

FOURTH DAY

Friday 5 June 2020

DRAFT HANSARD

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FOURTH DAY

Friday 4 June 2020

The Deputy Speaker (**Mr Koni Iguan**) took the chair at 10 a.m.

There being no quorum present, Mr Deputy Speaker stated that he would resume the Chair after the ringing of the bells.

Sitting suspended.

The Deputy Speaker resumed the Chair at 10.44 a.m., and said the Prayer.

‘Our loving eternal Father thank you for this beautiful morning that you have given us, you are so kind on us that you have blessed us much but Lord with the blessings that we have, we many times fail you, in our deeds, our doings and what we speak, today before you, we bow our heads and ask for your forgiveness, Lord lead us through this session, let us be your instrument, use us to represent our people and demonstrate of what you task us to do, lord we all now will congregate to say the Lord’s prayer . Amen’.

QUESTIONS

Stringent Bank Regulations

Mr ROBERT NAGURI – Thank you, Mr Speaker, on behalf of the people of Bogia District, I congratulate you on your elevation to Deputy Speaker’s post.

My question without notice goes to the Minister for Treasury. This is in regard to a matter that the public has raised for us, the members of Parliament and I stand this morning to raise the same matter again which it is becoming a problem now to ordinary people and members of Parliament.

Yesterday, there was a cheque presented to Bank of South Pacific, Madang Branch. This cheque was paid by me to a disabled staff of mine, who is my budget officer to assist him to build his house, so when he retires as a public servant he can go and settle with his family. This was a cheque of K20, 000 from my discretionary funds; not Project funds or DSIP funds.

The Branch Manager in Madang rejected my cheque, because he wanted the cheque to be paid according to his way and not mine, I do not know if the Branch Manager understands

the meaning of discretionary funds. Our people on the street are also complaining about excessive bank fees and all other fees charged unnecessarily by the bank and we as leaders, it is about time we have to step in and do something.

02/04

When will the Treasurer meet with the senior executives of the banks to discuss the issues affecting our ordinary people and also explain to all of us as customers of the bank?

I know we all have bad experiences with the Bank of South Pacific regarding the delay in our project funds which the Bank is becoming an auditor at the same time creating another venting place and it is not very helpful to us.

Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Mr IAN LING-STUCKEY – Mr Speaker, I would like to thank the Member for Bogia for his very important questions that affect all of us in this House; from my understanding this issue has been affecting us for nearly five years.

Mr Speaker, this particular issue of having the bank's querying cheques that have been approved following the due processes under the PFMA is very frustrating and it has angered many Members of Parliament.

Mr Speaker, these problems arose after the passing of the Anti-Money Laundering Laws in 2015 and as a result of these laws the banks had to put in certain rules, processes and procedures which has created this huge problem that we are facing today.

Mr Speaker, the anti-money laundering laws are steps into the right direction, so I do not think that there are many Members in this House who do not support it but it is just how it is implemented that is creating the frustration. I would like to inform this House that the Prime Minister has directed me on two occasions at budget management meetings to try and resolve these issues.

Mr Speaker, after this meeting of Parliament, I intend to call a meeting with the heads of the commercial banks, with the Governor for Papua New Guinea and the relevant officers in Treasury and Finance; to have a round table meeting to identify exactly where the issues are to try and see where we can amend some of those stringent regulations that have been approved and practiced by the banks. This can help us understand where best we can on the one hand continue to meet the intentions of the anti-money laundering laws but on the other had get rid of the red tape and all the processes that have stopped our cheques from being banked as and when we expect it to be.

So, to assure the good Member for Bogia, I will meet with them and see if we can screen line some of the processes and procedures that exist in our private sector, especially with cheques that are banked with commercial banks. If they have passed the laws under the PFMA speculations and have complied with the relevant and financial instructions then the bank should tow the line and cash those cheques as soon as possible.

Thank you, Mr Speaker.

03/04

Supplementary Question

Hefty Bank fees

Mr TOMAIT KAPILI – Can the Treasurer also instruct the Governor of the Central Bank to check on all the charges being passed on to the customers of Bank South Pacific starting from a Cash Handling Fee of two per cent on anything over K5, 000?

Bank South Pacific at one stage was PNG Banking Corporation and was owned by the people of this country. But because of certain arrangements in the past it was taken over. I know the government has some shares in in also.

Why are they declaring hefty profits year after year at the expense of the customers? We want the Bank to make a fair profit but why the hefty profits at the expense of the customers.

Every time you go in to deposit there is a fee. The betel nut seller and trade store owners go in to deposition K20, 000 to K50, 000 and are charged cash handling fees. There are also fees such as encashment fee, balance checking fees, eftpos fees and others amount to them making huge profits. So we are promoting them by allowing them to make huge profits from Papua New Guineans using the banking services.

May I ask you to task your Central Bank Governor to supervise those banks to prevent them from making millions and billions out of our Papua New Guinean citizens?

Mr IAN LING-STUCKEY – Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker and I want to thank the Member for Lagaip-Porgera for his important question.

Mr Deputy Speaker, in relation to this particular issue, bank handling fees, we find ourselves in a really funny situation because on the one hand, as I understand it, Bank South Pacific, for the 2019 financial results announced a massive net profit of K800 million. And most of us believe and have no doubts that it is racing towards announcing in the next one or two years, if you look at their projections, a net profit of a record K1 billion. That's a good

thing. We applaud the management of Bank South Pacific for providing a return on equity and a return to its shareholders.

But on the other hand, it's again frustrating to be able to witness the banks charging our little people, depositors and even commercial customers mosquito bite fees, like handling fees and a number of other fees that the good Member has mentioned.

So, Mr Deputy Speaker, I am happy, again, straight after the Meeting of Parliament during our regular meetings with the Governor of the Bank I will ask him to again sit down with the commercial banks and ask the banks to reduce some of these fees.

It's important to note that the government has no oversight and no control over these decisions by Bank South Pacific and other commercial banks.

Police Road Block

Mr PETER ISOAIMO – Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker for recognising the people of Kairiku-Hiri, I would like also take cue in congratulating you for your elevation as Deputy Speaker of Parliament.

04/04

Mr Speaker, after the relaxation of SoE sometime ago, Police were asked to remove all roadblocks except for minding the border areas. The whole Hiritano stretch has at least four roadblocks currently in place and they are harassing and intimidating people and as a result, people are taking sea voyage.

I understand there is a buai ban nationwide but you may have also posted that you were relaxing the buai ban on our people and so people are now taking sea voyage to bring the buai out of Paitana area to Fisherman Island and Hiri West-Kairuku villages to sell and trade.

As a result, I have already lost four lives of people in my electorate; one two weeks ago and the other two last weekend. They drowned during the process and were brought into Fisherman Island then into Koki and transported back to the village. Circumstances surrounding the death of the other person is still a bit sketchy and Police are still investigating the manner in which he passed away in the bushes near Hisiu. This is a concern now for my people and we want to know exactly what the position of the Police is? Are they going to continue? Even they are involved in organized crimes where they charge or ask people to pay them money to get through to Port Moresby when the Police Hierarchy is not present. There is one senior police officer who is leading them.

So, Mr Minister, are you going to look into these problem areas and find solutions for them or do we allow my people to continue to suffer in this manner?

Are the Police from NCD allowed to go into Central Province and do police work like rampaging through Porebada village and causing a lot of havoc to the people out there?

The Ward Member has already lodged a complaint to the police public complaint section. There are others who are also gathering information to sue your Department. As their leader I am left with no option but to go along with them and see how best I can help them.

So, my questions to the Police Minister are:

(1) Are police officers from different areas and zones allowed to go into other areas to carry out policing? In this case, Porebada?

(2) Are all roadblocks along the Hiritano Highway legal or illegal?

In my view the one at Agevairu is illegal. There's one past Angabanga Bridge in Kairuku District which is also illegal. We are only supposed to have two roadblocks. One at Laloki for NCD/Central check and one at Apanaipi for Central/Gulf check. That's all

Mr Speaker, people are dying because of these issues. I concur with the fact that we do have cases of the corona virus and only eight people have been infected so far. But in my electorate lives have been lost. So can the Police Minister clarify the Government's and his position in relation to the questions raised so that people will know.

05/04

Mr BRYAN KRAMER – Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I'd like to thank the Member for Kairuku-Hiri for raising these very important questions. To put the question into context about what will I do, *Section 196, subsection 2* of the *Constitution* says the Minister has no power or command within the police force except to the extent provided by a constitutional law by an *Act* of Parliament.

Mr Joseph Lelang – Point of Order! Mr Acting Speaker, I think we've been hearing this particular reason and excuse for some time now and I just want to remind the Minister that as a minister he is expected to give the political direction and the future strategic directions he wants to develop the policing and police force in this country. That is his responsibility. In relating to the policy as well as the strategic direction and political leadership, he is expected to do that. He cannot continue to give the same excuses all the time. Thank you.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER – Honourable Member, I think the Minister is trying to get to the point of the question so I will let him to continue.

Mr BRYAN KRAMER - Thank you, Mr Speaker. I was trying to answer the question. The point he raised has no relevance whatsoever to the question. This is a law in our *Constitution*, it's not an excuse.

To answer the question by the Member on the road blocks, firstly, the power and control lies with the commissioner. We don't have the power to say anything on the legal and the illegal road blocks. Road blocks that have not been sanctioned either by commissioner or a PPC or commander can be ruled as illegal. So, police have the powers to arrest anyone and investigate provided that there is reasonable cause on powers provided by the *Constitution*. So, when police set up road blocks without any reasonable cause that road block could be illegal because there is no basis for it.

On the issues regarding the road blocks in Central, I had a discussion when the SOE was declared, NCD and Central essentially have one center unlike other centers like Madang province or Eastern Highlands where they have the main center where you can close up the province and go to the main center.

Central's main center is NCD so, when road blocks are set up, how can they get to the main center? But I don't control the police force. That was the only advice that I gave. There were some forces that have come in and set up road blocks, I have no authority to overrule.

On the issue of the *buai* ban, yes, initially the ban was issued by the Health Minister using his powers before the SoE, raising concern because the Covid-19 was being transmitted by saliva. People that chew betelnut have the high risk. When they chew, they spit and saliva moves. Some people chew betelnut and spit and everyone at the vicinity can catch Covid-19. So, based on the very little information about Covid-19 and the concern about safety and risks, we've issued the ban. But again, I do not have the power as the Police Minister, it is with the Minister for Health. The SoE then came in so we maintained the ban.

Kairuku-Hiri, Central, and Gulf are the main suppliers of betelnut which provides an income for so many grassroots people here. Like so in Madang, we are one of the main suppliers of *buai* into the Highlands Region and many of my own people survive on betelnut. They pay school fees from selling betelnut. So, when the ban came in, they assumed that it was me that enforce the ban. Even people or my officers that work with me or community leaders I engaged with were attacked physically and one was cut. They said, they attacked us because Police Minister has put a ban on the sale of their *buai* so they have targeted us.

So, I share the same concern as the Member for Kairuku-Hiri. Those concerns were brought to the attention of the commissioner and a decision was made. I informed the other members that betelnut ban has been removed because we now can assume that there is no direct evidence or basis of high risk between betelnut and Covid-19. Initially, we want the way we are concerned about the risk. Now that we have closed off our borders, all the confirmed eight cases have come back negative. There is no evidence at this stage of any Covid-19 in the country and the decision has been made by the commissioner. That is why the new orders that he had issued when we extended the SoE does not make any reference to the continuation of the betelnut ban.

So, as far as I am aware and I'm informed, the *buai* ban has been lifted but with that in mind, what can be lifted is the law that actually makes the betelnut sales in public place illegal. This was passed in 2018 by Parliament in the previous government.

06/04

Section 44(b) prohibits selling, buying and chewing of betelnut in public places. A person who sells, buys, chews or spits betelnut in a public place is guilty of an offence and fined not exceeding K10 000 or imprisonment of a term not exceeding three years. That's the law which was passed by this Parliament in 2018, and one would say well people steal huge sums of money in PNG and get away with it and yet people chew betelnut in public places and get jailed for three years. But again, this is a law and so provided the sale and chewing of betelnut doesn't happen in public places but happens at home then this law doesn't apply. So, while the ban of betelnut has been lifted, the sale of betelnut in public places remains.

On the issue of zones, whether police have powers to arrest by crossing over to other provinces; these are some of the issues raised by the Governor for Central. The police have the powers to arrest anyone anywhere which they suspect of committing a crime. This is not like in USA where they have State lines where one police department in one State cannot cross another line and make an arrest. Here in PNG we have constitutional powers and police cross the entire country. But it must be based on reasonable cause. And they can't just go around and arrest people just because they feel like it or go to another province. Again, if that deployment is unauthorised or has been directed not to go into another province without the authority of the provincial commander, assistant commander or the commissioner then any action they take would be deemed illegal.

On the Porebada incident; I was informed this morning by NCD Assistant ACP, Wagambie Junior, that investigations commenced three weeks ago and a Drone has been sent to carry out surveillance for evidence to be sent to court.

I have been told that those who were involved are subject to investigation by internal affairs and arrest will follow suit, this matter has been taken care of but arresting someone needs evidence. So, those witnesses that sighted police brutality have to submit a formal complaint signed by all witnesses. That will assist the police prosecution and if they don't turn up for court than those charges are dropped, and then the State becomes liable.

If the people who were badly affected they want to take the State to court then that's their right. And I have told my people in Madang that if they are being attacked by police then take the State to court so that officers involved must be prosecuted and found guilty and charged. They then will be automatically put of the payroll as well.

Whilst on that I also want to explain about the issues of police brutality which is the function of Internal Affairs and they have been suppressed and shutdown. So recently it has been brought to my attention by the Commissioner and he is looking into it to find out why internal affairs pays K3 million every year for office space. Why are they hiring so many hire cars? So, because of some inability on action, he issued a direction for change in Internal Affairs to beef them up. Unfortunately, Ombudsman Commission instructed him that he has no power to remove certain officers with Internal Affairs who are not carrying out their duties. So, these are the ongoing issues that the Police Force is dealing with and hopefully will be sorted out through this new Commissioner.

Supplementary Question

Police Harassment

Mr ROBERT AGAROBÉ – Mr Assistant Speaker, on 18 April 2020, a Fox Unit Squad moved into Central Province, especially at the Porebada Junction and raided the market there and harassed my women; our daughters and mothers at the market.

07/04

It also went to the extreme where they were inhumanely searched for money. And this was all put into a petition and signed by over 200 people. It was later given to the SOE Controller. And so, I would like to ask the Minister if there is going to be a response from the Controller to my people and if that is to take place, when will that be?

The second issue in relation to betel nuts, and I would like to bring it to the attention of this House, is that there has been enough pressure and our growers have been penalised enough. Our growers and sellers have been penalised during this period.

(1) Will the Government be looking at other options of progressing the sale of betel nut but in a controlled manner, pertaining to what the Minister has mentioned; that it is a law that was passed in 2018. (2) If we are going to be policing this law, when do we start? We should be putting more emphasis on the chewers. They are the culprits in this case. They are the ones chewing irresponsibly and spitting all over the place.

We should not be penalising the grower. The grower has nothing to do with the abuse of the betel nut. We should allow the betel nut to be sold in public places and the seller should be allowed to sell but very high penalties should be placed on the chewer. These are the culprits, they (chewers) should be allowed to buy but take it home and consume it in his own home. If the government is going to take some direction in managing this betel nut, is there a possibility that this could be done?

And maybe some amendments made to this law and more penalties should be put on the chewer.

Mr BRYAN KRAMER – Thank you, Mr Speaker, I acknowledge the questions raised by the Governor of Central. On the first question asked in relation to the petition, I have not received one yet, it may have been delivered to my office, but I am happy to convene a discussion directly with the commissioner and ask him to provide a response to the Governor and the petitioners. The issues raised were illegal conduct of police officers and I encourage the Governor to meet with those who signed the petition to also put in writing a statement so that those certain officers can be dealt with.

It's important to understand the issue of ill-discipline in the Police Force. The AFP were brought in to assist PNG with a partnership to improve in areas of college training. When the recruitment came up for some 300 new recruits and they were doing the screening, I was informed that over 100 fake applications were identified. They made recommendations for those applications to be put on the side and they were told to be quiet and to ignore it. And those applicants were accepted and we are now seeing the same in the Defence Force. So, under this Government, with the Commissioner and the Minister, all of these issues are now being addressed.

On the issue of betel nut, *sub section 2* of the same provision that already says that “*Notwithstanding to sub section 1, the Minister may by notice of National Gazette declare an area*

in which betel nut may be sold and bought. So, in this case areas of public markets are essential to regulate the sale of betel nut can be done by the Minister, by the *National Gazette*. It does not clarify which Minister. And on the other points that he raised in relation to going after the buyer, but we are struggling to even get our police to force the law, so you can understand the challenges of trying to implement force on a person that is chewing.

It is not only the issue of spitting and but also the issue of health in this. This is why in the same laws, there were provisions to go after smoking. On the issues of chewing, all I could suggest and this is because we do not have the ability of the Police Force in numbers to enforce on chewing is to issue licenses to people who want to go into trading betel nut. They must then ensure the area where they sell is kept clean.

08/04

The other option which we have in Madang is; if you drop one rubbish, you pick up ten so whether the law is, you spit you clean ten. So, if you spit, you clean up ten other people's betelnut spittle. That is the fastest way to change people's habit but again police won't be able to enforce it except the local authorities.

Mr RICHARD MASERE – Mr Deputy Speaker, firstly, on behalf on my people of Ijivitari, I would like to congratulate you and the people of Markham on your elevation to the office of the Deputy Speaker.

My question is directed to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Attorney General is in relation to the ICAC Bill that was presented two days ago. Like all members of Parliament I applaud the work of the Minister and his department and also would like to applaud the direction of the Prime Minister to ensure the ICAC Bill was brought in this time of Sitting.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER – Honourable Member, let me inform you that your question is related to a bill that is before Parliament, therefore, I rule that you reserve your right until the Bill is debated.

Electoral Process Reforms

Mr RICHARD MARU – Mr Deputy Speaker, on behalf of my people, I would like to congratulate you on your appointment and I have no doubt that you will serve the country and the Parliament well and make your people proud in your time.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I would like to direct my questions to the Prime Minister, who is also the minister responsible for the electoral process and the Electoral Commission of Papua New Guinea and the conduct of all elections including the coming 2022 General Elections.

Mr Deputy Speaker, before I ask my questions, let me give the Prime Minister some background in this Parliament. We all know the last three elections had been marred with violence and killings, loss of property, election rigging, fraud and all commentators including international observers have called for major reforms of the electoral process in this country, I am sure this is also the feelings of Muslim members of Parliament today. As Parliament and as Government we have a responsibility to undertake immediate reform to the electoral process of our country. The O'Neill-Abel Government end up the formulation of the Medium Term Development Plan No.3, specifically highlighted that by 2022 we are going to have the electronic voting and counting not only did we put that in the plan but we provided K15 million in the 2018 budget to start that process, that funded the electoral commissioner and his teams visit to India, started discussing with India to bring technology and support from the Indian government to reform our process and bring an electronic voting and counting by 2022, so we can guarantee fair and safe elections in this country for the first time.

Mr Deputy Speaker, in India, the biggest democracy in the world over 800 million people voted and in three days they had the results, no court of disputed returns, they had fair elections, no violence, it was all done in three days because of technology and the systems they used. So the process was started by the previous Government.

09/04

Mr Speaker, I am led to believe that that process is not ongoing because the National Procurement Commission has now stopped the tender process for the new electronic idea system for our Common Roll process. For the last nine months no one has explained why this is the case and there is no progress in the reforms; including the legislative reforms so that we can have electronic voting and counting by 2022.

Mr Assistant Speaker, this responsibility comes directly under the Prime Minister. In our midst to explain to this Parliament, will this Government deliver Electronic counting and voting by 2022 or will not? And why isn't progress being made to prepare the country and Electoral Commission for the reform that we are all looking forward to?

We haven't acquired the technology or brought in the people and experts or even done pilot testing and it seems that if we continue to go to sleep then nothing is going to happen in 2022 –

Mr Bryan Kramer – Point of Order! Mr Speaker, I want to clarify for the benefit of Parliament, I think that some of the statements made by the Member for Yangoru-Saussia is not entirely correct. He made a statement that the Indian Government used the electronic system and there were no disputes and violence. Now, this is not correct because in the 2019 Indian Election there were four killed as the voting kicked off. So, for the benefit of this going on record, when we come to Parliament and make statements we make sure that our statements are accurate. So, there are violence and election petitions in India.

Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER – Honourable Minister, I think the Member is trying to explain his own question for the Prime Minister to answer.

Honourable Member, make your explanation short and ask your question.

Thank you.

Mr RICHARD MARU – The Minister is wrong; it is not about election-related violence. It was because of religious violence so do not confuse this Parliament. If you do not know enough then you are wrong.

So, Mr Deputy Speaker, the Prime Minister needs to inform this Parliament if his Government will deliver the reforms and implement electronic voting and counting process by 2022?

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr JAMES MARAPE – Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for giving me time to respond to the Member of Yangoru-Saussia.

Before, I answer the questions, I would like to congratulate you for being elected as the Deputy Speaker of the National Parliament. You are not new here as you have served this country in your own capacity as the Minister of State, Vice Minister of the State, Assistant Speaker in the past, and Chairman of many parliamentary committees and now you are at the Deputy Speaker's Chair. I would like to say congratulations to you and your family and the people of Markham. I didn't know that tomorrow will be your birthday so I wish you Happy Birthday in advance.

I am happy with the question from the Member of Yangoru-Saussia, this is a very important question because it concerns the electoral process for 2022 Elections and into the

future. The Marape-Steven government believes that this idea is part of the many clean up in the Public Service of unfulfilled obligations and liabilities; and ideas from the other side of the House which have not been accomplished because of lack of funding.

I am happy that the Member for Yangoru-Saussia mentioned this because he has a lot of knowledge about this as when he was the Planning Minister he was one of those who started of this project but it has not been completed. This is just one of the many outstanding projects that were never completed.

10/04

Let me refresh our minds of one or two activities that took place in the O'Neill-Abel Government and before that too.

For instance, K200 million was spent on a NID program that bore almost no result. One of the cleaning up that we are doing and one of the many sad legacies of big projects that sounded nice and good but delivered almost little or nothing.

Today, our Government has stopped NID for sometime because again NID bided for another K200 million to run NID program. We checking on what has happened and we've been responsible and we need to identity citizens in our country.

We want to run the NID program parallel with Census 2020 and in the process, also do an updated roll or biometric registry, if Electoral Commission feels that way. So, we save money and spend the same money and add value for money and achieve more instead of the NID program running the NID and asking for another K200 million per say. For Census again bided for another K200 million plus to run census

Many of these fat projects we run in Waigani at the expense of getting actual results on the ground.

Mr Speaker, under the leadership of our present Planning Minister he believes that cheaper way we can do this instead of Planning Ministers of past who wanted to do more expensive; carrying around big gadgets to set up NID program all over the place and yet, we delivered not more than five per cent of our citizens are registered as we speak.

We will optimize use of limited resource we have in Budget to run NID, Census, and do biometric registry all almost concurrently at the same time, using the same resources envelope that we have allocated small in this year's budget.

The coronavirus has stalled the process of reallocation and reprioritization to ensure that our country is safe from Covid-19. But the Planning Minister, Treasurer and Finance Minister have kept Census 2020 Update, NID and this biometric process within our radar so that we can

run them together and hopefully deliver a program that is cost effective, cost conscious as well as getting the outcome we want. That means including registering our population, linking to the Electoral Roll, linking to a population census and linking to NID.

We want to have one unified platform instead of Common Roll having their own data, platform and system that is completely isolated from National Statistic Office. National Statistics has its own data and statistics completely different from the so-called pet O'Neill-Abel NID program.

These are miss-fired efforts of the past that we want to clean up so that we put limited money to good use and run systems and key national important programs correctly, efficiently and achieve the results at the earliest but with the least cost so that we can save some money and use it elsewhere.

I mean K200 million for an NID program resulting in 5 per cent of country getting registered is very shameful at the lowest level. This is something that we are checking and cleaning up. The Planning Minister will put a program out after a week of fully assessing how the coronavirus has affected our 2020 Budget. We will reprogram and hopefully, the balance of 2020 and 2021 year gives us an opportune time to clean up and I share the Member's sentiments which he is absolutely correct.

He was a former Planning Minister and has nothing to do with the mess that is happening up there.

11/04

It was a mess before he took over. But I agree with him that preparing a better electoral roll for 2022 is the way to go as a country. We all must help with this and we must pass many of these responsibilities of population update back to the provinces. Let's update our population first at the ward, district and in the provinces and then we will link to the biometric programme.

Hopefully in the 2022 Elections, we can have all the data and a system that will ensure one person one vote, through ID and biometrics system. That should clean up a lot of the voting discrepancies we have in our country.

I can assure the Member, it's part of our programme and we want to do it, although cost is a big problem at the moment. In fact there are three programmes running concurrently at the moment The Electoral Commission has its own programme. And I noted, he correctly mentioned that he led that trip to India and possibly that K15 million was spent on that trip. I do not know but I will check it out.

Since then, work has been advanced. The concept is still there and we have taken stock to ensure that these programmes do not run on their own. It must link up with the National Statistical Office and the population update and the National Identity programme.

In my view, N.I.D stays at the back until we have a population platform. The National Census 2020 would have given us this opportunity however, Covid-19 is pushing back this priority. We will pick it up at the end of this year and certainly every district will be involved.

I ask every Member, as part of their activity, to assist in taking stock of your population at your LLG, ward and district level and together we can collate the numbers and pass it on to the National Statistics Office. From there we can override with the biometric and N.I.D programme and make it more simpler and cost-efficient for us, instead of one agency asking for K200 million, another agency asking for K200 million and a third agency asking for another K200 million. I would rather put this K200 million in opening up roads than spending on systems in the Port Moresby.

MOTION BY LEAVE

Mr RAINBO PAITA (Finschhafen – Minister for Finance and Rural Development) – I ask leave of Parliament to move a motion without notice.

Leave granted.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS – REARRANGEMENT OF BUSINESS

Motion (by **Mr Rainbo Paita**) agreed to –

That so much of the *Standing Orders* be suspended as would prevent the Minister for Treasury from presenting his Ministerial statement.

**MINISTER OF TREASURY – ECONOMIC UPDATE –
RESPONDING TO COVID-19 – MINISTERIAL STATEMENT –
MOTION TO TAKE NOTE OF PAPER**

Mr IAN LING-STUCKEY (Kavieng – Minister for Treasury) – Mr Deputy Speaker, in these most difficult of times, facing one of the gravest threats to the future of our people, I wish to provide the Parliament with an economic update. This update is my third this year. How things have changed. How uncertain has been the battle.

In my first economic update on 19 February, the expectation was that Covid-19 would be contained to China. The focus was on how we get out of the deep, deep budget, growth, jobs and debt holes left by the former Prime Minister, O'Neill.

In my 4 April statement, just six weeks later, the focus was on best preparing our health systems and our economy for this deadly enemy. I announced an economic stimulus package of K5.6, now K5.7 billion.

Today, two months later, I will provide an economic update as well as progress on the Marape-Steven Government's smart, innovative, caring, responsive economic stimulus package

12/04

Reflections on the Impacts of Covid-19.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Honourable Members, I wish to place on the public record the nation's thanks and appreciation for all those individuals and organisations who have contributed to the successful outcome of Papua New Guinea's war on the coronavirus thus far.

While it is still early, we have been spared the worst effects of the pandemic on the health of citizens, and the wellbeing of the economy and government finances.

Our hearts go out to those Papua New Guineans who have contracted this terrible infection, and the six million-plus people in other parts of the world. Almost 400,000 people have died, none of them our citizens and we send our condolences to their loved ones.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I am proud to be a part of the Marape-Steven Government team that has led Papua New Guinea into battle and has, so far, conquered our enemy. I wish also to place on the public record the nation's gratitude to all those people who have made important contributions like public servants, emergency services workers, the security services, elected representatives at all levels, the private sector and NGOs, scientists, doctors and medical experts, and our international friends. Most of all I want to register my deep and sincere

appreciation for the sacrifice ordinary Papua New Guineans have made since the lockdown began under the State of Emergency.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Papua New Guineans have pulled together as a nation like never before, in the face of fear and uncertainty, financial pain, and most importantly, separation from our friends and family. National unity has been the key factor in our victory to date; with the obvious exception of the Members for Ialibu-Pangia and Vanimo-Green, who have chosen to put cheap, political advantage ahead of the national interest during a State of Emergency.

Indeed, Mr Deputy Speaker, we should never forget we would be in a much better financial and economic position today if it had not been for the reckless, wasteful and self-indulgent Prime Ministership of Mr O'Neill. We would have been in a position to fight our own battles.

Estimated Economic Impacts of Covid-19

Mr Deputy Speaker, Covid-19 is having devastating economic impacts around the world as we all know. The speed of the impacts in many countries around the world is much faster than the Great Depression of nearly a century ago. PNG is not immune from this global downturn. There are still great uncertainties. Some of these are global. For example, what will oil prices be over the next seven months? We had the extraordinary situation where oil prices went negative in late April. They have now recovered to about \$US20 per barrel, less than half the budget estimate.

13/04

The global economic shock is expected to reduce the value of PNG's exports from \$US11.3 billion in 2019, down 15 per cent to \$US9.6 billion in 2020. These international developments, combined with the impacts of our actions to stop the spread of Covid-19, is estimated to reduce PNG's GDP growth this year by 3.7 per cent, dropping our growth forecast from a positive 2 per cent to a negative 1.7 per cent.

Mr Deputy Speaker, this is bad news. A drop in growth of 3.7 per cent. It would have been much worse without our economic stimulus package. Globally, the Covid-19 impact is less than other countries in our region. For example, using the IMF's April World Economic Outlook Report, the Solomon Islands is facing a 5 per cent drop in growth, Fiji a 8.8 per cent drop in growth, Samoa a 8.1 per cent drop, and countries such as Palau a large 13.7 per cent drop.

Mr Deputy Speaker, the fall in growth is expected to reduce resource revenues in particular by an estimated K1 073 million. In addition, domestic tax revenues are also expected

to fall by K1 149 million. So total tax revenues are now expected to be reduced by K2 222 million, slightly more than my earlier estimate of K2 billion. Unfortunately, this is another K2 22 million in budget cuts or additional financing that we face.

Mr Deputy Speaker, the Covid-19 pandemic has also had significant impacts on global financial markets as most of us are aware. This brings through some additional bad news that in the interests of honesty and transparency we will not hide. Until last Friday, all information that I had been provided with and came across my desk indicated that we were on track for meeting all the financing requirements of the 2020 Budget. However, we just been told that the level of expected financing from the ADB Partial Credit Guarantee Bond, has been reduced from \$US300 million down to \$US190 million, a shortfall of \$US110 million or some K380 million. This is purely due to the changed economic circumstances from Covid-19.

This adds to our financing challenge. Combined with the extra forecasted K222 million loss in revenues, we are now looking for K502 million more than back in April this year. Things keep moving quickly.

Over coming weeks, I will set out plans for how we will be meeting these additional financing challenges.

This is likely to involve a combination of additional domestic financing including quantitative easing and exploring options for deeper budget cuts Update on the Economic Stimulus Package

14/04

Mr Deputy Speaker, I want to update Honourable Members on the status of our K5.7 billion Economic Stimulus Package and in particular the K600 million direct spending dedicated to the war on Covid-19.

First, I will deal with the Covid-19 Treasury Bond. This was bringing forward our cash financing to overcome the worst of our cash shortages. The first two tranches of this bond financing have raised over 2 billion. I am very confident we will raise the remaining K500 million after June this year.

The Bond raising was a resounding success. It was a vote of confidence in the Marape-Steven Government, and our plan for the future. The Take Back PNG agenda. But it was more than that. Instead of handing immense profits to exploitative foreign financial institutions in dubious and extortionate deals, the Marape-Steven Government has borrowed from domestic financial institutions and individuals who will make a fair and honest return on their investment.

That is, the PNG shareholders in BSP and Kina Bank, the two big super funds, smaller financial institutions such as savings and loan societies, and individual Papua New Guineans looking for a safe home for their money with very good returns. However, this government welcomes new, foreign-based investors into the PNG Bond market. The Treasury Bond brings with it many other benefits, the most important of which is that it was the quickest way to get some cash into the Treasury.

Mr Deputy Speaker, the cupboard was bare after the O'Neill deprecations. Not only did he leave us with nothing, he left us with record deficit and a massive increase in debt. Now the Treasury Bond has given us some breathing space. Unfortunately, much of it had to be used to repay debt excesses incurred over previous years. Indeed, most of the recent financing was for 10-year bonds. So what was really happening? We were having to take out 10-year bonds in part to repay 10-year bonds taken out by Honourable O'Neill when he was Treasurer! So stop blaming this government, for taking a loan, to pay off your loan!

Fortunately, by planning our part, there remains cash in the bank with which we will fulfil our immediate obligations and begin the long, arduous and expensive task of rebuilding our nation, while at the same time dealing with the coronavirus pandemic. But managing our cash flow remains a very difficult balancing act at this time.

Honourable Members should note that the Prime Minister and I including our other economic ministers and hardworking staff are doing everything in our power day and night to fast-track the K1.5 billion we are negotiating with our international friends and other multi-lateral agencies.

15/04

Mr Deputy Speaker, I am aiming to have K1.26 billion from the IMF, in the Treasury, by the end of this session of Parliament next Friday. That is 75 per cent of the funds, we believe and are confident, we can access, and a big boost to the stability of government finances. I might add that this money is on very concessional terms, not the exploitative rates charged by the former Prime Minister's merchant banker cronies. How concessional? The IMF funding has a zero per cent interest cost. That's right! K1.26 billion at zero per cent interest cost, the best, cheapest and only sovereign loan, ever negotiated, by any government, in our history. And yet the former Prime Minister and Member for Ialibu-Pangia, who should now call himself the member for Sydney Harbour, has the audacity to criticise our Covid-19 Bond raisings with high interest rates. When in fact, our government had no choice at all but to borrow these funds

at this specific time, of the worst pandemic in our history, to in fact, pay for a loan that was raised and executed, by the very same person, at the time he was the Treasurer!

So stop blaming the Marape-Steven Government, for getting a loan, to pay off your loan! Stop blaming the high deficits of the budget, when it is your deficit we inherited and part of your budget legacy! Stop blaming the performance of the economy, when it is caused by the Covid-19 pandemic! Stop your foolish grand-standing, denying your irresponsible economic legacies of debt, economic, jobs and income holes!

The Member opposite, lied and claimed, we lost our sovereignty by agreeing to this money. What did we agree to? Once again, we agreed to do, what we wanted to do, under the Marape-Steven Government's, reform program.

We agreed, we would publish details of Covid-19 contracts, on the PNG Procurement Commission's website, like you should have done for APEC-to show off your hotcakes! We agreed, to regularly review Covid-19 expenditure at weekly BMC meetings. We agreed, to key strategic revenue actions from the IRC's annual plan. We agreed, to improve our cash flow budgeting sheets and have Treasury and BPNG share more information. All good things, we were already planning to do. No loss of national sovereignty, keeping to our honest economic reform plan, and K1.26 billion of financing at zero per cent interest. Sit back, watch and learn! It will be used wisely, constructively, fairly, accountably and transparently. We are well on track, with the remaining K240 million, in additional international financing.

16/04

Honourable Members should be aware by now that the K600 million in direct budget spending, supported by the extra financing from the Treasury Bond, will shortly start flowing into their provinces and districts.

Mr Deputy Speaker, frankly, implementation has been slow and unacceptable to the government. This funding has not gone out as quickly as we had planned and wished for. There are two reasons for this. First, revenue shortfalls. We had the plans but insufficient revenue, to support the policy priorities. Second, our budgeting systems are too rigid for an emergency response. New balances have to be struck between getting the cash out quickly and ensuring its accountability.

Let me assure all Honourable members, that I have authorized the full amount of warrants, for the Covid-19 programs. Clarification on the temporary extension of the State of Emergency, also means that some of the detailed payment delays have been cleared. Come and talk to me if you don't start receiving funds into your district and provincial Covid-19 accounts

by early next week. The K600 million direct support package has been split into two parts Health & Security Sector, and Economic Sector

The details of the K280 million for health and security are as follows:

- K60 million to limit the spread of the pandemic through preventative health actions, by upgrading hygiene at markets, schools, universities and technical colleges, churches, district hospitals, aid posts and other potential hotspots. And K0.5 million is being distributed to all provinces and districts. Full warrants have been released and funding set aside, from the first and second C-19 bond raising;

- K37 million to be distributed directly to front-line provincial health authorities, as a 22 percent increase in each of their 2020 Budget funding allocations. Full warrant has been released and the first K22 million has already been released to Health for payment to PHAs through the HSIP account;

- K30 million for the Department of Health with the focus on the provision of Personal Protective Equipment. Full warrants have been released and funding set aside from the first C-19 bond raising, on top of the K45 million already released;

- K60 million to the RPNGC, the Defence Force and Correctional Services to strengthen law and order and to defend our borders. Full warrants have been released with the first K30 million paid to the Police for redistribution;

- K73 million to the Defence Force, to construct 10 border posts, including facilities for Immigration, NAQIA and Customs activities as appropriate, to future-proof the border. Full warrants have been released and the first K35 million has been paid to Defence;

- K15 million to the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, with capacity building and strengthening of PNG's foreign missions, to respond to the needs of PNG citizens living overseas, as well as the repatriation of those who need to return home. Full warrants have been released and full payment has been made;

17/04

- K5 million to support the Marape Government's commitment to help PNG churches and urban authorities provide food for those most in need; and

The details of the K320 million for the economic sector are as follows:

- K113 million for districts and provinces to promote agriculture development and food security through an outreach campaign and grants for improved crop production such as the purchase of seedlings and management of threats to plant and animal health. K1 million to

every province and district is being distributed. Full warrants have been released and funding set aside from the second Covid-19 Bond raising;

- K 50 million as a price support program for agriculture export crop production directed at small cash crop producers, especially in the coffee, cocoa and copra industries initially, implementation details on this will be released shortly;

- K45.5 million to support rural MSMEs and households, enabling districts to undertake responsive MSME activities such as market improvements and small business training. K500 000 has been allocated to each district. Full warrants have been released and funding set aside from the first Covid-19 Bond raising with disbursement taking place as we speak;

- K41.5 million as an additional Business Stimulus Package to protect jobs and make doing business easier which will be mainly directed to support provinces to reduce existing charges on businesses. Full warrants have been released with the first K19.5 million from the first Covid-19 Bond and K22 million from the IMF funding expected to be received next Friday; and

- K70 million for additional economic-based activities to help stimulate the economy, with options being discussed further with the IRC and Customs, as well as other more direct stimulatory measures. Warrants are waiting final programme details.

Mr Deputy Speaker, the Marape Government is cognisant of its responsibilities to transparency and accountability. For example, provinces and districts are to report on all spending, in accordance with Finance Instruction 5/2020 on Covid-19 procurement and reporting requirements, which is available on the government's procurement website:

[http://www.procurement.gov.pg/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/FL05-2020-Expenditure-Control-of-Funds-for-Covid-19-Emergency-Response signed.pdf](http://www.procurement.gov.pg/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/FL05-2020-Expenditure-Control-of-Funds-for-Covid-19-Emergency-Response-signed.pdf)

Details of Covid-19 spending, will be published on the Procurement Commission's website.

Mr Deputy Speaker, these initiatives are practical and effective, very carefully targeted and look to the future. As much as dealing with the immediate impacts of the coronavirus pandemic, they place the interests of our people at the centre of our efforts.

18/04

I want to stress that most of the money is going to provinces and districts continuing our decentralised approach and our focus on the rural and subsistence economy and the informal sector.

This is where the bulk of our population is, and it is entirely appropriate that this is where the money should go. This is our fundamental policy when it comes to disbursements of much of this funding. The local level knows how to spend the funds more effectively, for many of these programs than bureaucrats in Port Moresby.

For example, K211 million is going to provincial and district administrations. In addition, Provincial Health Authorities are receiving K37 million extra a 22 per cent increase in their budgets, and provinces will receive support for lowering PMV fees and charges.

Honourable Members will appreciate that this is a remarkable achievement, at a time when Covid-19 has added to the devastation, caused by Mr O'Neill's destructive and discredited leadership. Most economists agree that this is the worst economic crisis facing the world since the Great Depression back in the 1930s, nearly a century ago, and Papua New Guinea is having to deal with it as a "fragile state," thanks to the former Prime Minister.

This is just a friendly term the international community uses for failed state. So, Mr Deputy Speaker, the Marape-Steven Government is being forced by the O'Neill disaster, to deal with Covid-19 with one hand, tied behind its back.

One consequence of the former Prime Minister's waste and mismanagement is that the Government will need to re-allocate all the planned additional Covid-19 expenditure from other budget programs. This means the K600 million stimulus package, along with the K45 million provided earlier for health activities, means we will be looking at budget cuts of at least K645 million. For technical reasons, the World Bank health support of K70 million will also add to budget expenditures, and we will find budget cuts for this as well. So budget cuts of at least K715 million is required, to keep our expenditure at the same level as the 2020 budget. The CACC is examining areas to be cut. As noted above, the additional drop in forecast revenues of K222 million and the loss of at least some of the ADB Partial Credit Guarantee. means we must somehow find ways to finance this, or else look for even deeper budget cuts. More analysis will be made and our financing plan will be updated shortly most likely with a shift towards more domestic financing and quantitative easing.

Mr Deputy Speaker, the Marape Government's Covid-19 response is not just a simple spending package. Unlike the former Prime Minister, who spent like a madman and impoverished the nation, we have adopted a caring, people-first approach that is innovative, responsible and sustainable. We have used a wide variety of strategic interventions, to complement the K600 million direct spending in our Economic Stimulus Package so that our children and grandchildren are not buried in debt for the rest of their lives.

19/04

These interventions are aimed at saving jobs, protecting household finances and supporting local businesses in both the formal and informal sectors, urban and rural-remote communities alike. They support women as much as men, the young as much as the old.

Mr Deputy Speaker, ours is a very balanced and fair response, based on extensive consultation with all sectors of society.

- We have worked in close consultation with the Independent Consumer and Competition Commission to control price increases, which helps protect the standard of living of all families and reduce the cost of doing business for our entrepreneurs. Indeed, we have been vigilant, in ensuring that fuel cost reductions have been passed on. The lowering of fuel costs is acting like a massive subsidy to the freight transport industry, a great help in supporting our farmers access to markets at this time of Covid-19.

- We will also help families and businesses by cutting the cost of transport, which will have far-reaching benefits across the economy. Action includes making it cheaper for traders, to reach markets by removing fees and charges imposed by provincial governments and transport authorities, until the end of 2020. License fees for PMV operators will be halved. This is in addition to the fuel cost price reductions we are experiencing already.

- We have prioritised our Budget measures to clear government debts to business, many of which are local enterprises, allocating K2.5 billion in arrears clearance between 2019-2021. K1 billion will be repaid this year. This is debt that the former Prime Minister ran up to unsustainable levels and then refused to pay. This will help provide operating cash for companies in priority sectors, and provide cash flow to MSMEs which are highly vulnerable to deteriorating economic conditions.

- We have instituted a range of taxation concessions to help companies manage cash flow and to reduce regulatory burdens. We are encouraging Papua New Guinea's growing number of entrepreneurs through a cheaper and simpler tax regime, 2 percent of turnover for small businesses rather than 30 percent of profits.

- We are taking steps, with the Investment Promotion Authority, to lower the regulatory cost of doing business - for example we are reviewing the *Corporations Act* to strengthen business resilience during periods of economic hardship.

- We will be introducing changes to superannuation legislation, to authorise early access to superannuation to provide cash for households, that would otherwise, be in financial crisis because breadwinners have lost their jobs, a measure that is worth about K500 million.

- We have negotiated with the finance sector for loan repayment holidays for qualifying business customers, by introducing two interventions (i) reducing the KFR from 5 to 3 per cent (ii) reducing commercial banks cash reserve requirements (CRR) from 10 per cent to 7 per cent of total assets, which is estimated to be worth a further K500 million in support.

20/04

We are working with the MSME Council and others to track how this is working in practice to support our businesses. And YES, government is aware that many commercial banks, may not be cooperating and passing these benefits to their business customers.

- We have discussed the implementation of quantitative easing to enhance our capacity to raise cash on the domestic market. We are considering further actions in this area, to ensure that BPNG has the same room to move, as most other central banks in our region.

Conclusion

Mr Deputy Speaker, our response to Covid-19, in terms of protecting people, protecting the economy and protecting government finances, continues and enhances the Marape-Steven Government's Take Back PNG agenda.

It further entrenches our new vision for a stronger, more independent and more sustainable Papua New Guinea -moving government's emphasis to the non-resources sector and the informal sector, much greater assistance for agriculture, much greater support for entrepreneurial small businesses, much greater support for rural areas, more decentralised actions and decision-making, cutting red tape, and supporting the move in the 2020 Budget towards development spending rather than public service wages.

Despite the devastation, the Marape-Steven Government has seen this crisis as an opportunity and as a result this Economic Stimulus Package is not just for now, it is for the future.

Thank you Mr Deputy Speaker.

Motion (by **Mr Rainbo Paita**) agreed to –

That Parliament take note of the paper.

Debate Adjourned.

GRIEVANCE DEBATE

Question proposed –

That grievances be noted.

Mr WILLIAM POWI (Southern Highlands) – Mr Deputy Speaker, before I express my grievances, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you on your election as the Deputy Speaker of our honourable Parliament. I have confidence in you to do a good job.

I also want to congratulate and thank your predecessor who happen to be my local Member of Nipa-Kutubu Open Electorate in Southern Highlands. I think he did an honourable thing by vacating the Office when he moved to the Opposition benches. One cannot hold an important position of government and be in the opposition.

21/04

I have consulted with him, but I want to take this opportunity to thank him for humbly accepting the call to move to where he is now. On this token, I want to contribute towards this grievance debate in relation to the issue and importance of us coming back from an economic recession and the realities facing our country. And as the country progresses from now, I want to speak on the importance of moving some of these key impact projects that are facing our country and the Government at hand.

The first issue is one that is affected by the P’Nyang Gas Project. I think this project is important for our country and our people. And I want to appeal to all stakeholders that are involved in progressing of these discussions, that it is important for the country whilst still facing the challenges of Covid-19 and its devastation that we are slowly coming out from. It is equally important that we give confidence to our country where we can kick-off on some of the important impact projects facing the government and the country. This project is important, and on behalf of my people, I stand to echo the importance of kicking off P’Nyang. If we can come to a win-win on this project and as long as it is a win for the industry with a win for our people, I stand to echo this important concern that it must kick off.

I also want to commend the Government for taking a stand as far as Pogera is concerned. I know it is before the Court but it is an unprecedented area that we are going to in terms of empowering our people to take back PNG and giving them opportunity to come out of the bondage of poverty, life and opportunity. On this note, I also want to commend the Governor of Morobe and his provincial government and the leaders of Morobe for taking a proactive

position on getting Wafi Gold out of the way. So, these are in the midst of all the recessions, doom and gloom of the economy scenarios that we are going through.

Let us share some positive hope for our people. And I stand here, to express that we rally behind the government and the intentions be noble and hope we move in the right direction. Let us take hold of all that is happening and the implications of the economic down turn brought about by the global pandemic. Let us remain focused on giving our people hope, now and into the future, if we can kick-off on some of these key economic projects.

Thank you.

Mr BENJAMIN PHILIP (Menyamya) – Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. Before I continue on my grievance debate, I wish to make my Maiden Speech on this Floor of Parliament.

22/04

I feel insulted when I hear some members mispronounce the name of my district as Muniama or Miniama. I would like to make it known now on the floor of Parliament, as of now, the right pronunciation is Menyamya.

Menyamya the name given to my electorate by the first Lutheran Mission who came to my district in the late 1960's.

Mr Deputy Speaker, on behalf of the people of Menyamya, an estimate of 87,000 in population, I would like to thank, the Prime Minister, Honourable James Marape and all Members of Parliament for congratulating and welcoming me, in to this Honourable House as the newly elected Member of Menyamya.

I would also like to acknowledge the respective political parties that endorsed their potential candidates to contest in the by-election but were unfortunate, can endorse them in the 2022 National Elections.

Mr Deputy Speaker, lastly I would like to acknowledge the former member for Menyamya, the Late Thomas Pelika, he was a strong leader, who did so much for the district in terms of development but came to a halt when he passed on. I would like to assure the people of Menyamya that I will try my best to complete the tasks from where he left off, before 2022.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Menyamya district has a big population and has potential for agriculture development but there are many challenges. One of those is the lack of road network that connects Menyamya to Bulolo and Lae.

Lastly, I would like thank the people of Menyamya for their support, trust and belief to mandate me as their leader for the third term.

23/04

Mr Deputy Speaker, I would like to extend my appreciation to the PNC Party Leader, Honourable Mr Peter O'Neill and the party members for supporting me through the by-election campaign and also to all the PNC supporters in Papua New Guinea.

Mr Deputy Speaker, with the new practice one day polling for By-elections, I would like to thank the Electoral Commissioner, Mr Patilius Gamato, and his officers for running a free and fair election, but many people did not vote because their names were not on the Common Roll. I also want to thank the Police Commissioner and his officers for keeping the peace and order during the by-election in Menyamya.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I also would like to thank my wife, Diana Philip, for standing behind me all the way through this By-elections and all the members of the Christians Faith Churches for their prayers to God for keeping the peace during the By-elections and having mercy on our country.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Menyamya District is a very big electorate with a population of more than 87, 000 people. It is comprised of a difficult geographic setting with so many mountains, terrains and valleys and is located far from Lae City, with a distance of more than 200 kilometres. Menyamya has a big potential for agriculture development but there are so many challenges to achieve this. One of the biggest challenges we face is with the road network, as I speak there are many corroding portions of the road between Menyamya, Bulolo and Lae.

Mr Deputy Speaker, my priorities are focused on road development, infrastructure, health, education, law and justice, commerce, SME and agriculture. But, to achieve my priorities before 2022, it will be impossible unless I have the support of the Prime Minister, his Cabinet Ministers, the Governor and Members of Morobe; also with the experience and wisdom of PNC's Party Leader.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I am not a new Member to the Parliament so I know that supporting each other to achieve our goals is very important and if we are going to be just thinking of politics, we will not achieve our goals. We must serve the interest of our people as best as we can to see development in our country.

Mr Deputy Speaker, with this I would also like to express my concern for the highway in Menyamya –

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER – Honourable Member for Menyamya, we have 10 minutes each in the Grievance Debate and I know it is your Maiden Speech but your 10 minutes has already lapsed but I will ask you to incorporate the rest of your maiden speech in the Hansard.

24/04

Mr PHILIP BENJAMIN – Mr Deputy Speaker, I have only a few lines to go before I complete my speech.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER – Honourable Members, this is his maiden speech so I will use my discretion to allow him to complete it.

(Members agreeing)

Mr PHILIP BENJAMIN – Thankyou Mr Deputy Speaker, I would like to also raised some issues being faced by my people in Menyamya and Aseki. A major problem being faced over many years is the condition of Lae-Bulolo-Menyamya road.

This important highway was built in the 1980s following the provincial government's plan and support. However the road is often damaged by heavy rains and a lot of funds for the Menyamya is spent on its maintenance. The distance from Bulolo to Menyamya station is about 125 kilometres. And during my last term in Parliament from 2007 to 2017, Menyamya District spent more than K20 million in DSIP funds on this highway.

During the National Elections the people always voice their concern and urged Members to bring their plight to Parliament. They ask when the government was going to improve and seal their road. This road services three electorates; Menyamya in the Morobe Province, Kerema in the Gulf Province and Obura Wonenara in the Eastern Highlands.

The strength of the three electorates in terms of income generation lies in organic coffee. Mr Speaker, I am calling again on the Marape-Davis government to include this road for funding in the 2021 Budget. This road is the lifeline of the three electorates in terms of bringing their coffee to the markets for export and movement of cargo and workers.

Mr Speaker, we should set aside our political differences and put our people first in dealing with issues affecting their well-being. I end my maiden speech on that note. May God bless our beautiful country.

Mr JOHN ROSSO (Lae – Minister for Lands) – Firstly, let me congratulate you on behalf of the people of Lae and the people of Markham as our Member of Parliament on your elevation as Deputy Speaker.

I also want to thank the Member for Nipa/Kutubu and former Deputy Speaker, Honourable Jeffrey Komal for doing a good job. I also welcome my wantok and new Member for Menyamya in Parliament and I am happy to acknowledge your presence. It is good to see you in Parliament.

25/04

Allow me to thank the government under the guidance of Prime Minister, James Marape and the Works Minister in regard to inter-connect PNG through road links. The policy initiative is long overdue and you'll agree with me, having good roads are important to our people.

Our people are a resilient people. They do not depend on the government to make money. And when you have road access for rural people, they will plant their coffee and cocoa and bring them into town. Roads are a critical link to our rural areas.

I would like to commend this government because this has now become a priority. Our people will be empowered to make money and local contractors will also benefit when we build roads.

Many of our local contractors, I used to be contractor once, will see money going directly to them. They will enhance their capacity and employ other Papua New Guineans and as a result money also remains within the country.

The inter-connect PNG initiative is about connecting the provinces but within the province it also connects districts and promotes the growth of industries such as agriculture. It also involves improvement of jetties for the coastal areas. Areas such as Samarai in the Milne Bay province need good jetties for boats to carry the people's produce into towns and have access to government services.

I would like to also acknowledge the previous NA - led government and the former - Prime Minister, Honourable Peter O'Neill who continued the concrete programme for the Lae roads. Work is not complete and I am also imploring the assistance of the Works Minister in regard to those roads in Lae that are yet to be completed. While you are working on the rural roads, do not forget that there are also tax payers who live in the cities. So, now we need to get together and see how best we can improve the road-infrastructure in Lae city.

If we can make our tax payers happy, they will pay more tax into the government coffers and will be happy to work with the government. Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr MORIAPE KAVORI (Lufa) – Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker for recognizing the people of Lufa.

I'd like to say something on prayers said here Parliament. Isaiah 59:2 in the Bible says when you are in the state of sin and pray to me, I will not listen to your prayers. Can the relevant Parliamentary Committee look at appointing at least four people who will be responsible for saying prayers on our behalf?

26/04

Thank God in Heaven for giving us good understanding to take care of our people. All of us are Christians, when we cry to God, he will open the window in Heaven and see us and will hear our cries. When we pray to God for our needs and problems we face in our country, He will listen and answer our prayers. The word was God and gives us good understanding so that we can change our nation.

That's why, I want the Parliamentary Committee to discuss and permanently appoint four or five people to prepare themselves at home before they come here to lead us in prayer in the Parliament. We must never forget that we are living because of our living creator. This Earth will come to an end very soon and we are living in the last days.

The second king of the world, King Nebuchadnezzar in his second year, of reign, he saw a vision of a statue created from different elements representing different empires. The feet of the statue were part clay and part iron depicting the last divided empires we are now living in. the Babylon, the Media-Persia, the Greek and the Roman Empire are gone and Jesus will soon come.

The second point is, many times I have notice that, we pinpoint at Mr Michael Nali, the Works Minister for funding and he is not making money. He is just like us but we put all our burden on him.

I have my issues too. I have three concerns in Lufa, one of which is in the six airstrips in the remote areas in Karimui and Chimbu, and part of it is in Kerema.

The oil is from my land because the river flows from Lufa to Kerema and now they will extract the oil in Kerema.

It will be good if each district can use their million-kina funds from the DSIP and buy their own machineries to build their district feeder roads so that the national government can concentrate on the national highway roads.

This can be used to shorten some kilometers of the roads rather than expect everything from the national government. When national government fund money to build a road, there used to be a lot of complaints and false claims from the land owners. These unnecessary claims used to drain a lot of money meant for the road construction and as a result the roads are left incomplete.

The previous government has allocated K7 million for my Unagi road before the change of government, I have inspected the road and noticed that K7 million was used up and only 10 kilometers of road was upgraded. I sued the contractor and I am still in court over misuse of the funds. I went to see the Tenders Board and had an argument over the awarding of contracts. They brought in some old equipment to upgrade the road and can't reach the assigned distance of the road. They cleared grasses and upgraded few kilometers only and left, and I am in court with them, even though I don't know where the money is. But, I want the government to audit where the K7 million is. That's why I see that it as bad.

I am purchasing some machineries. I enquired with for the cost of hiring a road grader and they charge me K420 per hour for the grader and the roller separately, and K220 for a timber truck. When I did calculations, it totaled up to almost K20, 000 per week.

I realized that the fund will be exhausted within the next 15 days so I bought a new grader at approximately K700, 000 and had done a lot of work since.

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I want to inform this Parliament that as for the Members representing the remotest electorate must use initiatives to purchase bulldozers to upgrade our rural roads so that when the National Governments funding allocated than we can fix other major roads which we can't afford to assist. This is just my small contribution on this debate and I can't elaborate further on that.

And to my son Koni, you left me and went and I am feeling cold but now I feeling warm again when you allowed me to speak and I am so happy with you. I thank you on behalf of the people of Lufa for being elected as the Deputy Speaker of this Parliament until 2022, thank you.

(Laughter in the Chamber)

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER – Thankyou honourable for your contribution.

Mr TIMOTHY MASIU (South Bougainville – Minister for Information and Communication Technology) – Thankyou Mr Deputy Speaker, before I proceed on to my debate I would like to congratulate you on behalf of the people of South Bougainville and the Autonomous Region of Bougainville for being elected to occupy this big Chair, now we won't crack jocks anymore because I will have to respect you as Deputy Speaker of the National Parliament to run the affairs of this Honourable House. This is actually a big tusk you are required to perform and so I fully trust and believe that you will give your utmost effort to run this House with your wider knowledge and experience.

I also want to acknowledge the newly elected Member for Menyamya, Honourable Benjamin Philip, I was once elected into Parliament through by-election as a first timer but you came back for the second time. I am so happy that you have taken your seat and contributed to this debate.

Most leaders have already debated on major issues but I want to debate on some minor issues which I believe that it's very important and major issue because during the Covid-19 period we heard a lot of stories circulating around on this huge pandemic which we debated a lot on this Floor of Parliament.

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge and thank the media sectors in the country. I as the Minister responsible for Information and Communication Technology, want to thank the all media organisations such as *Post-Courier*, *The National*, *EMTV*, *FM100*, *PNGFM* and other media organisations, such as *NBC* both Radio and Television which dedicated their time in telecasting live on this pandemic Covid-19 from the very beginning up until now on which SoE has been extended for further 14 days.

Most times we argue with media for misreporting or not performing their duties up to standard. But I think that it's very important we must acknowledge the kind of work their do, they have done a tremendous job collecting news around the world to inform our country about this major pandemic Covid-19 and other related issues that arose during this time.

I also want to acknowledge the two daily Newspapers because during this time the SoE was put in place and all the domestic and international flights have been cancelled and restrictions were put in place and daily newspapers were not distributed to other provinces to be read but they maintained their professional approach and conducted their duties as reporters to make sure news continued to flow without much hindrances and restrictions.

I also thank the other private media outlets and radio stations in the country such as *NBC* who cannot broadcast because the Department of Health condemn it.

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Within this time, we were able to assist because information was very important. The information of Covid-19, whereby we are being told that there is no cure and vaccine, we were only left with the information that we must create awareness amongst our people and help them to understand. I have observed that during this period, a lot of our rural people that are scattered across the islands and the highlands, have not received timely information.

I am truly saddened that the Minister responsible for imparting this information to the people. I'm saying this so that when the Government is making its budget, it must assist NBC Radio, where it can be able to broadcast timely information during such times to our rural communities. Our people have the right to have access to all this information and it is our duty to make it available to them. When we do not equip our communication network to make sure information reaches the length and breadth of this nation we are denying their rights to important information.

I am requesting the government to assist NBC to make sure that in the future we are able to put up good equipment such as transmitters, so that information reaches our people. Most of these transmitters have been there since the colonial era. I acknowledge those Members who have taken their own initiative to assist their province in terms of enhancing information and communication. Those who have not yet taken this on board, please let us work together to make information and communication easy for our rural communities.

I also appreciate and am happy with the work that is being done by the Department of Health and the Police and the Permanent Parliamentary Emergency Committee for your reports. As the Minister responsible for communication, it is my wish that these information on the reports reach our people. And to all the Ministers, if you are invited to be on air, please come along and share your knowledge and information to our people. This is especially for the Minister for Health, Education and Higher Education. We have a big task ahead of us to disseminate information to our people. The radio stations are a Government entity and must be utilized.

This is so people understand what is going on in our country, when we are faced by the challenges accompanied with the Covid-19 pandemic. I want to thank the Ministers for transport, immigration and Police for going on air sharing the information to the people of this country. And those other important Ministries who have yet to make their information known, please come forward and tell the people.

A learned population will always follow what the government is doing. Let us help our people, not only when we campaign but after we are elected we must be seen to be working for

our people. Let us always connect with our people and keep them up to date with what we are doing, so as to give us that knowledge that when we want to continue in the next term, our people are ready to support because we have helped them. On Monday I will be in Kerema to launch Radio Gulf, which was previously condemned. It has been renovated and I want to thank the former Minister for Communication, Honourable Sam Basil, Rainbo Paita and yourself.

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You have been a Minister for a short while too, I would like to thank you for assisting me in reviving Radio New Ireland and Radio Morobe and I know for sure that other radio stations will be revived as well.

Radio Western is a radio station that was condemned early this year by the Health Department so I have sent a team of engineers there and have sighted and made reports and it is published for tender for interested bidders to start work at Radio Western.

And also the other radio station in our country, NBC Madang is now broadcasting on short wave frequency and the people of Rai Coast and Karkar are now listening to NBC Radio Madang at this time. Other radio stations that are not in operation have been prioritised to be in operation likely, Radio Vanimo which is at the border. I have consulted the Minister for Finance, Minister for Treasury and the Minister for Planning to assist financially in completing these projects, mainly at the border because when you are at the border, you will be listening to Radio Indonesia instead of our local radio station.

Thank you and all have a blessed weekend.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER – Honourable members, let me interrupt the debate and inform the House that our time has gone past 1 p.m.

The grievance debate must stop, therefore I inform the house that the grievance debate has come to an end.

Motion – That the Grievances be noted – agreed to.

Mr RAINBO PAITA – Mr Deputy Speaker, I would like to thank all members, both in the Government and Opposition that have been present during the first week of the Parliament session.

As I keep saying, it is our primary role as elected leaders is to be in this House. We have made a lot of sacrifices to be in this chair and if we do not appreciate it then we should not be

here. I know this will happen in 2022 so once we are re-elected by our people, we must embrace it, sit through Parliament and talk about important business and pass important legislations before we return back to our districts and provinces.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion (by **Mr Rainbo Paita**) agreed to –

That the Parliament do now adjourn.

The Parliament adjourned at 1 p.m.