

FOURTH DAY

Friday 16 February 2024

DRAFT HANSARD

Subject:

Page No:

QUESTIONS	1
Local Level Government Election Method.....	1
Supplementary Question – Provincial Governments to Decide.....	4
SOEs Semi-Privatisation.....	5
Puma Saga - Release Report Findings	10
Telefomin Road Funding.....	14
 ANSWERS TO PREVIOUS QUESTIONS.....	 19
 PERSONAL EXPLANATION.....	 22
 GRIEVANCE DEBATE	 25
 ADJOURNMENT	 44

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

CORRECTIONS TO DAILY HANSARD

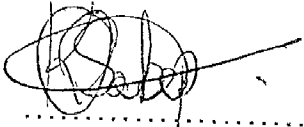
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KENNETH SEBEPMIN

Acting Principal Parliamentary Reporter

FOURTH DAY

Friday 16 February 2024

The Acting Speaker (**Mr Koni Iguan**), took the Chair at 10 a.m.

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

Sitting suspended.

The Acting Speaker again took the Chair at 10.40 a.m., and invited the Governor of Manus, **Honourable Charlie Benjamin**, to say Prayers.

'Jesus, eternal and loving father in heaven, this morning as we leaders come before you, we ask that you be with us this morning. You give us wisdom, you give us knowledge and understanding. You remove fear and anxiety from amongst us and you fill us with your peace the peace, that comes from heaven, your holy spirit in us. Father, give us wisdom and knowledge and understanding, and as we deliberate upon important matters of this country, may your interest be our interest and our people's interest be their interest. You forgive us where we have failed you, where we have fallen short of your glory. Accept us this morning according to your will. Amen.'

QUESTIONS

Local-Level Government Election Method

Mr WAI RAPA – Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker. Thank you, all the leaders, the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, Ministers, Governors, and everyone in the Public Gallery. I would like to ask a question that is very important to local-level governments. I would like to ask this question to the Inter-Government Relations Minister.

We have our local level government elections just around the corner and I believe this is one of the last Parliament sittings before the LLG elections. It has been announced in the media that the elections of council presidents will be done by the people. During the Governor's Conference in Lae, we said councillors should elect the president while others said the people should vote.

As you all know, I am a long-serving councillor and president for Mt Hagen and Western Highlands Province and if we let the people vote for the council presidents then we are removing the powers from the councillors. It's just like the Prime Minister being elected by the people thus taking away that role from members. It's just like removing the powers from our councilors, which is not good at all for our local level governments, and I speak from experience, so Minister what is your final decision? Can the Minister clarify whether presidents will be elected by councilors or by the people?

02/04

Mr SOROI EOE – Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker, let me also recognize our brothers on the other side this morning. I also want the country as a whole to take note of the information I give today because it is an important issue. I thank the Governor of Western Highlands for raising this important question for the people and members of Parliament to know and prepare for the coming event because there is so much confusion going on.

On 13th January 2024, I wrote to the Electoral Commissioner indicating the dates of Local Level Government (LLG) elections. I want to inform the people of this country, especially the men and women who are planning to contest the coming elections to please take note of the dates, especially the rural communities of Papua New Guinea.

The dates for LLG elections are as follows;

- (1) The issue of writs is on Thursday 27th of June 2024,
- (2) Nomination closes on Wednesday 3rd of July 2024 at 4 p.m.,
- (3) Polling commences on Saturday 24th of August 2024.
- (4) Polling ends on Friday 6th of September 2014, and
- (5) Return of writs on or before Thursday 27th of September 2024.

These dates have already been given to the media and these are the final dates on which the Electoral Commission will conduct the coming LLG elections.

The second issue that was raised by the Governor is very important and pertinent to the methods of elections. There were two methods; one is for the ward members to elect the

president, and this has been the practice since 2019. The other method starting in 2012 had the people electing the presidents. The confusion is still there and has not been cleared as yet.

But during the recent Governors Conference on October 2023, they decided that the power be given back to the provincial governments, and in its official resolution, each provincial government must debate because provincial governments consist of both LLG members as well as open members. I think it's a suitable place for each provincial government to decide on how they want to elect their presidents.

That was the decision so each provincial government must submit their position to my office. After receiving all the indications through the PEC, it then goes to the NEC for approval. And from there, we can then advise the Governor General to indicate which option to look at.

03/04

As I've said, no option is the best option but at least the majority decides, so basically that's what it is. The issue was given back to the provincial governments to indicate to my office which option they want to look at and having looked at all the requests that come in, then we will look at which option is favoured by the provincial governments. That is something that we will present to the Cabinet. The Cabinet is a final vetting body so again it should be subject to the Cabinet's final decision before the Governor General approves it.

I hope that clears the matter but having the opportunity, Mr Acting Speaker, let me also indicate, and I may be straying away from the issue that has been raised but I want to indicate to members particularly in relation to their salaries, that they are now put on the Alesco Payroll.

So that matter has been finalised between my office, DPM, and of course the Treasury. But at the same time, the government is looking at how we can enable ward members to perform their duties and not only receive the salaries. In the past, they were not on the payroll and only received a bit of allowance but this time, they are put on salaries so that they can perform their duties as a government representative on the ground.

Mr Acting Speaker, allow me to also discuss issues about the LLG elections because it's relevant. This is about the separation of LLG elections from national elections. Currently, my department is submitting to NEC an amendment to *Section 34*. This will enable the LLG elections to be conducted 18 months after the national elections. Experience has already shown us that every time after national elections, two or three months after the return of

writes, an LLG election is supposed to be conducted but because resources have been scarce and limited and having conducted some very expensive elections in the past, this has stopped the LLG elections to be conducted and which is the case today.

So, by the separation of 18 months, the government can have sufficient revenue to conduct proper LLG elections.

Thank you.

**Supplementary Question –
Provincial Governments to Decide**

Mr CHARLIE BENJAMIN – Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker. Mr Minister, you informed us already that each provincial government will give its views on the method we will use to vote for the presidents, and then the NEC will decide on the final method of election. My view is that each provincial government should decide on which method to adopt. NEC should endorse two options for each provincial government to choose from; the people to vote for the LLG president and the councillors to vote for the LLG president. Why not the NEC endorse it and give it to the province so that we can choose our preferences rather than following the NEC's decision on one option?

Thank you.

Mr SOROI EOE – Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker. I thank the Governor of Manus for the very good suggestion. There are also some cross factors involved. I think I have already explained that in our Government Caucus last year. The election of presidents by the people is similar to conducting an election for regional members in national elections.

04/04

And when you look at the council presidents, we have about 300 different LLGs; and you are looking at 300 presidents to be elected in, therefore, it requires huge resources. I just want to make that clear so that you are mindful of this factor before we can consider this option.

This option also means that when presidents are elected by the people, they are just like a mini-MP or Open Members. You can only replace them during the next election unless we make provisions to allow for interventions to occur if the council president is misbehaving in his office. Otherwise, as it is now, that is the most glaring problem that is associated with the

president being elected by the people. And that is a choice for each provincial government to make.

I have taken note of what you have said and what we can do is dependent on the request of provincial governments and we can also submit that option with the other option to the Cabinet to decide. Let me clarify it properly; the provincial government makes its recommendation from these two options. We have 22 provincial governments and 50 per cent of them will recommend the election of the president by the people and the other 50 per cent will recommend election by the ward members. Let us make that recommendation to the Cabinet as an option as per what the Governor of Manus has mentioned.

What each provincial government is recommending is an option that we can take but that is subject to NEC to decide based on financial resources that are entailed in terms of conducting elections. It's not just a simple issue of deciding what options to take but also being mindful of the resources that we have when we are conducting 330 different council presidents throughout the country.

SOEs Semi-Privatization

Mr SASINDRAN MUTHUVEL – Mr Acting Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister for State Enterprises. Being a former State-owned Enterprise Minister responsible for initiating SOE reforms and thereby securing US\$500 million from the Asian Development Bank, my questions are based on two important factors; merit-based appointments and bringing efficiency into the operations of the company.

(1) Where are we at our semi-privatization exercise as we know that the services of all our utility companies are deteriorating? The blackouts are unbearable and even traveling with Air Niugini is very challenging.

(2) Are we going to continue to give excuses as we try to avoid a 'Fire Sale?' This word I have heard since I became a member of parliament. So, by making this excuse we continue to experience deteriorating services and continuously fail to provide the much-needed service to our people.

Mr Acting Speaker, right now two of our 767 aircraft are undergoing heavy maintenance and we are currently leasing aircraft.

(3) Can we look at leasing another 767 or 787 as we have already ordered? Can we lease another 787 even if it is expensive so that we can give that reliability while also keeping in mind the safety aspects of traveling?

Mr Acting Speaker put yourself into the shoes of people who need to attend appointments, medical emergencies or bring dead bodies from abroad. How would you feel if you missed three consecutive flights keeping dead bodies of children or failing to keep appointments?

05/04

How do we address these blackout issues given the current challenges with Puma Energy supply which has released some statements talking about the Jacksons Airport Location Agreement?

They are terminating Air Niugini's fuel supply with Air Niugini and that termination will start on 15 May 2024. How is it going to affect our ability to supply fuel, especially aviation fuel to our airline?

Also, how are we strategizing to address that fuel supply to PNG Power, they have in fact reduced the credit terms. These are major challenges in front of us.

Mr Acting Speaker, the only solution is to partner with the industry experts and semi-private without fear of losing. What is the point of losing hundreds of millions of kinas every year? Rather the situation can change immediately to become a positive cash flow by semi-privatizing these utility companies. Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker

Mr Kerenga Kua – Very good question!

Mr WILLIAM DUMA – Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker, I want to thank the Governor of West New Britain for these very important questions.

The Governor knows what the issues are, having been a former Minister himself and I want to thank him for that. I also want to give him credit for signing the ADB-led SOE reformed program, which resulted in a significant amount of money being given to the Government of Papua New Guinea.

Mr Acting Speaker, the good governor has asked many good questions starting with 'how' about seven 'hows'. I want to request that he put those questions in writing and the people of our country deserve to know at least some answers from myself and this Government in listening to our important SOEs. And I ask that he put those questions in writing so I can respond in Parliament and perhaps make a ministerial statement.

But in a nutshell, I can give three examples of three companies that are struggling as all of us are aware. Starting with Air Niugini, with the approval of this Government, we have gone past the point of organizing or requesting financing to purchase 11 airplanes from Airbus. They are scheduled to arrive starting next year. Unfortunately, I cannot provide immediate solutions to the problems. But in the long term, we do see some solutions starting with the replacement of the very aging planes as we all know. F100s and F70s the aircraft manufacturing company has ceased producing them starting in 2019. Like all the airline companies we are looking at replacing them. In the case of us leasing 767s and 737s, it depends on the availability of those kind of planes in the aircraft market.

It is in fact a depressed market for leasing and sub-leasing of aircraft, we are looking at all the options and we are also looking at the cost factors. But we would prefer to lease 737s because we know that we will be purchasing two Dreamliners the 737s will join the fleet next year so our preference is to lease any available 737. But the current market is such that I can inform the Governor that there are no cheaper immediately available 737s compared to 767s, so those are the challenges that we are facing.

Eventually down the line, as we all know governments are not good at running businesses, we will follow that trend that we are seeing in other countries and we will go down the path of selling Air Niugini. But we intend to fix what we've got first. Instead of adopting the lazy way out and selling them.

The same situation is for PNG Power but in the case of PNG as you all know the Marape-Rosso Government has put its money where its mouth is and it has already allocated K211 million. That money has been released and most of that money has been used to order the equipment that has been identified by many experts that we have engaged. We have engaged about five experts to turn our country around and there is enough literature available for this company. Telling us what needs to be done, we know what needs to be done and it's only a matter of time together with the allocation of money from the Parliament which we now have.

06/04

I can now inform this Parliament that we have already spent K115 million ordering parts that are not here from overseas. We are also like other companies in this country experiencing Forex issues. Once we can get those parts, we will be able to fix all the aging infrastructures that PNG Power has.

In terms of the personnel that we have, I can inform this House that we have realized that our people are our worst enemies. We have entrusted and put them in positions of responsibility in that company, but unfortunately, they have disappointed us so we are now starting to look offshore to bring in experts that we need to turn around our very important company.

The days of appointing cronies and 'wantoks' to our SOEs are long gone. As the Governor alluded to, as part of the ADB-led reform program, we have farmed out the important aspect of recruitment to overseas-based consultants.

So those who want to apply to important posts like chairman, directors, and CEOs of our companies have to apply by email to the recruitment companies and they go through a process. What the Cabinet receives is a finely reformed product for the appointments of the important positions. We have changed those things around, and as the saying goes 'good things take time to come' and you will soon see the benefits of all the hard work that we are putting in now.

So, in the case of PNG Power, you will realize that the power to Port Moresby is fully energized. We now have power-generating sources from Edevu, Dirio, Niu Power, and our traditional source at Sirinumu. There is enough power.

What we need now is new infrastructure to replace the old transmission lines, transformers, and connecting systems with new, more competent, and committed people to help turn PNG Power around.

Once again, we now have the money, we know where the issues are, and soon we will not have any more issues. I did indicate before Christmas that by then, there would be no power blackouts in Lae and Port Moresby which eventuated.

So, we are quite determined to tick all the boxes that are required to be ticked and we will see that our SOEs then become companies that we will be proud of.

To conclude, in the case of the question of whether we should sell all our SOEs, it depends on timing. This country is not bankrupt and we will go down the path of selling our SOEs. We have options available where we can either use the issue of partial privatisation or look at the Singaporean model which was introduced by Lee Kuan Yew. He was there for a long time and was able to bring in experts from other countries to Singapore. He did not trust his people. When he brought in experts, he paid them well and made sure that they delivered what he proposed. If you look at Singapore, they have never sold a SOE. They are gold mines and continue to deliver for the people.

We have those choices and eventually, all of us will be asked to make those important decisions. These decisions will not be made by the government or myself as the Minister, they will be made by the leaders of this House. Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker.

Mr SAM BASIL JUNIOR – Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker, for recognising the people of Bulolo, this time on this side of the House. Before I start, I would like to wish you and our brothers on the other side a happy belated Valentine's Day. We must bring some love back to this House because yesterday it was very tense.

My question is directed to the Minister for Works and Highways. Before I do that, I would like to thank the Works Minister for visiting my district without my knowledge after I released my statement to the media about the Connect PNG program.

Mr Acting Speaker, yesterday we were taken through a very lengthy presentation by the Minister on the Connect PNG program. While it was music to the Governor's ears, for some of us, it reaffirmed our concerns and I hope the Minister can answer my questions now rather than later.

07/04

I will refer to page 12 of the Minister's statement yesterday –

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Honourable Member for Bulolo, may I interrupt you? If you are going to raise questions on the Minister's statement from yesterday, I will not allow that because it is yet to be debated.

Honourable Member, you can resume your seat. I will give you more clarification. It is now on the Notice Paper therefore you cannot raise questions about that.

Honourable Member, I will allow you if you wish to ask a different question.

Mr SAM BASIL JUNIOR – Yes, there are questions I have yet to ask.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Honourable Member, I will listen to the question and if the question is about what I said earlier I will make another ruling.

Mr SAM BASIL JUNIOR – Mr Acting Speaker, my questions are as follows;

(1) Can the Minister confirm how much of the K65 million has been dispersed and to which contractors?

(2) If there are backlogs in funding allocations –

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Honourable Member, those questions relate to the Minister's statement therefore, so I apologize but I will rule your questions out.

(Opposition Members interjecting!)

Mr SOLEN LOIFA – Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker, for recognizing the people of Menyamya --

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Honourable members, the Chair has recognised the Member for Menyamya.

Mr SOLEN LOIFA – Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker, for recognizing the people of Menyamya.

Before I ask my questions, on behalf of my people, I would like to convey our sincere condolences to the people of Madang and Usino-Bundi for losing their leader.

My question is directed to the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister and NEC delegated the investigation of the Puma Saga to the former Minister for Petroleum to address the problem with Puma Energy when we were having an energy crisis in our country –

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Honourable Member for Menyamya, sorry for interrupting you but I did not hear to whom you are directing your questions.

Puma Saga - Release Report Findings

Mr SOLEN LOIFA – My questions are directed to the Prime Minister.

We are still experiencing this energy crisis today so I would like to ask the following questions;

(1) Did the committee compile a report on the solution to this crisis?

(2) The Prime Minister funded the SOE committee so how much was allocated to the committee to find a solution to the energy crisis we are faced with?

(3) Has the committee conducted any investigations?

(4) If the committee has established some solutions, then can you inform the House?

Thank you.

Mr JAMES MARAPE – Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker. I appreciate the questions from Members for Menyamya.

The Puma issue has been ongoing for some time now and in pursuit of finding a permanent solution, based on the submission of the then Minister for Energy; Cabinet did approve K8 million for a team to ascertain exactly what the issues are behind the Puma saga.

I was advised that K2 million has been remitted but I am yet to receive a full report on that committee's work and now that the former Minister has left the government ranks, we have assembled the Chief Secretary and his team to get work. Since two weeks ago, they have been pulling in the Central Bank and I want to appreciate BSP and Kina Bank for their understanding because this is not normal times. Puma has been the dominant market supplier of petroleum products, especially in the precarious situation in which they are the only supplier to our airline industry. So, in that context, we have been trying our best to ramp up the investigation into what happened.

I would like to indicate to this country that I am somewhat dismayed that despite the K2 million paid to that committee, the report has not come forth as yet. K2 million may not seem big to some consultants but it is a large amount of money to do work especially when it is an everyday job for those who are paid for this.

I have tasked the National Authority, the Central Bank, and the Chief Secretary not to ask for more money to do what is your everyday job instead sit down, get to work and the team is working.

They have asked the Central Bank to give the report that gives the black spot on Puma if it is a black spot. I want to indicate to our country that the Central Bank has not yet come forth so all of us should know by now that the Central Bank works at arms-length away from the Treasury. Central Bank does not come under the control of the Executive Government, they are independent and that has been maintained by us thus far. But in the national interest, we have asked them what is the blackspot, the impropriety, the illegality of Puma's existence in our country and that report has been worked upon.

From the combined meeting that we have had with the Central Bank, Puma Chief Secretary, the National Energy Authority, myself, and the Treasury team, Puma does continue

to transact out of their operation which is based in Singapore and they have not shut down their operations. They transact in Singapore to supply their clients elsewhere in the Pacific including Papua New Guinea.

The Central Bank has been tasked to come back to us on the particular reasons they have cast a shadow over Puma and why BSP and other banks are hesitant to manage Puma's Operational Account.

08/04

The Central Bank is in the process of furnishing us with that report and we've been asked to bring it as soon as possible. It has now been almost three years in the making that we've been running around in a circle. As far as the Central Bank's conclusion is concerned, they've been asked to go to Singapore and elsewhere, where Puma is operating. If there is any impropriety, they will certainly correspond with banks elsewhere. This includes corresponding with reserve banks elsewhere to establish those improprieties. With that, I want to assure this House that the long-term solution has been looked upon so that we are not overly reliant on one dominant supplier and short-term measures are also being looked at.

I noted early today or in the last week or so there have been signals that they have reduced operations in the country. I want to also give assurance that we have not isolated Puma out completely, we are working with them so that supply can be maintained. I thank BSP for extending their account with them and I also thank the Central Bank for the swift intervention in the market to allow Kina Bank to continue holding a greater level of foreign exchange to ensure the fuel supply is supplied.

I want to give an indication to our country that Air Niugini under Kumul Consolidated Holdings is also looking at the alternate fuel supply. We are working on alternate solutions for our country for the medium-term and long-term going forward. Those that are supposed to do the job have received K2 million and I am waiting for the report to come into our office to indicate some progress on matters that they see fit to be progressed upon. Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker.

Mr Kerenga Kua – Point of Order! I just want to correct the Prime Minister, perhaps he is so busy that he forgets that we already tabled the final report when I was still a minister. By law, a state of emergency under this sort of situation can only be for 30 days. When the state of emergency was declared there was no funding. We immediately got to work and so

we had to use that energy authority administrative funds and we ran the emergency for 30 days.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Honourable Member, I will not allow you to make a statement using the point of order. Also, the Prime Minister has already summed up the answers to the question.

Mr Kerenga Kua – I could raise that at any point in time. What he said is that there is no final report given and I'm saying it was given! He also said funds were given and not properly accounted for and I'm trying to get to that too. So that is the point of order, clarity needs to be given because these sorts of situations cast innuendos on people. Not just on me but on the Chief Secretary, the Managing Director of National Energy Authority, and all the other good people -

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Honourable Member, I will interrupt you, I will not allow you to make a long statement on the point of order.

Mr JAMES DONALD – My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Works. The 'interesting' Minister.

(Laughter in the Chamber)

Mr JAMES DONALD – I just want to ask a specific question relating to his department and this is regarding the Telefomin road. Telefomin Road is always catching the catch and flowery of this country and there is one fact that everyone must know –

Mr Ereman Tobaining Junior – Point of Order! Mr Acting Speaker, I think he asked the same question during the last Parliament meeting and the Minister for Works explained that.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Honourable Member, thank you for raising your Point of Order but I will rule it out of order and I will let the Honourable Member continue.

Telefomin Road Funding

Mr JAMES DONALD – Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker. Telefomin road is a subject of interest for many of us and for me particularly in Western Province because it connects North Fly with the West Sepik Province.

09/04

Mr Minister, when I asked you a few questions in the recent or last sitting, you answered some questions but those questions were never fully disclosed. So, I did all my research and here I would like to present some information that you will have to explain to me, the host, Ok Tedi Mining, and the people of Western Province and Papua New Guinea.

Every time, Mr Acting Speaker, when the Minister presents to this House, he has never been informing the House where the funding comes from to fund the Telefomin road. He indicates in this House that the funding is coming from Connect PNG. The 5.6 per cent all the time but I want to inform this House and the people of North Fly and Western Province that the Telefomin road funding comes from the Ok Tedi Tax Credit Scheme, 100 per cent.

So, these are the questions that I would like to ask the Minister;

(1) Can the Minister confirm that there has never been any funding from 5.6 per cent of the Connect PNG that funds the Telefomin road? You always boast about Connect PNG funding Telefomin road forever when you should give credit to the people of Western Province for funding that road. You have never on record acknowledged that.

(2) Can the Minister confirm or deny that Telefomin Road was 100 per cent funded using the OTML Tax Credit Scheme and the contractor is Ipwenz? at the value of almost K236 million contract with K119.7 million paid so far and a balance of K116.7 million yet to pay? Why I make that statement because there are about five approved projects for people of Western Province sitting in a queue expecting the funding to come from the tax credit scheme, including the Daru town road of K68 million from the Minister for Livestock for the Daru town rehabilitation. Yet the Minister sees fit to sit there next to his Minister. So, the issue is there are many road contractors or projects in Western Province and yet no acknowledgment.

Mr Minister, would you agree with me and say that your Connect PNG program is not the Connect but the 'Conn Act' that you are conning the people of North Fly, Western Province? Instead, say that you are using the money from Connect PNG to fund the Telefomin road.

This confirms that you are lying. So, that's a question I want to raise to the Minister. He needs to state whether he confirms or denies that this is what he is doing.

Ok Tedi Mining has become a family mine and I say this because he pushed to place his brother from Telefomin as the current Managing Director.

Mr James Marape – Point of Order! The *Standing Order* makes it clear no imputations, no inferences, no assumptions. This Parliament is not a place where you bring people who cannot defend themselves into disrepute.

Mr Acting Speaker, you need to inform the Honourable Member on the other side to read his *Standing Orders*. You can have every right to ask your questions but no imputations, no inferences, not to bring any professional Papua New Guinean into disrepute.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Honourable Prime Minister, your Point of Order is in order. Honourable Member, I will ask you to refrain from mentioning professional people in your questions.

Mr JAMES DONALD – Mr Acting Speaker, I did not call the person's name. Anyway, I withdrew if he felt the pain. I was asking the Minister but this is true. Is the Ok Tedi Mine your own personal mine because his brother from Telefomin is managing it? That's what I'm trying to say.

Mr James Marape – Point of Order! The Honourable Member needs to refrain from using words such as 'family mine', or is it your personal mine. These were once inferences and imputations. You need to allow him to withdraw this statement from the *Hansard*. The Managing Director under question has been with Ok Tedi Mine for 30 years.

10/04

He extended the life of OK Tedi Mine by 20 years, he is a professional and he is the one who sealed the road from Kiunga to Tabubil. For the first time through the OK Tedi Tax Credit Scheme constructing the road from Tabubil. This is a state fund being utilized to support important projects for his people which they missed out on such services for so long.

Mr Acting Speaker, don't bring a professional Papua New Guinean into disrepute.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Prime Minister, your Point of Order is in order. Honourable Member for North Fly, please withdraw those inferences.

And from the Chair to you to withdraw the word ‘con program’, the statement you made against a national program carried out for the majority of the people to benefit from.

Mr JAMES DONALD – Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker, I withdrew the term ‘family business’. But let me inform you, Mr. Acting Speaker, the word ‘con’ is a dictionary word in case you don’t know. The word ‘con’ means persuading somebody to believe in something and that’s called ‘con’.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Honourable Member, this is from the Chair, the word ‘con’ from the dictionary is interpreted by people it is not right.

Mr SOLAN MIRISIM – Mr Acting Speaker, I thank my colleague Member and my neighbour for North Fly. He is always very pertinent, and interested and talks a lot about this portion of the road. However he didn’t realize that his thoughts were not right and as a leader, he should be supporting this program to connect Telefomin District with North Fly, which will contribute economically to this district.

He does not realise that 40 per cent of Telefomin’s working in Ok Tedi Mine contribute in terms of tax for him to get his royalties and other benefits. And also, his close associates stated that he has done nothing for his electorate.

Mr James Donald – Point of Order! Mr Acting Speaker, it would be proper for the learned Minister to simply answer the question.

(Laughter in the Chamber)

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Honourable Member, your Point of Order is in order to allow the Minister to answer your question.

Mr SOLAN MIRISIM – You asked four questions so allow me to give some background information before answering your questions. The road from Tabubil to

Telefomin almost 80 per cent will connect from Western Province, which is in his electorate of North Fly.

(Laughter in the Chamber)

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – This will be the last time to raise points of order.

Mr James Donald – It's very interesting because it seems he doesn't know the geography of his electorates. Almost 50 to 60 per cent is in Telefomin in West Sepik and that's what he is trying to do. So, it's not true, 80 per cent is not in Western Province.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Your point order is out of order.

Mr SOLAN MIRISIM – If it's hurting you then please sit down quietly and allow me to answer it.

(Laughter in the Chamber)

Mr SOLAN MIRISIM – There was no road access from one LLG to another and during my term as the Minister for Works and Highways, I constructed the road to this LLG to link with his electorate to give service to his people.

11/04

They are my people too but they voted for Mr James Donald by using this road but he did not appreciate me for that. So, as a leader from that area, Ok Tedi is in that mean area and Telefomin is regarded as the preferred area. You are from Hawin and Yongom, you cannot speak the language with them but I can.

(Laughter in the Chamber)

Mr SOLAN MIRISIM - I have my clan on this side and Telefomin too we speak the same language and have the same culture, we are the same people. So, I have delivered the road because they are my people in Telefomin. You should be really happy as a leader.

Mr Allan Bird – Point of Order! Whilst I appreciate the argument between the two members there is a growing culture that ministers and prime ministers will always say, I did it and I did deliver it. I think the basic question asked by the Member to the Minister is one of accountability and transparency.

So, can we confine the answer to the contract value, how much has been paid, was it properly tendered, who applied for the tender, and so on because these are public funds? That money does not belong to Western Province, West Sepik, or even Telefomin.

It is a tax credit fund. It comes out from the consolidated revenue and that fund belongs to the people of Papua New Guinea. So, let's get some transparency. Correction, please don't personalize and say it's yours or for the Prime Minister, the money belongs to the people of Papua New Guinea and it's not yours.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Honourable Governor, your Point of Order is in order. Honourable Minister, I think you have given enough background of your relationship between you and the Member so I would ask you to go straight to the question in relation to the funds. We know that both of you are from the same area so answer the question.

Mr SOLAN MIRISIM – Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker. Our brothers are feeling pain so I will answer the four questions. A 5.6 per cent of the Connect PNG was allocated for that road because it is part of the two missing links; Finschhafen to Lae and Tabubil to Telefomin and Connect PNG has supported that.

Also, Connect PNG is supported by the tax credit scheme for those areas that have resources like mine, oil, and gas. The tax credit fund is government money. Of the 2 per cent tax credit funds, 1 per cent goes to the project areas and the other 1 per cent goes to the country.

So, Connect PNG funds through tax credit from the Ok Tedi, two per cent is for the government. It is aligning with Connect PNG for funding the roads in Papua New Guinea and Tabubil to Telefomin Road is one of them. The Daru Road sealing is one of your five projects. Very soon you will receive your funds for Alispit to Indonesia road and others as well. So, one of the big funding from the tax credit scheme is road sealing that is currently undergoing from Kiunga to Tabubil. You should appreciate all this.

To answer your second question, the Ok Tedi has funded K236 million through the tax credit scheme and they have a record for that and I don't have a record of that fund in my

office here in Port Moresby. If you have a copy of the record, you must show it to me so that I can confirm that figure with the Ok Tedi, but I don't know how much they have paid to the contractor.

Thirdly, for the Ipwenz Construction, yes it was started during the former government and when the new government came in, they continued. So Ipwenz Construction was awarded the contract to start the road. You must know that our people of Telefomin and North Fly also are very happy with this road. If he questions this Ipwenz contractor, this road will not reach our people of Telefomin and North Fly. So, there are times that you must appreciate.

12/04

I am not aware of the K190 million but I will have to check before I get back to you. If you said you have paid, then I will have to check with Ok Tedi as they have their own systems as well as their own contracts.

In relation to Connect PNG, it is truly PNG and it is working. I believe we must give credit where it is due. Regarding your last question where you asked about awarding contracts to family

Mr ACTING SPEAKER - Honourable Minister, I will not allow you to answer that question, because there was a point of order raised and I asked the Member to withdraw that question.

Mr SOLAN MIRISIM - Thank you, now we will always expect those questions regarding Connect PNG but all in all we must be happy and appreciate that roads are being built to connect our people.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER - Question Time has lapsed. Governor of Oro, I apologize, I will recognize you after the Prime Minister, has to reply to questions raised in the last Meeting.

ANSWERS TO PREVIOUS QUESTIONS

Mr JAMES MARAPE - I ask leave to reply to a question asked by the Governor of East Sepik on employment data.

Leave granted.

Mr Acting Speaker, two sessions ago the Governor of East Sepik did ask some good questions on the employment figures and, in that question, I did give full assurance that I would reply on the actual people behind the desks from 8 a.m. - 4.06 p.m., or from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. in his definition of employment.

I did point out that on this side of the House, our definition of employment is fundamentally different, deeper, and fuller. We don't look at employment in the context of a paid job sitting behind a desk. As far as employment goes, we look more so into people's empowerment, where they are engaged in economic activities. Nonetheless, he wanted me to define employment from his context and that is actual day job or night job per person earning salary. We are also in the business of growing employment. The six big LNG and mining projects that we have coming on board as well as our focus on agriculture.

Our focus on other sectors of the economy will broaden space. I want to give the number as in my reply that time I asked him and this House to put a hand on 2018-2023 numbers. It is my distinguished pleasure to give some number if it is of any help to the leader who asked this question and to all of us.

In 2018, our agriculture, forestry, and fisheries sector employment - and this data comes from IRC and not from James Marape's electoral office. IRC has these numbers and any of you are most welcome to go and pick them up from IRC because these emanate straight from those who pay personal income tax.

In the agriculture, forestry, and fisheries sectors in 2018 we had 54, 008 employees in that sector, 2019 we had 55,673, in 2020 we had 29,084, and we all can understand the impact of COVID-19 that caused that huge decline. One year on after that there was a rebound in that sector to 64,357 and in 2022 a massive double-up figure of 138,728; the biggest ever expansion in our nation's history in these sectors.

That confirms the Treasurer's assertion that the non-resource sector GDP has been posing a 4 per cent plus rise consistently for the last three years. Put your fingers on these numbers if you think I am lying. I do not lie unnecessarily, I don't lie. Go down to IRC, some at the back are known to spew continuous lies to our people.

Mr Acting Speaker, in the mining, quarry, and petroleum sector we have had 12, 657 in 2018, 15,809 in 2019, 14,519 in 2020 and 12,591 in 2021, 13, 418 in 2022 and 9, 268 in

2023. There is a slight decline in this one but it will rebound again very soon when we have the other projects coming on board.

13/04

In the manufacturing sector, we had 15,449 in 2018. The reference point to 2018 to Papua New Guinea is simple, that's under the previous administration. We cross over to 2019. In 2019 we had 30,871 who were paying tax. In 2020, 18,734 were paying taxes. You ask me why in 2020, even in COVID-19 you have this number seemingly increase, our government subsidized local production in the food space with COVID-19-induced global market shrinking with it subsidized a little bit in the food sector. I want to also indicate in 2021 it went to 22,982, in 2022 in the manufacturing sector there were 175,568 paying taxes to IRC. In 2023, 178,706 were paying taxes. If you look at this, in 2018 there were 15 449 paying taxes compared to last year 178 706 paid their taxes, which is a very big jump in the non-resource sector of our GDP.

I could run the electricity, gas, and water supply, there is a big increase in the figure there. I will circulate this table to all members of parliament so that we for once speak with facts. Instead of making assumptions or accessions, think that you know better than the rest of us. This is our country; we are equally concerned about our people. We work in this sector also.

I want to also point out in the overall figure if I could give in the interest of time, Mr Acting Speaker, to respect your Chair. All in all, in the quantum overall, in 2018 there were 453, 222 people in the private sector in employment. This does not include the government sector; I want to announce to the country, one of the obligations we have to you is to cartel no expansion in the public sector recurrent. We don't want to increase the public sector employee space except for police, health workers, teachers, and the magisterial services who will see some increase. But the rest we are putting a stop to.

But in the private sector employment space in 2018, there were 453,222, in 2019, 484,811 in 2023 in all sectors we have 547,839. The evidence of an increase in employment numbers. But I want to inform this House, that this is not substantial. This is not massive, if it took us 44 years until 2018 to only create 453,222 jobs for every citizen then needless for us to blame anyone. All of us must work together to create a bigger space and broader economy, it all comes to prudence, strong hands, and managing the economy. You can say you can run the economy but it takes a real man, a real team to run the economy in tough times.

We've run it in the last four years and came out in the tough years. We know where our goal post is we're moving to prosperity for our country. Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

Mr DON POLYE (Kandep – Minister for Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology and Sports) – Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker. I have a matter of public importance and I would like to seek leave of the Chair to do a personal explanation in regards to a *Post-Courier* report by Melin Baroi dated 1st of February, 2024.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Leave granted.

Mr DON POLYE – Mr Acting Speaker, the news report insinuated that I was one of the ministers who authorized a fraudulent payment to a named law firm. My political rivals and those that a naïve in mindset have capitalized on it to tarnish my good reputation and good character.

However, I forgive all those who misunderstood me regarding the false rumors that have been circulated on social media, the cunning insinuations that I have seen, and the deceptive computer animations that have culminated in criminalizing or demoralizing both the Prime Minister and myself.

14/04

I urge those who are blind and don't see things clearly to acknowledge the following truths or factuality.

Mr Acting Speaker, the first is that a named law firm allegedly and fraudulently paid is a matter before the court and therefore it is a sub-judicial matter. But I see it so freely discussed by Papua New Guineans, even by members of this honourable House through social media and everywhere. The matter is under judicial consideration and therefore prohibited from public discussion anywhere else. The court is the competent place to discuss and establish the truth.

I therefore asked that the freedom of speech and use and the aidance of social media be not abused, corrupted, or misapplied without responsibility like I have seen happen very

recently in the period of the Vote of No Confidence. I have seen it getting heavier, thicker, and hotter but only to maliciously deface my good character and reputation and I asked that people refrain from doing that because the matter is before the court. I am not one of those parties and I am irrelevant in this case.

Secondly, I have been a Member of Kandep Open for the last two decades. This term of Parliament is my candid fifth term as the Member for Kandep, and I am proudly doing my job as a member of my other colleagues on the Floor of Parliament.

Since I was elected in 2002 up to the present, I don't have a taint or dot in my career. I am saying that humbly but I also have some pride because I don't have a taint or dot. Before entering politics in 2002, I had a clean record as a humble civil engineer, public servant, consultant in the private sector, and law-abiding citizen. I am a law-abiding citizen and an authority-respecting citizen also irrespective of whatever position I hold in public office.

Whatever I hold in public office is important but what is more important to me is my reputation and my character because the office does not make me good, I have to be good within myself to make the office good and lift the standard high.

So, I would like to urge those who understand the truth to be responsible. I have not abused the office that I have been responsible for in any capacity. I have been in various governments and I have never mismanaged the people's money, or misused taxpayers' funds within my electorate or anywhere else that I was responsible for.

So please do not criminalize or accuse me for only want of political experience. It is not good and not the right way. Do not try to destroy a good man to gratify yourself. That is not the way to do things. Let us be normal and simple. Whatever you are looking for will come if you are normal and simple.

Look at the evidence. I am not in there.

Mr Belden Namah – Point of Order! Mr Acting Speaker, the Minister for Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology and Sports has rightfully said that the matter is sub-judice. That explanation can be reserved when the matter is before the court because he will be answerable to the court and not here. The Parliament is not a courthouse. He should reserve that so when it's his time to appear before the court, he can explain to the court.

Thank you.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Honourable Member, your Point of Order is in order. I will allow the honourable Minister to continue because I have seen from his explanation that he is trying to inform the public of how the use of social media and other media streams is tarnishing individual members' reputations.

But to explain himself on the wrongful allegations is a matter before the court. Honourable Minister, refrain from doing so, however you can inform the country of how the use of social media is affecting us all.

Your explanation can be on behalf of all members of the House so that the people out there must be careful not to tarnish the names of honourable leaders of this House.

15/04

Mr DON POLYE – Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker. like I said, I am not going to Court and I am not a party to it but people are calling my name so I am talking about that.

Finally, I want to say that I saw Mr James Marape's name come up in a decision that the National Court made where it cleared him but I still see people continue to tarnish people in those cases.

That is the truth.

Mr Kerenga Kua – Point of Order! Mr Acting Speaker, that is not a fact. The Minister is misleading the House so he should withdraw that last paragraph.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Honourable Member, your Point of Order is in order. Honourable Minister, I have ruled earlier that I want you to refrain from certain matters which I have made reference to earlier.

Mr DON POLYE – Mr Acting Speaker, I will conclude now. I just urge that let us not spread false rumors just for some political gain. What I am saying is that some of us are not in that, we are not in Court, and we are completely irrelevant to all these assumptions you are making. So, please do not use social media for politics because you want to spoil somebody. Some of us love our reputation and love to build our character to remain there so please do not destroy us when we do not deserve to be destroyed.

Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker.

GRIEVANCE DEBATE

Question proposed –

That grievances be noted.

Mr GARRY JUFFA (Northern) – Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker. I have three particular subjects that I would like to talk about today.

Taxation

Firstly, on the issue of taxation, secondly, on the issue of elections and lastly, on the issue of transnational crimes especially on the rise in the importation, production, and distribution of illicit drugs.

Firstly, Mr Acting Speaker, my concerns about a recent decision made to do away with the dependent rebates, I believe that this has been placed on hold by the IRC as it appears on their website that they have placed this decision on hold, which is commendable.

However, I believe that there are organizations that are already implementing this decision to stop employees from claiming their dependent tax rebates. This is causing a significant amount of misery to a segment of our population; those who are making an effort to at least claim these rebates and get some relief from the rising cost of goods and services that we are all facing.

So, I would like to urge the Government to seriously consider reversing this decision and allow the taxpayers to claim dependent rebates which are about K200 to K300 per fortnight for many of them. Whilst that might not be an amount of money that is not significant to us here in the higher income bracket, it is significant to those who have to forgo that amount of money every fortnight.

Mr Douglas Tomuriesa – Point of Order! I think that there was something put in the newspapers that this rebate is K64 so can the good Governor relook at that and correct himself that it is K64 and not K200 or K300?

Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Honourable Opposition Leader, your Point of Order is in order but I think that the Honourable Governor is making his debate upon what information he has researched so I will allow him to present his findings to this House.

Mr GARRY JUFFA-- Mr Acting Speaker, it depends on how much is being earned by the taxpayer so it is not specifically K64 although I am glad to see that the Opposition Leader is keeping himself informed on tax laws in our country; that is good, do more studies on that.

16/04

So, we must do away with that because we cannot cause misery to our people. We have put the threshold for taxpayers up to over K20,000.00 and that's great but then we have removed the rebates which is not so great. This will not only cause misery but causes concern out there. So let us also clarify that and if it is already happening, then inform the companies, and the government departments that are doing it to immediately stop.

Also, in October 2015 after two years of work, almost a hundred submissions were made by stakeholders that the tax review committee had tabled in its report to the government with 91 recommendations. I think the government at that time had sanctioned that report and paid the tax review committee to carry out its work but the report remains yet to be attended to. I would urge our government to do this immediately. This will provide some tax relief to legitimate taxpayers.

On a side note, I'd like us to consider going after those taxpayers who are not paying their taxes. There are quite a number of them operating in the fishing industry, logging, and various other industries in this country. We are not vigorously pursuing this bad taxpayer. What we are doing is hammering those who are already paying the taxes and we have to stop this. We have to make a conservative effort to look at what is called the Black Economy, and Mr Acting Speaker, I remember that this government and the previous government and the governments before them had spoken on many occasions about attending to what is known as the Black Economy, but no one has made an effort to do anything about this. The Black Economy is a significant chunk of our economy which is operating in this country as free riders and is not paying their taxes. We are allowing them to do as they please and they are investing and thriving and growing their businesses and even funneling their funds offshore.

Nothing has been done with these bad tax payers but we keep on hammering those who are making the effort to pay taxes. So, this government needs to make a significant effort to take the bull by the horns and tackle this segment of our tax-paying population who are avoiding taxes in this country.

They can start by taking a look at the recommendations made by the tax review committee. In those recommendations, I believe there were some suggestions of lowering the tax rates which are the highest in the region. The tax rates that are imposed on our taxpayers are very high; company tax, withholding tax, and income tax. We pay the highest taxes in the region and yet we are supposed to be an extremely wealthy country, if you look at our resources. That is on the subject of taxation.

Local-level government elections

On the subject of LLG elections, I differ from the views of my colleague governor and I respect his views but for us in Oro Province, the Assembly, the PEC, and the people, we consulted they opted for council presidents to be voted in by their people rather than by their counselors. We prefer that option and I believe that at the last Governors conference in Morobe, it was decided that provinces should decide, whether they want to opt for allowing counselors to vote for council presidents, or whether the people should vote for council presidents.

Some provinces would prefer that councilors should vote for the council presidents and that is fine, they have reasons that are peculiar to them and we appreciate and respect that. But those of us who feel that the people opt to vote their council presidents ought to be given that opportunity as well and we should not consider the cost. I understand the Minister's concerns about that and he has valid concerns but if we have a government for the people, of the people, and by the people, we should listen to the people. In this instance, if a people in a particular province for instance Oro Province decide that they would like to elect their council presidents, then we should allow for that.

Illicit drugs

In regards to my final subject, has to do with trends in social crimes but in particular the rise of what we would call hard drugs. Drugs such as heroin, cocaine, OPM, methadone, methamphetamines, fontanels, and a frightening new drug that is emerging in Western countries called tranq, or animal tranquilizer.

17/04

Animal tranquilizer is very cheap and very addictive and it is finding its way into the Pacific. It's already here on the streets of Port Moresby. There have been instances where policemen and public servants have been caught using these hard drugs. This is a frightening development.

When I was a law enforcement officer, we were combatting the rise of transnational crimes. We started to see the emergence of transnational criminal cartels. Papua New Guinea was just a transit point.

Today Papua New Guinea is also a production point. This is frightening. In the past, what we observed were cartels flying in what they call 'cooks', to cook the drugs in the country before exporting them on log ships, yachts, and other small crafts. Now they have their cooks trained here to do that and they're operating here and they're thriving. And then the illegal farms are then converted into legitimate monies. They're buying properties, developing gated communities, and running legitimate businesses like restaurants. You'd be surprised but this is already happening here.

Now if this cheap drug hits the streets and it's accessible to a youth, a growing youth bulge who are restless, and unoccupied, and if we don't do anything about them, they will become a serious concern for us. If these drugs become accessible to them, we will have serious problems. I remember as Director for Intelligence I wrote many assessments to the Government of the day about this emerging problem. This was in 2008 we started to see what was happening. It's happening now. I feel that we need to take serious stock of the situation and address it with the severity that it needs.

The recommendation I would like to make out of this is that the police need to be empowered to develop the capacity that it needs to address this growing issue. We established what we called the Transnational Crimes Investigation Unit in 2006. It was established by the Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary, the Papua New Guinea Customs, and the Australian Federal Police. That organization has been left to deteriorate to a point where it is no longer functioning.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Honourable Governor, your 10 minutes of debate has lapsed.

Mr ALLAN BIRD (East Sepik) – Thank you for that clarification. Mr Acting Speaker, I just want to say how thankful I am that one question I asked the Prime Minister made him uncomfortable. I think we are too comfortable in this House. We've been comfortable for a long time and our people are feeling the impact of our lackadaisical comfort. And this is one of the reasons why I wanted to come here to this side because inside the Government you

can't talk like this. And I feel so sorry for my brother, the Governor of Northern because I sat with him for five years while he complained and he's still complaining. And here's the thing.

Mr James Marape -- Point of Order! I appreciate the Provincial Member is feeling sorry for the Member on the other side but needless to feel sorry for another leader, we are all equals and he should know he is the last person to rebut that. On this side we don't encourage debate and conversations, Mr Acting Speaker.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Honourable Provincial Member, I will ask you to continue and take note of what the Prime Minister has said.

Mr ALLAN BIRD – It seems to be an interjection of no effect again but anyway; we are doing many no-effect interjections on the floor. In any case, you see, I hear a lot of ministers lament the fact, why aren't we like Singapore? Well, there's a simple reason and the reason is we don't report on the same things that Singapore does. We don't report on job statistics on the floor.

This is the first time in six years I've been a member of Parliament that a Prime Minister has reported job statistics. Do we wonder why we don't perform? The interesting thing is, the numbers that you were applauding, and I'm going to double-check these figures with the Employers Federation after this because that's the job of a responsible Opposition. We have to keep you in check, you know why?

Mr Acting Speaker, that side of the House is going to spend more than K26 billion of public funds this year.

18/04

If the front bench of the government can spend that much amount of money in the name of our people, it makes it our job that they account for every single toea they spend. That is our job, but more than that if you want to be like Singapore then you have to bring reports to the Floor like Singapore.

Mr Saki Soloma – Point of Order! The Honourable Governor is making a good speech but if the money comes it will also be used by the Opposition, so can he correct that statement, please? Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker.

Mr ALLAN BIRD – Mr Acting Speaker, if he listened carefully, I said K26 billion because the total balance is K27 billion and we might only use K1 billion for our people and the rest will be with them. I can bring –

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Honourable Governor, please resume your seat. It is the Chair who will make the ruling on the point of order and not you to make the ruling. Honourable Governor, you have six minutes left so I will ask you to take note of what the Member has said and you may continue.

Mr ALLAN BIRD – They felt the pain so they are continuously interjecting. But in any case, from the numbers we received only 100,000 jobs were created in the last five years. It was just an overview of what the Prime Minister has provided.

(Mr James Marape interjecting!)

Mr ALLAN BIRD - Later you can provide the report and we can talk, but the point is, Mr Acting Speaker, the People of Papua New Guinea want to know what we are doing with their money. If we are creating jobs, then where are they?

For instance, I saw the forestry job numbers go up but I know for a fact that we increased taxes on logging by 70 per cent. I know because I sat on that side of the House and we did that and I know that a lot of forestry companies have shut down. I'm a bit skeptical about some of these numbers but anyway, we will verify them next week. The point is if we want to be like Singapore, we should adopt some of the Singaporean practices.

For instance, we should have a very strong front bench, and that front bench should be performing and reporting not just on the Floor for the benefit of the Opposition, but for the benefit of the people of Papua New Guinea. If you are going to be spending significant funds and say that we did this for the people of Papua New Guinea, don't just come and report on roads and bridges and things like that which we all welcome but report also on the growth in the economy and the inflation numbers. Come and explain here so that the people of Papua New Guinea will understand why they are feeling the pain. They want to know and that is where we are failing.

There is no dashboard report that the government can come and present in this House that shows how the country is performing. We don't have a dashboard report. Mr Acting

Speaker, and why shouldn't we? This is the modern world and we should have things like that. We like to be like Rwanda and we talk about it, we want to be like Singapore, well, when are we going to adopt the practices that make these countries the way they are rather than just talking? Because again, the energy for the development of this country is directed by the front bench of the government.

The 38 ministers determine where this country goes, the rest of us whether you like it or not are given K10 - 20 million and told to keep quiet and go back and work at our districts and don't come and complain here. Do not talk about the government's large amount of money, it belongs to the government. That is our current cultural practice.

So should anyone be surprised that we are not like Singapore we wish to be like them, but we are not. I'm not surprised! I'm not surprised because our very practices are cargo cultist. The people of East Sepik should agree because the K340 million that I received and gave is rightfully theirs. We tend to forget that one vote that made someone become Prime Minister. So, what we gave rightfully belongs to the people of East Sepik because we worked for it.

19/04

We tend to have short memories and we have the 'this is mine and I am the owner' attitude Hold on a minute! Consolidated revenue fund belongs to every single Papua New Guinean, they are entitled.

This is what's wrong with our country because when we have the mandate, we continue to say, 'I built that classroom', no! You built it with Papua New Guinea's money, not with your private money. You are just a custodian; you don't act as the owner. We need a change in the thinking of the leaders of this country where we think, I become the father so I will look after all of you, no! You are not a father; you are just a custodian.

We continue to think like that and I wonder why our country is all over the place. We wonder why there is no investor confidence because they see how we perform, our lack of reporting, and a dashboard where investors can gauge and see whether Papua New Guinea is an investment destination or not.

If I come and invest 10 billion dollars, will I be able to take my profits out or not? If they are going to lock up all the foreign exchange, and there is a backlog of foreign exchange orders, how do I get my profits out? Maybe, I shouldn't bring my 10 billion dollars and invest in this country. Maybe I should take it to another country.

These are the things that we discuss in the government *WhatsApp* and nothing happens. We are going to have a grievance debate today and many good ideas are going to come from the Members of this Honourable House.

I don't see anyone taking notes. I don't see anyone coming back and saying to the relevant Ministers, well this is the concern of Member and for such and such. Can we go and do something so that later we can come and inform the Member that yes, the government takes note and we are implementing some actions towards resolving the concerns of the Member for such and such? We haven't seen that. I'm not saying it is the fault of the current government, I'm just saying that it's a cultural problem that we need to fix if we want our country and its people to raise their standards and do better.

If we want them to come and start working so that we will tax them and then use their tax to help them then perhaps, the standard needs to rise right here. Perhaps, the standard should be that but first of all, let's follow the law. If we pass a law in this House, then we should be the last people to break it, like some of the questions we asked during the week.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Honourable Provincial Member of East Sepik, your 10-minute debate time has lapsed. Honourable Members, I'd like to interrupt the Parliament to make a small explanation to the House. Honourable members, resume your seats, please.

As of today, the Chair will recognise the provincial Governors as Provincial Members. As per the National Gazette, all governors-elect were recorded as the Provincial Members. Only for the National Capital District, we will be addressed as Governors, and for the Autonomous Region of Bougainville, we will be addressed as Regional Members for Bougainville. All the Provincial Members must be addressed as Provincial Members of their respective provinces.

Mr WAKE GOI (Jimi) – Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker. I hope to share some of my thoughts. I thank all of you for being present here so that we stay together and share our views. In my personal view, I think that we should revisit the number of populations in each ward. I am aware that most of the newly created wards don't have many populations. When a ward is divided into two or three, each new ward holds a population of 200 to 300 population each or so.

Maybe, I don't know, but wards with 2000 to 3000 population were divided. I believe that when we want to develop a new LLG, it will be checked and it will be very important so

I just want us to know. I am not sure of most of the processes but with the few that I am aware of, we have been trying to get it done but we got sucked up along the way at the provincial level and it didn't go down to LLGs and wards so I am sharing this.

I don't think there is a need for a common roll for LLG elections. We just had the national general election recently and the common roll was updated already. It is not necessary to update again. A lot of mess has been created and many resources have been wasted. Those same public servants who took part in the general election should conduct the council election in each ward in our electorates would be fine. If we spend money in that way will help us.

For the council, we should come up with some election eligibility criteria or policies for instance, those councilors who serve for more than two to three terms can be qualified to contest for the LLG president post.

20/04

Put such things in place so that we can follow and make some improvements. We must put in some kind of competitive and strong measures to ensure we have good people representing our people in the wards. We may ask for candidates to be qualified to a certain educational level and be of good character and sober habits.

This is because we now have a lot of educated people who drop out of grades 8, 10, 12, and even tertiary institutions who are in the wards and they will all be wanting to nominate. If we set some standards and qualifications, we may empower good candidates to nominate for LLG elections. This way we also encourage to have good councilors who will represent their wards on behalf of their people.

I believe we should also try to improve on our voting system as it is not the first time, we are going to conduct the LLG elections so we should try to improve on our voting systems to assist our council elections as well. If we are not ready to make improvements during our council elections, we should try some improved ways to ensure our other elections run smoothly.

We have the systems in place, we have just not grasped it or we are not using them to the full capacity as we should. Let us try and improve some of these systems like the biometric system and others during bi-elections or in small contexts so we have space for improvement where necessary.

Of our systems, we must improve from the bottom up or top down so to achieve better systems and better ways of doing things going into the future.

Mr BELDEN NAMA (Vanimo-Green) – Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker, I wish to take this opportunity to debate an issue of importance and this is in relation to the security of our country. The law-and-order situation in our country especially the manning of the border posts in our country.

I have debated so much on this issue in Parliament but successive governments have not taken this issue seriously, especially the border posts and law and order in the country. There have been inaction and irresponsibility by the governments.

Firstly, I want to debate the issue of the border posts in Western Province and West Sepik province. I want the Ministers for Defence, Internal Security, and the Prime Minister to take note of some of the very important points that I will be raising. In Vanimo especially at the Wutung Border, our soldiers are becoming immigration and quarantine officers checking our people who move about this border area. It is not the duty of a soldier to do that. I received a report of one person from my electorate who wanted to bring his gold to trade in Indonesia but this gold was seized by soldiers. This gold was worth about K400,000. To date, nothing has been done and the owner of the gold has not received any word or even the gold from the soldiers.

This is very serious and I want to say here that a soldier's job on the border is to patrol the border between West Sepik and Western Province, along the border between Indonesia and Papua New Guinea not become immigration and quarantine officers. The border post at Wutung must be removed.

Soldiers must be mobile and seen to be patrolling the borders. There is a lot of illegal trade and transnational crime.

21/04

A lot of people are coming into our country illegally because our borders are not properly manned. Probably because our soldiers and the police doing their jobs on the border are not properly funded by the Government. We have compromised the security of our nation. This is a very serious issue.

We are not a country, if we do not give prominence to the security of our nation. And then I'm seeing some posts on social media, of soldiers performing duties up in the highlands

standing and walking around those so-called warlords who are also armed. Where are we heading to? Where is our country heading to? I'm seeing also posts of soldiers having affairs with women and taking shots with a woman holding a gun. We need serious attention. There is a total breakdown in discipline in our forces.

Mr Acting Speaker, the Defence Force cannot be run by an acting commander for such a long time. What has happened to the suspension of the Commander of the Defence Force, where is the report on the Kupiano incident? There was a training that went wrong, there was an investigation conducted or a general inquiry that was conducted, but it has not been tabled on the Floor of Parliament and the Commander is still under suspension. Any Army in any country in the world cannot be run by an acting Commander for that long. There must be a permanent Commander, if you allow that, there will be a breakdown in discipline.

I want to know when the Government is going to table the report on the Kupiano incident and when the issue of the suspension of the Commander is going to be addressed. And when the black Wednesday happened, we suspended three prominent government officers including the Police Commissioner but within 14 days the Commissioner was reinstated. Two issues; firstly, two people died in a training that went wrong and secondly, 20 people died during the mayhem in the city. And then we reinstated the Police Commissioner, that fast! Is there some business that's going on in the leadership in the country?

Mr James Marape – Point of Order! With respect to the Member of Vanimo-Green, a good statement but its assertion of biasness. *Hansard* should remove this one.

In every matter, there are case merits of every matter and this Parliament has not yet been presented with facts on the general board of inquiry into the Defence matter. In fact, it has been concluded as we speak.

But on the Police Commissioner's matter, let it be on *Hansard*, that he was on leave, the Acting Commissioner at that time is still suspended as we speak. So, I just want to correct that. The Acting Commissioner at that time was acting when the ugly events of January 10 happened and is still on suspension as we speak. The investigation ascertained that the Commissioner was out of office, which is why he was restored in 14 days. I will make an announcement on this in due course but I just thought as a point of order let's not make biased statements in the public space, our people are watching, and we speak on matters of substance without making inferences and accessions.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Prime Minister, your Point of Order is in order, I'll ask the Member to continue.

Mr BELDEN NAMAHA – Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker. What I'm basically saying is that you have on one hand a commander that has been suspended for too long. We cannot allow a Defense Force in any country to be run by an acting Commander. On the other hand, we have a police commissioner who was suspended and in no time, he was reinstated. What is the practice?

22/04

In the Defence Force, the department is supposed to be a support element, but the Defence Force Department has grown into a white elephant. No wonder soldiers are experiencing a shortage of food supply in their messes and they have no uniforms to wear because the money is spent on the Department of Defence which has become a white elephant.

Soldiers have laid complaints of misappropriation, irregularities, and corruption within the Department of Defence against the Department and Secretary of Defence and nothing has been done yet. The complaints were laid last year and nothing has been done yet.

This is an important security element. This is the last line of defense of our country. We cannot allow the Department of Defence to grow more than the Defence Force itself, the uniform personnel. The Secretary cannot encroach into the command and control of the uniform personnel because they come under the command and control of the Commander of the Defence Force.

The same applies to the Police Force. While I am talking about the Police Force, the investigation team that was involved in an investigation of one of our members of Parliament has been disbanded and most of them have been suspended, for what? Are you telling me that we are already encroaching into the systems of government and politics is interfering with the systems of government?

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Honourable Member, your time for debate has lapsed.

Mr SASINDRAN MUTHUVEL (West New Britain) – Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker. Before I proceed with my Grievance Debate, on behalf of my people of West New Britain

Province, I extend my sincere condolences to the family and people of Madang, especially the people of Usino-Bundi for the untimely demise of our late Honourable Minister, Mr Jimmy Uguro.

Mr Acting Speaker, thank you for recognising me. I want to talk about the amendment to the *Constitution* of Papua New Guinea to declare that PNG is a Christian country and we have adopted Christian values and principles.

I congratulate the Attorney-General for passing this important bill as well as the other amendment to the bill of our court systems to give clear separation as National, Appeal, and Supreme Court.

Mr Acting Speaker, in regard to religion, I was born as a Hindu. It doesn't mean that I chose that, I was born into a family of Hindus so I followed that. Religion is like rivers that flow into one sea. The rivers are pulling us to the same destination which is God.

God does not require our recognition to exist. If you ask me if religion is important, yes of course it is. It gives us guiding principles for our people.

Yesterday, I was reluctant to support the decision of the Catholic Diocese so I checked in with Bishop Aruam and he said that the decision was made by professionals. But then I realize that an overwhelming 96 per cent of our people support this according to the CLRC report.

23/04

If it is the wish of our people, then we are here to express their wish and not for us to come here and give our personal opinion as to what is best so as long as our people can follow these Christian values and principles and if we honestly say that we are following these values and principles, I do not think we would have behaved the way we did yesterday in this Honourable House.

Mr Acting Speaker, it is not about how many verses in the Bible you know but it is what you can follow. Even if you follow only one verse in the Bible then you are a true Christian. But I see many people just come and quote the Bible scriptures whether the quote really exists, I do not know.

Mr Acting Speaker, that is the truth! They come and preach and everybody thinks that it is true and they will believe you. Even during the elections, they will use the Lord's name to convince people to win votes. This is where we are taking advantage of the minds of our innocent people.

Mr Acting Speaker, as I said earlier, religion is not a choice, maybe until after 18 years when you learn about it, you can decide but when we are born, whichever church our parents worship in, we will just follow them. The good Lord knows what is best for you. If you are born in this part of the world then you worship whatever it is as long as you can follow your religion faithfully because we will all reach the same destination where we believe that there is only one creator. There cannot be one creator, there cannot be more than one God so as long as everyone follows faithfully.

Mr Acting Speaker, today many people are dying in the name of religion. The good Lord didn't tell us to fight in the name of religion, he didn't say that one religion is better than the other so if you do not abide, they have the right to kill you but we are all created equally. If you get a cut and it bleeds it will be the colour red, my cut will also be the same colour red, or will it be blue? If you cry and your tears taste salty, my tears too will be salty?

Mr Acting Speaker, for me religion is simple, doing good is my religion so if I do good, I feel good and if I do bad then I feel bad; it is as simple as that. we cannot take advantage of the innocent minds of people in the name of religion but help them with a guiding light, yes, every religion is important and PNG has the majority as Christian followers, it is great. Even if people want to follow one principle of Christianity, then this country will be changed in terms of attitude.

Mr Acting Speaker, being born as a human being itself is a blessing. But, when we are born as a human being there are four sins we are born with, our senses are imperfect, we are sure to make mistakes, we are sure to become illusion and we have a propensity or a tendency to cheat, this is unavoidable, when you are born as a human being no one is perfect.

Mr Acting Speaker, the British ruled India for more than 300 years and they wanted to convert all these billion people to their religion but they never succeeded and of course, the population from the other churches is substantial and existent. Before the churches came there were already systems in place just like here in PNG, of course, churches united us together because we were divided into many tribes, and clans so when Christianity came it allowed us to unite these 800 tribes, clans, and different language people.

Now, if I was to strictly follow my religion, my religion has four principles;

- (1) No eating meat, do not kill animals and eat,
- (2) No alcohol or no intoxicants,
- (3) No illicit sex, no sex outside of the marriage and
- (4) No gambling

24/03

That's what the church is saying, but also other principles state; do not eat certain meat which some may follow while others may not. This means that principles are available and it is up to us whether to follow the traditional principles that are set up by our ancestors or not. We have a lot of religion but spirituality is one.

Mr Acting Speaker, my time is almost up but I just want to tell a short story to conclude my debate. Once there lived a pastor who was very religious and very close to God. One time the huge dam near his village collapsed and the water flooded the place.

For his rescue, some people told him to get on their truck, but he refused and said I am a man of God and he will come and rescue me, so they left. The water flooded his place and the pastor was floating in his house a banana boat came by and offered to rescue him but he refused and sent them away saying, he was waiting for God to rescue him.

Finally, the water covered the house and he went up to the roof where a helicopter came by and tried to rescue him but again, he refused and waited for God to come and rescue him. Unfortunately, the water level rose and the pastor drowned and died. Just because he was a good believer, he was able to go to Heaven.

In Heaven, the Lord was receiving the people and when the pastor's turn came, he was so mad, and told the Lord, I was so faithful in honoring and praising you and you didn't come for my aid. There the Lord told the pastor; I have sent people to rescue you three times. I sent the car, the boat, and the helicopter but you refused.

Mr Acting Speaker, the message is that the Lord is in the hearts of every one of us sitting here and there. It's not like he will come in person to rescue us that is why we have to respect that he is with us. He is with us even in the very darkest places, so we have to respect the entire creation.

Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker.

Mr ELIAS KAPAVORE (Pomio) – Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker. Firstly, on behalf of my people of Pomio, I want to pass my condolences to the late Education Minister and Member for Usino-Bundi. We convey our deepest sympathy and pray that the Lord will give peace to his soul.

I just want to continue this grievance debate with a few observations. Firstly, the governor of East Sepik made a comparison with Singapore. Singapore had a consistent Prime

Minister for over 31 years. From 1959 to 1990. Lee Kuan Yew was the Prime Minister of Singapore. They did not change their prime minister compared to Papua New Guinea which has frequently been changing prime ministers.

It has been 49 years since independence and we must have eight to nine prime ministers already. On that, we acknowledge our former Prime Minister the Late Grand Chief, I think he was in the office for quite a long time. During his terms, he introduced the Vision 2050 and the PNG MTDP 2010-2030, including other Medium Term Development Plans.

My observation is after the 2017 Elections we had the MTDP 3 and it aimed to cover the years 2018-2022. The aim is to secure our future through inclusive sustainable and economic growth.

25/04

There are nine key result areas. The first one talks about improving or growing the economy. And then one year later after the MTD plan was introduced, the government changed in 2022. Last year in 2023 a new government was formed and we called the new plan MTD 4.

So, we look at the MTD 4 covering the four years from 2023 to 2027. Just only one year after implementing this particular plan. It's clear and gives us twelve strategic priority areas. The first one also talks about growing the economy. To increase the current economy to 200 billion by 2030 is in there and our targets are in place. It also has specific targets for SPAs is clear. It's a very important document that we need to align ourselves with from the LLGs to the districts, provinces, and agencies. I think the plan is very clear.

I want to thank the Prime Minister and the team for recognizing me as the chairman of the PAC. We know that this year we allocated K27 billion in the Budget and our committee will be establishing some key monitoring systems to make sure that the funding allocated to agencies like the PHA Department of Health, even the Connect PNG, and every funding that is going through will be monitored properly so we achieve the targets for MTDP 4. So, that's our plan at the moment.

So, I want to state that in just the first year after the implementation of the MTDP 4, and we are talking about changing the government again. What Singapore did was they continued. That's the government that was established and they maintained that Prime Minister for some time. So that's my thought only.

My Grievance Debate today is, are we giving the chance for the Marape-Rosso Government to be assessed on their performance? They asked to give the assessment in 2026, 2027. So, we have a plan that is guiding us aligned to MTDP 4 that's already aligned with STDB 2030 and 2050 Vision and aligned to the *Constitution* and I believe we are on the right track. If we can bring good discussions, I believe we can bring our country to a better position.

Secondly, I was in my district last week and I was presented with a petition from the PMV owners. Their concern is that there is an increase in crimes which are being committed by youths under the age of 18 years who are taking advantage of the *Juvenile Act of 2018*.

So, plenty of crimes being committed in the country are 12 years, 13 years and 10 years old. Police are finding it difficult to arrest them too. They can't lay formal and proper charges on this particular age group because they are under the *Juvenile Act of 2018*.

So, they have asked me to bring this to the attention of the Government and look at ways to amend this section so that police can carry out their duties according to the law and formally arrest them as adults. These are the people who cause trouble and are arrested and locked up by police, released and then they are arrested again later.

As I speak today, my LLG at Sinivit is facing this problem caused by the same youths. So, it's something that we need to address as a government. Looking at the *Juvenile Act of 2014*, if we can make some amendments to reduce that age factor from maybe 18 to 12 or 14 years old?

Thirdly, I was in Vanimo three weeks ago and had the chance to go to Indonesia to meet with the Consul-General of Papua New Guinea to Jayapura, His Excellency George Wiri, and in line with the statement with the member for Vanimo-Green, I support him. We need to improve the border security at the border. It's very important that we need to improve our border security in that particular area. The Indonesian side is well organised. You will see the processing of all passports through an electronic system. Ours is taking too long and are still manually filling out the visa forms.

26/04

Theirs is electronically done and it's processed on the other side. They are preparing to support the Connect PNG and establish public transport terminals on the other side, and are waiting for us to establish the same on our side so they can support us to also grow our

economy. I support the Member for Vanimo Green and we need to improve the security systems at the Wutung border. Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker.

Mr DOUGLAS TOMURIESA (Kiriwina-Goodenough – Opposition Leader) – Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker. Firstly, I would like to apologize to the Chair for our shouting yesterday. I am not apologizing to the Parliament but to the Chair for our behavior.

Mr Acting Speaker, I have two grievances I would like to point out. The first one is when we supported the *Act* on Christianity and the other one is on the *Constitution* and *Standing Orders* of the Parliament.

Mr Acting Speaker, yesterday, the Minister for Justice and Attorney General Honourable Pila Niningi presented the *Act* on Christianity and we debated on it. When I saw the paper, I was expecting to find the definition of Christianity. We must first define the word Christianity before the laws are passed.

A committee was set up and traveled around the country to conduct a survey. When they came back, they didn't define Christianity, but *Section 45* of our *Constitution*, stipulates very clearly and we are putting more on top of the word Christianity.

We must define the word Christianity inside this House because you cannot say you are a Christian because this country is a Christian country. We need to define this word Christianity to ourselves, and what this word Christianity means to us as individuals. Because if there was no Christ who died on the Cross of Calvary more than 2000 years ago there won't be a word called Christianity.

Mr Acting Speaker, the survey carried out was very good but some of our speakers yesterday and today, for example the Governor of West New Britain spoke about his religion and the principles they believe in. We call ourselves Christians but do we live by some principles like the Governor for West New Britain has spoken about? Some of us call ourselves Christians but do we live by the principles of Christianity? You can call yourselves Christian but if you don't live by the principles of Christianity, it becomes hypocrisy. I sat and heard the Governor of West New Britain speak and remembered about three years ago he came back from India and presented me with a plaque.

Mr Rainbo Paita – Point of Order! You stated 'from his country', Governor of West New Britain is from Papua New Guinea, can you retract before you continue with your statement, Honourable Opposition Leader? Thank you.

27/04

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Your Point of Order is in order.

Mr DOUGLAS TOMURIESA – Your country is Papua New Guinea, the country where you were born. Thank you. I am happy that you are serving the people of Papua New Guinea and you are Papua New Guinean.

Anyway, let me get back to my point. Most of us we call ourselves Christians but what are the principles we believe in? That is why I leave this question with the Prime Minister and the Minister responsible for this bill that was tabled yesterday. Let's define the word Christianity. What does it mean? I leave it in your hands.

Mr Acting Speaker, I know our time is about to lapse and I'll be very fast. Let me finish by saying, that yesterday we stood and shouted at all of you and all of you shouted back at us. Some of us acted like we were not leaders in this House.

(Members interjecting!)

Mr James Marape – Point of Order! The word 'we' is inclusive. The behavior yesterday was from them so he should say 'I', not 'we'.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER – Honourable Opposition Leader, resume your seat. Honourable Prime Minister, your Point of Order is out of order.

The Chair has heard from both sides of the House. Honourable Opposition Leader, our Grievance Debate time has lapsed. Thank you.

Motion – That grievance be noted – agreed to.

Mr RAINBO PAITA – Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker. I thank the Members of both sides of the House who sat through this week and collectively discussed the issues of this country.

ADJOURNMENT

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

That the Parliament do now adjourn.

The Parliament adjourned at 1 p.m.