, but little by little, agriculture is effectively helping our people. I will not dwell any longer on that, but let us see what the Ministry of Agriculture will do in the country before we can tell whether we do something or not.

Honorable Speaker, Lau/Mbaelelea is one of the biggest constituencies in the country in terms of size and population. I have tried to bring down necessary developments and services to the people during my term in Parliament. Yet little has been achieved. I must thank the good people of Lau/Mbaelelea for their understanding and contribution made to our country. I must assure my good people that we will still continue with our programs for this year.

It is commendable to note that the honorable Prime Minister has highlighted in his honorable speech that one of our constituency flagship activity. That is the Fadila-Masilana Road. This road is funded with funds from the RCDF and support from the Ministry of Infrastructure. We appreciate the Prime Ministers remarkable statement to mention this Faadila Road.

The people of Lau/Mbaelelea constituency look forward to the government's support for this road. We expect the first phase of this road to be completed before the end of this year. We plan that it will be opened by a government representative before the house dissolves on December 31.

Again, I want to remind those who wish to contest in this up-coming national general election in 2024. You are mostly welcomed to try. You have all the democratic rights to prove who you are to the people. It is not good to create friction among us for the sake of elections. All of us have the democratic right to contest the national general election. Let the winner represent our people.

Mr. Speaker, I am saying this because some of the intending candidates in our constituency of Lau/Mbaelelea, before their names come out, they already clashed with each other. The election has not started! No! No! Mr. Speaker. Everyone has the right to stand. If anyone wants to win, go and talk to our people in the rural areas. Do not go around in front of the shops or in front of hardware's in Honiara and campaign in these places. These places do not vote. It is our people in our constituency who will vote. So I want to mention that here, since some of our intending candidates go around the warehouses and preferred suppliers shops to campaign. Are these will be the ones to vote? I thought our people at home are the ones who will vote. If you want to campaigns, go and do it at home. I have been saying this for a long time now. It is our people back home who will vote. If you want to campaign, go and talk to them in the village and let the people decide. I am

not campaigning. I am just talking about what has been happening. Elections will be 3 months into next year, which is April 2024. Those who want to contest in Lau/Mbaelelea, you have to go home to do your campaigning. People will choose who to vote.

I am always available to represent my good people should they still need my service and contribution in representing them in this Honourable House. That is for next year. If you still believe in the current Member for Lau/Mbaelelea to lead, you vote him back in April next year.

I also appreciate those who continue to make many criticisms against the current Member for Lau/Mbaelelea. I accept it. This is done in the Lau/Mbaelelea Facebook Forum and other Facebook forums. I have been criticized. They claimed to know more. This is not easy I tell you! To reach where I am sitting now is not easy. Do not think that it is easy. Do not just sit and criticize on Facebook. You need to look at yourself in case the current member is better than you.

Rural people will feel and see the goodness of your work. Those who criticize are only good at criticizing. Let me say this, God sent Jesus, yet, it is us Christians who crucify him on the cross. He is innocent. The same for the honorable Member for Lau/Mbaelelea. When does good things for Lau/Mbaelelea, people will just criticize him. These are well educated people. But they never did anything for the people. "If you can not beat him, come and join him".

To my good people, our program will begin very soon as we are going towards the end of this year. Be prepared. Together let us help each other for the good of ourselves.

We want to thank the Solomon Islands Government DCGA for its continuous support for my people and the support by the Chinese Embassy towards the construction of our road. I want to thank them and the other partners. We will continue to become partners in support of each other in developing Solomon Islands together.

With these few remarks, I would like to thank the Honourable Prime Minister for this Motion. I may resume my seat.

Mr. JOHN MANENIARU (*West Are Are*) (10:40): Thank you Mr. Speaker for giving me the opportunity. I will be very brief because my colleagues have already spoken on the issues that I have an interest in.

Let me thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to join colleagues to add my voice on behalf of my people of West Are'Are Constituency, to the debate of the motion moved by the honorable Prime Minister on April 19, 2023, *That an address be presented to His Excellency the governor general as follows: We the National Parliament of*

Solomon Islands here assembled beg leave to offer thanks for the speech which has been addressed by you to parliament.

Thank you Prime Minister for the Motion, which gives us the opportunity to address and present to His Excellency the Governor General, the vote of thanks as a response. We want to continue to pray for our Governor General for strength and also wisdom as the Head of State, representing the King.

Let me sincerely thank His Excellency the Governor General, Sir David Vunagi, the Governor General of Solomon Islands and the Constitutional representative of His Majesty King Charles III. Thank you, Head of the Independent Democratic Sovereign State of Solomon Islands for delivering the Traditional Speech from the Throne on 17th April 2023, for bringing warm greetings and special well wishes from His Majesty King Charles III to us in Parliament and also the people of Solomon Islands. It is an important tradition that we have the opportunity in Parliament through the speech from the throne.

I wish to also thank the Honorable Chief Justice, who is also present during the delivery of the Traditional Speech from the Throne. And his presence indeed graced Parliament. On the same note, I wish to also thank the Speaker for his presence, which gave us the honor, as our leaders who were present during the Speech from the Throne.

His Excellency then went on to reflect on four years ago 24th April 2019, when the Honorable Prime Minister was elected into office, in this very honorable Chamber. A riot was followed. His Excellency noted this with great sadness. We also join him in that. It was a really sad event. We can go back to it, but it happened when we undertake one of the important functions to elect the Prime Minister. That was four years ago.

We can go back another four years leading up to the election of the Prime Minister again in 2014. There was the Mbike Island shooting incident that almost killed half of the elected Members of Parliament. That was also during the election of the Prime Minister. I would like to see the wisdom of the Governor General, that he can share with us the honourable Members, on the incidences that occurred immediately after the election of our Prime Minister.

I wish to join His Excellency in the reflection and ask the question, why is this so for our country?

Why did it happen? When did it happen? In the past or recently? But I think the wisdom that His Excellency was trying to put through in his reflection is that we should also look into why it happened in our beautiful country.

We can even go back another four years when we elected the Prime Minister. That event was referred to as the Black Tuesday. These things happened when we elect the Prime Minister of this country.

The same question remained, and the same question continues to be asked, but it is important in my view that we reflect on as leaders, as honorable elected Members. Why are these things happening? I will leave that reflection to us. We pray for that matter and continue to think about it very seriously.

I think it is high time that we seriously review and investigate this question as to why this is happening when we go into the election of our Prime Minister, so that we can come up with answers, so that we can peacefully elect our Prime Minister and he becomes a blessing for his country. Let us take on that responsibility to investigate and review our systems as to why this is continuing to occur. It is almost like a four-year occurrence in our country.

His Excellency went on in his reflection, calling for unity and standing together with one vision to help our country and our people grow and prosper. This is to actually happen in preparation for our National General Election, which is next year. I think that is what the Minister for Agriculture is starting to warm up for during his speech. I think it is good that the Minister has the eagerness to start looking at the responsibility.

The standing in unity and standing together with one vision, one people, one country, I support the Minister for Agriculture for reiterating that, for our people to grow and prosper.

It demands that we work hard to ensure that our future elections for Prime Minister are peaceful and a blessing for our country, our children, and our children's children. That is something that we must reflect on as reflected in the wisdom of His Excellency to us.

His Excellency reminds us all Members of the National Parliament, Provincial Assemblies, church leaders, chiefs, community leaders, women, men, youth, boys, and girls of our national motto, "To Lead is to Serve". If we keep reminding ourselves of this, we will not have problems. There will always be peace in our country if we embrace this motto. There will of course be prosperity.

Maybe something is not right with how we live this motto. Maybe "To Lead is to Slave" brings curse to us, on major events of our country. We keep pointing fingers, but who should be responsible? This is why I made the call that we should make a review. The Government should engage in serious review and investigate what we should do to stop those things when we go into elections.

In commenting, I would like to thank the DCGA and all stakeholders who had led us in the fight against this pandemic. Above all, we thank our God Almighty for blessing our country and keeping us safe from this pandemic. Other countries are still suffering. As we know, and my brother the honourable Minister for Finance will know, it is not a good one. It affects our economy and we are continuing to struggle with it. That is one cause of why our economy is on its knees. Therefore, we very much happy and thank all our stakeholders , the Ministry of Health and Medical Services who has led the team in this fight.

The fight is still not over. We are still inside the blessing of the God so we must also continue to be alert and continue to do work in areas of preparation and continue to be ready as this pandemic as we heard from the acting Minister of Health and Medical Services who had confirmed that were already cases in the last few months. So, the pandemic is still around and we must continue to be alert and prepare for it.

As also highlighted by His Excellency, the COVID-19 pandemic and the November 2021 riot have left our country in an economic hardship. An economy that is struggling to have head above water, hence our many services needs are not met and provided for. This is exactly the situation we face when we go through the challenges. They have caused us these hardship and so it is good that we continue to reflect on improving what we need to do in terms of preparing.

His Excellency highlighted a man made economic disasters which are negatively impacting our economy can be avoided. I believe that our economic disasters will continue if we do not put our House into order. Let us stand with the Audit Report submitted to Parliament by the Auditor General. What I am getting at, means that if we do not put our house in order, we do not look at the problems that we have created ourselves. The mismanagement, our systems which is not working, continue to expect, then we must go back and clean up so that God will bless us more. If we continue doing wrong with those things, it will always be there to haunt us in the corners of the Ministries, of our systems, of our work places.

We have received this audited report. Let us commit. If Government can lead us with a political view then the reports are with us. The next thing is to tackle them so that we commit to starting a new term for our Parliament as well as putting a new platform where we address prosperity in this country.

I believe, there are a lot of issues and problems in our system that we need to weed out. But who will start? There are reports that are in the system here in Parliament, in our Ministries, who will pick them up and action them?

It needs collective efforts and commitment from all of us in the honorable Chambers as well as those the Public Service and private sector, if want this country to prosper and receive continuously blessing that comes out of these things as a result.

Therefore, I wish to reiterate that it is high time for us to look at our backyard and prepare our country to change its pathway.

Let us fight the man-made disasters and those behind it, if we to really address why we have known advance or prosper as expected. We have to look at the problems and who cause them. This is a small country. Everyone knows what is happening.

Therefore, if we finish this term, the Government should start us this term and going forward so that we prepare for the Pacific games and also prepare for a new platform for our country, if there is a space for us to make some changes in that regard.

On clean up, I want to thank the DCGA and Public Service and private sector for the clean up they are doing every Fridays in our town. If do it outside, we should also do it inside so that Solomon Islands can be a fresh country and our God will bless us accordingly because certainly we are Christian country.

Let us launch the big clean up of our systems and also clean up ourselves, knowing that one blind man cannot lead another blind man. Thus, let us be committed leaders and look at what we can do if there a space available for those actions.

Regarding the Pacific Games, I also join other colleagues who have taking the floor before me to congratulate the DCGA and all stakeholders for the Pacific Games infrastructures, as stated, such as the roads, mentioned by the deputy Prime Minister of MID, beautifying our city and we congratulate everyone in their efforts to continue to meet the datelines for our Pacific Games.

I encourage the Government as they continue to tell us on the floor in planning to manage our facilities after the games. When the games are over, this will be an investment in the youths, as we already heard, and our sporting people and legacy for our future generations.

The game will be a historic event and looking forward to it and I fully supporting the Government in all programs and plans to make this a very successful history, the hosting of the Pacific Games. Again I also join the Prime Minister in the call to be ready to welcome about more than 5,000 athletes that will be competing on our shores. It is going to be a historic event. Let us prepare for it.

Let us also prepare to welcome our visitors to our shores, of up to 10,000 and it is a big thing. I think during the games, we only hosted a mini games many years ago, which is a small number. This is a very big one. With these things, it means that our country must prepare so that we have open hearts to welcome our visitors, more so the athletes that will represent their countries to come and compete with each other on our shores. I want to continue to encourage the Government to work with our athletes toward our goal of 40 gold medals. That is a good goal. We must get the 40

gold medals. It will not be easy. It requires a lot of preparation for our athletes to compete with our neighboring athletes. Our target is to win 40 gold medals.

Let us continue ensuring that our infrastructures that represent a huge investments in our country and they must be viable into the distant future. My worry is that our existing facilities are not really well looked after. This are world-class. They are many and also huge. Are we going to have the resources to really look after them well, when we do not even look after our minor sporting infrastructures?

I know times have changed and are not the same, and I trust the Government will put in place a plan for these facilities. I worry is that we are not even able to look after our minor infrastructures. That is the challenge that I want to flag as an encouragement to the plan that we have already heard.

In terms of infrastructure projects, particularly those related to the Pacific Games, let me again thank the honorable Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister, and the Ministry of Infrastructure for their plans. It is an important one, and I am happy that the Minister responsible for infrastructure has assured us that we are on schedule in terms of the delivery of these important infrastructures for the Pacific Games and our city as well as our readiness to welcome our visitors and athletes. So I am happy with the Minister and his Ministry as they continue to lead us towards the schedule for these Pacific Games facilities.

I agree with His Excellency that our challenge since independence has been the lack of strategic and transformative infrastructure to drive the economic growth of our country, and it remains a challenge today. When the Deputy Prime Minister, who is the Minister responsible for infrastructure, made his response to the Speech from the Throne, he informed the Parliament, and I am pleased with his advice to the honorable Chamber.

It is really a challenge. We are an island nation and to really connect us, a lot of our infrastructures are not in place. We have talked about a few infrastructures, in some constituencies, but I would like to share some of my concerns with the hardworking minister. One is that some of our infrastructures, which the Government has paid for, are incomplete, especially outside of the city. It must be completed because we paid for them. I am also aware that there are a handful of projects that have been paid for but have not yet started. Can the minister take this up so that we address them because they are important in terms of our infrastructure programs. Let me thank the Donor Partners with the Ministry and the Government for supporting this great initiative and also our infrastructure programs and projects in the country.

In terms of natural disaster, I also agree with His Excellency that Solomon Islands is the second most vulnerable country in the world. The increase in frequency of

severe weather events, including cyclones, heavy rains, flooding, landslides, earthquakes and even tsunami, are the major challenges for our country.

That one is one of my concerns, but I trust the Deputy Prime Minister. Our town can easily be inundated when it rains. I hope that the work that will begin soon will address it, so that if during the games, I will help pray that there will be no rain. It is not good for our city. There will be flooding and mud everywhere. Our drainages will be blocked. I know the Government through the Ministry of MID have the plan to address this.

I think the other important issue in the reflections of His Excellency is the increase of frequency in the severe weather events. It will continue to occur. We cannot stop it. We just pray and hope that these things will not come to our country. We must prepare for such things.

For the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, I just want to thank the Minister for his programs, together with the donor partners our development partners for the health infrastructure facilities in the country. The Minister, in his speech, he said that there area health centers and clinics, some are completed.

Those infrastructures are good. We need them. The problem I see is with the operation of those infrastructures. When we build an area health center, equipment, medicine and staff have to be provided. This is not happening. We only build the infrastructure, like area health center, but there are not equipment. I think that is important.

For us in South Malaita, we are thankful to the Government for Afio. A bit more help with the equipment and the facility so that we do not go to Auki. At the moment, our emergencies are still rushed to Auki. It takes long hours at sea, but that is the real situation and that is basically what I am getting at. Let us equip those clinics, those facilities that we built so that they serve our people.

There is also the ongoing stocking of those clinics and facilities. The Minister was responding to a question on delivery of the medicines. This is a real concern. The clinics in the villages usually run out of basic drugs. If the issue with delivery of medicines is not addressed, it will really affect them. It is a problem when even the basic drugs are not in our rural clinics.

It is a very big concern because our clinics in the villages they are usually empty. And delivery if they cannot fix the freighting and the ships to take those things to go the medicines it will not work.

And if simple medicines cannot stay on the shelves of the clinics

With Fisheries and Marine Resources, I would like to thank the DCGA Government for their work, particularly for the Bina Project in West Kwaio.

We look forward to welcoming the first canned tuna in 2025 as been assured to the floor. Bina Harbour was a late 60s project in the record that I saw. Let us be serious about investing in this project. It will involve 3,000 employees and the spin-offs will create up to 5,000 employees. It took many years until today.

If the investment commitment we see happening to the 2023 Pacific Games, happens for a handful of our projects, our country will pick up. We should leave this matter to the capable and powerful Minister of Finance who drives our economy. This is crucially important and I have no hesitation in highlighting it.

With the Ministry of Traditional Governance and Ecclesiastical Affairs, the Traditional Governance Bill is a good Bill. We need to bring it back. It is good for those at the village level because it deals with the governance structure. The Minister of Lands is working on the Customary Land Recording Bill as well.

For me, chiefs continue to work. I am yet to see the Minister. Two of our panels have been suspended. When you bring people from other tribes to make judgments on tribes that they have no clue on, can cause problems. I am very happy to inform the House that work is continuing. The panel can be suspended for now. Let the chiefs do the work. There is a structure in place.

Let us look at ways where we can open up 80 percent of our land that is customary for investment. We must encourage our rural people, the custodians and the resource owners to participate.

These policies are in place and the legal framework is what I want to call upon the Ministry of Traditional Governance and Ecclesiastical Affairs to quickly bring the Bills.

The Ministry of Agriculture is a big Ministry and the Minister already informed us of what his Ministry is doing. Looking at our country, our programs never reach some of the areas in our country. The Minister need to bring a list of how he holistically addresses agriculture in Solomon Islands in terms of policy and budget. That applies to other Ministries as well.

If we look at Solomon Islands as a country and continue to call upon everyone to remain united together, we must not leave anyone behind in terms of our policies, programs, as well as projects. There are certainly remote places in our country that have been waiting but are missing out. There are also other reasons for equitable distribution and holistic approach to our people.

In the legislative calendar for 2023, I would like to congratulate DCGA on the proposed Bills for the 6th Meeting of the 11th Parliament. A total of 11 Bills are expected. My committee will certainly need time and resources to really support the work. As the chair of the Bills and Legislation Committee, I fully welcome the announcement by the DCGA and the Prime Minister about Bills coming in June for us to look into.

In terms of the separation of powers, I agree with His Excellency on the separation of powers between the Legislature, Executive, and Judiciary. His Excellency raised an important matter in his speech, that of the separation of powers. His Excellency made those remarks based on what appears to His Excellency as the Bills and Legislation Committees embarks on a policy review exercise through its consultations. His Excellency further stated that this is not the function of the Legislature. This is true. I, as the chair of the Bills and Legislation Committee, and my committee Members know such task is not part of our function.

It is well-known in this House and in previous Houses that any Bills submitted to Parliament by the Executive Government for consideration must have been drafted pursuant to Government policy. I understand that it is also the practice of the Attorney General's Chambers that drafting instructions must be made by instructing Ministries based on Government policies. No law should be brought before Parliament without policy support. Those of us in the Bills and Legislation Committee know this very well.

That is the role of the Bills and Legislation Committee. We look the Bills on behalf of the legislature to ensure there are no errors. The accompanying policy is always comes from the Government.

The functions of the Bills and Legislation Committee are stated in Order 71 of the Standing Orders of the National Parliament. This is also highlighted by His Excellency. These are functions in addition to those contained in Standing Orders 50 and 55. Standing Orders 71(f) specifies that one of the functions of the Bills and Legislation Committee is to also examine such other matters in relation to legislation that, in the opinion of the committee, require examination. In fact in the opinion of the Committee require examination. We the Committee and I must inform your House and I assure that order we have worked within and with it. We are clear. With this and our examinations, we must do it well. The government brought it to Parliament and the Bills and Legislation Committee must sit down with it. That how we can sleep well. Let us do it right. It is a law for our country. It is a law for our people and it is a law to achieve good outcome for our country and the future. That is this function. I assure you that we have done this.

Whilst I appreciate the Opposition of this House, making policies review in its capacity as the alternate government, I beg to differ from His Excellency's view that it is not of the person or the Bills and Legislation Committee to review government policy in relation to a Bill referred to it by Parliament. This is clear. The Bill comes, we sit for it and if we see that it is a straight forward one then we let it go through. But if the Bill has interest of us in the country, then it means that we must extend it. For example, the Bills that will come like Forestry. Forestry is not only for Honiara it must also go to our resource owners, so my Committee will have to extend it.

Unfortunately, due to the constraint of resources, we can only reach the provincial centers and take in and regard that as representation of our people in the rural villages, in the constituencies in the provinces. Let us be part of it and that is the function and responsibility of my committee. It is our people, they are the resource owners and if any Bill is of interest to them, which will affect their lives and their livelihood, they deserve the same and that is the standpoint of my Committee.

I hold this humble view and I differ from His Excellency's view based on two research. First, Standing Order 71(f) specifically authorises the Bills and Legislation Committee to examine Bill matters in relation to legislation. Through examining Bill matters in relation to legislation. The words 'matters related to legislation.' It is wide enough to empower the Bills and Legislation Committee to enquire into government policy from which the Bill matters.

Second, Standing Order 48(5) (c) allows members of the Parliament to debate to matters and principles of the Bill. A debate on the matters and principles of a Bill will undoubtedly touch on the current policy supporting the Bill. Particularly if the mover of the Bill is a government minister. With Standing Order 71(f) is read with Standing Order 48(5) (c), it is clear that the report by the Bills and Legislation Committee containing matters relating to legislation would greatly assist members of Parliament in their debate at the second reading. That is important for us to be clear on in terms of the observations by His Excellency on Standing Order 71.

Thirdly, the bill could be amended during the committee stage or after the second reading. Certain amendments are typographical in nature. There is opportunity during the committee stage for members to propose and vote on amendments. Any amendment that is not typographical is weak and may arise from a matter of policy. Therefore, it is important that is addressed by the BLC and outlined to the hosting and instructing ministry. That is the process with draft legislations under Standing Order 71, which is the function and responsibility of the BLC.

Having said that, I would agree with His Excellency only if his remarks in the speech relate to bills and legislation committee conducting hearings on my days that are not in relation to any bill before the House, and that is important. If my

committee is going out and doing its own business by leaving the bill in the box, then I will agree with His Excellency.

I would also want to clarify here that the current bills and legislation committee are indigenous citizens of Solomon Islands and therefore, have the simplest responsibility for this country and its citizens and children as far as legislation is concern. It is not an easy responsibility as we look at the future of our country and citizens in making sure our country's law belongs to our country. These are highlight by His Excellency regarding my committee for going out and doing consultation is in Standing Order 71. However, it is good for us to go to our people as extension of the parliament. When you are here, extension of parliament is to go and meet our people, an opportunity through our parliamentary committees. I always appreciate bills, but it is not easy.

However, on the business going out with the bill that has their interest and important that they participate on it. It is a good practice that His Excellency has said. I totally agree with him and I did not have any more thoughts and intention as the current chair of the Bills and Legislation Committee to change it around.

The call by the Minister of Agriculture for the BLC to remain united and properly review our (draft) laws is something my committee takes at heart. That is a response to the observation by His Excellency on separation of power as well, as standing order 71 mandates that function and responsibility to my committee.

In conclusion, I want to thank His Excellency the Governor General for the traditional Speech from the Throne. I want to wish him and family God's blessing. May God continue to grace him with wisdom as he lead as our Head Of State. On the same note, on behalf of my people of West Are'Are Constituency, I want to thank the Honourable Chief Justice who sits during the speech to give that honor and power of his presence. I want to pray that God will continue to bless him and family also. Sir, thank you for being part of the traditional speech from the throne. Your presence and that of your staff also need noting. And I want to really appreciate them on behalf of my people.

Thank you for the opportunity. I support the motion and resume my seat.

Hon. PETER SHANEL AGOVAKA (*Central Guadalcanal—Minister for Communication and Aviation*) (11:31): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to participate in this debate on the motion and the address of thanks to the governor general.

Sir, first of all I acknowledge and thank the Prime Minister for moving the motion. I think some of us have read the motion. The motion that is addressed to be presented to His Excellency, the Governor General, is as follows:

"We, the national parliament of Solomon Islands, here in this assembly, beg leave to offer thanks for the speech that has been addressed by you to Parliament".

And on this note, I would like to thank the Governor General, the representative of King Charles III, and the Head Of State for the traditional speech from the throne".

Mr. Speaker, may I deviate a bit in going back to our historical settings? Then I will come to my ministry.

In 1568, the explorer Alvaro De Mendana arrived on our shores. Actually, they were exploring or searching for the southern continent, which is now Australia. There were no foreign sailors or explorers visiting Solomon Islands for the next two hundred years, after Mendana arrived in the Solomon Islands. In 1767, as you know, Mr. Speaker, a British ship landed in Santa Cruz, and the rest is history.

In the 18 century, European whalers and traders brought iron tools and other foreign goods, which gave greater advantage to coastal communities. They could trade with them compared to those inland.

Mr. Speaker, the reason I allude to this is because when we end this historical setting, you will understand where I am coming from.

The difference in wealth between the groups widens as time goes by. The coastal trading left out most of the other islands that do not live in the trading areas and do not have the commodities that the whalers wanted to trade for. Such as sea cucumber, pearl shell, and turtle shell. This is a dilemma that has plagued us to this day. Development is concentrated on islands where whalers and traders can trade with the locals.

Solomon Island came under British rule in 1893 as a protectorate. And you know what, Mr. Speaker, the British ruled through Headman and Councils appointed by the District Officer of the government. The role of the Traditional Chiefs was not recognized in a formal way by the government. The British system did very little to include a real voice of the local population in the way that they were governed.

You know as a result of this Top down approach the level of participation by the local population and their Chiefs was very low. I think we can see it today as well. This brought about two phenomena's or two things; the *Bigman* syndrome or Politics, secondly the *Wantok* system. You know the rest after this is history.

Our Independence in 1978, the hope and freedom for our people was subsequently marred by allegations of corruption. The arrival of logging companies from South East Asia created a phenomena of corruption which maintain much of its pre-modern trail, in involving both the State and Society on all levels. With local chiefs on the lower end, right through to Public Servants and Politicians at the top end.

Mr. Speaker as Colonial Administration increased in size, Honiara became the central pull factor for other Islands and of course Provinces. You must have heard this statement before, "*Solomon Islands is a nation conceived but never born*". This is evidence in a weak sense of National Unity in this country.

By the 1990s Solomon Islands has not created a strong sense of one Nation, but rather a collection of different local identities bound together by a system of government that had been largely imposed by outside powers. Our constitution spells most of the things in our daily lives. There were great divisions between the resources of different groups of people and Islands. This also created that phenomena that we are groping with today.

To add to that, massive immigration into Guadalcanal created land conflicts. Something that our people on Guadalcanal are grappling with. Today high levels of corruption and mismanagement of the country's resources led to a weak system and a lack of confidence in government processes and procedures. Today it is evident. You go to the Ministries and you will see. This is so evident in the ministries providing services, and the productive sectors.

Mr. Speaker I allude to the above sentiments because it provides a backdrop of what this current government is faced with. The challenges of our country gave rise to the decisions the **current government took to provide the kind of service that Solomon Islanders can enjoy. Mr Speaker, hence the Speech from the Throne reflects much of the government policies and work programs.**

This government looks at the challenges and will turn these challenges into opportunities to serve the people of this nation in the various sectors of government ministries. And one such ministry is the Ministry of Communication and Aviation for which this person speaking is responsible.

I apologise this morning for coming late to parliament, hence I could not answer the questions proposed to me by my good friend, the Member for Aoke/Langalanga. Perhaps, now is an opportunity to answer the question that is troubling the Member of Parliament Aoke/Langalanga.

One of the questions is about the Telecommunication Huawei Tower projects. It is asking the minister to explain the above returns of investment in telecommunication for the Huawei Tower project. As a matter of perhaps updating the house, I would like to response as follows—

Mr PETER KENILOREA (Jnr): Point of Order Mr Speaker!

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Member for East Are'Are.

Mr PETER KENILOREA (Jnr): On the issue of questions and answers which is a separate item, I think it is something that perhaps a ruling needs to be made here.

Also, for the question to be raised when the member of parliament looking to ask the question is not present here as well. So it would be good if such questions be raised by the honorable member responsible for the question also present in the chamber. Perhaps we propose that this question be asked at the right time when both the 'asker' of the question and the respondent are both present.

It is already listed in our paper for business of today. It has been moved but perhaps it can be relisted for another day.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you I hope the minister understands what the member for East Are'Are has raised.

Some of the things that you are going to say now will probably be raised when they actually ask the question. To be followed by supplementary questions. I would agree that whatever answers you will provide will be done later after the question is asked.

Hon. MANASSEH MAELANGA: Point of Order Mr Speaker.

I think the issue is included in the program of action within his ministry. If it is in the speech of the minister, I think there is no problem for the minister to talk on the issue because it is a matter of infrastructure program, which is in the Ministry of Aviation.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you Deputy Prime Minister for your intervention. I understand what the Deputy Prime Minister is saying in terms of what the minister is trying to outline. Things that are relevant to the implementation of the policy. I believe he has the right to inform the house and later on, maybe he will answer specific questions relating to the question. Minister please.

Hon. PETER SHANEL AGOVAKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for your ruling. Whether the member for East Are'Are likes it or not, I am including in my speech some of these things. So I will just go through with them. It is a government program policy, and of course it is in the question. But I will not go into the specific details of it. I will talk in general as provided for me in my speech. I will leave the questions and answers there and I will go into the speech if that is suitable for the Member for East Are'Are.

I will start by perhaps reading some of the mission statements that we have in the Ministry of Communications and Aviation's priority areas. Our mission is to build and improve Aviation and Communication infrastructure coupled with workable policies to assist in advancing growth and service delivery through partnerships for

our people. Create an employment and conducive environment for aviation and the communication sectors.

The policy development and regulatory reforms at the ministry are mainly to do with the Telecommunications Act, The Civil Aviation Act, The Solomon Islands Postal Corporation, and the new Television Act. Sir, the Ministry proposed review and amendments to the Telecommunication Act, purposely to reflect the trend and advances made in the telecommunication sector in particular, the ICT sector, which is an ongoing development.

In regards to the Civil Aviation Act, the governments plans to review the Act to reflect changes considering airport management reforms in the sector. As you know, the Minister For Finance and myself formed the Solomon Islands Airport Corporation which twill be in charge of government airports throughout the country. This airport management body is a State Owned Enterprise (SOE) that will look after airports owned by the government throughout the country.

The government also considers the Solomon Islands Postal Corporation which comes under the Communication ministry. There are a lot of outdated issues and we need to review the Act so that it takes into account the decline in the market, the decline in mail, and also the introduction of e-commerce into the country. We also need to look at the Solomon Islands Postal Service to expand its business focus and products, in line with world trends and changes in technology.

You know, there are post offices all over the country in the nine provinces and we would like to use this particularly for e-commerce. Not only for e-commerce but maybe money transfer, particularly for our public service officers who are living in the provinces like in Temotu. Locations where I am sure have no banks, I hope there is a bank at Lata. The purpose is for teachers, police officers, and public service, health officers to receive their salaries. We would like to use the postal offices as a medium to disburse salaries, transfer money and move money for our public service around the country, not only in Lata. But those in Choiseul Bay, in the Shortlands, right down to Renbell and other provinces without banks at the moment. That is something that the Ministry is currently doing to improve the postal sector to act as an agent to receive and transmit funds for our people.

We are also looking at the Television Act. As you all know, Pacific Games is coming up and Television is a very important component to relay the games to the provinces, the region and further abroad. A new board is appointed and it is now ready for gazetting. They will soon have their first meeting to consider the need to have a television in the country.

The other policies that we have is the Post-link outpost and implementation and that is to do with the private airports under our policy. It is an implementation that

we continue to do. As is the current experience in the country, some of the government airports continues to have blockages and stoppages because of compensation claims by land owners. We cannot dispose that, so we need to buy private airports and purchase land so that government own these airports without having to worry about compensation from landowners.

We also have the National ICT and National Radio Broadcasting Policy. This is rolled out and is ongoing. As you know, we are looking at e-government, particularly in the Ministry of Education. My ministry will work with the Minister of Education on this matter, and the Minister of Health on e-Health, e-Commerce and the internet services.

We have a master plan with an implementation strategy to guide the roll out of the ICT and Radio Broadcasting Policy. As you know, we have the Sim Card Registration roll out. Our dilemma is where we will put these data. At the moment, there is a toss between putting it in a private sector and Central Bank has offered to have the data stored in their system. The Ministry thought that it is best placed in a government property and government system. These are confidential information's. They are data of those whose sim cards are registered. It is slow coming but hopefully by the third quarter of this year, 2023, we will be able to roll out the sim card registration.

The other positive development is the Cyber Crime Bill. The Cyber Crime Policy is in the development stages. There is a draft that is circulated and consultation is on going on the Cyber Crime Bill. It is a very important Bill. The question is, how do we criminalize people who are using internet and tech communication services to bully, threaten and do all sorts of things to people. As you can recall, there was a suicide incident that happened because of online bullying. This is not good for our country. We professed to be a Christian country and yet we are doing the opposite. It is a very important Bill, one that once passed will be able to set us on par with the rest of world, in terms of cyber crime laws and regulations.

Coming to the airport management reforms, my ministry is in transition. We are handing over the responsibility of looking after the airports around the country especially government airports to The Solomon Islands Airport Corporation Limited. Hopefully by third quarter this year we will be able to launch that, and the ministry will look after the legislation, budget, regulations and policies. This will allow the Airport Corporation to look after operations of the airport for the country.

The development programs and activities for 2023.

The Honiara improvement project funded by JICA (the Japanese Government through JICA) is now completed. I think much has been said about the international departure lounge now in operation. It is quite spacious despite the building not of

the size that we wanted it to be. There are rooms for improvement on this and the airport lounges have been made so that we can improve the airport to the kind of airport that we wanted it to be. The problem at that time was shortage of funds on JICA's part. Hence, some of the things we wanted include were not included.

That leaves me with the question of funding by our partners. For some of these projects, I think it would be good for government to also contribute part of the funding arrangements. When it comes to a shortfall of funds, the government can chip in so that we ensure the project is what we wanted it to be. Not something will just be given on a plate to us, but something that we too contributed in making it what it is. Because at the end of the day we will actually own these things.

We want to own something that we see is a good thing, rather than something that was just handed to us on a plate. We took that approach and if you look at Taro and Seghe airport, there are three components of funding. We have New Zealand, Australia and Solomon Islands Government. The three contribution will make sure that the airport that will be handed over is a nice airport for us. Because, we want it and we also contribute to it.

Just on the Taro airport, it is progressing and Seghe will soon be launched. By the second or third quarter this year, work will begin. The Munda airport runway repair is ongoing. It includes an over layer of asphalt tar as opposed to ordinary tar we have. This will help in reducing wear and tear of the airport and also the planes that land. It will cushion or absorb the impact of landing and taking off. Therefore, the runway and terminal at Munda is on track. Hopefully, the minister will be able to visit and see the progress in the coming weeks. If anything is of concern, this can be discussed with the operators. There are other airports that we want to buy. These are private airports and we are dealing with landowners. Hopefully, in the third quarter we will be able to purchase these airports for the government, so that we can construct runways and terminals.

So far as the Honiara Airport is concerned, tender documents have been completed for the re-tar sealing of the Honiara Airport. The winning bidder is China Railway. So they will construct that. But my concern is the timing and I do not think that it will be ready for the Pacific Games. But I am hopeful that if this company can work at night, then we will be able to have a good runway when the contingent of the Pacific Games arrive.

Lata airport was approved for World Bank funding. So the design, reviews, begin this month in April. At the moment we have only one engineer so that is a problem. There are a lot of airports but there is only one engineer. I asked the PS to recruit at least three more engineers so that they can help out with the international airport including our domestic airports.

There are interests from landowners who want to give us their lands to build airports on. Some have very strong interest, offering their land for airports. Something I really appreciate.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to touch briefly, on the SIRAP project. The SIRAP project is being funded by the World Bank. The first phase of SIRAP, or SIRAP 1, has already been completed. Phase one has a lot of activities and we target Malaita. But since the provincial government at that time did not cooperate on the work, we re-allocated these funds to other aviation projects. So now it is SIRAP 2 and it is all about aviation programs.

I want to talk about SIRAP 3 and I hope World Bank is listening. In terms of SIRAP 3 we are thinking of doing this way; we will allocate a number of activities in SIRAP 3 to Malaita. We have been talking a lot about helping Malaita province, in particular tar-sealing the Auki township road system, constructing a drainage system, construct a road from Auki town to Gwaunaru and build the new Fiu bridge. So these are important infrastructure developments that will come under the SIRAP 3 project for our people of Malaita province. There is ongoing work under SIRAP 2 on the North road and bridges. Hence, you will see work going on there at the moment.

Mr. Speaker, I will go to my next portfolio, communication. As you know, communication is an important service that we must have, just like water and electricity for people's daily lives. As you know we have committed the government and the country on a loan from the Axiom bank to pay for the broadband Towers. It is a total of 161 broadband towers. Hopefully the Minister for Finance can sign the loan then the procurement of the Broadband Towers and shipment can happen.

Mr. Speaker we have done our due diligence on how to repay those loans. We work with the Central Bank and the other agencies that allows and help us to repay the loan once we start drawing the loan from the Bank.

Mr. Speaker the financial return is very good. That is from the assessment and due diligence carried out. The Broadband Towers should be able to help our people or provinces, particularly the provinces and areas that network for mobiles cannot reach. This is the vision that I see. Lets help the people. Help them. Lets provide the service because Telekom and BMobile are having their own problems financially. Therefore, they cannot build a tower that provides for everybody. Hence, the government steps in so that we can provide the kind of service that our people want.

That is the break down or update on Telecommunications. There are other activities going on in our Provinces. We have a Computer Emergency Response Team. This one is for monitoring activities on the internet. They will inform Facebook-inc about

what is going on in terms of Facebook in our country. We are working with Facebook-Inc. in Sydney and Singapore.

In concluding I just want to say, while we have a weak sense of National Unity in our country, this government would like to unite our country from shore to shore. By providing infrastructure development hopefully we unite our people. One such activity is the Sports Program and the Pacific Game. The games is a very important consideration for unity in our country. It will give us a sense of unity and a sense of Nationalism in our country. People say, we hope to get 40 gold medals. I too, also hope that we have 40 medals too.

The games venue will give the opportunity for our youths. This country is full of youths. The majority of our population are youths. Give them the kind of service so that they can enjoy the sports stadiums, the facilities that are provided for under our Infrastructure Program. Road works is going on. I think the first layer of tar seal has begun at Henderson and coming down to town very soon. Hopefully we will be able to have a better road than what we have now before the games commence.

I support the Motion moved by the Prime Minister. I want to thank the Governor General once more for the Speech From The Throne. I would also like to thank our donor partners particularly in the Aviation sector, Australia New Zealand, Japan. And also our communication sector, our partners PRC who have helped us with our loans.

I would like to thank my people of Central Guadalcanal Constituency for their continuous support to look after the affairs in the constituency. As you know there is Gold Ridge, Win Win, the Tina Hydro; These are three major projects in the country that help our government to collect revenue in that regard.

I challenge everyone to work together and get our country united together so that we can be blessed by our unity.

With these few remarks I support the motion.

Parliament suspends for lunch at 12.12pm

Parliament is resume at 14.04

Hon CHRIS LAORE (*Shortlands—Minister for Home Affairs*) (02:04): First of all, on behalf of my people of Shortlands, I thank the Governor General, His Excellency Sir David Vunagi, for delivering the Speech from the Throne on Monday, April 17, 2023.

The speech is like a reminder to me and all of us, to see how we look at our country, our nation. So my question is, do we have pride for our country through the lens of

our National Anthem or the national motto, *To Lead is to Serve*? While looking at that retrospectively, going back to when we gained our Independence in July 1978, I ask myself that question, which I could not answer. It is because I did not know how to answer it. So I will leave it to you to answer.

At that time, I recall being in the 4th grade in the Shortland Islands. We practiced our National Anthem in preparation for the visit of our first Prime Minister, Late Sir Peter Kenilorea. He came through to Shortlands to meet us. At that time we also wanted to be a state but it did not work out. We practiced every morning. We sing the National Anthem and I never forget this anthem even today.

I never thought that one day I would be here in this August House as a Member of Parliament. When I was a child, I was very happy that the Prime Minister visited Shortlands. I never thought I would be here in this House and call myself a son of Solomon Islands.

When I studied the Speech from the Throne—I will not dwell on the entire speech—the question I ask myself was, how do I see myself? Do I have pride in my own country? And are we caring enough for our country? These are the questions I ask myself when I listened to the Speech from the Throne.

As Minister responsible for Home Affairs, I have to shed some lights into where we are leading our country towards a better country for us and a country that we are proud of.

Before I highlight some of the policy initiatives that form part of my Ministry's under the DCGA's fundamental reforms, I want to thank my Ministry through the National Sports Council for successfully hosting the Solomon Games, from 27th to 31st March 2023. Almost four weeks ago. It was a great success. Nine major sports were played and all nine provinces including Honiara took part, Honiara team representing Honiara City Council.

Hosting of the Solomon Games in March this year 2023 is not just about sports, but it is about bringing up our country together. It is about economic opportunities and opportunities presented to our private sector. It is about training opportunity for our volunteers and putting Solomon Islands on the map. Our athletes deserve the opportunities sports can provide, such as learning about team work, fair play, humility in respect for other team mates and opposing teams. It is about doing your best and focusing on goals.

We look to the private sector to help us support our athletes to represent our country on the international stage. We look forward to moving in steps with the private sector to fund more initiatives in the areas of sports and recreation. The Solomon

Games 2023 was a supply chain event, where potential athletes were selected to represent Solomon Islands in the upcoming 2023 Pacific Games in November.

Let me tell you the winners. The overall winners of the Solomon Games was Malaita province. Let us congratulate them. The fair play award went to Choiseul Province. Let us congratulate the two teams, the winner and the fair play. I will come to that part.

We want 20 gold medal and we have identified a lot of new comers, elite athletes from the provinces. Malaita won 20 gold, 12 silver and 15 bronze medals. Honiara, representing the Honiara City Council won 9 gold, 11 silver and six bronze. Makira Ulawa won 12 gold, 10 silver and 7 bronze. Isabel won six gold, 10 silver and 13 bronze. Guadalcanal won 4 gold, 3 silver and 11 bronze. Temotu won 4 gold, 3 silver and 4 bronze. Western won 3 gold, 3 silver and 3 bronze. Renbel won 2 gold, 2 silver and 2 bronze. Choiseul Province won 2 gold, one silver and five bronze. Central Island Province won 1 gold, 2 silver and 6 bronze.

The total gold medals won were 58. One of these athletes were selected to represent our country and she can win a medal for us too. We have identified them and it was an achievement for us to host the national games so that we select a few more athletes to join the team to represent team Solomon Islands. I am done with sports. Now to synchronized elections.

As I have stated in my remarks on Monday April 24 on the second reading of the Honiara City (amendment) Bill. I stated that the policy on the synchronization of election is a growing trend in the modern world today. It simply saves costs and make it easier to manage elections.

This Amendment Bill is consistent with government's stated policy to amend the Honiara City Act of 1999, to allow synchronization of elections in 2024. The Amendment to Section 6 of Honiara City Act of 1999 will enable the next ordinary elections of the Members of the Honiara City Council to be held on a day in 2024. That is not later than 30th April 2024 rather than May 22, 2023. That is for the synchronized elections. We have tabled the amendment in Parliament.

The Ministry of Home Affairs has some priority policy initiatives, which form part of my Ministry's fundamental reforms under DCGA. Under fundamental reforms, the following legislative amendments are at the stage of drafting. They are the Honiara City Amendment Bill 2023, The Infringement Notice on Spot Fine, The Citizenship (Amendment) Bill 2023, and Civil Registration (Amendment) Bill 2023. These are at the drafting instruction stage. They will come to Parliament soon.

Other legislative amendments that are still at the review stage include The Gaming and Lottery legislative review, Cinematograph legislative review, Honiara City

Council legislative review and Honiara City Council Financial Management Ordinance. The problem we have is not enough funds and COVID-19, which delays the timing for all these reviews.

I will come back to a policy we passed last year. It is an achievement for the DCGA and it makes the history. This is the Solomon Islands National and Recreational Policy 2021-2035. It is a 15 years policy. Its implementation will make it easy for successive governments to prepare short term policy objectives within the scope of the policy. The Sports Policy guides the Ministry of Home Affairs and other government Ministries, including Honiara City to organize and develop sports and maximize the benefits of sports to Solomon Islanders. We launched the policy last year.

The other policy we are still working on is the Non Government Organization Policy (NGO Policy) 2023-2035. This is still at the provincial consultation stage. The other policy the Ministry is still working on is the 18 Years Plus Card Policy, which is still being formulated and developed. This is for identifying people 18 years and above. The students who enter night clubs are below 18. So we are trying to formulate the policy, purposely for identification of 18 years and above. This is to protect those below 18 years from going to night clubs.

I will come to the new cemetery. I will not dwell too much on the cemetery. I think a question was asked recently, last year on the cemetery site. The government identified Gilbert Camp, just beside the site for the new hospital, on parcel number 191-052-823. This is the site of the new cemetery. The Kola Ridge cemetery has been closed and we are still waiting on the Master plan from the Ministry of Lands and Housing before we can go ahead to do these things. That is what the Ministry and HCC are waiting for.

On land fill and rubbish dump, currently, the rubbish dump at Ranadi is full and can not expand because the coast line is around 200 meters. It is also divided by part of the Burns Creek stream, and there are industrial buildings and houses around the site. The land fill is rising by 10 meters above sea level so my ministry is working with the Ministry of Environment, Disaster Management, and HCC to identify an alternative site for the relocation of the dump site. We have identified areas for the however, this needs a lot of work to be done.

They have identified five sites, including a site near Mt. Austin area and three sites near Tenaru, Garivera area. There needs to be closer collaboration between my ministry and those involved, like Guadalcanal province, Honiara City, the Ministry of Environment, and other stakeholders.

So my Ministry and the Ministry of Finance are looking at funding options to support the land fill. The Asian Development Bank agreed to fund the task, awaiting

initial assessment to be done, and that has been done. They have identified the sites and we agreed on the site at Mt. Austin as the preferred site. But in the vicinity of that area residential buildings and Solomon Water facilities as well. We need about 40 hectares of sanitary land that will serve Honiara and its surrounding areas for up to 40 years.

So the donor has given us USD\$15 million where \$10.5million will be grants, and \$4.5 million to be concessional loan. The ADB gave us a deadline and if land is not identified by end of third quarter of this year, all the funding will be forfeited. So we are trying to identify a site so that we do not forego the funding. So that is about the landfill site.

Let me move to Honiara City enforcement and transport so that we all hear what is going on within Honiara City. Honiara City is rolling out a program to control short bus routes. This is ongoing. The task force is formed and is consulting with stakeholders on the initiative. The same task force on the bus service is also working on the ordinance and business plans to ensure the initiative is carried out.

Regarding market services, Honiara City Council has begun construction of Gegema betel nut market. I do not know where this is, but I think it is in the Tuaruhu area. The betel nut market is very important because it provides a legal market place to sell betel nuts, leaf, and lime. When the new betel nut market at Tuaruhu opens, all illegal markets in Honiara City will be closed including the King George Betelnut Market, the Rove Betel Nut Market, and the White River Market. Vendors will move to Gegema Market. So that is what HCC is currently working on. On waste management and control, HCC in partnership with the Solomon Islands Government launched the Safe and Green Games 2023 and I would like to thank the government for that and the public servants for coming out every Friday afternoon to work. The City Council is part of this activity as well.

We are trying to clean our Honiara City in preparation for Pacific Games, so that we look good. It looks like we do not care for our City. I used to see after the cleaning, next day it is dirty again. I wonder whether we are going to change or not? That is why I said here at the beginning, do we have pride for our country or not? That is the question. We see a no care attitude.

On National Sports Council, yes the work plan for 2022 and 2023 the Ministry through the National Sports Council is preparing to host the Mini Pacific Sports Ministers Meeting schedule for November 2023, before the Pacific Games. Sports Ministers of the Pacific will come for a meeting before the Pacific Games. That is for National Sports Council.

On Civil Registration, we continue to record deaths and births in our statistics. Last year 2022 we registered public employees but many government ministries and

agencies failed to submit their registration as requested. The Civil Registration Division's Strategic Work Plan includes registration of all government employees, public servants and Honiara City Council Schools. School registration is again delayed because of continuous financial constraint.

Mr. Speaker now I will talk on our Development Projects. The Ministry of Home Affairs start to deliver medium sports development projects and these are sports facilities for Malaita Province, Western Province and Choiseul Province. This project portfolio cost \$7.5million appropriated from the development budget for 2022. For the Malaita Province, Aligegeo Sports Facilities refurbishment has completed. It should be handed over early next month to the people of Malaita. The Aligegeo Futsal court fencing is yet to be started. There is an issue with the contractors vending number. As soon as they have it work will commence. The contract has been awarded awaiting the vending number. I do not know what the vending number is for. That is in Malaita.

For Western Province, the Shortlands Community Multipurpose Hall has been identified. This is at Korovou Sub-station. The Western Provincial government offered land because it is under utilized. We are so happy with the Western Province government. However, preliminaries such as UXO Survey, Environment Impact Assessment, architectural design have not commenced, despite the projects tendered last year and successful bidders have already signed their contracts. The mobilization payments are pending approval by the Ministry of Planning and Aid Coordination for the utilization of the development fund. That is what caused the delay and I do not know when it will start. COVID-19 contributed to the delay as well. COVID-19 has gone and now we are waiting for the funding. Mr. Speaker for the Noro Tuna Park, the toilets, ablution block and changing rooms is almost complete. It is now at stage five. And I believe this year, it will be completed and handed over.

For the Choiseul Province, everything is done here. The project memorandum of understanding was signed between three parties. The Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Provincial Government Institution, and Choiseul Provincial Government. The Ministry of Home Affairs PS had already signed and executed the departmental warrant. However due to compliance requirements at the Ministry of Finance, finance is yet to be remitted to the Ministry of Provincial Government and then to Choiseul Provincial government. That's with our developments in terms of our medium-term developments.

Despite challenges experienced in 2022 as well as the first quarter of 2023 the Ministry of Home Affairs was and is able to execute its sports facility project in few of our provinces. Reverting to 2023 it was very difficult and challenging for the sports division, especially with the impact of COVID-19 and the riots as well. It

causes a lot of disturbance affecting the government's revenue collection which also delayed executing of the activities against the targeted time. Nevertheless, the overall performance of the Sports Division in my ministry or Ministry of Home Affairs is acknowledged. It has been shown that the division in his own track can achieve most of the medium-term projects for 2022.

With this sort remarks, I once again like to thank the Prime Minister for this motion. To debate in response to the speech from the throne by His Excellency Sir David Vunagi for delivering the speech from the throne on 7th April 2023. I would like to thank the Prime Minister and the DCGA government for looking after the country. With this short remark, I support the motion and I resume my seat.

Mr. ALFRED EFONA (*Central Honiara*) (02:30): Thank your Mr Speaker for your indulgence for giving me the floor to say a few remarks.

The Honorable Speaker of National Parliament of Solomon Islands. The honorable Prime Minister, Honorable Deputy Prime Minister, Honorable Cabinet Ministers. Honorable Leader of Opposition, Leader of Independent Members of Parliament, Deputy Speaker and Members of Parliament, The Attorney General, Lord Mayor of HCC and Councilors, Provincial Speakers, Premiers and Members of the Provincial Assemblies, Your Excellency Head of Missions and Diplomatic Corp, Reverend Church Leaders, Constitutional Post Holders, Permanent Secretaries, Traditional Chiefs and Leaders, distinguished guests, fellow Solomon Islanders, ladies and gentlemen.

I offer my regards from the people of Central Honiara Constituency. And I wish to thank the Prime Minister, the Democratic Coalition Government for Advancement calling on the debate of the speech from the throne. I would also like to thank the Speaker of Parliament for allowing me to speak today. While I acknowledge the reflection from His Excellency on the need to respect the rule of law and principles of representative democracy, I understand that democracy is also without its expenses. If our people are to be asked to follow the rule of law then the government must also be ready to make adjustments to listen to the people. The relationship between the people and the government must be a relationship that is built on trust. If trust can be fostered and develop well between the people and the government, there will be no need for a Security Pact with China at all. Trust is the only currency that will help this country remain a solid, unified state that also reflects our Christian country.

On the level of human interaction with the government, trust is a requirement for leadership that I cannot emphasize enough. These two must never go without the other. As we head towards the 2024 National General Elections, we are being called upon by the Governor General to learn to stand together and be united in our vision

and collective efforts to help our country and our people grow and prosper. This is a call that further emphasizes the need to build trust between the government and the people. If we are to resist anything that will cause division and disharmony amongst us as stated by the Governor General in his speech from the throne, then the question of trust must be given from the government to the people in its dealings with the provinces, constituencies, and people as a whole.

I do not wish to further elaborate on this concept. But if we are to assess the speech from the throne correctly, then we need to understand the governing principles and goals of the political party that forms the government of the day, the Our Party.

To have a better understanding on how far we have come along in the developmental department of trust, it is only right that we measure the performance of the current government by way of using the only document that seems to carry a sense of importance with the government, and that is the Our Party governing principles and objectives. This is found in the OUR Party policy framework. Apparently, the concept of trust is a concept that can be found on four of the bedrocks of OUR Party governing principles and objectives.

1. That Our Party will ensure that the social, political and economic development in the country is balance and distributed equally,
 2. That Our Party will recognize the sustainable development is achieved only through effective partnerships that are based on trust, openness, respect, and mutual accountability. And that government institutions and non-state actors must always put public interest above personal ones, national aspiration above parochial overview.
 3. That the government under the Our Party principles and objectives is committed to assessing and supporting the sustainability of development outcomes in the context of Solomon Islands local environment. And ensures justice and natural resource use including land matters.
1. Fourth, that the government system is responsive, disciplined, non-corrupt and proactive in dealing with peoples' wishes.

There are 15 governing principles and objectives provided for. But today's debate, I shall only dwell on these four.

If you look into our four Our Party governing principles that I have just mentioned, you will find that the very foundational bedrock for these four, lies in the level of trust in the government's holds with the people.

How trustworthy is the government when it comes to striking a balance on the distribution of social, political and economic benefits in terms of funding from

ministries to those in the Opposition than those from the government? How trustworthy and sustainable development achieves through effective partnerships that are based on trust, respect, openness, mutual accountability? How reliable and trustworthy is the government in holding foreign logging and mining companies accountable in their commitment to accessing and supporting sustainability of development in the context of Solomon Islands local environment, and ensures justice in natural resource use, including land matters throughout the provinces? How responsive is the government system at enforcing discipline non-corrupt practices and pro-activeness in dealing with people's needs and wants?

My constituency have asked specifically the question of transport funding entitlement to the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Infrastructure Development in last year's PAC Hearings. The question of whether or not the constituency is entitled to the Transport Fund. However, the answer I got from the PS was a yes. Unfortunately today, I am still unable to work on the Central Honiara Constituency back roads because I do not have the supplementary support I need to improve roads within Central Honiara Constituency.

Pacific Games is only six months away. What form of improvement are we getting with the feeder roads in Central Honiara Constituency? This to me does not reflect well on the party's governing principles and objectives. It does not reflect the parties intention captured in their manifesto, which is equal distribution of social, political and economic development. It is not balanced and distributed equally at all by their own party's principle. Although, I acknowledge the Prime Minister's efforts with the Minister of Infrastructure and Development, I must reiterate to the Prime Minister that the potholes in Central Honiara Constituency is not getting any smaller. It is getting bigger and bigger by the minute. If we want our visitors and athletes from overseas to enjoy their experience here within the capital city then DCGA please do something about the feeder roads. I will support the Governor General's call for the people in Central Honiara Constituency to be hospitable to our visitors and athletes. I will kindly call upon the Honourable Prime Minister and his Cabinet to strongly consider improving the roads in our capital city in the three main commercial constituencies of East, West and Central Honiara especially Central Honiara Constituency.

I also note in the Governor General's Speech from the Throne where he mentioned the lack of strategic and transformative infrastructure to drive economic growth. His Excellency also highlighted the use of concessional loans. Our relationships with our multilateral and bilateral partners perceived to be the way forward for fulfilling the need of our strategic and transformative infrastructures within the country.

I also understand that this way forward proposed by the Governor General came from deductions he gathered on the negative global COVID-19 pandemic effects upon the economy of our country which have been proven difficult to recover especially with the November 2021 Riot. These two events have given the Governor-General the premise to urge the government to continue with its efforts to support economic recovery and building resilience, through strategic and transformative infrastructure development throughout our country.

While I do not disagree on the economic recovery argument put forth by the Governor General in his address is that, I also do note the economic challenges of the modern world today. It is evolving and will continue to evolve. New events will arise that are man-made and natural in occurrences. It will definitely see us run after these events to control outcomes. While we seek to continue controlling outcomes of these man made and natural occurrences of past events, new ones will emerge and no doubt they will be more diverse and extreme.

We simply cannot continue to design strategies under policies of disaster management systems that are doomed to fall. We cannot continue to pursue this road especially when we do not take into account the evolution of ongoing disasters which does have the potential to become increasingly more frequent and disastrous. What we have learnt from the COVID-19 pandemic and November riots is that this events have made obvious to us that a DCGA have become accustomed to strategies that involve preparations following disasters. This has taken on huge investment outlays that are without long term guarantees of success. These strategies do not take into account the one important factor left, to consider that disasters are man-made, natural or otherwise. This is now becoming more frequently and disastrous. So to simply design strategies and policies for disaster management systems will simply not do. DCGA needs to start thinking about designing a new economic model.

Mr Speaker, I will not go into the details of how to create a new one, but there is no doubt about the need for one. For instance, the population of our country continues to increase, but the economic base of our country has shrunk. Revenue-generating sources have diminished, and employment opportunities have also shrunk. These have created an ongoing influx of unemployment. Young people's idleness creates hopelessness and disgruntled youths continue to develop destructive attitudes and behaviours and strong resentment towards authorities. Education and medical service delivery systems have disintegrated and economic infrastructures has become diluted, especially among the rural areas in the provinces. The value of our currency continues to decline against other currencies. The voice of the rural populace is silenced by the pressing situation. They find themselves in the majority of the population now. Life is full of despair and hopelessness.

Mr. Speaker, this situation has created such depravity with limited resources to meet the increasing needs of the citizens of this country. Naturally that situation has provided an environment conducive to corruption.

In the colonial days before our independence, with sound principles of governance and great respect for Christian principles and values, corruption was unheard of. People served and worked with reverence and respect for leaders in authorities without entertaining corruption.

The current situation creates an increasing social gap between the haves and have-nots. A common fear is that the widening of this social gap will create distortion in society between the few rich elites and disadvantaged majority. This widening gap will then create a power dominance for the few, and such a situation risks civil unrest, further fuelling the hurt ordinary citizens or locals may have towards the Chinese operating businesses within the country, for instance.

Mr. Speaker, we cannot simply prepare for LDC graduation when these issues are serious matters of concern. We cannot settle for a Federal Constitution with these matters are not strongly considered under a broad sector approach and without economic analysis and peer review. We also just cannot bank on our preparation for our nation's LDC graduation status on the backs of our young, talented economic exported overseas without securing for them an agreement with our neighbouring friends. Without securing for them an agreement with our neighboring friends for study visa permits while they are overseas.

Mr. Speaker while I do recognize and acknowledge the remittances sent back to aid our plans to boost economic recovery, unfortunately I also recognized the struggle these young people face in relation to not be able to pursue opportunities to further their own studies while overseas. Their work permit have only confined them to seasonal work. As such they are slaves in our neighbors territory. They will return the same way they left unskilled laborers. We build Australia New Zealand's economy while our talented young people themselves will return and become slave to our own system and to foreigners who we import into the country to build our Strategic Infrastructures.

Mr. Speaker to not provide study visa permits to our seasonal workers on the other side does not reflect the Party stand to support the rights of all people to education, human rights and preventive/curative health services. Services are intended to be made readily available and accessible to all Solomon Island citizens. This should not be any different even if our citizens are overseas. A government that cares for its young talented work force will pursue to make study visa permits available for them. Our young people need study visa permits overseas in Australia and New

Zealand to allow them the opportunity they need to study in the universities as well as in any given course they wish to upgrade their level of skills on.

Mr. Speaker the work is seasonal. The key word is *seasonal*. It only occurs during seasons of harvest. When the season is over with a study visa permit any seasonal worker can take that opportunity to undergo further study.

We simply cannot build this country on the back of foreigners for the next 10 years in the name of Strategic Infrastructure Development. At some stage this young men and women will return back from seasonal work. With the up-skill training they receive from study visa permits overseas they can also continue on with the job of building our economy not as slaves this time but as upgraded skilled laborers contributing to the growth of our economy.

We simply cannot export our young people overseas in exchange for inability to provide for their employment back home. We cannot expect them to contribute in building the economy when they return when they have no access to visa study permits to further on their education whilst overseas.

Mr. Speaker, the Governor General has also highlighted the need for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Executive Summary Report to be tabled in Parliament this year. I fully agree with the recommendations

In forming the house on what the government has done for ex-combatants, that is not good enough. Ignoring the Solomon Islands post-conflict rehabilitation and reintegration association going to help the country to maintain peace, unity and reconciliation especially on the eve of the games.

Foreigners will enter our shores and visit our islands, our lands. And the last thing they need to see is ex-combatants making it difficult for them to move freely around in the city. It is in the best interest of the government to make all efforts to keep the peace and address their situation before it gets out of control and ordinary civilians suffer as a result.

On the issue of the Federal Constitution at present. I do not see the need for us to venture into a federal system yet. We are yet to discover how costly it is to run such an alternative political system. However, I do register my agreement with the Governor-General on the need for the government to tread carefully, especially considering the issue of preparedness by the provinces on adopting this new federal constitution system. I also acknowledge the Governor General's request to have the draft constitution undergo peer-review studies and economic analysis.

On the issue of bills carried forward from last year. The ministers and their respective ministries are encouraged to pass the bills and bring these acts of parliament before the house to be debated upon.

We are after all legislatures whose main function is to create the necessary laws needed. To bring about the much-needed change and improvements needed to make life easier for our fellow countrymen. As the Member of Parliament for Central Honiara Constituency. My constituency will feel the direct grant of these laws as they are passed and enacted. I am excited to see what these laws are going to look like. And how they will impact our economy and country for the better.

I am also thrilled to have known that there are still laws that will be tabled before parliament this year. As we have done little or less on introducing new laws in the house last year. This year alone should be an exciting year of new discoveries and will learn lessons as we work together to embrace the year head-on.

The challenge of development for Central Honiara Constituency is on strengthening good governance. Capabilities within the constituency, especially in overcoming market failures. There are also very few sectors within the constituency that have proven to be success stories of markets being able to reach levels of international competitiveness. Infant industries are stifled by competition from foreign Chinese and Bangladesh businesses. While on constituency interventions are providing a small income generating activities, it hardly grow above infancy levels at all.

The lack of state government services capabilities that can help strengthen the local indigenous business owner to overcome business management issues and grow their own capabilities is just not there in the rural outskirts of Central Honiara Constituency. From my time as a member of parliament for Central Honiara Constituency, I can say that there is just not enough done by the government to ensure that potential small income-generating activities by locals from Central Honiara Constituency can grow and become an addition to an already civil value-added industry.

We need to protect our local value-added business owners who have the potential to go on and overcome the challenges of market failures and to work together to help our local business owners reach levels of international competitiveness. This is my wish and dream to see local businesses grow within Central Honiara and reach levels of international competitiveness. This is still very much a real challenge and struggle for many entrepreneurs and firms within the Central Honiara Constituency. But although the challenge is great, no doubt it definitely is worth the time and effort to overcome.

The lack of business training courses for recipients of small income-generating activities often leaves recipients facing challenges that produce very little outcome. State government recognition of added-value products within Central Honiara Constituency is lacking. Competition from foreigners often confines constituents to the sale of household goods only and not value-added products.

On that note, I would also like to caution the government on the passing of the value-added tax bill this year. The Act will have direct implications for local constituents who are striving to reach international levels of competitiveness. Should they be given the opportunity and chance, the government must always protect our local value-added industries and businesses.

The business environmental conditions are just not conducive enough to ensure that the small income-generating activities have the support of the government in enforcing property rights, maintaining a strong rule of law, and creating regulations that would allow new income industries and private contracting to work effectively within the constituency.

In reality, there is just not enough done by the government to promote markets for Central Honiara Constituent businesses that can compete on an equal playing field against the Chinese and the Bangladeshis. Our competitive advantage internationally is already being threatened domestically by foreigners. And if we have great governance capabilities and community infrastructure within Central Honiara Constituency, I believe with the right team and help from our development partners, we can overcome these development challenges together regardless. The challenge of ending the mentality of the dependency syndrome upon the administrative arms of the government, and upon the administration itself, lies upon everyone of us. This will always prove to be a challenge. This is a challenge that my administrations aims to address and bring about tangible developments in the areas of human development and growth within my constituency of Central Honiara. No one is perfect but we will try our very best to provide the type of leadership that Central Honiara Constituency rightly deserves.

On that note, I would like to conclude by saying that I believe, with much hardship comes much responsibility. I believe that all of us have made necessary sacrifices on all levels to see that the aims, missions and goals of our constituencies are achieved within the ethical and moral boundaries of our given NDS goals and aims.

With that, I would like to conclude by acknowledging our Governor General for the speech delivered from the throne. I acknowledge our development partners for their continuous support towards our development aspirations.

I acknowledge with gratitude, the opportunity to speak here on the floor of parliament granted to me today by the Speaker of Parliament. I acknowledge the Prime Minister for leadership over the last four years. I thank the Ministers of the Crown and the Leader of the Official Opposition, the Leader of Independent members of parliament for the time and they attention here today. '

I thank the people of Central Honiara Constituency, the elders of communities, priests and church pastors of our various different church denominations, the

mothers and the fathers, youths and most important of all, those with special needs for respecting one another and by upholding each other through these tough and struggling times. Most importantly, I thank the people of Central Honiara Constituency for being patient with my young administrative team who tried to do the best we can to deliver. That is what we shall continue to do. May God be with us all and may God continue to guide and protect us as we all learn to humbly serve one another this year, 2023.

With these few remarks, I thank you all for being patient and for listening to my response to the Speech from the Throne. I shall now resume my seat and I support the motion.

Hon. BARTHOLOMEW PARAPOLO (*Ngella—Minister for Culture and Tourism*) (3:12): Thank you Mr Speaker for this opportunity to contribute briefly to the motion that is before this honourable House.

On behalf of my good people of Ngella Constituency, I would like to join honourable colleagues to thank His Excellency, The Governor General of Solomon Islands on delivering the traditional Speech from the Throne on Monday 17th of April 2023. I would also like to thank the honorable Prime Minister for moving the motion before this House and you rightly assured us for this country to make our own reflection on the speech.

I think the speech was delivered so eloquently. It highlights the key policy and legislative reforms that have been undertaken by the DCGA government and what it intends to achieve within the remaining life of the current House.

The speech was also delivered with a great emphasis to remind us of our noble duties and responsibilities as duly mandated leaders, to lead to serve the people of this country.

The speech once again outlined the importance of unity in our country. Unity among various ethnic groups, religious and cultural backgrounds is among the corner stone of building our nation. President Abraham Lincoln once said, *...a house divided cannot stand*. Maintaining our national unity is critical for the country to achieve progress and prosperity for our people. Unity is when people join together towards the common goal which is necessary for our survival.

This statement reminds me of how we have demonstrated our unity towards our fight against COVID-19 pandemic. Through the *Iumi Tugeda* campaign that was rolled out during the global pandemic, we are able to maintain our COVID-19 free country status for a much longer period and be able to contain the spread of the virus which would have infected much more detrimental impact on the lives of our people. And for this, I would like to acknowledge the leadership of our prime

minister, his Cabinet, government officials, donor partners and everyone in the country for the source of patriotism and determination to limit the impact of the pandemic of such global nature. This shows how resilient we are as a people and we can achieve anything if we work united together.

Unity provides a sense of security and the feeling of safety. It provides an environment of peace and love. Unity strengthens the nation as well as individuals. Unity encourages a sense of pride in oneself. So let us embrace it.

Sir, the Speech from the Throne also emphasizes the impact of the November 2021 Riot, which the country is still crippled by. This self-inflicted disaster is unnecessary and we must prevent any further riots from happening in the future at all costs. It has a detrimental impact of the image of our country. It portrays a negative presentation that the Solomon Islands is not a safe tourism destination. Events like these derails all our efforts and kills the confidence of visitors and investors to come to the Solomon Islands.

Sir, as I have stated earlier, the Speech from the Throne highlighted the key policy and legislative reforms undertaken by the DCGA government, and one particular bill that I am pleased with is the Special Economic Zone Bill. This bill will be brought before Parliament in this sitting. I am pleased, as His Excellency rightly stated, that the tourism sector will be one of the sectors that will greatly benefit from the bill once it is passed by this honorable house. This law will enhance the work that my ministry is currently doing to attract more investment in the tourism industry.

My ministry, with the support of our donor partners, is aggressively working to identify and profile high potential tourism investment ready sites that will be promoted to potential investors.

His excellency also highlighted the Pacific Games in his speech, which will be hosted later this year. This event will significantly boost our local tourism industry. Also, we expect more people to converge in Honiara and the country. This is going to be a great opportunity to showcase and expose our tourism potential including our beautiful environment, people, and diverse culture.

My Ministry is pleased to note the huge sporting infrastructure that has been developed and planned to leverage to develop and promote sports tourism as a new market segment after the major event. Hence, I would like to take this opportunity to urge our people to welcome our visitors during the games and show our usual friendship with a beautiful smile. The Speech from the Throne also highlights the review of the National Development Strategy. I think this review is timely as it is important to consider the change circumstances that are happening globally and now affect our development objective locally.

I want to highlight my Ministry, the Ministry of Tourism. We know that the Tourism industry have been really affected by the COVID-19. We did not receive much visitors in the country in the last two to three years because of the COVID-19 and the close of borders. Solomon Island Tourism Industry Pre-COVID visitors arrival in Solomon Islands was over 28,000 in 2019. This trend shows that the country tourism visitors arrival was growing on the average of 20per cent each year. Despite the drop in 2014 the Industry quickly picked up again in 2015 and maintained its climb in 2019. After the declaration of the global pandemic in March 2020 all international travelers was stopped. Solomon Islands visitors number trap by 95per cent from the previous years and a further 83per cent from 2020 to 2021. This devastated the Solomon Islands Tourism sector and many tourism operators went out of business.

Mr. Speaker with a survey of 100 tourism operators conducted on February 2022 findings indicate that 60per cent to 70per cent of small business had ceased operation and nearly 1500 jobs lost due to the pandemic. Regardless of the bleak outlook, the survey also shows some positive findings.

The Tourism Sector was found to be well ahead of other industries in terms of COVID-19 readiness. About 87per cent of managers and owners are fully vaccinated while 65per cent of staff are fully vaccinated. Twenty five percent staff and operators with majority of our Ministry and Tourism Solomon Staff were fully vaccinated. There is 98per cent willingness to take part in COVID Safe Training, 83per cent forced no jab no job, no mask no entry policy at their establishment. Following the reduction in international travel, the tourism division within the Ministry of Culture and Tourism put in two action plans; (1) The Minimum Standard COVID-19 extra care action plan. (2) The '*Iumi Tugeda Holide*' action plan. The minimum standard COVID-19 extra care action plan is to prepare the industry ahead of the decision to reopen the border. In October 2020, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in partnership with the Ministry of Health and Medical Services sign an MOU to collaborate in the development of the SOP manual, training rollout and certification of partnerships and businesses. The completion of the manual on SOP was titled the "COVID-19 extra care".

With the rollout of the COVID-19 extra care training for tourism sector a total of 220 staff were trained in 2021. A total of 901 staff were successfully trained in 2022, which was well ahead, well above our target of 1,000 participants by July 1st 2022. With the *Iumi Tugeda Holide* Action Plan, the idea is created with domestic tourism bubble to support, maintain and sustain the tourism industry during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In this regard in 2020 my ministry in partnership with the Ministry of Public Service and the Ministry of Communication and Aviation along with Tourism Solomon's

and Solomon Airlines initiated the idea that the public servant's officers becoming the targeted domestic market. Other private companies also enjoyed this as well. According to feedbacks this had benefited a lot of those who have properties that participated in the initiative.

With the development budget for this year 2023, a total of six projects have been identified as approved as our ministry's key initiatives under our budget. This is a total of SBD\$10million. This includes the following: (1) development and upgrade of tourism attraction under recreation sites within Honiara and Guadalcanal in preparation for 2023 Pacific Games. (2) Landscaping of National Art Gallery in preparation for the Pacific Games, (3) Rehabilitation of the National Museum, (4) Upgrading of accommodation facilities within Honiara, (5) DBSI guarantee and credit facility scheme supporting minimum standard and quality program for all industry operators, (6) Development of tourism products and offering the visitors the best tour experience of their lifetime. In this regard, the Bloody Ridge National Peace Park project has been the key activity under this project.

My ministry is very hopeful for the successful implementation of the above project within the time frame given. I therefore look forward to our continuous mutual support and cooperation from our partners. I would like to thank our donor partners, DFAT, IC, and the new partners coming into MCC Millennium Challenge Corporation. I would like to thank them for the support towards the industry. My ministry looks forward to working together to achieve what they can do for us.

I would like to thank our hoteliers who have suffered during COVID-19. Now that they are starting to pick up, I hope they receive more visitors at this time. Some of our hoteliers are looking at developing more rooms and are trying to engage renewable power for their power systems in the hotels. Which is a good turn-around for green and sustainable energy. New investments are preparing to come and support the industry, thus we look forward to work closely with you and our government is also behind your investment in whatever we can.

I also thank our Chinese community in the Solomon Islands for their development, especially in tourism. A lot of them are starting to build more hotels and resorts around the country. I salute you for what you are doing to support the tourism industry in the country. As you know, most of you are loggers. When the logging runs out, you move into tourism. So I am happy that you invested money in the country. This is the case within the mining industry. It is good to support the industry so we can grow foreign earnings in Solomon Islands.

I thank land owners who allowed their land for tourism activities. I ask the churches for the idle land to allow land for tourism activities so that church, community, and province and everybody work together so that we develop the land so they can also

earn revenue. My ministry has a team to consider your interests. They will do profiling on the type of tourism activities that is suitable for your land. Then we will start to work with possible investors and provide support to you towards a partnership to develop sites fit for resorts, hotels or whatever we can do on our land.

My constituency, thank very much for your support. I look forward to continue working with you before the end of the Eleventh Parliament. If you are someone who is sleeping, you will miss your opportunity. Those who make an effort, you will get something. This is because no one will come and put the spoon into your mouth. You must work hard before you can achieve what you want. Do not gossip or criticise the other person who works hard. I encourage my good people of Ngella to work. Do something on that land that you own. Do not cry over what belongs to another person.

Therefore, when constituency projects are ready, we will continue with livelihood projects like housing scheme, sanitation, water and so forth. Let us do this before any big development takes place in the constituency. You must prepare yourself to receive the big things that will come. Without you preparing yourself, nothing will come. Therefore, you and your resources must be prepared for the big things that will come in the future. Because Our Party will return. Our Party is very strong and the unity of the Party is there. Our Party looks at your resources. It protects your resources. Our Party wants you to receive the maximum benefit from your own resources. That is what is all about Our Party. You and your resources.

My good people of Ngella Constituency, do not sleep but wake up and work. Do not cry over split milk.

With these few remarks, I support the motion and resume my seat.

Mr. TAUTAI KAITU'U (*Rennell/Bellona*) (03:41): Thank you Mr Speaker for giving me this opportunity to briefly contribute to the Speech from the Throne delivered by His Excellency, The Governor General to this honourable House and the people of Solomon Islands.

I thank His Excellency on behalf of the people of Rennell and Bellona, the chiefs, church leaders, village elders, young people. I thank thee for the speech delivered. I would also like to thank the honourable Prime Minister for his leadership over the last eight years, four years as a DCCG government and four years for DCGA government.

I thank the Ministers of the Crown for the work you do in your respective ministries. I thank the Leader of the Opposition, the members of the other side of the House, The Leader of the Independent Group and my colleagues the backbenchers. I thank you for all the work done together as a government for today.

In the Speech, His Excellency reflected on the last four years, how the country's economy was brought down to its knees with the COVID-19 pandemic. That, followed by the November Riot which left our businesses in China Town in total ruins. We are at the recovery stage and God help us, nothing of this will happen again in the near future for this fragile economy.

We have been reminded in the speech, that Solomon Islands is a Christian country, a democratic country but yet a few of our very young people decided to take the law into their own hands and lead the riot in November. I hope the long arms of the law will get them to justice.

Of course we know that when there is no infrastructure there is no economic development. As I speak here, there was a meeting in MID to organize the launching of the wharf in my constituency in Bellona. If all goes well the DPM will take a delegation for the opening next week.

Therefore, I thank the DCGA Government lead by the Prime Minister and ADB for the funds for this very important infrastructure. This is the only wharf in Rennell and Bellona Province. I hope that those of you who will come back to parliament will continue to support our small province Rennell and Bellona.

I know some of my colleagues are involve in road construction. Some roads are very important for development and I hope the government will continue to work on its roads to complete them. To inform my people, my office has purchased road construction machines. We also applied to donors to give us additional machines so that we can also continue to rehabilitate our roads which are run down since they were build 20 years ago. I know some ministers including the Prime Minister have seen the state of my road on Rennell. They are in the worst state in 2020, even worse now.

I must thank the Minister of MID and his ministry for the new initiative road sustainable development program that will kick start this year. Infrastructure development will be one of the key projects. I am looking forward to and thank the PRC for this new program.

I would like to thank the Minister and Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of Education for giving us new dormitories in our secondary schools. This might appear as a small project but to us it is a very big project. I am so thankful to the Ministry for Education to include us in rehabilitation of schools. More so to thank the Minister and Permanent Secretary, ministry officials for sorting out our scholarships. It was a real headache early this year. All ministries know what happened. Now, all these had been sorted out and the students are settled. Now they are studying and we have been awarded their scholarship to those who most deserved them.

With the Pacific Games around the corner, I must thank donor partners especially Australia, New Zealand for their support in training our sportsman in Australia. It has been echoed by the leader of Independent that we must send the right people for training in order to achieve our aim of getting 40 gold medals.

I must thank our donor partner, PRC, for building this stadium. We would not have held this Pacific Games without the stadiums. So I thank the donor for their assistance. These sports facilities will be there for many years and our young people will continue to use them for sports development in Solomon Islands.

The Federal Constitution; Solomon Islands is like other countries in the Pacific, with hundreds of islands scattered across the Pacific Ocean. But we are kept together as one nation under one system. With the proposed federal government system, it is going to be more expensive than what we have now. Financing nine states would definitely be a problem. His excellency had remained us to review this to make sure that we were talking the right way.

Even with our current system, there are some ethnic groups of islands who would like to break out from Central Government. We Renbel wanted to break off—I think the Western Province as well and Makira—but we are still under this one system that holds us together as a country.

With the federal system, I think it will lead to the disintegration of the Solomon Islands, as I have said. In Australia, different states have been populated by many different people of different ethnic groups. In our case, one island group is one ethnic group. We Renbel are Renbel people; Malaita are Malaitans. So with the federal system in place, I think it will not keep Solomon Islands but to disintegrate the country. This is my humble view of the federal system.

The Electoral Bill and the synchronization of the elections in the provinces and Honiara City Council, I think is a welcoming amendment to the Act. His Excellency has urged the DCGA government to amend the Provincial Government Act and the Honiara Amendment Bill in order for the election to take place on one single day.

This will obviously decrease the budget for elections in our different constituencies dramatically. As it costs a lot of money to take voters to the national election and then back to Honiara and the back to the provinces again for the provincial election. So I think the government has come up with a very good policy to synchronize all elections to happen on a single day.

On tourism, Sir, I must thank the Minister For Tourism for his work. Tourism is a new industry that is not developed over the years. If you look around the Pacific, Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Vanuatu, and New Guinea, they are all flooded with tourists. Why not Solomon Islands? Because I think we have more to offer for

tourism. I think the government will continue to develop tourism in the years to come.

I speak on behalf of Renbel. It has been echoed many times by the honorable Prime Minister about the need to rehabilitate the airport and the road that leads to the lake which is the only World Heritage Site in Solomon Islands thank you. There are several Bills yet to be brought to Parliament and all these Bills are very important. The Forestry, Building code, Environment CDF Amendment, Education Bill. Some of these Bills are in the Attorney General Chambers and they are very important office that deals with these bills. The office must be fully staffed, well resourced and equipped so the work is done with the Bills before they come to Parliament.

Few of the Bills I think are very important for the development of this country. One of which I think of is the Tribal Panels Bill. This Bill helps to settle land dispute. In the current system, land settlement is handled through the Court System. It started with the Council of Chiefs, if there is appeal it goes up to the local court. If there is an appeal again, it goes up to the CLAC then to the Magistrate court than to the High court, and to Court of Appeal. It is a long process. I have learnt that some of the cases are in there for 10 years. Some of the cases are there in the system until the plaintiff of the complainer passed away.

But with this proposed bill, there will be a panel made up of villagers, Chief, leaders in the village. They hold a hearing of the dispute between this two land owners and will decide after seven days. That is the final decision. Then the agreement is signed and then the land is given to whoever the is the rightful owner. Then he can develop his land. But this bill goes together with the Traditional Governance Custom Facilitation Bill and the Land Reform. So I think this Bill also is very important and they will be brought to Parliament in the future.

The CDF Bill is under review and there is provincial consultation going on at the moment. We MPs have had a session going through the bill. It was made very clear, the need for the review of this bill. I thank the Minister for Rural Development and his Permanent Secretary for facilitating the review.

The Mines and Forestry Bill is a very important bill as alluded to by the Leader of Independent. We must make this connected to infrastructure. He mentioned that we can make agreement. I mean, it has to come in the Bill and its regulation. We can make certain mileage of road in proportion to how many cubic of meters of log logged. It would be the same with mining, if we can agree that a certain mileage of roads is made in proportion to how many tonnage of mineral mined on that land. I think if that is done I am sure the land owners will get the maximum benefit from their land and the government of the day will also benefit.

With the mining that has happened on my land it has been a bad experience to my people. People have been traumatized by the false promises, by the damage to their family, the relationship has been broken and the contractors have left with no rehabilitation of the roads. So as MP of Rennell and Bellona and the President of the West Rennell Land and Resource Owners Association and a land owner, I wish that the government support me not to carry out any further mining on the tiny island of Rennell. Thank you DCGA for the support on that matter.

As the general election is nearing, we have heard many people putting up their hands to run as candidates. And people are saying they are the divine choice. They are the chosen ones to run. However, I think all of us are here according to God's will. You just have to do your work and see if you can come in. But to claim to be a divine chosen one is the wrong wording for the constituents. As I see it, all of us here in this house are chosen by God to be here. That is what I stand on.

Finally, I thank His Excellency the Governor General and his office for continuing his work reminding us of the mandate each year, of our work for our people. I would like to thank the Prime Minister as the head of the Executive government, the DCCG and now the DCGA in the last four years. Thank you for your strong leadership and we will continue to support any government that comes into the Twelfth Parliament.

My people of Rennell Bellona, we are still waiting for the suppliers for the constituency projects. This is to have their contracts signed then we can start to distribute the goods as we always do in the last 8 years. So be patient, I think it is not a wise thing to criticize leaders on social media. We just have to wait and see how we can help our people in the rural areas.

That is all I can say in the motion. With these few remarks I fully support the motion and beg to resume my seat.

Mrs LILLY MAEFAI (*East Makira*) (04:46): Mr Speaker, thank you for allowing East Makira the opportunity to contribute to the Speech from the Throne delivered by His Excellency the Governor General on 17th April.

I wish to join my colleagues in response to the motion moved by the Prime Minister, to offer thanks for the speech which His Excellency has addressed to the parliament.

On behalf of my people of East Makira Constituency, I would like to thank His Excellency for his able leadership and guidance as our Head of State in leading our country during its toughest time in our modern history. During which we have experienced COVID-19 and lost many of our people.

At the outset let me begin by stating that today we are speaking from a different lively and favorable atmosphere. Unlike the gloomy days of last year and COVID-

19, which many have lost loved ones to the pandemic. But thank God for His unwavering days on us, we are able to see this day.

On the political front, I know it has not been an easy year for the government given the many challenges that we faced. In that regard, I would like to thank the Prime Minister for his leadership in both thick and thin times. Mr Prime Minister, you have shown courage and determination as the captain and we have landed as safely for another year on the shores of the Solomon.

The Governor General has touched so many national issues ranging from socio-economic to the sporting front. Like he usually does, he often challenges us, as leaders of this nation to live up to the expectations of our people and, of course, to lead with dignity. I am thankful for his reminder. I know he speaks from his heart as a former school teacher and a bishop who, during his time, dealt with people every day. I will not touch on all the things he stated, but just a few points.

I wish to join His Excellency in saying that as leaders, we must be the building blocks of our country. This line does not only apply to us, the politicians, but to all leaders of all levels in our country. Leaders should always be part of any solution, not part of the problem. Often, we see leaders at the heart of dividing our communities rather than unifying them.

Talking about leadership, I fully support the government's move to synchronize the elections of the provinces and Honiara City with the national general election in 2024. Besides the cost, it is a sound reform that will be easy to manage and set an excellent platform for our future elections. This is also good because it will allow those intending to run in the national election to contest and permit those seeking provincial ward leadership to contest the wards separately. I believe that this will also promote party politics, with parties campaigning on policies at the national and provincial levels.

For the Pacific Games 2023, I wish to congratulate the government on its achievements so far. Given what we have seen now, the games will definitely be a success. There is one point that I would like to underscore. I know the games organizing committee is now calling for volunteers. It would be very encouraging if we could urge our people living in Honiara to apply and join the program. This is a huge way that our people will contribute to the games and be part of their legacy. And that volunteerism among our people will be a great legacy of the games.

In that regard, I appeal to our people to at all times maintain the cleanliness of our city by not throwing rubbish in public spaces; instead, they must throw it in the right places. I would like to thank our hardworking public officers for helping to clean our town every Friday afternoon.

Let me turn to my constituency. On behalf of the people of East Makira Constituency, I would like to thank the DCGA for the support under the development budget 2023, through the ministries of health, education, and development and infrastructure for supporting my constituency. For the ministry of health, the \$5 million for the mini hospital at Namuga; a two-story building for Santa Ana High School from the Ministry of Education; the Ministry of Infrastructure, the shipping grant of \$5 million to purchase a vessel for my people and the constituency, that is the cry of my people.

With this support from the government, my people will be able to use it and feel the closeness of these services, which will remain with them. Thank you so much, DCGA, and the ministers, for recognizing the needs of my people.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank you for allowing me to speak, and I support the motion and wish to resume my seat.

Mr. DERRICK MANU'ARI (*West Makira*) (04:57): Thank you Mr. Speaker, and I thank the Minister for Education to give me this time.

I would like to thank you for allowing the voice for the people of West Makira to join in offering thanks for the Speech by His Excellency to this honourable House. On that note, I would like to thank the Prime Minister for seeing it fit to invite the Governor General in all the meetings of parliament to deliver speech and continue reminding us of our roles as leaders of this nation.

On that note, I would also like to congratulate the Prime Minister for his four year tenure as the leader of government and also DCGA. Congratulations on successfully taking this country over the last four years which falls on the 24th of April. So congratulations DCGA and Prime Minister.

I am going to look at an overview of some of the important points raised by His Excellency in his speech to parliament. I would like to start by quoting His Excellency. One of the reminders he made in his speech is very important at this time and I quote:

We cannot continue to claim to be a democratic country when we do not respect the rule of law and the principles of representing democracy.

I think this is for all of us, each of us as members of Parliament, lawmakers, legislators and also as participants debating the processes and procedures inside this House.

As we know, the values and principles of democracy are manifested in the manner in which we uphold the conventions of Parliament. I am making this point because in recent experience, these issues have raised some doubts on how we respect the

role of parliament as opposed to our roles as members of parliament. It is timely that The Governor General has continued to remind us of these important ingredients, the principles and values of representative democracy. And the processes and procedures of parliament must always be upheld at all times.

I know that our country is a diverse country. It has been diverse when it was established. And it continues to be a diverse country. That is why Solomon Mamaloni in one of his speeches in those days that, *Solomon Islands is a nation conceived but not born*. In recognition of the diversity we have in terms of different traditions, belief systems and ways of life we have in our country. As a united Solomon Islands, it is the responsibility of leaders to continue to make sure that we remain so.

The Governor General has noted with great challenges in his speech the continuous occurrence of social disorder in the form of riots and lawlessness which we have continued to experience as a nation. We have come out of many years of conflict which we now can refer to as a ethnic crises. The spillovers or the effects of that experience still continuous to haunt us. As leaders, we have a responsibility to make sure these things do not happen again. It is very important.

Our country is already diverse. And suppose we leaders do not exercise or be driven to hold the unity together, these things will continue to happen. We have seen few occurrences of social disorder in the four year term of the Eleventh Parliament. When that occurs we tend to point fingers at each other and put the blame away from us. I think that is being irresponsible.

As leaders we must accept our responsibilities, failures, weaknesses with humility. It is only then we can truly address the social issues that continue to haunt us. The division or divide that is there. We need to acknowledge that and find lasting solutions to ensure this things do not happen again.

We had COVID-19 which is beyond us and something that is a natural disaster. But, we also have the riots which can be avoided. We are now dealing with the impacts as these two events has highlighted in the speech of the Governor General.

I have been observing how these things happen over the years. I think as responsible leaders and government, it is always important that we are proactive. What I see is that we are always good at damage control. Damage control is obviously trying to control the effects of the things that have already happened. We must try to be proactive and make sure we prevent these things from happening.

As a diverse nation Mr. Speaker, if we leaders do any small things that people might perceive differently, it can lead to divisions that end up in violence. The nature of

our nation is something that we must accept and that is why when we try to deal with the issues that comes up we must deal with them amicably.

I am just discussing the points in support of what the Governor General mentioned. I do not want us to continue to experience these things. As a small country we are struggling in this global village and we cannot continue to allow these things to hold us back.

On the legislative reform, I note that the government brought a number of proposed legislations before the parliament. I also note that some of these legislation not on the list, are currently being consulted with the people. For instance, the Traditional Governance Bill, The Land Reform Bill that is yet to come as mentioned by the Minister for Lands, The Traditional Dispute Resolution Panel that is also mentioned by the Minister of Justice. I am happy that they are been thoroughly looked at through consultations. That is the right thing to do. Because if I do not consult with our people, they will not feel part of this. Then when we implement it, implementation of the Act will fail.

However, I urge the government and responsible ministers to bring the bills to parliament as soon as consultation is done so that we deliberate on them. Because we tend to forget these important things when we focus on things that are not fundamental to the changes that we need to have for this country. We tend to consider things that we have immediate impacts and returns out of. We tend to forget these things.

To me the Land Reform and Traditional Governance Bill with the review of our justice system is very important. They define the cornerstones of our economy. The Traditional Governance Bill will empower the work of chiefs in our communities. The Land Reform Bill will give more say to the resource owners. The reform in the justice system will allow timely problem resolution or dispute resolutions to our resources owners. Because now as we stand, some land cases which are prerequisite to development initiatives are there listed for almost 10 or even 20 years. That hinders development. If we reform these things then other things will fall into place. I am urging the government to continue to consider that. I do not know if we still have time to deal and dispose off these important piece of legislations in this house. But I know COVID-19 also have its impacts on us with regards to the time that we need to do community consultations. But I hope that the bills will come and when they do, we will look at them and pass them. So that we start looking at fundamental development challenges that we have as a nation.

Sir, a lot of divisions which we have in our country is caused by political indifference. A lot of time we allow politics to drive our motives which resulted in divisions and conflict. I will not hesitate to point out in this house one thing that I

do not want to happen again. The manner in which this government handles issue of Malaita with one of their former premiers. To me it is a sad case. We have mechanisms in place to handle such issues in way that will not result in what we all witnessed it turned out to be. But perhaps the reminder by the Governor General in his speech matters. That we must learn to accept democratic processes with humanity and respect. Respect and Humanity are key words of the Governor General there.

As I have stated Mr speaker, this country needs all its leaders to work together. And such divisions can only further expose our vulnerability.

On that note, I would like to comment briefly on this proposed federal system. I know it is been carried out over the past decade. Its almost ten years. Yet we continue to allow it to hang over heads. Because it seems to me, that we say what we will do about it, but we do not allow ourselves the opportunity to actually do what we talked about. That is why it continues to be prolonged. What if we just do what is necessary for us to do and see its outcomes?

I know the process will be expensive and preparedness is important, but I am talking about the administration of that process. The actual roll out is totally another issue. Lets seek the views of the people as you have said, through the peer review then let us see if it is good for us or not. The options are available. Like the Parliamentary wing leader for United Party stated, there are options out there to be examined. But there is no doubt that the system that we currently use fails us. We need to strengthen it or find ways to strengthen it and improve it. Regardless of the fact that we pour millions of dollars into our communities through government and aid donors, our economic base does not expand. It remains the same. And with each year our public expenditure burden continues to increase. It will come to a point where our capacity cannot handle it. So as we continue to grow older, because of all these things our dependence on outside aid will continue to increase if we are not careful. So instead for us to grow bigger we will become more dependent. And here we are, talking about graduation, graduating from a Least Developing Country. We are talking about that, but I think preparedness in terms of our economy - we are not prepared.

I am saying this because it is not only the responsibility of government. It is the responsibility of our people as well. Reports from MRD on project implementation shows a very high failure rate from recipient of projects, our people. What can we do about that? If we do not address that one, million of dollars will continue to be dumped in the blue seas; waste. It will not have a positive impact on our economy.

While on that, during the COVID-19 period we have the Economic Stimulus Package (ESP) fund given out to people. Up to this day we did not hear any report

its outcomes. We do not know what the ESP stimulates, what is the growth. What specifically do we achieve with that fund. I urge the government to please carry out a study on those questions. What are the impacts of that package? How much growth results out of that package? What does it stimulate and for the stimulation to impact on the economy as a whole. This is because it is millions of dollars. Huge amount of money. We cannot just leave it like that, we need to know so that if we see that we are wrong then we do not repeat it again next time. That we do it differently. We cannot pretend that what we are doing now is right. Many things are wrong. We need to recognize that one and make changes.

Perhaps it is time for us to focus on building industries so that we maximize the benefits of our primary products or resources. We sold our timber overseas and when they sell it back to us, it is so expensive. We export round logs overseas but when they come back in products such as furniture's, papers, and so forth, we pay a lot of money.

Simple things. In the past we had Solomon soap. As a result of a lack of government support Solomon soap no longer exist. We should focus on such small initiatives so that we maximize the benefits of our raw products. That is the way forward.

If we continue to follow the cycle we are going on right now, that cycle will continue to repeat itself. As a result there will be very minimal growth. I want to see our estimated growth anytime rising to 6 to 7 per cent. Every time it is below 3 per cent. What can we do about that and how will we achieve that?

Mr. Speaker I am a believer in Human Resource investment. Over the years I have been trying to invest in Human Resource in my constituency. This is because we have a very high level of illiteracy as compared to other parts of the country, other constituencies. Other constituencies will experience that when you make a service available things will automatically fall into place. You build roads people will make business around it out of their own initiatives. This is because they have the idea. They have the idea and the knowledge to make things happen. So the level of dependency is less. However, when it comes to the situation where the knowledge is lacking, no matter how many services you put there it will not trigger any economic turn around. No, Sir!

So, I believe Human Resource investment. It is very important and especially in my constituency. And I would like to express my disappointment Sir. I have my own Human Resource Development plan when it comes to scholarships. But the changes made to the MPs Scholarships really disturbs my plan. **Mr Speaker the context of our constituencies are different. It is totally different. Some constituencies have a lot of doctors and lawyers. Not for us. You can count the number of doctors and lawyers by hand. That is not enough. While Solomon Islands priority as a nation**

says moves from investing in lawyers, and doctors, it is still our priority. That is why the scholarship for MPs to endorse their constituents to go for studies at their discretion is important to me.

The changes to this requirement or the way it has been administered caused a big disadvantage for my constituency. Because we are misrepresented in the decision to change the process. This is because everyone thinks the context of all constituencies is the same. So enough lawyers, doctors. But our focus is different. That is why we have our own human resources development plan. So when they make selections based on their own plan and pass it to me for my endorsement, I will not endorse it because I do not agree to that list. The list is not selected based on my development profiling needs.

So I stand here to express my disappointment Mr Speaker. Solomon Islands is one country as I have said. But it is a divided country because we are from different geographical and demographical backgrounds. So when we make decisions, we must base it on that fact. Therefore, I do not agree with the change. It totally disadvantaged West Makira.

We have a student studying to be a pilot. The scholarship he needs is for three years. When I talk with the officers, they only gave a scholarship for one year with the knowledge that this student needs three years to complete his studies. They him a scholarship for one year. That is ignorance! I am utterly disappointed. Such decisions begs me the question whether this really is a responsible government. These are small things for individuals, but it speaks a lot.

As I have already said, such decisions can cause dissatisfaction and discontent among our people. And I did not know what happened to the students studying in the Philippines. But I do not think they can go back because it's now in the middle of the year. I met the students a few times recently and they still have hope. If there is no hope for them then tell them straight to just forget about it, instead of them thinking that there is still a possibility. That is on that Mr. Speaker.

I want to comment on a piece of legislation the Minister of Justice assured that he will bring to the House. This is the Legal Practitioners Bill. The legal Practitioner Bill is already before the House for Second Reading. That bill is important to administer the work of legal practitioners so that we have uniformity and standardization in terms of legal costs, relationship between practitioners and their clients. And it is important because lawyers had wanted to go on strike several times already because of some of these issues. But the bill is still gathering dust somewhere, and I want that to be taken forward for parliament to deliberate on.

The SPEAKER: *Point of Order!*

Parliament proceedings interrupted at 4:30pm

(Leave sought and granted to the Prime Minister)

Hon. MANASSEH SOGAVARE: I move,

That Standing Orders 10 be suspended in accordance with Standing Orders 81. To permit the continuation of business until adjourned by the speaker in accordance with Standing Orders 10(5).

Question put and agreed to

(Relevant Standing Order is Suspended)

Mr. DERRICK MANU'ARI: One of the pieces of legislation mentioned by the Governor General in his speech is the Electoral Reform Bill, with an amendment to the Electoral Act, and I know that previous speakers have commented on. I wanted to make a brief comment on the idea of putting the national elections and provincial elections together. I think that is a move in the right direction. I want to congratulate the government for that wisdom. It is important because it will lessen the cost of the elections. It will also, in a way, strengthen unity or partnership between the national and provincial leaders.

As you know, we currently have elections at different times and we cannot deny that some of our members in the provinces we do not have good relations with due to political indifference. So when we have one election, the decision will be made, and people will work together as a group, even going out to campaign together. So that will cause unity, and we can work together toward our development goals instead of working against each other like it is happening at this time. So I would like to congratulate and thank the government on that because it is very important.

I also note that maybe one or two provinces will not be included because they had their elections just recently. Let the government rethink that decision. Let us all together. We start off together so that we do not depend on the other to make changes. If they do not do it, then they will continue to miss out all the time. So we should just do it. Whatever is due to them, give it to them. It is a decision that we make. So let us face the music. All of us go together, including Honiara City, so that we know that it will continue like that. If we think that we can change it later on, what if that does not happen? What are we going to do then? So I support that.

As I mentioned earlier, I congratulate this government and the Prime Minister for the four years that they have been in government. I am happy that stability was there. There was the first time, now it is just the second time. I hope that it will continue in the next parliament.

Stability allows for continuity of government programs. What you start, you are able to complete. But some of the bills here, like the TRC, we delay until the final hours of parliament before we bring them. This is purposely so that we do not deal with their consequences. We just pass it on and allow the next government to deal with it. We pass on the buck to the next. We must not do that.

If there is an opportunity for us to deal with it here, so we do it so that if there is a weakness then we improve it, we refine it. This is when it comes to the laws. For instance, the proposed amendment of the forestry act—it was there for ages. We only visit it now because we are almost at the end of the Eleventh parliament.

The practice of passing the buck is not good, it is wrong. Like the Political Integrity Bill, this is also how it is passed in parliament. They leave to the end of the last year before they passed it, so that the next government is the one to deal with it. That is wrong. We take responsibility now. Deal with it now, refine it now and we see how it works. What we want is to pass the laws so that it works well for us. So, like the role of PEC, Parliamentary Entitlement Commission, it caused a lot of problems for us. They are an independent group but they decide our pay. And every time they make a decision, there is always public outcry.

You have four years, you have stability, you have the number to make any amendment to the Constitution which will be good for this country. Look at all these areas. Ironically, the only amendment that you brought was to extend the life of Parliament for our own sake. Perhaps for the people, but secondary.

I am bit disappointed because you have four years and you have stability, this was an opportunity to come in with a lot of reforms and amendments to the Constitution, amendments that need the number that you have. That opportunity does not always come. This is the only second time we had this opportunity. The second time for a government to have the number and to remain for four years. But we have missed that opportunity. If there is still a chance to bring anything, please bring it in before this year ends. Opportunities like this does not come frequently. It only comes twice 40 years of Solomon Islands history.

The need for a lot of fundamental changes to the Constitution exists. Even this Standing Order and its relationship with the Constitution which we quarreled over when you brought the Amendment to extend the life of Parliament. We need to refine such things. What is not good, refine it, strengthen it so that it does not happen again.

How I see it what had happened, that is blatant disregard parliamentary procedures and processes. The democracy which The Governor General talked about. I hope this is not a missed opportunity for us to really put our country back on track in terms of legislations.

In terms of infrastructure development, I would like to thank those hard working people out there along the roads every day. They laboured day and night on the dusty roads to prepare the roads for Pacific Games. This is a massive job. They work under sun and rain. But I am concerned Mr. Speaker. I have said it before and I will say it again; I am concerned whether those designs will hold until the commencement of the Pacific Games. Otherwise, one or two days after completion the rain arrives and the condition of the roads will return to how the roads are normally flooded. It will be a very big national embarrassment for our visitors who will be here.

I have spoken to a few local engineers. Some of them do not agree with some of the designs; the drains are too narrow. If a heavy rain falls, the drains will become blocked and it will not perform its work.

Our local knowledge and local context are not factored into those designs. Why? because it follows how much money is available there for them to work. We cannot do variations. Because if we do, it will incur extra costs that we cannot afford. That is why when we negotiate these contracts, we negotiate at that level where we factor everything in there. Negotiation does not happen at the engineering level. It happens at the top level where the government and public officers operate.

I would like to urge those responsible to negotiate those contracts that when you do, lets make sure that we negotiate for something that is to be of benefit to us for a long term. For example, we spend millions of dollars. Aid donors and the government spend millions of dollars on the roads and bridges in Kirakira in Makira. The bridge only last for two weeks. The first heavy rain falls and it damages bridge. Now, I think it is only one or two bridges that is still left standing. We wasted the million dollars in this way. Our ignorance is costing us millions of dollars. That is the cost of ignorance.

It is best for us to build something expensive which will stay for along time rather than building something that is not expensive but is destroyed the next day. But even if it is not expensive but it costs us in millions. That is still expensive for an economy like Solomon Islands. The ramp at Kirakira for instance, now it looks like a stone that pops up in the sea. But it is not even a year old.

That is what I am talking about. It costs us. But these are developments that people crave. They love these because it will benefit them. However, if we are ignorant in not factoring for local knowledge and context, then why we do it at the first place if we do not want to do it?

The fact that we do not do it properly indicates that we are not interested to do it. We give false hope to the people that things will change. But it lasts for only two weeks or one month then its over, we go back to normal.

I am very happy that we have a lot of infrastructure. We now have the stadiums here. The Minister for Tourism talks about Sports tourism. That is one way we can utilize the stadium or sports facilities so that we have money in return. The only way we can benefit from the infrastructure is for us to use it. If we do not use it we cannot benefit from it. But it should not be ourselves who use it, people from outside must come and use it. If we use it ourselves then we will just contribute to the wear and tear of the facilities. There are no economic returns because we will be using it for free. Therefore, we must bring people in to use these facilities. When they come in they bring in currency. That is how we can raise money from the infrastructures.

It is good that the Minister of Tourism is talking about that. Please look at that seriously. Let us commence with sports tourism straight after the Pacific Games.

My worry at the moment is, we should now have a maintenance strategy in place. A precise strategy to avoid it to being like those bridges. Lawson Tama and Multipurpose are very small but sometimes we only carryout maintenance after it is in a bad state. We only carryout maintenance when we plan a sports event. We need to come up with a maintenance strategy so that we maintained those infrastructure in their current conditions and keep it that way. We cannot fail like the other countries. In Vanuatu the stadiums for the recent Mini Pacific games and now overgrown with bush. Because they did not use them. I do not know what had happened but obviously from the outside, you can see that the stadiums are not in use. There is no sports tourism therefore the millions of dollars are a waste. Because it is not in use no one cares to maintain it. Who will worry about maintenance because it lays idle? Make sure we do not go down that path. We have the advantage to learn from them, and let us not commit that same mistake.

The Pacific Games is only seven months away. I hope that every programs in terms of infrastructure will be completed well before the games starts. I am with you. You have my support, all the way in your preparation for this games. I am only raising concerns which I do not want to see during games when our friends arrive.

I hope, our grassroots people in the villages in the rural areas will also benefit with us when these people come in terms of food supplies to help feed the people. And I think that is the only culture and exchange in terms of sells of artifacts. At the moment everything is centralized in Honiara. The people who want to benefit will have to come to Honiara. They cannot stay home in their provinces to benefit, they must come to the town. Therefore, we must be prepared for that time when people will migrate to the city. Rural to urban migration will reach its peak during that two weeks, because you will not participate if you remain in the village. But it is an experience of a lifetime therefore, we must be ready for that. Our houses will be very full and over crowded. Hotels and accommodations will not have enough rooms. The social problems will rise and people will get drunk and make nuisance

along the roads. I am sure we are preparing for that, but there is no harm in reminding us.

I am anxious because seven months is not far away. Things are progressing well and tar sealing of the roads are progressing most stadiums are completed and that is very good. We are planning to host one of the best Pacific Games in history and we will all be hoping that, that will be our achievement together. To my people of West Makira Constituency, if Pacific Games are televised live, which I must confirm, then satellite dishes will be sent in May and be distributed across the constituency so that we can watch the games from our villages. I do not stop anyone from coming to Honiara. If you think that you can come, then you can come. If not, then the satellite dishes will be brought to you to view the games from the village.

Mr speaker, I have said enough and I thank you for the time for me and my people to voice out our concerns. Thank you as well for the address by His Excellency in regards to some of the things that we as a constituency would like to bring to the government's notice and put before this house.

With those few remarks, I support the motion and resume my seat.

Hon LANELLE TANANGADA (*Gizo/Kolombangara—Minister for Education and Human Resources Development*) (4 :49): Mr Speaker Sir, on behalf of my people of Gizo/Kolombagara constituency I would like to contribute to the motion that was moved by the honorable Prime Minister, that an address be presented to his excellency the governor general as follows:

We, the national parliament of Solomon Islands, here assembly, beg leave to offer thanks for the speech which has been addressed by you to Parliament.

Like my honorable colleagues in Parliament who have already spoken on the motion, I stand to contribute to the motion in my capacity as Member of Parliament for Gizo/Kolombagara constituency and Minister for Education and Human Resources Development, in the ruling Democratic Coalition Government for Advancement. I am indeed delighted to make a few remarks on the speech delivered by our Governor General on the 17th of April.

At the outset, Mr. Speaker, I would like to acknowledge the interventions of my honorable colleague members of Parliament from the Opposition, the Independent group, colleague ministers and back benchers of the ruling government.

Our honorable colleagues from both sides of the house have eloquently spoken on key areas that His Excellency, The Governor General, mentioned in his speech. In doing so, they have dwelled on and highlighted their perspectives on the economic, social, political, cultural, religious, and even spiritual aspects of our country's development and approach to development.

Honorable members of Parliament who have spoken so far on the motion not only acknowledged developments that the government progressed or achieved this far, but they cautioned, questioned, and wanted to find out more about the status of important projects and programs that the government has pursued during the past four years.

In my intervention, Mr. Speaker, I will respond to some of the issues raised regarding my ministry on certain reforms my ministry has under taken under the current education reform program.

But first, allow me to reflect on his excellency, the governor general's speech, especially on the points he made that captured my attention.

Mr. Speaker Sir, in his speech, his Excellency the Governor General has made a special call for all members of Parliament, provincial assemblies, churches, chiefs, women, men, youths, boys, and girls to be not only conscious of our national motto, "Lead is to Serve", but most importantly to apply the concept to the real situation in order to advance our country further in its delivery of services and development.

I have observed that as leaders, we value our status and have led our people in various aspects of our country's development. However, we are perceived variously, and sometimes our people have questioned, our ability as leaders of our nation, whether we are indeed serving them or serving ourselves for our personal benefits.

So what do our people expect from us, their members of parliament or political leaders, and how can we tell if we are responding to what they want? Despite the various perceptions our people hold about leaders, I am glad to say with confidence that we continue to communicate with our constituents on matters of importance to their well-being and the constituency development they aspire to pursue.

We continue to strive to interact with our people and share important information and artfully engaged in dialogues. Through our government and development partners financial assistance we have developed Infrastructures and provided social services to our people. I would like to sincerely thank the Minister of Rural Development and his Permanent Secretary for ensuring that their monitoring and evaluation team physically visit our constituency and document a good work that has been done to transform our communities in each constituency. And I would like to sincerely thank the DCGA government through the Ministry of Rural Development for the grants that have seen water supply projects in communities in both Gizo and Kolombangara Islands and other important Infrastructural Development.

However you may realize like I said, our constituents continue to expect, demand, aspire for more financial support to transform their quality of life in both rural and urban areas. This is the biggest challenge of our time. How we respond consistently and continuously during our term as members of parliament to develop our constituencies to the satisfaction level of our constituents is important.

That said we need to listen to our people and appreciate the hardships they go through in life. We must respond to their needs, and I believe we all do. We must continue to remind ourselves that our people want to be heard. They want to engage in a two way dialogue with open lines of communication, with us, their members of parliament as I have mentioned.

Mr. Speaker, to lead and serve our people, we need to demonstrate strong values and uphold high ethical standards. As a member of parliament for my constituency I have learnt that my people want to count on me as their leader, to do the right thing no matter what. As leaders we should not expect others to act ethically if they do not model those behaviors themselves. As leaders we have to be worth emulating, as they say. It is not only who you are on the inside, but what you do on the outside that matters. Furthermore, leaders who live their values, naturally built trust and credibility amongst their people.

Mr. Speaker, this brings me to my next point, the importance of supporting peace initiatives in our country so that we limit the occurrence of uncontrolled public disorder, which have the potential to destroy our people and the economy. I recognize that it is not only the government of the day that is involved in peace initiatives. We as parliamentarians are consciously working towards a peaceful Solomon Islands, that recognizes and respects each others cultures and opinions. It ensures that conflicts are addressed amicably in reasonable time.

I have always been a patriotic Solomon Islander despite the many challenges this nation has gone through, despite the limitations and our status as being a least developed country in the world. I have come to appreciate that I come from a culturally diverse and geographically challenging nation, with vast ocean and many Islands and ways of life. I long to see a united Solomon Islands where I am accepted and appreciated. Despite all this unique identity, we are one Solomon Islands. When I think "Solomon Islands", then I can do my utmost best to serve others despite their social and cultural backgrounds. It is my appeal that we continue to speak unity in order to see progress and prosperity.

We continue to make joint efforts with churches, NGOs, communities, women's groups and other organizations to promote peace and inclusive societies. Societies that provide access to justice for all and build effective accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

Our people in the provinces, in rural villages, in urban and semi-urban centers including students and teachers in boarding schools continue to enjoy life. However, there have been instances where villagers have experienced fear from some form of violence and do not feel safe as they go about their lives. All of us should not be intimidated, all of us should be free from fear and violence whatever our ethnicity, political and religious affiliations.

We know the consequences armed violence and insecurity can cause to our people. All these have a destructive impact on our country's development and I have noted that sexual violence, crime and exploitation are prevalent where there is conflict and no rule of law enforced to the expected level. There are men who prey on the most vulnerable female members of our society. That we must be vigilant on and punish the perpetrators. I am pleased with the work and efforts of our government, civil society, communities, church organizations or even individuals who have progressed and will continue to do so to work together to find lasting solutions to conflicts and insecurity.

As a country and people, we must continue to strengthen the rule of law. And promote human rights which is key to this process of peace-building. As is reducing and combating corruption, petty crimes and ensuring inclusive participation at all times.

My ministry with key stakeholders such as education authorities, communities and school leaders are persistently enforcing our vision for education. Not only do we emphasize acquisition of knowledge and skills, and development of attitudes by learners so that they earn a living, but also emphasize living together in harmony with others and their environment.

My ministry will always envision and work towards steps that would promote a united and progressive society where all of us can live in peace and harmony, with fair and equitable opportunities for a better life.

The government's remaining program for this year includes tabling of important legislation for the deliberation and consideration of the National Parliament. You have heard the Speech from the Throne, my ministry's Education Bill is included in the list of bills that will be tabled in the next sitting of parliament.

At this juncture, I just want to inform parliament that the Education Bill project started in 2013. It is one of the few bills that have been widely consulted with key education stakeholders. We involved them in the decision process to determine what should be in the bill. It is technically in good shape for submission to parliament.

The draft Education Bill has been with the Attorney General's Chambers for the past three and half years. The Minister and the senior management team of MEHRD and are grateful to the work advanced by our learned Attorney General and his team of legislative drafters. This includes MEHRDs legislative draftsmen, contracted by the DFAT.

We are expecting the final version from the Attorney General's Chambers in early May. We will take the paper to Cabinet and the Bills and Legislation Committee before it is finally tabled for parliament's final approval in the June/July sitting. With the excitement in place and in anticipation of the passage of the Education Bill my ministry has already put in place its plans on the socialization and implementation of the bill.

The MEHRD Senior Management team has agreed that MEHRD staff as administrators of the education sector should understand the law fully before its implementation. It is my ministry's view that we will be held accountable and ensure the laws are fully implemented. We must be well versed with the provisions of the Education Bill in order to protect the education providers, schools, teachers, and learners. In other words, we need to plan so that we are better prepared for the implementation of the new Education Act.

Alongside the Education Bill, my ministry has been working on reviewing and finalizing the subsidiary legislative documents over the last weeks. They are now in its final refining process and will be ready for socialization and implementation. Following approval and enactment by parliament of the Education Act.

The subsidiary documents includes the administrative instructions which will replace the outdated Teaching Service Handbook, 2011. A new Financing Code, Learning and Assessment Framework. The Minister is responsible for its implementation and enforcement and the administration instruction will be issued by the Permanent Secretary of MEHRD. Its aim is to improve governance and management of the entire education system.

My ministry has also developed and completed a new costed teachers scheme of service. As soon as the Education Bill is passed by Parliament my ministry will seek Cabinet approval for its implementation. The new Teacher's Scheme of Service is an outstanding issue given the fact that our teacher's employment conditions and salaries are based on the old scheme. Since 2011, we have not reviewed the existing Teacher's Scheme of Service, but my ministry is more than prepared now to support teachers so that their employment conditions and services are taken care of. Lest we forget, our teachers are the lowest paid teachers in the Pacific jurisdictions. It is time we support and continue to value teachers for their service. The improvement of

working/employment conditions for teachers has been one of the key reform agendas of my ministry.

Educational research studies have revealed the necessity of prioritizing human resources development in educational systems, which cannot be overemphasized. Among strategies for action researchers pointed out that will contribute directly to an improvement of the quality of education, is a sustained investment in the professional development of teachers and the improvement of their working and employment conditions. Research also indicates that the status of teachers and the status of education are closely related.

Teachers can only be the catalyst for change in the movement against child labor if they are supported in the process of improving their work with children in the classroom. There is a teacher professional development project currently being implemented by the ministry of education with the support of donors. This project, along with the revised national curriculum, will be implemented over a period of 10 to 15 years. The new education legislative framework, compared to the current education framework, is comprehensive, provides clarity in terms of the provisions to develop and improve our education systems. It will support current efforts to reform the education system in a more effective way.

As you would be aware, the current Education Act of 1987, Cap. 69, has a lot of gaps. Therefore, we need the new education legislation to drive education transformation and development that matches the demands, expectations, and aspirations of our people. Those who continue to perceive education as a tool that can empower Solomon Islanders to create a better future for the young people and the country.

Please allow me to respond to a concern raised in relation to tuition fee subsidies, generally known by the public at large as school fees, by the Leader of the Opposition. The question of whether the school tuition fees would be continued or not under the new legislation was driven by greed and the government's position on this matter. My ministry's current policy direction is to review the school's grants with the intent to increase them so that the tuition fees charged to students are factored into the grants to ease parents' financial burdens as they currently practice. So in the context of fee-free education policy, the current position of my ministry is that school fees should not be charged to our children's education. Rather, the government or state should provide free education. The financial assistance required to support student learning should be provided in the form of grants to schools. That is a challenge for school boards and school principals as well.

I would like to inform parliament and sincerely thank the Australian government through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) that enabled my

ministry to recruit an international technical advisor to determine the cost of educating a child. The cost at each level of education in the school system for each sector of our education system, such as ECE, PPY, primary, junior secondary and senior secondary school up to Year 12.

All costs that would contribute towards the child's education leading to quality education and learning outcomes, amongst students in Solomon Islands will be determined and factored in the cost analysis. From the data and information obtained, a new school grant level will be determined and applied to support the operation of schools.

There have been questions regarding the DCGA redirection policy on tertiary education and skills development. This includes the call to explain and update stakeholders work progress on the existing national scholarship policy and multi-tier scholarship programs. These are those that focus on the skills based on career pathways for youths, and to strengthen and upgrade existing rural training centres to TVET status. My Ministry through SITESA has also progressed work on the Policy for Skills Development.

Despite the negative impacts of COVID-19 between 2020 to 2022 on the education sector my Ministry through technical assistance have assisted SITESA and developed policies for students scholarship program. Today, SITESA has demonstrated completion of policy statements through:

1. The development and completion of the National Scholarship Policy and Administrative Manual in 2021.
2. The establishment of a sub-committee to support the functions of scholarships in Solomon Islands, such as the National Scholarships Committee and the Scholarships Review Committee,
3. The establishment of the online scholarship platform that supports submission of applications for each selection and assessment of eligible candidate for scholarship with the intention to ensure that transparency and accountability, efficiency, improved performance and fairness is demonstrated through out the scholarship selection and awarding process.

Therefore SITESA has met the requirements of the policy statement through the improvement and reforms under taken with the scholarship sector that addresses national training and priority needs.

I acknowledge the dissatisfaction and distaste raised by the Member of Parliament for West Makira regarding the scholarship policy, particularly noting the constituency category. To put into perspective, the scholarship plan is reviewed and approved by the Minister annually. This is based on the labour market demand survey and consultations done with all stakeholders sectors of both private and

public. Once, that consultation is done than the SITESA Board will review the plan and submit to the Minister for endorsement before scholarships are advertised.

I also acknowledge concerns raised on lawyers and doctors in the country. Yes for MBBS Studies, as mentioned in the question and answer time, students must at least reach a GPA of 4 and above. For students in the constituency category who apply and having met that criteria they would be considered. As I have mentioned, for us to think as Solomon Islanders, the scholarship program is for Solomon Islanders and not for each constituency or certain ethnic groups. That is how I would like us to see it, when we are building human resources because we will be helping every Solomon Islanders.

Also, just to raise in terms of pilots that is also mentioned, we have halted scholarships for pilots because we have limited planes but too many pilots. So, we reduce the number of scholarship for that for the past two years now.

In the scholarship plan, Solomon Islands has a quota at the Medical Schools in Fiji and Papua New Guinea. Our annual quota is five. That is why the government can only send that number. And as a responsible government, we do invest in the viable areas and disciplines.

This leads me to my next point, the DCGA program of action for the Ministry of Education through SITESA which is to develop a multi-tier scholarship program inclusive of skills based performance and career pathways for youths. I am pleased to inform Parliament that SITESA has demonstrated completion of policy statement through the scholarship program since 2020 and has included a category dedicated towards the implementation and improvement of the skill sector in Solomon Islands through funding of eligible candidates for scholarship at the nominated rural training centre.

The eligible candidates are given the opportunity to complete qualification levels in Cert 1, 2, 3, 4 and Diploma in a trades course. The Solomon Islands scholarship program also provide pathways to students under the scholarship towards completion of more than one qualification from certificate 1 through to diploma without exiting the scholarship program. Also, the scholarship program has prioritized the allocation of spaces to the skills sector. The allocated opportunity for the skill sector accounts for 30 percent for all scholarship allocated on an annual basis. This approach encourages the implementation of multilayered scholarship program inclusive of the skills sector.

I would like to encourage parents to also encourage their child to think in the pathway of skills and trades. We have a lot of white collar jobs in the country. We need to invest more people in our skills and trade pathways. We allocate 30 percent of scholarship awards for that area.

Strengthening and upgrading of existing rural training centers through allocation of \$4.5 million grants package for the seven piloted RTC. This funding package is allocated to address the required teaching and learning resources of RTC infrastructure development needs. That is to improve the capacity of RTC to provide sustained quality learning environment for students.

More so, the development of the quality assurance framework in supporting standards is vital to set the benchmark of expectations required of a training provider in the country. The standards would prompt RTC and other tertiary institutions to strive for continuous improvements in delivering quality education.

The National Research Institute is outlined in the DCGA action plan. In short, I would like to inform parliament that a feasibility study to determine the establishment of the National Research Institute has been successfully completed toward the end of 2022. What remains now is the review and amendment of the Research Act (1982), to accommodate the establishment of the National Research Institute.

My ministry in collaboration with the Attorney General Chambers has been tasked to facilitate the review and amendment of the Research Act. All key stakeholders who are connected and have vast interest in research will be consulted, and their inputs will be considered in the review and amendment of the Act.

Finally, The role and responsibility of churches in education is of paramount importance. Both the existing Education Act and the draft Education Bill 2023 specify the role of churches in education. The majority of schools in our country are owned and operated by church education authorities. An indication that churches play a pivotal role in the education as it of its followers.

In Solomon Islands the church by its nature is both a teaching and learning institution as well as the advocator for Christianity. From the days of the early missionaries and today, churches have continued to play a key role and responsibility to its members to instruct and educate them in the knowledge of scriptures and salvation in Christ.

You would be aware, Mr. Speaker, that the foundation of the natured education growth and development were laid down by the early Christian missionaries who combined the introduction of Christianity among Solomon Islands with education. This early Christianity educational nexus formed the important milestone for further participation of the church in the development of education in modern Solomon Islands. Since then the churches have continued to contribute significantly in this direction.

In this era and time, not only does my ministry recognized the influential role that churches play in Solomon Islands education system. My ministry has continued to partner with national church representatives as agents of change, to address spiritual development of children and students as well as their moral development. Apart from providing students the opportunities to learn skills and knowledge which are vital for their everyday live living. There is scope for the churches in Solomon Islands to contribute further in the development of education in the country. It is anticipated that the churches consider an integrated education development approach to strengthen religious education that supports the growth of positive values and faith as sources of spirituality.

The Ministry of Education and Human resources Development recognizes various Christian doctrines, notions and fundamental in the way different churches authorities run their schools. However, the ministry mandates that the national curriculum, national examinations, school leaders and teachers standards, education authority standards, and other universal values requirements are to be met by all education authorities and their school. MEHRD therefore involves all church education authorities in all education reforms, and we are keen to continue with this partnership arrangement with churches to ensure the role of the church in the implementation of the education policy. And my ministry recognizes that the church has significantly contributed to the development of education in our country and will continue to play an important role in the provision and expansion of education through meaningful participation in partnership with key stakeholders such as the Ministry of Education, parents, and the school management committees.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in closing, let me take this opportunity to register my vote of thanks to the hard-working citizens of this nation who are driven with a purpose and passion to see that they contribute to building this nation into what we all dream of for our future generation.

There is always hope when you see professionalism and ethical leadership in our workplaces, and I would like to sincerely thank all public servants who positively responded to the call to engage in our safe and green games campaign. People will hold differing views, but I say never give up. in demonstrating the willingness to keep going despite thousands not appreciating the hard work, time, and effort put in to ensuring our beloved citizens remain clean from morning till dusk.

I would like to sincerely thank our nurses and doctors who ensure that the sick are attended to and cured for in our clinics and hospitals. At times, you will feel unappreciated, but know your profession is a higher calling to touch lives in their vulnerable moments. Thank you

To our dedicated and committed teachers in our schools. Teaching should be more than a profession; it should be our lifeblood. It must permeate the whole being of a child. We impart holistic knowledge, balancing all four aspects of life. Thank you, teachers, for ensuring our nation's future generations are well taught and trained with life skills for survival and Christian values to respect themselves and each other.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am sure you will agree that despite threats, unrest, and insecurity, we have our law enforcers to ensure that the citizens of this nation are safe and that justice is served. Thank you to our police officers and all law enforcement agencies for your line of work.

80 percent of our population lives in rural areas of our provinces. Those who cut copra, sell at the market, engage in the fishing industry, work in the plantation, till the soil to sell their produce at the market, and engage in agricultural activities, I salute you. Despite the pressing heat of the sun, you still manage to work and grow our economy.

To our athletes who are training and preparing to represent our nation, thank you and be good ambassadors during the Pacific Games. Our youths, keep sharing that positive attitudes with your peers. Keep supporting each other and advocate for the future you want. As leaders and elders, we must listen to their voices and continue to support their good efforts.

To our donor partners, on behalf of my people of Gizo/Kolombangara, our heartfelt thanks for your ongoing support that had a great impact on our rural populace in education, infrastructure, water, sanitation, and support for our youths.

Finally, to the good people in my constituency, I sincerely thank you all for your contribution, ensuring that the standard of living in our villages and communities continue to improve despite the challenges and financial limitations we have. We will continue to work to support your good intention to see our constituency viable open to market, and that we improve our standard of living and support our flagship program, which is investing in education.

With these few remarks, I concur with the speech from the throne. I resume my seat.

The SPEAKER: I now call on the Prime Minister to speak in reply.

Hon. MANASSEH SOGAVARE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me the floor to round up the debate on the motion I moved nearly two weeks ago. I would like to thank all Members of Parliament who contributed to the debate and the Ministers who took time to shed more light on the issues pertaining to their Ministries. I thank the Minister of Environment Conservation Climate Change and Meteorology who

is not here, for making the effort to come to Parliament to contribute to the Motion, despite of his health. This is commitment to the call of duty and I salute him for that.

It has been a truly lively debate and rightly so. Of course a very low start, but it picked after towards the end of the allocated days, with many things said and just the purpose of this debate. We allow members of parliament to respond to the sound advice given to us by His Excellency. All comments are welcomed, with ministers explaining the questions raised in the course of the debate, by the other side of the house. And of course giving advice and comment on the issue that His Excellency raised, brought to the attention of the government.

We truly welcomed all the contributions. I think the Motion fully satisfies and achieved its purpose.

The Leader of Opposition of course took nearly three hours of parliament time to conduct a critical analysis of three previous speeches that His Excellency delivered to this Parliament. Of course expressed his concern as usual. He reminded the government of a long list of policy intentions carried in those speeches.

The Leader of the Independent group also expressed the same sentiment. He is not in the Parliament so we do not know where he is. After making us sit down for three hours to listen to him, he is not here. But the implication of course being that the government failed to deliver on what was outlined in those addresses.

But that observation is not consistent with what was actually said by His Excellency. His Excellency fully appreciate in His address that the Democratic Coalition Government for Advancement came through some very unprecedented challenging situations, which affects its ability to deliver on commitments. Right from the word go, riots in 2019, and that is nothing to do with the issues that are raised. Right on the word go, before the government even start to work. It is not about judging what the government is not doing or is doing. It is basically people expressing disappointment that you know the outcome is not in their favor. So we really need to be clear.

The riot in 2021 and the effects of COVID-19 were specifically highlighted by His Excellency in the address. So, really it is by the Grace of God that this government was able to deliver. And I think you know that. I want to commend the Members of this group (DCGA) for standing through thick and thin. This demonstrates what critical stability can achieve for any country. So I just want to make the point.

But as noted earlier I thank the Ministers for responding to the specific issues raised. Not to repeat what the ministers have said but to concentrate on issues that come under my responsibility. Before that, I want to join the others and would like to

briefly pick up on his excellence's reminders. I think it's picked by almost everyone that spoke to this motion. And that's a good thing that the message actually sinks.

As pointed out by colleague members of parliament, the Excellency was very clear in his address to parliament. He started by reminding each one of us to be responsible. In the exercise of our duties as members of parliament generally. And as holders of the office of Ministers of the crown, as members of His Majesty's cabinet. As leaders and members of various factions in parliament.

I am very encouraged by the positive acknowledgment by members who spoke to the motion. Highlighting issues of servant leadership and the significance of his excellence's quote of the national anthem. Highlighting our desire when we found this country for peace, progress, and prosperity.

The advice for us is to prioritize the fight against corruption and modeling our leadership style. To that of the greatest servant leader who ever walks this planet earth. And the person of Jesus Christ himself and bringing hope to our people. And apply the rule of law fairly because no one is above the law. It is a welcome call and is something that we all need to take heed because that is what leadership is all about.

And our motto is to lead is to serve cannot be any further from what is highlighted in the speech. And of course, the responses by members of parliament and that is a very fitting reminder. It is easy for us to simply lose our way in the meds of competing global and domestic interests.

This is more so now in the wake of increasing geopolitical interest in our region. And the very interesting development we are seeing in the strategic moves. And adoption and implementation of various security strategies by the major powers in and beyond our region. You see various security treaties are assigned by the very people who are concerned about our security agreement with the Peoples Republic of China.

They tried their very best to consult us and after they have signed those agreements, we have no problem. And I am taking the time to reemphasize so this point because the November riot has all the ingredients of geopolitics written all over it. taking advantage of the country's vulnerability, now we need to be honest about that unless we forget.

We are in this parliament to represent and that resonates very well. He comes shouted his powerful message we are in this parliament to represent the best interest of the people of this country. Collectively through the mandates given to us by our respective constituencies. We must not forget that.

We do not and should not as we heard bring into this parliament our own personal interest. And when it comes to the unavoidable influence of geopolitics, we decide what is best for the country. Not what other countries especially the Western world say is good for us.

Now that statements may appear to be biased. But I cannot think of how else to express. The position accepted by the western world is that our friend, the People's Republic of China is the common enemy, and we must brace ourselves against. This is a most racist and bigotry position I have ever come to now.

As correctly stated by the Foreign Minister, we are not in the business of taking sides. Although we are gravely concerned about the moves by western allies to actively get the small island states to tow their line of thinking. This is one of the biggest mistakes committed by the western world. They want us to see their enemies as our enemies also. It is this kind of thinking that this creates an alarm and arms race in the region. Countries are marching war equipment's and arming themselves for war with the latest and State of the Art equipment.

This world would be a better place to live if its citizens top priority is to concern about the good of mankind instead of preparing for war. In this regard, I am note the concern raised by the member for East Are'Are. He is concerned about the SBD\$1billion grant assistance by the People's Republic of China towards games infrastructure, with the advice that nothing is free. Well, we need to be clear about what we meant by that statement. What is our concern?

There is also concern about the reference to Solomon Islands as the second most vulnerable country in the world. That statement needs to be corrected. Tonga actually is the second most vulnerable country in the world. However, the risk report identifies that the pacific is the hot spot for climate change and disaster risk. Vanuatu, Tonga, Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, Fiji and Kiribati are listed in the top 20 countries, most at risk and vulnerable to disasters in the world. With that correction, and contrary to any conclusion that people may have, this is in reference to the country's vulnerability to natural disasters.

But grant it that Solomon Islands is also very vulnerable by other development measures which can be easily taken advantage of by big countries with evil agendas. That is why we must always be vigilant and be guided by a pragmatic foreign policy.

Going back to the point of discussion and if the statement that nothing is free implies that we may be selling our sovereignty, I must comfort this House, that we have nothing to worry about as far as our relationship with the People's Republic of China is concerned. Because that is not the objective of the Peoples Republic of China in how they deal with small developing countries like Solomon Islands and

the world. Yes, they are winning hearts because they address the needs of small developing countries. They are genuine about their grant assistance. They took the United Nation Sustainable Development Goals, of *leaving no one behind*, very seriously. Their record of addressing poverty is second to none in the world. You do not see beggars on the streets of major cities in China.

All the nonsense that we hear about PRC trying to take advantage of small island states using debt trap and spreading ideologies that the Western world consider repugnant, is a hopeless propaganda of the Western world. The West obviously, is gasping for breathe to keep up with the genuiness of the People's Republic of China in the conduct of its foreign relations. There needs to be a change in attitude in the kind of ideology we are spreading in the world if we want to see the world a better place to live in. What is happening in the countries, they are fighting wars to survive is in many ways influenced by conflicting interests that countries have in response to those who want to exert the influence on others. It is in that context that we must be vigilant to chart the future of our country. We owe that to the future generations of our country. The call for us to be strategic in the kind of development strategy we adapt and how and where we construct strategic game changing infrastructure is also a very important call—A very welcoming call. And I heard that from the Leader of the Independent Group—Of course, our development strategy must move away from strategies that functions on trickle-down theory to ensuring that our people benefit from their resources is a genuine, genuine call and it is very welcomed.

I want to maybe just quickly address things that are said. I note the response of the Chairman of the Bills and Legislation Committee on the concerns raised by His Excellency on the role of the Committee as part of the legislature. Let me just put it this way. We are reminded of the doctrine of separation of powers by His Excellency in that statement.

As a matter of doctrine of the separation of powers, the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary must respect the laws of each arm of the government. This is a fundamental doctrine. This fundamental doctrine of separation of powers is the foundation on which the Westminster system of democracy is founded upon. A member of Parliament is required to comment on each law and the policies governing the creation of that specific law. This includes arguing on the floor of Parliament that the law is insufficient because it addresses wrong policies and suggest changes as we heard. Such is why apart from the Executive, the Opposition and the Independent Group are expected to have alternative policies to the Executive which they must argue that in Parliament.

However, for the Bills and Legislative Committee, it is a creature of the Legislature. As rightly stated by His Excellency, their functions are stated under Order 71. I

would like for you to note that Order 71(b) of the Standing Orders uses the phrase 'draft legislation.' It specifically states that a function of the Bills and Legislation Committee is to review all draft legislation prepared for introduction into Parliament. In reviewing legislation, the Bills and Legislation Committee is required to, in relation to the draft legislation, to ensure that the draft legislation (a) complies with the Constitution, (b) complies with parliamentary procedures when submitted to Parliament that is accompanied by the current government policy and relevant supporting documents—so you can see the reason why that Bill is submitted to Parliament—whether the legislation conforms to government policy. And of course, the bill is drafted by the Attorney General or a competent private drafter with regards to private bills.

Although consultations is not required by the Constitution, whether the government has carried consultations with the relevant stakeholders. Under order 71(b), The Bills and Legislation Committee may also in discharging their functions, provide a detailed examination and analysis of policies for debate in parliament, ensuring that they are evidenced-based and providing a report to parliament. These thing backs the application of order 71(f). Order 71(f) of the Standing Order of the National Parliament states that the Bills and Legislation Committee may also and I quote:

"...examine such other matters in relation to legislation that in the opinion of the committee require examination."

It is important to note that order 71(f) The Bills and Legislation Committee has mandate to examine such other matter in relation to legislation. However, unlike order 71(b), we must note the use of the word legislation without the use of word draft. The intentional omission of the word "draft" before legislation may mean that it is not intended to refer to a draft legislation. But a reference to a legislation that was already passed by parliament. This is logical since the mandate of the Bills and Legislation Committee is not only to enquire on a draft legislation but also to review all legislations, both principle and subsidiary that are already passed.

I leave that matter there before the House or you have the court to resort to if you are not comfortable about that.

On the TRC Report, we note the call by the Leader of Independent group for the five volumes of the report to be tabled in parliament. For the information of the House, that requirement of the Act was already fulfilled by the government then, ruling I think it is in 2014. What is left to be done is for parliament to deliberate on and consider the recommendations made by the commission.

Most of the five volumes is a record of the stories of people who come forward to tell their stories. The most important volume is the one that carries the

recommendations. It is my understanding that apart from new members who only come in the parliament in the Eleventh Parliament, all other members should have a copy. I have two sets. Some of you can come and take the set from me. Most members of the Tenth Parliament and Ninth Parliament should have a copy. There is no excuse for all of us.

The government of course will take the opportunity to inform parliament on how it deals with the recommendation. That is a matter that will come to parliament after we return from the Special Adjournment.

With the Federal Constitution, it is good to hear some lively debate on that matter. The discussion and debate on this matter both in public and in this parliament seems to suggest that the government is taking this matter lightly or is refusing to deal with it. That comes from the Independent group who is not here. That is far from the truth. This is a serious matter and no one in his right mind must take this matter lightly. If there is a government that is taking this matter seriously, it is the Democratic Coalition Government for Advancement. The prior governments before DCGA shows a lot of carelessness.

This is not a simple matter as rightly pointed out by His Excellency. How we handle this matter will determine the future of these chain of islands we are proud to call Solomon Islands and its desire to stand forevermore. We express these words that are carried in the national anthem, yet we care very little or not all about what it means. As rightly stated by His Excellency, we need to tread this matter very carefully. Contrary to statements made in this parliament that this is the wish of the people, or, as I heard from the Leader of the Independent Group, that all people in Solomon Islands want this system, so we must implement it. The truth is the country is deeply divided over it. And even on the floor of this very Parliament. We are hearing different views expressed over this matter. Among the issues of concern is, the provisions of the Federal Constitution fails to adequately address the Bona Fide demand of the people of Guadalcanal. That started this whole thing. Not properly addressed. If you read through that all your hairs will stand up.

The revenue sharing scheme will need to be relooked at because it is not appropriate. People are already complaining about it. The cost itself is something that is still unclear to us. But the way this thing is structured, we have the Federal Government and we have nine states. Then potentially, we have five thousand community governments. It is not defined. So a village can be a community to be governed. So we have a President, a Governor and an equivalent name at the community government level.

So all these things are still blurry. So what it does is it just expands the size of the political structure in this country. Very little concern is the service delivery function

of the government. So it is something that we need to look carefully at. The new system is designed for the whole country, not just some. It is interesting to note the references made to the Townsville Peace Agreement by those who spoke about this matter, and it is always assumed that the state government system is demanded under Part 4(1)(a) of the Townsville Peace Agreement.

This is an assumption, Mr. Speaker, that was made without really considering what parties to the agreement agrees upon. The relevant clause is expressed as follows: Part 4 (1)(a):

"Malaita and Guadalcanal Province shall be given more autonomy by devolution or by simple constitution amendment, to effect self-governing status in order to allow the people of Malaita and Guadalcanal to look after their own affairs and to provide for the needs of their growing population".

Sir, the exact wording of the Townsville agreement is reproduced here to make the point that the parties to the agreement did not talk about the state government system as the system to be adopted. They are talking about a system that would see more autonomy through devolution of powers or self-governance status under a simple amendment to the current constitution.

In other words, they are talking about improving the present system of government to address the real issues behind the call for greater autonomy which is the unfair distribution of the country's wealth generated by the provinces. This is particularly true for two major provinces, the Guadalcanal province and the Western Provinces. Up until now, they host the majority of the big national projects. The argument is that they get very little in return.

So the government will take the advice of His Excellency very seriously on this matter. Cabinet will be approached to consider an implementation plan based on the advice of His Excellency.

I want to commend the minister of rural development for the reform of our rural development strategy, is the government's response to the call to get most Solomon Islanders to actively participate in development. Our people must be actively involved in the decisions that affect their lives. Not just passive recipients of things. All the big things we are doing aside, we must not forget that the real strength of our country lies in the untapped wealth in the rural economy. We have unutilized potentials of this country for too long, or where we tried to do it is very unsustainable. And this message resonates and it keeps ringing out on this floor of parliament. And we are bringing in the Forestry Bill and the Mining Bill. They will eventually see the light of day under this government.

I will just quickly run through the other matters that are raised then we should finish. Allow me to clarify the review of the Political Party Integrity Act was raised and that comes under my supervision.

The Political Party Commission and the Office of the Registrar of Political Parties are a mandated body by law to carry out this review. And the Policy directive has already been given in 2019. The Office of the Prime Minister and Cabinet has been following up on this with the officer of the Registrar of Political Parties but nothing has been done. This is unfortunate and really disappointing. There is a bill that was already drafted. What they need to do was to consult on the bill. This bill was with them for the past four years and absolutely nothing was done. The position of the Registrar is now vacant and will soon be advertised. Hopefully the new Registrar will get things moving. But it may be too late to do this here.

On the SIICAC the point was raised, and correctly raised. I do note the concerns raised by the Leader of the Opposition regarding the reforms to this Act. That was also raised by other colleagues from the other side of the House. The Chairman of the Commission has actually written to me. He has raised these issues and I have tasked my officials to look into this and act on it. However, I was advised that the Act cannot be amended in this meeting. So any reforms in this Act can be captured in the budget for 2024. They will depend on their work plan and budget bid.

On Electoral reforms, I expect Electoral reforms to be brought to Parliament this year. I understand that the taskforce has been going to our provinces doing consultations during whole of last year. But that said, the Ministry of Finance has already released the funds to pay for the equipment and kits needed for the voter registration. Once the equipment arrives, the registration of voters will kick-off. Registration is expected to start in July. However, if there are delays in procurement then we will expect registration to start later than July. But we will make every effort to make it happen earlier.

CEMA has already started exporting copra last year. Some of our first grade copra has been exported to United Arab Emirates. Preparation for third copra exports is underway and copra from other centres are now coming into Honiara for proper grading and packaging. Approximately 150 metric tonnes of copra is ready for the third export.

Recruitment of Branch manager for the Malu'u buying centre on Malaita is on halt and will resume after the Ministry of Commerce funding is received. The centre will be ready to begin purchasing copra and cocoa very soon.

Copra from Pakera is now in Honiara with approximately 100 metric tonnes ready for exports. Additional copra and cocoa from other provinces are still coming in and will be ready for exports. Low key official opening of the Honiara warehouse 1 and

2 was done in February this year. Funds for other centres are now available to enhance, complete and resource the provincial centres to begin purchasing and exporting of copra, cocoa and other commodities. It is expected that export of copra and cocoa should increase by 10 per cent by the end of 2023.

On Political stability, I wish to touch on political stability. Political Stability is very important for progressing major developments. And I can say this because I believe it is because of this stability that we see progress made on some of our big projects. However, I would like to see our government in residence—and that is our officials, to be more active and aggressive in implementing policies. All ministries must not be complacent. The political government has given its policy directives and it is up to the administrative government to implement this policy directives. And I wish to thank my ministers and back benches for staying together for the last four years. We have faced a lot of adversities on multiple fronts, but yet with persevere. We must continue to stand together in solidarity and continue to serve our people and country.

On separation of powers, the judiciary and legislatures push for more autonomy is welcomed. However, nothing has come to Cabinet for deliberation from the judiciary and legislature. If nothing comes to Cabinet then no decision can be made. This is why we have Permanent Secretaries and its ministry to drive and push for these reforms and bring this to Cabinet through their ministries for further action. And I understand that some work have been done over the past years, but these were not brought to the attention of Cabinet for further action.

That said I wish to encourage some of the Standing Committees of Parliament to be more active. It seems that only the Public Accounts Committee and the Bills and Legislation Committee are active. I find it surprising that the Public Expenditure Committee has never had any inquiry for the past four years. One would think that this standing committee would scrutinize government expenditures after end of each financial year. And I must say that the lack of oversight and the scrutiny of the Public Expenditure Committee year in and year out, is not very encouraging. And we would encourage you to do that.

I also expected the Constitutional Review Committee to at least call for submission from our citizens on the Federal Draft Constitution. But that I understand is not yet really presented to parliament because of the scheme of arrangement that was recommended to the government. The scheme is that we amend Section 61 of the constitution first. That will set in motion the process. That is killing that policy right there because no one in this parliament will agree to give up easily legislative power. That is the reason why it does not come. Therefore, Cabinet will look relook at that and maybe reorganize the plan for implementation so that it will come to the Constitutional Review Committee.

Selection and training of Solomon Islands athletes to make team Solomon's, and that is the last thing I will talk about. The Solomon Islands will field its largest team ever to represent our country and compete at the 2023 Pacific Games in November this year. And I thank those who have spoke and encourage the government to do the right thing and prepare our city so that it looks good when people arrive. And it is very encouraging - those things that are expressed on the floor of parliament. Solomon Islands is looking to compete in all 24 sports in the Pacific Games.

The selection of athletes to compete is first done by each Sports Federation—that is in relation to how things go—based on the athlete's performance. The list from the individual federations are then submitted to the National Olympic Committee of Solomon Islands (NOCSI) for the final selection of team Solomon's. NOCSI is the sole authority to select the final composition of team Solomon's.

I think the Solomon Islands National Institute of Sports has been and will continue to provide training for all athletes selected to be part of Team Solomon. In addition, NOCSI and the National Sports Council have selected 80 athletes from seven sports including Athletics, Weightlifting, Boxing, Taekwondo, Judo, Swimming And Table Tennis to train in China for 90 days or three months. After their return, they will continue further training in Honiara right up to the games. The People's Republic of China will send seven coaches after our athletes return in October, to work with our athletes right up to and during the games. The Solomon Islands National Institute of Sports is also supporting NOCSI and the national sports council to send athletes to regional competition events hosted in other Pacific countries, especially Australia and New Zealand, between now and the Pacific Games in November.

Exposing our athletes to these regional and international competitions is crucial preparation for our athletes, because they can gauge themselves against the skills and abilities of athletes in other countries and refine their training program to maximize their competitiveness in each of the sports.

So, this is the first time ever that our athletes are being prepared in a more coordinated way. Together with our very own national institute of sports, SINIS, and with the support of our partners, the government of the People's Republic of China and the government of Australia we are confident of a better showing to bring home more medals or to retain medals here in this country during the 17th Pacific Games in November, 2023. We are confident our target of 40 gold medals is not impossible for our athletes. And if we add the other medals, we might reach the overall medal tally approaching more than 100 medals.

Sir, in conclusion, thank you very much for bearing with me. Before I conclude, allow me to once again call on all permanent secretaries who have bills to bring to

parliament to do so in this meeting. I want to see the drafting division within the Attorney General Chambers to work closely with the relevant ministries.

With those remarks and responses, I beg to move.

The SPEAKER: Honorable members, the honorable Prime Minister has moved that an address be presented to His Excellency the Governor General in the following terms, we the national parliament of Solomon Islands here assembled beg leave to offer thanks for the speech which has been addressed by you to parliament.

Question put and agreed to

(The Motion of Thanks)

Motions

SPECIAL ADJOURNMENT

Hon. MANASSEH SOGAVARE: I move,

That at this adjournment on Wednesday, April 26, 2023, parliament shall adjourn to Wednesday, May 3, 2023.

I received a letter from the Chair of the Bills and Legislation Committee saying that they will need at least three days. We give them until Wednesday next week to look into this bill before the House.

I also received a request from the Bills and Legislation Committee that they would also like to see these other related bills come to parliament. The Provincial Governments Amendment Bill and so forth. We will try to do that as soon as Cabinet clears the bills.

We have two Supplementary Appropriations that are already tabled. Perhaps the Bills and Legislation Committee and Public Accounts Committee can also start to look into these three bills. We will see how it goes in the seven days. If they need more time, we can look at it.

That is the reason for this Special Adjournment, and so I beg to move.

The SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Prime Minister. Any members wish to comment on the motion?

Question put and agreed to

Motion passed

(Parliament adjourned to Wednesday 3rd May 2023)

ADJOURNMENT

The SPEAKER: According to earlier resolution of the House, parliament is now adjourned.

Parliament adjourned at 18.08

[Edited]



Eleventh Parliament

Sixth Meeting

NATIONAL PARLIAMENT OF SOLOMON ISLANDS

Wednesday, 3 May 2023

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

(Subject to Revision)

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NATIONAL PARLIAMENT OF SOLOMON ISLANDS**Wednesday, 3 May 2023**

The Speaker, Mr Patterson John Oti, took the Chair at 09:57.

Prayers.

Business of the House

ATTENDANCE

All were present with the exception of the Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade, Minister for Forestry and Research, Minister for Provincial Government and Institutional Strengthening, Minister for Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs, Minister for Public Services North West Guadalcanal, North Malaita, North New Georgia, North Guadalcanal, Ulawa/Ugi, South New Georgia/Rendova/Tetepare, West Kwaio, West Honiara.

TABLED PAPER

- (a) Report on the Honiara City (Amendment) Bill 2023, National Parliament Paper No.13 of 2023.

Questions and Answers

TELECOMMUNICATION HUAWEI TOWERS PROJECT

#133 **Hon MATTHEW WALE** (*Aoke/Langalanga*)—*Leader of Opposition* (09:59) to the Minister for Communication and Aviation: Can the Minister explain to the House the returns of investing in the Telecommunication Huawei Towers Project?

Hon. PETER SHANEL AGOVAKA (*Central Guadalcanal—Minister for Communication and Aviation*) (10:00): Thank you Mr. Speaker and also to the member for Aoke/Langalanga for the question he has posed this morning. In fact, it formed part of my speech during my intervention on the Speech from the Throne. In any event, I will answer the question.

The Huawei Broadband Towers will certainly bring investment or revenue to the country. In this modern age of 21st century, telecommunication has become an essential part of life, like water and electricity. Therefore, telecommunication broadband towers are crucial national infrastructure facilities, again like roads, airport and wharf. The direct return stream will generate revenue from day one, from the provisions of voice, SMS and also the data service to the general public.

The Solomon Islands Government will receive continuous sound revenue streams via operation partnership with the Solomon Islands Telekom, and probably later we will do it with Bemobile as well.

Based on independence studies, the Solomon Islands National Broadband Infrastructure Project is feasible from both technical and economical perspective. The indirect benefit, the social and economic return, improve Government communications and working efficiency in remote communities. We have the e-government. As you know, last Friday the Minister of Commerce and I launched the e-Commerce program for the country. That again will bring revenue through trade, internet, and the service provided by the broadband in the future.

We can question the returns, but we have our research and due diligence, and there are many investments that we can get from the broadband towers and its use.

We will connect the rural areas that have no connection at the moment. That gap will be minimized. People will be using internet from their villages rather than coming to Honiara or the urban centers. So the rural settings will come up, to light up, so to speak. People do not have to come to Honiara. Small businesses will spring from this. Farmers, fishermen, and the general trading public will use the internet. You can order your goods online. This brings revenue through the broadband towers. It will bring our country to par with the rest of the region in terms of connectivity for our people in the provinces.

Just to keep you up to date on the Solomon Islands Broadband Infrastructure Project, there is awareness and also a survey going on as to where we should put the towers where they are effective. Also, the towers construction will begin in the third quarter of 2023.

We have partnered with telecommunications company that we have here in making sure that the revenue and collections of revenue are coming through our operators and also the Government.

Mr RICK HOUENIPWELA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask a supplementary question in relation to the response by the Minister.

I am assuming that we loaned for this project. So the question is about the terms of the loan and the revenue. The Minister did not state anything about the revenue that we will get from this project. So I want to know the return on this project. What is the rate of return we expect from this project? Thank you

Hon. PETER SHANEL AGOVAKA: I will give the question to the Minister of Finance to answer because he directly deals with this, and he may also inform Parliament in terms of the signing of the Axiom Bank loan as well, so that the house

and the country is aware of what is going on in terms of the purchase of the broadband towers and also what revenue we will derive from that. Thank you

Hon HARRY KUMA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you member for Small Malaita for the question. This company is going to be a publicly owned company, but its operations will be commercially oriented as well. It has lots of commercially sensitive information as well and we have to be mindful of that. For the IR Penal rate of return and financial modelling of it, I will share some information that are relevant. It's IR, which is internal rate of return is just below 9per cent and that 9per cent is a little bit higher than what is normally the case for Pacific Island countries. Pacific Island countries, in terms of communication industry, the internal rate of return is always below 10per cent or even below 9per cent and the average is such that are ours, which is 8.86per cent. It is a little bit higher than what was experienced in the Pacific.

In terms of loan, it will be a loan project, which is 1per cent interest, very concessional terms. It will have a grace period of five years and the term of that loan is 20 years. But recovery for this project is only 11 years, meaning that we can actually use the revenue and profit from this project or company to fully pay or fully recover investment within 11 years.

Mr RICK HOUENIPWELA: I want to thank the Minister of Finance for assisting us to know the investment that we are making and this will produce a return for our country. I want to thank the Minister for Aviation for enumerating that there are other benefits. I think I remember he mentioned the indirect benefits. Those indirect benefits have been provided Telekom. So I want to know if the Minister can inform the House if Telekom has not done those things, in terms of internet and Voice and SMS? Has the Telekom company not providing these services?

Hon. PETER SHANEL AGOVAKA: Yes, in deed Telekom provides those services; voice, SMS, as well as the data services. Their problem is going out to the rural areas that are not economically viable for them. So they tend concentrated on places that are economically viable. Hence, this is where the Government provides service and this is where the Government steps in to fill the gap that Telekom cannot fill, and that is to provide towers to enable our Citizens to use those services from Telekom; such as voice, SMS, as well as data services.

Mr RICK HOUENIPWELA: So the Minister's answer now prompts where I am getting to with regards to my question. So how do we assume that this project will be commercially viable, if we are going to be servicing those sectors, those areas that telecommunication or Telekom companies believe are not economical?

Hon. PETER SHANEL AGOVAKA: The Government only provides service. When you go to the hospital, you do not pay for medicine. It is free. The Government pays

foe it. Now, this is about providing service for our people, the kind of service that is beneficial to our people. If we go to the rural areas, some places are not connected to mobile networks. You have to drive out or wade out in the sea or somewhere to get mobile network. We are not looking at the short term. We are looking at the long term benefit. As I have said, the indirect benefits will be numerous. Our people will enjoy it. They can do research; do studies on the Internet at home rather than you coming to town, They can do business such as e-Trade, e-Commerce, e-Health, and e-Education. The list goes on. All the 'E' under the sun will be available to our people once these broadband towers are installed throughout the country.

Mr RICK HOUENIPWELA: I heard the Minister of Finance also said that this project, comparatively speaking, with other regional countries, the IRI return is much higher. In other words, this project is profit oriented, unlike medical services.

I am confused as to how we want to provide service and then we want profit. This question is about return. What do we mean by return? I am assuming that the return is on the investment in terms of what the Minister says, the money that we get, that comes back as a result of what we pay out and revenue comes in. That was the return that the Minister of Finance talked about. That is the principal question.

I am a bit confused with the answer by the Minister of Aviation. That is why I stand to ask, perhaps he can clarify again. The project seems to be profit-oriented, but that is not the intention of the Government, as mentioned by the Minister.

Hon. PETER SHANEL AGOVAKA: Maybe I will clarify that. We can debate the word return itself, the financial return but let me say that the Government is looking at providing the services. We are not looking at the short term. We are looking at the long term. This project will benefit our country both financially and socially.

When I talk about finance, the finance Minister will come to that and allude to that. If you look at Telekom, it is very profitable. You pay a lot of data. You pay a lot of voice mails or SMS. People pay everyday. That is the kind of return that we are looking at financially. But socially, the benefits are huge.

Allows me to give the floor to the Minister of Finance so he can further explain the two types of benefits, social and financial.

Hon HARRY KUMA: The internal rate of return, as I have mentioned earlier, is about 8.86%. That is just above what is average for all the Pacific Islands. It is not substantially higher, as you said. That is your own word, my good friend. We are in the Pacific as well, and we cannot be substantially higher than them. We are just marginally higher than them, but that is considering the beneficial for such a country like us in the Pacific, where we are widely dispersed and need

communication to help our service delivery. 8.86% means that is the estimated annual return in terms of percentage. That is the profitability.

The revenue flow is such that by the 11th year, although the terms of this loan runs through 20 years, but by the 11th year we can fully recover our investment. That is another indicator of this project being feasible, viable and profitable as well.

I think, in terms of service that you touched on and which is also the heart of this project for the Government is to make sure that there is coverage to the people who did not receive such a communication. That is the objective of the Government in terms of service delivery, so that they have network to able to communicate. Health and education can benefit from it. The e-Government, e-Commerce, e-Education, e-Health and so forth, we are slowly moving into it. As this network coverage is more, at one stage the clinic in the rural areas would also be able to benefit from this in terms of communication. Of course, this is a public owned company and it would run as a commercial company. There will be a charge but that charge will be affordable to even service providers in health and education. I think that is the point in terms of service delivery.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: These are all public goods that we want for the entire country and all things being equal, which is a big assumption. That rate of return is a very good rate of return and over 11 years we get it back. However, I note that Star Link is rolling out its services across the region also and Star link technology costs very little fraction of the current existing cost and cost factored into the financial modelling, which is going in this project. Therefore, I am asking what is the sensitivity analysis of such technology? We are buying towers, which is a technology that is 10 years old now. The current technology makes it outdated already and is better and way cheaper. If it is rolled out here, it will affect the sensitivity analysis of the rate of return and therefore the mobility of Government to pay back this loan. This 11 years is too far. Just over the next two years, technology will improve and we will be struggling. Was that factored into the financial modelling.

Hon. PETER SHANEL AGOVAKA: Thank you Mr. Speaker and MP for Aoke/Langalanga for the question. I think this is a question about our future on how we factored the return.

With due respect to the change in technology, of course nowadays the satellites are becoming cheaper and these are the new technologies that is coming. Their affordability is another question in the rural area. As Government, we provide service. The towers will be here and they will be here to stay for 11 years or 20 years. The changes in technology will not affect our towers. The cost that we will derive from them will continue. If we put a satellite station Lata for example, we will still

need towers to reach Vanikoro and Temotu Pele. Even with a new technology, like satellite, we still need will have to get towers to signal to those in the rural areas. That is in terms of the question from the Leader of Opposition and Member for Aoke/Langalanga. Technology will change but we will still continue with the broadband towers.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: I think the explanation by the Minister is not correct. Now, the Star Link ones are just 20cm in diameter and you do not need to go and set up a satellite station or post. It does not even need any other infrastructure on the ground and they already costed it in Solomon Dollars, which is \$800 to get that.

My first question was, if this one to be licensed here as an operator, it will bring all the costs down and we would get fast and good reliable quality internet, which is public good that we want, and it can be rolled out right across the right.

The net effect of it is that it will challenge this financial modelling, and therefore we will have some issues with the rate of return. The Government will repay the loan without the flow of revenue to make it a viable stand alone project that will be able to pay itself.

Now, of course, the improvements in the Star Links technology is even the 20cm diameter technology that they have used, they are testing it now, and it will no longer be needed. It just go straight from low earth orbit satellites directly on to your phone. I am saying that technology is moving very, very fast and we are looking for 11 years to pay off this thing, although we have 20, but in a year or two, it will become very, very outdated and we are stuck carrying a heavy load USD denominated debt. It is a bit of a concern.

The SPEAKER: Take that as a concluding remark on the question that the Leader of Opposition had originally asked, unless any of the two Ministers would like to comment on the observations by the Leader of Opposition.

Hon HARRY KUMA: Just some clarification here. Yes, we have experts on telecommunication. The Leader of Opposition has his view and perhaps he has taken it from some technical advice and experts on communication. For this project, apart from the technical Ministry, the Ministry of Communication and Aviation, we are also engaging independent experts apart from Huawei, which helps us to roll this one out. We have independent experts from New Zealand to help us with financial modelling of it.

In terms of change in technology and what are the risks, as the Minister for Communication and Aviation had mentioned, in due respect to the view of the Leader of Opposition, we believe that this one will remain viable and profitable,

although there are sensitivities that it might be there in terms of change in technology and therefore the effects it has financial flows.

As far as being advised by an independent advisor that was given to the Government on this project, we will be able to recover our investment by that period.

INCREASE OF TELECOMMUNICATION COMPANIES

134 **Hon MATTHEW WALE** (*Aoke/Langalanga*)—*Leader of Opposition* (10:27) to the Minister of Communication and Aviation: Can the Minister confirm to the House if Government has any plans to allow any further interested Telekom companies to provide telecommunication services to encourage competition and reduce costs of services in the country?

Hon. PETER SHANEL AGOVAKA (*Central Guadalcanal—Minister for Communication and Aviation*) (10:27): Thank you Mr. Speaker and MP for Auki and Langalanga and leader of opposition for the question.

The position of our country is that the Solomon Islands market is very small at the moment for a third mobile network operator. Hence, there is no direct view for us to include the new mobile operator at the moment. However, the problem of competition or a lack of that is a serious concern and one that is largely attributed to the weak position of Bemobile in that sector at the moment, our second operator.

It is part of the provinces that I have discussed with Bemobile. Despite the promise that Bemobile brought when it was first granted a license to operate in the country, in spite of the competition it provided, it has since been struggling since 2017. As a result of the continuous change of their management team, corporate decisions have been made by the parent company in Papua New Guinea and then a general like of a new investment in the infrastructure. The second operator is not really as operative as the first operator, which is Solomon Telekom.

This has allowed Solomon Telekom to gain dominance and the share of the market from around about 55 percent in 2015, 2016 to around 83 percent in 2021 and 2022. This results in the concern that we all have about competition today, and brought about the question by the MP for Aoke/Langalanga.

As far as the Government and Ministry is concerned, we do not think of having a third operator, but if Bemobile does not keep up to speed with the provisions of services, then there is a possibility that we can invite a third operator.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: If one operator reaches 80 percent of the market share, that is a virtual monopoly situation and if Government just leave the policy discretion on whether there should be a third entrant in the telephony services, the size of the market to the two operators, if the Government abdicates that

responsibility, it would seem to me much more prudent to make sure that no single operator gets more than 60 percent. If it gets to that level, there should be a tender. I note also that this is a matter that the independent regulator has the jurisdiction on, but in terms of policy from the Ministry to push the regulator to look at it, is why this matter becomes of interest to us. Perhaps the Minister would like to comment on that.

Hon. PETER SHANEL AGOVAKA: Absolutely and I think the regulator is our referee in the telecommunication field. However, in terms of policy, as the Leader has rightly alluded to, we as policy makers, we look at how things will benefit this country. So this week or so, we will probably hear from them on how there plans to provide service as required and as conditions of their licenses. So we will talk with them and see how it goes, and then we will also look at inviting another operator. I know there are a couple of them around that can help us

Mr. JOHN MANENIARU: Just a supplementary question. If the third operator does not come in, it means there will be no competition, hence the monopoly continues, and the services that the Minister was alluding to that will be of quality to our people, I still do not fully understand.

When we look at telecommunication, it will be fast and efficient because of this investment to our people. I still do not understand. Help me to understand because even other services like medical and education, we are still struggling with. How do you assure the House that this telecommunication will not have any problems like other services? You have alluded to that.

Hon. PETER SHANEL AGOVAKA: In fact, we have our own operators, such as Solomon Islands Telekom, Bemobile, Satsol, and others that have just come in. They are our service providers in the country. We, the Government, only deals with policies, regulators, and legislatures. So we make sure that the legislation is conducive and for a fair and level playing field for everyone. But as it is at the moment, Telekom seems to be dominating because of our other weak player, Be Mobile.

So if that is the case, we have to re-look at of how we ensure that competition is not only fair but on a level playing field too. That means if we are to bring another player in, then we will see it. We will discuss it with the referee, who is the Solomon Islands Telekom Commission, and also with Bemobile as to how they can help us provide services in our country.

Mr PETER KENILOREA (Jnr): This is just a supplementary question in terms of the cost in the country for telecommunications and whether there is any comparative studies or analyses with our region of where Solomon Islands is in

terms of this kind of cost of this service in our nation compared to other Pacific Islands.

Hon. PETER SHANEL AGOVAKA: At the moment, the cost of our Telekom is quite high because, as I said, it is a semi-monopoly with a weak competition from Bemobile. But if you look everywhere, on the corner of the streets, in our homes, everybody is with their phones in their hands, doing whatever they are doing with their phones. I do not have the figure with me, but maybe we can provide that figure to our pigeonholes so that the Members will be able to look at our data in telecommunication of the country and also our region.

Mr DOUGLAS ETE: I will make a comment first. Internet in our country is the most expensive in the region. Power is the most expensive in the region. Water is the most expensive in our region. Whether you want make a comparative analysis in any country of the region, we are the most expensive country. It makes us unhappy. It is the business of the Government to look at it.

My question is; because of the grip of monopoly in this country, it causes problems in our country. So my question is whether the Government is looking at securities and regulations commission to be set up in our country or not? It affects the lives of the people.

The SPEAKER: Thank you Honourable Member. The question is asked beyond the specific information that the Minister was going to provide or has provided. So in a way, perhaps while your statement is correct, I think it will be beyond the scope of what the Minister and I am just this but the Minister will respond to it according. just an opinion.

Hon. PETER SHANEL AGOVAKA: Thank you Mr. Speaker and thank you for your ruling. I think this is a separate question, MP for East Honiara. The question asked by the Member for Aoke/Langalanga is about the competition and also having another player.

Of course, we acknowledge the costs of utilities in our country, water, electricity and doing business in the country is quite an expense and hence Government is doing its best. Tina Hydro is going on there, SIWA is trying to assist us.

I have already and I will repeat myself again, we will provide those data from the competition around the countries within our region; Fiji, Papua New Guinea etc. As I said we will provide those information and put it in your pigeonholes so that you can have a look at the data of telecommunication competitiveness in our country in comparison to the other countries in our region.

Mr RICK HOUENIPWELA: My question is related to the comments by Member for East Honiara and also the response by the Minister

The SPEAKER: As long as it directed on telecommunications.

Mr RICK HOUENIPWELA: Sorry?

The SPEAKER: thank you as long as it focus on telecommunication, which is the original question.

Mr RICK HOUENIPWELA: Yes, this question, the principle question is about why we do not allow a third operator; and the background of it is because of the cost of telecommunications in this country. That is why the question came up. It is very expensive. Minister, I think there is no need to go and do the study anymore. We are the most expensive. So my question is this. Has anyone looking at the cost? Not only cost but also the inefficiency. I make telephone calls at my house and it takes two to three minutes before somebody responds. Why is it like that? It was never like that, up to last year. It is getting worse this year. This is why the question was raised. The cost is very expensive but inefficiency is at its worst. If the Minister can inform the House if anyone is looking at these things? Who is looking at these things to make sure that services are efficient and must be low?

Hon. PETER SHANEL AGOVAKA: At the moment, Telekom is going through upgrades to try and connect with the internet through the Optic Fiber Cable. So you will see they are doing the wirings of internet, especially the optic fiber cable to be faster and reliable and more efficient.

The operations of the telecommunications network is in the hands of the operators. In our case, the Solomon Islands Telecommunication Company and Bemobile. Those are the two operators. The government is just looking at policies, legislation, and regulations. The referee that we have is the Solomon Islands Telekom Commission. They will determine whether the cost is too high or maybe you do not follow the rule of competition, or you do not follow the rules under the conditions of your license. It is the referee. This is why we form the Solomon Islands Telekom Commission to look after the operators for us. Our role is on the part of legislations, regulations and policies.

Mr. JOHN MANENIARU: We are looking at quality service at a quality cost for our people. As the Member for East Honiara mentioned earlier, it is very costly and the Minister also confirmed this. Doing business here is very costly and no one wants to come. If a third operator does not come in, the cost for telecommunication will go up, even with the new towers.

The policy of CEMA in the past, to our farmers, where prices are high but the Government ensure that farmers are looked after and work hard. Have you looked at a similar policy to provide subsidies to these operators to maintain a quality service throughout the country to our people?

Hon. PETER SHANEL AGOVAKA: Of course, subsidy is very important. The Member alluded to the fact that CEMA has been doing this. That is why when we provide towers; the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Communications, as well as Our Telekom Company will look at the revenue sharing.

We provide towers without Telekom Company paying a cent. We meet everything. That is one way of providing service and subsidiary. Subsidiary in terms of telecommunication, we will have to talk with Solomon Telekom about their shortfall and how we can subsidize them.

Looking at Telekom, that is weak at the moment, I think it is an important component to consider, to subsidize them and help them to come up so that both Solomon Telekom and Bemobile are on a fair and level playing field. If need be, a third operator can come and put them on a fair and level playing field. That is my response.

Mr PETER KENILOREA (Jnr): Thank you, Mr. Speaker and thank you Minister, for your responses. My question is with regards to perhaps potential partnerships, perhaps not necessarily telecommunication companies per se coming in, but partnerships with our current telecommunication providers to others.

In this regard, the responses to the towers and in connection with my question is the fact that Start Link, for example, a single disk can provide internet for 800 people. 800 people can feed from one Start Link disk. The cost of that Star Link satellite is USD\$500. For a month, it is USD\$200 for unlimited data for those 800 people. That is the idea.

The question is, with this rise in technology that happens over the course of one year, and this is going to be the continuous trend going up, and the idea that the telecommunication providers are already looking to partner up globally. For example, Star Link works with US phone providers to start a trialing of direct satellite to phone. These providers are looking for partners in developing countries so that they can work together because we provide the best laboratory for this kind of technology. We are definitely there so that we can leap frog to the latest and greatest rather than stuck to the technology of yesterday.

My question is that the Government policy allows our Telekom and others to partner with other telecommunication provides in developed countries to allow this kind of technology for our people to benefit from at a much cheaper cost? Thank you.

Hon. PETER SHANEL AGOVAKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and thank you, MP for East Are, for the question. Actually, it deviates a bit from the principal question, but in any case, let me say that this Government does not stop any partners between

the operators, whether it be Star link or other operators. It is their business. That is how they do their business. So what is important for us is the efficiency of the system that will work for our people. That is what is important, and this is where the Government agrees that you can partake in any activity, as long as the service is efficient and we make sure that our referee, the Solomon Islands Telekom Commission is aware that these things are happening and allows them.

There is no harm for our operators to partner with anybody to ensure that our telecommunications system operate for the best and good of our people.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: The Telecommunications Act, which brings in the new regime, was negotiated to remove the monopoly from Telekom. Their demand was because they do not trust the Government, and so they demand an independent regulator. That is why the Commission was established. Now, even with that, they are going back to the monopoly situation just by market forces, which is not good. That is why we see that it is expensive and that the quality of the service is really poor. But it has just taken too long, and it is unreasonably long even after the connection of the submarine cable.

The other thing with new technology is that they are normally referred to as disruptive technology. They have the potential to undermine the status quo. It will affect NPFs investment in Telekom as well. If they come under their own scheme and then very quickly suck up the market share, Telekom will very quickly become unprofitable. So these are considerations that were ought all to be considered from the policy angle from the Ministry responsible for communications and that is why it is important that Government must look at it. But the object of quality service at good price is the important objective on this one.

With those comments, I do wish to thank the Minister for Communication for his responses.

Business of the House

STATEMENT OF GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Bills

2022 SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION BILL 2023

2023 SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION BILL 2023

First Reading

The SPEAKER: The 2022 Supplementary Appropriation Bill 2023 and the 2023 Supplementary Appropriation Bill 2023 are now deemed to be set down for second reading.

*Bills***THE HONIARA CITY (AMENDMENT) BILL 2023***Second Reading*

The SPEAKER: Honourable Members, the responsible Minister had moved the Second Reading of the Honiara City (amendment) Bill 2023 last week. Debate on the Bill therefore begins or commences today.

Hon MATTHEW WALE (*Aoke/Langalanga—Leader of Opposition*) (10:55): Thank you Sir. I would like to start by saying thank you to the Minister of Home Affairs for bringing in this Bill to address a small amendment but part of a wider set of amendments that will head towards an important step forward in our elections administration.

I would like to start by saying that the change is needed to our political governance, and therefore the electoral system that supports ought to be targeted at obtaining the clearest mandate from the electorate at the various levels of government. This obviously has to happen in tandem with the development of the role of Political Parties. It is important that Political Parties present leadership and policies to the electorate at elections and seek the electorates consent on that body of policies and leadership to deliver on these policy proposals, so that when the electorate votes, they are informed on those two things; policies and leadership to deliver it. Our current system, which I think we all agree, is dysfunctional, outdated and has been corrupted against our own best national interests. It is terrible that in our current system, the electorate does not have any reasonable chance of knowing who might be the leader of Government at any of the various levels of Government during elections. The election of the leader for Government is left to the few who get elected. That has left our Governance extremely vulnerable to the worst of corrupt of human nature.

It is important that the electorate must have the mandate to elect the leader of Government at the various levels of Government based on the proposals presented at elections. Otherwise we are extremely vulnerable to electoral deception.

If Government was serious about reforms to provide greater political stability, it would anchor such stability in the direct mandate of the electorate. As it is, the mandate of the Executive Government is not from the electorate but only from the derivative mandate of the few who possess and animate Executive Government at the various levels.

The situation has been gradually getting worse, in my observation, and that increasingly the electorate is ignored in very important policy and legislative agenda and Executive Governments have taken the liberty of proceeding on

legislation as if they had any mandate for those actions and decisions when any such arguable mandate is only derived from the few in the Executive Government.

This clearly is not good for our country and we have a responsibility to change it. I am therefore extremely disappointed that the reforms to deliver on this is much more important and consequential policies are unlikely to come during the remaining life of this House.

None of us, including those of you in Executive Government, doubt the importance and significance of these reforms. We must have them. But it seems there is no will to make the changes that our country desperately needs in this important considerations. I wonder why this is the case.

Let me come specifically to the Bill and make a few brief observation and then I will be finish. The Bill presents 5 objectives:

(i) to differ the next City Council elections to allow it in coincide with the next Parliamentary elections.

(ii) to require the date of by-elections of the council to be fixed by the Minister on the advice of the Electoral Commission.

(iii) to update the eligibility criteria for voter registration.

(iv) to give the responsibility for registration of voters and conduct of City Council elections to the Electoral Commission

(v) to mandate the Minister on the advice of the Electoral Commission to make regulations relating to voter registration and conduct of City Council elections.

Let just make a few observation as to whether the Bill achieves its own stated objectives. First, it was pointed out to the Bills and Legislation Committee that this amendment is part of three amendments that aim to make it possible to conduct elections for seven Provincial Assemblies ad the Honiara City Council on the same day in 2024 and the same say as for the National Parliamentary elections. I think synchronized elections is now the term being used. As a policy, I think this is a good step, not only because of the cost of savings, but also to provide a more efficient electoral administration system.

Secondly, with regards to its first object, I note that the synchronization will only be on the matter of the date of the elections. The dissolution of the City Council and I assume for the up-coming provincial amendment as well for Provincial Assemblies, so the dissolution for this levels of government are not synchronized with the dissolution of Parliament. So Parliament will dissolve on December 31st , while the City Council will dissolve on April 16th, if the election as proposed will be on April

17th. Clearly, a policy choice was made on this point for the City Council to remain as it currently is. That is, to hold elections the day after its dissolution.

I note that this is currently also the scheme for Provincial Assemblies dissolutions and elections, and I therefore assumed that the announced Provincial Government (amendment) Bill will also retain the same.

Arguments have been made to the committee that in the interest of fairness, especially to non-incumbent candidates, that the City Council is dissolved in the same manner as Parliament, so that everyone going to those elections are doing so on a level playing field, depriving incumbents of the advantages that come from incumbency from being in office and having access to resources and the machinery of government at that level.

There is, of course some merit to this argument. However, I would propose that on the matter of dissolution, the synchronization should be the other way round, which would of course require Constitutional amendments. That it is the dissolution of Parliament that should be moved to be similar to that of the City Council and Provincial Assemblies in the current scheme. The need at the National Parliamentary level is greater for such a scheme.

In the current scheme, elections must be held for Parliament within four months of its dissolution. During that period, between the dissolution of Parliament and the election of a new Prime Minister in a new Parliament, a caretaker Government runs the affairs of the country, and that could be anywhere from that four months for elections to maybe another month. This would be about five and a half months before the country has an elected Government.

This is not an ideal situation in the 21st century. Although the Constitution is clear that the caretaker Government possesses all the powers of the substantive Government during a term in Parliament. Its legitimacy is always under question, and therefore some actions or decisions the Government would otherwise take, would normally be postponed until after the formation of a Government after elections. This is not a good situation for the country's governance. The country should never be without a legitimately elected Government derived from a legitimately elected Parliament.

I would agree that we need to move from the situation of caretaker mode for both the Executive Government and Parliament. The Executive Government is derived from Parliament. You cannot and should not have an Executive Government without the Parliament from which it is derived in the first place. A dissolution of Parliament should mean the dissolution of the Executive Government derive from it. An executive Government from a Parliament that has been dissolved clearly lacks the moral legitimacy and that ought to be the bottom line of this changes.

This of course is a serious policy consideration on the legitimacy of the mandate of Executive Government during caretaker mode. During election period, the Government should still be able to effectively govern and not restrain itself because it is in caretaker mode. We should never have a caretaker mode phase.

Different jurisdictions deal with this matter in a number of ways. Some do as the current scheme with the City Council and Provincial Assemblies. They dissolve today and hold elections tomorrow. Other jurisdictions have a fixed date in their Constitution that elections must be held, whether cyclone or no cyclone, that date is the date. Elections are held on that date. A new Parliament then is sworn in at a fixed date after elections, so that this Parliament runs its life events through those elections. When the results are made available, members that lost can be removed and new members come and join and then you have the 12th Parliament. You never lose legislative capacity. You are able to still make law during that period. Yet others have a system that only half the legislature would go to elections half way through the term of the other half that is remaining. So you never lose legislative capacity. You can still make laws. Some go to elections and everybody serves a full four year term but there is always an election half way. Those other ones serve their four years when those other ones just come in two years. This worked in some of the jurisdictions all with that object that there should never be an elected Parliament on any day so the country does not lose legislative capacity.

The point of all this permutations and combinations of course is so that at no time should a country be with out a legitimate Parliament and through that the legitimate Executive Government derived from it.

My view is that this is the direction we must take. It would of course require Constitutional amendment but it is one that is necessary to take.

Thirdly, with regards to the second object that the by-elections of Members of the Council to be set by the Minister acting on the advise of the Electoral Commission, I have only a simple observation to make. The current wording of the Bill is opened as if the Minister for Home Affairs could also be the one responsible for general elections date gazettal. If the Provincial Government (amendment) Bill that is to come has similar wording, then that would add a third Minister as possibly responsible for gazettal of the General elections date.

Of course I grant that the provision would only apply for by-elections- that is the intention- and that the Electoral Commission would only advise the relevant Minister for the elections due under his Ministry's mandate, and so in this instance by-elections. Therefore the Prime Minister would be the only Minister receiving the advise to gazette the date for National General Elections. That certainly seems to be the policy intention. However, the wording could be better constructed so that it is

absolutely clear that the provision only applies for by-elections. In the case of the City Council, the Minister for Local Government and by his extension, of course with the new amendment Bill coming for Provincial Government Act, by-elections for Provincial Assemblies. So the construction of that amendment could be tidied up. In this Bill and in the two that will follow, it ought to be absolutely clear that only the Minister in charge of the Electoral Commission, and at present, that is the Prime Minister, acting on the advice of the Electoral Commission, is responsible for the gazettal of the National General Elections, and that the two respective Ministers only for bye-elections for lower-level governments under their respective jurisdictions. This would remove any doubts created by the current construction.

Fourthly, on the third object of updating criteria for voter registration, I think the Bill is deficient. The current wording merely repeats what is already an existing law in the Constitution. How does that add value? There is the proposal, that perhaps, it should include the definition already included in Section 4 of the Electoral Act 2018. That certainly would expand the current criteria provided in this Bill. However, like the current wording, it too would be already existing law that is applicable anyway without adding it in the Bill. It does not add any further clarity than what already exists.

I suppose we will have to await the proposed amendments to the Electoral Act 2018 to see any meaningful proposals on this very important object, but as it is, the Bill on its own and as it is currently worded, is unlikely to achieve its own stated third object.

Fifthly, the fifth object of this Bill is to empower the Minister to make regulations relating to voter registration and the conduct of the elections of Members of the Council acting on the advice of the Electoral Commission. I admit this is an improvement on the current law in that it constraints the Minister to act only as advised by the Electoral Commission.

However, it perhaps should be considered that all matters relating to the registration of voters and the conduct of all elections for all levels of government in the country, should now be the monopoly of the Electoral Commission, and therefore by extension, be restricted to their Minister, which is currently the Prime Minister. This would be a neater and much more tidy arrangement.

The House was informed that this Bill will be followed by amendments to both the Provincial Government Act and the Electoral Act to enable the so-called synchronization of elections. I am concerned that there was no mention of any reforms to come in amendments to the Political Party Integrity Act. This too was sighted in the taskforce report as having some effect from these changes.

We know it is an important part of our electoral and political system, a growing importance and it is clear that its current state is simply terrible and is in desperate need of substantive change.

A lot of work and consultations have been done on proposed changes to the current Political Parties Integrity Act. Of course, it requires a political will to make substantive changes to that law, which should also mean Constitutional changes to bring in anti-defection measures.

I would like to hear from government some clarification where these proposals are and when we should expect to see them in the House, whether it's possible to see these proposals in the remaining life of this House or not.

Let me conclude. Although I am keeping an open mind to the possibility that the more substantive and consequential reforms needed to strengthen our electoral and governance system may yet come, I am disappointed that halfway through the year, we are told of only the three amendments that will affect the coming elections. The excuse used for the extension of the life of this House was that there were very important electoral reforms that the Government wanted to complete before elections. And therefore, it needed the extra seven months to do them.

This, and the other two announced Bills will have consequential effects on the administration of elections but it will not have much effect on political governance, which is by far the most urgent and the strategic need in our system of political governance.

With regards to this Bill, the Committee did not have the benefit of the other two Bills relating to elections and so was deprived of the benefit of an overall perspective of the proposals. There is much that the Committee assumed.

The proposals contained in this Bill are improvements on the existing law to deliver on synchronized elections. However, there are still policy options that ought to have been considered in this Bill. So I say that at the very least, in its current form, the Bill should be amended to achieve greater clarity.

Those are my few observations and thoughts on this Bill, and I resumed my seat. Thank you.

Hon ISHMAEL AVUI (*East Central Guadalcanal—Minister for Lands, Housing and Survey*) (11:19): Mr. Speaker, I first of all thank you for recognizing me to contribute as well to this very important Bill, the Honiara (amendment) Bill 2023, as moved by the Minister of Home Affairs and MP for Shortlands.

First of all, I would like to thank the honorable Minister and the Prime Minister for their hard work, especially getting this Bill onto the floor of Parliament. I would like

to thank the staff of the honorable Minister and most importantly, his Permanent Secretary for their hard work, which I greatly appreciate.

Also, I would like to thank the hardworking Chairman of the Bills and Legislation Committee for their scrutiny of the Bill and the production of the Committee Report, National Parliament Paper No. 13 of 2023.

I will deliver a general talk and be brief. The honorable Minister for Home Affairs, when presenting the Bill, is asking Parliament to approve certain changes in the principal Act, the Honiara City Act of 1992.

The Minister is obliged to bring the Bill due to foreseen circumstances that are going to happen during the National General Election in 2024, which the Principal Act of 1999 does not provide for. And if this Principal Act is not amended to cater for this changing circumstance, we will be seen to be acting undemocratic and illegal. There are four Section done for amendment under this amendment Bill; Section 2, Section 6, Section and Section 18. My interest is on the changes proposed to Section 17, the right to be an elector. This particular amendment re-emphasizes the democratic principle of the rights of individuals granted under the Constitution. This Section 17 grants an protects that right for individuals eligible to vote in Honiara, to participate in electing Members of the City Council.

Secondly, this amendment updates the eligibility criteria for persons to be registered to vote to be the same as the Electoral Act 2018.

All these laws must be consistent in the application to our people. Otherwise, we will be applying different laws to different people within the same jurisdiction. If we do, this is again undemocratic. This country is democratic country and this Parliament's role is to legislate and to promote these democratic principles.

I would like to emphasize that those who live in Honiara must vote in Honiara. By definition, Honiara is their ordinary residence. That is their place.

I do agree with what the Law Reform Commission said in the report, that you have to make a choice whether you vote in Honiara or your provincial constituency.

Registration of voters is an issue in the past, either at the ordinary elections or the National General Elections. Over the past national general elections, very often the names of people that we expect to vote are not on the list. This is because there is not enough time given for vetting and objection of voters list. This time around I am happy because the registration will be done early by the Electoral Commission and continuously for a much longer time period before the national elections. That is a big improvement in our electoral system. I am happy with those electoral reforms.

I am a bit sad when the Leader of Opposition said that the reforms will not work. No! Those reforms will work. Reform is continuous and we improve on them from time to time. Incremental reform is good. I suppose that is what the Electoral Commission is doing. It is a continuous process.

I would like to call on the responsible authorities and perhaps the Electoral Commission to make sure that the registration process is not tampered with. That is my only worry on this so that those who are eligible to vote in the Honiara City must register.

Another feature of this Amendment Bill as shown in Clauses 6 and 8 is that the Minister will be acting upon advice of the Electoral Commission. This is good because the Minister is not acting on his deliberate judgement. In other words, there is no discretion powers here, which means that the Minister is safeguarded to avoid a conflict of interest maybe. I am really happy and these are reforms and improvements. This shows that we are moving to mature politically.

As I have said today, I will not take long. I will contribute briefly. The reforms are what we want and we must appreciate that reforms are not a big bang, but a continued process. We implement reforms as we go. It shows we are growing and matured in the political development of this country. I see that this amendment Bill will cause improvements to our electoral process in Honiara City. It is democratic and suitable for the governance of Honiara City as well as this beautiful country.

I support the Honiara City (amendment) Bill 2023 and resume my seat.

Mr. JOHN MANENIARU (*West Are Are*) (11:28): Thank you Mr. Speaker. I will also be very brief on my contribution. First, let me take the opportunity to thank the honourable Minister of Home Affairs for bringing this Honiara City (amendment) Bill 2023 for us to look at. I thank the Permanent Secretary and Attorney General Chambers to help us with this Bill, and particularly my Committee, the Bills and Legislation Committee.

On that note, I also want to thank the Members of the Bills and Legislation Committee and the secretariat for the two days we have been sitting and look at this small amendment which is also a big job. Therefore, I want to thank them for their time and thank the Secretariat of Parliament for this report.

I am talking in support to the intervention and contribution of the Leader of the Opposition. He already spoke on the issues that we have discussed. I do not want to repeat those again. I thank the Minister of Lands, Housing and Survey for that support to the Committee on this report as well.

The Committee has no problems on the synchronization of the elections to take place on the same date, for the National Election, Honiara City Council election and also Provincial Assemblies elections.

What I also would like to share is that, when we look at the Bill, it does not synchronize the times for dissolution. It is four months for Parliament, City Council is at the eve of elections and the same with the province.

These two have that choice and Parliament is also by Constitution and Electoral Act. There are four months. We have to synchronize it to give time for us to look at what is best when we talk about synchronization. This needs to be further considered. We need to have some consistency in our policies and electoral reforms.

The gazetting of the elections date by three Ministers as already appeared on the Honiara City Council (amendment) Bill 2023, the Minister of Home Affairs has the power to gazette it. Although the Leader of the Opposition already talked about this, I would like to reiterate the fact that we need to synchronize it so that the Minister responsible for National Elections has the power over all three elections. The other requirements for the Ministers are clear. They have the powers to make their gazettes.

In terms of this amendment, the synchronization of the election, it is good. In terms of Honiara City, migrants from the provinces who register here in the three constituencies is a big problem. You will notice that even rural people are migrating to Honiara to register at the Honiara constituencies to vote. There will be some control on this at this time. You have to make a choice, whether to vote in Honiara as a residence of Honiara City or you vote in your constituency.

In terms of the Honiara City (amendment) Bill 2023, I want to look at the Honiara City Act. Is this the best amendment for Honiara in terms of our interests, in terms of reforming Honiara, that city that we wanted it to be green, is it good for us citizens? Or should we look more deeply into the Honiara City Act for us to make appropriate amendments that suit the needs in Honiara? We, the citizens of Honiara, should note that our Honiara City Council keep on working under this Honiara City Act in terms of their election. But in terms of the election of Councilors, is that all? Or there should be further reform so that we see the best amendment that would produce the best outcomes for Honiara to be greener. So I just want to flag that in terms of this amendment, particularly to the Honiara City Act. Although it is a very young city, we still have a lot issues to address.

I just want to comment on the residence of the City, including us, and then our constituency, regarding our Ward Members. You will make a choice that will be clear. But for us, I just want to reflect and say that I too would like to go and vote for my Ward Member, so that I can vote for a good Ward Member whilst I am

staying here in Honiara. But that is not going to be allowed under the synchronized reform. Since I am from Honiara, I will have to make a choice about whether to vote for a Ward Member or vote here for my Councilor. Most of us will go back to our constituencies. I think all of us will go because you would like to vote yourself too to win in your constituency in the coming election. But I would also like to vote for my Councilor for Honiara City. I will no longer contribute to that because I have to go back to the constituency for the National Election as well as the Provincial Election. Residents of Honiara should also be given the opportunity to vote for their Councilors. At the moment, it will not happen. That that is also an issue for Honiara, to have the opportunity to elect our representative Councilors.

The recommendations of the Committee has already touched on by the Leader of the Opposition, but I want to reiterate again very important recommendations by the Committee.

1. to ensure administrative clarity on the conduct of the date setting of elections. The Bill clearly mandates the Minister only for By-elections.
2. the dissolution of the Parliament, Honiara City Council and all Provincial Assemblies should be synchronized.
3. the criteria for registration should include Section 4 of the Electoral Act 2018.
4. The Bills and Legislation Committee note that the Bill will not address the issue of cross-border votes and therefore recommends that the matter is taken up in the amendments to the Electoral Act 2018.
5. Choiseul Province and Western Province must be included in the 2024 synchronize elections.

So those are the five important recommendations by the Bills and Legislation Committee on this amendment Bill that is before us.

The other issues that the Committee came across in the enquiry are in the report and I would like to thank the stakeholders that came before the Committee to help us compile this report on the Honiara City (amendment) Bill 2023 for Parliament.

With that, I would like thank you for the opportunity and I support the Motion. Thank you.

Mr RICK HOUENIPWELA (*Small Malaita*) (11:41): Thank you Mr. Speaker and I want to thank the Minister. I support this Bill. It is a good Bill for the reasons that have already been enumerated by previous Speakers.

Let me just make very few points that I thought we should address. I suppose this relates to one of the points raised by the Leader of Opposition. It would be really

helpful to the Committee when looking at the amendments because we are looking at amendments of three laws. We should be looking at three laws to do amendments in our preparations for the National General Elections in 2024. That is the Electoral Act, Provincial Act and also Honiara City Council Act. It would have been really helpful if we the Committee and the House to consider all these together so that we have a bird's eye view on where this is heading. I think it will just only enhance our understanding to where we are heading in terms of the reforms that are necessary to prepare us for the upcoming General Elections.

One issue that I think is noted in the report, which has been quite a difficult one that needs addressing. The law tries to address but it is a bit hard. This is the issue of cross-border. The definition to place of residence in the Electoral Act is very broad.

Some people from Choiseul Province came and vote in my constituency. They did not vote for me, but because this definition made it difficult for us to remove them. It is a big issue, and I think one Minister spoke on this before. It will be an issue for Honiara as well. The point that was made was that Honiara residents should vote here and not in the constituencies. I do not know how we can deal with this. If you look at it carefully, all the Ministers will vote in Honiara and not in your constituencies. This is an issue that I think the Electoral Commission tries to address, but it is a hard one.

With this amendment, I am talking about something that is yet to come, which is the Provincial Act, as well as the Electoral Act. I suppose once all these amendments are synchronized, it will mitigate the issue of cross-border. To me, it is an issue that we need to address.

I am not going to talk long but I talk in support of this Motion and the amendments that the Minister brings. The amendments are supported by a number of tasks, which various people have been tasked to perform. One of the tasks is the taskforce on electoral reform, which was carried out- and I understand late last year- and their report was published early this year. It enumerated a number of advantages, which I want to comment on one or two of them. I think they are very compelling reasons.

The first being the cost saving from a synchronization of elections for Honiara City Council, the provinces as well as the national elections. You will see in the report that the estimated cost savings is about \$47 million. That is quite a substantive amount of money for saving, which is really good.

The other advantage that was mentioned is to do with the high turnover for provincial elections. This has been a problem in the past up till now, where somehow people just did not turn up to provincial elections even if their names are on the electoral poll. This is not good. I think this amendment will make sure that everyone attends. My view is that if 80 percent turn up in the constituency for the

National General Elections, the same number will also turn up for the Provincial Government Elections. This is good.

One of the advantages I noted in the report is that it will strengthen our political party system. I do not believe that. It will not happen. I think it should not be included in this report. Why do you include this in the report? Where we should address this political party issues is the Political Parties Integrity Act. I do not see where the party system will be strengthened by these amendments.

Let me now and urge the Electoral Commission to must do the work. I understand they have now trained Election Managers. I am concerned about that work that the Electoral Commission must do a good work. Make sure that the voters roll is clean. In many constituencies, even people who already died two or three years ago are still voting. We need to clean the voters list.

When the CEO appeared before the Committee, he was very confident in terms of the budgetary side of the work. This is the first time for me to see the CEO of the Electoral Commission happy. He has got money and others are promising to offer financial support as well. I added the figures and it is way over his budget, which is really good, but he has to do the work to ensure that the electoral roll is ready for April next year.

I would like to thank the Minister again and the Prime Minister. Let us get on with it. I want to say I fully support this Motion and the amendments. Thank you.

Mr. DERRICK MANU'ARI (*West Makira*) (11:50): Thank you Mr. Speaker for allowing me to briefly contribute with regards to the amendment of the Honiara City Bill 2023.

I would like to point out a few things that have been identified in the Committee's Report with regards to the current electoral reform but pertaining to the Honiara City (amendment) Bill 2023.

First of all, I would like to thank the Government for these very important reforms to strengthen the administration and management of our electoral processes. I will not repeat things that are already said by other speakers. I just want to point our a few things. I know this is the beginning of the whole process of the electoral reform. Even though these things will become clearer as we go into the main Act, the Electoral Act, but I would like to highlight them now because it is also part of the Committee's enquiry. First of all, I would like to on the registration. At the moment, there will be no longer any out of constituency registration. The reason for that is to avoid cross-border registration. When registrations are done in Honiara, it is easier for people from other constituencies to come and register even though they may not be from that constituency. This amendment, in a way, will control cross-border. This

means that people will need to go back home to do registration. I can already see what will happen. A lot of people or candidates who want to contest in elections will be finding ways to send people back home to register. It will almost be similar to when people are going for elections. People will charter boats, pay for fares and to send people back home.

There is nothing wrong with that and there is a certain group of people, that in every movement and mobilization, we tend to forget. The people living with disabilities. In times like these, people will be in so much rush and the ships will be full but these people, most of them or some of them, in terms of mobility, it will be a bit hard for them to move round like those of us who are able, to go home and come back quickly.

If the Government through the Electoral Commission can look at how they can be provided a privilege so that they can be allowed to be registered in town to vote in their constituencies because they do not have the ability that we the normal people have to move around.

On top of that, our people who are living outside of the country, by the end of the year, would almost reach 6,000 or 7,000 or even 10,000. These are the seasonal workers. If this current reform does not allow them to register outside of the constituency and even so to vote, then we are depriving them of something that we ourselves are encouraging them to participate in at the first place. They are participating in this scheme to help our economy. It is a program that is endorsed and supported by the Government. Therefore, it is important that we allow them to also must participate in the registration and also elections. We have to find a way.

We know that elections are coming up and we know that these people are going there for a number of years. Some of them will not be here during the election year. I urge the Government to look at that to make sure that these people also participate in this very important process of elections, which begins with the registration.

I support the synchronized or simultaneous elections. I know that in East Makira Constituency, they had already done this in there. From what I had found out from people, they said that it is easy for them to understand as long as there is enough time for people to go and do awareness and tell them what to do, because there will only be two ballot papers and two ballot boxes. You will only give directives on how they will cast their votes. It is not a very difficult process.

Also, at the moment listening to what the Electoral Commission presented to us, I have a lot of trust that this process will be handled properly. They have people in there who are responsible to help the people to make sure that they vote properly. There will be assistance available for them. While there maybe arguments around the fact that it will be difficult for the people to understand and so forth, I am of the

contrary. I think when it was piloted in East Makira, the results were okay. I am just encouraging the Government to look at that and I have a lot of trust on the Electoral Commission that they will continue to work on this to make sure that the change does not have any huge impact on the voter turnout spoiled ballots come this coming election. Finally before I took my seat, I want to join others in registering my view on how ordinary resident is currently defined. At the moment, even though you are born in a different island but if you can trace your family tree to another place, you can qualify to vote and register, and it has caused a lot of difficulties. If a person is married to a place, anyone who is related to him or her, can register and voter in that place. It caused a lot of difficulties because when we try to manage the development in our constituencies and we allow this to happen, it only complicates how we manage, profile and facilitate or implement developments of our constituencies. That problem, if sorted out during the time of elections, it will help on the side of how we move development after elections and when Government is formed.

In the current process, we are not looking at it. With this one, the definition of ordinary residents still remains the same. I hope when it comes to the main registration, we will look at this one, on how best we can make it to suit our context.

Already, the changes to registration, that we must register at our homes, they are all trying to achieve that one goal, that only the people of that constituency can register. However, if the definition does not change, that rule will remain and still we do not achieve what we want to achieve, by not allowing for out of constituency registration. We already say that there will be no out of constituency registration but if this definition remains, that problem, in my view, will still remain unless we deal with the definition the ordinary resident. That is the only way for us to avoid out of constituency or cross-border voting.

These are the few things I want to add here. Once again, I have a lot of trust on the Electoral Commission. With these changes, we will see the positive outcomes in terms of how people turn out to vote and participate meaningfully in the whole electoral process, beginning with the registration of voters up to the casting of ballots. However, I urged the Government not to forget our seasonal workers and as well as people living with disabilities, who are also participants to this very important process.

Thank you Mr. speaker and I support this motion.

Hon. MANASSEH MAELANGA (*East Malaita—Minister for Infrastructure Development*) (12:00): Thank you Mr. Speaker and I will be brief on this Honiara City (amendment) Bill 2023. First, I would like to thank the honourable Minister for

moving the Bill which before Parliament so that we look at the amendment of the Honiara City.

I have few things to debate, just to present before this House and then I will take my seat. I want to thank the Minister and the Government for seeing it fit for this amendment to come before parliament. As other speakers have said and shared, we all have different thoughts on these things that should happen. Otherwise, we have the Electoral Commission that takes care of such issues in elections. One of the areas that I would like to touch on first is that I agree with the synchronized elections, where the National Government, the Provincial Government and Honiara City will be dissolving on December 31st .

I speak on behalf of my people of East Malaita also on this Bill. The issue of the two provincial governments that will not involve still concerns me. At the end of 2028, we will be back here because they are following a process. Those are some of the areas that I would like to raise for the Electoral Commission to consider.

Another issue is batch counting. I would like to make it known here that I am one of those who disagrees with batch counting. I find it very difficult because if we go through this again, you cannot know if any corrupt activities take place during counting. This is not counting on polling stations, which is the usual way. With batch counting, you cannot verify if there is corruption during counting. That is why I want us to go back to our old system of polling station counting, so that you actually know how many voters cast their ballots during the day. There will be no foul play during the counting. I know all of you here will agree with it. This is how we will know the number of voters who cast their ballots on that day at that polling station. If anything goes wrong there, we will easily find it. For instance, there are only 400 voters, but why does it reach 500 to 600? This means that there is foul play, and you better check with the responsible officers. These small things are very important, and I suggest the Electoral Commission should consider this carefully for this coming election.

It comes back when we have the petition. You cannot verify because they mix the batches, but if you want to find it, just go straight to the pollen station, and you can pick that out and find out who cast a ballot but is not physically present to vote. So it means some do it for them to increase the number.

Out-of-constituency voting is very important. I know all of us have different views on this out-of-constituency voting. The issues raised are very true. A lot of our people are going to the Seasonal Work Scheme. I am not sure how the Electoral Commission will do it, but I think time is the limiting factor here to organize things for voting during this time. I have been to Australia and visited one farm where our farmers wanted me to see them. They want to vote. I told them that it is their right.

It is up to the Electoral Commission as to how organize out of constituency voting. I will leave it there for the Electoral to think about this. This is very important as other colleagues there has raised. There are about 200 workers in the farm that I visited. They also asked the question of voting.

I think the Electoral reforms that happen are very important that can fit in the issues that came up for us to look at this Synchronized election, that combines all; Provincial, National and HCC. I think it is time that we need to do these reforms too. There are other reforms that Electoral is working on it so I think it is important.

Just to touch on the cross-border that has been raised here, I think it is quite a difficult issue. The cross-borders usually go and registered by themselves. No one forced them to go and register. It is only after elections that they will and tell you that they are cross-border voters. We need to look at how we can address cross-borders.

I thank the Electoral Commission for the registration that will happen back in the constituencies. The cross-borders happened especially when we did the registration in town. There were a few problems happened during the registration in town, especially at Town Ground. It is good to avoid these cross-borders. It is good that registrations will be done in the constituencies so that only those from the constituency can register in order to avoid cross-borders.

I think with the amendment that happened to HCC Act, I do not have any issues. I would like to thank the Australian Government and New Zealand Government for supporting the upcoming election.

Once again, I would like to thank the Minister and the Government for getting this Bill before Parliament.

With these few remarks , I support the Bill.

Parliament is suspended at 12:11pm

Parliament is resumed at 2.09pm

Hon ANTHONY VEKE (*West Guadalcanal—Minister for Police, National Security and Correctional Services*) (02:09): Thank you honorable Speaker, and thank you for recognizing the Minister of Police to contribute very briefly in support of the Bill, The Honiara City (amendment) Bill 2023, moved by the honorable Minister for Home Affairs.

Allow me to thank the Government for initiating the Bill, and in particular the Minister and his team from the Ministry of Home Affairs, in ensuring that the Bill is before us for debate.

As I have said; I will be very short as other colleague Members of the House have already highlighted a lot of issues that are critically important, which I also endorse.

The Honiara City (amendment) Bill, in my view is legal, appropriate, necessary and timely. As such I render my support through the proposed amendment. As I have mentioned earlier, speakers have highlighted a number of issues which I do not like to repeat here, but I would like to make some very general comments in my contribution to the proposed amendment.

I would also like to join others in highlighting the importance of one of the things that was mentioned is synchronizing elections. Synchronizing elections in Solomon Islands, in my view, is a positive direction for the country in terms of elections. Synchronizing elections saves time and resources. It eliminated issues of limited resources and actually, it saves the resources.

With that, we do not go wrong with the proposals that come before the House for synchronizing elections. The country that we keep on complaining of the little and the meagre resources that we have, it is wise that we start developing and proposing systems that realizes saving of resources, the little resources that we have.

Synchronizing elections simplifies the voting processes and takes away the confusion and the complexity of the multiple elections that we have. And I do not need to go back and list down for us, the processes that we already experience and have in the country and the difficulties that we have and how we can simply the confusions that sometimes occur during elections. Therefore, I believe that by synchronizing elections, and this case for the Honiara City Council, it simplifies the voting processes and reduces the confusion and the complexity of the election that we have and sometimes experience with the City Council.

The other aspects of synchronizing elections is that, it reduces political interference, which at times can create imbalances of power. The chances of such interference is reduced when we synchronized the elections. As you already know, I have been a Provincial Member for 12 years and being a Premier for eight years, and this is something that actually happened. After the national leaders are being elected, the provincial members are elected. The national leaders campaigned against whoever in the provincial election that they do not like. That is political interference. All these things can happen. I can go on and write an essay on that because I have a first hand experience of such interferences during provincial elections.

With the Bill refers to the other Honiara City Council Amendment Bill but it is similar and I believe that it is the same. I believe that once we synchronized elections, it helps to reduce the political interference that sometimes exert on our leaders at the lower tier of the government system.

I think it is a good proposal which starts with the Honiara City Council on the amendment that we have before us and hopefully, we will see those that are coming from the Ministry of Provincial Government for the Provincial Governments.

The other benefit of synchronizing elections is voter turn out. In terms of voter turn out, in a synchronized election, I believe it would increase turnouts. The voter turnout normally, the experience that we have with the current system in terms of election, the voter turnout at the lower tier of the government and I believe as I said the City Council have a similar experience and that it is very low and very poor. I remember when I first came to join the Provincial Assembly, I came in with about 190 plus votes. That is the difference. When it is the Parliamentary elections, they get almost get 3,000 to 4,000 votes. It gives some kind of a feeling of whether you are truly elected or truly representing the people or not. When you have 5,000 people in your Wards but then you only 100 plus votes. You definitely feel very bad about it, but what can we say, the people do not want to come back. How many times would they paddle their canoes to come and do voting? Doing it as one is very good because they come only once to do it.

It increases the political participation for people to choose their leaders and that is the good thing about synchronizing elections. So, we would expect that the voter turn out in the lower tier of the government, in this case City Council, will increase and it will almost be similar to the Parliamentary elections for the three constituencies of Honiara. That is good and very encouraging. The leaders of the City Council for this purpose, they feel that they are fully representing the population of their Ward. They do not come in with only a few hundreds of people then we say that they represent the people. That is a good thing about synchronizing the election.

Much has been said, I do not like to bore us, but just like to contribute to show that I think the Government has this proposal, which for the positive development of Solomon Islands, in my view, and therefore I would not hesitate to support Bills that contributes to the positive growth of our country, whether it be City Council or our Provincial Governments which we have in the country.

With that, I once again wish to thank the Minister and his team from the Ministry of Home Affairs for the effort behind the Bill and I support the Bill and resume my seat.

Hon CULWICK TOGAMANA (*Maringe/Kokota—Minister for Health and Medical Services*) (2 :20): Thank you Mr. Speaker. Thank you for recognizing the Member of Maringe-Kokota and also Minister of Health. I rise to contribute to this debate on the amendment to the Honiara City Bill 2023.

At the outset, let me thank the Minister of Home Affairs for tabling this Bill in Parliament. I also would like to thank those who had contributed to the debate and in support of this Bill, whose spoke earlier on. My intervention, likewise, will be fairly brief, speaking in support of this Bill.

This Honiara City (amendment) Bill 2023 is one of those Bills and few more others that will come to look into electoral reforms on our legislation. For this Bill, I support it especially and I need not to repeat the important points that were already raised in terms of the Bill that allows for Honiara City Council to be dissolved and at the same time in elections be synchronized with national elections along with the other Provincial Governments. The merit for this synchronizing of the election is already being elaborated on the floor of Parliament in terms of cost. An important point raised by the Minister of Police, the participation of the electorates on the very important processes such as this.

Normally, we would see a huge turn out for the voting for Members of Parliament but when it comes to Members of the Provincial Assembly, the turn out is quite low. To have these two in a process occurring at once, I look forward and I do believe that the turn out for also election for the member of the Provincial Assembly, in this case members of the Honiara City Council will be increased. So I fully support this amendment.

Likewise, with the passage of this Bill, it actually will home-in the important decision to our electorates, to make a firm decision on where they will register. I think that is quite important. We talked about cross-border registration. I think for this passage of Bill it is important that the eligible voters must register. If they register in Honiara, then do remain in Honiara and also register for the three constituency.

In terms of the voter's registration, I do see the importance, especially our young people, who have left and go on this labour mobility scheme of more than 5,000 or so. If some of them are not registered, how are they going to be registered since we are not doing the out of constituency registration?

I do hope that the Electoral Commission will allow a longer period and open up the registration early this year or maybe middle of this year until next year. This allows for our young citizens who will be turning 18 by April 2024 to start registering now and not only three months or so next year before we open the registration.

We should be able to know in terms of those who will be away overseas as students or joining the labour mobility scheme, whether they have registered or not because we should be able to look at their passports for their dates of births and know is yet to be registered and how many are already registered. In this regard, the out of constituency voting, which is probably not going to be the case for 2024 General

Election, we will look into that and I hope the Electoral Commission will make some provision, especially our citizens who would also like to participate in this democratic process but they will be away overseas.

In terms of the Political Party, I hear the sentiment raised by my dear brother the MP for Small Malaita that he does not believe that the party system will work for National Parliament, to be adopted at the Honiara City Council Councilors and also the Provincial Members. I think that is one of our challenges, that we do not have a party system operates at the National Parliament and adopted at the Provincial Assemblies.

When we always use this terminology that the Provincial Governments are agents of the Government, it does not really reflected well because we do not have this continuity of the party that rules at the National Parliament is also operated at the Provincial Government or the Honiara City Council for that matter. While I do conquer with the MP for Small Malaita in his view that this will not work and it requires the strengthening of the political integrity party legislation.

However, give it a time, so that if it works, it will work and if not, certainly we look at the amendment of this political integrity party to allow for strengthening party system that at the national, provincial and also the City Council. So I look forward that hopefully this will. When we go for campaigns at the national level, we do them together with the provincial elections. It will not really interrupt the daily activities of our electorates in the villages, who will listen to the national campaigns and then later the provincial campaigns. In doing this, it is just repetition. So synchronizing this, certainly it will be smooth, not only for those of us who contest at the national level, provincial and City Council, but also for our electorates who will be listening to these campaigns.

In terms of cross-border registration, I support this amendment. I support it in the sense that quite a number of the registered voters, as I speak now, there are intending candidates who will contest in Gao/Bugotu. They come to my constituency of Maringe/Kokota, to solicit support, for their voters in my constituency to cross the border to Gao/Bugotu.

The MP for Gao/Boguto, has no objection for that because he is not doing that, but the intending candidates are doing that. So this cross-border voting is not to strengthen the kind of leadership that we want to put in there. But some people are grass-hopping for the sake of access to this RCDF fund from Members, and that is quite dangerous. When it comes to this, the MP for small Malaita stated earlier, after the election, they come and say that they also voted for you, but the voter is from East Are'Are or Isabel, Maringe-Kokota. When they do that, they are asking for assistance. This is not right.

There is a system that allows people to be considered for this, but the Electoral Commission must tighten its mechanism to ensure that people who are opportunists, I would say, should be dealt with accordingly and make sure that they remain in the constituencies that they belong to and remain there for voting at the national and provincial levels when we synchronize this.

I think that is all I want to say on this. I support this amendment and Bill and I resume my seat.

Mr DOUGLAS ETE (*East Honiara*) (2 :33): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Firstly, I would like to thank the hardworking Minister of the Ministry of Home Affairs.

I have been asking around concerning the level of consultation, which is why I want to thank him. It was a robust consultation on this amendment alone. Once the Minister brings the whole amendment and review of the Honiara City Council, that would be a bonus for the Government. But for this matter alone, I would like to thank the Minister of Home Affairs and the Lord Mayor and his team at the Honiara Council. On that note I want to say thank you to these two people and their teams within their various establishments.

The amendment that we come to see on the floor of Parliament this afternoon is an amendment for amending the Honiara City Act and probably two other amendments will come at a later time, the Provincial Government Act, probably Section 9 of the Provincial Government Act and the Electoral Act. I understand that you currently not a Chairman in the Commission, Mr. Speaker, but would like to say thank you indeed for those of you who worked hard to bring this amendment before Parliament.

The three Bills, Honiara City amendment now before Parliament with the two others, they point to two things. Firstly; they point to the overall improvement of the electoral system, which would be judged in the light of whether these amendments fulfill the general principles of representation in our country. Will it fulfill this general principle of representation or not? Secondly, whether the threshold of representation affects the principle of one man, one vote and that the amendment together with every other amendments that will come will strengthen the voting system of our country. The answer is obviously 'yes'. The answer to both hypothesis is 'yes'. It will strengthen it. Although we would want to see other review and amendments to be brought to Parliament on strengthening the party system, the political system of government, but with this specific amendments alone the obvious answer is 'yes'.

Number one; it will obviously should in due time improve the principle of representation in both the Honiara City Council and the Parliamentary elections. In

theory, that is a choice by Government. There are a lot of choices that Government should do and should have taken. With this, it will strengthen the system.

Bigger democracies like England, USA, or a first past the post, their amendments and improvements do not come at once. They come in pockets. They come after another to improve the system. Secondly, the question of time and space, whether the old system that we now synchronize will benefit the Government in terms of its finances. 'Yes'. I think there was an analysis in the report that says that the Government is going to save money, as suppose to holding numerous elections. Tax payers money is going to be saved. I do not have a speech on me, but with those views, I do support this Bill

The issue of registration that would include Section 4 of the Electoral Act 2018, the temporary residents, I do not want to see any of you charter ships back home. Leave them in Honiara. I am talking as an MP in Honiara. Do not charter boats back home. Let them stay in Honiara. What do you charter those ships for? I am seriously in saying this because a lot of us stand up here to talk about cross-border. Out of the 28 cases that went to the High Court, including my dear sister for Kolombangara, it says, there is no law prohibiting any single citizen of this country to vote wherever he or she chooses if he or she lives in that place. That is his or her domicile.

They throw away all the ideas of cross-boarder. There is cross-border. Who told you that? Go and check the 28 High Court cases, including my petition case.

Late Edwin Satori who wrote the songs "*Waka bauti long China towni and Nomata if laf lo mi*" said, Honiara is home to all of us, not only for people from Temotu, Are'Are, Choiseul or Shortland. It is our home.

Now that we are dealing with HCC, with the three constituencies at HCC, I do not want to see any of you charter those boats going to North Malaita, Isabel or Choiseul. Leave them in Honiara. Anyone who wants to register home can go to the village and have himself and his family registered there. I support what the Minister did. If you want to vote in Shortland, you have to go there to register.

For the Honiara constituencies, the hotspot of the whole 50 constituencies is East Honiara. I say this because some people only win with 1,000 but not in East Honiara. I am saying this because a lot of us stand here and talked about cross-border. There is nothing about cross-border here. There is virtually no law. It could be a policy in the mind of the Government to bring it into law, bring it to Cabinet and bring it as a Bill to Parliament or an amendment in Parliament, but currently, there is virtually nothing.

One man one vote is the theory of democracy and that is one of the pillars of democracy. You know that Mr. Speaker. You are a very experienced person and you

know this well. You have been in government and you have been in public service and in politics and an ambassador for this country for numerous years. You know this well. One man one vote is the principal. I am tired of hearing about the cross-border and need to say something about it. With that, in view of whether these two hypothesis, whether the amendment itself will influence the overall improvement of the electoral system, judged in the light whether the amendment fulfils the general principle of representation, the answer is 'yes'.

Secondly, whether the threshold of representation affects the principle of one man one vote and that the amendment would strengthen the voting system of this beloved country call Solomon Islands, the obvious answer to this hypothesis is 'yes'.

With that, I would like to thank you indeed Mr. Speaker. I thank you indeed the Minister for Home Affairs and the Lord Mayor and your HCC team.

I thank you indeed and I obviously support the Bill.

(Debate is adjourned)

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. MANASSEH MAELANGA: Mr. Speaker, I move that Parliament do now adjourn.

Question put and agreed to

(Parliament adjourned at 2.47pm)

[Edited]



Eleventh Parliament

Sixth Meeting

NATIONAL PARLIAMENT OF SOLOMON ISLANDS

Thursday, 4 May 2023

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

(Subject to Revision)

NATIONAL PARLIAMENT OF SOLOMON ISLANDS**Thursday, 4 May 2023**

The Speaker, Mr Patterson John Oti, took the Chair at 10:00.

Prayers.

Business of the House

ATTENDANCE

All were present with the exception of the Minister for Communication and Aviation, Minister for Agriculture and Livestock, Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade, Minister for Traditional Governance, Peace and Ecclesiastical Affairs, Minister for Justice and Legal Affairs, Minister for Provincial Government and Institutional Strengthening, Minister for Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs, Minister for Public Service and Members of Parliament for Marovo, North West Guadalcanal, Central Honiara, East Honiara, North Malaita, Small Malaita, Rennell/Bellona, West Makira, Ulawa/Ugi, South New Georgia/Rendova/Tetepare, West Kwaio and West Honiara.

Questions and Answers

QUESTION NO.135

The SPEAKER: Question No. 135 to be asked by the Leader of the Opposition, Member for Aoke/Langalanga, unfortunately, the Minister is not here. So we will move on to the next question.

The two questions are actually for the same Minister. So on that note, I take it that the minister will not be able to make it in time and cannot hold up the Business of Parliament.

Bills

THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENTS (AMENDMENT) BILL 2023

First Reading

We proceed on to the next Business. Members, I understand that the government wishes to set down the Provincial Government (Amendment) Bill 2023 for First Reading today.

Normally, under Standing Order 44(1)(a), First Reading of the bill should happen not less than three clear days after the minister has given notice of his intention to

present the bill. We have just received the bill this morning, hence, I will call on the minister responsible to take necessary steps.

(Leave granted by The Speaker)

Hon. MANASSEH SOGAVARE (*East Choiseul—Prime Minister*) (10:03): I move that,

Standing Orders 44(1)(a) be suspended in accordance with Standing Orders 81 to permit the First Reading of the Provincial Government (Amendment) Bill 2023 to take place today.

The SPEAKER: Honorable Minister, would you like to explain why you want to suspend this Standing Orders?

Hon. MANASSEH SOGAVARE: This is a very urgent Bill that needs to come. It is a partner Bill of the Honiara City Bill that parliament passed, and that is to deal with the synchronization of provincial government elections with the national government election. The seven provincial government will be dissolved in the middle of this year (2023). If we do not do this quickly, we will have issues here. Of course, we will deal with Choiseul and Western Province cases separately. Those amendments are very important leading to the elections that will take place in 2024, the synchronization of elections, both at the national and provincial levels.

The SPEAKER: It is proposed that Standing Order 44(1)(a) be suspended in accordance with Order 81 to permit the First Reading of the Provincial Government (Amendment) Bill 2023 to take place today.

Hon MATTHEW WALE (*Aoke/Langalanga—Leader of Opposition*) (10:05): Thank you Sir. In the circumstances we have no issues of objection. It is just that I encourage the Ministries to do their work. We do not just wait then all of a sudden Honiara City is dissolved in May or all of a sudden the provincial governments dissolve in June. So Ministries really have no excuse to drag things.

I know there has been COVID. We cannot blame everything on COVID for every delays. Ministries must carry out their responsibilities so that Parliament too is in a better position in terms of its efficiency. It is not good for us to come and adjourn. Bills come when Parliament is sitting hence we have to adjourn so that Bills Committee can inquire into the provisions when we have tight deadlines on those dissolutions. This does not reflect well on the sponsoring Ministries. So I just wanted to register that protest. But having said that, we have no objections in the circumstances.

Mr. JOHN MANENIARU (*West Are Are*) (10:06): Thank you Prime Minister for moving the motion.

At the outset, I join the Leader of the Opposition Group. I have no problem with the request to Parliament. I just want to wear my hat as the Chairman of the Bills and Legislation Committee. When we expect our Bills to go through, all of us love to pass good bills and good laws for this country. Do not expect to put pressure on me to meet day and night. Give us time.

So when you submit important bills—we know that certain bills will come—but then you must also wear my shoe to allow me the time for consultation with our people. I just want to raise that here as we consider this request to suspend Standing Orders. We need to love to set good precedents in this Chambers.

For the Committee, those that have been experiencing sitting in this Committees, when it comes for us to quickly dispose bills to Parliament, timing is important. I want you to have some understanding. I need time because I have the responsibility to take due care for our country and our people.

I have no problem with the request by the Honorable Prime Minister to suspend the Standing Order. I support the Motion.

Hon. MANASSEH SOGAVARE: Thank you Mr. Speaker. I thank the Leader of opposition and the Chairman of the Bills and Legislation Committee for supporting the Motion to suspend the standing orders so that the bill can be brought to Parliament quickly, then it quickly goes to the Bills and Legislation Committee to deal with it.

With that I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to

(Provincial Governments (Amendment) Bill 2023 set down for First Reading)

THE 'HONIARA CITY (AMENDMENT) BILL 2023'

Second Reading

(Debate continues and concludes)

The SPEAKER: I take it that there are no further contributions to the debate. Therefore, I will now call on the honorable Minister to deliver his speech in reply to the issues and comments raised in the debate on the motion he moved in respect to the Honiara City Council (Amendment) Bill.

(Minister delivers speech in reply)

Hon CHRIS LAORE: Thank you Mr. Speaker, I rise to wind up the debate on the Honiara City (amendment) Bill 2023. First of all, I would like to thank the Chairman

of the Bill and Legislation Committee for taking on the leadership, time and effort in scrutinizing the Bill.

I also thank the Members of the Bills and Legislation Committee for their roles in looking through and scrutinizing the Bill. I also thank the honorable Members of Parliament who had contributed to the debate of this Bill on the floor of this honorable House.

All of your contributions either by comments, critics and your analysis are acknowledged.

To round up a discussion on the Honiara City (amendment) Bill 2023, I wish to address the five recommendations in order to provide more clarity to the House and also to our people who are listening to our debates.

Before I embark on the recommendation, it is imperative that I revisit the objectives of Honiara City Council (amendment) Bill 2023. The Honiara City (Amendment) Bill 2023 is designed to amend the Honiara City Act of 1999, No.2 of 1999 to enable the Minister:

- i. to defer the next Ordinary Elections of Members of the Honiara City to be held on the date fixed by the Minister,
- ii. to ensure that any election or by-election date to be set by the Minister in accordance with the advice of the Solomon Islands Electoral Commission,
- iii. to update the eligibility criteria for voter registration,
- iv. to require the Electoral Commission to register voter and conduct elections for Members of the Council and
- v. to require the Minister to make regulations relating to the voter registration. and the conduct of elections of Members of the Council in accordance with the advice of the Electoral Commission.

Having outlined the above objectives, I would now like to address the five recommendations outlined in the report by the Bills and Legislation Committee.

Recommendation 1: To ensure administrative clarity on the conduct of the date setting of election, that the Bill clearly mandates the Minister only for bye-election.

Apart from allowing the Minister to set a date for the Ordinary Election of the Honiara City Council, the Bill also allows the Minister to set the date for any by-elections. Pardon my ignorance, but my reading of this recommendation is that the Committee is of the view that the Bill only mandates the Minister to set dates for

by-elections. If such reading is incorrect, may I correct that the Bill allows the Minister to set dates for both ordinary elections and bye-elections.

Clause 5 of the Bill amends section 6 of the Honiara City Act of 1999. Section 6 of the Act provides for the holding of ordinary elections. Clause 5 amends section 6 by adding a new section 3(a), which effectively gives power to the Minister acting in accordance with the Solomon Islands Electoral Commission to set the date in 2024, which is not later than 30th April 2024, for the holding of ordinary elections of the Honiara City Council.

Clause 6 of the Bill amends section 10 of the Honiara City Act of 1999. Section 10 of the Honiara City Act provides for the holding of by-elections in Honiara City. The amendment continues to give to the Minister to set the date for the holding of the by-election, but unlike the repeal to subsection 2, it now requires that the exercise of the power is acting on the advice of the Solomon Island Electoral Commission.

Recommendation 2: The dissolution of Parliament, Honiara City Council and all Provincial Assemblies to be on a particular synchronized date.

This is consistent with the objective of the synchronization policy. The Honiara City Council (Amendment) Bill 2023 realizes these objectives and allow the Minister to declare the date that is synchronized with the Provincial and National General Elections. It is also important to remind ourselves that the date must be set by the Minister acting on the advice of the Solomon Islands Electoral Commission.

Recommendation 3: That the criteria for registration to include Section 4 of the Electoral Act 2018.

The recommendation by the Bills and Legislation Committee to include the requirement of Section 4 of the Electoral Act as an additional requirement for registration. Section 4 of the Electoral Act refers to the meaning of 'ordinarily resident'. However, the inclusion of Section 55(1),(2),(3) of the Constitution of Solomon Islands in the new Section 17 effectively provides for the criteria of ordinary resident.

Recommendation 4: On the issue of cross-border votes, the Committee recommends that the matter to be taken up in the amendment of the Electoral Reform. My Ministry will be in consultation with the Electoral Office, the Office of the Prime Minister and Cabinet on the issue of cross-border. The amendment to the Electoral Act will attempt to address the issue of cross-border as recommended by the Bills and Legislation Committee.

Recommendation 5: The Committee recommends that the Choiseul and Western Provinces to be part of this synchronized elections to be included in this 2024 synchronized elections.

This matter is to be dealt with by the Ministry of Provincial Government and Institutional Strengthening. It has nothing to do with the bill that is in front of us, the Honiara City Act of 1999. The Provincial Government will look at the synchronization of Choiseul and Western Province to be included in 2024. This recommendation falls squarely outside of my portfolio as the Minister responsible for Ministry of Home Affairs.

The Honiara City Act of 1999 does not provide for a caretaker City Council. Section 9 of the Honiara City Act of 1999 provides that the City Council shall be dissolved on the eve of the ordinary election of members. It means that the governing City Council continues until it is dissolved on the eve of an ordinary election of members.

The policy intention of Clause 7, and the inclusion of the accompanying notes that makes reference to Section 55(1) and (2) of the Constitution in the Bill is for the sake of proper access of the law by the lay person.

One of the benefits highlighted during the debate is that logistics and administrative expenses will be significantly reduced because it will have one joint election instead of two separate elections. The conduct of separate elections will cost around \$143,871,168. The simultaneous election of Provincial, Honiara City and National Elections will cost around \$96,583,864. It reduces the cost to around the difference of \$47,287,304.00.

Another highlighted benefit during the debate on the synchronized election is that there will be a high turnout for City Council election, which is normally low compared to Parliamentary election. More citizens will participate in the Honiara City election once election dates are synchronized. This is true because when we have different dates, people do not turn out on provincial or City Council elections, as stated by the Minister of Police and Member for West Guadalcanal. With the synchronized election, the turn out will be equivalent to the national elections. This Bill makes history as far as synchronization of election dates are concerned.

Once again I thank the Bills and Legislation Committee Members and Members of Parliament who contributed during the debate of the Bill. I also thank the Electoral Commission, Inter-Ministry taskforce, Electoral Office, Office of Prime Minister and Cabinet for pursuing the fundamental election reform in making it happened in the history of Solomon Islands.

To conclude, I would like to reiterate to this House that despite other assertions, provincial governments and the Honiara City Council are agents of the crown and fall within the concept of the crown. The comment by the Law Reform Commission is true, that the Honiara City and Provincial Governments are agents of the crown.

With these remarks, I beg to move that Honiara City (amendment) Bill 2023 be now read a second time.

Question put and agreed to

(Bill committed to the Committee of the Whole House)

THE 'HONIARA CITY (AMENDMENT) BILL 2023'

Committee Stage

Clauses 1-6 agreed to

Clause 7

Hon MATTHEW WALE (*Aoke/Langalanga—Leader of Opposition*) (10:29): Thank you Sir. Just for clarification since we are synchronizing of these and of course the synchronization, the dissolution of Parliament and Parliamentary election is the determinant. I want to know whether the Constitutional amendment that has extended the life of this house by seven months, is that now being commenced?

ATTORNEY GENERAL (10:30): Thank you Mr. Chairman and thank you Leader of the official Opposition for that question. Yes it has been commenced.

Clause 7 & 8 agreed to

Mr CHAIRMAN: Honorable Members that concludes our proceedings on the Bill.

The Committee is dissolved

(Bill proceed to the Third Reading)

Parliament is resumed

Hon CHRIS LAORE: Thank you Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker. I wish to report that the Honiara City (amendment) Bill 2023 has passed through the Committee of the Whole House without amendments.

THE 'HONIARA CITY (AMENDMENT) BILL 2023'

Third Reading

Hon CHRIS LAORE: Thank you Mr. Speaker. I move that the Honiara City (amendment) Bill 2023 be now read the third time and do pass.

Question put and agreed to

(The Honiara City (Amendment) Bill 2023)

*Motions***MOTION OF SPECIAL ADJOURNMENT**

Hon. MANASSEH SOGAVARE (*East Choiseul—Prime Minister*) (10:33): Mr. Speaker, I move,

"That at its adjournment on Thursday 4th May 2023, Parliament shall adjourn to Monday 15th May 2023".

There are three Bills introduced to Parliament. These are the two Supplementary Appropriation Bill; the 2022 Supplementary Appropriation Bill 2023 and the 2023 Supplementary Appropriation Bill 2023 and the Provincial Government (amendment) Bill 2023 to allow the Bills and Legislations Committee and the Public Accounts Committee to look at these two Bills and report to the Parliament and hopefully by 15th of May when we come back, we should be able to dispense with these three Bills and then we will see how we will go from there. So those are the reasons for this request for Special Adjournment.

Hon MATTHEW WALE (*Aoke/Langalanga—Leader of Opposition*) (10:35): Thank you Sir. Again, in the circumstances, we have no objection but again. I would like to repeat what I said earlier today. It is important that the sponsoring Ministries for the various Bills do really pick up their act so that we too are more efficient and more organized.

In terms of the length of this adjournment, given that Provincial Governments will dissolve at the end of June, obviously the Bills Committee would need to be looking at that Bill first and then PAC can start.

Just so Members appreciate the PAC process. When Appropriation Bills are received, the Auditor General usually takes a chunk of days to prepare his advice. He does financial analysis and then that comes to the Committee. The committee then starts the inquiry proper, and then of course may be two days or so for reporting to be finalized at the end. It is not really quick. It requires time.

In the matter of Supplementary Appropriation Bills, since you insist on the Standing Order, and rightly so, there is no Second Reading debate on it. So you would expect that much of that would be raised at the PAC level. We will expect a bit more time to be given to PAC to deal with the two Bills. The 2022 is probably straightforward but the 2023 Supplementary is asking for quite a large amount of money.

Since there is not debate, I think it is incumbent on the PAC to deal with it a little bit more robustly. It is so soon, after we have just gone past December, the obvious question is: why weren't these seen back in the December budget and catered for?

Those issues will obviously be fleshed out during the PAC process. PAC may come back if it is going to require a little bit more time, given that Bills Committee will take a few days at the beginning of this break. I just want to flag that out so that we know what might happen.

I have no objections to the Motion.

Question put and agreed to

(Parliament adjourned 15th May, 2023)

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. MANASSEH SOGAVARE: I move that parliament do now adjourn.

Question put agreed to

Parliament adjourned at 10.39

[Edited]



Eleventh Parliament

Sixth Meeting

NATIONAL PARLIAMENT OF SOLOMON ISLANDS

Monday, 15 May 2023

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

(Subject to Revision)

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NATIONAL PARLIAMENT OF SOLOMON ISLANDS**Monday, 15 May 2023**

The Speaker, Mr Patteson John Oti, took the Chair at 10:06.

Prayers.

Business of the House

ATTENDANCE

All were present with the exception of the Prime Minister, Minister for Fisheries and Marine Resources, Minister for Commerce, Industries, Labour and Immigration, Minister for Agriculture and Livestock, Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade, Minister for Traditional Governance and Ecclesiastical Affairs, Minister for Women Youth Children and Family Affairs, Minister for Mines Energy and Rural Electrification, and Members for Aoke/Langalanga, North West Guadalcanal, Central Honiara, North New Georgia, North Guadalcanal, West Makira, Ulawa/Ugi, Temotu Nende, South New Georgia/Rendova/Tetepare, Rannonga/Simbo, North New Georgia/Vona Vona, West Kwaio and West Honiara.

TABLED PAPER

- Report on the Provincial Government (Amendment) Bill 2023. (National Parliament Paper No.16 of 2023).

STATEMENT OF GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Motions

MOTION OF SPECIAL ADJOURNMENT

Hon. MANASSEH MAELANGA (*East Malaita—Minister for Infrastructure Development*) (10:10): I move that,

At its adjournment on Monday 15, May 2023, Parliament shall stand adjourned to Wednesday 17, May 2023.

The reason for this special adjournment is for PAC to sit down to look through the Supplementary Appropriation Bill 2023, that is all I can say, thank you very much Mr Speaker.

The SPEAKER: Any member wishes to comment or contribute to the motion before I put the question?

Mr DOUGLAS ETE (*East Honiara*) (10:11): Without any hesitation, I wish to thank you Mr Speaker and thank the Deputy Prime Minister for moving this adjournment motion.

Firstly, that upon resumption of Parliament on the 17th of May, the 2023 Supplementary Appropriation Bill 2023 report from the PAC should be tabled and I thank the Deputy Prime Minister for giving us this time. Secondly, that will give PAC time to complete the 2022 Supplementary Appropriation Bill 2023. The committee would probably start in the afternoon today.

I understand that this 2022 Supplementary Appropriation Bill 2023, is not a government priority. The priority Bill is 'The 2023 Supplementary Appropriation Bill 2023'. Nevertheless, the committee will start today afternoon and probably complete it before this weekend.

On that note, I support this motion.

Mr. JOHN MANENIARU (*West Are Are*) (10:13): I join my powerful Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee to thank the government particularly the Deputy Prime Minister for moving this special adjournment motion.

Indeed this side of the House, the Opposition does not have any problem. It will help us because we are all in these committees. We would like to really support the government with the Bills so that we pass them in this House.

Secondly, members of these committees such as the BLC and as a member of the Public Accounts Committee request the government for understanding giving sufficient time. When you do that it suits us. We want to work moreover, do it properly. We need the time and I really appreciate the wisdom that comes from the government to give this adjournment so that the secretariat to the Public Accounts Committee can produce the report we will debate on Wednesday.

With that I support the special motion of adjournment.

Question put and agreed to

(Motion passed)

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. MANASSEH MAELANGA: I move that parliament do now adjourn.

Question put and agreed to

Parliament adjourned at 10.16

[Edited]



Eleventh Parliament

Sixth Meeting

**NATIONAL PARLIAMENT OF
SOLOMON ISLANDS**

Wednesday, 17 May 2023

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

(Subject to Revision)

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NATIONAL PARLIAMENT OF SOLOMON ISLANDS**Wednesday, 17 May 2023**

The Speaker, Mr Patteson John Oti, took the Chair at 09:45.

Prayers.

Business of the House

ATTENDANCE

All were present with the exception of the Minister of the Ministry of Infrastructure Development, Minister for Public Service and the Members for North Malaita, Small Malaita, Malaita Outer Islands, East Are 'Are, North Guadalcanal, West Makira, Ulawa and Ugi, South New Georgia Rendova and Tetepari, West New Georgia Vona Vona and West Honiara.

TABLED PAPER

- Central Bank of Solomon Islands Annual Report 2022 (National Parliament Paper No.14 of 2023)
- Ministry of Traditional Governance, Peace and Ecclesiastical Affairs Annual Report 2022 (National Parliament Paper No.15 of 2023)

Bills

THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT (AMENDMENT) BILL 2023

Second Reading

Hon ROLLEN SELESO (*South Guadalcanal—Minister for Provincial Government and Institutional Strengthening*) (9 :47): I move,

That The Provincial Government (Amendment) Bill 2023, be read a second time.

Mr Speaker, I am greatly honoured to present to this honourable House, The Provincial Government Amendment Bill 2023, on behalf of the Cabinet which represents the good people of this nation.

The presentation of this bill and its approval in this honourable House will surely leave a legacy on the administration and management of provincial elections in the provinces of Solomon Island and to facilitate and organise with this, transparency and cost effectiveness.

Based on the government's policy statement, this bill came about as a result of numerous consultation and discussion amongst the various stakeholders of government and within our provinces and communities.

As a result of impact reviews within the vicinity of our electoral administrative and financial circles, as part of the policy of the current government a taskforce was established in 2020 to look into the area of electoral reform based on the Electoral Act 2018 and other related Acts of Parliament and their respective regulations.

These reforms call for improvement of areas that had been well covered in this Act when it comes to National and Provincial Elections. The experience of the 2019 National General Elections and its recommendation was also taken on board in the electoral reform. The task force was appointed by the Solomon Islands Electoral Commission with the endorsement of the government.

The taskforce comprises officers from government agencies and institutions including the Political Parties Commission, Law Reform Commission, The Electoral Commission, Office of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, The Attorney General Chambers, and the Ministry responsible for provincial governments and the Honiara City. The task force is mandated to perform the following tasks;

(1) To assist the Solomon Islands Electoral Commission with the implementation of the DCGA's electoral reform strategy framework 2019-2022 referred to in the DCGA's policy statement, policy translation and policy redirection in terms of the conduct of elections and stability of political parties systems;

(2) To assist Electoral Act 2018, taking into considerations lessons learned from the 2019 National General Elections, report from electoral observers mission, and with the recommendations from workshops and views from members of parliament and provincial assemblies.

One fundamental area that was covered base on the consultation of the taskforce in the provinces is on the issue of synchronized elections. We normally associate synchronize elections with combined elections or one day elections for both provinces and national parliament. I may use this word 'synchronize', 'combined' or 'one day' interchangeably but the meaning is just the same. It is all about conducting and aligning the management and processing of elections preparation and the actual polling that would take place on the same period of time. Synchronization in this case would imply amalgamating the processes and convening of elections both at the national and sub-national government level.

As part of its mandate the task force carried out numerous consultation in 2021, 2022 and early 2023 on the electoral reform and particularly for the purpose of this

bill, the synchronize elections. Consultations were done involving members of provincial assemblies, provincial and public officers and stakeholders including business houses, churches, women groups, youths, chiefs, teachers, nurses and other professions and groups within the private and public sectors. There is overwhelming support of synchronized or combined elections since the idea came into prominent some 10 years ago.

For the information of the House, the idea of combine election was firstly discuss by provincial premiers during their conference at Kirakira, Makira Ulawa Province in 2012. The idea was transformed into a premiers resolution in the following premiers conference at Gizo in 2013, and was submitted as one of their resolutions. Resolution 4, Gizo Premier Communique states and I quote;

To align the provincial and city elections with national general elections.

That resolution aims to conduct election both at the national and sub-national level on single day or a single period.

During each consultation the taskforce studied and analysis the pros and cons of conducting synchronize elections, come up with a number of benefits. Some of the benefits include;

1. Reduction of logistical administrative expenses,
2. Promotes the existence and presence and recognition of political parties at the provincial and community level,
3. Synchronised elections bring out high voters-turnout at the provincial and HCC level,
4. Causes minimal disturbance to civil servants working on the election events,
5. Reduces voter poaching since election are held once every four years, rather than twice and three times in period of four years,
6. One important area is the convenience to conduct such an event since voter participation in all level of government will happen at one time.

With the benefit it brings we must also acknowledge the challenges brought in by the combined elections. Some challenges may include greater mobilization of resources, logistics and manpower since it will be a big event and the fact that it may not create much employment opportunity since it is a 'once in four-years event. However, having gone through the pros and cons, the task force and the government assessed that the benefits outweighed the challenges. All in all, there is overwhelming support for the combined election to take place, and I hope with the recent passing of the Honiara City Amendment Bill 2023, which also promotes

synchronized elections at the HCC level. It will also pave the way for the election to be conducted with peace, convenience, and lesser cost.

Mr. Speaker, this bill calls for amendments to certain sections of the Provincial Government Act of 1977, notably Sections 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, and 15 including other new provisions that the new sections 9(a) and 11(a) within those original sections of the main Provincial Government Act.

Mr Speaker I am also aware of the issue and recommendation brought up by the Bills and Legislative Committee during the hearing and scrutiny of the bill last week. Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me clarify few issues here. One is legislative reviews of our electoral laws and their regulations, which will slowly be geared towards reorganizing the Electoral Commission as the ultimate government body or agency that will have ultimate control over the conduct and management of elections in the future.

This also includes advising the ministers responsible, whether provincial or HCC, to fix the date of elections. As we understand, the Governor General can proclaim the date of election for the National Parliament, while the respective minister can do so for HCC and provinces. Of course, with the advice from the commission, we hope the current reform can address these issues so that the minister can only be responsible for the proclamation of by-elections and not ordinary elections.

Second, Mr. Speaker, I also understand the issue of cross-border voting, synchronized dissolution at both the national and subnational level, the issues of qualification or disqualification of candidates and criteria for registration were also raised through the BLC recommendations. These are important developments which the task force on electoral reform is currently working. We hope that such issues can be clarified in the reviews, particularly on the amendment to the Electoral Act 2018 so that the election can be conducted with peace and understanding.

Mr. Speaker, the issue of Western and Choiseul provinces also comes up on whether they can be included in the coming election in 2024. Although one of the reasons for simultaneous elections is on the issue of cost factor, it would be very expensive to include bought provinces in the coming election in 2024. It would also be a denial of democratic governance for our good people in Western and Choiseul Provinces if they were governed only for a period less than 15 months.

The government has worked on those issues in consultation with those two provinces and hopes that services will continue. We hope to include both provinces in the 2028 national general elections. Cutting short the lives of both provinces by 2024 would imply payment of compensation to the tune of \$50 to \$60 million.

In summary, Mr. Speaker, the general issue covered in the amendment includes a synchronized election to be held on an appointed date in April 2024. This means extending the lives of seven provincials assemblies from June to December 2023. Second, the inclusion of Western and Choiseul provinces to be part of the synchronized or combined election in 2028. Third, recognizing of the Solomon Islands Electoral Commission as the body that is mandated to register voters and to conduct elections. The new amendment also provides for advisory or consultative role with the Commission, that is the Minister can pick the date for election with the advice from or having consult the electoral commission. Fourth a certain amendment also made reference to the National Constitution and Citizenship Act 2018, particularly in area of disqualification or qualification to contest provincial election. This criteria is also in harmony with the national and HCC elections.

The amendment generally provides for an election process that is transparent less costly more convenient and accessible to all citizens to participate fully in the electoral process by exercising their rights freedoms and privileges.

Mr. Speaker the Government has taken this approach of Synchronize election seriously and hope this process will bring in more excitement of the bigger event that will be coming in 2024.

Election in 2024 as we know is the next bigger event after the coming Pacific Games in November 2023. The combine election nationwide will be an unprecedented event and will be historical. Yes we have had a small number of pilot combined election in 2019 in East Makira and in 2022 in West Kwaio. Although there are some positive lessons learned we are however more cautious but at the same time more confident that with the coming combined elections it will be conducted with ease and more convenient and less costly.

Mr. Speaker Sir question one will bring to this Honourable House is, what possible outcome are there that the propose amendment will try to achieve?. Expected outcome of the bill would involve (1) To resolve practical problems that often arise during elections. For example, holding or conducting more than one election in a period of four years. (2) To help the Ministry with the advise of the commission to align Provincial elections where it sees fit with the HCC and National General elections to save cost. (3) To resolve any uncertainties with regards to assembly life of six Provincial Assembly in conjunction with the end of term of the National Parliament. (4) To provide greater legal certainty and the prevention of the potential abuse of other section of the Provincial Government Act 1997. (5) To save money and unnecessary costs.

Mr. Speaker the Parliament should be rightfully proud of this proposed bill and the contribution it makes to the betterment of both National and Provincial elections in

the Provinces. It will ensure also that the democratic voting rights of citizens are recognized and at such right provided and exercise with free will in our National and Provincial Electoral system. It will make a real difference to the lives of many citizens and to our communities. I therefore thank all Members for listening and would like to seek their understanding on the benefits those amendments will bring.

With those few remarks I commend this bill to this Honourable house and beg to move.

The SPEAKER: Honourable Members I understand that the Government wishes to commence debate on the Provincial Government Amendment Bill 2023 today.

Normally under Standing Order 48(5)(b) following the second reading speech of the mover, debate shall be adjourned without any question put for three clear days. Hence I will call on the Minister for Provincial Government Institutional Strengthening to take the necessary steps.

(Leave to suspend standing orders granted)

Hon ROLLEN SELESO: I move,

"That Standing Order 48(5)(b) be suspended in accordance with Standing Order 81, to permit the debate on the Second Reading of the Provincial Government Amendment Bill 2023 to resume to date."

Mr Speaker, I seek suspension of the relevant Standing Order to allow this bill to be debated because the Standing Order requires three days clear days before a debate. So that is to allows us to debate and go straight to the committee stage today.

Mr RICK HOUENIPWELA: Thank you Mr Speaker, I want to ask if the minister can inform us about the question which was asked. I did not hear the reason for the suspension. I want the minister to inform the house. He wants to suspend the three days requirement, but, what is the reason for the suspension?

The SPEAKER: Honourable Minister, you may wish to repeat—

Hon. MANASSEH SOGAVARE: Thank you Mr Speaker, on the statement of government business which we will adjourn tomorrow until 14th June. In the month of June a number of provincial governments will come and end their four years term. They will be dissolved, and if we do not move this bill, they will dissolve.

The intention to hold synchronized elections next year will not happen because there is no amendment to this bill to allow that to happen. So it is very urgent that parliament need to pass this bill so that we do not have any problems with the provincial governments that will dissolve in June and allow Choiseul and Western Province to delay elections and not be part of the synchronized elections until 2028.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: In terms of such bills, when you come and table them for First Reading, I think it is probably good for us to move the Second Reading so that we fulfil the requirements in the number of days that the Bills Committee must deal with it. Both ways it leaves the minister free of his obligation to move it and not run a foul of the Standing Orders, and give the members the opportunity and the Bills Committee the opportunity to deal with it without putting parliament in situations where regularly suspending standing orders to facilitate it.

So, I think the ministers need to be more prepared. When the bill comes to the First Reading, you should be ready for the second reading as well so that when we move it, you are cleared. So maybe a note for ministers, as the government wished to table a number of bills later in the meeting in June or July. Ministers should be prepared.

The SPEAKER: The honorable Prime Minister has also commented on the reason for the suspension and for the urgency to which this bill must come before the house.

Honorable minister if you would like to add any comments on the Prime Minister's reasoning and also in response to the comments by the Leader of opposition.

Hon ROLLEN SELESO: Thank you to the Leader of the opposition, and I think the points that he raised were very important. I think the bill is an amendment, and it does not need to take time for us to drag it. I think we do not need to wait another three days because it will drag our time by waiting a few days. So I see that it is very important to have the second reading to pass the bill quickly.

The SPEAKER: I will now put the question, unless the MP for West Are'Are have anything different to add to the reasons or to the questions raised by the Leader of opposition.

Mr. JOHN MANENIARU: Thank you indeed for your indulgence in giving the time for West Are Are. I am happy with the reasons provided by the Prime Minister and the minister. But the suspension provided for in the Standing Orders, I am beginning to see that we are trying to capitalize on that provision. It is intended for good reasons by our forefathers. So ministers, when you bring these things, you work within our Standing Orders so that you look sensible in here. But when we rush them through and we keep on suspending, I am not happy with that.

I do not have any problem with the suspension of order 48(5)(b) to allow for second reading. And the reason given by the minister that the three days is too long, no! We must understand that. Your time to submit the bills timely to the floor is what is important to maintain then we just come and continue to suspend the Standing Orders.

So I do not have any problem with it, but just to register the concern.

The SPEAKER: Thank you for those observations and comments.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: Point of Order! Sir, just for the satisfaction of the House, Order 48(4) and (5) requiring some kind of certification from the provincial executive on matters relating to the amendment. I note that you obviously have been satisfied to let the bill proceed.

I wonder whether you can inform the house that has been duly received for each of the provincial assemblies that are affected.

The SPEAKER: Thank you. Honourable Attorney General, you may wish to comment on that, particularly Standing Order 48(4).

ATTORNEY GENERAL (10:15): Thank you Mr Speaker and the Official Leader of opposition. Basically, section 48 paragraph 4 talks about a certificate which if the Speaker is satisfied before we can move. Basically, Honourable Speaker, you are satisfied that is why we moved. We having moved to second reading, you would have already been satisfied of this requirement.

The requirement in terms of the this comes from the Constitution. I do not have the Constitution but of the top of my head, we have given advice that, that section does not apply in this regard. So, there is no need. That is the advice that comes from the Chambers on this.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: Yes, perhaps you could enlighten the House as to how you are satisfied on the requirements met. It would be good actually if the Honourable Attorney General could clarify on what basis the relevant Constitutional provision has ruled in-applicable to the question before the House.

The SPEAKER: Just to add on to the observation on this. If you read Standing Order 48(4)(b), especially in regards to any particular matter that is brought in here for amendment of the Provincial Government Act, this is not for all provinces but to any particular province concerned with a matter that is brought here, that has to be given notice. And in this instance, the issue before the bill or the amendment is to do with elections. And elections are not until, while for purposes for this—and if you look at the 2018 Electoral Act, vesting of all the elections in the provinces has since been passed on the Electoral Commission. And so, the conduct of elections, although previously was undertaken by each provinces, henceforth by virtue of the 2018 Electoral Act Provision, all conduct of elections will now be vested under the Electoral Commission. Therefore, there is no need to refer it back to the provinces in this amendment to the respective provinces.

I think the summary that was provided by the Minister in terms of consultations with the provinces through the taskforce established to consult the provincial assemblies and other stakeholders, that has fully satisfied but hence the notice to

the provinces has been undertaken and accounted for by the report that the taskforce has submitted. Therefore in this instance, for Standing 48(4) in the opinion of the Speaker does not necessarily hold water that you have to satisfy the three days' notice.

That is the view of the Honourable Speaker under Standing Order 31. Almost final.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: With your due indulgence, I accept that the matters with regards to elections goes to the Electoral Commission under 2018 Electoral Act, but the Bill also deals with the dissolution of provincial assemblies and that is not a matter for the Electoral Commission under the 2018 Act. It is a matter that affects the lives of the terms of provincial assemblies. Therefore, one would ordinarily think that it would need some kind of certification to satisfy yourself that matter has been curb.

We have heard about the consultations. But I think, this is asking for more some kind of certification to you and through you Parliament getting that satisfaction.

The SPEAKER: Thank you. These are observations that will be captured in any further amendment to the Electoral Act in 2018. These are issues that are going to be very useful for the amendments to the Electoral Act taking into account the transition that is being proposed now.

With those comments. I will now put the question.

Question put and agreed to

(Second Reading debate commences)

Mr. JOHN MANENIARU (*West Are Are*) (10:21): Thank you very much Mr. Speaker for the opportunity for giving West Are'Are to add the voice of his people to the debate on the motion moved earlier by the Honourable Minister of Provincial Government and institutional Strengthening for The Provincial Government (Amendment) Bill 2023, No.4 of 2023.

On the Note, let me also thank the Prime Minister and the DCGA Government for this bill. It is a very important bill and now it is before us, the legislation is a very good thing for us to appreciate it. Let me also thank the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Provincial Government and Institutional Strengthening and the senior official who work hard on this amendment bill that is before the House and particularly the Bills and Legislation Committee that has the opportunity to scrutinize this bill in the recent days. I also wish to thank all ministries that helped out on this bill, the Attorney General's Chamber, particularly the drafting division for the work. To the Bills and Legislation Committee and the parliamentary

secretariat for the work they do and patience and cooperation resulting in the production and tabling of the BLC report in parliament.

As I mentioned earlier on the suspension of Standing Order 48(5)(b), I want to reiterate that the committee is ready to support our bills for the country. But we are just human so we need time to dispose with the bills. The responsibility that the Bills Committee has is to consider stakeholders for the inquiry is also important. It is a healthy process where as a democratic nation we must always accord opportunity and timing for it. To the Bills and Legislation Committee, this is important. It reminds us that when you are responsible for the bill, the timing is important. Therefore, it reminds us that when you are responsible for the bill then the timing is important. We need the time to work on it. Have a timeframe so that when you submit it to other authorities that will be part of your team to scrutinize the bill, then we all can work together on that one. So I wish to reiterate and register that point Mr. Speaker.

Sir, I thank the Bills and Legislation Committee for the work that they have done on the Provincial Government Amendment Bill 2023. Particularly, I would like to highlight the recommendations that are before us in the report tabled in Parliament. As the Chair of the Bills and Legislation committee I have the responsibility to again reiterate the recommendation because they are quite important as far as the scrutiny and consultation by the Bills and Legislation Committee is concerned. There are seven recommendations to the bill and for the sake of those who are also listening to Parliament, Mr. Speaker, I wish to go through those seven recommendations.

First, to ensure administrative clarity on the conduct of the setting of elections, the bill clearly mandates the minister only for by-elections. Thank you, Minister of Provincial Government and Institutional Strengthening for highlighting that one as well. The reform is in progress and more of this will be covered in the Electoral Bill we look forward to in due course.

Secondly, the dissolution of Parliament, Honiara City Council and all Provincial Assemblies should be synchronized. This is the purpose of all three bills we disposed with one of which is the Honiara City Amendment Bill; the second one is the Provincial Government Amendment Bill before us and the Electoral Bill which will come later. The key objective here is to synchronize the election dates of the national parliament, the provincial governments and Honiara City Council.

Third, the criteria for registration include Section 4 of the 2018 Electoral Act. Fourth, the committee notes that the bill will not address the issue of cross-border votes and therefore recommends that the matter be taken up in the amendments to the Election Act 2018. Thank you, Minister, for capturing this by mentioning in your

second reading speech and as the Chairman of the Bills and Legislation Committee, I appreciate it. It is very important when we try to clean up our electoral rolls.

It is also important in this recommendation and I think that is basically what the minister has implied, if you look at some of our constituencies, you have all the constituencies in your constituency. You deal with all constituencies, a number of constituencies. I think it is important to address cross-border voters in this regard. Because when you win, you will share the limited resource for West Are Constituency but all 50 constituencies received the same share of the resources. We are not saying that it is not good. We do it according to the law, the person is related by blood or marriage so they registered in the constituency, that is not the problem. But when we have resources that are very limited, that is important for us. When we share the resources we must justify it, and do it equally as well.

The fifth recommendation is that Choiseul and Western Provinces must be included in the 2024 synchronised election. I alluded to that point earlier. The purpose of this bill is to synchronize elections. At the moment the Minister explained and clarified as to why there is an exception for these two provinces. But for the Committee, it is not good enough. When you are talking about synchronizing the whole country in terms of the Provincial Assemblies election, the National election, the Honiara City election, then synchronize it all. At whatever cost, that is what the unity of country is all about. I just want to pin down that point to justify the Bills and Legislation Committees thinking. To do a good policy, we reform it, we unite this country so that everything is the same for everyone when you are talking about election. This is important, very important to the people of this country and for us.

It was mentioned in the inquiry Members of Parliament are doing things for their own interest, not for the people. I will cover their concern under Civil Society submissions to my Committee at the end of my intervention. They say that Members of Parliament do these things for their benefit. No! We have noble intentions here. The objective is noble. But then, let us focus on what we should do inconsistency with the good policies we have.

Sixth recommendation Mr. Speaker

"That the disqualification of provincial members is not only confined to section 49(1)(a) of the Constitution but also include the subsequent paragraph of disqualification under the same section."

Recommendation seven Mr. Speaker

"That for future electoral reforms, that all matters relating to the registration of voters and the conduct of the elections are clearly the monopoly of the electoral commission."

Thank you Minister you already captured this one as far as the bills and legislation committee is concern. We put the responsibility and authority for election matters on that body. This is good policy in terms of our reform. I would like to thank you Minister and also the government for this focus and driving this particular reform ahead.

In terms of the synchronizations of elections, the passing of this Provincial Government (Amendment) Bill 2023, will enable the Electoral Commission to conduct simultaneous elections for Members of Provincial Assemblies and Members of Parliament in 2024. That is the reason for this amendment as we already know. Then, the current term of the Provincial Assemblies except for Western and Choiseul Provinces will end in 2023, and it is therefore necessary to facilitate the passage of this bill so that Provincial Assemblies and Honiara City Assembly elections are deferred to 2024, in line with the National General election for the purpose of synchronization of elections.

As I have already alluded to we must not miss the synchronization. I congratulate the government and the Minister for that. But, when we leave behind two Provinces as the Minister explained, because we are being fair to them because they just have their elections—no, you synchronize the whole country. Synchronize every provinces, put them together, you meet the cost. We meet a lot of costs here and there. This is an important cost that we do for the people of this country. It is their election, synchronize it right through because the unity that we have been talking about on this floor is all about the whole nation. When you say, you will come behind because it is costly then I do not think that is fair. Because a lot of the costs we incurred, why don't we also incur this for the unity of this country?

Let us give it a go and let us move this country in unity and solidarity in these big reforms ahead. My reflection is on the policy choice. What is the policy choice which leaves the two provinces behind? It is a policy choice and why not all provinces in the country are not synchronized? As we have alluded to earlier in the amendment is to synchronize the Provincial Elections, National Election, and Honiara City Council election.

Is this a choice by the provincial assemblies or the good people of the two provinces known to be synchronized with the rest of the country? Is this their choice or is it someone else's choice? The committee is aware that the concept of the simultaneous election was mooted by the premiers at a premiers conference held in Gizo, Western Province June 2013. The minister touched on this when he moved the second reading, and he quotes that which I also have.

The fourth resolution is to align provincial and Honiara City elections with the National Election. Is this aligning, no if it does not include other provinces? It

should state there 'except' Western and Choiseul Province. As the chair of the Bills and Legislation Committee, this is clear to us.

Our two provinces, Western and Choiseul provinces for whatever reasons. They will not join the synchronized election this time around is noted.

This is a good policy and I am happy with the government and minister. We will connect from the party down to the provincial government or even Honiara City.

I will give an example of Kandere Party. I am the wing leader of this party. I have the opportunity to go down to the province and pick my provincial members. And my provincial members from Honiara City Council. What a reform in terms of party politics for our country. Kandere party can take over the whole country. This is good so that we do not politicize because of the national win in numbers. This will be the same for the provincial and Honiara City Council. You can run our country because that is what we have been praying for. We look forward for the reform to be materialized. I will certainly salute all my ministers on the other side for this great policy. We reform so we do not politicize and we can go to the provinces to align with the national government.

Now it is an automatic alignment because the law provides for and the parties go right down to the provinces and Honiara City Council, and it's one party right through the whole system in the three-tier governments governing this country. And it's a great achievement in this objective and I look forward to continue to advance. Sir, with the conduct of the election, my committee has just released concern about the conduct of the election. Where does it begin? Is it from the declaration stage or the voting stage? This is a concern because the three levels of elections, as we all know and have noted, have different time frames. So how will they synchronize? But I understand that most of the synchronization in terms of policy and all these things will come to the electoral commission. We from the Bills and Legislation Committee are saying this because the bill should come together, all three of them. And I will raise this later on. If the three of them come at the same time, we can have a good overview of them all. At the moment we are assuming that the coming bill will be in the electoral and it will cater for this. If we miss this here, it will be a big disappointment to my committee. We are making these assumptions because the three bills did not come at the same time. They are synchronized in submission to this house, but they are not synchronized in submission to this floor.

The committee also look at the national elections. For ours, we have 56 days. And this is leading on from the earlier point that I stressed. Our provincial government's election has 35 days and for Honiara City it is on the eve of elections. These are the timings. Fifty six days for the national, provincial, and Honiara city in the eve of

elections. The reform that the minister talked about is very important. We synchronize this, if it is 56 days, then let it be for everyone. If it is 35 days, then let it be for everyone. If it is on the eve, then why not? We can also enjoy the benefits, but it requires consistency, transparency and accountability to all our people at all levels of governance.

In terms of fixing the election date, my committee looked at the exact date for all elections and it is not fixed in the principle act. It has already been fixed in the bill. Sir, we see that this has undermined the powers of the Electoral Commission as provided for by the 1978 Constitution, sections 58(1) and 137(4). The commission has the power, and they fix the dates. But here, the reform has put us in charge of fixing the dates in the bills. So that is one thing that the committee would like to raise regarding the electoral system.

The impact on existing bills - the Electoral (Amendment) Bill, will be brought into parliament soon to close various gaps the new bills will create. That one I already raised as a concern from my committee, that the bill should come because it is the important one. This is because the bill harmonizes the other two amendment bills, the Honiara City Council (Amendment) Bill and the Provincial Government (Amendment) Bill. The Electoral Bill should harmonize and give a good picture of the bills when we scrutinize them. We will clearly see the policy that the government mandates to lead us with.

Sir, the cost, and thank you Mr. Minister; the committee wants to congratulate you and your ministry and all stakeholders as well as the Electoral Commission for their hard work, to find out about the elections and what is going on and its cost. So when we do it one by one, and then one by one, we know that when we add them all up it increases, and it should be just one. So to save almost \$50 million is a good saving and we can capture more, as various teams take us through the reform to really furnish their data. The committee is happy with these savings. I have already told us about the Bills and Legislation Committee position in terms of Western Province and Choiseul Province. They have missed out on this synchronising election and they will go on until 2028, as the Minister alluded too. And it is clear by the amendment that these two provincial assemblies will join the rest after 6 years in their terms. It is good for them.

My Committee has heard and had noted that the Guadalcanal provincial government registered their disappointment on this matter and had seen it as unfair on them and sister provinces, in terms of benefits to their MPAs. That is something that was registered with the Bills and Legislation Committee which I would just like to highlight in my report. With that, we are happy assuming that there is no longer an issue for Guadalcanal Province one of our big provinces and they are with us in

support of this Provincial Amendment Bill parliament is now considering. It is just a concern they have registered. I hope, it is no longer an issue.

It is already been mentioned by the Minister, it is good that the reforms come because a number of issues are also passed not only to the Ministry and the Electoral Commission but also in the constituencies. We are also bearing a lot of costs for the cross borders. It is good that they are coming to vote but we pay for them to cross borders in the past. It is an expensive exercise. When we reformat the cross border again, understandably going to the system, it will also be a concern to other stakeholders.

I have already alluded to the Civil Societies groups that appear before the committee. At this juncture, I would like to thank the Civil Societies when the Bills and Legislation Committee request them to appear and help with bills, which is for our country, they usually respond proactively and responsibly. Thank you NGOs and Civil Society groups who come to be witnesses during the Provincial Government (Amendment) Bill 2023.

From the reports they have highlighted, and I wish to put this in record, that they are happy with the consultations but they do not know what happens after the consultations. They get to know this only when they appeared before the committee. We asked them if they were consulted and yes they were consulted, but they were also waiting for the report to be produced, but they did not receive any and now it is the end process. That is a concern our civil society groups have raised when they participated in the hearings, but they would also like to see the draft reports before they are finalized to be brought to Parliament as an end to the Bills and Legislation Committee. One issue that is raised during the discussion is provincial revenue sharing. That is urgent and very important to our provinces. Let us do it now for them and we hold the work we are doing with this synchronized election and leave it for 2028. However, let us make amendment on the Provincial Government Act so that it caters for the critical issues in our provinces. That is a submission from the Civil Society when they appeared as witnesses in front of my committee.

I am happy with the Civil Society and I also see that there is importance in their submissions which has logic in it as well, when you come to prioritization of what the province should go for in terms of the amendment to the legislation that covers their administration.

I want to conclude that my committee's disappointment is that these three bill does not come as a package and we are struggling. However, the committee is grateful to the Electoral Commission. The CEO assisted with a lot of our question to make the bill sit properly to push it to the Chambers. I want to thank the CEO of the

Electoral Commission and his team who really stand on behalf of the Honiara City Council and Ministry of Provincial Government on critical issues relating to this reform policy, of synchronization of elections. Those are the committee's disappointment, that all three bills should have been submitted together more so the Electoral Bill so that we properly see this synchronization policy in terms of us legislate for.

I want to just point out at the end of this bill, that it has the name of the Minister for Provincial Government and Institutional Strengthening, Hon. Anthony Kamutaulaka Veke. That is the Minister in charge. But then, we have a different minister moving the second reading. In the copy with me, submitted and received by the Bills and Legislation Committee, that is the name, Hon. Anthony Kamutaulaka Veke. Perhaps you gave a wrong copy to the Chairman of the Bills and Legislation Committee. Therefore, I need to point that out at the end. I do not know if that is the minister, or the right minister is the one who read the second reading speech today. I do not know but I wish to conclude in pointing that out.

With those few remarks, I support the motion and resume my seat.

Mr PETER KENILOREA (Jnr) (*East Are Are*) (10:53): Thank you, Speaker Sir for recognizing the Member for East Are'Are to make a contribution to this bill that, of course, I support.

I just want to raise a few issues that compliments and adds additional points to what the Chairman of the Bills Committee has already outlined really well.

I think the main purpose of this bill, given to the Bills and Legislation Committee, has been met in terms of the main objectives of having some synchronization in our elections or simultaneous elections being held. We heard of five points from the minister which he read out today in terms of what the bill is supposed to accomplish. I think for the most part that is done by this bill and the amendments that we are seeking here for this particular bill. But I also want to lend my voice in support of the points that were already made by the chairman of the Bills and Legislation committee.

There are certain issues here in terms of our process that have been raised prior to us now moving into the committee stage that I think might need better reflection for all of us in terms of law-making processes. As it deals with both our two tiers of government, particularly national. We are making laws that impact another level of government, which is the provincial level.

These two separate governing entities are therefore, purposed and their functions are quite clear. But the idea that we are running faster than we should be in areas

that we are now dealing with elections. We all know that under the Provincial Government Act there is also the same provision that was now repeated in the Standing Orders that we were just discussing earlier. Part two has to be satisfied, and some amendments to part two have to meet certain satisfactions before we can move on to the second reading of laws. And it just so happens that the bill comes with an amendment to Section 9 of the Provincial Government Act of 1997, and that section is in Part 2 that deals with elections.

So going forward, Mr. Speaker Sir, I know that you have already made a ruling but I think it is incumbent upon us here as national executives as well as Parliament that when we come together and make laws that we do not run roughshod over processes that are there for a reason. For those reasons, as I explain, Mr. Speaker, sir, it is clear that we are making law here at the National Parliament. Nothing stops us from making laws in the National Parliament that affect the provinces, which is also contained in the act. That is clear, but there are certain processes that we must go through, including the one that we have just discussed in the Standing Order, which reflects what is already in the act of the provincial government. This is very important, I feel, in terms of our tiers of government and making sure that we do not tread on each other. Knowing full well that all the members, the assemblies, and the provincial governments, despite their lower voter turnouts, Mr. Speaker, come through the same door that all of us here come through.

We are all elected by members of our wards and we have come and we have come through the fire of democracy and elections. So when we make laws that impact on another tier, it is very important that we follow as much as possible to what has been laid out very clearly in terms of our laws, the provincial government, and our Standing Orders.

That aside, in terms of the bill itself that we have before us, There are some issues that I just wanted to raise here in addition to what has already been mentioned.

Cost Serving: the minister has highlighted this as his fifth point, but for this, it is the number one point. Cost-serving is something that we should not look down upon. It is very important for a nation like ours that we try to do things efficiently and save money. That is the biggest plus and additional advantage of having this bill come before the House.

The other issue in particular is the ones concerning party politics and encouraging party politics is the weakest in terms of why we need to amend this bill. I say that because, of course, we might encourage party politics, and that is fine, but that is up to the parties themselves to do that, and we cannot put that as a reason behind this particular changes in the elections for provinces that we feel might help in that regard, in terms of promoting party politics. We cannot put that as a reason behind

these particular changes in the elections for Provinces that we feel might also help in that regard, in terms of promoting party politics. That is covered under the Political Party Integrity Act, but perhaps might need amending as well to reflect this properly and I think that is a place for it. But let us not dwell on that now, maybe that will come at the next house. Let us focus on what needs to be done. The idea about collective submissions in the sense that the executive and the Minister gives to the Bills and Legislation Committee all these connected legislative amendments, is very important for us. Because we do not want to leave anything to fall between the cracks as it were.

There is advantage in having all three of this amendments together; the Honiara City Amendments, Provincial Government Amendments as well as the Substantive Amendments in the Electoral Act itself. I think having that all together as was already alluded to by the Chairman of the Bills and Legislations Committee has its advantages in that we make sure that there are no cracks, that nothing falls in between what we are trying to do to get to the objective that the Government is looking to pursue and achieve. That is something that I think is been lacking in having this piecemeal approach to these important legislation. So that is something in terms of moving forward that we should really look into, combining these laws that are related and allowing the Committee to have a very good bird's eye view and helping the work of the Parliament moving forward and law making.

Coming back to the issue of Political Parties, I think these are some of the areas that perhaps we should look more carefully into. And the idea that this will be successful in terms of the amendments we are doing here is perhaps, more accurate to say that - it is still up in the air. We will not know how successful this is until we actually do it, in terms of the amendments and how they are implemented. There maybe unforeseen issues that still arise when we do implement things. Just like any law that will be coming before this house and any law that we implement, there are unforeseens that we cannot put our finger on even now when we make those laws. But then there are some things we can look ahead and perhaps see. In terms of the Political Parties, the idea that what happens at the National Level, where post elections we get into camps. We are going to be expecting camps as well now at the Provincial level with politics coming down more heavily along party lines. Are we going to have a situation whereby the National Government is ruled by certain Political Party and then Provincial Government is ruled by another Political Party? And could that highlight perhaps impacts or perhaps the relationship between the National and the Provincial? Would that be affected as well, or even more politicize, knowing full well that there is no Official Opposition in the Provincial Government level-system of governance as we currently have it?

These are issues that we will not know until we get there but I think as law makers we should already start to see what scenarios might play out. And it is only

incumbent upon us to also highlight these issues as we make laws to ensure that these things are minimized, if we can minimize them here now rather than encouraging a situation whereby politics become the number one or consuming fire, sucking all the oxygen from what we should be focusing on in terms of the development of our nation.

That is something that perhaps we should really look at and study, in terms of how the implementation of these amendments will be implemented in practice. And we will not know that until we have done and implemented this with the next elections.

The National Government as we all know has a different system setup. There is an official opposition, and then there is the executive. Those are not there in the provincial government; perhaps party politics might start to lead us towards that. And is that a good thing if we start to do that as well at our provincial level? Or is this a lead-up to more devolution of powers towards provincial levels? That is something that we do not know at this time but it's something that we should be aware of.

The other point I want to touch on and highlight here, is the one about the out-of-constituency voting. And this one is to do with the next bill that we are supposed to be getting, in terms of the committees for Bills and Legislation. I would like to highlight this particular issue as one that the executive can start looking at before you bring the bill.

Out-of Constituency voting for those within the country as well as those outside of the country. That is something that is already coming in our discussions throughout this Honiara City Council as well as the provincial government elections amendments that we were looking at. Out of Constituency voting's we know many people are already working outside the country. The idea to allow them to exercise their democratic rights is something that we feel very strongly about. And as we await the electoral actual substantive bill to come in, start to look in to those issues already and see how mechanisms can be put in place to allow our people their right to vote and exercise those rights wherever they may be. And I think this is something noble approach that the government can look into together of course with the Electoral Commission, and working together towards that end.

Same here internally as well for the provinces and us in the constituencies and rural areas, the idea about putting in Honiara constituency boxes with those that may not be able to make it back to their registered constituencies can also have an opportunity to throw their votes and exercise their rights even here in Honiara. I think in past debates, the Member for West Makira had already raised the idea about vulnerable people and how we can make it a bit easier for them to exercise

their rights and allow perhaps this opportunity for them to vote in Honiara, rather than travelling all the way back to their constituencies to exercise that rights.

When it comes to voting it must be the principle that we make it easy to vote rather than harder to vote. If we have that principle we should work towards mechanisms that would allow such to happen. Indeed one of the cost-saving parts in terms of these elections is that, is one that registration is now going to be done out in the provinces and not in Honiara and anybody who needs to register needs to travel out. But again this puts the cost on the elector knowing that they might be travelling twice now for registration as well as for voting. While we are looking at saving money here at these kinds of amendments we should look at the precious gives to our own voters who will be travelling twice to allow them to cast their votes.

These are issues we should carefully consider when moving forward, in terms of these amendments that are coming.

One of the important ones in terms of transparency of elections, we look forward to receiving the draft bill, to consider counting right at the polling station right after the end of polling. To count right there and get rid of these counting centers. We get to election results faster in a more transparent way. That is something that is happening around the world and is making election experiences more transparent, results more faster and it reduces this notion of doubts in election results that also can affect the legitimacy and the mandate that is given to us. People are still questioning those of us sitting in here. I have been travelling around and the Speaker of Parliament your, your colleague from Kenya mentioned that in their last election, the presidential election, they counted right after the polling closed. And that was the best outcome for them. It got rid of all these behind the scenes things that people perception. It might be real or might not be real, but we have to try and minimize the perception of corrupt practices that happens when you move ballot boxes from the polling stations to a counting center.

Let us move forward, let us put this star link satellites where all these things will be happening so that people can click and watch people counting in their constituencies from wherever they are in the world. That is transparency and that is how we can move our nation forward and grow our democracy making it stronger.

Thank you very much Mr Speaker, with those few words, I support this motion and I resume my seat.

Hon. MANASSEH SOGAVARE (*East Choiseul—Prime Minister*) (11:11): I would like to say a few words. The purpose of why the government brought in this bill is very clear in terms of the objects and reasons for this bill. For the benefit to the house let me read it again:

To defer the next ordinary election of members of the seven provincial assemblies of the province listed in a new Section 9(A)(1) proposed in the bill to be held on a date fixed by the minister in accordance with the advice of the electoral commission.

And it continues there,

...to defer the ordinary elections of the seven provinces

And then also

...to defer the next ordinary election of the members of the provincial assembly of Choiseul and Western Province to be held in 2028 requiring the electoral commission to register voters and conduct elections for members of the provincial assemblies and require the minister to make regulations relating to the conduct of elections of members of provincial assemblies questioning the results of those elections and consequences of irregularities in accordance with the advice of the electoral commission and require the date of bi-elections of members of provincial assembly to be fixed in accordance with the advice of the electoral commission and for correcting Section 15 of the Act.

When it comes to political parties and so forth, this bill does not cover that. It does not deal with those issues. We will deal with those in the bill that touches on those issues when that bill comes before the floor of parliament.

The last speaker raised issues about out-of-constituency voting and counting and polling stations, and I think that relate to the conduct of elections. This one deals with the things I outlined and listed in the objects of the bill.

The question was of course raised by the Chair of the Bills and Legislation Committee, why we have the name of the Minister for Police as the minister sponsoring this bill. At that point in time when this bill was introduced, the substantive minister was out of country and we have to appoint the Minister for Police to take up those portfolio subjects under the Minister for Provincial Government so that we could table this bill.

An honourable member interjecting:

Hon. MANASSEH SOGAVARE: Yes, we assigned the function to the Minister for Police. So that is why when this bill was introduced, it had his name because, at that point in time, he was actually the minister assigned the responsibility of Provincial Governance and Institutional Strengthening at that time. I will only touch on the issues that are relevant to this Bill.

The point raised, I think the Point of Order raised before this proceedings for the second reading was raised by The Leader of the Opposition and made reference to by the member for East Are 'Are. We have sent an advice to the Ministry of

Provincial Government and Institutional Strengthening on the 20th of November 2017. That clears that point on the question, does the Bill affect the function of the Provincial Executive?

The Attorney General then made this advice as to the question a) which is; Does the Bill affect the functions of the Provincial Executive? The learned Attorney General at that time made this advice,

It is my view that nothing in the Bill affects in any way any of the functions of the executive of the Provincial Assembly. The functions of the Provincial Assembly are prescribed in section 26(1) of the Provincial Government Act 1997 and Schedules 3 and 4 of that Act. Provincial Election is not one of the functions prescribed in Schedules 3 and 4."

That is the advice of the learned Attorney General to the Secretary to the Ministry of Provincial Government in 2017.

I think those are the matters that I would like to clear.

We note the concerns by the Civil Societies raised by the Chair of the Bills and Legislation Committee – Civil Societies can raise any issues. Some of the issues that they raised and of course revenue sharing is a very interesting subject they raise. It is something that we will study. In fact, revenue sharing is one of the very pillar of the proposed new Federal Constitution. It decides on how to fund the operations of the provincial government, and this is through the revenue sharing.

There is a lot of problems there which we need to look at first before we can venture into that. When we share revenue, we must share the responsibilities as well. We do not just share revenue while the functions remain with the national government. That is what the government must be clear on. If we have to pick the revenue sharing out from the proposed structure of a new government system, we really need to be satisfied that we do not deprive our national government of the much needed revenue when the functions remain with it and just the revenue that is devolved.

The Ministry of Provincial Government will be advising, directing and guiding the Cabinet on that matter. We had given that task to them to advise the government on it.

Yes, I acknowledge the cost involved here. We weigh those things and seek the views of the two provincial governments as well. If we have to dissolve them very early, the cost will be over \$60million in compensation. I do not have the exact figure here. But in these times, where the country is desperate and we need to fund budget we can do with that \$60 plus million in terms of cost saving as opposed to if we dissolve them and the government is obliged to pay them that amount. That matter

in terms of cost savings is very appreciative by this parliament. Speakers that have spoken appreciate that cost-saving is a very important matter and in fact the MP for East Are Are list that as number one. With that I thank the Chairman of the Bills and Legislation Committee and the Chairman of the Foreign Relations Standing Committee for their contribution to this debate on this bill and I support this bill.

Hon MATTHEW WALE (*Aoke/Langalanga—Leader of Opposition*) (11:20): I was not going to make a contribution, but I think I will add some thoughts, I suppose partly my disappointment and I raise this and register it when we deal with the similar amendment which comes to the Honiara City Council Act, to enable simultaneous elections.

That is, it is a good step and of course it makes the conduct and administration of elections more efficient. On that matter of cost savings is much appreciated and also the cost if Choiseul and West were to participate, the savings would have been offset almost equivalent. So it would be cost neutral. It would not cost us more. Those savings would be apply to the entitlements of the two provinces. But we respect that the choice has been made, and the choice is based on desire of the two provinces to continue for the remainder of their term.

Just in terms of the big picture. The big picture is my disappointment. Of course we are dealing with elections. This bill specifically set out on elections. But my disappointment is on provincial government reform. The debate or the discussion around the proposed Federal State Constitution, and I am talking in the dark. I have not had any privilege of reading any of the proposals and certainly not the final one that has been submitted to the Prime Minister. I was thinking that this debate is one of the source of instability and agitation on us, because our people demand it and a minority do not understand what is involved and they think that it can be delivered over night. And ought to be and it must be delivered. Therefore, it continues to be a source of tension.

And therein lies my disappointment that I think with regards to provincial government we could have in this even with Covid, we could have concluded the work on revenue sharing. If we proceed with revenue sharing, yes, give the functions to them and they cannot get the money for nothing. The money is purposely to perform responsibilities and so devolve the functions and give public service to them as well, the workers. It would have taken the sting out of this debate and it allows government to look at all the other issues which the government is still hanging up on, which it is not really satisfied on in that particular debate.

I just feel that a lot of work has gone into this revenue sharing, not just in this term of parliament, in the last House as well. The ministry told us that, that work is fairly

advanced and they explained in the last House to the Public Accounts Committee the formula they were proposing. So obviously a lot of work has gone into it and consultation has happened. But my view is, we need to take the first step on this one, even if it does not go full blown on revenue sharing, the money that goes to provinces needs to be far more than what is going now. Of course, devolution of powers is within the current law, so give it to them and let us test it. Give the human resource as well. So the big picture is my disappointment.

Of course, you can argue, that is outside the objects of this bill and is irrelevant to the matter before the House now. Yes, that would be true. But in terms of what the ministry has been doing to date, I think we miss the opportunity to handle a significant matter that would really aid the provinces in the services delivery and also remove an unnecessary irritant of decentralized government that we want to move forward with.

So that is what I want to add on, and maybe it is something that the minister should be thinking about.

Mr RICK HOENIPWELA (*Small Malaita*) (11:26): I want to pledge my support for this bill and motion, but I also want to reiterate the points made by others on this side who have spoken earlier, especially in terms of some of the concerns that have been raised.

Two concerns of particular importance in my view is, firstly especially for us in this House, the power and authority that we have in making laws. It is important that we recognize that the laws we make have an impact on the rest of society, especially our people. So we need to try our very best to comply with the established procedures that are given to us in this House. Be it the Standing Orders or other general understanding of how we make laws so that it leaves out the idea that people say we bulldozed our powers on every body else. That is the general point that I would like to make.

The other point that I would like to make in response to the minister's response to recommendations made by the Bills and Legislation Committee Report, I heard he was making this general comment on concerns relating to the electoral commission. Some say that more power should be given to the Electoral Commission. In this case, the power to choose the date of the election. Some of the witnesses that provided evidence do not want the minister to decide on that. I heard the minister saying "we are making progress towards strengthening the Electoral Commission in terms of the authority that it has in due time". So that is good. I think the minister is saying that we are making incremental progress. So that is a good approach, no need to rush. That is good.

But the other point which I think others have mentioned and this came out very strongly during the inquiry is, why is this the priority? Provincial Governments priority is revenue sharing. And I acknowledge the explanation made by the Prime Minister on this. But like the Leader of Opposition was just making, this is already with us, it is with the government. The work is complete. We only need to bring the amendment. And I heard the Prime Minister wanted Parliament to look at it in line with the idea of Federal Government system. But the Provinces want government to deal with this now. So I would like to under score that point.

My third point, this relates to one of the recommendations of the Bills Committee and that relates to Clause 10 where an amendment is made to Section 15. I think it is Section 15(1)(a) of the Provincial Act. That is a good thing. It not only aligns the disqualifications of Provincial Members with Members of Parliament, but that is a correction brings it up to date, because that section only puts Section 15(a) I think. Therefore we have to put Subsection (1)(a) to it. That is a correction that we should make.

Having said that, in my view, when I read Section 15 of the Provincial Governments Act I think that is more comprehensive than Section 49 of the Constitution. We should copy some of the Subsection in the Provincial Government Act to apply to Members of Parliament. That is my thinking Mr. Speaker. We must make amendments to Section 49 of the Constitution. I will read Sections that I feel need to be included, especially Subsection 15(1)(e) of the Provincial Government Act which says;

...is disqualified or a person is disqualified from membership of Parliament or a Provincial Assembly or from registration as an elector or from voting at elections under Solomon Islands Law relating to offences consented with election.

It is a good one. I think if we still do not have it or not apply yet for Members of Parliament we should make it.

Another one is Subsection 1(J) I think which says

A member has not attended three meetings (of the Provincial Government Act) within the lifetime of the Assembly without reasonable excuse in writing to the speaker...

Some of us here just go all over the place. I do not know if they had written to you or not. But I do not know those MPs who are absent from these meetings ever write to you Mr. Speaker giving you their reasons for being absent. That one I think it is good. We apply that rule to us. If it is already there than we apply it, but if not I am proposing that it is a good amendment. My last point, Subsection 2(a) which says,

For the purpose of Subsection 1(d), two or more terms of imprisonment that are required to be served consecutively shall be regarded as a single term of imprisonment for the aggregate period of those terms.

Sir, if this wording is not inside the National Constitution to disqualify the Members of National Parliament, I think we should make the appropriate amendments to apply that is my view in relation to Clause 10.

Finally, this amendment would have been really good if all three can be included. This is the point made by the Chairman of Bills and Legislation Committee. It makes the work easier for the committee to look at all these things together. In this case, we deal with different amendments or bills at different times. Therefore, the committee does not have the benefit of seeing what's in the bill that is yet to come. In a way, some of these recommendations that the committee made can be addressed by the subsequent bill that will come. The Chairman does not know. So some of these things will make our work a lot easier if we approach it that way.

Finally, I want to congratulate the minister for bringing these amendments. I would like to express my support of the motion and of course the bill and I resume my seat.

The SPEAKER: Before I call on the honorable minister to deliver his speech in reply, perhaps I need to further clarify the earlier ruling base on the suspension of the Standing Order under 48(4). The ruling that was made was that order must be read with Standing Order 44(4), where the matters that come before the bill do not specifically fall under the jurisdiction or competence of the provincial assembly. Furthermore, had that been the case it would have been referred to the Speaker in the first place so that the Speaker considers it and then of course gives leave to refuse the timeline given for the period specified for the notice at the dispense of the speaker under Standing Order 48(4).

With that comment from the Chair, I will now call on the honorable minister to deliver his speech in reply.

(Speech in reply)

Hon ROLLEN SELESO: Thank you Mr Speaker, I hereby rise to wind up the debate on the Provincial Government Amendment Bill 2023.

Let me first thank and acknowledge the Chairman of the Bills and Legislation Committee for his leadership and contribution to the detailed process of the bill and to allow hearing from other stakeholder members during the scrutiny of the bill. Mr. Speaker, let me also thank the members of the Bills and Legislation Committee for their contribution and great analysis in ensuring that the bill must consider other aspects that are related to each jurisdiction and operation.

I understand a lot of issues have been discussed, and that will warrant further research, consultation, and analysis. This is important so that further input and further amendments to the provincial government act must be seriously considered for the betterment of carrying out our serious service delivery mechanism at the provincial government level.

Mr. Speaker, I believe the Bills and Legislative Committee are also aware that this amendment is just a minor one compared to the bigger amendment that may come later this year. The coming amendment will deal with the governance, functional responsibilities, and financial aspects of the provinces. We hope to table this 2023 (second amendment) bill later this year. So I think a lot of issues have been raised. I think the main provincial amendment act of 1997, once it comes in, can cater to and devolve some functions for the finance side of it for revenue sharing and all these things. And I would like to thank my colleagues for raising all these.

Mr. Speaker, let me also thank members of the honorable house for their contributions to the debate of the bill. I understand that all your analysis, critiques, and recommendations in the debate are hereby acknowledged and should help shape the improvement of the bill, which very soon will become law once it passes through the committee stage.

Just to reiterate what was mentioned during my second reading speech, some of the benefits of the bill may include: it will reduce logistics and administrative expenses; it may create voter turnout in the committee because it attracts casting or voters for both the constituency and the ward level; third, it will reduce voter fatigue and commitment of work by public servants involved in the election because such an exercise will be held once every four years and not two or three times a year as recently experienced. Fourth, synchronized elections are also convenient and may be easy for us to manage and control.

I believe that this House will fulfil the state policy intention of not only this current government but other previous governments as well in ensuring that participation in elections on whatever level of government is a national responsibility, is a personal solemn duty, and at the same time is a process for allowing our citizens to fulfil their democratic rights in choosing a leader that will represent their voice in this honorable house.

I believe this Honorable House will fulfil that aspiration by making sure elections are synchronized, fair, and convenient to conduct and manage. In terms of the recommendations highlighted by the bills and legislative committee in their report, let me assure the house that my ministry will work closely with the provincial government and national government, plus stakeholders, in addressing those issues addressed during the BLC hearing last week.

On the recommendation of fixing a date for the proclamation of the election process, discussions were done at the taskforce level to make amendments that allows His Excellency, The Governor General to proclaim the date of ordinary elections, whilst allowing respective ministers for Honiara City and Provincial Governments to declare or set dates for By-elections only. We hope that the Taskforce will look into this.

On the recommendation on simultaneous dissolution of provincial assemblies, Honiara City Council and National Parliament, the Electoral Reform Taskforce will also look into this and hopefully work on the necessary amendment so that both the commencement and the dissolution of the these different houses should happen simultaneously.

In terms of section 4 of the Electoral Act 2018, we hope to get a better clarification on the definition and their applicability when it comes to disqualification or registration in certain ward or constituency. This is a notion that has create some misunderstanding and we hope the current review of Electoral Act 2018 should shed some light on this.

Let me also thank the BLC for raising the issue of Western and Choiseul Province at this point in time. Due to facing the issues to do with finance and the coming Pacific Games and the preparation for the coming general election. That is very important as we can see. There are two very big events that takes a lot of commitment of the national government. If we have to take on board these two provinces to come in the elections with other provinces, it will cost us a lot of money. Also, not to disturb the flow of service to these two provinces. Cutting the assembly lives of the provinces short of 15 months period of government should not bring justice to our good people of Western and Choiseul. We hope that the synchronised election is not a daily or a yearly event but rather a gradual change or process. A process that develops mature as we progress through time and development.

The issue of cross border. Registration and voting also came about in the report. We hope this should be addressed and resolved with the appropriate amendment to the Electoral Act 2018.

Another recommendation with regards to the disqualification of provincial members once they are dual citizen or a citizen of another country is straight forward. Those can be incorporated in the amendment as well. The issue of the signing of the Bill, I think you have seen it that it is the Minister of Police that had appeared on it. The Prime Minister had explained on that, I was out in the provinces during that time they submitted this Bill to the Parliament. The Minister of Police then was supervising my ministry.

Going forward, there is quite a number of other areas that requires further amendment. My ministry will continue to work collaboratively with Solomon Islands Electoral Commission and re-elect the reform Taskforce and other agency of government including the Office of the Prime Minister and Cabinet in ensuring that the outcome of the legislative reform program must be felt in such a way where the conduct and management of the simultaneous elections are convenient and less costly. In addition, it must be structured in such a way to enjoy while fulfilling their democratic rights in participation in the electoral process.

With those few remarks, I would like to thank all members once again for your contribution on the debate. I hereby commend the Bill to be read and hereby resume my seat. Question put and agreed to

(Bill is committed to the Committee of the Whole House)

Bills

THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT (AMENDMENT) BILL 2023

Committee Stage

Clause 1.

Clause 1 agreed to,

Clause 2.

Mr RICK HOUENIPWELA: Thank you Mr. Chairman. I want to know whether the minister has in mind that what kind of month and date.

Hon ROLLEN SELESO: I think the Electoral Commission is proposing the month April 2024.

Clause 2 agreed to,

Clause 3 & 4

Clause 3 & 4 agreed to,

Clause 5

Clause 5 agreed to

Clause 6

Clause 6 agreed to

Clause 7

Clause 7 agreed to

Clause 8**Clause 8 agreed to**Clause 9

Hon MATTHEW WALE: With regards to the two provinces that will not join the simultaneous election this time, that is, Choiseul and Western Province, if there is going to be by-elections in their current term, would that still fall under these provisions or would they be excluded?

Hon ROLLEN SELESO: I think the point that has been raised will be taken into account in the amendment to the Electoral Act to address that.

ATTORNEY GENERAL (11:57): In terms of Western and Choiseul, the amendment in Clause 6 which is the new S9(a)(3) covers it. So it does not fall under them. We specifically put them in that clause.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: My difficulty with that is that Clause 6(3) specifically references 2028 election. But I am asking for by- election for both in between. When we come to Clause 9, that date would be fixed by the minister for the other seven acting on the Commission's advice. What about these two?

ATTORNEY GENERAL (11:58): In terms of by elections, it will fall under this. This is for the first election after this amendment for these two provinces. Whereas if it was a by-election in that case, then it would still be on the advice of the electoral commission, which is still in consistent with the Honiara City Council's decision that any other elections from now on would be acting on the advice of the electoral commission.

Clause 9 agreed toClause 10**Clause 10 agreed to**

(Committee of the Whole House dissolved)

Parliament resumed

Hon ROLLEN SELESO: Mr. Speaker I wish to report that the Provincial Government Amendment Bill 2023 has passed through the Committee of the Whole House without amendment.

The SPEAKER: Honourable Members, Honourable Minister reports the due consideration of the Bill by the Committee of the Whole House without amendments will now proceed immediately to the third reading of the bill.

Bills

THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT (AMENDMENT) BILL 2023

Third Reading

Hon ROLLEN SELESO (*South Guadalcanal—Minister for Provincial Government and Institutional Strengthening*) (12:02): I moved that the Provincial Government Amendment Bill 2023 be now read a third time and do pass.

Question put and agreed to

(Provincial Government Amendment Bill 2023)

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. MANASSEH SOGAVARE: Mr. Speaker I beg to move that this house do now adjourn.

Question put and agreed to

(Parliament adjourned at 12.03pm)

[Edited]



Eleventh Parliament

Sixth Meeting

NATIONAL PARLIAMENT OF SOLOMON ISLANDS

Thursday, 18 May 2023

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

(Subject to Revision)

NATIONAL PARLIAMENT OF SOLOMON ISLANDS

Thursday, 18 May 2023

The Speaker, Mr Patteson John Oti, took the Chair at 10:05.

Prayers.

Business of the House

ATTENDANCE

All were present with the exception of the Minister for Fisheries and Marine Resources, Minister for Provincial Government & Institutional Strengthening, Minister for Public Service, Minister for Education & Human Resource Development, Minister for Health & Medical Services and Members for North New Georgia, North New Georgia/Vona Vona, North Guadalcanal, West Makira, Ulawa/Ugi, South New Georgia/Rendova/Tetepare, Member for North West Guadalcanal, West Honiara

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND REPORTS

- Report on the 2023 Supplementary Appropriation Bill 2023 (National Parliament Paper No.18 of 2023)

Bills

THE 2023 SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION BILL 2023

Second Reading

The SPEAKER: Point of Order! The Ministers microphone is not working. I will suspend Parliament for 5 minutes while our technicians attend to the sound system.

(Parliament is suspended)

Hon HARRY KUMA (*North West Choiseul—Minister for Finance and Treasury*) (10:25): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move,

That the 2023 Supplementary Appropriation Bill 2023 be now read the second time.

Sir, before I discuss the details of the supplementary budget, I would like to thank the chairman and members of the Public Accounts Committee for their time and tireless effort in scrutinizing the budget over the last few weeks. I commend their support and careful consideration of the 2023 Supplementary Appropriation Bill 2023.

Sir, the 2023 Supplementary Appropriation Bill 2023 is being authorized under Section 51 of the Public Financial Management Act 2013, read together with Section 102(3) of the Constitution, Section 58 of the Public Financial Management Act 2013, Section 103(2) of the Constitution, and Section 60 of the Public Financial Management Act 2013.

Sir, as all members of this honorable House would appreciate, the main purposes of the supplementary budget are to:

- a) Regularize the contingency warrants that have been issued for urgent and unforeseen needs and for purpose for which no sum has been appropriated.
- b) Make donor funding available for programs that have not been captured under the government's regular budget process.
- c) Reallocate budgetary resources through variation
- d) Supplement additional expenditure for urgent needs that have risen in certain government priorities.

Mr Speake Sir, before I go through the bill in detail, I would like to discuss three key issues that form the basis and rationale for the 2023 Supplementary Appropriation Bill 2023.

First, as a responsible and accountable government, it is incumbent on me as minister of finance and treasury to update this honorable House on the state of the economy in view of the COVID-19 pandemic and other shocks that we have gone through over the last three years.

Second, and most importantly, is to provide an update on the implementation of the 2023 budget. Our government will obtain the necessary revenues and expenditure plans, especially for the implementation of economic and fiscal policies to grow the economy and maintain service delivery to our people.

The third is to explain the necessity for the 2023 supplementary budget.

On the global economic outlook, Mr. Speaker, sir, 2022 was a volatile year for the global economy. Economic, geopolitical, and ecological changes all impacted the global economy during the year. Inflation sows to accumulated heights, promoting rapid monetary policies tightening and squeezed households budgets. Just as COVID-19- pandemic related fiscal support was weaning in most countries,

Many low-income countries faced deep fiscal difficulties, and at the same time, Russia's on-going war in Ukraine and tension elsewhere had raised the possibility of significant geopolitical disruptions.

Although the pandemic impact has moderated in most countries, by year's end its lingering waves continue to disrupt economic activities in most countries.

Sir, an intense heat waves and droughts across Europe and Central and South Asia also provided a taste for a more inhospitable future blighted by global climate change.

Amid this volatile condition, the global economy slowed significantly to just 3.2 percent growth compared to 6 percent in 2021. The global economy appears poised for a gradual recovery in 2023 with global growth projected at 2.8 percent and rising modestly to 3.1 percent in 2024. The positive outlook reflects strong recovery following in major economies reflecting the opening of borders. Although the balance of risks remain tilted downside severe health outcomes in China together with Russia's continued war in Ukraine and tighten global financing conditions could hold back the recovery process. The current geopolitical fragmentation could also hamper the economic recovery progress achieved so far.

As many have observed 2022 was a year of brutal inflation worldwide. Inflation reached historical levels in many advanced economies so that by year end global inflation was around 9 percent. However global inflation is projected to fall around 7 percent in 2023 and 4.9 percent in 2024 as a result of increased Central Bank rates to fight inflationary pressures across the globe. On domestic economic updates like many other developing countries our economy also sailed through choppy international waters and contracted by 3.5 percent in 2022 compared to the original forecasted contraction of 4.5 percent earlier in the year. The law decliners came mainly from stronger than expected growth in the construction sector in to both donor infrastructure development projects and ongoing construction of the 2023 Pacific Games facilities. Increase private sector consumption and investment means that global pandemic are greater than anticipated physical support from the government in keeping the economy afloat is recession in 2023.

Mr. Speaker looking ahead Solomon Islands economy is forced to enter green pastures in 2023 after more than two years of recession with real GDP growth projected at 2.7 percent this year. The forecasted growth in 2023 reflects our resilience and more than expected recovery in key sectors such as agriculture, fishing, mining, wholesale and trade construction manufacturing and other business services after experiencing the adverse clause of covid-19 over the last two years. The ongoing donor funded infrastructure development projects especially those associated with the 2023 Pacific Games will also further support growth towards end of 2023.

Mr. Speaker on major contribution of growth factors in 2003 the agriculture sector as we all know agriculture remains the most important sector and source of

employment and livelihood in the rural areas. The agriculture sector contributed \$505,550,000 or 18percent of total export earnings in 2022. Looking ahead the agriculture sector is projected to contribute 3.3percent of GDP in 2023 reflecting expected increase activities in both the formal and informal sectors in line with Pacific Games. The construction wholesale and retail sectors are projected increase by 2.3percent and 1.9percent respond respectively while mining activities are expected to marginally grow by 1percent in 2023.

Mr. Speaker business and services activities are projected to increase by 2.4percent in 2023 as covid-19 pandemic is expected to be at low levels and as a result of expected boost in the construction sector and infrastructure project as well as Tina Hydro projects and other private project investment. Services and Industry sectors are expected to contribute 2.4percent and 0.9percent respectively in 2023 reflecting a projected decline in logging the primary sector is expected to contribute relatively less at around 0.4percent in 2023. The easing of COVID-19 restrictions were result in positive growth in the Tourism Sector in 2023. However, the recovery is still very uncertain given the high uncertainty in the global outlook. Tourism is unlikely to return pre-COVID 19 levels until 2023. It depends entirely on COVID-19 Outlook as tourists may still feel unsafe to travel, as lifting travel restrictions may not be enough to induce an applicant for tourism in such heighten risk environment.

The impact of the November 2021 Civil Unrest, COVID-19 and Ukraine War has changed the trading environment for most manufacturers. Preliminary information's based on a business consultation conducted in early January 2023. Showed that most manufacturers were negatively affected in 2022. As business conditions and operation decline by 20percent - 40percent compared to in 2021 levels.

However, despite these challenges, the manufacturing sector is expected to remain positive around 0.6percent growth in 2023. Reflecting the reopening of the economy and relaxation of the border and COVID-19 restrictions and strong government support in business 2022.

As all honorable members are aware, the logging industry remains our key source of export tenements. Total exports from our forest products are amounted to \$1.4 million in 2022.

In terms of production, logging activities continued the downward trend witnessed since 2018. The sector fail by 20.8percent in 2022 and further declined by 4.5percent in 2023. The decline in logging activities largely reflects the downturn in log production. Associated with the decline in the number of logging, license and general equation of our natural forest resources.

In terms of government revenues, export duties from logs amounted to \$86 million in the first quarter of 2023, 14percent higher than the same period in 2022. The Total fish cuts fell by 5.8percent in 2022 however the sector is projected to slightly increase by around 0.1percent in 2023 reflecting an expected increase in fish catches. And increase in international and domestic demand for fish products in line with the improvement in the supply chain.

Favorable weather conditions and the recovery in domestic economic activities will also support the project in growth in 2023. Labour market performance remains relatively weak in 2022 compared to the year 2017 – 2019 period. This is mainly driven by the impact of the recent pandemic and the November 2021 Civil Unrest. As most businesses and companies have not fully recovered from these downfalls. According to the Solomon Islands National Provident Fund and members contribution remains broadly the same at the 2021 levels at around 56,000 contributors.

The labour market outlook for 2023 is expected to recover a bit lower than pre-COVID-19 level. Owing mainly to the reopening of the economy and relaxation of COVID-19 restrictions. And contraction projects that are aligned with the upcoming November 2023.

Mr Speaker with regards to prices the inflation rate is expected to over between 4-5 per cent in 2023, slightly less than 5.9 per cent in 2022. The key drivers of inflation are high global fuel prices due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Compounded by inflationary pressures in the domestic economy through elevated transportation costs and rising prices of imports. As we all know high inflation poses a risk to the recovery process by potentially constraining economic growth through reduced purchasing power and consumption spending. Well not much can be done to control imported inflation, the government will make sure that goods and services are not unnecessarily priced, this will be done by regularly monitoring of the prices of goods and services through the price and monitoring unit in the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, Trade and Immigration.

Solomon Islands Trained Deficit wined further to 1,679million in 2022 from 781million deficit a year ago. This negative out turned stemmed from our 19 percent increase in imports to 4460million combined with a 6.7 percent decline in export 2,782million during the year. The sizable increase in imports are emanated from all import categories except for machinery and transport equipment, fuel import surge by 56 percent to 1,129million while food imports rose by 26 percent to 9,077million reflecting higher international fuel and food prices. Basic manufactured items grew by 16 percent to 946 million, chemicals soared by 55 percent to \$380 million whilst crude materials increased to 48 million from \$31million in 2021. These outcomes

were attributed to ongoing construction projects relating to the 2023 Pacific Games and other major public infrastructure projects in the country.

The increased trend deficit led to a widening in the recurrent account deficit from \$627million in 2021 to \$1,780million at the end of 2022. Although the surplus in the capital account soared to \$1,580million on account of increase donor support towards public infrastructure investment projects such as the Pacific Games sports facility, international terminal and road upgrades and other ongoing public infrastructure projects in the provinces these were insufficient to offset the current account deficit. Consequently, Solomon Islands recorded an overall balance of payments deficit of 192million in 2022 compared to a surplus of \$411million 2021.

As a result, the level of gross foreign reserves declined by 3 percent to 5.458 billion at the end of 2022. This level of reserve remains well above the minimum IMF threshold of six months and is adequate to cover 13.8 months of imports of goods and services. On fiscal update based on the original 2023 budget that this honorable house approved on 14th December 2022, government expects to collect total of consolidated revenue of 3,380million and total expenditure of 4,884 million resulting in an overall budget deficit of 1.504billion. Government is aware that funding this historical deficit will be a challenge, however, the government is committed to maintain strict discipline and ensure additional funding is secured to address the 2023 budget shortfall and key policy priorities delivered as expected.

In this regard, the government has developed a robust funding and financing strategy as a guide to secure additional funding measures to fund the development shortfall and to ensure the smooth implementation of government's programs and policy priorities as highlighted in the 2023 budget. As a result of the strong commitment and as already taken measures to ensure secure additional funding to address the 2023 budget shortfall reduce budget deficit of \$216.5million was achieved by end of April 2023. Additional funding to fund the deficit has been secured from the general budget support from development partners, borrowing and issuance of development bonds, additional revenue policy measures and rolling over of 2022 development financing funds into 2023. Income from these measures have secured or revised a development financing and additional revenue measures of \$1264million which is \$944.7million higher than the original 2023 development financing estimates of \$320.2million.

In terms of 2023 overall revenue performance, total revenue collections till the end of March amounts to \$714million for 22 percent of the total SIG revenue estimates of \$3202.6million in 2023. This is an under collection of \$60.4million or eight percent against the three months expected revenue projection of \$774.6million. \$714million consist of \$455.1million from Inland Revenue Division, \$221million from Customs Division and other ministries non tax revenue of \$38.1million.

On the expenditure side, the total overall expenditures amounted to \$730.2million at the end of March 2023 for 16 percent of the total overall budget expenditures of \$4611.9million in 2023.

In terms of the SIG Project Funding total development spending were \$25.6million or two percent of the total development budget of \$1170.9million. Development spending was slow in the first two months but picked up in March as ministries started to implement their projects after their work plans were approved by the Ministry of National Planning and Development Coordination.

The fiscal outcomes in the first quarter only showed how vulnerable we are to address developments in the global economy. This calls for the need for more collective efforts during these unprecedented times. It also confirms the fact that spill over effects of COVID-19 pandemic is real and that we are yet to fully recover from the aftermath of the politically driven and social unrest in November 2021.

Solomon Islands economy is still on a recovery path but continue to face external hate wings and inherent domestic risks. The economy is honestly not as what we would like to be. Recently, however but not surprisingly some colleagues in this honourable House have blamed the government for having a sick economy. While they have the rights to say whatever they want but some of them I am amazed on how they see and view things. As we all know and have experienced in the last three years, have been very challenging times for us all. Never had we gone through such period since gaining political independence in 1978. Maybe, they are the only Solomon Islanders who have not felt or are new to what the country had gone through since the entry of COVID-19 in early 2020 and the November riot of 2021. The nation wide COVID-19 transmission in 2022 and the increasingly pressure of Russian Ukraine War which continues to be felt globally.

As I have said in my Budget Speech on 6th April 2021 when the DCGA Government assumed political office after the 2019 General Elections. It recognised that many of the socio-economic development challenges have shake the country since independence have not been successfully addressed. The DCGA Government was fully prepared to implement its policies and programs to address these development challenges after the passage of the 2022 Budget. However, just when the government was ready to implement its policy and development programs, the unexpected COVID-19 struck.

As I have said before, the envious impacts of COVID-19 were real and must not be under estimated. Globally, the pandemic spread with alarming speed, infected millions and brought global economic activity to a near standstill as all countries impose tied restriction on movement to halt the spread of the virus. As highly open economy we are not immune to address global financial and economic

developments in our major trading partner countries, especially the Asian market where 67 percent of goods is exported and 76 percent of goods and manufactured products are imported.

If all major developed countries in the world were severely affected by COVID-19 pandemic and now the war in Ukraine, who are we to say that we would not be affected as well? As Mr. Klemens von Metternich of France once said, *When America sneezes the world catches a flu*. However, in our case, not only did we have America sneezing, we have also had to deal with the COVID transmission and the consequences of a riot in 2021.

As you see Mr. Speaker, the sick economy condition that some of us are very forward in talking about is not government's making. As a responsible government and given the situation we were in, government have taken all necessary actions within its powers and capacity and with the support of donor community and address the challenges we were faced with over the last three years. It will take time for some of the government policy actions taken to bear fruit. However, I wish to remind this honourable House, had the government not taken drastic measures to address the effects of COVID-19, we would not have reached this far as a nation.

In this regard I wish to acknowledge all Solomon Islanders and donor partners who worked so hard and sacrifice their time and skills in helping government to address the impacts of COVID-19 over the last three years. The government is fully conscious of our development challenges and fully committed to do the right thing to improve the social and economic livelihood of all Solomon Islanders and live as one people and one country.

Let me outline some risks ahead of us. The combine impacts of COVID-19, November riot and the war in Ukraine continue to pose significant health and economic risks to Solomon Islands outlook in the near turn. The global outlook remains variable with heighten and certainty and downside risks to the outlook of Solomon Islands economy. Any further rising global energy prices, uncertainty of gas supply would significantly increase inflation worldwide with negative cross-border spill overs which would adversely affect major industrial sectors and general global economic performance.

The domestic risks to the economic outlook reflects our low fiscal and external buffers and subdue investment due to the impact of the pandemic and the recent social unrest. In recent years, we only manage to keep ourselves afloat because of the expansionary fiscal policy we adopted the support from development partners, resource industries such as logging and the resilience of our subsistence way of

living. The impact of COVID-19 compounding with the recent riot has heightened the risk on the sources of revenue that may be more rapid and disrupted on the economy than anticipated.

The projected decline of forestry and logging activities in 2023 will adversely affect government's finances and hence the government requires to identify new sources of revenue such as strengthening the taxation regime for the mining sector and tax reform particularly. The government hopes that the completion and implementation of the tax review will lead to our taxation system that is more attuned to promoting economic growth and foreign investment in the medium term. Sir, the uncertainty of commodity prices due to the pandemic and the Russian-Ukraine war poses a risk for the economy and affects commodity exporters in copra and cocoa through losses in exports and revenue. This could tip some economies in-depth crisis and slow activities further.

Mr. Speaker, the government is fully aware of the challenges that we have faced and is therefore committed to implementing additional fiscal and economic response measures to support the implementation of the 2023 budget.

Sir, on the revenue side, government has already implemented the increase in the tobacco exercise duty on January 1, 2023. Government expects to collect additional revenue of \$65 million from the Tabaco exercise increased. The exercise rate is set at 5 percent for cigarettes and 10 percent for roll products.

Sir, recently the government also introduced a plastic tax of 50 percent. However, the government is aware that this will not significantly achieve the objective of reducing plastic pollution. Therefore, the government also intends to introduce an additional 50 cents to reduce pollution from plastic. Government anticipates an additional \$1 million in annual revenue collection from this measure in 2023.

Sir, in addition to the tax on plastic, government also plans to introduce an annual pollution fee of \$50 to be introduced and charged on pollution emitters. This will start with vehicles, followed by ocean-going vessels and other engines.

Applying the fee to vehicles alone would generate an estimated annual revenue of \$1.9 million. Increased duty for plastic and pollution fee is aimed at reducing pollution as part of promoting the 2023 Green Games campaign.

Mr. Speaker, in 2022, fuel imports were exempted from duty and goods tax. However, the government has reinstated the import duty rate of 50 cents per liter in January this year. This will generate additional revenue of \$34 million in 2023.

Sir, government also proposes an increase to the alcohol exercise to be effective as of October 1, 2023. This will bring additional revenue of \$3 million. The increase in alcohol exercise is timing as the last exercise increase was 10 percent in 2018.

Sir, with regards to businesses whose properties were destroyed during the November 2021 civil unrest, the government is committed to assist these businesses and will provide support to rebuild the damaged buildings to revive economic activities as part of the government's economic recovery initiatives.

Mr. Speaker, having discussed the economic outlook, the revenue and expenditure performances for the first three months of this year and the proposed additional economic and fiscal response policies that the government would embark on, Let me now turn to the 2023 Supplementary Bill 2023.

Mr. Speaker, the 2023 supplementary budget that I will present for the approval of this honorable House sends a clear message to our people about what the government truly values or the government's commitment to fiscal responsibility measures. It also recognizes the need for safety and security and the need for more investment to build a better Solomon Islands for all.

Mr. Speaker, as you would agree, the government is responsible and accountable to Parliament and the people of Solomon Islands. Where people require more quality social and economic services, it is crucial that we provide adequate resources to improve the livelihood of our people while at the same time ensuring sources of growth are further strengthened and sustained.

Mr. Speaker, for this reason, the 2023 supplementary bill seeks Parliament's approval of \$370,637,520 as additional expenditures from the consolidated fund to provide much-needed government services for the year ending 2023.

Sir, the bill is consistent with the government's overarching policy objectives, as the government has approved a total of \$4.1million in contingency Warrants, \$159million in Advance Warrants and \$207.5 million in additional supplementary expenditures for continued service to the end of this fiscal year. Mr. Speaker Sir the additional supplementary are expenditures reflect Governments ongoing initiatives to invest in Transformational Investments to boost economic recovery and further strengthen our resilience to achieve sustainable economic growth as one of governments overarching policy objectives in the midst of uncertainty. On this note the government has approved a total of \$216.3million or 58percent of the 2023 Supplementary Appropriation Bill towards the fundamental sector which consist of the following:

- \$15.4million Advanced Warrant from various donor partners for the FMIS upgrade to Microsoft B365 system to strengthen government systems and

processes; the Economic Stimulus Package to caution the negative impacts of COVID-19, and support to the National Disaster Management Office to pay off COVID-19 related arrears incurred in 2022.

- \$100million as additional expenditure for the construction of business properties damage during the riots in November 2021 in order to strengthen private sector business and wholesale retail sector and service activities to contribute to growth and
- \$5 million as Solomon Islands government support to the Development Bank of Solomon Islands under the Ministry of Finance and Treasury.

In line with governments priority events for 2023 a sum of

- \$92.2 million through Advanced Warrant is also allocated towards the National Hosting Authority in preparation for the Pacific Games later this year and
- \$2 million as additional expenditure for the establishment of a printing unit and outstanding commitment in 2022 under the Office of Prime Minister.

Mr. Speaker Sir the outcome of the riots in 2021 has also increased the number of high profile cases that require urgent action. As such an external special Public Prosecutor is being recruited to deal with the high profile cases to assist the office of the Director of Public Prosecution under the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs. Therefore a sum of \$1.5million is allocated to the Ministry through Contingency Warrant provision.

Additionally the total funding for productive and resource sector is \$72.3 million or 20percent of the total 2023 supplementary budget bill which consist of:

- \$557,049 as Advanced warrants to support Tourism Product Development visitors experience and COVID-19 safety measures.
- Advanced Warrant of \$818,331 to develop Solomon Islands Computer Emergency Response Team;
- \$2.3 million towards *Mekem Strong Fisaries* projects through Advanced Warrant and additional supplementary of \$6 million to support seaweed farming;
- \$2.6 million as SIG emergency support to the government of Vanuatu as well as Temotu Outer Islands that were affected by Tropical cyclones Judy and Kevin.
- \$31.05 million towards the revitalisation of CEMA allocated from Ministry of Agriculture Commerce and Infrastructure Development as the governments ongoing commitment for economic recovery through opening of economic opportunities to our rural and Provincial centres.

- A sum of \$30.4 million for additional for additional road maintenance outstanding payments for work already done in 2022; purchase of boat and machineries and tar sealing of Auki road
- A sum of \$2 million to support and elevate farmers to ensure local food production meets the catering needs during the Pacific Games and
- The sum of \$6.6 million for urgent demand for passport books office rental and utilities including support towards the Suava economic growth centres.

In line with the Government overarching policy of empowering our people and promoting national unity and prosperity the government has also prioritised protecting the health wellbeing and capacity of our people the very people we represent in this Honourable House. Sir, the government had therefore issued a total funding for social sector services of \$84.6 million or 23percent of the total 2023, supplementary budget bill. And it consists of

- \$17.5 million in advance warrant to support ongoing programs and education reference materials;
- Additional supplementary expenditure of \$21 million for Office Rental payments, the printing of exam papers and shortfall in grants and utilities;
- \$8 million for rehabilitation of school infrastructure.
- \$26.1 million in advance warrant is to cater for ongoing health operation in 2023 and further construction of our prefab mental health acute ward.
- \$3.2 million in advance warrant for asset maintenance and housing construction.
- Another \$2 million in additional supplementary expenditure to support new motor vehicles to boost police security and law and order during the pacific games later this year.
- \$687,502 in advance warrants to support ongoing reform programs and the transformation strategy and
- Additional supplementary expenditure of \$3.3 million to identify potential talents in preparation for the Pacific Games later in November 2023.

The supplementary budget before this house will collectively be funded by domestic external financing and direct budget support from our development partners. The details of these funding sources are provided in the explanatory notes in the bill itself.

When I presented the 2023 Appropriation Bill 2022 in December last year. I send that the government has a historic overall budget deficit of \$1.5 billion and that only \$320.2 million had been secured from domestic and external sources, especially from our development partners to fund the budget shortfall relating to the 2023 development budget. Given the fiscal challenge, our funding and financing plan was developed to guide the government in the implementation of the 2023 budget,

ensuring key government priorities are covered when big payments are expected and ensuring funding is available when required.

As the minister for Finance and Treasury, I am pleased to report that together the government has maintained its commitment and have already secured an additional development financing sources which gives a revised estimate of \$1,264.9 million. This is sufficient to fully fund the development budget this year.

I am pleased to inform this honorable house that the government of Australia has been very generous and willing to fund \$144 million of the preparatory cost of the general elections this year. This will also enable the government to reallocate \$144 million to cater for other recurrent expenditures in this bill.

The government remains committed to ensure that funding and all preparatory activities for the 2024 National General Elections are in place and carried out a schedule through the Solomon Islands Electoral Office.

You will note that the sole purpose of this bill is to make funds available to maintain governments' contractual commitments and support economic recovery initiatives. In order to protect the health and well-being of our people, add further boost the recovery process. The government remains committed to maintain the fiscal stability and discipline. Hence additional expenditures must be fully funded to maintain stability and discipline in the overall fiscal framework for the 2023 financial year. Although the economy is expected to recover this year, it is still fragile and needs more work to be done. It is crucial therefore that all government machineries remain committed and demonstrate due diligence discipline and make wise decisions on how we manage our limited resources for the remaining months of 2023.

As usual, the Ministry of Finance and Treasury will continue to strengthen its capacity to closely monitor all expenditures and ensure they are spent wisely, responsibly and as allocated. A finance circular has been circulated to all ministries to adhere to their respective responsibilities as stipulated in the public finance management Act and the budget Execution Strategy and Payment Process to ensure smooth implementation of the 2023 budget.

Mr Speaker, I therefore call on all responsible accounting and accountable officers, permanent secretaries, financial controllers, human resources managers and directors to uphold the requirements of the Public Finance Management Act 2013 and work together to manage our limited financial resources in the most effective and efficient manner possible.

Mr Speaker to conclude, let me again remind this honorable house that the lingering impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the recent civil unrest and the ongoing war in

the Ukraine continue to risk and complicate our fiscal policy responses. Nevertheless, the government is firm and will continue to do the right thing in ensuring the economy remains afloat and grow further.

Our recovery platform policies present unique opportunities not only to refocus our efforts but also revalue the importance of economic resilience and living as one people in one country, one Solomon Islands. I am confident that we can overcome future challenges if we work collectively as we have already demonstrated in the past recent years since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020. This supplementary budget is another series of budgets put forward to support our recovery process, we hope that the negative impacts of the pandemic will be further minimized through our collective efforts and commitments.

Let us continue to work together to address the development challenges ahead of us. Let us learn from the past to inform our responses and let us build one Solomon Islands from Shore to Shore as one people serving together under our sovereign God. With these few remarks, I commend this bill to the house and I beg to move.

The SPEAKER: Honorable members, I will invoke Standing Orders 67 so that the Bill is committed to the Committee of Supply without any question put after the second reading has been proposed.

Therefore we will proceed immediately to the committee of supply to consider the 2023 Supplementary Appropriation Bill 2023.

(No votes taken at the end of Second Reading)

Bills

THE 2023 SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION BILL 2023

Committee Stage

The SPEAKER: Honorable members, the House will now resolve into a committee of supply to consider the 2023 Supplementary Appropriation Bill 2023.

(Committee of Supply)

Head 25: Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs – The Sum of \$1,535,400

Head 25 agreed to

Head 32: Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, Meteorology and Disaster Management – The Sum of \$2,610,000

Hon MATTHEW WALE: Just for the Minister to clarify the split between the two recipients on this money.

Hon. STANLEY SOFU: I did not really hear the question of the Leader of Opposition.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Can you repeat the question honourable Leader for the Minister?

Hon MATTHEW WALE: Yes, just for some clarification on the split between two beneficiaries on this CW.

Hon. STANLEY SOFU: Thank you Mr Chairman and I would like to thank the Opposition Leader and Member of Parliament for Aoke/Langalanga. For clarification, for spending of the ministry until December, \$1million for Vanuatu Kevin Cyclone and \$1.61 million for Temotu during cyclone.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: Sorry, just in that response he said up to December 2022?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Minister, is it for 2022?

Hon. STANLEY SOFU: No, the time frame of this funding, the ministry is aware but they have not told me.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: I mean we are regularizing a Contingency Warrant. So obviously the money was paid. Perhaps the Minister of Finance could explain on when this was spent.

Hon HARRY KUMA: I did not really clearly get the question but the probably he was questioning the timing of this CW. We are dealing with 2023 Supplementary Appropriation Bill 2023. So we are dealing with everything that falls in 2023. For 2022, if there is any CW that has not been regularized in Parliament then that would come in another Bill.

Mr. JOHN MANENIARU: Just on policy, on disaster especially on Temotu and Renbel. We normally reach them weeks after when they are in need. Is there a policy that we are looking at to better serve the people after disaster which the ministry is looking at, or does it have a plan?

Hon. STANLEY SOFU: Maybe, the Prime Minister or Minister of Finance may assist. But in terms of policy, you know, when something happens, it will take time before it is addressed. But there is a provision for it.

Hon. MANASSEH SOGAVARE: This is an area that we really need to look at to improve. As the minister has correctly explained, the way this whole thing is organized is for us to firstly wait for the report. They will look at that place and made the report that will take one, two or three months before the assistance will go. However, the idea that comes out from the question raised by the Chair of Bills and Legislation Committee, is that we will need to look at immediate assistance

first. The point is taken and we might look at reorganize these things, so that when disasters strike, immediate assistance like water goes first instead of waiting for the report.

Therefore, the point is taken and something that we need to improve on in that area.

Head 32 agreed to

Total Recurrent Contingency Warrant – The Sum of \$4,145,400

Question agreed to

(Total Recurrent Contingency Warrant stand part of the Schedule)

Part 2: Advanced Warrants

Head 05: Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development-\$17,557,335

Mr RICK HOUENIPWELA: Thank you Mr. Chairman. I want the minister to give more detail on what are the ongoing activities that is happening in the ministry that is funded by DFAT?

Hon ANTHONY VEKE: The three key areas that DFAT supported education on is curriculum development, professional development and on infrastructures.

Mr RICK HOUENIPWELA: The areas the Minister just mentioned are very important areas. I am just wondering that minister can affirm the committee if this support will continue?

Is it really ongoing, I mean into next year?

Hon ANTHONY VEKE: Yes. The current arrangement will end in the middle of this year and there is work done to prepare this program to continue for another three years.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: Sir, with the amounts involved, they are significant amounts. I am wondering why these were not taken up in the main budget at the end of last year. And now this bill was tabled at the end of April. So in the first quarter of the new year, we submitted these significant amounts. Were they in the planning process by the end of last year, or we stumbled upon on these expenditures in the first quarter?

Hon ANTHONY VEKE: I am not sure which particular head the honorable leader is asking for. But I think he is referring to the old budget. It is a big figure, and he is talking about planning.

Yes, some of the provisions that are there are being phased out and they are done in phases. So spending will continue to appear in the budget, but you will see that most of the budget is included in the planning process, but there were some internal issues with the Ministry of Finance which occurs last year, that some of the payments that were appropriated in the budget were not able to be paid out. Which means the ministry has to recover or make sure that it comes from the provisions of the supplementary to enable those payments in this year's budget.

Mr DOUGLAS ETE: Regarding the \$10 million in Head 05 on page 5. This is a substantial amount of money for the materials. What kind of materials are these? How would the schools benefit from?

Hon ANTHONY VEKE: For that particular head, it is for curriculum material or teaching and learning resources that were developed for junior secondary schools under the New Zealand Cognition Limited contract. There are 28 teaching and learning resources all together, and those that have been completed will be published. So that is why we have that in the budget.

Mr. JOHN MANENIARU: I'm looking at the Sub Head which ends with 22517. There are two items there. One is "Others Local Other Costs" and "Others Local Other Costs". One supplementation of \$1 million and the other is \$2,507,335. Can the minister clarify to the house since both has the same name. What is the difference and what does "Others involve?" The two increase there Chairman thank you.

Hon ANTHONY VEKE: With the first one other costs are costs for purchasing science apparatus for the three Community High Schools and the other one local other costs or others as well is to meet the cost to migrate data and other activities from Teaching Service Division to open MS, so that is the provision for both of them.

Mr PETER KENILOREA (Jnr): Just to follow up on the answer of the Minister in terms of this reference to education materials, the second one down \$10 million. I heard it correctly that it belongs to New Zealand or is this one partner? Do I hear it correctly, is it New Zealand or Australia?

Hon ANTHONY VEKE: It is from both the DFAT and MFAT.

Head 05 agreed to

Head 06: Ministry of Finance and Treasury – The Sum of \$15,446,564

Mr RICK HOUENIPWELA: Thank you Mr. Chairman on that Ministry of Head 06 the Minister perhaps can enumerate how much on this \$15 million goes to different activities. I see in the explanatory note some go to upgrade in D365 system and some in ESP and some on Disaster Management Office. Some on the arrears too. I am

interested on how much goes to this economic stimulus package. How much of this money?

Hon HARRY KUMA: I think your particular interest is on the stimulus package. The allocation that goes to stimulus package is the two ones below on consultancy fees and printing/stationery and photocopying. Consultancy fees is \$30,000 and printing stationery and photocopying is \$261,479. This is mainly putting together the report where we hire consultancy and this is funded by the Asian Development Bank. We hire consultancy and pay for printing materials and stationaries which are funded by the Asian Development Bank. The other allocations is consultancy fee, which is DFAT funded. For the D365-office stationery of \$5,000. For disaster preparedness and relief, that was a world bank support to COVID-19 related areas to NDMO. The other is for public service annual travel, that is related to D365 for the traveling of officers.

Mr RICK HOENIPWELA: Thank you I want to thank the Minister for his answer. I did not hear the answer. He said the payment or the payment of consultancy fees and expenditure for printing and stationary, that will be paid for the printing of a report. I want to know what kind of report is that.

Hon HARRY KUMA: This is the report which is the completion report of the implementation of the stimulus package. We agreed to produce a report of the implementation. And that report has been printed, the funding comes from Asian Development Bank.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: Thank you, that is a very expensive report for \$10.6million. I mean it is an important activity and we need to know how effective that intervention was. Therefore we would need some expertise, but it does look a little bit on the pricy range, to do this kind of consultancy.

The question Chairman is, if this report is available and whether it can be tabled in parliament so that all of us have the benefit of seeing the lessons being learned.

Hon HARRY KUMA: Thank you Leader of opposition, we take note of that. The report can be tabled in parliament. Consultancy fees are only \$30,000 for the compilation of this report. I think that is a very reasonable amount for consultancy fee charged. And of course the printing of it. We know that printing job is not that cheap. It is also expensive. So that takes care of it under printing/stationary and photocopying which is \$261,479.

Mr. JOHN MANENIARU: With the consultancy fee, are the consultants locals (Solomon Islanders) or are they overseas consultants? How many Solomon Islanders are involved? Inform the committee.

Hon HARRY KUMA: With the stimulus package, which is funded by ADB Consultancy fees, it is local. The cost charged is \$30,000. But I think you are also looking at consultancy fee which is on the top one 155000022106 that is consultancy fee with respect to upgrade of the FMIS system D365 project or financial management system of the ministry of finance and the upgrade of that we have to hire external consultant who knows the system for upgrade. So that \$4.4 million is for external consultant which is funded by DFAT for us to upgrade that system.

Mr RICK HOUENIPWELA: Sir, I am assuming that this sub head item 219001 000122212 Disaster Preparedness is part of this. My question is as this is a payment related to arrears in 2022, I want to know if the minister can tell us if there are no arrears expenses related to this COVID.

Hon HARRY KUMA: As I have said, the \$10.6 million is intended to clear all the arrears all disaster and COVID-19 related work in the previous year's especially in 2022 which is under NDMO. We know that this particular funding that goes towards COVID-19 is under audit as well and there are other specific payments that is still under internal audit assessment as well and yet to be released and so of course there are still arrears that is under assessment here. As soon as it is cleared all the assessments or internal audit work is cleared, then we will clear all these others.

Mr DOUGLAS ETE: I want clarification on this \$100,000 from realized foreign exchange gain losses. Sub head 001155 Item 2222812 \$100,000.

Hon HARRY KUMA: As you know these are development partner funding that is denominated to various foreign currency like Australian Dollars, US Dollars and when they come in the foreign exchange favors our foreign exchange rate and so because of that we gained a little bit too because of the strength of our dollar and that is the gain that is reflected here.

Mr CHAIRMAN: The question is that the sum of \$15,446,564 for head 06 stands part of the schedule.

Head 06 agreed to

Head 09: Ministry of Health and Medical Services-\$26,187,489.00

Mr PETER KENILOREA (Jnr): Just a clarification on the explanatory note. The reference to the Republic of China(ROC) which is Taiwan. Does this belong to Taiwan as well or is a typo?

Hon FREDRICK KOLOGETO: Thank you Chairman. On ROC, it is the outstanding money when ROC was still here so the Ministry is still using it.

Mr. JOHN MANENIARU: In the explanatory note, at the bottom part talks about the money to cater for the outstanding 2022. It is in operations and activities that would be implemented in 2023. I am interested on the medicine containers which are at the wharf. They cannot be cleared because there is no money for it. I have asked the PS during the inquiry and they confirmed that yes their containers are still at the wharf. When we have money then we will clear it.

In the Supplementation on subhead item 2010010002212-disaster preparedness relief, that is the disaster funding that will help us clear for the medicines and the containers. I regard it as a disaster because it has not being cleared and now the supplementation for this one. If the Minister can clear to the Committee.

Hon FREDRICK KOLOGETO: Thank you Chairman, that will go for the maintenance of our facilities in the hospital.

Mr. JOHN MANENIARU: Just a follow, so inside the supplementary, is there any extra there that you will use to address the situation with so that the containers of medicine are coming out to save our clinics in the rural villages who had run out of medicines now?

Hon FREDRICK KOLOGETO: The funding is allocated for a different thing and not for that sub heading.

Mr PETER KENILOREA (Jnr): Just a supplementary follow up on my original question. Can the Minister kindly point out on the sub head which one is the ROC Taiwan still continuing for yet?

Hon FREDRICK KOLOGETO: So the last one on 215209000023002 ROC, its money is for the pre pack mental health acute ward. This is what the money will be going to.

Mr RICK HOUENIPWELA: I want to go on the issue of the medicine which is still at the wharf but we cannot still clear. For the Minister to affirm that it will not pay all that medicine?

Hon FREDRICK KOLOGETO: We have the imprest account and we will able to pay for the container. We must pay the container so that we have medicine at the hospitals.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: If that is so, why does the containers stayed there for too many months now? It is a unreasonable situation.

Hon FREDRICK KOLOGETO: This issue is not only for today and yesterday. It is a long time issue. We have so many outstanding and as we aware of, money is hard

and so the ministry prioritize that medicine must come. As we speak, according to those at finance the money to get containers out is ready.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: It is an entirely unreasonable situation. There is no excuse that is good enough for this one. Those containers have been sitting there for months, and even the Panadol is not in the clinics and hospital. This is totally unreasonable and inexcusable and somebody should be held responsible and accountable for this. Somebody should be fired for this, maybe a couple of people.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I think take note of those comments. Only one of you two can talk at one time, not both.

Mr RICK HOUENIPWELA: Thank you Mr. Chairman for your indulgence. I will go on to another sub-head. I am assuming that I think on what the minister stated about the Item rent capex-non residence is for this male mental health acute ward.

I want to know what was the plan of the ministry and what time will this be completed?

Hon FREDRICK KOLOGETO: The budget is not there of this non-residential building. The ministry hope that it will able to complete it. If the budget it short, my friend the Minister of Infrastructure will give some money to complete this work.

Mr RICK HOUENIPWELA: Just a supplementary. The minister's answer is disappointing and that is not very reassuring.

That mental health is needed a very long time ago minister. The mental cases of this whole country is very big. At the moment if you went to the hospital everyone are mixed up. Therefore, I am not happy with such answer. I am commenting, but I am very unhappy with this.

Mr DOUGLAS ETE: This head 9, page 7, sub-head 201-00-100, item 222-02, drugs and dressings. This is one of the issues which a lot of people and myself are worried about, regarding the level of drugs and dressing currently in our country. In two or three months, Honiara will be full. I am worried about this because I thought that the \$3million is inadequate. I think we should increase it. What is the thought of the minister? Are they going to come and search for some supplement to increase it?

I want the minister to assure this House that with this level of funding of \$3 million we will be all right in a few months as we get closer to the months that leads to South Pacific Games, which will fall in the third and fourth quarter of this year

Hon FREDRICK KOLOGETO: Before I answer the question raised by the chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, I want to address the concern of the MP for Small

Malaita. By the end of this year, the mental health building will be completed. So that we take care of our people who are roaming around the streets.

On that note, concerning the concern of the chairman of the Public Accounts Committee and MP for East Honiara, that is just additional money. We have enough money for this year. As we speak, Mr. Chairman we have 78 percent of the drugs in surplus and according to the ministry we have 83 percent consumables. Those are useable consumables and they will be finished. But I want to enlighten the house that these funds are just additional funds. We will be able to go through this year with its budget. Thank you.

Mr PETER KENILOREA (Jnr): Just concerning training for in-service, ending 22402. I would like to know if these trainings are for our doctors and nurses. And if doctors, how many are we looking to give in-service training to? thank you

Hon FREDRICK KOLOGETO: The money is for our graduate nursing students at SINU who will come into the workforce in the ministry.

Head 09 agreed to

Head 14: Office of the Prime Minister and Cabinet – The Sum of \$92,278,761

Mr RICK HOUENIPWELA: I just wanted the prime minister to list the different activities this \$92 million will be used for, or the facilities for which funding is given to NHA? Thank you

Hon. MANASSEH SOGAVARE: This is for the renovation of 52 buildings in the six institutions to accommodate athletes. These are St. Joseph School, Don Bosco, King George the Sixth, SINU Panatina, SINU Kukum, and St. Nicholas. Also, the funding of the water sports at DC Park , also some equipment for Solomon Islands National Institute of Sports and also funding support for the TAs that are working for delivering this games.

Mr RICK HOUENIPWELA: Thank you Mr. Chairman thank you for this response. My question is just one request Mr. Chairman can I make it or not? and it is directed to the Prime Minister since this item has I think it is appropriate place that I make this point about Pacific Games.

Mr CHAIRMAN: To do with this head?

Mr RICK HOUENIPWELA: Yes

Mr CHAIRMAN: Ok

Mr RICK HOUENIPWELA: Thank. Mr. Chairman in the inquiry many concerns were raised but I will point out only three. One in terms of the security of the host

places where they will host the athletes one on food and another one on accommodation. So my perhaps request to the Prime Minister is whether he can work in liaison with the line Ministers concerned to make sure those preparations in terms of those specific areas can be completed and we are ready for it Mr. Chairman thank you.

Hon. MANASSEH SOGAVARE: Mr. Chairman thank you Member for Small Malaita. If I can remember like to do with food, the security of the places that they will stay in, and the facilities. Yes Mr. Chairman the safety of these facilities security is something that we are looking high on. It is very important for us especially when we are bringing in nearly 5,000 athletes and then many more people will come and their families will to watch the games Mr. Chairman. So in terms of facilities maybe need of course for putting up temporary fencing, we are talking with our Australian friends to look at that if we can do that Mr. Chairman and there are some positive response there that we can on look at but of course we are deploying; we are working very closely with the Ministry of Police for their security plans for the infrastructures there and number of phases there; one of course as soon as those facilities are completed no one will stay there, and so it brings up this issue of security there straight Mr. Chairman so we are working very closely with the Ministry of Police on that one with the support of SIAAF to look at how we can make sure that the facilities are remain intact by the time games are happening Mr. Chairman.

So we are working very closely with the Ministry of Police and they have briefed the CMCC on the progress or their preparation. They will come again. We ask them to come again if there are any changes on security arrangements. In terms of food preparation Mr. Chairman it is very important we bring athletes in and food preparations is very important and we really need the people that are professional to prepare their food, and if you look at this big building on the other side of KGVI school there that is where the big dining hall will stay where the athletes will eat from. There is a budget allocation for a body I think almost \$18 million on the late one. There will be an outside group to look after that. There is a number of local contractors as well that will be engaged there. We make sure those people who are engaged in this matter are people who are qualified and can provide that quality service to our people.

In terms of budget allocation, I think the presentation before the PAC there is \$47million for the master caterer and then about \$35million for other contractors as well. There will be a public screening and people to identify who can provide quality service to participants in the games.

Mr RICK HOUENIPWELA: This matter was brought out in the committee's report in recommendations, 1,3,4. Those issues are there perhaps my request is probably

the best way to address this is for the Prime Minister to bring an information paper to the house so that we know how these preparations are going especially in terms of food, and security issues. More especially at SINU campus, which is very bad. The issue is very serious and intruders are very high and also with regards to accommodation.

The Prime Minister informed the house some weeks ago that 10,000 people will be expected to arrive. That's excluding the number which he said 5,000 athletes and officials, but probably ten times more are coming from the provinces. These people will need beds, food and need to be looked after. That is the point, maybe an information paper might be an ideal thing to do.

Hon. MANASSEH SOGAVARE: Thank you Mr Chairman, I think it's a very good idea we will be ready to do that.

Mr PETER KENILOREA (Jnr): Thank you Prime Minister for the responses, the prime minister responded in terms of two particular breakdowns.

In terms of this head on accommodation, those few schools that have been upgrading in terms of dormitories and the water sports DC park with this amount of \$92million, a break down of this amount for these two? Is the Prime Minister in the position to give us a breakdown of these two matters within these estimates?

Hon. MANASSEH SOGAVARE: Thank you Mr Chairman, I am not provided with this information but we can provide the breakdown. This \$92 million actually, is for four projects: the renovations of 52 buildings of six institutions - St Joseph, Don Bosco, King George, SINU Panatina, SINU Kukum, and St Nicholas School. Then we fund the water sport at DC Park and some equipment for SINIS. Also funding support for people who work there. So we can provide the breakdown for the information above.

Mr DOUGLAS ETE: Thank you Mr Chairman and thank you indeed. He confirmed to the committee that an amount of \$368million will be the amount that will be given to the hosting authority, minus \$6million. The total in here would be around \$336million, so \$254million. Now the break down of the villages is \$80million here and there where the Prime Minister will furnish it in the paper, and I am very happy with the Prime Minister for doing that. But my question here is that the \$92million is the last one, so we should give it to them and no more. There will be no supplementation to support the hosting authority, and I think that assurance needs to be heard from the part of the government, and I thank the Prime Minister because the Pacific Games is a big thing and all of us are excited, and I am so excited, but I want to know not to repeat the issues of the FOPA in 2012. After we have a few million dollars of debt, it has dented the budget of the following year, and that is what worries me here.

This \$92.278 is the last money that we will be giving to the hosting authority, or would we still be coming to Parliament for another supplementation? That is what I want a clear explanation on.

Hon. MANASSEH SOGAVARE: As you know, Mr. Chairman, the two priorities of the government are to successfully host the Pacific Games and also make sure that the preparations for the 2024 General Elections go smoothly. To answer the question directly, this is assistance from the Australian government towards the budget to build infrastructure. The Solomon Islands government also budgeted for it. There are still gaps, of which we are confident, and from the discussions that we have had so far with our development partners, there is a green light that those assistances will not necessarily come in cash but probably in kind; we need a lot of vehicles and such, and there are positive indicators from development partners that we have spoken with already.

And I really need to commend the good work that the Chairman of the National Hosting Authority has done on this. He really drives it and takes it very seriously, and he is leading all the negotiations with the development partners, and he has briefed me that it is progressing very, very well. We are confident that we will successfully host the games with all the funding assistance and assistance not in kind and also in cash. **Head 14 agreed to**

Head 16: Ministry of Police, National Security and Correctional Services –The Sum of \$3,223,496

Head 16 agreed to

Head 20: Ministry of Culture and Tourism – The Sum of \$557,049

Head 20 agreed to

Head 22: Ministry of Communication and Aviation – The Sum of \$818,331

Mr PETER KENILOREA (Jnr): So, just wanted further explanation or clarification in terms of the group Asia Pacific Network Information Centre Foundation, who they are and where they are based.

Hon. PETER SHANEL AGOVAKA: Thank you MP for East Are 'Are for the question. Asia Pacific Information Centre Foundation is a group of institutions that would like to help us to set up firewalls in preparation for the sim cards and to monitor the Facebook. In preparation also for the Cyber Crime Bill that will be coming. Just to help us in terms of training, consultations and so forth.

Mr RICK HOUENIPWELA: This item on conferences seminars. What is the ministry's plan?

Hon. PETER SHANEL AGOVAKA: Conferences, seminars and workshop are mainly for training and consultation in regards to this new equipment we will soon receive to help us monitor the setup of firewalls and Facebook. Part of it is for sim-cards and cyber crime preparation.

Mr DOUGLAS ETE: Thank to the very hard working minister. I just want the minister to update us on the issues of the undersea water cable that has affected parts of this country. What is the latest development on that?

Mr CHAIRMAN: The question is not directly related to the provisions withhold upon. That is part of observation.

Hon. PETER SHANEL AGOVAKA: The question is not really related to this budget. In passing I will answer the question.

The undersea cable is damage here outside the G-club. Those are the domestic cable. What happened is that one of the ship had anchored there and when it pulls up its anchor the cable was damaged.

Currently, we are working on it. As you know network is down during that period, but now the network is coming back and Telekom is working on it as well as the Solomon Islands Cable Company is working on getting it back and repairing it so that we use our network.

Head 22 agreed to,

Head 23-Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources – The Sum of \$2,278,755

Mr RICK HOUENIPWELA: Thank you Mr. Chairman. I note that there is a corrigenda where a new table is circulated, so that I will speak on that new table .

One of the item is consultancy fee and there is a big reduction of more than \$1.3 million is on this sub-head item 20200100022105-Consultancy Fee. This is for the minister to explain why this sub-head was reduced?

Hon FREDRICK KOLOGETO: Thank you Chairman. This funding is allocated under Head-Quarter division but it is also captured on other sub-head and that is why it has a reduction there.

Mr RICK HOUENIPWELA: It is a good one. The minister is saving money. On another item on the same table and that is item subhead 202432002302, for which there is a significant increase. That is what the minister has asked for, and this is for Capex non-residential buildings. Can the minister explain what kind of infrastructure they are building that he is seeking an additional amount for? Thank you

Hon FREDRICK KOLOGETO: This increase is for us to complete our infrastructure at Doma. The one for e-clams, which the minister funded. Thank you

Head 23 agreed to

Head 24; Ministry of Public Service \$ 687,502.00

Head 24 agreed to

Parliament is suspended until 1:30 pm

Committee of Supply resumes at 1.42pm

Mr CHAIRMAN: The Committee will resume but before that, I would like to acknowledge in the public gallery the form three students of TAU Community High School from North East Guadalcanal Constituency. They are here to observe Parliament sitting. Please join me in welcoming them.

Total Advanced Warrant of \$159,035,302

Hon MATTHEW WALE: I just note it is a \$159 million total when the provision and the appropriation that was \$450 million for Advance Warrants. What is the legal situation gone over the provision in the substantive budget that was passed end of last year thank you.

Hon HARRY KUMA: Thank you Chairman and thank you Leader of Opposition, Attorney General is here will help me on that but the limit of Advance Warrants provision of \$150 million is not at any single Advance Warrants should exceed \$150 million so there are a number of issuance of Advance Warrants that are we already made and this is gone. This is just to you know appropriate what has already been issued so number of issues of Advance Warrants on every Ministry's those are the ones that are the act has prohibited us not to exceed \$150 million, single issuance of Advance Warrant.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: Yes perhaps Attorney General has clarified I thought the total in the same way that we provide usually for CW (Contingency Warrants) that the total will not go over \$20 million or whatever we set in any particular appropriation act thank you.

Hon HARRY KUMA: Yes it is in page one of the bill itself too and it says section 6 of the 2023 appropriation act 2022 provides that for section 62 of the Public Financial Management act 2013 the total amount authorized by Advance Warrants issued by the Minister for the financial year ending 31st December 2003 must not at any one time at each issuance of Advance Warrants after deducting repayments and moneys and deposit.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: Yes sorry I am not really sure in English but anyone does not necessarily means any one transaction as is being implied by explanation of the Minister. At any one time the total of all Advance Warrants should exceed \$150 million. That would be my reading of it, 159 means more than at one time, been at \$159 million until we regularize it so I am just asking what the legal effect of that is.

Hon HARRY KUMA: Chairman we stand by the way that we interpret this and we have been advised by the office of the Attorney Generals Chamber. That's what the provision means at any single issuance of advance warrant by the minister. That limits it and must not go beyond \$150 million. We are just putting together all the advance warrants that have been issued. And then we come properly appropriate it or regularize it by word of supplementary budget. It's not an issuance of it at this time, the advance warrant has already been issued throughout the year for the last months. So those single issuances are at the point in time that must not exceed.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: I still beg to differ on this one, if you look at the appropriation act. There is a schedule at the back where it will outline the maximum limits. And they are maximum limits, so we are talking about the total. We are not talking about individual issuance or individual transactions. It will not make sense if it's individual transactions. That would leave it as an open-ended permission license by parliament. So I am not really persuaded by that explanation but perhaps the honorable Attorney General could clarify. I do remember that the schedule of the act outlines the limits to borrowing and advance warrants, so some further clarification would be useful.

ATTORNEY GENERAL (00:00): Thank you Mr Chairman, in terms of the explanation of the minister that was the advice that was tendered from chambers. It's not a one-time where this total is more than \$150 million. This accumulation which was taken from the previous budget that given and was passed in parliament. That was added to this and it goes beyond the actual appropriation. At this time I think it's much less than \$150m but when we add it goes beyond that.

Section 60, of the Public Finance and Management Act, it actually says that. It shall not exceed in aggregate at any one time after deducting payments and monies on deposit. The amount of the appropriation act which is \$150 million, that's what the minister of finance explains to us.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: Sorry I am not a legal mind so I will just make a comment and we can lay it there, but I would say in aggregate is the total. You add everything and it must not go; at any time when you add all the aggregate, it must never go beyond \$150 million. That is the act, not at any given time, and so if that is the reading, it looks like by the time we hit \$50 million, the extra \$9 million at all those material times is an excess of that provision, so now we are being asked to regularize

this \$159 million. Maybe there should be another way; I do not know what tool is available to do that, but \$150 million is an excess of that provision. But it is still aggregate when you add them up; it is precisely the opposite of the explanation.

Hon HARRY KUMA: I cannot add anything further to that simple explanation and interpretation that has already been given. Yes, this is maybe it is stemmed from one of your earlier question too that why is an advanced warrant for a particular ministry is so significant and not included in the original budget. I think that is one of the questions that you asked for and it still because of the amount that is significant for each ministry that it has accumulated to now \$159 million. These are donor funds that come. It is not something that we advanced and will be repaid. We advance it because we were comfortable in that point in time that donor will provide that amount of money.

So there is this instrument that we can use so that we expend it and that money for sure will be coming from donors. So it is not something that we advance it and will be repaid so that we are uncomfortable with it in that regard but it is money, it is grant that donors give us. We know that for sure that it will come therefore we advance it at the first place. Now we basically regularize it in the appropriation act by way of this supplementary. For us to limit, you know to aggregate \$50 million in aggregate for whole year, I think that is something that is not reasonable because after all there are donors who will be willing to offer us grants to fund certain priority projects or programs of the government.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: I accept that. I mean, we understand that is what that tool is there for, but the law, the Appropriation Act, has set that limit, and if you wanted it to be like that, you could leave it open-handed or raise the limit. I mean, in the case of CWs, for example, a \$20 million CW must not exceed the \$20 million total, then it must come for regularization. For example, the same principle and same wording are in the advanced warrant provisions, but are there, well, two things: one, an internal control system so that each time an application comes from the Ministry for CW, surely the budget will look at how much is left in that space of the budget for CW, and surely there must be something similar for advanced warrants? Secondly, in terms of advanced warrants, especially donor funds, you are right; when the donor has money and we have the need to use it, we should take it; that is not a problem. Are there some other tools within the Public Finance Management Act to allow us to do that? That will breach or extend that limit, or does it have to come back to Parliament and extend that limit? Just for clarification.

Hon. MANASSEH SOGAVARE: Chairman, there are no other ways for us to explain this, I was of the same opinion when I was minister of finance. I thought that is exactly how the Leader of Opposition is seeing it, that it is like that but then I was advised that no, it is not, for this one it is on how exactly it is worded there on

section 6 of that. I think the Minister of Finance had explained that it is not at any one time. This is how you should see this and it is a bit different from Contingency Warrant where in \$20million, you must have to use up to \$20million and you must have to come and ask questions. Where as in Advance Warrant, you can use the money from the donors. The way it is worded there at one time, you cannot advance more than \$50million because you are advancing from consolidated fund in expectation of the money that will come from the donors. This is because we might have problem in terms of financial management, so it leaves us with \$250million at one time.

But one donor can give \$300million at one time so that was how it was explained to us and so that it how we see this thing. I was of the same opinion at the first time.

Mr DOUGLAS ETE: Thank you. That is what we all understand. The fiscal sustainability of the budget is important so that you do not advance more than what you should advance in the Consolidated Fund because at the end of the day within the 12 months, it is going to be replenished by the donors. But when you spoil its sustainability is what you have to managed. The fact here is we are going to break the law if we pass this for same law. I am thinking that the neatest thing to do is for us or for you to go back and to relook at it again. Like what the Prime Minister is saying, go back and have a relook and then come back and build up its limits.

We have limits in borrowing and we have limits on Advance Warrant. The sustainability management of such or it is the financial management of it that is important. We must make sure that we do not bust it up at anytime. Truly the donors are financing us more than the limits that we are having but we must stick to the limits by law. Financial Management and financial accounting of our country which the government is using is based on the Appropriation Act and Supplementary Appropriation Act is part and parcel of that appropriation. I am just cautioning here on that.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I am presiding as Chairman but that said, yes thank you for those comments.

Hon. MANASSEH SOGAVARE: Thank you for those. Actually, the government is not-every time say for example, this calls for \$250million has been reimbursed by our development partners. We have already received the money and that is exactly the reason why the Act says, the Minister of Finance cannot for budget management purposes and cash flow purposes cannot draw or advance from Consolidated Funds up to \$150million. Every time, let us see for example, Head 05 only advances \$17million at one time and then 06 \$15million at one time. That is what is happening, so that it does not go over and if we total it up it would be \$159million. For all these, we have already the money from our development partners.

We appreciate the various useful discussions that we are having in this matter.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: Just a point. We get the explanation offered by the Prime Minister and the Minister and Attorney General. So, maybe, we must amend the Public Finance Management Act so that it is really clear. We do not have problem with the explanation but the wording of it makes us to see as if it sets the overall limit for fiscal management. Maybe, something to think about.

(The total recurrent warrant agreed to)

Variation And Appropriation

Part 3

Recurrent Expenditure

Head 01: Solomon Islands Electoral Office-\$54,803,126.00

Head 01 agreed to

(The total recurrent off setting savings of \$54,803,126.00 agreed to)

Part 4

Additional Supplementary Expenditure

Recurrent Expenditure

Head 05-Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development-\$21,064,345.00

Hon MATTHEW WALE: When the ministry appeared to the committee, they made it clear that these were and as you can see they relate to recurrent charges and they knew at the time of budgeting that these were legally due.

It just points back to our budgeting process. I want to make that point that there is still need for the process to be a bit more robust than it is so that we are not doing supplementary dealing with what was already presented and was cut back of what was known to be expenditure at the time of the main budget process.

Hon ANTHONY VEKE: Thank you Chair and honourable Leader of Opposition for that comment.

We note it and also that it is important to realize the fact that the payments is not done by the ministry of Education but is done by the Ministry of Finance and even the budget process is that they put the nail to the coffin and we might submit but then it goes to the budgeting processes. So sometimes we realize what we now see before us. But we take note of your comment, leader.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: For the line ministries, this is a recurring issue. It is a budget process and an issue for the Ministry of Finance, especially the budget unit, to have a much more robust process. We know that we will have to come back to a supplementary . So we should include that first. We are tricking ourselves when we cut them out and then come back and put them back again. That is my concern on that.

Head 05 agreed to

Head 06: Ministry of Finance and Treasury -\$105,000,000

Hon MATTHEW WALE: Thank you, sir. Just to register on the \$100 million support for the reconstruction of China Town business buildings that were destroyed during the riot.

My office receives two calls, so I flag this to the minister so that he is aware of it. These two calls are from our Chinese friends who are business people, complaining that a particular officer working in the Prime Minister's Office demands 10 percent of these payments before they will forward these payments to Finance.

I ask for his name, but they are afraid to mention it. But one has already paid 10 percent to this person before he release the payment. The other he refused to pay, so his name was taken off the list last year but is back on it this year. But he also tarnished your name because he is trying to negotiate and he said that he would give shares to the bosses. So these kinds of things tarnish the reputation of the government.

But it is good that I voice this out publicly so that he hears it because this is not what we wants. I do not know how you would control this kind of behavior, but to make sure the right people get the money and not give it back to whoever is demanding a commission on it. There should be some internal measures there.

Hon. MANASSEH SOGAVARE: We will take note of that, and thank you very much for raising that.

Mr PETER KENILOREA (Jnr): I just wanted to ask about the amounts. How many of our businesses have already benefited from this? Thank you

Hon HARRY KUMA: Regarding the numbers of business that have already been benefited. What I have here is the amount that has already been paid in 2022, which is \$62.6 million. As an addition to this year, there have been payments of \$24.5 million already approved pending this supplementary. So that is the total worth of claims that have already been assessed and approved for payment for this year.

Head 06 agreed to

(The sum of \$105 million for head 06 stand part of the schedule)

Head 10:Ministry of Infrastructure and Development, the sum of \$9,415,853

Head 10 agreed to

(The sum of \$9,415,853 million for head 10 stands part of the schedule)

Head 14: Office of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, the sum of \$2million

Hon MATTHEW WALE: Just maybe perhaps some clarification on what this is about and whether this is going back to we run printery before or something else so that it is clear thank you.

Hon. MANASSEH SOGAVARE: Mr. Chairman the intention is to start one newspaper of the Government. Interesting I think some business name registered still there alive yet, so we might go back there but the intention is to do that Mr. Chairman.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: Thank you I did not get that first but a newspaper for the Government? sorry.

Hon. MANASSEH SOGAVARE: Thank you Mr. Chairman yes in fact we will see how what else that newspaper can carry but is to put out things that Government do. You see those newspaper now does not seem to carry enough of what Government did.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: Thank you and how that is going to be set up and run would it have a board or, and will the Parliament access it so we can publish you know we are also Government; publish staff free rather than give it to the commercial papers. We the Opposition would like to publish inside too so that we do not give the commercial paper. Is it like that or how?

Hon. MANASSEH SOGAVARE: The Opposition has worth reporting what we already did so I think it is alright. Yes we are still looking at you know how the organization aspect of this (inaudible:2:15:55) of course we could do it under that as well so it is something that we will look at how exactly it will happen here Mr. Chairman.

Head 14 agreed to

(The sum of \$2 million for head 14 stands part of schedule)

Head 16: Ministry of Police National Security and Correctional Service the sum of \$2million

Hon MATTHEW WALE: Thank you. The Minister to tell the Committee how many vehicles and what type of vehicles is this?

Hon ANTHONY VEKE: The allocation will be catered for the six new vehicles for police to procure. In terms of the type of vehicles police normally procure the vehicles at Ela Motors, so the types of vehicles that comes out from Ela Motors are the ones ministry will get.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: Just out of ignorance we are going to be having a number of VIPs coming for the games. So that's no longer included in this amount but perhaps the prime minister could inform us where are the vehicles we have for that.

Hon. MANASSEH SOGAVARE: It is part of the money that we requested additionally, financial budgetary resources. We are thought with our development partners as well and there's a very good indication. That they will supply a good number of vehicles for the teams. It looks like some ministers will come so we need to as part of the program of NHA.

Head 16 agreed to

Head 21 – Ministry Of Commerce Industry Labour And Immigration – Sum of \$4,564,000

Mr. JOHN MANENIARU: Chairman, first I would like to commend the minister, the demand is high and you kindly address it. Secondly, our citizens that are queuing outside your office every day. Is there any improvement to that because they can stand there the whole day? I hope there is already a plan to address that to be effective and efficiently serve our people. I want the ministers comment on this to update the committee.

Hon FREDRICK KOLOGETO: Chairman, yes a lot of people that always queue up in front of the office are mostly seasonal workers. The ministry has worked on how to improve it so if you look at the ministry towards the BSP office. We put an extension for seasonal workers to go there. The entry will be at the back of the office. They should give the key this week and work has already been done. That place belongs to the price control unit, they have been moved to a new office at Mokolo. That is why the development budget comes in for their rental. And for the seasonal workers to go there and not to disturb people with visas.

Mr PETER KENILOREA (Jnr): Just on the passports I just want to ask about the amount. How many units of passports do you expect for that amount?

Hon FREDRICK KOLOGETO: I do not really get the question can he repeat the question please?

Chairman, as of today \$4,860 is issued already so that is nearly \$5,000 so this money coming will be for the other \$5,000 so that it is \$10,000. Last year we issued new passports \$9,846 that is nearly \$10,000. So this extra money that we are asking for is so that we are hoping that it will reach \$10,000 and that is what the money is for.

Head 21 agreed to

Total Recurrent Supplementary Expenditure – Sum of \$144,440,198

Question agreed to

(Total recurrent Supplementary Expenditure stands part of the schedule)

Development Expenditure

Head 03 – Ministry Of Agriculture & Livestock Development – Sum of \$3,050,000

Head 03 agreed to

Head 05 – Ministry Of Education & Human Resources Development – Sum of \$8,000,000

Hon MATTHEW WALE: If the supervising minister can provide a list of the schools that are going to be beneficiaries to this additional allocation?

Hon ANTHONY VEKE: Around eight schools will receive that \$8million. Unfortunately, I can only read the names but actuals I cannot provide. The first one is:

1. (inaudible) community high school double story classroom
2. Onelapa Community High School Assembly Hall.
3. Aligegeo Provincial Secondary School dining hall
4. Western Provincial Education Authority Head office double storey six blocks
5. Lata Community High School classroom
6. Moa Primary School double storey classroom
7. King George 6th Lecture Theatre
8. Kopiu Primary School staff house.
9. Tabasaukete Community High School double storey classroom
10. Tenakoga Community High School double storey classroom rehabilitation because the building was burnt and we are aware of that in the news.
11. Selwyn College
12. Katova Community High School.

Head 05 agreed to

Head 10: Ministry of Infrastructure Development-\$27,000,000.00

Hon MATTHEW WALE: Just in terms of the purchase of the boat from overseas. It talked about a single boat, perhaps the Minister can enlighten the Committee for this boat and its purpose.

Hon. MANASSEH MAELANGA: Thank you Chairman. Can the Leader repeat the question?

Hon MATTHEW WALE: Just the allocation for purchase of boat from overseas. If the Minister can inform the Committee on what this boat, its purpose or would it go to the constituency or it is for the ministry for some purpose? This is for clarification.

Hon. MANASSEH MAELANGA: Thank you Chairman and thank you Leader of Opposition for the question. The boat is for East Makira Constituency and the support is for it.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: How much it is allocated for this? Is it this three million?

Hon. MANASSEH MAELANGA: Correct.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: Just in terms of tar sealing on the Auki road. I note there is a \$10million increase on roads, bridges capex. How much of that will go to the Auki tar sealing?

Hon. MANASSEH MAELANGA: Yes, we known that the project which is for Malaita Province for tar sealing had been rejected by the former Mara Government which was supposed to be funded by World Bank. That project did not happen, otherwise if it happened Auki township would had been tar sealed already. That is why the government put in this budget to help Malaita Province to do the unseal roads and the drainage in the whole township in preparation to get that project back from World Bank but it will take time. Government saw its commitment to help the new government to at least build the road around Auki even it is unsealed. To make a good drainage in preparation.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: This is talking about tarsal but the Minister mentioned unsealed, does it means that they will tarsal it? Is it only within the town area or it would go up as far as the airport or would go beyond a bit?

Hon. MANASSEH MAELANGA: I think to be corrected here it is not tar sealed. You cannot make \$10million on a tar seal road. It is expensive for us to make a tar seal road in Auki. To give a correct information here, it is for unsealed road in Auki township. At least we do fix the portholes in our town, so that it gets fixed a bit so that we can use it. Also to fix the drainage in Auki township in preparation while we try to work more to get the support from our donor partners to fund back the project in town ship.

Mr. JOHN MANENIARU: Thank you Minister for answer. So, if people from Auki do not want funding from World Bank, which financier or development partner or donor partner do they prefer? It is world bank that has the funding but they did not want it. Who then do they want?

Hon. MANASSEH MAELANGA: Thank you Chairman and Member for West Are'Are and Chairman for Bills and Legislation Committee.

Actually I do not want to go on further to that question, but just to let you know that we will try to work more on the world bank project. We are all aware about how to deal with donor partners. It takes months, a year to deal with our donor partners. Therefore, the \$10 million is from SIG to upgrade unsealed roads around Auki to Gwaunaru and drainage around Auki township. This money is purposely for that activity and as long this is passed the ministry will look at tendering out for any contractor to work on it.

Head 10 agreed to

Head 21: Ministry of Commerce, Industry, Labour and Immigration-\$16,062,620

Hon MATTHEW WALE: Thank you Chairman. Just in terms of revitalization of CEMA and I note that some of the allocation is also under MID and in Agriculture for various aspects of this revitalization policy.

When asked during PAC, regarding CEMA directly competing with existing private sector on cocoa and copra. There seems to be an absence of a clear policy on that one. They said we are now competing. Is that now a default position and so they will face annihilation of this lead purchasing power buyer on CEMA.

Perhaps some articulation of what government thinking is with regards to the role of the private sector on this industry.

Hon FREDRICK KOLOGETO: Thank you Chairman. As far as I know, that is not the case. The intention of CEMA is to go to the rural farmers that ships cannot reach them who finds it hard to transport their things. At the same time we want to put up the price to go high so that farmers can get a better price of their product.

To compete with other buyers is not the intention, but probably some private firms see it as competition. However, all along the government policy is to help everyone who plants coconut and that ships cannot reach them, which is the main intention.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: When the ministry appeared before the committee. The General Manager of CEMA also came. We asked them what the policy is to the CEO and the CEO gave the answer that, it is a bit hard not to compete. It will be indirect competition and so maybe that discussion needs to go down to them so that we do

not step on the private sector which is already vibrant and does not reach out to uneconomical parts of the country.

Hon FREDRICK KOLOGETO: That is a very important point, and the ministry is taking note of it.

On that note, we would like for competition to happen so that it ensures a good price. Otherwise, we monopolize the system, and there is no benefit to farmers but the middleman. So I think we should make it more competitive. But at the back of government policy, it wants services to reach places that are difficult to reach.

Mr RICK HOUENIPWELA: Just to comment on the minister's response on competition. It is difficult to pursue such a policy when some sections of the market are being subsidized. It will not be fair.

My question is in terms of the allocation. I think the money is directed to help CEMA and Suava. Can the minister update us on how much of the allocation is for CEMA and how much is for Suava EGC? Thank you

Hon FREDRICK KOLOGETO: Regarding the \$16 million, \$2 million is allocated for the Suava Growth Center, while \$14 million is allocated for CEMA. This is under phase two of CEMA's revitalization and recapitulation strategy.

Mr. JOHN MANENIARU: I just want to follow up on the question by the member for Small Malaita on the Suava Growth Center. In terms of the \$2 million, where will it take us to? I want you to inform the committee on this important project in Suava.

Hon FREDRICK KOLOGETO: The \$2 million, is for land back filling. At the moment, the market house at Suava is in progress. For that, it already has a budget.

Head 21 agreed to

Head 23: Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources \$ 6,000,000

Mr RICK HOUENIPWELA: This is allocation, according to my view; it is subventions and grants. I just wanted to know if the minister can inform the committee which communities they will release these to in terms of the subvention.

Hon FREDRICK KOLOGETO: This money is for seaweed farmers. There are a total of 590 farmers throughout the nation. Choiseul Province: 320 farmers; Western Province: 224 farmers; Malaita: 28 farmers; Isabel: 12 farmers; and Temotu: 6 farmers. There are a total of 590 farmers who will benefit from this money.

Mr. JOHN MANENIARU: Thank you Minister for that information. It is very interesting. Seaweed farming the Ministry came and was really encouraged with

this program and the potential it has in terms of export earnings. I ask those who are in the Ministry and MISIF is helping or New Zealand under MISIF to make our business strong especially in so-fisheries. On this seaweed I want us to double up that number on farmers or we go and let them know many more to come in because the potential is there but money is what the Ministry says not enough. Is there a chance that we can ask New Zealand that really focused on so-fishery to look at doubling up the budget. They said \$6 million is nothing even \$10 million is nothing in terms of us we need to go aggressive with this seaweed that is the thinking Minister if you can comment on it.

Hon FREDRICK KOLOGETO: Thank you Chairman very important point and I also agreed to the point of MP for West Are'Are. Seaweed farming is a new thing but the Ministry work strong on it. To let you know last year seaweed alone \$23 million we the government have benefited from that revenue, so we will tell New Zealand to give us double value for my friend in West Are'Are to farm many seaweed more. I also do not have it. I want it but not but I will be just Minister supervising only.

Mr. JOHN MANENIARU: Thank Minister you really make me to jump up. My question was seaweed is there, the potential is there but we cannot go to our farmers because there is not enough funding in the Ministry, but MISIF and MISIF I know New Zealand has standby on insurance. Their focus is insurance on rural and seaweed in one of them. Is there an opportunity where we can take it to the next level? Prime Minister should negotiate or discuss with his colleague in New Zealand and I do not see any problem on this one. They will like to listen to us. That is what I am asking on policy. Is there a policy thinking in that regard?

Hon. MANASSEH SOGAVARE: Chairman we could not agree anymore with what the Chairman for Bills and Legislation Committee come up with. This is the area that we need to drive really big. The potential there is just great Mr. Chairman, So we will take your advice we can discuss it more with these colleagues Mr. Chairman but this is where it looks like more investments need to happen even by Solomon Islands Government Mr. Chairman.

Mr RICK HOUENIPWELA: The Minister said this one is a new industry but it is an old industry already. I went and visit the farmers in Rarumana this was 10 years ago. They are still continue to farm as yet Mr. Chairman. My question is to do with what they told me 10 years ago and that is Government did not help them to support them to bring that product to Honiara to purchase, so it is not like coconut that we can use it at home as well so it is a little bit difficult thing but I want to ask the Minister what did the Government do in terms of helping these farmers? 590 famers are not enough but what did Government do to support them in terms of transportation or marketing? Otherwise people went and buy there less than the

price that they should pay for. Some people put a lot of investment into this. I want to know what we can do to support them in this industry or maybe CEMA is also buying it?

Hon FREDRICK KOLOGETO: The money is for the material of seaweed farmers. The ministry works with the people around the areas that are identified to have agents. These farmers do not have to come to town; they can sell to their agents at Rarumana and Wagina. And their job is to ship the materials here otherwise that is a good point we will look at it. At the moment the money is for seaweed farming. Thank you Chair.

Head 23 agreed to

Head 26: Ministry Of Home Affairs – Sum Of \$3,300,000

Mr PETER KENILOREA (Jnr): Thank you Chair, just have a question about the identification of talent. Is there a particular sport that we look at to target or is it open, and we look for the talent?

Hon CHRIS LAORE: Thank you Member for East Are Are, the Solomon Games that we recently hold identifies a lot of potential athletes. They could be gold medal winners; Malaita is the highest in the Solomon Games with 20 golds they have won in the recent Solomon Games. And those athletes have been looked into to be put into the teams. So individual sports where they were supposed to go in, such as athletics, boxing and other sports including team sports. They identified the good ones and try to put them with those at SINIS.

The Solomon Games that was recently held is our achievement that we ask the government to win 40 gold medals. We have identified a few good athletes, one lady in the high jump history they cannot beat her. Just recently one female beat the national record from Solomon Islands, so we have identified a lot of talented athletes in these sports.

Mr RICK HOUENIPWELA: I am very happy with the minister for the outcome of the Solomon Games. I was just wondering about the talents such as what the minister mentioned. What standard did the female high jump do to reach that record as compared to those that we are going to be competing against? So we are sure of 40 gold medals which the minister mentioned because the Solomon games are only to compete against ourselves. I want to know the speed they run and the height they jump too. How did they compare with the regional countries?

Hon CHRIS LAORE: Thank you Chairman, and I thank the member for Small Malaita for his very important question. I think these are selected from the Pacific Games records, Olympic Oceania records, Olympics records, and Commonwealth records. So we are getting closer so there will be competition and we should not

participate but we should compete. Participation and competition so that is what we identify the good ones so that they compete rather than becoming participants. Let me say this Mr Chairman, in 2019 I went to Samoa as minister and we went and participated and not competing so now we thank the government in preparation for this 2023 Pacific Games and we will win a lot of medals because they have shown it in the mini games. So we take the additional to come into the pool of athletes so that we can identify good athletes in preparation for the November games and I think we still have time for training and they will win medals as well because in the Pacific it is about 2 meters or less than in the fields and so she is about to reach that level of high jump so if she trains properly with our good coaches, she can win a medal. The 100 meters, we are closed to that and 10 as well but I do not know which province he comes from. But he is part of the selected athletes, the one sprinter and I think he is from Malaita but I am not sure.

Hon MATTHEW WALE: I do not know who is doing the selection, but it looks like the minister is involved in the selection and I am very encouraged. But Chairman, my concern is in terms of the sports governance. What SINIS is doing is really excellent but SINIS obviously their scope is limited in terms of going into the federations, the selections are done by the sports federations which are under Olympic Committee. The governance is always an issue with our Olympic committee and the federations really affects the selection for our national squads. I really do not know how we will fix it because the government should not be interfering with the Olympic committee under the charter of the Olympic international Olympic committee but we must take an interest because it is one of the very important part of our national life harnessing talent of our athletes.

Hon CHRIS LAORE: I think the NSC has a policy that we are working on and its governance is under NSC so with regards to NOCSI they are under Olympic federations but SINIS is currently under the National Hosting Authority. So I will not be able to say anything until after the Pacific Games then they will transfer everything to NSC to look after then we will look into that as well.

Mr. JOHN MANENIARU: This item: "identifying talents", when I saw this here I was disappointed because when are we identifying for? Our games are almost here. It is just six to seven months away but this is for us to just identify. I am with you minister, I think our athletes that we are trying to identify, because they have been training in hiding so it is good for us but athletes as we know their preparations for the games should be four to eight years and they develop consistently.

That is what I think we have missed but I was assured in the committee on the hidden diamonds and that is what we are going to identify hidden talents to compete for our 40 gold medals. I really like that.

Teams Sports, if I can ask the Minister to comment on, I am in Honiara and have been going and looking around because I am a person who is interested in sports. I am really disappointed. Team Sports means those that play in teams. The attitude that I observe is that they are just waiting for Pacific Games then they will compete. That disappoints me as I am one of those who loves sports and I would like our country to compete and showcase that this regional game, Pacific Games.

Minister, if you can give us comfort to us, the hidden talents that you will identify, are most of them here? or because for the 40 gold medals, I would like it to be more than that.

Hon CHRIS LAORE: Thank you Chairman and member for West Are 'Are and also Chairman of Bills and Legislation Committee for his comment and also question. He asked me on how we can the hidden talents and why is it that it is only this year that you held Solomon Games. As we know, COVID-19 had affected us for the last three years and we did not hold any sports. Even the School Sports was not held to identify the youths. Thus, we came up with this to identify at least additional from the previous one held in 2019 where some got picked but now they would be getting old. We want athletes within 18-20 years, these are the ones who are strong to compete.

I will not be able to talk about anything because Federations have identified their own. For example, athletics would be under the Athletics Federation. Team Sports, rugby, they will select the best ones under those who had participated in the rugby sevens. Before, we had not hosted any Pacific Games and that is why a lot of people are not worried about the facilities, international facilities. We are trying to train them towards Pacific Games and into the future. We now have international facilities.

To answer you on why we are just training now, because it is COVID-19 that made us not to do anything. It was only when it was cleared that we went to Saipan for Mini Games in 2021. From that, athletes were also selected. There were some good boxers who fought in this and they proved themselves. Previous good boxers were beaten in the trainings. They will have good boxers, athletes are identified through the Solomon Games.

We that comment and question of yours, as I have said, it was because of COVID-19, we could not host any other sports. We might have held recreational sports but not any competitive sports. That is my comment.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Thank you. MP for Small Malaita.

Mr RICK HOUENIPWELA: Thank you for indulgence. The answer from the Minister encourages me to ask this question. But let me comment like this, I agree

with the Minister on the difficulty that he has but another difficulty as well is that inside the 24 or 28 sports, half of them we do not know where they are playing and so forth. When I came pass SINIS, they are doing sports that nobody here knew of. So from this 40 golds, one which I note that we should have gold on is futsal but that I do not see in the sports list and I really sad for this. The sports that I see them training for at SINIS, there is no federation and nobody knows anything about it. In fact when I was talking with the Games Organizing Committee Chairman, he stated that they have the problem with the sports because there is no federation. You have to recruit through federations. This Hockey has no federation and also those who dressed up like the people who are going to the moon which I do not know what kind of sports is this. Nevertheless, the Minister must try hard for us to win gold medals.

My question is regarding the sports that we will now have the equipment. What will we do with the sports? Are we going to help them to form the federation because there a lot of them.

Hon CHRIS LAORE: Thank you Chairman and Member for Small Malaita for his question and comment as well.

The federations exist but they have issues in them as well. For example, Karate has a federation here, and there is another one recognized by NOCSI and the other is not recognized by NOCSI. Therefore we tried to iron it out and has been working on and it is straight. Regarding the current facilities we have, it will cater for all the sports after the Pacific Games. They have improved us on the side of sports because currently we do not have it and so that is why Hockey does not have a field. In the past, when I was attending King George School, the Hockey pitch is at the KG VI field, and the Cricket pitch is behind the KG girls dorm and baseball is at College. These facilities is there but then federations died out.

In terms of federation, I think NOCSI looks after the federation to compete outside. As you have mentioned futsal, we do not have enough countries that participate on futsal for that competition and that is why it is not included in the Pacific Games because we want certain countries to participate to make the completion to be better and that is why Futsal does not come in it. I am not sure but that is what I know from what they brief us in the ministry.

However, the Pacific Games is under the National Hosting Authority and its minister is the Honourable Prime Minister. Therefore, anything with facilities now and after the games will be under the National Hosting Authority, and until after the Pacific Games, it will be given back to NHA to look after these things.

Head 26 agreed to

(The total Development Supplementary Expenditure of \$63,412,620.00 agreed to)

Mr CHAIRMAN: Honourable Members that concludes our deliberations on the heads of the schedule.

Schedule agreed toClause 1**Clause 1 agreed to**Clause 2**Clause 2 agreed to**Clause 3**Clause 3 agreed to**

(Committee of Supply stands dissolved)

Parliament is Resumed

Hon HARRY KUMA: Mr Speaker, I wish to report that the 2023 Supplementary Appropriation Bill 2023 has passed through the committee of supply without amendments.

The SPEAKER: Honorable Minister reports are due consideration of the bill by the committee of supply without amendments, the 2023 Supplementary Appropriation Bill 2023 is now deem to be set down for third reading.

I understand that the ministers wishes to table a list of corrections Under Standing Order 58 (2) Before we proceed to the third reading of the bill.

Hon HARRY KUMA: Thank you Mr speaker sir. By now members should have list containing the typing error within the bill . That table identifies the error and describe how this will be corrected.

Sir, I tabled that list on a Parliaments records.

The SPEAKER: Thank you honorable Minister. Honorable members the house has been duly informed of the correction that will be made to the bill under standing order 58 (2).

This correction will be made to the bill according to the table before it is sent to his excellency the governor general for his ascent.

*Bills***THE 2023 SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION BILL 2023***Third Reading*

Hon HARRY KUMA (*North West Choiseul—Minister for Finance and Treasury*) (3 :11): Mr Speaker Sir, I moved that the 2023 Supplementary Appropriation Bill 2023 be now read the third time and do pass.

Question put and agreed to

(The 2023 Supplementary Appropriation Bill 2023)

*Motions***MOTION OF SPECIAL ADJOURNMENT**

Hon. MANASSEH SOGAVARE (*East Choiseul—Prime Minister*) (03:11): I move,

That at its adjournment on Thursday 18th May 2023 Parliament shall adjourn to Wednesday 14th June 2023.

Mr. Speaker there is a number of overseas trips that will happen which a number of Ministers will join the Prime Ministers delegations to a number of overseas engagement which will go on until June. So Parliament is requested that we will adjourn until that time.

A number of important business is also considered, one of them of course is the tabling of the TRC report after we resume in June we should see that report tabled. I understand with the Leader of the Opposition, we will give every Members of Parliament a soft copy of those five volumes. So everyone will have the TRC report and this short version of it is the summary of the reports and especially the recommendations. That one is carried in the shorter version so that one is a very important matter that we need the Parliament to clear it.

There is a number of important Bills as well that we are working at and the directive to all the Permanent Secretaries is that the Bills should be ready by June, or at least should come to the Cabinet so that Cabinet look at it clearer and then we give to Parliament in time for the Bills and Legislation Committee can look at them, so when we continue back in June 14 we should flow with the most of the important bills should already sit in Parliament for Bills and Legislation Committee to look at them.

I think those are the primary reasons for this special adjournment and I beg to move Mr. Speaker.

(Debate ensues)

Hon MATTHEW WALE (*Aoke/Langalanga—Leader of Opposition*) (3:15): Yes thank you Sir. The reasons are clear of its explanatory where Honourable Prime Minister has said. I just think it is little bit short this recess because you must know when cabinet clear the Bills and Bills Committee need time to not only conduct the inquiry but report writing, and if there are number of Bills in many ways it would be much better if the Bills Committee clear some bills then we meet a way efficient so that we do not come and adjourn and come and adjourn more. It makes it a little bit in efficient of use of our time. That is one issue that I think if we move it to July enough time you clear it and Committee too clear all the Bills and we can be sitting from July right through to even maybe September and also clear the TRC report which is an important outstanding for too long now.

On the TRC report Prime Minister and I were having discussion about it so I appreciate that the Government will make it available full five volumes, available to the Members of Parliament of course we have a responsibility to read up especially volume 3 the summary produce by the Government is a summary derive mostly from volume 3. The TRC report is part of the healing process for our country, and it's a long time. A lot of the issues are dated of course a lot of issues are still alive in the sense that we had not fully addressed them. But in terms of the victims and there are many in terms of the plight of the victims of the tensions. Having their names listed in the reports, having their cases heard publicly and their plight acknowledged in parliament at the highest level. Is an important part of closer and finding healing through suffering that happened during those times. It will be important that we don't just gloss over and we focus on the policy areas for example. But that we acknowledge many people not only those who are directly effective but many others also suffered.

We take a constructive conciliatory approach in that debate so there will be issues in that debate that need to be confronted. And we must not shy away from those but we must confront the men who are responsible mature embracing manner. So that it is truly part of the healing process as supposed to us at our leadership level. We are divided so it sparks more ill will or ill feelings in the community. That should not then become an excuse for parliament by passing or side-stepping any difficult issues that may arise in that debate. And I said to the honorable prime minister, we are open to having a prior informal discussion about how we should approach this. The TRC report when we come to the floor so that discussions are robust but are responsible and respectful. That will be very important and finally, I have a number of motions to deal with the audit reports and annual reports from SOEs and so forth.

So far we have had one or two Fridays but government requests the Fridays to deal with government business and house committee grants. We have a hard time dealing with those reports because they come under the private member's motions.

If you thinking of adjournment at least give us Friday to discharge some of the motions. And they are reports of parliament, we are all members of parliament and we are all obliged to deal with them.

I would like to put some of those motions through but of course. It did not stop the responsible ministers that tabled reports can also move the motions for us to deal with the reports. Or the respective chairs of the standing committees but I do have a number of motions on a number of those reports. I would appreciate just a little bit of consideration to give a little bit of time for Fridays when we do come back.

Mr Speaker; Thank you honorable leader of opposition of oppositions, any others who would like to contribute to the motion.

Mr PETER KENILOREA (Jnr) (*East Are Are*) (03:21): Thank you Mr Speaker sir, just to agree as well to the motion and I just want to wish the prime minister and the delegation success in your visits. And your mission that you are going overseas to see our partners. And I just wanted to share that at this time, we need many friends as we can so very much we want to wish you all the best in your trip, thank you.

Mr DOUGLAS ETE (*East Honiara*) (03:22): I just want to thank the Prime Minister for the motion. The motion, it will give Public Accounts Committee to do one more supplementary appropriation bill to which we have not started and we will be starting on those on that on Monday. But we are expecting another supplementation from government to come soon in June to September period so we must have time for that but with this 2022 supplementary appropriation bill 2023 we will get it done by next week so by the time we resume parliament in June it should be ready for parliament to have a look at. Thank you indeed Mr Speaker.

Mr. JOHN MANENIARU (*West Are Are*) (03:23): I just want to join my colleagues on this side to wish the government all the best in their programs and we are waiting. Time is important for all of us, bills, you know we are also rushing through them so we need time. Just on the TRC report, as the leader has alluded to it is quite awaited report, the country has been waiting for it for a really long time and I join the leader to call for how we will be doing it and go about because the report contains sensitive issues. It is more hard on families and us the country as a whole and the government to come up with a plan so that when we come to debate it here, our people understand it and they wait on the process that we will be going through with this very important report.

I just wanted to mention this and thank you for the time and I support the motion.

Question put and agreed to

(Motion is passed)

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. MANASSEH SOGAVARE: I beg to move that this house do now adjourn.

Question put and agreed to

(Parliament adjourned at 3.25pm)

[Edited]



Eleventh Parliament

Sixth Meeting

NATIONAL PARLIAMENT OF SOLOMON ISLANDS

Wednesday, 14 June 2023

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

(Subject to Revision)

NATIONAL PARLIAMENT OF SOLOMON ISLANDS**Wednesday, 14 June 2023**

The Speaker, Mr Patterson John Oti, took the Chair at 09:46.

Prayers.

Business of the House

ATTENDANCE

All were present with the exception of the Prime Minister, Minister for Finance and Treasury, Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade, Minister for Home Affairs, Minister for Fisheries and Marine Resources, Minister Traditional Government, Peace and Ecclesiastical Affairs, Minister for National Planning and Aid Coordination, Minister for Justice and Legal Affairs, Minister for Provincial Government and Institutional Strengthening, Minister for Public Services, Minister for Education and Human Resources Development, Minister for Health and Medical Services, Aoke/Langalanga, Marovo, North West Guadalcanal, Central Honiara, East Honiara, Malaita Outer Island, North New Georgia, East Makira, West Are Are, West Makira, Ulawa/Ugi, South New Georgia/Rendova/Tetepare, Ranongga/Simbo, West New Georgia/Vona Vona, West Kwaio, and West Honiara.

ADMINISTRATION OF OATHS

The SPEAKER: Honorable Members we have with us today a new member who was elected through a by-election on May 24th 2023.

According to Section 63 of the Constitution, no member is permitted to participate in the proceedings of this House until he or she has taken the oath set out in schedule 1 of the Constitution.

We will now proceed with the administration of the Oath.

(Member for West Kwara'ae takes his Oath)

STATEMENT OF GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Motions

SPECIAL ADJOURNMENT

Hon. MANASSEH MAELANGA (*East Malaita—Minister for Infrastructure Development*) (09:52): I move,

That at its adjournment on Wednesday June 14, 2023 Parliament shall adjourn to Monday 19 June, 2023.

The reason is to give time because the Prime Minister will return this afternoon with his delegation. That will give enough time for us to prepare for the public holiday on Friday 16 June, which is the first Kings birthday celebration. So I would like to encourage all members of Parliament to attend the first birthday for our King.

The SPEAKER: I take it that the reasons adjournment are clear and therefore I will put the question.

Question put and agreed to

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. MANASSEH MAELANGA: I move that parliament do now adjourn.

Question put and agreed to

(Parliament adjourned at 09:54)