

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

WEDNESDAY, 29TH MARCH, 2023

[CORRECTED COPY]

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WEDNESDAY, 29TH MARCH, 2023

The Parliament met at 9.39 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

MR. SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Members were present, except the honourable S.S. Kirpal.

ELECTION OF THE LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now call for nominations for the Leader of the Opposition.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I stand in this Parliament to nominate a Member, who is husband to Mrs. Litia Vulakoro, and a loving father of two daughters and one son. This Member has always put his family first and we know how proud he is of his family.

He has served Fijians in many roles, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as a soldier, as Minister for Defence and National Security, along with being Minister for Foreign Affairs for a short time. With that, he also served in his recent role as Minister for Defence and National Security.

One of his best jobs was Commissioner Northern, a job that he was so obsessed with that he started recognising himself and telling the people that he hailed from the North and not Tailevu North.

(Laughter)

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you for that.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, he has been named as Fiji's COP23 High Level Climate Champion. He places the same care in his work as he puts in his family, and he treats every Fijian as part of his family.

I am honoured to have worked with him for these number of years. I call him mentor, a teacher and most importantly, a very good friend.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I nominate honourable Inia Seruiratu to be the Leader of the Opposition.

HON. E. BIA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

MR. SPEAKER.- Are there any other nominations from the Opposition?

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- No.

MR. SPEAKER.- There being no further nominations, I, therefore, declare honourable Inia Seruiratu, being married to the North and is part of the North, to be elected as Leader of the Opposition.

(Acclamation)

MR. SPEAKER.- I now invite the honourable Leader of the Opposition to take his seat and

also allow, at this moment, the honourable Leader of the Opposition to say a few words.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Deputy Prime Ministers, honourable Cabinet Ministers and all honourable Members, this is unexpected. I was not expecting to deliver a speech after being elected as Leader of the Opposition, but I am, indeed, honoured and privileged for this opportunity.

I am here to serve all Fijians and, of course, being the Government in-waiting, we are here to ensure that we work with the Government and at the same time, keep them in check. Of course, we hope that we will work according to the expectations of our people and most importantly, bring prosperity and unity in the Fiji that we aspire to.

I wish to assure all honourable Members that we, in the Opposition, will do our best in the role that we play because it is critical for Fiji and, of course, for all Fijians in that respect, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Once again, thank you and I am, indeed, thankful to all the honourable Members, particularly our Party Leader and the General-Secretary, who are not with us in Parliament. Of course, to the honourable Members who have shown faith and trust in me for this critical role, I hope and pray that I will deliver to the best of my ability with the help of God and, of course, with the support of the Members of the caucus and all Members of this august Parliament, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

(Acclamation)

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, just before we proceed, I would like to re-echo what was said in Parliament when your predecessor was appointed as Leader of the Opposition, having heard from the honourable Prime Minister and as well as myself, that we will accord whatever should be accorded rightly to that high office, honourable Leader of the Opposition. We will try to ensure that all privileges are provided, there shall be no hindrance or checks and balances being imposed unilaterally to that high office of yours from this Office, as we had experienced in the past. That I would like to confirm from this high Office, Sir.

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Monday, 27th March, 2023, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- I second the motion, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATION FROM THE SPEAKER

Welcome

I welcome all honourable Members to today's sitting and all those joining us in the gallery, especially the Acting Commissioner of the Fiji Corrections Service, and those watching the livestream proceedings on television and internet. Thank you for joining us today and thank you for taking an interest in your Parliament.

Appointment of GOPAC Members

Honourable Members at this juncture, please, kindly note that honourable Esrom Immanuel and honourable Sakiusa Tubuna are now members of the Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption, in short is known as GOPAC. I wish them well in their new undertaking.

PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

Review Report - Civil Aviation Authority of Fiji 2020 Annual Report

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, this morning, I am pleased to present the Report of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs on the review of the Civil Aviation Authority of Fiji 2020 Annual Report.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, in the last term of Parliament, was referred the Civil Aviation Authority of Fiji 2020 Annual Report. The Committee was tasked by Parliament to review the Annual Report and the same Report was re-introduced and referred to the current Standing Committee on Social Affairs to scrutinise and report back on its findings.

The Committee took note of and deliberated on the previous Committee's work. This Report reiterated the work done by the previous Committee in reviewing and highlighting the contents of the Civil Aviation Authority of Fiji and made recommendations on the observations and findings noted in the Report. It further highlighted the discussions that was held by the Committee with Civil Aviation Authority of Fiji in relation to the issues noted from its Report.

Year 2020 was an unprecedented one in the history of aviation due to the substantial impact of the coronavirus disease or the COVID-19 pandemic on the aviation industry. Due to the drop in international passenger traffic, the total aircraft movements both, domestic and international, at Fiji's two international aerodromes dropped by 50 percent, and within the Nadi Flight Information Region traffic levels also dropped by 61.3 percent compared to the 2019 numbers. The Government grant of \$2.5 million in the 2020-2021 financial year helped sustain CAAF and its operations, as a result of funding constraints due to the reduction in international passenger travel.

In 2020, work commenced for the review of Fiji's primary legislation – the Civil Aviation Act 1976, Civil Aviation Authority of Fiji Act 1979 and the Civil Aviation Reform Act 1999. The objective of this project was to amalgamate into one document all of the civil aviation primary legislation, except security, and ensure that all International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) protocol questions relating to the primary legislation were adequately addressed.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, at this juncture, I would like to acknowledge the Members of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs during the last term of Parliament for all their hard work and effort which has greatly assisted our Committee in the completion of this Report.

I would also like to thank the honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs and I extend my gratitude to the former acting CEO of CAAF, Mr. Rigamoto Aisake, and his staff for their timely assistance in this review process.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, I commend this Report to Parliament and request all Members of Parliament to take note of the Report.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move:

A motion without notice that a debate on the content of the Report is initiated at a future sitting.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

Review Report - Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and
Disaster Management 2016-2017 & 2017-2018 Annual Reports

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, again, this morning, I am pleased to present the Report of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs on the annual review of the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management for 2016-2017 and 2017-2018.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, during the 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 reporting periods, Fiji was still recovering from the widespread damage and destruction brought about by *TC Winston* which was estimated at \$2 billion. The Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management's coordination role in restoring normalcy to lives reflected its critical role in coordinating Government's effort during emergencies and at normal times.

Despite *TC Winston's* recovery programmes and many challenges encountered, the Ministry adjusted positively and continued to implement capital programmes assigned for rural and maritime areas. The Ministry made a positive improvement in the 2017-2018 performance period with 89 percent budget utilisation compared to 76 percent in the 2016-2017 performance period.

The Standing Committee on Social Affairs, in the last term of Parliament, was referred the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management's 2016-2018 Annual Report and was tasked by Parliament to review the Annual Report. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the same Report was being reinstated and referred to the current Standing Committee on Social Affairs to scrutinise the Report and report back on its findings. The Committee took note of and deliberated on the previous Committee's work on the mentioned Report.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Report will reiterate the work done by the previous Committee in reviewing and highlighting the contents of the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management Report and made recommendations on the observations and findings noted in the Report. It further highlighted the discussions held by the Committee with the Ministry with regards to the issues noted from its Report.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to acknowledge the Members of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs in the last term for all their effort that has greatly assisted our Committee in the formulation and completion of this Report.

I would also like to thank the honourable Members of the current Standing Committee on Social Affairs and also wish to thank the former Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management, Mr. David Kolitagane and his staff, for their timely assistance in this review process.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, I commend this Report to Parliament and request all Members of this Parliament to take note of the Report.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move:

A motion without notice that a debate on the content of the Report is initiated at a future sitting.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

MR. SPEAKER.- The following Ministers have given notice to make Ministerial Statements under Standing Order 40:

1. Honourable Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Climate Change, Environment, Civil Service, Information, Public Enterprises and Veteran Affairs;
2. Honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-operatives and Small and Medium Enterprises, and Communications; and
3. Honourable Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation.

The Ministers may speak up to 20 minutes. After the Ministers, I will invite the honourable Leader of the Opposition or his designate, to speak on the Statements for no more than five minutes. There will be no other debate.

8th Our Ocean Conference – Panama

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, may I, first of all, congratulate the honourable Leader of the Opposition on his appointment to that position in this august Parliament. I am sure we can expect the same degree of diligence in the performance of his duty, as he has shown in his career in various areas this far. Congratulations!

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I had promised earlier on, while I briefly responded to the question from the honourable Member on the outcomes of the 8th Our Ocean Conference held in Panama, I promised to come back with a Ministerial Statement during this Sitting, so after this was cleared in Cabinet yesterday, I have come to deliver this Statement.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the ‘Our Ocean Conference’, as the honourable Leader of the Opposition is very much aware of and well informed in, was inaugurated in 2014 at the United States Department of State Initiative to draw international attention to the serious threats facing the world oceans and increase in global commitments to support marine conservation and enable sustainable development.

The objective of the annual Our Ocean Conference (OOC) is to:

- increase partnerships and investments to create and enforce Marine Protected Areas

- (MPAs) as we are familiar with in Fiji and the Pacific);
- develop sustainable fisheries, which is very important for us also in the Pacific;
 - reduce marine pollution;
 - unlock sustainable financing; and
 - mitigate climate change-induced impacts on our oceans.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Conference comprised a series of interactive events attended by ocean champions and activists who strive to inspire the leaders - our leaders, national leaders, international leaders, entrepreneurs, scientists and civil society to identify solutions and commit to actions that protect and conserve our oceans and its resources.

Fiji first attended the OOC in 2022 as the Pacific Region Political High Level Champion for Ocean and as Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency Chair. At the year 2022 OOC, Sir, in Palau, Fiji demonstrated, and I congratulate my predecessor and the honourable Leader of the Opposition's strong commitment to invest in supporting a sustainable blue economy in part through the proposed issuance of a blue bond.

Reflecting on the 8th Our Ocean Conference, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Republic of Panama became the first Central American country to host the OOC with the theme, "Our Ocean Our Connection", which is very true for us in the Pacific and those bordering the Pacific, as well as other oceans in the world. The Government of Panama highlighted the importance of knowledge as the basis of our actions and qualities to ensure protection of our ocean, responsible management of marine resources and sustainable future economic growth.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to say that Fiji was offered the opportunity to address the Conference in the official plenary. Throughout, that opportunity as head of the delegation, I set the stage through a plea to the Leaders present and millions watching around the globe that we must ramp up our effort to protect our oceans, ocean ecosystems and ocean-based livelihoods. My remarks focussed on emphasising the importance of immediate conservation actions and illustrated how Pacific Small Islands Developing States (PSIDs) like Fiji, are facing the brunt of the effects of climate change.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also underline some of the work that Fiji is doing to contribute to our achieving our ocean ambitions. We emphasised our work on locally managed marine area network and I thank the various chiefs in Lau, Vanua Levu, Lomaiviti and Yasawa, who have already planning or working on their network. Sustainable aquaculture and mariculture, green shipping and the targets of the 30 MPAs and our renewable energy.

Our delegation advocated the importance of working together with partners to co-finance crucial investments in the blue economy. Outcomes asked by the honourable Member yesterday in terms of outcomes of the Panama Conference, a total of 341 new commitments were made. These commitments represent over US\$20 billion of new investments in ocean conservation.

The 8th OOC had six focussed areas:

1. Sustainable Fisheries received 52 new commitments;
2. Marine Pollution Plastics received 65 new commitments;
3. Marine Protected Areas received 52 new commitments;
4. Sustainable Blue Economies received 52 new commitments;
5. Climate Change received 102 new commitments; and
6. Marine Security received 38 new commitments.

The funding is derived from the following sources:

1. A sum of US\$865 million was committed by the European Union and US\$6 billion committed by the United States of America.
2. Another commitment came from charitable organisations - Bloomberg Philanthropies and Arcadia, which established a fund worth \$51 million to help support indigenous peoples and local communities, NGOs and governments to improve and expand marine protection and to help nations protect 30 percent of oceans by 2030.

When we hear about the 2030 target, that is what it is.

A goal of the coming Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, an alliance organisation foundation, with private donors also committed to a donation of \$5 million to help developing countries join the High Seas Treaty that was being negotiated and eventually agreed upon. That was in New York, at the same time as the Our Ocean Conference.

A coalition of groups known as the Connect to Protect the Eastern Tropical Pacific Coalition also announced a recent commitment of \$118.5 million in private and public funds to strengthen marine protection for the Eastern Tropical Pacific Marine Corridor, an area encompassing more than 500,000 square kilometres or 193,000 square miles of highly productive and biodiverse waters of Ecuador, Columbia, Panama and Costa Rica. Previously, Our Ocean Conferences had generated more than 1,800 commitments worth approximately US\$108 billion.

For Fiji, we announced our agreement to work with the Government of the United States of America in partnership to undertake a feasibility study to explore the potential of creating a green shipping corridor in the region. We can work to expand access to new fields and technologies. Upon its completion, the two Parties will initiate discussions on next steps among key stakeholders.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji also agreed to join the green shipping challenge which is an initiative that catalyses actions from countries and non-State actors to advance the transition to 1.5 degrees alignment shipping sector. The United States, in pursuing this technical cooperation under Green Shipping Corridor Initiation Project announced under the Green Shipping Challenge at COP27.

Domestic shipping services are the lifeline for our citizens in outer islands to participate in the life of our nation and our economy. With over 300 islands and limited resources, aging ships in our Government fleet are becoming increasingly expensive to Government and by extension to taxpayers to service those areas. We, thus, intend to invest in new greener ships powered by renewable energy, to ensure greater financial and environmental sustainability.

In terms of our commitment, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to create more MPAs, I thank you and other high chiefs of Fiji, who have allowed this programme to be carried out in your *qoliqoli* areas and just beyond.

Fiji has committed to designate 30 percent of our Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) as MPAs by 2030. However, it is critical to understand how these MPAs function and how they are to be enforced. Securing financing to aid the various stakeholders to manage these areas, is crucial to the survival and conservation of our marine resources.

On Sustainable Marine Tourism, according to the COVID-19 Appraisal Report on ocean economy and the economic sector in Fiji by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 90 percent of tourism is based in coastal areas and these activities create valuable proceeds for conservation activities.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shed light on the importance of working with our tourism sector to proactively protect our marine resources while ensuring these resources create benefits that can be equitably shared.

On Sustainable Ocean Planning, Fiji's National Ocean Policy is now being implemented and supported in part through our partnership with US-based Waitt Foundation. I signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Foundation earlier this year just before I left for Panama.

The challenges our ocean faced is complex and requires stakeholders from different sectors to work together. Our Government is working closely with like-minded Governments from around the world to share best practices, knowledge and identify opportunities to better ensure the sustainable management of our marine space.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, at the 8th OOC which was the last one in Panama, Fiji reconfirmed our deep-sea mining moratorium during a bilateral meeting with the President of Palau. We also supported the United States Special Envoy on Climate Change, Secretary John Kerry, who called for green shipping corridors to impart through the articulation of Fiji's Shipping Emission Reduction Goals and our broader aims to green our domestic shipping sector.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji also met with the head of delegation for the Green Climate Fund (GCF). In this meeting, discussion focussed on the GCF's United States \$1.695 billion funding committed as part of seven projects including those at the national, regional and global level where Fiji is a beneficiary, as well as ways to simplify the processes required to utilise those funds.

We also spoke on ways to assist PSIDs to develop robust proposed projects and project proposals. As mentioned, Sir, our Government is working towards not only accessing finance, but also to ensure that the financing arrangement that we put in place are sustainable.

In that regard, our Ministry of Finance - thanks to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister responsible, is working towards achieving accreditation with the GCF and the Adaptation Fund, to be able to directly access project financing and develop large scale projects.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our delegation held bilateral meetings with the Minister of International Co-operation of Norway and we spoke about enhancing Fiji's Ocean Pathway Partnership (OPP), which calls for all urgent attention to the critical links between the ocean and climate change. We also discussed potential assistance for the Pacific Blue Shipping Partnership (PBSP) with Norway, given Norway is a world leader in green shipping. Panama's Minister for Foreign Affairs, the honourable Erika Mouynes, we discussed what centred around the sharing of experiences related to the development of sustainable tourism, MPAS and other areas of mutual interest.

With the United Kingdom (UK) Secretary of State for the Environment, the Right honourable Therese Coffey, we had discussions focussed on ocean protection and MPAs. Commitments led by the UK as well as discussions on UK's contribution towards the second replenishment of GCF, and I noted that the UK also funded the feasibility study and our proposed Blue Bond Insurance carried out by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is incumbent upon us to champion ocean issues and the needs for our region. We must continue to press for change, not only for our benefit but for our fellow PSIDs and many of which were not able to make it to Panama due to various constraints.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to develop these, I reiterate what I mentioned yesterday about calling on the

expertise and the experience of now the honourable Leader of the Opposition, who had been our champion in this area over few years to assist us, as we continue our negotiations and attendances at the various conferences from here on.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if you allow me, I will table a copy of the statement before you. Thank you very much.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you for allowing me to respond to the Ministerial Statement by the honourable Prime Minister on the recent 8th Our Oceans Conference (OOC) that was held in Panama during the period - 2nd March to 3rd March, 2023.

From the very outset, let me say, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that we totally agree with his concluding remarks that it is incumbent on all of us to champion ocean issues.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as alluded to by the honourable Prime Minister, the Our Oceans Conference started way back in 2014 and we, as a region, and let me go back to the *Suva Declaration* from 2nd September to 4th September, 2015, agreed and our Leaders have seen how we have suffered and this is what is stated in the *Suva Declaration*, I quote:

“See and suffer from the adverse impacts of climate change, including but not limited to increased intensity of tropical cyclones, sea level rise, severe storm surges, more frequent and more extreme weather events, coral bleaching, saltwater intrusions, high king tides, coastal erosion, changing precipitation patterns, submersion of islands and ocean acidification, with scientific evidence clearly informing us these impacts will further intensify overtime.”

So consistent with 2014, in 2015, our Leaders have identified how it affects us.

Of course, that is also translated, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent. Again, our Leaders stated that as large oceanic countries and territories, we are custodians of nearly 20 percent of the earth surface and we place great cultural and spiritual value on our oceans and land as our common heritage.

This is linked to the geopolitics in the region as well, Mr. Speaker, Sir. This is why we occupy a vitally significant place in global strategic terms. As a consequence, heightened geopolitical competition impacts our member countries.

Further, there is an increasing commercial and State-sponsored interest in our region's ecological and natural resources. This is reflected in the global communities' special interest in the blue economy and suggest that there will be growing demand for our resources over the years to come.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will not go into the details, but let me just pick up on something that the honourable Prime Minister stated about Green Shipping. Unfortunately, the honourable Minister for Defence is not in the Chamber today but this is in terms of defence as well. Defence is also green defence, and one of the key areas that Defence is targeting now is on the Naval fleet to be consistent with the green shipping initiative.

Apart from our commitment to our Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), Fiji and the Marshall Islands were the first two island countries and perhaps, the first two among the world, to further strengthen their NDCs - that commitment that was made in 2019, so it is important to us.

I have talked about the regional scene, Mr. Speaker, Sir, but locally, if we go to Part 13 of the Climate Change Act 2021, it is the section that deals with oceans and climate because of the significance of the ocean in our country as well.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, globally, we have been the advocate not only for Fiji but for the region. As a small Pacific Island Developing State but big ocean State, it is important, and I am again urging all honourable Members that we need to be consistent in our statements, particularly when it comes to issues as such because we are expected as responsible Parliamentarians because this is a fight that we all need to be involved in and we need to be in solidarity because it affects us. Our ocean defines and identifies us. It is our life, it is our culture, it is our very own existence, and we all need to champion ocean issues.

Again, with the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), you are very well aware, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Biodiversity is important for all of us. It affects our economic security, our food security, our livelihood and we need to be working together on this. Honourable Prime Minister, we are here to support and work together with you on this. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I intend to adjourn Parliament for tea and before doing so, I would like to inform you that there has been a slight change in the order of the Ministerial Statements that has been set.

Honourable Members, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-operatives and Small and Medium Enterprises, and Communications has withdrawn from making a statement and as such, when we resume, we will go straight to the honourable Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, to make her statement. Thank you.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.24 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.01 a.m.

Fiji Country Gender Assessment

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Speaker, before I commence with my Statement, I just wish all the women of Fiji a Happy International Women's month.

I was away, Mr. Speaker, on the International Women's Day, however, I just want to congratulate all women around the country who had celebrated this very important day and also International Women's month where I am able to speak on this very important document. Mr. Speaker, I am filled with great pride to share that last night it was launched by the honourable Prime Minister, and I was present to do so for this document - Fiji Country Gender Assessment (FCGA). It is a first of its kind in the Pacific and the first in the Asia Pacific region.

The FCGA was led by the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation in partnership with the Fiji Bureau of Statistics, across the whole of Government and in close collaboration with relevant stakeholders, including civil society and women's rights organisations.

Mr. Speaker, data is a powerful tool for achieving gender equality. It enables us to track progress, identify the barriers that women and girls face, and create evidence-based solutions to address those barriers. At its core, data is about counting women and girls in all their diversity. It is about capturing their experiences, realities, perspectives and contributions, and using that information to ensure accountability, budget investment and drive progress towards gender equality.

On that note and with the perform sense of enthusiasm and responsibility, I have the privilege of addressing Parliament today to present and discuss the findings from the FCGA, and to share the collaborative and comprehensive process of its development, signifying a monumental step towards achieving gender equality in our nation.

The FCGA is a whole of Government and comprehensive Report that provides key and updated statistics, sex disaggregated data and analysis across seven critical sectors and areas such as education, health, economy, ending violence against women and girls, women in leadership and decision making, social norms and environment. It highlights many of the achievements and progress in Fiji, as well as the remaining challenges in order to deepen collective efforts for achieving gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls in Fiji.

The FCGA further expected to contribute to a whole of Government and evidence-based policy dialogue to support integrating gender concerns and priorities into relevant policies, programmes and budget investments, while also enhances timely and quality data and gender statistics.

As I have stated, FGCA is the first of its kind in the Pacific and the Asia Pacific region, as it allowed access to existing data across all Government agencies, along in partnership with all relevant stakeholders. This included the establishment of a Data Steering Working Group and a Peer Review Committee, both of which played a critical role in the development of the Report.

The Data Steering Working Group which comprised representatives of Government agencies, facilitated access to relevant data, reviewed and validated analysis, while identifying data issues and gaps to improve the collection, accessibility and use of gender data and statistics. A comprehensive list of gender indicators was developed in partnership with this Data Steering Working Group, providing a deep dive into issues across sectors. The indicator list helped in the systematic collection of data and identified gaps also in the whole of Fiji data landscape.

The Peer Review Committee, Mr. Speaker, which comprised of Civil Society Organisations, women's rights and faith-based organisations, Secretariat of the Pacific Community, the United Nations, development partners and others, conducted a rigorous review process for each thematic chapter, providing valuable feedback and insights. Each FCGA chapter is a deep dive into the topic and together, Mr. Speaker, the seven chapters comprise a report of a whopping 500 pages, which I hold here in my hand.

To make the findings more accessible though, Mr. Speaker, we have also included seven policy briefs which I also hold here in my hand. The policy briefs, Sir, on each of the chapters, and they are in more concise format. Additionally, we have a visual report containing infographic sheets, one for each chapter. These infographics provide a snapshot of the most critical data and analysis, making it easier to engage with the findings.

I would like to highlight, Mr. Speaker, that the FCGA was a battle issue for the previous Government. Most importantly, as for the inclusion of gender data disaggregated by ethnicity.

In the first month of my tenure, Mr. Speaker, I required the Ministry to review and ensure the inclusion of available disaggregated data as much as possible, if it was available through the FCGA process, and to reinstate any deletions and censorship of contents, evidence-based recommendations, analysis and findings across the chapters based on ethnicity.

And as I move on to highlight some of the key findings of the FCGA, I would like to, firstly, emphasise and acknowledge the role of partnership and meaningful collaboration in overcoming numerous challenges faced in the process of the development of this document.

We are grateful for the collective efforts of countless individuals and groups. I want to express my deep appreciation to my predecessors, the former Minister – Ms Mereseini Rakuita and former Minister – Ms. Rosy Akbar, who played a significant role in shaping the initial vision and providing leadership while safeguarding the Report.

I would also like to thank the Fiji Women Crisis Centre and the Fiji Women's Rights Movement for their consistent advocacy and public awareness efforts in support of the FCGA. Their dedication has ensured that the FCGA was neither lost nor overlooked. Furthermore, our gratitude to the Government of New Zealand for generously supporting the FCGA, and to the Government of Australia for provision of additional technical expertise and guidance.

Honourable Members of this august Parliament, the FCGA findings reveal that despite notable progress in some areas, such as education, critical challenges continue to hold back the empowerment of Fijian women and girls in all diversities. Gender discriminatory, social norms and cultural practices remain a significant obstacle to gender equality in Fiji. Women's participation in the formal economy and the labour force is significantly lower than that of men, and most working Fijian women are engaged in informal employment with lack of job security, irregular income and no social protection.

Our women and girls might not be well positioned to secure work in emerging digital and technical fields, limiting their opportunities for economic empowerment in the context of future jobs. Cancers of reproductive organs, particularly breast and cervical cancer are the leading causes of death related to Non-Communicable Diseases among Fijian women. Moreover, violence against women and girls is still pervasive with the appalling high rates of sexual violence and other forms of gender-based violence.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, women in Fiji shoulder three-quarters of unpaid care work at home. The labour force participation rate for women is 46 percent, compared with 83 percent of men. Only 40 percent of women are employed, compared with 78 percent of men, and women earn on average one-third less than men.

People aged 15 years to 24 years who are not in education, employment or training is 18 percent, with the young women mostly affected from that 18 percent - three times the rate for young men. This rate has not substantially changed in the recent years. It is important to note that these statistics are in the context where women outnumber men - among students in academic programmes in Fiji's universities, accounting for 60 percent to 65 percent of students and over 50 percent of graduates.

The 21st Century workplace requires that nearly everyone have digital skills. The gender parity ratio of girls to boys enrolled in secondary level home economics courses is 15 or greater. In contrast, the gender parity ratio is less than one for digital and other applied technology courses. There is tendency for some parents and teachers to reinforce cultural beliefs that science, digital and other technologies, engineering and mathematics education is masculine and falsely imply that girls are innately inferior in these fields. Yet, the data confirms that Fijian girls in secondary schools enrolled in computer courses often outnumber and outperform boys.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, men's violence against women is normalised in Fiji and in the family dynamic, recurring from one generation to the next. Over the course of the lives of ever-partnered Fijian women, nearly two thirds (64 percent) experience intimate partner violence, including physical violence (61 percent) and emotional violence (58 percent). This is higher than the global average of one to every three women. More than four in ten women experience severe physical violence, including 50 percent of women who are physically attacked during pregnancy. In Fiji, the most common form of sexual violence is child sexual abuse involving girls (and some boys) under the age of 18, accounting for 74 percent of all the reported sexual violence cases.

In the year 2020, four in 10 women were not able to make their own informed decisions about their reproductive health rights. Cervical and breast cancers are the most common forms of cancers among women. In 2020, the age-specific incidence of breast cancer was 65.1 cases per 100,000 Fijian women, while the related mortality rate was 41 cases per 100,000 Fijian women.

The age-specific incidence of cervical cancer was 22.5 cases per 100,000 Fijian women, while the mortality rate was nine cases per 100,000 Fijian women. This means approximately 293 cases of breast cancer and approximately 184 deaths from breast cancer and for cervical cancer, 120 cases and approximately 90 deaths in one year.

Please, note that the above data and statistics were just a brief snapshot of the challenges and issues identified by the FCGA. I would like to invite and urge all honourable Members of Parliament and relevant stakeholders to undertake a deep dive and study this document findings and policy recommendations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as the honourable Prime Minister had stressed last night in the launch, behind these numbers are the stories of real lives - lives that have been impacted by gender inequality and discrimination, lives that are waiting for us to take action and make a difference.

With utmost commitment and dedication, I would like to highlight that moving forward, the FCGA is expected to serve as a primary guide for all our policies, programmes and budgetary allocations. Specifically, we were focused on women's economic empowerment, prevention of gender-based violence before it starts, women's leadership, reproductive health rights and the future

of work in the context of climate crisis, technology and the digital revolution, as well as inclusive of data and statistics.

I would like to emphasise too that addressing the complex issues and challenges identified by the FCGA requires a collective effort by the whole of Government and Opposition and the whole of the population. These issues cannot be solved by any single individual, agency or sector alone. It is essential to recognise the interrelated nature of these challenges and adopt a multi-sectoral, coordinated and transformative inclusive approach that fosters partnership, collaboration and shared responsibility to address gender equality in our society.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the coming months, the Ministry will be rolling out key Whole of Government initiatives, including:

- the development of the Fiji Women's Economic Empowerment Plan (2023-2028);
- the roll out of the upcoming Fiji National Action Plan to prevent Violence against all Women and Girls (2023-2028); and
- Phase II of the Gender Transformative Institutional Capacity Development Initiative (ICD) which has so far done a pilot project for nine Ministries, with specifics on gender responsive budgeting.

As we undertake these initiatives, we are looking forward to working with all Government agencies, with the Leader of the Opposition and the Opposition Caucus and, of course, relevant stakeholders to ensure the effective implementation of the Fiji Country Assessment findings and recommendations across all settings and sectors.

I want to emphasise, Mr. Speaker, that this document is not based on just any modelling of data, it is based on actual data provided by the Fiji Bureau of Statistics and I want to thank the former CEO of the Fiji Bureau of Statistics, who was present last night as part of the Panel because he was Chairman of the Data Steering Committee and was very instrumental in helping for this data to be provided, despite the challenges. We must use the power of data to change our lives through evidence-based policies, programmes and budgetary allocations. This is the first step to promoting gender equality based on facts and statistics to address gender equalities.

To conclude as I present this document, when I attended the Commission on the Status of Women in New York, many world leaders did not have this document themselves in their countries. So, this is a model, and I want to give acknowledgment to the previous Government and my predecessors where I now have the big task to implement this particular document and ensure that this is seen across all Ministries, that there is a dedication to gender responsive budgeting and also evidence-based policies that we will take on as a Coalition Government. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to respond to the Ministerial Statement made by the honourable Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation. From the outset, I would like to say, good that it has progressed to where the data has finally been established but Cabinet in 2020 first approved and launched this gender assessment when the former Minister was there, Mrs. Mereseini Vuniwaqa. Moving on, the various policies that came into place in the framework was already there, plus other budgetary allocations that were targeted to areas of needs only.

We all agree, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that data is there and that is the spirit that women need - assistance. The onus now will be on the honourable Minister for Women in her proposal to the honourable Minister of Finance on some of the targeted areas that will be needed to empower those

policies that come out from those evidence-based and research-based policies. However, there are other issues. A very important point was raised by the honourable Minister this morning on gender violence but, again, she still fails to acknowledge her previous statement here in Parliament on events that transpired in 1987. Probably, that could be part of the data or evidence that should come out, especially when she had uttered that but, again, she missed the opportunity.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the various opportunities that we have as evidence of how women are involved in leadership, and I would like to thank the Acting Commissioner for the Fiji Corrections Service, Mrs. Salote Panapasa. That is an achievement in a male dominated institution like the Fiji Corrections Service. I think she is the first woman to rise to that leadership role and that is an achievement.

The other achievement too that we had noted a few days ago is how women are impacting sports and an example of that is Ms. Rusila Nagasau from Cakaudrove, the Captain of the Fiji 7s Team and Fiji's 2022 Sportswoman of the Year. The other achievement too is when you look at our Fijiana Team. They are the defending champions of the Super Rugby Women's Division. Some of their players are Ms. Vitalina Naikore and Ms. Raijeli Daveau, who were also recruited in the Fiji Corrections Service Team. These are achievements based on policies that are there from the previous Government on how women are impacting lives and also setting examples.

However, what we really need to look into is that one of the policies probably that was launched last year during the term of the former Minister for Women, Ms. Rosy Akbar, is the participation of women in agriculture and there is an existing policy. The Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Fisheries and Forestry, together with the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, plus other stakeholders, can see areas where we can increase women participation.

There is only 14 percent participation of women in agriculture in Fiji - a very important sector, given that many are women in the rural areas. That is something that we can focus on because there are existing policies in the budget that are already there that target our women in the rural areas, especially the removal of market fees. Now, we hear in the Labasa Market a few weeks ago that market fees will be re-introduced. That is something that the honourable Minister can look into because these are some of the areas that give more income for women to take back home because they are the ones who look after the livelihood of the families at home.

The other industry, Mr. Speaker, Sir, a few years ago, when we brought up the Fiji Airways Guarantee, the honourable Minister for Women was in a *TikTok* chewing a plane. That particular guarantee supported the tourism industry and also supported the airline industry. That is where women also participate....

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Point of Order.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- What about his comment on Indian women?

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- What number?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Standing Order 60, the response should be relevant.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- It is relevant.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Now, he is talking about Fiji Airways.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- It is relevant.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER- Order, order!

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- It is a personal attack on the honourable Minister for Women. Please, respond to the Ministerial Statement. And he referred to some data from 1987 which is non-existent.

MR. SPEAKER.- He is a very fast player. He is talking about the Fiji Rugby Union and the *Fijiana* Team. He is a very fast player - thank you honourable Bulitavu, you may continue.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Women participate in the tourism industry and with the airline. When the borders were opened, most of the women were recruited back as flight attendants and those women who sell at stalls in agriculture, women went back to being employed at the hotels and even ATS where she had once championed the rights of ATS workers. Women went back to packaging and hospitality, et cetera.

But, again, Sir, the data is there, there is plenty work that the honourable Minister needs to do and I think she needs to work on that, not only the books that she has but practical work and money that she needs to ask from the honourable Minister of Finance. *Vinaka vakalevu*, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I have been advised that there are no Bills for consideration.

REVIEW REPORT ON THE FIJI CORRECTIONS SERVICE 2017-2018 ANNUAL REPORT

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move:

That Parliament debates the Review of the Fiji Corrections Service Annual Report 2017-2018 which was tabled on 30th August, 2022.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Ministers and honourable Members of this august Parliament. As the Member moving the motion, I rise to make a short contribution on the Report of the Justice, Law and Human Rights Committee on the Review of the Fiji Corrections Service Annual Report 2017-2018. Before I begin, Sir, I take this opportunity to congratulate the honourable Inia Seruiratu on his election as the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Committee Report was tabled in the last term of Parliament, and I wish to proceed directly to reiterating some of the main areas of discussion that are captured in the Report. To begin with, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there were a few pertinent issues identified by the previous Committee, which include:

- The Fiji Corrections Service is committed to sustainably retaining its key staff and in doing so, meets the international correction officer-to-inmate ratio standard of one is to five, that is, one Corrections Officer for every five inmates.
- The Fiji Corrections Service continues to work towards its target in reducing the rate of recidivism annually.

- The Annual Report has insufficient information on the promotion of gender equality, however, after clarification, it was noted that the Fiji Corrections Service has invested considerable efforts in implementing policies that promote gender equality and empowerment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these issues were addressed and clarified by the Fiji Corrections Service, and any information on this can be retrieved from the Committee's Report.

Mr. Speaker, I will go straight into the few recommendations put forth by the previous Committee for the consideration of the Fiji Corrections Service, which were intended for continued improvement service delivery, and these include –

- The Committee appreciated the fact that there was a high number of staff turnover for the Service but acknowledged the Fiji Corrections Service for trying to ensure to maintain service delivery which is on par with the international standards. The Committee, therefore, recommends the FCS does a thorough review of its human resources policies and plan and develop strategies to build capacity of the staff and retain them in the service.
- In terms of these discrepancies identified in the financial statements of the Service for the reported period, the Committee recommends that more collaboration is needed between the Fiji Corrections Service, the Ministry of Finance and the Office of the Auditor-General to strengthen the financial management system and to ensure that there are minimal serious discrepancies in future reported financial statements.

Mr. Speaker, I commend and acknowledge the great work carried out by the Committee of the previous Parliament, and I also want to thank my colleagues of the current Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights.

With those few words, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I urge the honourable Members of this august Parliament to take note of the contents of the Committee's Report.

MR. SPEAKER.- Before I offer the floor to the speakers who are intending to speak on this, may I just remind honourable Members that before me is a list of speakers that have been identified by the honourable Whip from the Opposition and that of the honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament. We will begin the batting by offering the floor to:

1. Honourable A.A. Maharaj.
2. Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Justice.
3. Honourable M.D. Bulitavu.
4. Honourable Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Climate Change, Environment, Civil Service, Information, Public Enterprises and Veteran Affairs.
5. Honourable I. Naivalurua.
6. Honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, I rise in this Chamber today as the former Chairperson of the Committee that compiled this Report.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fiji Corrections Service Annual Report covered information on the type of work that is actually carried out by Fiji Corrections Service.

Mr. Speaker, the Report also highlighted the work that has been undertaken by the Fiji Corrections Service as its mandate given under the 2013 Constitution of the Republic of Fiji and

Corrections Service Act 2006 which is to serve the public by keeping in custody those convicted by the courts and providing effective corrective rehabilitation services, whilst applying the relevant human rights obligations and standards.

From the review, there were few key issues identified, Mr. Speaker, and one of the key areas of focus for the Fiji Corrections Service is to try to reduce the rate of re-offenders in line with the National Development Plan on achieving the 3 percent threshold. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the rate has gone down and provides a positive indication that the strategies put in place by the Fiji Corrections Service are being implemented effectively.

Further to that, the Committee acknowledges the numerous rehabilitation programmes implemented by Fiji Corrections Service which includes the Yellow Ribbon Project. It would be worth noting that the implication of these programmes has impacted the lives of inmates in their transition back to community.

Through the Yellow Ribbon Project, Fiji Corrections Service took a lead role in creating awareness and educating the public on the roles and responsibilities on taking ownership of ex-offenders once they complete their sentence.

Mr. Speaker, another significant issue is the number of staff turnover which occurred within the reported year. The Committee noted that the Fiji Corrections Service had engaged in substantial number of staff to man what is called *Operation Musu Dovu* for a short period. The length of the contract for these temporary staff were entirely dependent on the harvesting season of sugarcane and once the task is completed, their contracts were terminated at the end of the cutting season. This, Sir, added to the high turnover rate for the reported year.

Mr. Speaker, also included in the number of staff turnover are the retirement, resignation and dismissals. We need to keep in mind that the staff of Fiji Corrections Service are not dealing with normal people. They are criminals and dealing with them is not easy. The staff go through a lot of pressure and stress which also impacts their psychology. We need to ensure that proper consideration is given towards the health and wellbeing of Fiji Corrections Service staff.

The environment in which they work in, Mr. Speaker, is very different. With all sorts of inmates around them, it becomes a very tough situation for them to deal with it as these staff are not health professionals and are not aware of how to deal with the mindset of inmates.

Mr. Speaker, the Committee also noted that the Fiji Corrections Service has endeavoured not to let the staff turnover affect their service delivery and its aim to achieving the international benchmark of one Corrections Officer per five inmates.

It was noted that during the review of the Annual Report, the Fiji Corrections Service had utilised a total of 81 percent of its budget allocated for the fiscal year. It was noted that unutilised coverage of the expenditure was a result of some pending projects that were yet to be completed in due time.

Mr. Speaker, the Committee also undertook the scrutiny of Annual Reports using a gender lens and it was encouraging to note that the Fiji Corrections Service is committed to the implementation of gender neutral and non-discriminatory policies, including those that relate to staffing.

Under the leadership of Mr. Francis Kean, the Fiji Corrections Service has achieved so much to improve the life of inmates, not just during their prison term but also once they had served their

terms and are out to live a normal life. Mr. Speaker, we need to continue to provide support to Fiji Corrections Service as they are doing a wonderful job.

With those words, Mr. Speaker, I stand to support the recommendations made by the Committee.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, may I congratulate the Leader of the Opposition, honourable Seruiratu, on his appointment as the Leader of Opposition. You richly deserve that position.

I would like to also acknowledge the presence of the Acting Commissioner, Fiji Corrections Service. It is right that she is present today, given the Ministerial Statement by the honourable Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation. Mr. Speaker, she is the first to rise to that prestigious position.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to make a response to the review of the Fiji Corrections Service Annual Report 2017-2018 submitted by the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights. I also offer my congratulations for the detailed Report submitted by the Committee, and I have expressed the same to the Chairman.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fiji Corrections Service is obligated under the Corrections Service Act 2006 to serve the public by keeping in custody those convicted by the courts and providing effective corrective services and applying all human rights, obligations and standards. This is the message I have outlined in my visit to the Fiji Corrections Service on the necessity and importance of measuring them to the 2013 Constitution, to the minimum standards and to the law of this land.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is noted that the review captures the findings and recommendations of the Committee with respect to the pertinent issues noted from the contents of the Fiji Corrections Service 2017-2018 Annual Report. The Report outlines the work conducted in the reported year with an allocated estimate budget of \$38.8million. The Fiji Corrections Service Annual Report also reflects the operations and administration of the Fiji Corrections Service through the collaborative effort of its staff and stakeholders in achieving its target for the 2017-2018 financial year.

On the deliberations and findings by the Committee, Mr. Speaker, Sir, recidivist is regarded as a tendency of a convicted criminal to reoffend. In line with the Fiji Corrections Service standard guideline, an inmate is considered recidivist when he or she is admitted within 24 months from his or her initial discharge date.

For the 2017-2018 period, the Fiji Corrections Service had implemented programmes and strategies to reduce the likelihood of reoffending behavioural patterns. Mr. Speaker, Sir, in this regard it was noted there was a significant decrease of the recidivists whereby 27 was recorded in the 2017-2018 period, as compared to 72 in the 2016-2017 period.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it was also alluded there were numerous programmes and activities that were undertaken in conjunction with the Fiji Corrections Service's existing Rehabilitation Programmes, one of which has been the Yellow Ribbon Programme which is a programme that aims to successfully reintegrate inmates back into the society.

I do acknowledge, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the contribution made by honourable Naivalurua, who had initiated this project when he was the Commissioner. I also do acknowledge the presence of the former Commissioner, honourable Vasu, both of which had served the institution distinguishably and made numerous contributions and provided new limelight as to how the rehabilitation programme

should be administered effectively.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, regarding the Rehabilitation Programmes, the Committee knows that out of the 15 inmates targeted for the 2017-2018 period, the Fiji Corrections Service managed to secure job placement for 12 inmates. It was also noted that Government had granted a total of \$200,000 for the Yellow Ribbon Project to assist the Fiji Corrections Service in raising community awareness throughout Fiji.

Regarding capital projects activities, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it was noted that in the 2017-2018 period, the Fiji Corrections Service had engaged in works that improved the infrastructure, the Corrections enterprises and also improve Corrections services. So, over the years, we have seen a move away from being kept in custody and into other areas where they can be meaningfully utilised, given the special skills that they have before they were admitted, or the skills that they picked up whilst in the services of the Fiji Corrections Service.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee had identified potential discrepancies in the financial statement provided in the Annual Report. However, as advised by the Fiji Corrections Service, the Annual Report shows the audited annual financial statements whereas the budget estimate shows an unaudited financial budget.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the issue of staff turnover, this was considered an area of concern, given the international benchmark ratio of 1:5 Correction Officers per inmate.

As clarified by the Fiji Corrections Service, temporary relieving custodial officers were engaged for three months period during the *Operation Musu Dovu*. The services of these temporary relieving custodial officers were usually terminated after the completion of the works, and this had contributed to the high number of turnover recorded for 2017-2018 period. The Government will also be looking at a new policy in terms of re-engaging and assisting in the *Operation Musu Dovu*.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, regarding gender-related policies, it was noted that the Fiji Corrections Service was evidently a male-dominated working environment and rightly so at a point in time. However, the society has evolved, there is also a growing population of female inmates. That is why there is also a shift in terms of the employment of officers to look at the gender imbalance. It is also notable that female officers have progressed into prominent positions within the Fiji Corrections Service. A good illustration of that is the Acting Commissioner.

The Fiji Corrections Service is committed to the implementation of gender neutral and non-discriminatory policies, including those that relate to staffing. On that note, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to commend the Fiji Corrections Service for striving towards implementing gender neutral policies as we now have a female Acting Commissioner, Mrs. Salote Panapasa.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to comment on the recommendations by the Committee. The Committee appreciated the fact that there was high turnover of staff for the Fiji Corrections Service but acknowledge the Fiji Corrections Service for trying to ensure and maintain service delivery which is in par with international standards.

The Committee also recommended that the Fiji Corrections Service does a thorough review of the Human Resource Policies and Plans and develop strategies to build capacity of the staff in the Fiji Corrections Service.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the last Job Evaluation Exercise (JEE) for Fiji Corrections Service was undertaken in 2003 by Mercer Human Resource Consultancy through the Public Service

Commission. Since then, the Fiji Corrections Service had not undergone any other JEE. It is hoped that a JEE will be undertaken for the Fiji Corrections Service in the not-too-distant future.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I had mentioned to Correction Officers during my recent tour of the Suva Corrections Centre, Correction Officers faced more difficulties than their counterparts in the Fiji Police Force and the Republic of Military Forces. The working in the Corrections system can be very challenging and we need to address the trauma associated with this. The approach now is to try and create an environment in which the welfare of Corrections Officers is also looked after. Moving forward, this will include the upgrading of Corrections Officers accommodation, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is also envisaged that there will be a dialogue held with the Vice-Chancellor of the University of the South Pacific for Correction Officers to further their education, not only at USP but in other regional educational institutions in response to the better discharge of their duties.

In terms of the discrepancies identified in the financial statement of the Fiji Corrections Service, the Committee recommended that more collaboration is needed between the Fiji Corrections Service, Ministry of Economy and the Office of the Attorney-General, to strengthen their financial management and ensure that there is minimal serious discrepancies in future reported financial statements.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as recommended the Fiji Corrections Service will work closely with the Ministry of Finance and also with the Office of the Attorney-General for the preparation and reporting of financial statements.

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you, honourable Attorney-General, for you input.

Before I give the floor to honourable Naivalurua to share some of his experiences, I would like to share a few experiences when sitting up here and this Report is being brought in. Having been a member or once serving time as an inmate in our day and I am not only the first Member of Parliament to be in that kind of experience - the flatfooted honourable Bulitavu has also experienced that. So, this Report has come in at a time and just to share with you honourable Members that even though you may be sitting here, you can be joining others by going in for some sort of crime that you have done, so we respect this. We certainly respect this Report coming in just to shed some light with us, the lawmakers of this country.

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to speak on the Review of the Fiji Corrections Service Annual Report 2017-2018 that is now tabled before this sitting of Parliament.

Fiji Corrections Service is a place of personal passion and history, and it remains my privilege to have served as Commissioner from 2006 to 2010.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we debate this Report, it is worth noting how far this organisation has come and how many lives have been positively impacted and changed. It is also worth highlighting the essential place the Fiji Corrections Service holds in the security and transformation of our nation.

For the information of this august Parliament, the Fiji Corrections Service sits at the backend of the judicial system and was an organisation that previous Governments had neglected to the detriment of the whole nation. Nelson Mandela, a former prisoner and President of South Africa stated: “No one truly knows a nation until one has been inside its prisons. A nation should not be judged by how it treats its highest citizens, but its lowest ones.”

It was into this neglect that the FijiFirst Government, under the former Prime Minister, breathed new life and through a number of initiatives, including the Yellow Ribbon Programme, they brought value, dignity and opportunity back to the men and women who had gone astray.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the transformation of the Fiji Corrections Service has been unprecedented in the history of the organisation. The genesis of these changes first introduced in 2007 to 2008 was a major paradigm shift and how businesses were conducted at the Corrections Service. The shift was from a contained punitive prison system to a rehabilitative corrective system.

If I may put it plainly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it was quite difficult to distinguish between an inmate and a staff of the Corrections Service in those days. These changes challenged the core values of the serving Prison Officers at the time. However, with perseverance, commitment and passion the duty, this shift gained traction and became the new norm, resulting in commendable and remarkable achievements for the organisation.

And it is here, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that I would like to personally acknowledge the fine men and women who serve as staff and officers within the Fiji Corrections Service, but who remain hidden and nameless in this Report. As I stand today in this august Parliament, I recall many of their faces and the dedication and passion they brought to the paradigm shift of changing the organisation and changing lives. Basically, Sir, the Corrections Officers used to be known or are known today as the captains of lives.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of those, if I may acknowledge, as previous speakers had recognised her this morning, amongst us is the Acting Commissioner for the Fiji Corrections Services, none other than Commissioner Panapasa. Commissioner Panapasa was a woman who was identified earlier in her career life, Sir, as someone who had the potential and huge potential to move into higher positions in her future career. So, her career was shaped much, much earlier and that has been realised today.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the staff, officers and their families deserve every opportunity to be recognised for their fine work and significant sacrifice and contributions. I also thank the honourable Prime Minister for the similar sentiments of recognition and encouragement he shared last Friday at Naboro as the Chief guest of the Pass-out Parade.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Report tabled in Parliament today, again, demonstrates the Fiji Corrections Service's commitment, perseverance and participation in building a better Fiji. I want to acknowledge at this point the previous leadership of the honourable member seated in this very Chamber, none other than honourable Vasu, who made significant contribution during his time as Commissioner.

This 2017-2018 Annual Report is a record of the leadership of Corrections Commissioner Francis Kean. His strategic vision and purposeful leadership of the Fiji Corrections Service achieved significant gains.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, allow me to bring context for this Report and share with this august Parliament an example that will identify how far we have come, and the success identified in this Report.

The Naboro Maximum Correctional Centre was built in 1973. However, its first overall maintenance and renovations were carried out by the FijiFirst Government. Neglecting the maintenance and upgrading of such critical infrastructure for 30-plus years left Fiji Corrections staff and inmates in an unsafe working and living environment. The commitment and budgetary support

for the infrastructure upgrades undertaken by the FijiFirst Government across all the institutions has led to a safer working environment for Officers and better living conditions for those inside.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with the commitment to sound, vision and planning, the Fiji Corrections Service is the only Government organisation I know with a 10 to 20 year capital projects master plan (if I may). I was unsure myself, but I had to find out whether it was true or not, here is their plan. This master plan is revised every two years to ensure that it meets operational and organisational needs, meets our international best practice and has sound and secure facilities to implement first-class rehabilitation so that lives are changed.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Report highlights some significant gains and important principles that remain critical to our Correctional System's good order and operations. Of note is the strategic aim and focus of the Fiji Corrections Service on the reduction of recidivism. The Report highlights the decrease in recidivism of 38 percent. This is a commendable achievement with a significant positive social impact on our communities and to the nation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Report highlights the Yellow Ribbon project and its continuing positive impact and engagement with the public. The Yellow Ribbon project is the flagship of the rehabilitation movement. The Yellow Ribbon project continues to be a major success with our recidivism rate achieving its lowest ever recorded data of 1 percent in the financial year of August 2020 to July 2021. This is a major milestone for the Fiji Corrections Service and Fiji. This is the heart and soul of rehabilitation or changing lives. With the yellow ribbon as the flagship, there are other significant rehabilitation programmes that deserved to be highlighted in this august Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fiji Corrections Service introduced the Employment Expo in 2018. The Employment Expo showcases the vocational skillsets developed by those currently inside. Selective eligible inmates are given an opportunity for employment under the Early Release Scheme and connected to the employer through the Expo. Since 2018, the Employment Expo has been a massive success for Fiji Corrections and the men and women inmates who have engaged in this opportunity.

Another one, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is the Sow a Seed Mentorship Programme. This is for young offenders at Nasinu Correctional Centre. The Programme is open to volunteers to offer a fatherly and motherly ear to many of these young offenders who come from broken families.

The Programme is a restorative one where the end state is a multi-pronged approach towards good behaviour, education, employment, family reunion and leading law-abiding lives upon their discharge from prison.

Mr. Speaker, it is also worth commenting on the Solesolevaki Programme – a rehabilitation initiative specifically for inmates and rural prisoners. The Programme involves the family, *Lotu* and the *Vanua* to ensure the success of this initiative.

There are many success stories of this Programme, however, one worth mentioning in this august Parliament this morning is the case of a prisoner who started this programme in 2017. While serving, his family had split, with the wife remarrying. To cut a long story short, to highlight the success of this Programme, the prisoner is now reunited with his wife and children, and he now holds a Turaga ni Koro (Village Headman) appointment in one of our villages in Waibuka, just above Naitasiri.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in summary, the Yellow Ribbon Programme or Project is now a national asset of Fiji. The Fiji Corrections Service has continued to invest, innovate and contextualise the Project to remain fit for purpose and bring benefit to our nation. The FijiFirst Government could see

the benefits, remained committed and gave ongoing budgetary investment. The community can see the benefit and came out in force last year with the largest participation ever in the Yellow Ribbon Walk.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, not only has the Yellow Ribbon Project become a national asset, but it now has the potential to become an international value-added project where Fiji can export the project values and infrastructure for the benefit of our Pacific neighbours and their correctional services.

Mr. Speaker, the Report before this Parliament commends the Fiji Corrections Service for maintaining service delivery, and I add my affirmation to that commendation. Maintaining service delivery is a rehabilitation-driven approach that requires the development of a strong organisational culture and increasing skillsets from the officers and service providers. To the credit of the leadership of the Fiji Corrections Service, this was achieved and continues to be achieved.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Report highlights staff turnover, and it is worth noting the demanding nature of the Corrections environment. Bringing a paradigm shift and embedding that paradigm shift as the new norm requires a clear vision and commitment to capacity building.

As mentioned, Sir, the demands on Fiji Corrections Officers are significant, as we have heard from the honourable Attorney-General and requires a lot of support at this point. I thank you, Sir, for the commitment that you have made.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have a published document here, outlining the remarkable Fiji Corrections COVID-19 story with me. This booklet, outlining how the Fiji Corrections leadership developed a strategic plan that assessed the risk and implemented a response, is a story of national significance. Our Fiji Corrections Officers demonstrated their invaluable contribution to the nation by remaining at the frontline of the response. Not only did they put themselves at risk, but they saved and protected lives of those under their care. This is a story that we can be proud of and deserves our attention and applause.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in closing, I would like to thank the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice, for his visits in recent months to the various Correctional Institutions and his encouragement to the officers and their families. The best way of the honourable Minister to put real substance to his words of encouragement is to put his personal support behind, fully implementing the Job Evaluation Exercise for the Fiji Corrections staff that was approved by the FijiFirst Government.

For those fine Fiji Corrections Officers whom the honourable Minister has thanked and encouraged are now waiting to see if the Coalition Government will complete this exercise by providing the appropriate funding in the 2023-2024 National Budget. Will Fiji Corrections personnel be remunerated, and their service conditions uplifted in accordance with what we ask of them and for the professionalism and dedication their delivery? That is the key question that I pose.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I invite the Coalition Government to continue to commit and support the Fiji Corrections Service and the Yellow Ribbon Programme or Project. Much good comes from investing in those who have gone off-track and need our justice system's focus and our Corrections system's guidance. As Nelson Mandela has so profoundly stated, "This is nation-building at its best".

To my colleagues on the opposite side of this august Parliament, the platform has been built and established, and you will find it strong. Commit to it, invest in it, prioritise it and it will serve all of us well.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in concluding, I affirm the review of the Fiji Corrections Service Annual

Report 2017-2018 as tabled and commending it in Parliament for endorsement in this parliament Sitting. *Vinaka saka* (Thank you, Sir).

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I add my words of congratulations to the Chairman and the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights and also the previous Chairman and Committee that conducted this review.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Motion, presenting its review to Parliament, gives us an opportunity to discuss and debate the Report, as well as what we have experienced and seen of the services, activities and actions of the Fiji Corrections Service.

I was honoured to have been invited to the Fiji Corrections Service passing out parade last Friday. I was fortunate to have been given time not to inspect but to visit other aspects of the operations in Naboro. I was very, very encouraged, but I joked with those who sat with me, particularly those who paraded before me when I visited the farms, and told them, “Do not feel too bad about wearing that uniform. You are wearing that uniform for crimes you have committed. You are not wearing that uniform for perhaps, crimes not detected.”

I reiterate the words of the honourable Naivalurua, a former Commissioner of Fiji Corrections Services, on recidivism. The Acting Commissioner proudly went through those figures when I was visiting with her the establishment. That is a very good indication of the work the Correction’s efforts of those that serve in our Corrections Service and the institutions.

Honourable Naivalurua mentioned that it was an indication of the success of the former Commissioner of Corrections Service. That could be true an indication of the fear of those who came out of ever going back into that establishment. I hope it was the effectiveness of the Corrections Service rather than the fear of re-offending and going back into our prisons.

The recommendations that came from the Committee, I would like to assure Parliament that we will continue with the corrective actions that were started when the Report was tabled initially and carried out by the former Government. We will continue to improve the conditions of the Service. There was mention of the pay and emoluments of staff in various grades of the Service which we intend to look into and perhaps, with the Budget coming up, we might be able to do some more work and build it into their conditions of Service.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I noticed one thing with the serving officers (men and women), I saw that their morale was very good and that is a big help to those who are undergoing corrections in the establishment. I congratulate the Acting Commissioner and all her senior officers, men and women, in the Service. The world has had many former inmates who rise to be Heads of State, some Heads of Governments and we also have some who narrowly missed being sent in to be under the services of our Corrections Service personnel.

Having been through the courts a few times, I do not envy you, but I count myself very lucky to have avoided being a member of the brigade in the orange uniform. I also would like to commend the whole justice system and perhaps, explain why the honourable Naivalurua brought up the issue of the state of the facilities – he mentioned 35 years. I am glad that I was in-charge of Government very early before those buildings needed repair, so do not blame me, it was those other people. We will continue to improve the conditions of the Service.

When I went there on Friday, I looked for an officer who came to me after my pensions and entitlements were taken away. He came to me because his father was a member of the Wesley Church in Levuka and asked me if he could join. I said, “Boy, if you take my name there as recommending

you, you will be kicked out, you will not even be interviewed. I am in the bad books of those who are in-charge of recruitment into the Service. But what you can do is, stay here at home and I will set you your required fitness level test exercises.” I took him to the seawall and took him for the normal army route for the RFL. I took him through the sit-ups and chinning bar and all those things, and I was very happy that he did that very well. And before he was interviewed, he was fit and is now employed in the ranks.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is a lot of preparatory work, even before they go into the Service and as they serve, they serve the community. And while we laud the Yellow Ribbon Programme, there were also other very respectable programmes that were applied by past Governments, even before my time where those undergoing their term in prison were given the opportunity to interact with the public.

While there on Friday, I met an inmate who spends the weekend at home. He is a plant operator and is responsible for preparing the field on which a few hundred thousands of *dalo*(taro) are being planted. So, he is allowed to go home and comes back on Sunday evenings and continues the work.

I am also told that they earn money while they are doing productive work while they are there. When they are released, they take with them some money to continue what they do while they are still serving their term. So, this man will go home and when he gets home, there will be almost a hundred thousand *dalo* plants already ready for harvest when he goes home. That is a very good programme.

I congratulate the former Commissioner and the Acting Commissioner for that programme which they have incorporated into the corrective work carried out for those who are unfortunate to have been caught and be imprisoned.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to give my short contribution to the debate that is before Parliament and, that is, the Review of the Fiji Corrections Service 2017-2018 Annual Report. I think the speakers who have spoken before me, the honourable Attorney-General, the honourable Prime Minister and honourable Naivalurua, have clearly outlined the paradigm shift of the organisation. I will not venture more into the details of the rehabilitation framework, but will focus more on the second prison, that is, society.

In terms of the Yellow Ribbon Programme, it is on two fronts - one is the rehabilitation programme that happens in prison facilities and, secondly, the integration of those who have completed rehabilitation into our society. The main part that we play as the second prison to unlock through that Yellow Ribbon Programme is giving a second chance that will accept them back into the community. That is the challenging part because if that is not managed well, then recidivism rate will go up. If they are not re-integrated well into the society, they will re-offend and go back into the system and that process continues.

There needs to be proper programmes. I think there are already programmes in the Fiji Corrections Service that the Acting Commissioner and the previous Commissioner are aware. They had job placements, plus those who are released are assisted with finance. The honourable Prime Minister just said, do their farming and other activities, and other skills that they have learnt while in prison.

In that year in 2017-2018, I was an inmate in prison and that was the year when they introduced in the Nasinu Corrections Service, inmates learning music and now they have a band. They are part of a mixture of Corrections Officers and inmates that make-up the Fiji Corrections

Band. From then, when it started, most of them did not know music, it was a difficult task for the instructor to teach them and after that drills on how to drill at the drill square.

These are talented people. It is the duty of the Corrections Service. The programmes and skills they have is to unlock those gifts and talents so that they are used positively rather than breaking the law. That is the role that we need to play as a society and we, as national leaders, to participate more on Yellow Ribbon Programmes, whether it be marches or any other thing that is conducted by the Fiji Corrections Service that we see and also advocate on how society impacts that. We, as national leaders, should in the programme and that will also assist the Fiji Police Force when they see that our crime rate reduces because of the change and perception in our society, given that we also play a very important part in the integration process.

One of the challenging issues that was raised to the Committee while we were doing our review was the untold incidents and contraband. I think this continues to be an issue because when rehabilitation programmes are implemented within prison facilities, there are only a few who still want to go back to their previous trend of life. However, there are enough measures in place, plus other technologies - camera, CCTVs, metal detectors, for those who bring in contraband like mobile phones, *suki*, cigarettes and even most of the drugs that are on the streets are also in prison.

Also in prison, we can find dollar notes. I do not know what to buy there but they know how to use it, and these are some of the challenges that Corrections Officers face. However, to stop this system so that they shift to rehabilitation programmes, that is why they need to tighten up on those contraband.

I am also told incidences where given the stressful task, Corrections Service officers are also being locked up with inmates and sometimes they go through a lot of pressure. They do not have enough time to go home, the environment, and I think one of the suggestions that the Committee had suggested to the Commissioner then and the delegation that came from the Fiji Corrections Service is for officers to go through a distress programme and also trauma programme while they are still serving. Sometimes through pressure at work, it does result in some kind of incident beyond them because they are dealing with notorious criminals.

These are some of the things that could also assist them, not only the path that the honourable Attorney-General has said for them to go for further studies in universities but things that could help them, given the environment that they work in, in order for them to handle the work pressure and other related things that are associated with the work they do and the environment.

There is a big shift, if you see the facilities, the activities that are involved, I talked about the band, tailoring, piggery, farms, engineering and even baking and other things that you will see prisoners or inmates learning so that when they come out, they may use that as part of trying to earn a living from what they have learnt whilst serving.

The other thing that honourable Naivalurua had suggested, and I saw the reaction from the honourable Attorney-General in agreement while talking to the honourable Minister of Finance is the Job Evaluation Exercise (JEE). The last time the Fiji Corrections Service delegation appeared before the Committee, we had raised it and they said that they have made proposals and a policy to the former Minister, but they are still reviewing the JEE.

This will provide that incentive and a morale booster for the officers. This will assist in eliminating the staff turnover rate that is there where some have opted for other work or opted to work overseas for better rates. And I urge the Government to look into the JEE and increase in pay for these officers who have worked very hard.

The other big achievement in the Corrections Service, not like in other Ministries is that, they have a Trade and Marketing Division. Not only that they do agriculture, poultry or piggery, they also do small business investment. That was started during that time and also advanced by honourable Vasu. It helps them learn entrepreneurial skills and also, they have markets to sell their products and that comes back to the coffers of Government. That is a successful model that is there that other Ministries can also learn from, on how they have assisted these inmates, the potential they have to earn income again for the State.

That is my contribution to the motion and, again, just to reiterate that we (society) play a very important role in unlocking that second prison. That is very important for the successful implementation of the Yellow Ribbon Programme.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will try and be very brief but before I start my contribution, I want to warmly congratulate my friend, honourable Seruiratu, on his election as the Leader of the Opposition. I know him from his days as the Commissioner Northern and I know we tried to do a number of things when he was there. He was very passionate about Vanua Levu and I hope that he still remains that passionate, and will support whatever we do for Vanua Levu.

MR. SPEAKER.- His heart is always there.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- We used to have very robust debates in Parliament but one thing I can say to the people of this country today is that honourable Seruiratu always showed humility and understanding and we were able to converse outside of Parliament as well. So, I think, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are going to see a new era of humble leadership both on the side of the Government and perhaps, on the Opposition as well. So, congratulations my friend.

For the information of Parliament, let me just give some information, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The Fiji Corrections Service has established 15 Corrections Centres around Fiji, including two female Centres - one in Suva and one in Lautoka, and two male Remand Centres - one in Suva and one in Lautoka. The Northern Division, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is without a male Remand Centre and a Women's Corrections Centre. However, with the budget support from the Government, we think that those projects would commence in this financial year.

The Government funding, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the Fiji Corrections Service between 2016-2017 and 2022-2023, a total of \$267 million was allocated as the budget. I know there are a number of ongoing projects and programmes that support the Fiji Corrections Office, and these include, ongoing maintenance work to staff quarters, upgrade of institutional buildings and infrastructure, CCTV camera upgrade, purchase of inmates ration and stores, upgrade of public cemeteries, purchase of office equipment, creek boulders, body scanners, replacement of chubb locks and razor wire, rehabilitation programme and the Yellow Ribbon Poverty Alleviation Project.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I was very pleased with the contribution from honourable Naivalurua. I think he provided a very good overview of the activities, service and the plans of the Fiji Corrections Service and after him, the honourable Prime Minister in his very well-articulated elucidation of the experiences that he has had.

Let me just add, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I was always kind of fascinated and perhaps, supported the rehabilitation of prisoners and particularly, the Yellow Ribbon Programme because many years ago when I was at the University of the South Pacific and I was the Head of the Fiji Centre which was responsible for delivering distance education and extension courses, we had a programme which was initially funded by the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation and we used to go to prisons and enroll students to do courses.

I was so pleased, Mr. Speaker, that over the years, some of them came out, completed their degrees. One of them actually started in prison, ended up doing a PhD and ended being a lecturer at USP. So, Mr. Speaker, I fully support the Yellow Ribbon Programme and I think the Programme should really be extended to schools and youth groups as part of the awareness programme because I think our youth which make up a large percentage of the prison population need to understand that life behind bars can be a big waste of time.

On the issue of job evaluation, Mr. Speaker, I know that it is under review, and I agree with honourable Naivalurua that there is a need to look at that. There is quite a bit of disparity in the salary bands and allowances, but I am actually surprised that the previous Government with their claims of unprecedented growth for the last 10 years or 15 years did not do anything. So, Mr. Speaker, that is one of the things that we have to do. That is a fact.

HON. J. USAMATE.- All you need to do is just pass the budget.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- That is a fact, you cannot dispute that.

Obviously, Mr. Speaker, the increase in the number of staff did take place from 2016 to 2022 and there is a ratio disparity. I am told that it is one is to ten (1:10) right now, whereas the UN and international standard is one is to five (1:5), so that is another area that we perhaps, have to look at when we are looking at the budget for next year.

I was just talking to the honourable Attorney-General that perhaps, there has to be a review of the Corrections Service Act 2006 because I am told that it only talks about the inmates. It does not talk about the officers and those who are involved in the work of the prison itself, Mr. Speaker.

On that note, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the previous Committee and the current one and I hope that we, as a Government, would be able to address some of these issues and fundamentally, look at more extensively the causes of how and why people actually end up in prison.

For us as a country, there is a huge cost of crime. The economic cost of crime can be quite debilitating in terms of our overall economic performance, not only in terms of taking away our labour but also maintaining and running prison systems and our justice system. So, at some point, part of our rehabilitation would be to look at what we can do and extend those knowledge and awareness of what can happen in prison and outside of prison so that we can reduce the overall prison population in the long-term.

MR. SPEAKER.- I now invite the honourable Chairman for his Right of Reply.

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, firstly, I commend and thank the honourable Members for their contributions towards the motion before Parliament and, once again, thank the Committee from the previous Government and the Committee that is in charge today.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to reiterate some of the points that have been raised by honourable Members especially on the SDG, on gender balance, and I think that the Fiji Corrections Service is looking into more women being recruited to help out in the Corrections Service duties.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, with regards to the contributions made by the honourable Prime Minister and the honourable Attorney-General and the continuation of programmes such as the Yellow Ribbon, it will be considered.

Contributions made by the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance that

through the coming Budget, we are looking to funding some of the Remand Centres and some of the projects and programmes that are pending, we are thankful to the contribution from the honourable Minister that they will be looking into those, and we can see it rolling in the coming months.

On that note, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also take note of the contributions from honourable Naivalurua and honourable Bulitavu on some of the key works that Fiji Corrections Service does, and the master plan as outlined by honourable Naivalurua. The main idea of the master plan is to change the lives of inmates and how it affects them when they come back into society.

Mr. Speaker, I thank honourable Members, once again, for their contributions to the motion on the floor and I also thank the previous Committee and the current Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights.

MR. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote to note the content of the Report.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now intend to adjourn Parliament for lunch and we shall resume when the bell is sounded. The Parliament is adjourned.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.37 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.37 p.m.

**REVIEW REPORT ON THE
ITAUKEI TRUST FUND BOARD 2019 ANNUAL REPORT**

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move:

That Parliament debates the Review Report on the iTaukei Trust Fund Board 2019 Annual Report which was tabled on 30th August, 2022.

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

HON. A.V.B.C BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the iTaukei Trust Fund was established through the iTaukei Trust Fund Act 2004, to provide financial autonomy to the Great Council of Chiefs.

The iTaukei Trust Fund was also established to foster advancement of indigenous Fijians and Rotumans by promoting initiatives that will better their standard of living and enhance appropriate cultural traditions and values.

The Fund contributes towards boosting the capacity of Fiji's cultural sector through the provision of scholarships, especially services in language, culture and heritage and financial assistance.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, my sincere appreciation goes out to the Members of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs in the last term of Parliament on their efforts in scrutinising and compiling this Review Report and for tabling it to Parliament in August 2022. Having said that, Sir, I also wish the existing Committee Members the very best in their Committee deliberations for this Parliamentary term.

As part of the scrutiny process, the Committee requested for public hearing, and also received written responses on the issues that were identified by the Committee, which were then clarified by the iTaukei Trust Fund Board.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the course of the Committee deliberations, several pertinent findings were made. We noted that the Board made significant inroads in both organisational, direction and development. It achieved a gross revenue of \$8.1 million and a net from operations of about \$1.4 million for 2019, compared to \$3.9 million in 2018. The decrease in profit was attributed to the written down value of the burnt *Vale ni Bose*.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fund launched its Strategic Development Plan of 2019 to 2023, which outlines the five priority areas which are prudent financial sustainability, language, culture and heritage, communication, leadership, entrepreneurial and business skills and human capital management.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it was also pleasing to note that the Fund's investment continue to satisfactorily grow during the year with its investment portfolio continuing to generate positive returns in funding the mandated objectives of the Fund.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee has highlighted its findings for the Fund's financial and operational performance for 2019, and subsequently made recommendations to improve its overall performance and continue to diversify investments both, locally and overseas.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee commends the team of dedicated and motivated individuals, who have worked together to bring the iTaukei Trust Fund Board to new heights through the enhancement of its service delivery through investments. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- Before I invite, honourable Members, I would like to inform the House that I have received the list of speakers from both honourable Whips - the Opposition and that of the Leader of Government Business. There are eight speakers, and the order is as follows:

1. Honourable V. Pillay;
2. Honourable Minister for iTaukei Affairs, Culture, Heritage and Arts;
3. Honourable A. Tuicolo;
4. Honourable Minister for Fisheries and Forestry;
5. Honourable Ratu J.B. Niudamu;
6. Honourable Minister for Public Works and Meteorological Services, and Transport;
7. Honourable M.D. Bulitavu; and
8. Honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I contribute more to the Report before Parliament for debate on the review of the iTaukei Trust Fund Board 2019 Annual Report, at the outset, I would like to acknowledge the work done by the Members of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs in the last term of Parliament that comprised of the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services; honourable Tuicolo; former Members of Parliament - Mrs. Salote Radrodro, and Mr. George Vegnathan and the Committee was Chaired by myself, in the effort of putting this Report together and subsequently table it in August of last year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee requested the Board to provide an update on the *Vale ni Bose* which was destroyed in a fire in December 2019. The Board informed us that based on the fire report from the National Fire Authority, the Police had closed its investigations and plans were underway to redevelop the *Vale ni Bose*.

We were informed that the *Vale ni Bose* - building with contents, was insured for \$6.5 million. The insurance pay-out was received on 11th November, 2020, and this has been invested, while the Board was waiting for the commencement of the redevelopment of the project.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the period under review, the Fund reviewed its treasury functions which resulted in the renegotiation of the term deposits in favour of high interest rates. The Fund also continues to diversify Australian investments in providing adequate return, despite the volatility in the stock market.

For the Fund offshore investment, the Board decided for the first time to review the whole investment portfolio, to provide an independent assessment on the effective stewardship of the Fund's investment. The Committee had recommended that the Fund fast-track the implementation of recommendation by Mercer (Australia) to realise the effectiveness of the review being carried out.

In conclusion, I wish the Management, Board members and Staff of iTaukei Trust Fund Board well and continue to generate positive returns in funding the mandated objectives of the Fund.

HON. I. VASU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the debate on the Report before us from the Standing Committee on Social Affairs. I would like to thank and congratulate the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on her appointment and her team for tabling this Report. I

would also like to thank the Chairman and members of the previous Standing Committee for the Report that is before us.

As Minister of iTaukei Affairs, Culture, Heritage and Arts, the iTaukei Trust Fund Board falls under my portfolio. The iTaukei Trust Fund, as was already mentioned, was established through the iTaukei Trust Fund Act 2004, to provide financial autonomy to the Great Council of Chiefs. The Fund was also established to foster the advancement of iTaukei and Rotumans by promoting initiatives that will better their standard of living and enhance appropriate culture, tradition and values.

The Fund contributes towards boosting the capacity of Fiji's cultural sector through the provision of scholarships, specialised services in language, culture and heritage and financial assistance. At this juncture, I would like to pay tribute to our former Prime Minister, *Turaga na Tui Kobuca*, the late Laisenia Qarase. His visionary leadership established the Fund that was envisioned by previous leaders.

From an initial investment of \$40 million, the Fund has expanded to its total asset of \$323 million in 2019. The Fund stands as a testament on the ability of the iTaukei institution to manage its investment, given the right governance and support structures. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is a special area that the Coalition Government, through my Ministry, would like to strengthen and grow to the next level.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will now address the recommendations by the Standing Committee.

Recommendation 1

That the Fund, through the *Vanua* Fieldwork Project, continue its research and documentations of distinct iTaukei and Rotuman cultural practices in Provinces and Districts, to help revitalise traditional skills and knowledge.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fund continues to implement the Vanua Fieldwork Project. The *Yasana* (Province) of Rewa Vanua Fieldwork was completed last year. Documentaries and resource materials have been traditionally handed over to the *Gone Marama Bale na Roko Tui Dreketi* at the Rewa Provincial Council Meeting in 2022.

On that note, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the *Yasana* of Rewa fieldwork documentaries are currently being aired on the Fiji Television platform "*Na i Lololo*".

This year, the focus is on the Province of Tailevu and the preliminary work has begun. The intention is to roll out to all the 14 Provinces and Rotuma.

The Vanua Fieldwork is undertaken after the conclusion of the Sausauvou Leadership Programme. This Programme is intended to equip upcoming traditional leaders with effective leadership management and good governance skills. The delay in the project was due to COVID-19.

Recommendation 2

That the Fund fast-track the implementation of recommendations by Mercer (Australia) in relation to the review of its investment portfolio.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, an official delegation will be visiting Mercer; the Fund Investment Broker and Fund Managers in Australia to discuss the best way forward for the Fund. The trip is planned for April this year. The current value of investment in Australia now stands at AU\$70 million.

Recommendation 3

That the Fund continue to diversify its investment portfolio so as to generate positive returns for the funding of its mandated objectives.

Mr. Speaker, I can confirm that the Fund continues to diversify its investment portfolio. The outcome of Recommendation 2 is expected to generate optimal returns.

Recommendation 4

That the Fund continues to monitor the progress of the Valenibose Redevelopment Project to ensure works are completed according to the given timeframe.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, allow me to update Parliament on the progress of the Valenibose Redevelopment Project. The basic design and drawings are in the final stage. Once the full detailed drawings and costs have been finalised, they will be presented to the Board for approval. Once the approval, the tender process will proceed for the appointment of the building contractors. The Board will approve the awarding of the tender.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, construction is planned to commence from June this year and practical completion towards the end of 2024.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the Board and the staff of the iTaukei Trust Fund Board for their excellent achievement and the positive impacts on the lives of those they serve. *Vinaka vakalevu.*

HON. A. TUICOLO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank you for the opportunity to speak on the motion before Parliament for debate on the review of the iTaukei Trust Fund Board 2019 Annual Report which was tabled in this august Parliament on 30th August, 2022.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as a former member of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, I too would like to thank the former Members of the Committee - the former Chairman, honourable Viam Pillay, the former Deputy Chairperson, Mr. George Vegnathan, the Minister for Health and Medical Services, Mrs. Salote Radrodoro and Ratu Tevita Niumataiwalu as an Alternate Member, for their contributions towards the review of the iTaukei Trust Fund Board 2019 Annual Report and compilation of the Committee Report.

Mr. Speaker, I must also acknowledge the Secretariat team namely, Sheron Narayan, Marica Tuisoso and Rupeni Mudunavuku - for their dedication and support towards the formulation and completion of this Review Report.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to commend the work of the former Chairman of the Board – Mr. David Kolutagane, and the Board Members; the CEO – Mr. Aisake Taito and his team, for their dedication and commitment towards the achievement of the Fund’s mission in developing and facilitating initiatives that will improve the quality of life and enhance culture, tradition and values of iTaukei and Rotumans through language and cultural programmes, leadership management, entrepreneurship, and prudently investing the iTaukei Trust funds to earn superior returns while complying with the iTaukei Trust Fund Act, and to enhance the long-term value of the Trust.

Mr. Speaker, the Committee made few observations and noted that the Fund achieved a gross revenue of \$8,095,992 and a net profit from operations of \$1,438,770 for the year, compared to \$3,984,876 in 2018. The decrease in profit was attributed to the written down value of the burnt *Vale ni Bose*.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, the Committee also noted that the Fund’s investments continue to

grow satisfactorily during the year. This was a direct result of the review of the treasury function and the full settlement of the \$8 million loan. Shares in the RB Patel and Fijian Holdings Limited increased during the year due to a share split. The Fund's tourism investment at the Radisson Blu Resort Denarau business area continues to generate positive returns.

Mr. Speaker, the Committee has made four significant recommendations to resolve issues identified by the Committee. With that being said, I would like to briefly speak on Recommendation No. 1.

Recommendation 1

That the Fund, through the *Vanua* Fieldwork Project, continue its research and documentations of distinct iTaukei and Rotuman cultural practices in Provinces and Districts, to help revitalise traditional skills and knowledge.

Mr. Speaker, this recommendation is in line with the Funds third mandated objective in which the Fund sponsors research into languages, arts and culture of the *iTaukei* and Rotumans, and the better understanding and preservation of their heritage.

Mr. Speaker, the purpose of the Vanua Fieldwork Project is to research and document distinct cultural practices and to produce educational resources for *iTaukei*. Research and documentation also involve the revitalisation of traditional skills and knowledge. Community members, the men and women and young and old are engaged in this process, including the Provincial Office to facilitate knowledge transmission.

Mr. Speaker, we live in a truly connected world, we can access any culture we like with the swipe of our finger. We can also learn about traditions; we many never experience first-hand. Therefore, Sir, I totally support the recommendation on the continuation of the Vanua Fieldwork Project and expanding the project to our Provinces and Districts as the exercise will document distinct cultural practices and produce educational resources for our *iTaukei* and Rotuman brothers and sisters.

On that note, Mr. Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to contribute and also support the motion before this august Parliament. *Vinaka*.

HON. K.V. RAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, please, allow me to make a short contribution to the motion at hand. I wish to thank the previous Chairman and current Chairperson and Members of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs for the report on the iTaukei Trust Fund Board.

I also wish to thank the Chief Executive Officer, Mr. Aisake Taito, and his Management Team in the work carried out in 2019. I note that the Trust Fund has carried a huge amount of work towards the effort of strategic investment and foresight in the development of the iTaukei Trust Fund.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I take note of the activities of the iTaukei Trust Fund as defined in the iTaukei Trust Fund Act 2004, in section 4, prescribing the purpose of the Fund and the function of the Board.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I note the third recommendation of the Report and one which the Ministry of Fisheries and Forestry fully welcomes and support.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Coalition Government, through the Ministry of Fisheries and Forestry, is looking to establish a cooperative collaboration with key agencies such as the Department of Cooperatives.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Cooperative model is a proven one that has worked in many countries globally and one that is encouraged to be replicated in Fiji to empower inland and coastal communities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this establishes a structure that the Ministry will drive its intention to diversity from traditional agriculture, forestry and fish farm to a more integrated agro-forestry and fisheries farming. The Ministry has launched its initiative model on the International Day of Forests on 21st March, 2023 at Korotari Forestry Station in the Northern Division.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, those are some investments I know that would boost household income and economic recovery and will interest more beneficiaries to further invest.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank you for this opportunity to make my contribution to this motion, highlighting the linkage of recommendations in the Report to the work of my Ministry. I, therefore, commend and support the Review Report to in this august Parliament. Thank you very much.

HON. RATU J.B. NIUDAMU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, before making my contribution to the motion this afternoon, allow me to also pay my condolence to your *Vanua o Lalagavesi* for the passing of the late Ratu Epeli Ganilau, *Na i Taukei Vuniduva*, a well-respected and distinguished gentleman.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise in support of the Review Report of the iTaukei Trust Fund Board for the year 2019. As the Chairperson of the Committee had alluded to earlier, the iTaukei Trust Fund Board is a crucial institution established in 2004 by the Fijian Government to advance the wellbeing of the indigenous Fijian and Rotuman communities. Through its efforts, the Board promotes initiatives that uplift the standard of living of these communities while enhancing their cultural traditional and values.

At this juncture, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would also like to thank the iTaukei Trust Fund Board and its CEO, Mr. Aisake Taito, for the various initiatives available to our indigenous communities and one that is really delightful is the leadership training for young leaders in the indigenous community whereby the honourable Minister had already alluded to, the *Vuli ni Sauvaki ni Vanua*. It prepares our young leaders in taking leadership role in the *Vanua* and as we all know, the strength of the *Vanua* will depend on its leadership, and I am really grateful for that, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also would like to congratulate the Chairperson and Members of the Committee and also the last Committee for the preparation of this Report.

I wish to express, Mr. Speaker, Sir, my gratitude to the Committee for their insightful observation and recommendations. I particularly commend their proposal to fast-track the implementation of recommendations made by Mercer (Australia) concerning the review of the Fund's investment portfolio. This review provides an independent assessment of the Fund's effective stewardship of its investment which is vital in fulfilling its mandate.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Mercer (Australia) review will serve several essential purposes. Firstly, it will assure the Fund that its investment policies and portfolios are sufficient to provide maximum returns necessary to meet its mandated objectives.

Secondly, it will safeguard the governance and stewardship role of the trustees as the findings will provide a clear roadmap for effective stewardship of the investment portfolio in the long term.

Lastly, it will ensure that the Fund employs financial resources in areas that yield optimal

returns while providing financial stability, growth and sustainability in the long term.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am delighted to note that the Fund's investment portfolio increased from \$200.5 million in 2018 to \$316.7 million in 2019. The implementation of Mercer's recommendations will lead to an even more significant increase in the Fund's investment portfolio. This will enable the iTaukei Trust Fund Board to earn superior returns while complying with the iTaukei Trust Fund Act. Furthermore, it will enhance the cultural traditions and values of *iTaukei* and Rotumans through language and cultural programmes, leadership management and entrepreneurship.

In conclusion, I urge all honourable Members to support the Review Report of iTaukei Trust Fund Board for 2019 and the implementation of Mercer's recommendations. The Fund's investment portfolio is crucial in advancing the well-being of the indigenous Fijian and Rotuman communities, and we must ensure that it continues to deliver positive outcomes for these communities.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the 2019 Review Report of the iTaukei Trust Fund Board. It is a key report in the *iTaukei* governance structure and framework, and it is critical that we look at it in association with the other institutions which make that up - iTLTB, *Veitarogi Vanua* and other institutions within that.

At the outset, let me ask the question, the other side of Parliament has always expressed the legacy of FijiFirst. We do acknowledge that, but we also need to ask, what are the legacies they have not mentioned? When we talk about *iTaukei* governance structure, that is a key question. What have they left behind in terms of *iTaukei* governance and development?

When we read this Report, we need to look at that in consultation or closely with that kind of question. I note from the Report the gross revenue has been mentioned and also the profit from operations of \$1.4 million and the attribution to the decreased profit to the burnt *Vale ni Bose* or the GCC meeting house. We, as a Coalition Government will be convening the GCC meeting, unlike the FijiFirst Government which removed it.

In terms of the iTaukei Trust Fund, there is also an objective there of boosting the capacity of Fiji's cultural sector through the provision of scholarships, special services in language, culture and heritage which is good.

In terms of scholarships, we know the key areas which are gaps in skills these days, particularly within the *iTaukei* communities and that is an area which could be targeted with the revitalisation of that scholarship. The other side of Parliament would label my suggestion as racist. It is not racist; it is a methodology of assistance targeting a gap in skills. They have repeatedly said that, it is on the record.

The other area is leadership, entrepreneurial and business skills. This is again very critical, especially for the *iTaukei* governance in terms of management of resources. So, financial skills, business planning, project management and I do implore, especially with Nadave as an institution to include these kinds of training. Again, with those entrepreneurial business skills, we have to ask the question, what has FijiFirst done for *iTaukei* business? What have they done?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Zilch.

HON. P.K. BALA.- You do not know what we have done.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- What percentage of our GDP is attributed to the *iTaukei*? This is the data we need.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Be honest man!

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- And you have not provided that data. That is what I am talking about in terms of the relevant data which needs to be developed, but the FijiFirst abolished ethnic data - data on ethnicity. That is required in terms of development. When we look at statistics, we streamline various data - indigenous, women, et cetera. Unfortunately, FijiFirst did away with that and that is where the gap in the statistics is.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- We look after everyone.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- But in terms of the data we have, the Household and Income Expenditure Survey 2019-2020 confirm 30 percent live in poverty, of which, 74 percent are *iTaukei*. So, what does FijiFirst, in terms of real economic development, business development ensuring that *iTaukei* make up a better percentage of economic output in terms of the GDP - there is nothing, we do not have anything in terms of data. So that needs to be re-developed.

I do commend the *iTaukei* Trust Fund for the Vanua Fieldwork Project and that has been mentioned in terms of the revitalisation of the traditional skills, knowledge and recording, which is a key development. When we look at *iTaukei* Affairs, it is incumbent.

As I mentioned and also to look back at the legacies of the last 16 years under Bainimarama and FijiFirst, I would say it is a shameful episode in terms of *iTaukei* governance and development in this country - from the abrogation of the 1997 Constitution, the removal of the entrenched legislation and various other issues which happened from then till now. We, as a Coalition Government will be rectifying all those, as mentioned by the honourable Minister for Fijian Affairs. Everything will be rectified.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Potholes.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- We will be working with you as we are encouraging partnerships on the review of this. We are thankful to the honourable Leader of the Opposition for responding positively and I hope, honourable Bala will also respond positively instead of interfering with me every time.

In addition to that, the GCC, which was removed, will be rectifying that because the reason for the removal is uncertain. There was just no valid reason, and it is an institution for consultation for indigenous issues; that is all. It is not a political institution or anything, but of course we will be going through the review which has been announced by the honourable Minister for *iTaukei* Affairs and that will ensure that it will be an institution which is independent and not involved in politics, as always been the criticism from the other side, except for development issues which will be brought in by the Ministers. That is all!

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have heard the other side of Parliament talking about various developments but let me remind them that they were guided by the sunset clause. They need to be reminded of that. It is not that I am bringing up the past, I am just saying that they were guided by that in the last 16 years.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Point of Order!

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- And we have to rectify that, that is what I am trying to say.

MR. SPEAKER.- There is a Point of Order.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Point of Order - 60. He should talk on relevance, there is no sunset clause in the Report. Please!

MR. SPEAKER.- Please, confine yourself to the content of Report.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- The reason I said that is

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- No, you don't have to.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- ...because in there it is stated clearly that there has to be a sunset on indigenous institutions, that is what it says, and that indigenous institution includes the iTaukei Trust Fund and the framework is included also. I want to read out a quote from there, but I might be kicked out of Parliament for incitement.

(Laughter)

So, I will not read it because I know I might be subject to the Privileges Committee.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Please, please!

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- All these was done without consultation and in a dictatorial manner but I know that the Opposition side of Parliament, I mentioned to honourable Bala, "You will be sitting here and I will be sitting there."

HON. P.K. BALA.- (Inaudible)

(Laughter)

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Since that has happened and there have been goodwill on both sides, we will be working together to rectify these issues. When we look back, the whole thing was just totally unnecessary from 2006 to 2022 and we are back to square one today because we will be working on rectifying some of those issues, not for political sake but that is what is requested by our people. It is not only that by the indigenous people, but it is also for good national governance because you have frameworks for consultations and other ethnic people in Fiji do understand some of the issues which are raised by the Great Council of Chiefs which is good for national unity.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I know that maybe honourable Bilitavu will speak after me, and he will be addressing some of the issues I raised, but honourable Bilitavu was with us....

(Laughter)

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- He was also really with us on some of those issues.

(Laughter)

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- He was with us on trying to rectify those issues and I thank him and the honourable Leader of the Opposition that we will be working together as mentioned by the honourable Minister for iTaukei Affairs...

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Good try, good try.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- ... to rectify and especially there are some constitutional

amendments, we will be working together.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to give my contribution to the motion that is before Parliament on the iTaukei Trust Fund Board 2019 Annual Report.

HON. J. USAMATE.- *Maaro.*

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- First of all, I would like to acknowledge those who had put the iTaukei Trust Fund Act 2004 together. One in particular that I would like to specifically mention is the former Member of Parliament, Adi Litia Qionibaravi. She was one of the founders of that particular research that led to the Act and the establishment of the commercial arm of the Great Council of Chiefs (GCC). That is why the iTaukei Trust Fund Board has the role as stipulated in section 4 of that particular Act that comes from the original iTaukei Affairs Act on the advancement and the good governance of the *iTaukei* and how to advance.

I would have thought that the Minister for iTaukei Affairs would have given some history and throw some light into why the commercial arm of GCC was one of the key deliberations of the GCC then. It was embedded into one of the documents that most of you will know, called the ‘Blueprint - 50/50 By 2020’ by Mr. Laisenia Qarase.

In 2004 when this Act came in, the building was already there. Then in 2006, there was a change in government and there was a committee that came into place that most of us should know, it was called the State of the Nation and Economy Report that led to the People’s Charter for Change, Peace and Progress. There was a committee that was specifically tasked under the Charter that was to look into the review of our indigenous institution that was led by the former Colonel Apakuki Kurusiga. That Committee, in that review, had gone into plans and policies.

I would disagree with the honourable Ro Filipe Tuisawau where he said that during those times and even in the FijiFirst Government, that the *iTaukei* legacy was left behind. This Committee continued and the status where the iTaukei Trust Fund is at now is due to the change of direction that was led by the Committee under the leadership of Colonel Kurusiga and also the Minister for iTaukei Affairs then.

One that I will also acknowledge is the late Ratu Epeli Ganilau, who was the Minister for iTaukei Affairs at that time, even led up to the time when the GCC was suspended and also the events that led up to other things. Probably, the Bainimarama Government at that time saw that for indigenous issues, they need to be prioritised before the resurrection of the GCC later. But again, the issue here is the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) that most of you used to talk about.

In the UNDRIP, there are clauses that talks about, there needs to be economic advancement of indigenous rights as part of our collective group rights and this is one of it, that was of the programmes that the FijiFirst Government had continued. If the FijiFirst Government had left the legacy of the *iTaukei* people behind and the development in business or accelerating them into the commercial sector, then we would not have had this Annual Report being debated here.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- That is something that needs to be clarified and I think that has been subject to many political debate and campaign and has formed many political ideologies. Most of the indigenous political parties do campaign on this especially on the sunset clause argument, the 20 or so degrees that they talk about.

But again, the things that continued were more important to the *iTaukei* people....

HON. J. USAMATE.- He's seen the light.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- He has not seen the light.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- ... that helped in the economic empowerment of the *iTaukei* people.

Back to the Report, one of the biggest achievements that the *iTaukei* Trust Fund Board has achieved, if you look at the number of real estates it acquired here in Fiji, it owns the Radisson Blu Resort, that is the business auxiliary unit. That is part of the *iTaukei* Trust Fund assets and few properties in Suva. In Suva Street, they have got shares in RB Patel and other stock exchange markets around the world. They have also got that investment in Australia and in the United States of America through the leadership of its current CEO, Mr. Aisake Taito, and the other committees that look into other policies on how they can generate funds through investments.

Those investments that come into the Fund, the no returns from investment go into indigenous development - development of our culture, our language and other things that the honourable Minister was talking about. The field work that he was talking about in Rewa, that is attached to a historical history of Rewa - on the ancestor of the Rewa people from Burebasaga. It is the migration of Ro Melasiga from Verata to Rewa, that is the core of that project that is funded by *iTaukei* Trust Fund.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Tell them.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- That will be educational to those who would want to know Fijian history and the migration and how the Burebasaga Confederacy developed. These are some of the things probably that is important as to why the *iTaukei* Trust Fund is there. The Trust Fund also helps in other educational programmes.

In indigenous language, the Trust Fund partners with the University of the South Pacific on Diploma in Indigenous Studies where it allows most *iTaukei* teachers who want to advance into language studies are able to work as teachers and also at the Fijian Affairs level. Not only that, but the biggest achievement also we have in this term of Parliament, two of them are upstairs as Interpreters of Parliament. They were also part of this programme on indigenous language. This is the development that took place after the Kurusiga Committee came in and the development under the Bainimarama Government and the FijiFirst Government.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- So, the indigenous educational part, FijiFirst did not leave any indigenous people behind...

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- ...he took them together and this is the thing that we need to correct and some of the things in our political narrative.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Tell them about the business.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- We will go into the other things. If you look into the Annual Report, there is a verbatim attached where the CEO, Mr. Aisake Taito, was summoned to the

Committee and there were two Opposition Members at that time who were part of that Committee – honourable Salote Radrodro and honourable Ratu Tevita Navurelevu. They had asked questions to the CEO and the CEO had explained to them their queries.

But in terms of the other thing that the honourable Tuisawau had talked about on the entrepreneurship development of *iTaukei* people and that the FijiFirst Government did not do anything, let me remind him if he could read the verbatim which was in 2022. The CEO now, Mr. Aisake Taito, had said that in 2021, they gave an expression of interest where two were selected (was under the FijiFirst Government), to be trained at Nadave, to be on business paths to become entrepreneurs. So, the first pioneers in Nadave happened in 2021 and that was under the FijiFirst Government; entrepreneurship of the indigenous people.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- The other achievement that happened too was the *Sauvaki Ni Vanua* and it was under the FijiFirst Government. About 30-plus traditional leaders from Navosa graduated at Nadave. That is in the Report. If you look at the Report, those were the achievements, yet again, the Government is saying that the FijiFirst Government had done nothing to the indigenous people. These are some things that we really need to correct.

The other thing that you need to look at is the other programme by the iTaukei Trust Fund called the *Solesau*. *Solesau* is an educational programme that is put in a kit, available online for the Fijian diaspora overseas...

HON. J. USAMATE.- Hear, hear!

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- ... who want to learn their culture, heritage and language. So, these are the things that the FijiFirst Government ensured through the Sustainable Development Goals and also the other indigenous laws that are there to ensure that *iTaukei* are on par and that we do not lose our culture and language. We thank the former Prime Minister and Minister for iTaukei Affairs for that visionary leadership.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- That is something that I hope the Government will work upon - what has been achieved and what needs to be done, moving forward on how to empower that.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- We are trying to fix your damage.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- There was an important question that was asked by Salote Radrodro in the verbatim and that is if the iTaukei Trust Fund will be venturing in other areas for economic empowerment of iTaukei, but the focus now is still on culture and language. I see the path that the Minister for Fisheries and Forestry is trying to take in terms of how the Trust Fund can assist the indigenous in forestry and fisheries projects, but again they can talk amongst themselves as Ministers on how...

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- We are trying to fix your damage.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- ... funds can also advance iTaukei in all those other areas in agriculture and fisheries where funds will be available with the Trust Fund but that needs to be discussed with the

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- The past Government was idle.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- That needs to be discussed by the Board too.

That is the important thing that we need to know and understand - the iTaukei Trust Fund, why the FijiFirst Government continued to ensure the advancement of *iTaukei* people economically and through this Fund, protecting this Fund. That was one of the mandates of the FijiFirst Government that has ensured where the Fund is at the moment and also it helps the current Government moving forward with the objectives that are there, what other things, the new ideas that should come from you...

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- You will get it.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- ... to continue the journey. You are in the driver's seat now, so you need to continue. Stop trying to say that the FijiFirst Government did not do anything. We have done enough. We are yet to see what you can do for the indigenous people and this ...

HON. J. USAMATE.- Hear, hear!

HON. K.K. LAL.- 100 days.

HON. A. BIA.- Five days left.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- ... is the challenge that you have.

HON. K.K. LAL.- 100 days.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- I think only five days is left for the 100 days and other things that people were promised during the Election, but this is your time to shine. Stop acting like the Opposition.

(Laughter)

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- No, no.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- That is one of the things that I want to remind them. Stop acting like an Opposition, act like a Government. In the last two days, this side of Parliament is acting like a government in waiting.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- And you people should not be confused.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- You will be waiting a long time.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Wait for the next budget, not long.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Get your act together.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Yes, thank you, thank you.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- We all support the Report and what the Committee had done. Thank you to the Committee and the review and everyone, I think the 2013 Constitution looks after everyone especially the protection of indigenous Fijians in the 2013 Constitution on *iTaukei* land, Section 28 and also on customary chiefly titles and ranks, it is protected. Native land cannot be alienated so the protection is there by law. Now we work on our advancement through economic development, and I think the Government and the Opposition can work together to achieve more things ahead.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, for a while I was kind of really bemused by the contribution from the honourable Bulitavu. Honourable Usamate had remarked from the other side that he has now seen some light.

HON. M D. BULITAVU. Yeah, come!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I was just wondering that very soon he will see the light again and probably start supporting us from the other side.

Before I come back to some of the comments that were raised by Members from the other side, Mr. Speaker, let me just begin by saying again and the honourable Minister for *iTaukei* Affairs quite rightly pointed out that the *iTaukei* Trust Fund Act was established in 2004 under the former Prime Minister, late Mr. Laisenia Qarase, basically to guide the operation of the Fund. So, in terms of the funding, Mr. Speaker, the objective of the Act was to provide the financial autonomy to the Great Council of Chiefs.

This was, Mr. Speaker, repealed in 2012 by the military regime. Just hearing some of them from the other side, the arguments that we had throughout the eight years that I was sitting on the other side and honourable Tuisawau is right, whenever we raised issues that directly affected our indigenous community, those who are sitting that side and were sitting this side, labelled us as racists. But they do not know, Mr. Speaker, that the GCC was abolished only because the GCC refused to support the 2006 *coup*. That was the beginning of what they started to do without doing the appropriate consultation.

Mr. Speaker, just putting things into perspective -

- (a) Providing funding for undertaking promotion and sponsoring of programmes in the *iTaukei* and Rotuman languages and cultures;
- (b) Providing funding for the management and leadership of entrepreneurial skills of the *iTaukei* and Rotumans;
- (c) Sponsor research into languages, arts, cultures of the *iTaukei* and Rotumans and better understanding and preservation of their heritage, and any other purpose approved by the Board as advantageous to the beneficiaries.

So, Mr. Speaker, the *iTaukei* Trust Fund Board does not receive any government funding. But we know and honourable Tikoduadua knows that the Government actually took away \$20 million that was for the Fund. It was grants. All that talk from honourable Bulitavu about government supporting the Fund to look after the interest of the *iTaukei* community is all hogwash, as honourable Usamate says all the time.

The other point, Mr. Speaker, that honourable Tuisawau raised and we have raised this on many occasions is that, the former Government refused to recognise the fact that we needed ethnic

data to target our policies into appropriate sectors and for appropriate issues. When the Bureau of Statistics Report came out, Mr. Speaker the former Government Statistician (Mr. Kemueli Naiqama) did the right thing. He produced the Household Income and Expenditure Survey Report which laid down ethnic data and showed some very important statistics which could have guided policies for both, our indigenous communities and our other ethnic communities because both, Mr. Speaker, have different problems. If you look at, for example, maternal health or say for *iTaukei* woman as compared to Indo-Fijian women, different, Mr. Speaker, and unless you collect statistics to understand where the target should be, you cannot do that.

The Household Income Expenditure Survey (HIES) showed and honourable Bulitavu and honourable Usamate, they are all sitting there, they did not defend it, they did not support what we, in the Opposition, at that time wanted.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- The statistics showed.

Honourable Bulitavu was in the Opposition, but he was supporting the Government. And I do not know, I was told that the Government was providing a lot of funding for projects in his area. That is why he supported the Government from the Opposition.

So, let us get this right, Mr. Speaker, and we, as a new Government, we want to set a new agenda and new direction and one that will for unity - one that will bring people together and one that will allow people to understand each other's concerns. If you do not allow ethnic data, you are not going to get that understanding. People will continue to have different kinds of prejudices. People will continue to speculate. People will continue with rumours. It is better to bring this to the fore, talk about it and Parliament is the best place to talk about it. So, for all those who say under the pretext of common and equal citizenry....

HON. K.K. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, a Point of Order.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- What is your Point of Order?

HON. K.K. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, just a while ago, the honourable Deputy Prime Minister said that the Indian women and *iTaukei* women are different. This morning, we

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- What is your Point of Order?

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Lal, you have risen on a Point of Order, could you state your Point of Order?

HON. K.K. LAL.- Standing Order 60, Sir.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Why?

HON. K.K. LAL.- This morning we spoke about women empowerment. And here, we have the honourable Deputy Prime Minister creating division by saying that Indian women and *iTaukei* women are different.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. K.K. LAL.- He should withdraw that comment, Mr. Speaker, he is already dividing us.

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Deputy Prime Minister, you can continue.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, whenever the honourable Member opens his mouth, he shows his lack of understanding and comprehension as to what I was saying. I was not talking about the differences, I was saying that when you look at maternal health, you find different situations, different indicators and different statistics. That is all I am saying.

So, Mr. Speaker, obviously, the Great Council of Chiefs will commence soon, and it may be an opportunity to review the Act and perhaps, bring back the repealed provision which will allow the Great Council of Chiefs to be financially autonomous and basically through assistance from the Fund and, of course, the Government will have to look at what is the financial situation and how that needs to be taken into account.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just to bring back this debate and I think it is a healthy debate when we talk about ethnic data, we, as a government, have already decided that we are going to make the Fiji Bureau of Statistics more independent. We are going to review the Act. We are going to adequately resource the organisation so that they are able to, not only collect ethnic data but also get proper analysis done and have the capacity to give us that information that will allow us to make good policy and targeted policy for all those in different regions or parts of the country or according to different ethnic groups.

I remember, Mr. Speaker, many years ago, we did some study of our Melanesian community in the Kalekana area. All the data when it was aggregated into two different ethnic groups did not show that the poverty rate amongst that community in that locality was extremely high. No one knew about it. And so, there was never any attention paid to address and look at the causes of how those things were happening.

So, Mr. Speaker, having ethnic data does not necessarily mean that you are going to device racist policies. This is what they thrived on for all these years. They talked about one in Fiji, but they actually exploited. They went and campaign on the basis of race, that was what they did.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Yes.

HON. P.K. BALA.- And what about you?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- So, it is very important, Mr. Speaker.

You are talking about potholes.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Don't point at me.

(Laughter)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Actually, Mr. Speaker, honourable Bala was talking about potholes. Perhaps, he should think about drowning himself in shame in those potholes because that is what they left us.

(Inaudible interjection)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.-As a government, they have left us....

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Point of Order, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- A Point of Order.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we take as good as we get, but when you get insulting by telling someone to go and drown himself in a pothole, that is offensive. He should take that back.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, let me say that the honourable Member talked about potholes. All I am saying is that, that is their legacy when they were in Government and they left it for us to handle, so we are going to fix all that.

HON. P.K. BALA.- When?

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- For eight years, Mr. Speaker....

HON. P.K. BALA.- People are suffering.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- ...he was part of the government ...

HON. P.K. BALA.- No money!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- ...and he was the Minister for Infrastructure. They have left nothing. They made this country broke.

HON. P.K. BALA.- No money!

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- That was what they left us. People understand what mess you left us.

Mr. Speaker, let me conclude by saying that this is a very important Fund. As I have said, we need to look at how investments can be strengthened and how the income derived from those investments can help us to provide more funding in the areas that I have pointed out which was the original objective of the Fund set up by the former Prime Minister. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs to give her Right of Reply.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.-, Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the honourable Members who have contributed to the debate this afternoon. I noted that all honourable Members have spoken at length on the various recommendations in the Report and of the organisation as a whole.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as an *iTaukei* woman and Member of the Coalition Government, I respectfully note and commend the plans to commence construction of the *Vale ni Bose* in June of this year. I also note that construction should be completed by the end of 2024. This is in line with the Coalition Government's commitment to bring back the *Bose Levu Vakaturaga* with the first meeting scheduled for May this year.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have no further comments.

MR. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote to note the content of the Report.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, before we proceed, I kindly request that since the Standing Orders states how we meet and the time, therefore, for the purposes of complying with it, especially with respect to sitting times, I now call upon the Leader of the Government in Parliament to move a suspension motion.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

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

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

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as noted on the Order Paper, we have two more motions for debate. With the number of speakers listed and also the Oral Questions that we have to get through, therefore, given the time that we have, this particular motion is to seek the permission of Parliament and honourable Members that we sit beyond 4.30 p.m. in order to get through all the businesses that we have today.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on this motion, if any?

Since there is none, I now call on the Leader of the Government in Parliament to speak in reply.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have nothing more to add, thank you.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

REVIEW REPORT ON THE FIJI RICE LIMITED 2013-2017 ANNUAL REPORT

HON. S. TUBUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move:

That Parliament debates the Review Report on the Fiji Rice Limited 2013-2017 Annual Report which was tabled on 30th August, 2022.

HON. S. KIRAN.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

HON. S. TUBUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, the honourable Leader of the Opposition and Honourable Members of Parliament, I rise to speak on the Review Report on

the Fiji Rice Limited 2013–2017 Annual Report that was tabled on 30th August, 2022.

Before I begin, I wish to warmly congratulate my former school mate, honourable Seruiratu, for his accession to the distinguished position of the Leader of the Opposition in this august Parliament. Of course, I wish him all the best in his tenure of Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs tabled its Review Report on the Fiji Rice 2013-2017 Annual Reports during the August 2022 Parliament sitting. It was done by the former Chairperson, honourable Vijay Nath.

Fiji Rice Limited was first established as Rewa Rice Limited in the early 1960s before going through the name change. Executives of the Fiji Rice Limited were invited to provide submission to the Committee during which key achievements and challenges during the period under review were discussed.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee recommended for Fiji Rice Limited in full consultation with stakeholders, particularly the Ministry of Agriculture, to formulate a comprehensive strategic plan to align with the Ministry's commodity plan.

At the same time, Mr. Speaker, we agree with the Committee that when marketing Fiji grown rice, the industry in collaboration with relevant stakeholders could promote brown rice which is one of the highest selling product by Fiji Rice due to its rich source of dietary fibre which can reduce Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs).

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it was noted that there is an issue of aging farmers particularly in the Northern Division as the younger generation are not willing to actively participate in rice farming. There is a need for stakeholders to work together to develop initiatives to ensure that we have replacement farmers being trained so that they can develop the industry more sustainably.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank the former members of this Committee, honourable Vijay Nath, Mrs. Veena Bhatnagar, Dr. Sachida Nand, Mr. Inosi Kuridrani and honourable Ro Filipe Tuisawau, who were part of the Committee that produced this Report. Thank you, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- Before I invite members to speak on the motion, I would like to, once again, inform Parliament that I have also received a list of speakers. Since the motion is from the Government, I think what has been happening right up until now on the various motions that have been brought before Parliament is we invite the Opposition to do the first batting and then it will be the Government. So, in that way, the order is as follows:

1. Honourable M.D. Bulitavu;
2. Honourable Assistant Minister for Rural and Maritime Development, and Disaster Management;
3. Honourable Leader of the Opposition; and
4. Honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics.

Whilst on that, I would like to adjourn Parliament for afternoon tea and we will resume once the bell is sounded.

The Parliament adjourned at 3.54 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 4.35 p.m.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to give my short contribution to the Motion that is before Parliament on the review of the Fiji Rice Limited 2013-2017 Annual Report.

Sir, Fiji Rice Limited was formally Rewa Rice Limited, established in 1960 by the Government then that was before Independence, but it was rebranded, Sir, in 2017 as Fiji Rice Limited under the FijiFirst Government, given that the company had also moved into other areas in Vanua Levu, like Dreketi, plus other areas.

The Company has now a qualified and very innovative team with Board of Directors and Management and has developed strategic plans and projections to turn the company to self-sustainability in the last five-year term from when it started in 2017), through the leadership of its Chairman - Mr. Raj Sharma who is from Vunicuicui in Labasa, plus other Board members, and Mr. Ashrit Pratap the General Manager for Fiji Rice Limited.

One of the achievements seen from this turnaround is the significant increase in the demand of brown rice and its by-products. Those are some of the innovative ideas brought in by the new Management of Fiji Rice Limited when they rebranded the company in 2017.

They have undertaken maintenance work; the staff members have grown and also other various strategic initiatives. One of the efforts they have achieved through the FijiFirst Government then was providing the company with competitive market to farmers and at the same time, join hands in the Fijian Grown Campaign and Buy Fiji-Made products that reduce the rice import bill through those initiatives.

The Company has also managed to purchase a new Mill that has eventually helped in the increase of daily buying of paddies to farmers and provide more employment to the local people.

There are other areas that the Company has also ventured into with the assistance of the Ministry of Agriculture. In the year 2013 to 2017 through the rice variety research at Koronivia and at the Dreketi Research Station in Macuata, there were about 26 rice varieties that was introduced and tested, and that led to the two new rice varieties that was released in 2019 - *Sitara* and *Cagivou*, in addition to the other varieties that are already produced and harvested in Fiji. Probably, the honourable Minister for Agriculture will talk on the other varieties like *Nuinui*, *Totoka*, *Deepak*, *Star*, et cetera.

However, some of the things that they already have is good price in this industry. The world price for rice now is about \$150 per tonne and Government subsidises another FJ\$200. Fiji Rice is paying about \$850 per tonne to farmers and \$200 has been subsidised by Government through the Budget. That is some big achievement.

Also, there are other issues of improvement. There are other irrigation projects in Dreketi. We are hopeful that local areas in Macuatu will improve rice farming in the area. There are other things that we would probably like to hear from the Budget that will be coming up in July, such as other subsidies in terms of fertilizer and weedicides that can improve more returns to the farmers. These are some of the things that farmers in Vanua Levu and around Fiji will be looking forward to, to the honourable Minister of Finance - the local Dreketi boy.

(Laughter)

On things that could improve the industry and also encourage more farmers because what the

Company is currently facing if you see the recommendation, is the aged farmers. There is plenty old farmers and their children are not into farming, just like sugarcane. They have left Vanua Levu and other areas and ventured into other areas to find work.

What we can do is provide these incentives and other innovative ideas to the industry so that we can encourage those to continue with farming because it is an industry, it has got lucrative prices there, the market is there and other mills are probably opening up, as well as paddies are readily available through the Company and are easily bought by the locals now.

There are few challenges that the company faces in terms of climate change, resilience of varieties of seed, and the honourable Minister might talk on that. This morning, we had a good discussion with the honourable Minister for Agriculture. I was talking about meeting the Chinese delegation that is around and how they have shared their production of agriculture and how it has contributed to their economy.

They have shared with me the return to their economy. It is a great lesson. My honourable colleague had said that it is a great time to also seek for co-operation and also other technical assistance aspects that could help this kind of industry, especially in Fiji because we have got more land available and also through the projects that have benefitted through most of our communities.

Our cooperatives in Macuata, landowning units, our youth have gone into cluster farming through rice farming, especially in Vunivutu. We are thankful for the budgetary provision of 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 that was allocated to assist farmers in mechanisation through tractors whereby these cooperatives provide about one-third of the contribution, and the rest are sometimes provided by the Ministry of Agriculture. I think that provision is still available.

Last year, I had assisted one through mechanisation because one of the main suppliers in Labasa supplied machines and we were able to give them out to farmers in Vunivutu, up in Nadogo area in Macuata, to help farmers cultivate their land in the area. This can also continue. There are other projects in Nabua, in the *Tikina* of Koroalau, Cakaudrove that were assisted.

There are still many other potential and I am sure that the honourable Minister for Agriculture, from what we have seen in videos through his visits, he is following those key areas and probably policies will come up in the new Budget that we will hear in July.

More assistance will be given to this industry. I came to know this industry when we were doing the Public Enterprises (Amendment) Bill back in 2019 where most of the Government companies came to present to the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights and presented to us the standards of the company and how they are contributing to the Government coffers as Government companies.

One of the higher achievers was Fiji Rice Limited. The Chairman of Fiji Rice Limited, Mr. Raj Sharma, is also managing two other Government companies without getting any allowance (zero allowance) but he gave his best effort, knowing very well that the provisions are very high under the Public Enterprises Act. If you give yourself to become a Board member, what governs you, what you cannot do and what you can, so most of the time people are discouraged to come into government company board because they will be tied up. But we are thankful to some people who are patriotic Fijians, who are able to give themselves and service for the nation to avail themselves to these boards, and also help steer these boards to achieve its vision and mission statement.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Mr. Raj Sharma is also the Chairperson for Fiji Coconut Millers and Food Processors. We hope that Government supports the company and other initiatives that come up and

take it to another level where it is right now from 2017 when it was rebranded and the reforms that was done to it, reaching the state that it is now, the other challenges that I have mentioned and other suggestions that I put forward that the Coalition Government can take it forward from where the FijiFirst Government had lifted this particular government company.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, due to some late assistance of participation, the secretariat has re-arranged the speakers once more so as to provide the best response from both sides. In this instance, the honourable Minister for Agriculture will be the next speaker, followed by honourable Lal, before honourable Assistant Minister Vocea and then the fifth will be the honourable Leader of the Opposition before it is rounded off by the honourable Deputy Prime Minister Professor Prasad.

HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to speak on the motion by the Chairman of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs. I would like to thank the former Members of the Standing Committee on Economic for the preparation of this Report.

From the outset, I would like to congratulate the Chairman of Fiji Rice Limited, Mr. Raj Sharma and the CEO, Mr. Ashrit Pratap for steering Fiji Rice Limited to be one of the more profitable agro-based government companies. I also commend the former government, in particular, the former Minister for Agriculture, honourable Inia Seruiratu who was very passionate about agro-based industries growth and I will continue on his path.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, rice has progressively become a staple diet as it is now consumed by every household in Fiji. It has become an essential commodity that requires special attention in terms of production and development in the country. Fiji imports an average of 40,000 metric tonnes of rice annually, mostly from Asian countries with a self-sufficiency level of 17 percent.

The Ministry of Agriculture produces close to 50 tonnes of seeds annually for the distribution to farmers, which is 20 percent of the total seed requirement for production. Let me touch on the recommendations in the Report and what the Ministry is doing with regards to the recommendations.

Recommendation 1, we are grateful that Fiji Rice Limited now works with the Ministry of Agriculture in terms of the Ministry providing agriculture statistics, which the company now uses as relevant data for their future plans and reports.

Recommendation 2, the company must be commended for pushing for the production of the brown rice which has become the delicacy, not only for the people of Fiji, but for the Minister for Agriculture as well. I have been told that Fiji Rice Limited is working with the Ministry of Health in terms of using brown rice as an alternative food, especially in the fight against NCDs.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in order for Fiji to raise rice self-sufficiency level, the Government will embark on the following priority areas:

1. To finalise and endorse the National Rice Development Strategy 2023-2028 in collaboration with rice stakeholders.
2. Conduct an inclusive national rice survey immediately to validate the National Rice Development Strategy.
3. Formation of rice co-operatives. During my maiden speech I had spoken about the advantage of farmers joining co-operatives and the benefits that being a member of the cooperative brings as opposed to being on your own.

4. Provision of adequate infrastructural support to rice farmers. This include the construction of farm roads, drainage and irrigation schemes.
5. Strengthening of the national rice research and development activities. I think the honourable Bulitavu has alluded to this. The objective of this activity would be to come up with higher yielding varieties, not only in terms of planting large land areas, but looking at the higher yield per hectare.
6. Continuous capacity building support on rice farming practices. These, as the honourable Bulitavu had alluded to earlier will include the exchange programmes and the provision of technical expertise in collaboration with our development partners. This morning I met with the Deputy General Secretary of Guangxi Province in China and this was part of our discussion.
7. Introduction of machines to support mechanised farming needs for different activities. The Ministry of Agriculture already has a farm mechanisation programme in its current budget, but we would be seeking an increase from the honourable Minister for Finance, because we feel that the amount given is not enough. I think the honourable Minister will vouch for that because most of the rice in Fiji is grown in his area in the North.
8. Promotion of rice cultivation through establishment of local farms, farmer field schools to facilitate dissemination of information to new farmers and extension office. This is an important activity because it provides our farmers with a practical hands-on training on rice production methods and techniques, and it opens up their knowledge and skills to better methods of rice cultivation.
9. The Ministry has in place a gender in agriculture and youth in agriculture policy and this is one of the issues raised in the recommendations of the Report. The absence of young replacement farmers has become a problem, it has become a constraint to production, not only for rice farming but for crop and livestock farming as well in this country. To that end, the Ministry of Agriculture has put in place these policies to address youth, women in agriculture and to try and entice them to get involved in mainstream production in the agriculture sector.
10. It is to increase our monitoring through regular field visits and advisory services. I must apologise that there has been a lot of complaints on the absence in terms of our presence as a Ministry in certain areas in terms of the provision of sound crop advisory services to other farmers. There have been complaints in terms of our visibility as a Ministry, and we are currently working on that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on Recommendation 4 in terms of the aging farmers, I have already alluded to that, but we are also working with the institutions that provide training on the same of young farmers. We are glad that Navuso has now opened up also to young women and we must commend those who run the Navuso institution for making that move. I do not know whether they made that move to attract more funding or whether it is in the national interest. But having said that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you for allowing me to speak on the motion.

HON. V. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to make a contribution to the Annual Report of Fiji Rice Limited for the year 2013-2017. Before I do that, I would like to make some clarification in regard to my maiden speech on Monday.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, after I have delivered my maiden speech on Monday, the honourable Attorney-General went to the media and gave a statement that my speech was written by someone outside this Parliament. This is a blatant lie! I am able enough to do my own speech and not only him, honourable Prof. Biman Prasad also during tea time in the tea room, he said the same to me and he has not done that to me only....

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Point of Order. The honourable Member, I can talk about a lot of the conversations he had during tea time, totally irrelevant, unnecessary and actually his Point of Order proves that, that might be correct, what the honourable Attorney-General said.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, please confine yourself to the content of the Report.

HON. V. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is just a clarification because honourable Prof. Biman Prasad has not done that to me only, he has also done that to honourable Ketan Lal and honourable Rinesh Sharma too. We are able Members of Parliament.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Stop this game.

HON. V. LAL.- Honourable Attorney-General has this habit of charging people without evidence.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Point of Order.

MR. SPEAKER.- All I am asking, honourable Member, please confine yourself to the content of the Report. That is all. Let us not go back to that.

HON. V. LAL.- Before I do that, Sir, I challenge the two honourable Members to prove that my speech was written by someone else.

On the same note, Sir, as a former news editor and programmes director, I am saddened to say that some of our journalists are not following the basic principles of journalism.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. V. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, after interviewing the Attorney-General....

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Point of Order. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think the honourable Member is not respecting your decision. The honourable Member should respect the decision of the Speaker. The Speaker has warned him twice to stick to the Report. He is actually defying you, Sir. Have some respect for the Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, as I have stated, could you please just confine yourself to the content of the Report. I do not want to be forced to be making a drastic decision.

HON. V. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I just want to make one clarification, I should have been given the right of reply and Fijivillage decided not to, I do not know why, Sir. I will go back to....

MR. SPEAKER.- Continue, please.

HON. V. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will just go back to the Report. The Standing Committee on Economic Affairs has given a number of recommendations as alluded to. One of the recommendations here is to formulate a comprehensive strategic plan to align it with the Ministry's commodity development plan.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee believes that when marketing Fiji grown rice, the industry in collaboration with relevant stakeholders could promote brown rice as it is known for its rich source of dietary fiber which can reduce risk of non-communicable diseases.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it was noted that there is an issue of aging farmers as the younger generation are not willing to take up rice farming. The Committee in its recommendation stated a need for stakeholders to work together to develop initiatives, policies and a conducive environment to make rice farming a more lucrative career. Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji Rice Limited has achieved significant progress despite the challenges they had faced in the recent years. Some of the key achievements that Fiji Rice Limited has made over the past years is its investment in upgrading their mill has paid off significantly.

Fiji Rice Limited has set up a new mill in 2017 worth \$135,000 and changed from kerosene to electric dryers which cost them a total of \$75,000. Their mill building has been repaired and maintained at a cost of \$201,000 and they have also upgraded their silo and elevator at a cost of \$221,000.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, furthermore they have constructed a new warehouse worth \$330,000 and a new office in Dreketi worth \$137,000. These upgrades have improved their efficiency which has been critical in ensuring that they maintain a high level of production output, enhance their storage capabilities and streamline their supply chain management.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji Rice Limited's effort to increase their market share has been successful. They have secured contracts with all major supermarkets in Fiji and have been supplying rice and sugar to FSC farmers for the past three years. Initially they were supplying to a few sectors in Vanua Levu but now they have expanded their supply to the whole of Viti Levu and Vanua Levu. Fiji Rice Ltd has also secured a contract with Fiji Airways to supply rice for their business class.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the expansion efforts have also extended to our new Dreketi office which has been constructed at a cost of \$137,000. This office will enable Fiji Rice Limited to better serve their customers and partners in the Northern Division. Fiji Rice Limited has made significant progress in expanding its market. They now supply all major supermarkets in Fiji and for the past three years, they have been supplying rice to FSC as I said earlier for its farmers, deducting the cost from their proceeds.

However, we must acknowledge the challenges that Fiji Rice Limited has faced. The high cost of production mainly due to the mill's underutilisation has posed a significant challenge. They must also contend with competition from cheaper imported rice which is preferred by consumers as well as the aging of farmers as the younger generation are not interested in rice farming.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, climate change effects such as sea water seeping into rice farmlands have also impacted their operations. As we look towards the future, we must address these challenges head-on. The way forward involves a massive planting campaign, encouraging all farmers especially cane farmers with suitable land to plant at least one acre of rice per year. Fiji Rice Limited will also introduce strict leasing conditions on land use and channel agriculture subsidies through Fiji Rice Limited where only farmers supplying to them will receive subsidy.

Furthermore, Fiji Rice Ltd will include rice farming in school and university curricular to promote interest and education in the industry. In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am optimistic about the future of Fiji Rice Limited. With the continued support of Government and stakeholders, Fiji Rice Limited will overcome its challenges and continue to grow and expand operations.

HON. J.R. VOCEA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, just before I make my contribution to the motion before Parliament, I join the other Members of Parliament to congratulate the Leader of the Opposition, honourable Seruiratu, for being elected today into that position. I have known honourable Seruiratu for a long time. We spent six years together in that boarding school in Lodonu, Tailevu North, and he was also my boss when I was Commissioner Northern. He was the Minister for the Ministry for Rural and Maritime Development and I know he is very passionate about the work that he does every day and as a result he is now the Leader of the Opposition. Thank you, honourable Seruiratu.

Just going through, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Report that has been tabled in Parliament, I have some observations to contribute to the debate. It is sad to note, Sir, that Fiji loses close to \$44 million yearly on the importation of rice from other countries such as Vietnam, China and India, and I am very optimistic that Fiji has the potential to be self-sufficient in rice production. It has been noted that the production of rice continues to decline over the years, and I would like to offer some solutions in terms of listening to the Report that has been tabled by the Economic Affairs Committee and some of the previous experiences I had with Rewa Rice.

Being the Commissioner Northern we had worked very closely with the board members and one of the issues that I would like to highlight to this august Parliament is if we would like to have sustainability in the production of rice in this country, to expand rice farming to other areas that have interest in rice farming but have not been given the opportunity to do so in the past. I remember whilst I was the Commissioner Northern, there were some farmers from Cakaudrove and Bua, we brought them to the Dreketi Agriculture Training Centre to be trained on rice farming and rice cultivation. They went back and they were really eager to continue with rice farming, but I do not know what the problem is. Nothing eventuated. They lost what was taught to them during their training and they lost interest in rice production. I hope that we will continue to train a lot of people especially those who are eager to do rice farming in the country.

There is one example of what I have said, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is a farmer in Vunivutu in Macuata by the name of Aseri. He was not a rice farmer (not honourable Radrodru) before, but he had some interest in rice farming and last year, he harvested eight tonnes of rice and is optimistic to increase his production this year. This group from Vunivutu, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in Macuata, have gone ahead to form their own co-operative and have contributed towards the purchasing of their own tractor.

I am very optimistic that we can revive the rice industry or rice farming in Fiji if we form co-operatives as being alluded to by the honourable Minister for Agriculture. During lunch today, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I was at the office of the Indian High Commission in Fiji, and I managed to talk to His Excellency, the High Commissioner for India in Fiji and he told me that India with a population of 1.4 billion, one of the fastest developing countries in the world, the country has 1.9 million co-operative movements. So, they thrive on co-operatives, 330 co-operatives on sugar mill operation and a lot more banking and finance co-operative institutions are spread across the rural and urban areas.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I was brought up in the copra industry. We thrived on copra plantations, on co-operatives formed during those years with copra. The funds saved from those co-operatives in the coconut industry, we built our houses, we sent our students to secondary schools and there were a lot of developments in our villages that were the outcome of these co-operatives. This is a way

forward for the industry and that is to revive the co-operatives movement so as to address the declining production for our rice in Fiji. We need full support from the Government to revive the industry and as was alluded to by the honourable Member from that side, a group from Nabua Village in Koroalau have now received a tractor to try and improve rice cultivation in that area.

During my maiden speech in Parliament early this year, I put out some classical examples of some co-operative movements in Fiji that continue to thrive for example, the Nayarabale Youth Group in Vaturova in Cakaudrove, the Lovia Co-operatives in Gusuisavu, as well as the Nukusolevu Co-operatives in Nasarawaqa in Bua. This reminds me and I keep on asking questions, the logic behind the review of the co-operative movement in Fiji which was undertaken way back in 2010. If I remember correctly, Mrs. Mataikabara and Mr. Are Wakowako were the ones involved in the reviewing of the co-operative movement and that resulted in the reduction of many of the cooperatives that were established in Fiji in those days.

I firmly believe, Sir, that rejuvenating the philosophy of Koro Co-operatives will positively contribute to arresting the declining stages of our rice industry, not only for economic survival but for household consumption as well.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank you for giving me the opportunity to contribute and I support the motion before Parliament.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- I thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for giving me the floor to contribute to the motion before Parliament.

As alluded to by the honourable Members who have spoken before, this is a crop that has a lot of potential and particularly being a short-term crop - three months, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I hope that with the discussions today and with the commitment that has been made by the honourable Minister for Agriculture, we will see some improvement and a new level of energy, particularly to the farmers but, of course, we have to look at the whole value chain as well.

Mr. Speaker, I got involved with rice, I have no clue about rice farming until I came to the Northern Division and by virtue of the appointment, I was part of the initial Dreketi Rice Revitalisation Taskforce. I remember Mr. Haripal Singh, the late Mr. Pita Mawi, and all the farmers in Dreketi, particularly in the Muanidevo, my good friend, Mr. Paras Nath, and the honourable Deputy Prime Minister is smiling because he knows him very well. This is how I got involved with rice. And then I was given chairmanship of the then Rewa Rice and the changes begin to happen, Sir.

I will not go into the detail recommendations, but I will perhaps, add some key additional areas of specific interest to help the Committee and, of course, the Ministries involved as well.

Firstly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would say that Rewa Rice back then was one of the underperforming, perhaps non-performing, or struggling entity for many reasons which I will not go into. But there is one thing that I wanted to highlight and urge Government as well to consider it seriously. The honourable Prime Minister is not here but I will urge the three Deputy Prime Ministers and all. Parliamentarians, particularly honourable Members on the other side - it is about selecting the right people to do the work, particularly the Boards and Management. This is one of the key contributing factors to the non-performing or the underperforming or the struggling that was behind this entity.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, no names, but this is one of the struggles because they could not. Government was not in a position to write-off, and this was the initial challenge that we faced as the Board. We cannot go to lending institutions because of the debt that was there with Rewa Rice. Most

of the money was given or taken by the Board members, Senior Management and it is the culture back then in this entity.

I would like to urge Government, please, when it comes to selections of Boards and the appointment of people into the senior management of entities, particularly Government or State enterprises, please, let us select the right people to do the job so that the entity can deliver. I would urge Government, please, consider that seriously because this is one of the key contributing factors to the non-performance of this entity.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we can have the best processes, we can have the best systems, we can have the best of technology and we can have all the finances, but if we have the wrong people, unfortunately, the entity will suffer. This is why I am urging, and I am making it a key point in my contribution this afternoon because this is an area that will help to revive the entity.

Of course, they are already on the right momentum. I congratulate, Mr. Raj Sharma and, of course, the late Turaga na Tui Macuata, Ratu Waisea Katonivere, who was heavily involved as well, Mr. Ashok in Savusavu, and who have contributed.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for Agriculture for his commitment. Listening to his contribution, one thing that caught my attention was him mentioning about field farmer schools for farmers. That is something that has been missing from the modernisation plan that we initially launched in 2014 - long overdue, and I hope that the honourable Minister will set up these farmer schools to be his legacy.

We, in Fiji, take it for granted that we are from farming communities, but farming is a profession. Farming is a business. We need training. We need capacity development. We need to move with time.

Unfortunately, I say that again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, unfortunately, we take for granted that we are from a farming background. It is the same thing in sugar, *dalo* farming and *yaqona* farming, but technology is here to assist us so that we can come up with the best yield because when the harvest is good, the farmer gets the maximum out of it.

The honourable Minister for iTaukei Affairs knows this very well. We need the farmer schools because the model that we adopted in the modernisation plan is based on the Asian and the African model of smallholder farming concept. The honourable Assistant Minister in the Prime Minister's Office also knows this very well, being a former regional employee of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).

Although some argue that it is a weakness for Fiji, we cannot be like developed States where they have bigger holdings, particularly when it comes to the economy of scale, but there is strength in our smallness through the cooperatives or through the clusters (whatever we want to call them), if we group them together, look at the value chain and particularly, capacity development. Thank you, honourable Minister, for committing to the farmer schools for the next financial year.

The honourable Minister of Finance is listening. All he needs to do is to declare his interest because he is from Muanidevo and provide the funding.

Another critical area, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is the mill itself. The egg and the golden goose rule - same thing with sugar, we need to invest in the mill. This is a 1970 mill. The driers, the eight big driers, are still kerosene driers but we have made some investment and I hope that Government will continue with that investment because with Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) and

Codex, we need to have the highest standard because the dollar is in the quality.

The mill was neglected, Mr. Speaker, Sir, just like the Fiji Sugar Corporation (FSC), and Fiji Rice gets its money from processed paddy. Therefore, the challenge as well for the honourable Minister of Agriculture is to ensure that more paddy is produced because they will process the paddy and then from the processed paddy, they will then have money from rice. But for us to produce good quality rice, let us fix the mill first.

The FijiFirst Government has started that process, Mr. Speaker, Sir. There are new driers in place because with climate change, the drier is very, very critical now because rice needs about 11 percent moisture level (if I am correct) and we need to fix the silos as well because the farmers are producing, but now one of their biggest challenge is that they do not have driers at home.

The traditional system no longer works now where they keep it in heaps because of climate change, otherwise it will germinate before it gets to the mill. They need more volume in terms of drying. That is why, apart from the old processing, you need to fix the driers and the silos as well for storage. Then it will be good for the farmers because most of the time it demoralises the farmers.

The farmers have planted, they have harvested but when it comes to purchasing, Fiji Rice cannot purchase simply because they do not have storage capacity. Not only that, because they can only store in the silos when they have reached the 11 percent moisture level. So, both of these are very important, and I hope that Government can continue and, of course, we have our friends and our partners as well.

Labour issue, that is reality. We just need to bring in mechanisation, but we have to look at each of the farmers groups. Some prefer the *vodre*, that is the work behind type, and some prefer the bigger combined harvester, but the honourable Minister knows this very well and he knows the story about the dozer too. Maybe he can tell us during tea break.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is mention about new varieties because with climate change, we need more resilience, and we have to look at the new varieties.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is the maximum utilisation of land and the honourable Minister for Sugar is listening, and he knows that this is something that we have tried to start as well. The honourable Minister and honourable Assistant Minister for Rural Development talked about moving rice out of Dreketi, but we need to look at the opportunities, particularly in sugarcane farmers because they are sitting farmers and not all of their land is utilised for cane. There is a lot of wetland in the sugarcane belts as well.

Back then in the Committee on the Better Utilisation of Land (CBUL), we were looking at the holding for each farmer, the land classification and how can they best utilise the land that they have. A farmer can have 50 acres of lease for cane, but he is only planting 30 acres. Perhaps, five acres or 10 acres is too hilly. We have started with pineapple in those areas in Ba and the wet areas, we are considering rice. You maximise the farmers income, you diversify, at the same time you spread the farmers' risks as well. The more income that the farmer gets, the better it will be for them, and we have a challenge now about enticing farmers to remain, otherwise they will leave the land, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

So, I would urge the honourable Ministers, please, continue the dialogue, continue with discussions because there are some cross-cutting issues that need to be sorted which includes land leases as well. Honourable Minister, if you are in Vanua Levu, please, go and look at Korokadi first. There are some serious issues in Korokadi now, and if they can be addressed because there is huge

potential in Korokadi, apart from the three stages in Muanidevo.

Again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, huge potentials, not only in Fiji, if you have been to the Solomon Islands, our Melanesian brothers there are crazy with rice. I do not know why, but they love rice. Maybe, there are 40 million or 50 million and if we cannot achieve sufficiency level, at least, and if we half that import, that is another 25 million and 30 million into the hands of our farmers. Let us work gradually, let us do all the right things that are needed, particularly the very chain because of potential in there, we can do it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to begin by thanking the former Members of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs for preparing this Report. Let me also join the honourable Members and Ministers who spoke before me in thanking the Chairman, Board members and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Fiji Rice Limited and I am doing this also on behalf of the honourable Prime Minister, who is the Minister responsible for the Fiji Rice Limited.

I agree with the sentiments and the observation by all the honourable Members about the turnaround in the performance of the Company and I was quite pleased when Fiji Rice Limited acknowledged the fact that, even though the Company has been turned around financially, I know they have made some good investments in the mill itself, they have replaced the kerosene driers with electric driers and there has been some upgrade work in terms of making sure that the silos are improved and generally, the milling infrastructure so that they are able to accommodate the increase in production of paddy generally.

Although over the last several years, I think we have seen some increase between 2021 and 2022 but as I have said, the most important aspect of any company based on production of the crop is the crop itself. If we do not address the farm level efficiency, farm level incentives, farm level production, then no matter what you do with the mill, you are not going to be profitable. You may be profitable for a while, but if the production does not keep pace with what is required by the mill, then obviously you are not going to do that. That is what has happened with respect to the sugar industry.

I also wanted to, on behalf of the honourable Prime Minister, Mr. Speaker, Sir, say that the challenges facing the rice industry and, of course, it has a big history, you would remember in the 1970s when the irrigation schemes were set up in Nausori, Navua and then in 1970s. In fact, if you read the planning document and the debate on the setting up of these rice schemes, it was a very, very bipartisan support and initiative.

If you read the *Daily Hansard* at that time, you will see the honourable Prime Minister at that time, the late Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, the late Siddiq Koya, the Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of the National Federation Party at that time, those leaders saw the need for development around those sectors and it has lasted this long, Mr. Speaker, except that over so many years, we have not been able to provide or to put in the kind of investment that was needed to scale up the industry in a way that would have been very, very efficient and also would have served not only our economy.

In fact, by 1990, Mr. Speaker, we were almost like 66 percent self-sufficient in the rice industry in this country, but over the years that has gone down. It is important, not only from the point of view of rural development, supporting income of the rural communities, but also in terms of producing something which is very healthy. The experts and all the research show that brown rice contains most of the vitamins and minerals - rich in dietary fibre. It is good for blood pressure, good for lowering cholesterol as well, I am told.

As has been pointed out before that there is an increasing awareness about the health benefits of brown rice. I am hoping that more marketing, I think the FRL recently not only held the Farmers Award in different categories. His Excellency the President was there to present those awards. I think those are good initiatives, Mr. Speaker, to bring back the awareness about the need to cultivate more rice which is not only going to serve the interest of the farmers who are involved in it, but also serve the interest of the country as a whole.

I could not agree more with the honourable Leader of the Opposition that we need quality people. He is absolutely right; I agree with him. You need good Board members, you need good CEOs, you need quality, except that I want to remind the honourable Leader of the Opposition that not everyone who was there under their Government was appointed on merit.

Of course, that is history, Mr. Speaker, we are not going to get everything right at all times, but the philosophy behind the Coalition Government is that we are going to make sure that we consult, we work together, we bring people into the discussion and debate and by doing that, I think we would be able to bring people, incentivise people to come and serve the country, serve the people, not to serve their own interest in different Boards and different institutions. And there would be numerous examples of that, that we can point out, but I am not going to go into that, Mr. Speaker, but I agree with the honourable Leader of the Opposition that this is probably an example of a company which has been turned round and perhaps. with good leadership.

The issue of farmers leaving, Mr. Speaker, I think it is a general problem within the rural areas - the shortage of labour but over the years, I think the economics of some of those crops in terms of how farmers have been able to sustain their income has eroded and largely because the cost of production has been escalating. That is a very, very difficult proposition. I know honourable Members talked about subsidies to the farmers. That is something that the non-sugar crop farmers have articulated, they have been talking about that over the years and obviously, there was no thinking put forward in terms of how to incentivise farmers more, apart from supporting them with acquiring appropriate technology.

But also incentivising them to reduce the cost of production. One way you can do that temporarily is to do that by subsidy. But subsidy, Mr. Speaker, can incentivise the other way around. It can incentivise the farmers to remain inefficient because the subsidies allow them to make some profit. So, I think these are issues that honourable Members would realise that we need to think through carefully and perhaps, set a target, a time limit within which we encourage farmers to become more efficient.

With those points, Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the honourable Prime Minister, I want to thank the Committee Members and thank all those who are responsible for turning around their company. Thank you.

MR SPEAKER.- I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing on Economic Affairs to give his right of reply.

HON. S. TUBUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to thank honourable Members for their contribution. Those contributions and issues that have been raised have provided further insights into the industry.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, very briefly, I would just like to comment on some of the issues that have been raised. On subsidy, I totally agree with the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics that perhaps, we need to examine much closely the subsidy that is being provided, particularly when you look at how farmers

are responding to the subsidy. We are subsidising price but for how long we can continue, but we need to assess that.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the issue of technical assistance that has been raised also by the honourable Minister on technical assistance in ensuring that farmers are much more efficient. So, it needs quite a lot of research to be done at farmer level. From experience, there is a lot of technical assistance being provided on rice. For the last 30 years, there was quite significant research being undertaken, but in terms of the continuity in the staff that are there in the Ministry to ensure that these studies are being disseminated adequately, particularly to farmers in the rural areas.

The issue on brown rice has been alluded to by most of the speakers and that is one of the major product that has been developed by Fiji Rice and it is one of the products that they are trying to sell. Of course, last week, I was talking to Mr. Raj Sharma who was in New Zealand, he mentioned that there is a big demand also from our Fijian community in New Zealand for more brown rice.

I would like to thank the honourable Minister for the Government priorities and I hope there will be more synergy with the work that is being done by Fiji Rice in terms of achieving what we expect in the next four years.

On climate change, Mr. Speaker, Sir, particularly when we are developing an industry that is providing food to our people. Climate change is not only affecting us but affecting the countries that are supplying us, and this is an issue that we should be thinking about, particularly the major countries.

As your may have realised, Mr. Speaker, Sir, last year, India shut down its exports of rice. When they have an alternative and mandate to feed their own people, they will shut down exports. Of course, climate change is also affecting some of the countries that are supplying us, particularly Vietnam. If you look at the Mekong Valley in Vietnam, one of the largest producers of rice is also being affected by climate change. It will affect the distribution of rice to us, but the onus is on us to intensify the cultivation of rice in the rural areas.

Of course, the issue of co-operatives, perhaps we need to look into this more closely and come up with successful cooperatives and try to upscale it on other areas by involving the people who are involved in co-operatives and those are the ones who can promote it to other areas.

Capacity, I thank the honourable Leader of the Opposition. This has been an issue that we had already discussed over a long period of time when we used to discuss about capacity development in our communities, changing the mindset. I think we need to go into that also. This Government will try to look into that, trying to change the mindset and pilot it in some places so that we change the mindset of our people to adapt new technology and try to go into the agriculture production.

Once again, I would like to thank the Members of Parliament for their contribution to the debate, and the former Members for coming up with the Report.

MR. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote to note the content of the Report.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

REVIEW REPORT ON THE FIJI NATIONAL UNIVERSITY 2020 ANNUAL REPORT

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move:

That Parliament debates the review of the Fiji National University 2020 Annual Report which was tabled on 30th August, 2022.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I proceed, I wish to convey my sincere appreciation to the former Members of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs under the able leadership of honourable Pillay, for compiling this Report and tabling it to Parliament in August last year.

The Fiji National University (FNU) is a public, comprehensive and dual sector university offering technical and vocational educational training from Levels 1 to 6 and higher education from Levels 5 to 10, up to Doctoral Degrees.

As you would have known, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the University was established in its current form by the merger of seven Tertiary Government Colleges in 2010, with the mandate to make tertiary education an opportunity accessible to all Fijians. The principal activities of the University are the provisions of post-secondary programmes of study in higher education and technical and vocational education and training that are responsive to the needs of industry, the marketplace and non-formal sector of employment to students from Fiji and other countries in the South Pacific Region.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the period under review, the University also highlighted a few significant achievements, despite the challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, that brought a sudden halt to business as usual and forced most of us out of our comfort zones. The University responded with innovation and agility to minimise the disruption to operations and safeguarded the interests of the students in the delivery of e-learning for teaching and assessment. Those achievements include the production of academic quality assurance which brought about comprehensive selection of policies and procedures related to academic quality.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a major strategic direction for the FNU is international recognition. In 2020, the University commenced an accreditation strategy. The purpose of this is to ensure that the FNU moves closer to a situation in which international education recognises the merits of the University.

The Committee has highlighted its findings on the University's financial and operational performance for 2020 and subsequently made recommendations to improve the University's overall performance in its service delivery.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, before I offer the floor, I would like to highlight that there are eight speakers and the batting is as follows:

1. Hon. V. Pillay;
2. honourable Minister for Education;
3. Hon. H. Chand;
4. honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation;
5. Hon. P.D. Kumar;
6. honourable Minister for Public Works and Meteorological Services and Transport;

7. Hon. K.K. Lal; and
8. the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I contribute more to the Report before Parliament for debate on the review of the Fiji National University 2020 Annual Report, at the outset, I, once again, would like to acknowledge the work done by the Members of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs in the last term of Parliament – the Minister for Health and Medical Services, honourable Alipate Nagata, and former Members of Parliament - Mrs. Salote Radrodro and Mr. George Vegnathan. I was the Chairman of the Committee in the effort of putting this Report together.

Sir, the Fiji National University (FNU) is an institution committed to investing in its staff. In 2020, the University had a full-time staff body of 785 academic staff and 1,016 professional services staff. In terms of overall staffing, the University is relatively evenly balanced between men and women.

The Committee acknowledges FNU's commitments to the improvement of female participation in the College of Science and to promoting the advancement of women in their academic careers and has launched a series of initiatives to address gender imbalances.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it was commendable to note that the University, through its commitment of providing equal and affordable access to education for all Fijians, opened a newly established Disability Centre at the Nasinu Campus in February 2022. The University also conducted an online disability awareness workshop for the period under review.

It was a proud moment for the University community as two students living with disabilities completed their studies and graduated in April 2020. One received a Bachelor of Commerce Degree majoring in Management and Accounting and the other a Master of Commerce in Accounting. With that being said, I am looking forward to seeing annual reports from other Ministries highlighting disability inclusiveness at their workplaces and the services they provide. Furthermore, I encourage the Members of the Standing Committee to raise questions on disability inclusion to stakeholders when scrutinising annual reports.

In conclusion, I wish the Management, the Board Members and staff of FNU well to fulfil its vision to be a leading dual sector University in the Pacific.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to make a small contribution on the Review Report of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs on the review of the Fiji National University 2020 Annual Report. We are talking about 2020 and a lot of things have changed since this Report was reviewed by the Committee. We have seen a change in Ministerial positions, especially for the Ministry of Education. The former Minister for Education, honourable Premila Kumar, would be fully aware of the operations of the Fiji National University (FNU) at the time of the review.

The contents of the Committee's Report basically focused on some of the major recommendations that have been alluded to in the Report. I would like to make some contribution in terms of the progress that has been made in the respective recommendations made by the Committee.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the recommendation for the Fiji Maritime Building, the project as has been highlighted is nearing completion with the expected completion date of May 2023. The project is in its finishing and compliance stage.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the College of Business, Hospitality and Tourism Studies, I am pleased to inform Parliament that the project has been successfully completed and was opened late in 2022. The facility is currently in use with the ground floor being used as the Office of the Registrar.

The third recommendation, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is very interesting in terms of the FNU Labasa Campus at Naiyaca Subdivision. There has been a lot of discussions made regarding this project, especially the amount of money that has been spent and given by Government to FNU to construct this Campus and to be touted as the hub of academic learning in the Northern Division.

I have been advised the project was estimated to be around \$80 million and this Mr. Speaker, Sir, is a multi-million-dollar project involving taxpayers' money which has been spent and is incomplete at this stage. So, when projects like these are not completed on time, it tantamount to poor planning which resulted in the promises to the people of Labasa not being fulfilled and, therefore, delayed in trying to get their university.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the outstanding grants owed by Ministry of Health and Ministry of Agriculture, the FNU is liaising with respective Ministries to address the arrears in terms of the collection of University fees.

On the land lease and finalisation of boundaries, developments have transpired with regards to land lease and boundaries. The land lease conditions provided to FNU by the Department of Town and Country Planning were mostly development conditions that required input through various stakeholders for properties such as Legalega, Natabua and McGregor. The University is seeking deferment of conditions to a development stage from the Director of Town and Country Planning (DTCP) and the University is continuously following up for a meeting with DTCP which is yet to eventuate.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on a separate note, the issues at FNU are very complex and that is what I had anticipated the Committee to deliberate more on, especially the operations of the University in terms of the Academic and TVET Sections.

Today's new media highlighted that some Academic streams, like the Veterinary Science and Animal Husbandry graduates, who have spent a big number of years at the University studying, I think five years or six years, have not been able to be registered as Veterinarians because of the discrepancies in the programme that was offered by the University at that time. Perhaps, we can get more from the former Minister for Education on how these programmes were being offered by FNU without consultation with respective stakeholders. So, when students graduate, they are still awaiting jobs to-date. Five years or six years spent in schools, and they have yet to be recognised in the hope that the programmes that they undertook for studies will give them job opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is a very sad legacy regarding the FNU operations. It is very sad because the Ministry of Agriculture have also voiced their concerns in terms of the programme that was offered, but FNU at that time did not listen to the experts from the Ministry of Education.

We also note Mr. Speaker, Sir, that the FNU Act was reviewed and amended to give the FNU autonomy to operate. Previously, we used to have the Permanent Secretary for Education part of the FNU Council so as to ensure that the programmes have some input from the Government.

Now, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the question that the students are asking is, why are they being left behind? That is the question, and they have graduated.

HON. K.K. LAL.- (Inaudible interjection)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- They spent five years to six years. Some of them have opted to be paid through TELS but they still could not find formal employment and to be registered as veterinarians.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we also hear about international recognition for FNU, but we also question the lecturers who were brought in to teach in this particular programme. Were they of international certification? Were they of international recognition in terms of what they have with them in terms of their accreditation, or the degrees that they brought with them to teach these programmes at the FNU?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the question of credibility of lecturers and resources also questions the validity and the authenticity of their qualification. These events were happening during the time of this Report or after this Report. They spent a good number of years at the FNU and hopefully, this will be addressed. These are some of the works that we have been tasked to address - the anomalies that were left behind by the previous Government.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are also concerned because the livelihood of the students has been compromised. Now, they will not know how the FNU will give them certification to become certified veterinarians. We have shortage of skills, we have shortage of veterinarians as it can be confirmed by the honourable Minister for Agriculture but when such programmes have been run without proper certification or accreditation, it questions how the University has been run over the years.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the clock is moving and the next speaker is honourable Hem Chand but before he takes the floor, I would like to adjourn Parliament.

Dinner is being prepared in the Big Committee Room so as to get you, honourable Members, re-energized because we are hearing very interesting stories about this Report which is the motion before us. The Parliament is now adjourned, honourable Members.

The Parliament adjourned at 6.05 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 7.17 p.m.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to make my short contribution in support of the Review Report of the Fiji National University's Annual Report of 2020. At the outset, I would like to thank the former Standing Committee on Social Affairs.

The Fiji National University (FNU) was established in 2010 through the merger of tertiary institutions. It is the largest University in Fiji and is a dual sector University offering technical and vocational education, and higher education up to doctoral degrees. It was the initiative of the Bainimarama-led Government to establish FNU in order to promote and improve education, strengthen research, increase access to higher education and offer courses in other disciplines, including Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) areas.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the FNU is an institution committed to investing in its staff. The FNU invested in the recruitment of highly qualified and experienced academic staff to teach at FNU. This has enabled FNU to offer a wide range of courses across a broad range of fields including medicine, engineering, education, business and social sciences.

The Government's investment in FNU has also enabled the University to develop partnership with other universities and institutions around the world which has facilitated the exchange of knowledge and ideas. This has produced highly skilled and qualified graduates who can contribute to the nation's workforce and this is exactly what the country needs. These graduates can work in different sectors such as industries, government departments, non-government organisations and other sectors bringing their expertise and knowledge to benefit the nation.

Before the establishment of FNU, students faced challenges in upgrading qualifications. For example, teachers in Fiji found difficulties in upgrading their qualifications from diploma to degree and postgraduate studies. I remember before the establishment of FNU, there were two teacher training institutions. One was Lautoka Teachers College which used to provide training to primary teachers and Fiji College of Higher Education which used to provide training to secondary teachers. The maximum qualification provided to these teachers; it was only up to diploma level. Today, we have many teachers who have completed their Bachelor of Education and higher education from FNU and before only USP used to offer pre-service and in-service Bachelor in Education to primary and secondary teachers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the FijiFirst government also focused on ensuring that higher education in other areas is accessible to all Fijians. This led to the establishment of FNU's regional campuses which are located in central, northern and western divisions of Fiji. These campuses offer a range of courses and programmes that are tailored to the needs of the local communities. The FijiFirst government also introduced a range of scholarships and financial assistance scheme which helped increase the number of students accessing higher education.

The FNU plays a significant role in preserving the cultural heritage of our nation by offering programmes in language, literature and history. Fiji National University helps to maintain and promote the country's cultural identity and it also plays a very important role in promoting social mobility and reducing inequality. It provides opportunities for individuals from different backgrounds to access higher education which can improve their socio-economic status and increase their earning potential. Sir, the FNU also helps address societal issues and promote social justice through research, public engagement and community outreach.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, capital projects help universities upgrade their infrastructure and facilities. By having modern and well-equipped facilities, students can have access to the latest technologies

and tools that is necessary for their field of study.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, FNU has undertaken a major upgrade of its digital infrastructure which enabled FNU to make a speedy transition to fully online learning on the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The FijiFirst government's investment in research has also helped to raise the profile of FNU internationally and has attracted research partnerships with institutions and universities from around the world.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, when I was a lecturer at FNU back in 2014, only a few lecturers had doctoral degree at that time. Today, there are many with PhD and thanks to the FijiFirst Government for investing in research.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Hear, hear!

HON. H. CHAND.- In the past 13 years, FNU has grown in many aspects and this is through the efforts of the government, in particular the Bainimarama-led FijiFirst Government, former education ministers, senior management and staff of FNU, former council members and the FNU community at large. I have seen FNU progress over the years in terms of material resources, human and non-human resources. I have seen a lot of progress.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to contribute towards this debate and I fully support the motion before Parliament.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to contribute to the debate on the Fiji National University 2020 Annual Report.

Before I begin, Mr. Speaker, let me congratulate my colleague, honourable Seruiratu, for his election today as Leader of the Opposition in this Parliament. Honourable Seruiratu has done the hard yards. He sat here for eight years on this side of Parliament and he is going to sit on the other side of the House for four years and in time, he would be one of the foremost legislators in this country. I congratulate him and I wish him well, going forward.

Mr. Speaker, the Fiji National University (FNU) has done what it could do for Fiji but when I contribute to the debate on any Annual Report, I always try to bring it to the situation today. In the Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation, there is a huge need for immediate upskilling and reskilling of our people in tourism and civil aviation industries. We all know about the brain drain and, indeed, for tourism, it is a concern that all these robust forecasts that we have this year can be derailed by the lack of qualified staff.

It is quite pronounced, Mr. Speaker, and figures that have been given to me are in the vicinity of 14,000 to 16,000 workers in tourism who have left the industry to go abroad and replacing them is not easy because these are in the production area where you need people to be skilled and to be experienced. Of course, given the way we are, we can bring in our young people from the villages, give them a couple of weeks of training and they can be good waiters and waitresses. They have it in them, that attitude to serve, so it is very easy.

On the other on what I normally call 'a heart of the house' - the production area, there are huge challenges, Mr. Speaker. Chefs are now very difficult to retain in Fiji, and this is where we would like to see FNU play a bigger role and, in actual fact, I believe they have failed very badly in this area.

In aviation, Mr. Speaker, the same challenge or the same threat exists. In that, we trained our people in CAAF, in air management, aircraft engineering and they migrate and go overseas. Replacing them is the real challenge, Mr. Speaker. When we dialogue on this with the players in the industry, we are told that there are certain FNU facilities geared towards this that are underutilised.

The aviation facility in Nadi is not fully functioning. If it was properly functioning, Mr. Speaker, we could be replacing a lot of these aviation people who are leaving the country. In Food and Beverage, also a similar story, so going forward, we would like to see more focus by FNU to up its act and help replace those whom we lose through brain-drain.

Mr. Speaker, we cannot do anything about labour mobility, it is part of the new global economy. You cannot stop it, even with bus drivers. We had a meeting with our people – the Society of Fiji Travel Associates. They are people who operate coaches and the like, and they are losing coach drivers. I think a figure of 60 was given to us. They have lost 60 coach drivers.

So, what you need is an institution like FNU to identify and relook at what it offers in terms of education and training and meet its challenges. For some of us, we do not realise the extent of this threat until we see our bus drivers also migrating. And this is where, Mr. Speaker, I am very happy that there is a change in FNU. The new Councillors are people who we see, who can meet the challenge, who can be focussed on what needs to be done and help deliver the human resources that our country needs at this critical juncture and going forward.

Mr. Speaker, all in all, let me just say that much is expected of FNU and we wish and hope that the Councillors, the staff and Management will rise up to the challenge. Fiji needs it and especially my Ministry, the Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute very briefly to the review of the Fiji National University 2020 Annual Report which was tabled before Parliament. I wish to commend the Chairperson and the Committee for their findings and recommendations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji National University's 10th Anniversary was in 2020. It is a young institution. It is still dealing with some teething issues. We should give time to FNU to address some of the issues that was raised by the honourable Minister, but we will be talking about those issues individually.

The FNU is another legacy of the former Prime Minister, Mr. Bainimarama, for establishing Fiji's own national university. And I will talk about some of the good work they have done which is helping the economy as well, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

I commend the Committee for presenting four recommendations which focus on the finalisation of land leases, completion of capital projects, working closely with CIU for monitoring and implementation, and solving outstanding grant issues with two Government Ministries that owed money prior to the amalgamation of entities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Report is more than two years old and I agree with the honourable Minister for Education that FNU must have progressed with the implementation of some of these recommendations. At least, there are a few that I know they have already delivered.

On Recommendation 1, it must be noted that the University recorded an operating surplus of \$7.4 million in 2020, as compared to a \$6.1 million deficit in 2019. It meant that the University had money to continue with the pending projects but because of litigation, FNU could not progress with two capital projects.

The two capital projects in question are Nayaca Campus, as well as Fiji Maritime Academy (FMA). The difference between the two projects is this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Maritime Academy Project was 80 percent complete when the matter went to Court, and when something is 80 percent complete, it is easier to complete the other 20 percent.

However, with Nayaca Campus, only 47 percent of the work was completed - not even 50 percent, and the matter went to Court. The company became bankrupt and, obviously, when the matter is before the Court, it takes longer. Of course, we had COVID-19, which means that the cost of hardware materials has gone up but at no time, when I was the Minister for Education did FNU ever tell me that the cost of the project is now \$80 million. It has come to me as a surprise.

The total cost of the project was \$27.4 million and what I know, only 42 percent was paid to the contractor. So, they did 47 percent work but only 42 percent work was paid to the contractor. In terms of the loss from that perspective, it did not happen, but obviously just like any other project, even if you are building your own home, if you face challenges with your contractor, the cost escalates because you have to look for other people to complete the job. It is like that, but there are room for improvement as well, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I am sure the Construction Implementation Unit (CIU) is now working with FNU probably, providing advice, I do not know, but by consulting other institutions, they can surely improve on that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the last eight years, FNU received more than \$450 million in operational and capital projects to improve the quality of education which includes infrastructure development. Today, if you visit FNU, you will see new buildings, new lecture theatres, a new cafeteria, a new sports facility equipped with the latest gym equipment, new maritime academy facilities, and the list goes on.

Over the years, FNU has achieved a lot under the leadership of FNU Council which the honourable Minister of Education has removed hastily for no rhyme or reason. They were world-renowned Luminaries, Academics and industry leaders from across the fields of academia, business and science, including engineering and medicine. Unfortunately, they were shown the door, and surprisingly, no announcement for investigation was made which has become a trademark for this Government.

Under the term of the last Council members, the University grew in leaps and bounds. For example, Mr. Speaker, Sir, FNU developed the most meaningful strategic plan with a focus, which they are implementing and are focussing on addressing the shortages of skills in the market. They are producing graduates who can critically think and have an entrepreneurial mind and be responsible members of society. This is very important, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Continuous improvement of the facilities which led to the development of new infrastructure and renovation of the old structures. About 12 different projects were completed in 2020, so it is not just painting a bad picture of FNU, they have done quite a bit of work over the years.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Let us not forget that FNU always had a legacy issue which has continued over a period of time. This has been the challenge that any Board or Council will face.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, FNU had set up Naduna Campus for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) education in the North, saving thousands of dollars which FNU paid in rent - literally thousands of dollars. The most remarkable was the establishment of Fiji Maritime Academy which was on the verge of closure. The honourable Minister did not talk about this project because

this is a positive story. The programmes were not recognised and were about to be cancelled by International Maritime Organization (IMO).

This Academy is another legacy of the FijiFirst Government under the leadership of Mr. Bainimarama. It is one of the best in the Pacific region. We have the latest stimulators better than Australia and New Zealand, and the programmes are internationally recognised by IMO.

(Inaudible interjection)

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Do not worry, you will be cutting the ribbon, go in and have a look.

(Laughter)

Not only that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have a certification system with various shipping companies, such as SEAMACH, providing us access to shipping companies for our students to be trained on those ships.

The FNU has improved the quality of digital infrastructure. We have heard from honourable Hem Chand, so I will not speak on that. Now, FNU also launched Call Centre course to address the current needs of the BPO sector in order to meet the demands of the market. This is how FNU ensures TVET programmes are future-focussed for post-pandemic economic recovery and to take advantage of the opportunities of the 21st Century.

We often hear from the honourable Minister for Trade that the BPO sector has lot of potential, we recognise that long time ago. A lot of work has gone into it, but we have also recognised that the workers had to be skilled and that is why this course was specifically designed for the BPO sector.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on operation side, FNU developed new policies and SOPs to make the institution effective and efficient, including the use of Open Merit Recruitment and Selection (OMRS) to recruit staff. Through job evaluation, a new salary structure was introduced based on market rate to attract qualified people because if you look at other institutions that existed on its own and then it was amalgamated into universities, the pay was never that good, it was never based on the market rate and this exercise had to take place.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, serious and critical investments were made at FNU to make FNU a hub for higher education in the Pacific region. FNU is attracting not just regional students, but also international students. In 2020, 993 full time foreign students were enrolled at FNU, as compared to 735 students in 2016. Mr. Speaker, Sir, FNU attracted international students from Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Estonia, France, Guyana, Philippines, Seychelles, USA, South Korea, India, Sri Lanka and many more. In total, there were 55 international students, leaving the regional students aside, from 23 countries and the rest were regional students.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, international students can boost Fiji's economy and every effort should be made to develop policies to attract international students. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, international students contributed a total of AU\$25.5 billion to the Australian economy in 2022. Similarly, in 2019, international students contributed to \$1.2 billion in New Zealand's economy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, FNU needs to further develop this area to attract more international students. By doing that, FNU will be financially secure through the fees they will be collecting, but also generating economic activity.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, overall full-time student numbers also increased in 2020 with 13,580 when compared to 9,754 students in 2016. The FNU needs to develop, as I have said, the attraction of international students to its Campuses.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the FijiFirst Government's aim was to make FNU one of the best in the region and well-recognised internationally. That was our focus, and that is why we placed people of very high standing in academic world, and we managed to get people from international universities to help FNU grow.

Regarding veterinary science qualification which the honourable Minister spoke about, I think this Programme started around 2014 - the discussions and the talks went in, and what I was told that FNU invited Veterinarians from three different universities, they all came, had a meeting with the Ministry of Agriculture, FNU and other institutions where this course was designed. But there were other complications, and I will leave it to our leader to discuss this in detail.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the motion at hand on Fiji National University. In particular, I refer to the Chairperson's foreword which states, and I quote:

“FNU is a dual sector university offering technical and vocational education and training from Levels 1 to 6 and higher education Levels from 5 to 10.”

I raise in particular the issue regarding TVET. As already mentioned by the honourable Deputy Prime Minister, this is an area which is a current concern in terms of the supply of much needed skill people for the much-needed gaps in employment. This area as stated in the Report is covered by FNU in terms of the coverage they have.

Unfortunately, the number of TVET graduates have declined consistently in Fiji during the last five to six years. It is a concern because the figures indicate a drastic drop in the number of TVET graduates. So just to share that, in 2010 we had 2,935, 2011 we had 3,020, 2012 we had 2,574, 2013 we had 3,076 but from 2014, it started to reduce to 1,747, 2016 we had 1,514, 2018 we had 996, 2019 we had 1,019 and 2020 we had 1,316. So there has been a massive decline in the number of technical graduates from around 3,000 to around 1,300 in 2020 which is part of the period covered in this Report.

The figures for 2020 and 2021 have not been included but we can see the decline has been following a trend. This is despite Government grants allocated to FNU since 2013 ranging from \$28 million in 2013, \$42 million in 2016, \$84 million in 2018 and 2019 and then in the period of 2021 and 2022 is \$44 million and \$45 million in 2022 to 2023. Government had also allocated 5,000 scholarships in TVET to FNU. However, the uptake has not been as expected and close to 35 percent. Additional scholarships have been given but again the uptake has not been as expected or targeted which is why we are again raising this concern in terms of TVET training.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if Fiji has to produce more technically skilled people in the future, then it is vital that a total reform of the sector is undertaken which is what the Coalition Government undertakes to do. Sir, I have not seen in this Report which also covers the period 2020 any mention of the technical colleges which was established in 2015 by the FijiFirst Government.

Over 15 technical colleges between 2015 and 2019 were established throughout Fiji, over 240 staff were engaged, most of whom were transferred from the civil service. In 2019, the FijiFirst Government decided to transfer this to FNU. The FNU did not operate and manage this technical college carefully which resulted in the closure of colleges in December 2020 which is again a surprise that it is not mentioned by the Committee in the report. There was instant termination of about 240

staff and students left without any recourse.

We note that \$89.7 million was provided to support the operation and administrative expenses in relation to this. In addition, taxpayer funded tools and equipment was acquired and this cost approximately \$6.5 million. These were left without safe custody, so we are not sure what happened and there is reason to believe that some have been removed and there is a need for a thorough audit of this. That is an issue which I thought I would raise but which is not included in the Report.

Again, it is something which we need to learn from as a Government, not only the Opposition but we, as a nation, in how best we can move forward learning from that experience in addressing TVET. Given the skills shortages we face not only in terms of the current situation in Fiji but also the movement of skilled personnel out of Fiji and the need to incorporate the strategic planning at FNU, I suppose with a national human resource plan which would need to cover, not only in the short-term but the long-term the human resource needs of the nation.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, I stand today to make my contribution in support of the review Report on the Fiji National University's Annual Report 2020. The Fiji National University is an institution of higher learning that is funded and supported by the Fijian Government since its establishment. Sir, FNU plays an important role in the education and development of the nation and significance can be seen in several ways, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, FNU was established in 2010 through the merger of six existing tertiary institutions as highlighted by other honourable Members. The aim was to create a single university that would provide quality education and training to meet the needs of the country's growing economy. The Bainimarama Government's initiative was to invest in a comprehensive organisation that would improve the quality of education and research in Fiji, increase access to higher education, reduce common operational overheads and improve the skills of the country's workforce.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the FijiFirst Government engaged with the development of the Fiji National University shortly after it came to power in 2014. As education is a fundamental right under the 2013 Fijian Constitution, it is the responsibility of the Government to ensure that their citizens have access to quality education. National universities are institutions that provide higher education to a large number of students and funding them ensures that more people have access to education.

The Government's investment in FNU have resulted in several positive changes, Mr. Speaker, Sir. One of the most significant achievements is the expansion of FNU's infrastructure. The Government has invested heavily in the development of new state of the art facilities as you can see that they have been highlighted in the Report by the Committee.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government has heavily invested in the development of the state of art facilities including lecture theatres, laboratories and libraries. These facilities have provided students with better learning environment which have helped to improve the quality of education. Sir, FNU is very instrumental in conducting research and development projects that are beneficial to the nation in general. These projects can be in various fields such as technology, health, agriculture, environmental studies among others. Through these projects, the nation can make significant progress in solving societal problems and promoting economic growth. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, investing in national universities improve our country's global competitiveness, high quality education in research can attract international students, researchers, create global partnership and enhance the country's reputation in the international community.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, capital projects such as building new classrooms, libraries, laboratories and other educational facilities can provide students with a safe, comfortable and conducive learning

environment, upgrading existing facilities and technologies can also improve the quality of education and support the delivery of innovative methods. Capital projects are utmost importance for technical and vocational universities such as FNU as they can greatly enhance the learning experience for students, provide them with modern facilities and equipment and support the practical training required for technical and vocational education.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to refer back to a few things that were highlighted by the honourable Minister, and I would also like to advice this august Chamber that this Report was compiled during 2020 when the time the country was heavily affected by COVID-19 pandemic. We should note that strictly, that in 2020 Fiji faced for the first a pandemic that we have never seen before, not 2019, but 2020.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, during this COVID-19 pandemic, FNU and our students were affected as well, but this was not highlighted by anyone. During the pandemic our students also assisted the government and the Ministry for Health during the swabbing period, when they were swabbing patients or suspected cases. Our students were on the forefront with the medical professionals helping the swabbing operation. Sir, COVID-19 has taught us a lot. Some politicians who are sitting in this august Chamber and some honourable Ministers on the other side used the COVID-19 pandemic and FNU as a political football for their own political mileage during this pandemic period as well.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Talk about yourself.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- What is he saying.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- You talk about yourself.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- It is irrelevant.

HON. K.K. LAL.- It is relevant, Madam.

Some of our students were stranded in hostels because there were lockdowns. However, the University continued to provide them food and water, yet some politicians, Ministers or Assistant Ministers sitting on the other side used that opportunity for their own mileage. This was all over the news and this is relevant because this is the FNU Report.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. K.K. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am talking about FNU.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Hot air.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, when you talk about FNU, it is also talking about students and when you talk about students, it always comes to TELS and scholarships.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Tell them, tell them!

HON. K.K. LAL.- Students are waiting, when will this Government remove TELS? The same question goes to the honourable Minister. When you talk about FNU, when we talk about its facilities, we talk about scholarships as well, still no word. I can only see we are promising on the front page of the *Fiji Times* and *Fiji Sun*, that is it, nothing has been done so far, 100 days is about to

be over, students are waiting. Sir, FNU during the pandemic also provided hostels to our medical professionals who were working in CWM. There is no interest here.

(Laughter)

Our University provided facilities such as hostels to our medical professionals who were working day and night. Yet, none of the honourable Ministers or Government officials recognised that in today's motion.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, during the pandemic and I note in the verbatim, the Vice Chancellor, Dr. William May explained to the Committee Members that during the pandemic they also provided payment plans to students. That is how flexible FNU is and they also provided online flexible assessment programmes, online special assessments for students who were not able to complete their assignments on time. This is the FNU we have. They think about our students, yet this was not highlighted by the honourable Members from the other side. One thing I also want to note, Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the honourable Ministers who just spoke a while ago said, "we really do not know."

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Name them!

HON. K.K. LAL.- Honourable Tuisawau said, "we really do not know." They are sitting there for 95 days or plus, they have all the information, they can find it from the honourable Minister.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. K.K. LAL.- This is relevant, I do not think I have breached the Standing Order.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Point of Order! Mr. Speaker, Sir, his comments are misleading.

(Laughter)

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Could you quote your order?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Because I do not recall saying those words, "Do not know." I do not recall saying that. Whom are you referring to or what is the subject you are referring to ?

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- What is your Point of Order?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Misleading, misleading!

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- The Point of Order is that he is misleading Parliament with false information. Something I did not say – Standing Orders 44 and 60.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. K.K. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, if we just rewind a little bit, he said the same thing or in a similar context that we are not sure. They are in Government, and they have every information. They can call up their Minister, they can call up FNU, they have a new Council now. That Council

is politically motivated because some of their former candidates are sitting in that Council, whereby, the previous Council that was there, was removed.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- (Inaudible)

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Overseas.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, they were professionals from the legal fraternity, from the accounting fraternity, from experienced backgrounds who were concerned for our students and their future. The governance of the University is very important, yet right now the Council has politicians sitting in that particular body, I am not sure what is the direction the new Government is heading with that Council. Before I take my seat, I would also like to highlight that FNU, and its expatriate staff and local staff, have always portrayed professionalism and remained apolitical.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. K.K. LAL.- However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have other university staff like the VC of the University of the South Pacific who was confirmed by honourable Charan Jeeth Singh in a particular video that was viral on social media. It was

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Point of Order! I think the problem with the honourable Member is he is making allegations. This is the hallmark of the FijiFirst government and what they do. He is making an allegation that Professor Pal Ahluwalia was political because he ended up in a function where everyone was invited and he was attending the Education Ministers Meeting in Auckland, where honourable Aseri Radrodoro was also invited. As Vice Chancellor of the University of the South Pacific....

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Point of Order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I am speaking, why not just sit down? I have not finished with that, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Have some respect for the Speaker.

(Laughter)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- You telling me?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Yes.

(Laughter)

MR. SPEAKER.- Continue.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Have some respect for the Speaker, Sir. I am speaking. You are a lawyer, you should understand that better.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Yes, I rise on a Point of Order on what you are saying.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think you should ask the honourable Member to withdraw that comment because he is making an allegation based on someone attending a function. .

HON. P.K. BALA.- The video is here.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- The video is here.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Therefore, that person has become political. That is a very childish comment, he should withdraw. He is casting an aspersion on someone. He should withdraw that comment.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Ketan, you rounding off?

HON. K.K. LAL.- Yes, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I believe that I have not misled Parliament and there is evidence on social media and I think the media also picked it up.

HON. P.K. BALA.- I have got it too.

HON. K.K. LAL.- If you want, we can share the video with you.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Charan Jeath Singh briefly said that VC was supporting them during the election behind the scene and it is on record. This is a relevant information because when it comes to FNU, everyone points, but we also have other universities in this country. This is the same VC who was paid FJ\$534,000 where we are not sure. What could be the reasons why the three-legged government continue to pay or release the grants?

No surprise again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that the honourable Minister for Immigration is still quiet on the breaches of VC's work conditions here in Fiji. When an expatriate comes to work in Fiji, they are given work conditions that they cannot be involved in any political activity, however the Minister confirmed, Mr. Speaker, Sir....

(Inaudible interjections)

HON. K. LAL.- No, no, you cannot tell me to sit down, the Speaker, is there.

(Inaudible interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. K. LAL.- The honourable Minister for Multi-Ethnic and Sugar confirmed via his video, and he is on record that this particular VC was supporting them behind the scene, now he can come in front and support as well. There are more questions for the honourable Minister for Sugar coming along the way, not to worry, Sir.

Overall, the FijiFirst Government's investment in FNU has helped improve the quality of education and research in Fiji, increase access to higher education and strengthen partnership with industry and community. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the investment in FNU has been a positive development for Fiji's education system and its impact will continue to be felt in years to come because this is the legacy of FijiFirst.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. K.K. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, with these, I support this Report.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you for allowing me to take the floor, I know that I was not in the batting order but in the name of transparency, I just wanted to clarify the issue about the veterinarian course that was raised by the honourable Aseri Radrodro. I think there are a few of us here in the Parliament, the Minister for Agriculture and the Assistant Minister would know the background to this.

Let me just put it into context.

1. Is the shortage of skills in the Ministry, not only in the Ministry but of course regionally.
2. The demand from the industry, the sector.
3. We were hit with Brucellosis and Tuberculosis, it started way back to 2005. By 2009 it had started to have a big impact on the livestock sector in Fiji. The honourable Assistant Minister knows this very well.

It was the demand not only from the Ministry but from the sector as well. One of the key contributing factors to brucellosis and tuberculosis was the fact that we had a shortage of veterinary officers, qualified vets, I mean, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I recall, when I joined the Ministry in 2012 there were only two, both foreigners. A retired Scottish and a vet from the Philippines.

One thing that we need to take note of as well in Fiji is, we keep losing our people because Fiji is the base for most of the multilateral and regional bodies as well. We keep losing most of our people to SPC. We keep losing most of our people to the University of the South Pacific and now we have other universities coming in. The demand is always there, unfortunately, we invest in the capacity development, but they opt for better working conditions, so they move. The vets that were left behind were Dr. Ken Cokanasiga, he was at SPC, Dr. Robin Arrow and of course Dr. Niumaia Tabunakawai. These are the ones that we consult, they helped us well and they are members of the Veterinary Board.

So, we were excited about the establishment of FNU and it becoming a university and there were consultations between the Ministry but the problem, Mr. Speaker, Sir, if I may shorten it as well. They went ahead with the course but one of the key requirements for veterinary courses is laboratories. They were running the courses, but they should have established the laboratory first before running the courses.

They have advertised for applicants and our youths were into it but when it came to validating the course, et cetera then it was noted that there was no laboratory. Therefore, they cannot be given practicing certificates and be qualified as vets without fulfilling all the requirements of the course, that is the background to this, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I am not even sure now if the laboratory has been constructed and operating but that is the information.

Under the recommendation of the Assistant Minister, we go for para-veterinary courses. It is a level above the normal diploma and degree but not the fully qualified vet, just like paramedics. So, that was one of the options and of course we sent our people to Los Banos University, and a few the universities like Massey University and most of those that we sent then are now qualified local vets in the Ministry and I hope that they still remain with the Ministry.

Because vets, animal breeders and nutritionists were the key skills that were missing in the Ministry then. We have big plans about agriculture, but you do not have the necessary skills to take it to the next level. So, it is vets, nutritionists and animal breeders because we also have specialised plant breeders and animal breeders.

I have talked about losing our people. The qualified breeder who came back with a doctorate, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is now with USP, Dr. Poasa. We keep losing people, that is the story behind it, but it was the laboratory. One of the options too that was discussed but is FNU's responsibility is the Board and Academic but we, as a key stakeholder, have an interest in that and I know the honourable Assistant Minister for Agriculture is the one who usually goes to do the negotiations and discussions.

I think one of the agreements that was made then was for them to qualify with a degree in animal science so with that qualification, they can find employment in the sector and then when the laboratory is fully operational and meets the required standard, then they can return and do all the requirements that are still left so that they can then qualify with the full vet degree. That is the story behind it. Perhaps, the honourable Assistant Minister and the honourable Minister can help in that as well. But we need to put it in the proper context and Government has to learn from this and take it forward. We have a university there, we are proud of the university, let us put the investment into it, get good qualified people as well but we have to pay them. It is important for the country.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me say this at the outset that the Government fully supports the three universities in the country and on FNU, I can say again at the outset that we appreciate the work that lecturers, administrators and currently those in charge are doing for the university.

Many of the issues that have been pointed out by the honourable Members, of course, is really not the making of perhaps those who are running the actual university. I know, Mr. Speaker, Sir, they talked about the new FNU Council, but they actually forget that it was their leaders and in particular, one who is not in Parliament right now, changed the structure of the Council to suit the Government's own political agenda. So, apart from putting some professors and academics who I know were people of repute, who had done their bit and I know some of them were not allowed to do what they were supposed to do because the council was run by the cronies of the former government who were either in the influential position or were taking the government's position.

Mr. Speaker, the history of the FNU, I mean they forget that Dr. Ganesh Chand, who was the director of FIT – Fiji Institute of Technology, who did all the groundwork, got the Act, set up the University

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Under the FijiFirst Government.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- ... and they have never acknowledged that because he fell out of their favour. One of the reasons why he fell out of their favour, Mr. Speaker, was because he was an academic and he realised that any university's existence rests fundamentally on the principle of academic freedom.

Academic freedom, Mr. Speaker, means that you allow the administrators and the academics to run the institution - divorced from the political interference, so that the students have the freedom, the academics have the freedom, the administrators have the freedom to teach, do critical thinking, innovate because in any university, Mr. Speaker, the fundamental principle and that affects freedom, that affects economic prosperity and that leads to innovation.

Now, in the last 15 years and this is a fact, under the military government and under the FijiFirst Government, they interfered at every step of how the University was operating.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Come on.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Shame.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- It was based on what they saw. It was bad for democracy. It was bad for freedom, it was bad for innovation, it was bad for entrepreneurship and that is why we ended up with the situation where over the last 15 years, there has been hundreds of haphazard reforms.

We do not even know right now, Mr. Speaker, there has been no expert evaluation. Governments make mistakes, Mr. Speaker, but governments also learn from their mistakes and the only way you learn is by doing proper evaluation or proper study of the impact of some of the decisions you make and the policies. They refuse to acknowledge throughout their tenure that they made mistakes and there are many, Mr. Speaker.

In the last eight years, we have taxpayers, Mr. Speaker, who have forked more than half-a-billion dollars funding FNU. The people who work there, they deserve the freedom, the support and they deserve the environment in which that they can function. Unfortunately, that environment was not there. They talk about research

HON. K.K. LAL.- Point of Order, Mr. Speaker. I think the honourable Member is misleading Parliament. The Government has never stopped staff, students or professionals from any of their freedom that is protected under the Fijian Constitution.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Evidence.

HON. K.K. LAL.- If the honourable Minister has any sort of evidence, he should give it and I think he is not the Minister for Education. The Minister for Education should answer.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Provide evidence.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Provide evidence that there was never any assessment done.

MR. SPEAKER.- Continue.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, increasingly, the honourable Member is acting like a small-minded agitator, abusing his parliamentary privilege.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Point of Order, Mr. Speaker, Sir. That is irrelevant. I am not a small child here. I am an honourable Member of this Parliament and he needs to respect that, Sir. He should withdraw his statement. All Members are elected fairly here, therefore, I am protected under the Constitution.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Withdraw!

HON. K.K. LAL.- He should withdraw that statement, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- Continue. I have made my decision.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I am saying, Mr. Speaker, that the honourable Member is behaving like a small-minded agitator and attacking people.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Point of Order.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Sit down!

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- What number, what number?

HON. K.K. LAL.- Standing Order 62(4)(a) and I quote: “offensive words against Parliament or another member.” That is offensive, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Withdraw!

HON. K.K. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, if the honourable Member cannot understand the Standing Order, I request him to go and read the Standing Orders again.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Maybe, he spent too long as a student at FNU, Mr. Speaker.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Point of Order!

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- What is your Point of Order?

HON. K.K. LAL.- That is again offensive, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Anyone can spend any number of years to study. It does not require age, Sir. That is very offensive. You should withdraw that statement. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I request you to intervene and ask the honourable Member to respect other honourable Members and withdraw that statement.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Withdraw!

HON. K.K. LAL.- That is my personal life and he cannot bring that here, Mr. Speaker. Withdraw!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker ...

MR. SPEAKER.- You are raising your Point of Order and then all of a sudden, you are making the decision again. That is why I will allow him to continue.

Please, honourable Deputy Prime Minister, just confine yourself to the content of the Report.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All I am saying is that the honourable Member was attacking someone who was not in Parliament to defend to himself and that is an abuse of parliamentary privilege.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- No.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Yes. Well, if that is what they want, then it will be free-for-all, Mr. Speaker, because the parliamentary standards, we are not attacking people who are not here by name or by title and who cannot defend themselves and that is exactly what the honourable Member did.

They talked about research. They said the Government has promoted research and the Government has allowed people to do research. They forgot, Mr. Speaker, that in 2017 in this Parliament and we supported it when we were sitting on the other side. There was a Fiji National Research Council Act which was passed in Parliament and the objective of that Act which we supported was to raise the standard of research in science, education and create an environment where government would allocate funding.

Since 2017 until they were in government last year, Mr. Speaker, they never appointed the Council because after passing the Act, they realised, “hey, we are going to put money into this Council and there will be academics, researchers applying for funds and producing research because we have to supply the data which would be critical of the government.” They were afraid to set up that Council.

Five years now, Mr. Speaker, almost six years now. Let me assure the people and all the staff and students of all the three universities that this Government (I know the honourable Minister for Education is already working on that) is going to appoint a Fiji National Research Council and this Government is going to put appropriate amounts of research funds, Mr. Speaker, for university academics including students to apply for those grants so that we can create research, policy advice that would be useful for the government, for the Parliament and for the whole country.

The other point I want to make, Mr. Speaker, as I have said, about haphazard reforms, over the last 15 years, so many things had happened. They changed exams, they changed curriculum, they changed so many things without an evaluation.

In 2014, when the then Minister for Education came into Parliament, the first thing he announced was that he was going to set up an Education Commission. It never happened. And, Mr. Speaker, I know and I want to assure the people of this country and those who are concerned about education, those who have raised issues over the years in terms of reform, again, the honourable Minister for Education is looking at the possibility and perhaps, the Education Commission will be set up as soon as possible to look at the overall education system in this country, right from ECE, primary, secondary and tertiary education.

One that was talked about as well was technical education. That, Mr. Speaker has been a disaster. They set up Technical Colleges, we warned them in this Parliament that that was going to fail, and we poured in more than \$20 million, but now it is all gone down the drain. They tried to pass the buck to FNU, they did not give them enough budget, FNU could not sustain the Technical Colleges and they were all left abandoned. Today, we are looking at the state of technical education.

Honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation talked about the lack of skills. This is what all the employers in this country are telling us. Yes, people are leaving, they are always leaving, the rate at which might be bigger now, but we were always training enough people.

The system was working. We had Vocational Training Sections in a number of schools throughout the country and from there, Mr. Speaker, a two-year course put them in a pathway to go to FNTC. They used to get Stage 3 and 4, then Stage 1 and Stage 2 they would need to go to FNTC and from there, they could also go to FNU and go for a Diploma or Degree as they felt. There was a system that allowed a constant flow - something that was working very well, but they destroyed that. And so today, Mr. Speaker, this Government has been left to pick up the mess, and we are dealing with that mess.

As the honourable Prime Minister announced yesterday that we are going to fund the Polytech to ensure that we can start competency-based training as soon as possible so that we can train carpenters, plumbers and painters - we do not have people like that, Mr. Speaker. That is why this Government is determined to clean that mess that was created by the former Government.

The other point, Mr. Speaker, they keep harping about is the management of capital grants. It is not the people at FNU, they are competent people, but it is the Government’s direct interference. And I know, Mr. Speaker, the original tender that was about to be given to a construction company

based in Labasa was stopped, given to another one at an exorbitant budget and, obviously, that company failed.

Right now, Mr. Speaker, let me tell the people and honourable Members of Parliament that we are moving the Construction Implementation Unit (CIU) that was part of the former Ministry of Economy and putting it back to the Public Service Commission (PSC). The Unit had started handing over projects to relevant Ministries before the commencement of the new financial year.

I say this because this is part of one of the recommendations. Mr. Speaker, we are finding everyday (this is just one example) of how much wastage and mismanagement took place as a result of the way in which capital projects were managed in this country. And this is why the state of some of the Government properties and assets is in a state of disrepair. All of them know, those who were in Government, and this is one good example of how this has happened.

Mr. Speaker, let me conclude by saying again, we do not want to labour this point on and on, but we are only doing it because we want the people and this Parliament to understand what we are dealing with - the mess that we are dealing with is just unbelievable.

If you go around the country, Mr. Speaker, and I had been to Vanua Levu. You start from Bua, and you go right up to Wainikoro, you just look at the Health Centres, you look at the schools....

HON. J. USAMATE.- Point of Order, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are talking on a motion about the Fiji National University, we are not talking about the motion on the status of infrastructure.

There have been some comments made here about how tenders are operated. Everyone knows that there are tender committees and tender boards to do that. If the honourable Deputy Prime Minister can just focus on the motion, it is almost 9 o'clock, and if he continues like this, we will be here till 1.00 a.m.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- All I was saying, Mr. Speaker, was in relation to how the FNU Campus construction was managed by CIU and in relation to that, I wanted to inform Parliament that CIU will now move to PSC. They will work with the relevant Ministries and as an extension, I was explaining what happened with all other capital projects in other Ministries.

So, Mr. Speaker, we want to assure the three Universities, including FNU, that the Government fully supports all three Universities in the country, and we will do everything possible to create an environment, to provide the resources, to provide the framework within which universities can operate, become more efficient, fragile, research-oriented and be able to produce the skills and manpower that we need in this country. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. A.V.B.C BAINIVALU.- I believe we have had a very robust discussion and debate on the 2020 Annual Report for the Fiji National University. I thank all honourable Members who have contributed constructively and destructively this evening. I have no further comments, thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

Question put.

Motion is agreed to.

QUESTIONSOral QuestionsUpdate on PALM and RSE Schemes
(Question No. 11/2023)

HON. V. NATH asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations update Parliament on whether the Minister supports the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) and Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) Schemes?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to thank the honourable Member for asking the question. Sir, the short answer to that question is, 'yes'.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as Minister, I do support both Schemes and I wish to further add that during this Sitting, there is going to be a detailed Ministerial Statement on that, and that is when all other clarifications will be provided and honourable Members will be welcomed to ask questions at that point in time.

HON. P.K. BALA.- A supplementary question, Sir; can the honourable Minister explain if the decision to remove the No Jab No Job Policy enacted by the FijiFirst Government in line with majority of the international practices at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic affects the eligibility of Fijians to have equal access to places on the PALM Programme?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I believe that is a new question. I will answer it later on.

MR. SPEAKER.- The honourable Minister has stated that, that is a totally new question.

HON. P.K. BALA.- It is not, Mr. Speaker, Sir. What are we going to ask? On Monday when I started asking the honourable Minister for Sugar, all was 'new'.

(Laughter)

Now, all 'new'! What is going to happen to this Parliament? As Opposition, we have the right to know the response from relevant Ministries.

MR. SPEAKER.- And I am here to guide us, that is my role.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER.- So, please, accept my decision, that is a new question and you need to raise it later on.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Can I have another go?

(Laughter)

MR. SPEAKER.- No, you were given one chance, let the other Members raise their supplementary question.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. We will be looking forward to the honourable Minister's statement.

One of the challenges that we have seen in the past for those people going overseas to work is sometimes the social issues that come out of it when part of their family is there and part of them is here. Under the PALM Scheme now, they are allowing spouses to go across. I am just wondering whether the Ministry has been tracking that and what it is doing about those issues when people are separated, and all the social issues arise out of that? We did something, I would like to know what they did.

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I seek your indulgence again. I had just stated that I am going to deliver a full Ministerial Statement, inclusive of all those issues in this Sitting and, thereafter, questions can follow.

MR. SPEAKER.- I think we will take that as the answer because he is going to provide that through his Ministerial Statement later on.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Very wrong, very wrong!

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- No!

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Premila Kumar, I have made my decision there, please.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- Yes, I apologise, honourable Koya. He stood up first.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Scheme started under the FijiFirst Government. Initially, it was Seasonal Workers Scheme, then it came to Pacific Labour Scheme and then collectively, it became PALM.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- It started back in the 1940s and 1950s.

HON. P.K. BALA.- *Ahre bhaiya.*

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- *Batao, batao.*

(Laughter)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- You are full of jokes!

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, from this side of Parliament, we totally agree that this is a very good Programme and Scheme for Fijians. A lot of Fijians have actually benefitted from this Scheme by going overseas. The issue that arises, Sir, from business perspective, since there is a lot of labour mobility - labourers are going to Australia and New Zealand, there is a huge gap that has been created in Fiji. What is the Ministry doing, along with the Department of Immigration, to bridge the gap that has been created by our Fijians leaving to go offshore under this Scheme?

HON. P. TIKODUADUA.- *Ahre*, he told you the answer already.

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, our immigration laws, as far as foreign workers are concerned, are very clear. We work with the Department of Immigration to facilitate any employer

who applies to get foreign workers to work there, and they have to follow the terms and conditions.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- I have a very simple question, honourable Minister. I am hoping that you answer this rather than someone else. Someone else seems to be jumping up on everything.

Honourable Minister, one of your fellow Ministers has just mentioned to us earlier and has also mentioned some figures in the press with respect to the number of tourism workers who have actually left the country and it could have been under this particular PALM Scheme or the RSE Scheme. Those numbers came back as 14,000 to 16,000. Can you confirm those numbers?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- I will confirm those numbers once I have ascertained them, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

National Sustainable Tourism Framework
(Question No. 12/2023)

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation update Parliament on the development of the National Sustainable Tourism Framework?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to thank the honourable Member for the question.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the last three years, we have been guided by the Fijian Tourism 2021. It is our national sectorial plan, sometimes we also call it a masterplan or the Tourism Policy Plan. The crux of it was to grow Fiji's tourism to an industry valued at \$2.2 billion by the end of 2021.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, while I acknowledge the work of my predecessor, there were fundamental principles that needed more attention - principles such as inclusivity and equitability, and principles that matter. These, coupled with our vulnerability, means that we need to look beyond immediate gains more seriously.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the National Sustainable Tourism Framework (NSTF), the successor to Fijian Tourism 2021, will outline the strategic direction of the tourism sector. At this point, I would like to acknowledge the support of the International Finance Corporation (IFC) as our partner.

The development of the Framework is based on thorough research and broad stakeholder consultation and tourism-related industries, Government, Civil Service, Civil Society Organisations, communities and development partners. I remind the other side of Parliament that the approach we take is inclusive and consultative. In fact, I am hoping that the Opposition will contribute to its development.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Framework will clearly lay out policy direction, development and investment strategies and an action plan for the first three years of implementation. A key undertaking of the Framework is to gather inspiration and direction for the tourism industry by leveraging Fiji's natural, cultural, physical and reputational asset base, as well as resolving challenges and building resilience to be more globally competitive.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the first phase, we are undertaking a comprehensive Tourism Sector Assessment to determine the current state of the Fiji Tourism Industry. This includes reviewing the

current laws, policies, plans and incentives. We want to ascertain where we are now, determine where you want to be, what the challenges are and where the opportunities lie.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have established a private sector-led Steering Committee to oversee the development of the Framework and to provide technical contribution. The Committee consists of key partners, such as the Fiji Hotel and Tourism Association, Fiji Airways, Tourism Fiji, Society of Fiji Travel Associates, Savusavu Tourism Association and Suncoast Tourism Association. And for greater coordination, we also have key development partners who bring relevant expertise and independence, such as the Global Green Growth Institute, Office of the United Nations Resident Coordinator and the Asian Development Bank's Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, so it is quite inclusive.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have recently concluded a series of 13 Public Private Sector Dialogue sessions. The idea is to share best practices and gather feedback that will form the Framework. Topics discussed covered critical areas such as:

- diversification, not only in terms of geographical locations but the type of tourism that Fiji wants to attract;
- intensifying linkages between sectors to drive more economic benefits from tourism;
- creating inclusive workplaces for women and the vulnerable groups; and
- improved regulatory and institutional frameworks to improve the enabling environment and drive private sector growth.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, following each session, recording is made available publicly on our website for transparency. The Ministry has also activated a public consultation survey to get a buy-in from the people of Fiji because tourism is everyone's business.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, four focussed groups' discussions have been held to verify data and discuss in-depth issues and opportunities in areas of conservation, agri tourism and tourism value chain. The Ministry will also use a national economic summit to feed into the framework.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we intend to finalise the Framework for validation by May this year, following which it will be presented to Cabinet. Thank you, Sir.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I must inform Parliament that this is something that was instigated prior to this Government and it was instigated, not really shelved, but we were just waiting for budgetary stuff to be done, and I am glad it is actually happening.

But the question here, honourable Minister is that, because this is actually a Framework for a national sustainable tourism, the establishment of this particular Framework will require evidence-based data and recommendations. I understand what you are saying about inclusivity and the question really is, how is this information being sought? Is it just locally or are we actually seeking it from institutions such as International Network of Sustainable Tourism Observatories (INSTO)? They are Observatories that actually exist, and they come under the purview of the UNWTO. That is such beneficial information to Fiji that it would be remiss of us if we did not tap into that. So, the first question is, are we going to use that kind of information because these Observatories give us very critical information in terms of development?

HON.V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, let me assure the honourable Member that every source will be used in arriving at what we need to establish as our Framework. I just came back from a presentation by a Professor at the Reserve Bank of Fiji today - one of our local boys, and he presented and took another angle to our tourism, the challenge in tourism and we will use quite a bit of what he

presented today. Yes, whatever source is out there, Sir, we will use it, Mr. Speaker.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji Airways is an important stakeholder in this Framework and I understand that when the honourable Minister was sitting on this side, opposed the purchase of Fiji Airways aircrafts. Can the honourable Minister advise us that if he would have sold the aircrafts or returned, would we have achieved the outcome of the Framework and would that have affected the tourism arrivals in Fiji?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, that was a new question and also very high hypothetical, so it does not really deserve my reply.

(Laughter)

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, can the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation inform Parliament of the participation approach to the development of the Framework?

HON. J. USAMATE.- He's already explained.

HON.V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I have highlighted, it is going to be very inclusive and all private sector players are in this. I have named them, and we have had 13 sessions of consultations across the country. By the end of the day, it will be something that will hear the voice of a vast majority of our people - a little different from the way that the other Government used to do, like we were just told there is a masterplan and that it is. This one is going to be very different, Mr. Speaker.

Inconsistency in Retirement Age – Civil Service
(Question No. 13/2023)

HON. J. USAMATE asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Climate Change, Environment, Civil Service, Information, Public Enterprises and Veteran Affairs update Parliament why is there inconsistency in the retirement age in the Civil Service?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the honourable Prime Minister to answer this question, and I thank the honourable Member for the question.

Mr. Speaker, I do not understand the relevance of this question, as the honourable Prime Minister had provided a very clear and detailed explanation during the post-Cabinet announcement in early July. But just to help the honourable Member, I understand that he needs to be reminded of what the honourable Prime Minister said, who said as follows:

“The civil servants retirement age has been increased to 60 years and the contract-based appointments of civil servants has been removed to allow for permanent contracts for the government workers.”

He also announced the revision of the retirement age of Civil Servants to 60 years and that was going to be effective from 1st January, 2023. He also announced that because there were shortage of teachers, doctors and nurses and we know mainly why, the increase in retirement age to 60, Mr. Speaker, applicable for teachers, doctors and nurses was backdated to 1st January, 2022.

Mr. Speaker, that is, in short, the answer to honourable Usamate's question and I do not know what sort of inconsistencies he was talking about.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the Deputy Prime Minister for his reply to the question. Obviously, raising the retirement age from 55 years to 60 years will always be advantageous to those who are already employed, it gives them another five years. I think for everyone that is in employment, such a policy is something that they welcomed, although not so welcomed for those who are trying to enter the job market. They would not find it advantageous.

I have noticed over the past - I do not know whether it is this week or last week, we have seen that there is an intention by Government to also raise this in Local Government, I think, by making adjustments to the legislation there. I realised that the Civil Service does not include statutory bodies and the Forces but there is also an important question of relativity of benefits across all those whose employment is funded by Government. Does the Government, therefore, intend to look at how this new retirement age might be applied across all agencies where Government is funding?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, in fact, there are no inconsistencies. The honourable Leader of the Opposition would know that the Republic of Fiji Military Forces, Fiji Corrections Service and the Fiji Police Force are governed by different Acts and so, that is something that will have to be decided.

With respect to Local Government, Mr. Speaker, the Local Government Act will have to be changed if we have to increase the retirement age which this Government reduced it from 60 years to 55 years. So, the Cabinet decision has been made that a Bill will come into Parliament to change the Act so that Local Government workers can also retire at 60 years.

As for other Government entities and public enterprises, they are all governed by their own Act and it is up to the Boards and those organisations to look at the retirement age on the basis of what they need and perhaps, take signal from the Government in terms of what is happening in the Civil Service.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Deputy Prime Minister just mentioned in his answers that all the contracts are gone and permanent establishment because of the retirement age moving from 55 years to 60 years. Can the civil servants of this country expect an automatic transfer or is there going to be a process whereby they are going to be given permanent establishment? Can some clarity be given on that, because the contracts are already gone, so what is the next process?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, unlike the previous Government, we are going to strengthen the Public Service Commission (PSC) and basically we want to ensure, like before, that PSC will have an Open Merit System. The PSC is looking at how to deal with the movement of people from contract to permanent employment. But the decision has been made by the Government that all those people on contract will become permanent employees, and the process will be determined by the PSC.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we do understand that to increase the employment age to 60 years, it is harder for the younger graduates to enter the workforce. What is your approach to unlock youth-led potential and opportunities for carbon sequestration efforts giving rise to employment and greener entrepreneurship in Fiji?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is kind of a new question, but I will nonetheless answer that. I think this misnomer or misconception that somehow raising retirement

age is going to create more jobs is actually coming from those who do not understand what is happening in the labour market. If you look at the trend around the world, the retirement age in most countries, even in countries like Papua New Guinea, has been raised. So, Governments are looking at a combination of getting a system where young people can move in through internship, creation of jobs, et cetera.

Creation of jobs is based on what is happening in the economy and the size of the civil service and the needs of different sectors of the economy in terms of making sure that the civil service is catered for in a way that supports that. So, apart from that aspect of just looking at whether this is going to create new jobs or loss of jobs, that is not correct. I think it was created by the former Government to somehow suggest that if you reduce retirement age, you are going to create more jobs. It does not happen that way, Mr. Speaker.

First Home Ownership Initiative Assistance Programme
(Question No.14/2023)

HON. I. TUIWAILEVU asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Housing and Local Government update Parliament on the First Home Ownership Initiative Assistance Programme?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Sustainable Development Goal 11 (SDG11) on Sustainable Cities and Settlements, Target 11.1, states that by 2030, ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services, and upgrade slums. In trying to ensure that the target is met, owning affordable homes became a global challenge. The rising prices of purchasing or constructing a home was costly that it imposed pressure to the young and middle age income earners, hence renting a home was more economical.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, due to the declining home ownership faced globally, solutions were fostered by countries on addressing the implications it had on the economy, resulting in Government seeking ways to effectively resolve the decline.

Just a brief background on the Home Ownership Assistance Programme that was also done overseas, Mr. Speaker, Sir, on 1st July, 2020, Australia introduced the first Home Owner Grant Scheme as a one-off grant payable to first home owners who met the eligibility criteria. Accordingly, an analysis was recently conducted by the Australian Government to assess the effect of the scheme on the housing market. It was noted that the First Home Owner Grant was an effective scheme to enhancing housing affordability for the first-time buyers.

The First Home Ownership Programme was introduced in 2014...

HON. P.K. BALA.- So, we are on the right path.

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.-... to assist low and middle income earning households to home ownership.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- You can thank the government for the initiative.

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- To qualify for this Programme, the applicant's total household income will need to be \$100,000 and below or less if he or she is a Fiji citizen, above the age of 18 years and has never previously purchased or owned a home in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, from 2014, only households earning \$50,000 and below annually were assisted with a grant of \$5,000 to purchase their first home and \$10,000 for those who were building their first homes. Until 2018-2019 financial year, the grant was increased by \$5,000 and expanded to include households with an annual income between \$50,000 and \$100,000.

Households earning \$50,000 and below had a payable grant of \$10,000 to purchase their homes and \$15,000 to construct their homes. The newly introduced upper income range at \$5,000 to purchase and \$10,000 to build their first homes. The first land purchase programme was also introduced with a payable grant of \$10,000 for households that were purchasing their first residential land and were earning an annual income of \$50,000 and below.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, from August 2020, the grant assistance was further increased to \$15,000. Households in the range of \$50,000 and below were assisted with a grant of \$30,000 to construct their first home, \$15,000 to purchase, whilst households earning below \$50,000 and \$100,000 had \$20,000 to build their first home. However, the grant to purchase their first home remained at \$5,000.

Since the inception of this Programme, a total of more than 3,149 had benefitted with a total pay-out of nearly \$38 million.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Thank you, honourable Minister.

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- From this assistance, more than 1,800 households had their first homes constructed with a total grant pay-out exceeding \$28 million and 1,200 households purchased their first homes with a total pay-out of over \$9 million.

In the current financial year, the Ministry has a total budgetary allocation of \$6.5 million for the First Home Grant Programme and have paid out more than \$3.3 million. A total of 183 households have benefitted from this - 96 received grant to build their first home and 87 households purchased their first home. Sir, 110 households who were assisted were earning below \$50,000 and the remaining 73 households were in the higher income range.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Programme is ongoing...

HON. P.K. BALA.- Very good.

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- ...and the Ministry will be reviewing its policy ...

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- We will expand it.

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- ... to incorporate a monitoring and evaluation framework. We will also be exploring - options are incomplete houses to support those who have taken the initiative to construct their first home and lack funding to complete them.

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker, Sir; does the First Home Ownership Programme consider households who want to construct their first home on *mataqali* or communal land?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Thank you, honourable Member, for a very good question. One of the current criteria in order for them to qualify for the assistance is that they must have a registered title or registered lease or certificate of title. Households who want to be assisted under the Programme to construct their first home on *mataqali* or communal land must provide a valid lease title. This simply means that they need to get consent from, at least, over 60 percent of the *mataqali*

or landowning unit and conduct a survey in order to receive a residential lease. Titles can be used to access this grant to build their own, addition to the remaining criteria.

Another assistance that is also available is the Rural Housing Assistance Scheme which can also be explored for those who also want to be assisted under Rural Housing Programme.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- I thank the Minister for his response, very honest response and to the point.

How will the honourable Minister ensure First Home Ownership Assistance Programme is fair and transparent? That is the first part of the question.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Only one question.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- The second part of the question is linked to the first one, how does the Ministry ensure that the money that is given is actually used by the recipient?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- I think there are two parts to your question. The first part is on the transparency of the Programme. I think the Scheme is very transparent in the sense that for someone to qualify, there are certain criteria that are clearly stated for someone to qualify for that kind of assistance. It is a very stringent criteria and it applies to all members of the economy.

The second part of the question is on monitoring, whether the applicant or recipient receives whatever grant the Government gives. For the Ministry, most of the programmes or the grant were paid through commercial banks as well as other lending institutions, so that is the duty of the lending institutions because they also have very stringent policies in place. They also ensure that before they give out any assistance, that the applicant or recipient adheres or complies with the policy of the lending institution and the money is used for its intended purpose. We do not just give out money directly to the applicants, there is a system that one has to go through in order to obtain grant from the Government. So, we have lending institutions where money is paid to ensure that it reaches and meets the purpose the grant is meant for.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the FijiFirst Government initiated the very successful First Home Ownership Initiative Assistance Programme.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- What is the question?

HON. H. CHAND.- I am coming to that.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Do not worry!

HON. H. CHAND.- The honourable Minister has confirmed that the Government will continue with the Programme. Can he inform us of the demand for this Programme?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Thank you, honourable Member for the question. Housing is a basic need, so the demand for housing is always there and it is the duty of this Government to ensure that we are also going to provide housing assistance to those who actually need the assistance and will continue to provide that assistance.

As I have said, the demand is there, and the Coalition Government will continue to provide assistance to those who need to be assisted through the First Home Ownership Grant.

Rebranding of the FBC Logo
(Question No. 15/2023)

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am disappointed that the honourable Prime Minister is not here to answer the question, but I will go with any of the three Deputy Prime Ministers here. My question is:

Can the honourable Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Climate Change, Environment, Civil Service, Information, Public Enterprises and Veteran Affairs inform Parliament on how much money was spent in the rebranding of the FBC logo and explain how it came back to using the original logo?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, I am happy to answer the question on behalf of the honourable Prime Minister who had to go for another engagement, an urgent one. Well, I can tell the honourable Member that the cost was actually much less than the \$207,000 luxury vehicle that was ordered for the former CEO.

Let me tell say that the cost of total rebranding, Mr. Speaker, invitations, set-ups, logistics and evening client function exercise was only \$26,800 - 12.5 percent of the \$207,000 for the luxury vehicle. That is the cost.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Thank you for your response but you really did not answer my question.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I have answered your question.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- You did not answer the second part. Mr. Speaker, Sir, it cannot be taken as supplementary because he did not answer the first question. Why did you go back to the old logo? That was not answered, and I am still on the first question.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, the question was, how much did it cost and the simple answer to that question is, it is the Government's prerogative. This is a new Government.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Shame on the Government.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- If you come back with something, we can change it again.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, the honourable Members are acting like a bunch of jokers. I mean, they should have some sense to listen. They ask a question, and I am answering that question.

(Hon. K.K. Lal interjects)

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- *Bhaito, bhaito.*

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Hey, sit down!

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Lal, resume your seat. You make so much noise.

(Laughter)

We are trying to follow the debate.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- The honourable Member on the other side who is sitting at the back is really becoming a joke.

(Hon. K.K. Lal interjects)

MR. SPEAKER.- No, you leave that to me.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- What I am saying, Mr. Speaker, is that the rebranding was decided by the new Board which met in consultation with the Government and they had decided that they need to restructure FBC. It was a mess, it was a political tool, it was used by the former Government as a political propaganda tool.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Forget about the logo, what a waste.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- The Government and the Board decided that FBC should be put in a new light. It is going to become an organisation that will become profitable under the new Board, with the support of the Government and it will become an organisation that people will like and understand that it is going to change from a propaganda mouthpiece of the former Government to a State broadcaster which is going to provide the service that the people of this country deserve. That is why we did the rebranding and that is why we did the restructure.

Short-Change of Cane Price – 2019 to 2021
(Question No. 16/2023)

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Multi-Ethnic Affairs and Sugar Industry update Parliament of the total amount short changed to cane growers from the guaranteed price of \$85 per tonne of sugarcane in the three seasons from 2019 to 2021?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- I thank the honourable Deputy Speaker for asking this question. Yes, there was a short-change, but let me go back prior 2019 and start from 2017.

In 2017, the previous Government gave \$85 per tonne. In 2018, they also gave \$85 per tonne. What happened in 2019? The former Minister for Economy said, and I quote:

“What’s new in this budget is that we will be setting up a stabilisation fund, funded in partnership with FSC of \$85 a tonne for all cane payment for the next three years.”

Mr. Speaker, come 2019, instead of paying \$85, they paid \$82.21 - a shortfall of \$2.79.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Shame on you people.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- In 2020, they paid farmers \$82.41, a short change of \$2.59. In 2021, they paid the farmers \$81.93, a short-change of \$3.07 cents. I will tell you what happened.

In that case, the farmers lost \$13.87 million and you fooled the cane farmers. I am a cane farmer. I lost \$8,500 in the short-change. So, I will tell them, through you, Mr. Speaker, that a saying

goes that you can fool someone some time but you cannot fool someone all the time. And that is why, Mr. Speaker, since they fooled the farmers, they are sitting on that side of Parliament. And you will sit there for a term of...

(Laughter)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- A Point of Order, Mr. Speaker. Just a point of clarity, the gesture by the honourable Member is unparliamentary.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- You're the ones who are shouting at us...

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- He needs to control his gesture, Mr. Speaker.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- ...just let him talk!

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Maharaj, you have been in Parliament for quite some time now and this never happened before - this type of clapping, yelling, beating of the table, which affects the decorum of the Chamber. Both sides are doing that. I thought only the Opposition side was doing it but all of a sudden, the Government side was doing it as well. So, given that, we will just leave it there and request honourable Members to ask relevant supplementary questions or otherwise we move on.

HON. P.K. BALA.- I just want to inform the honourable Minister that the short-change that he has been talking about which he has not revealed was for the industry cost and that was paid on behalf of the farmers. Please, go and do some research.

(Honourable Government Member interjects)

HON. P.K. BALA.- Can you keep shut please, I am not talking to you.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Irrelevant.

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. P.K. BALA.- My supplementary question, Mr. Speaker, Sir, since we are on the price, can the honourable Minister for Sugar inform this Parliament on whether there will be any top-up on the final payment of \$6.85 because that is the time when farmers need more money to prepare for harvesting?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is a new question. I will answer that when he re-submits his question.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister, I was trying to ask you whether can you answer that, or is it a new question altogether? But now, you have jumped the gun as well.

(Laughter)

So, it is better we leave it at that, and go on to the next question.

Reduction in Social Welfare Programmes
(Question No. 17/2023)

HON. S. KUMAR asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation inform Parliament if the social welfare assistance put in place by the previous Government will be reduced?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- I thank the honourable Member for the question. The simple answer is, 'no'.

HON. H. CHAND.- A supplementary question, Sir. Recently, the honourable Assistant Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation made a comment while speaking at the National Federation Party's Rakiraki Branch Annual General Meeting, that many of the 96,000 plus social welfare recipients should not be receiving assistance from the State.

For the Assistant Minister to make such a comment in public reveals the ...

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- What's your question?

HON. H. CHAND.- ...uncaring nature of the Coalition Government for the poor and needy of our country. My question is...

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you.

HON. H. CHAND.- ...can the honourable Minister confirm whether a study was undertaken to back what the honourable Assistant Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation revealed publicly?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Speaker, again, I thank the honourable Member for his supplementary question. In fact, Sir, what we are currently undertaking now is a review of the Social Protection Programme, that is, in partnership with DFAT. Already, Mr. Speaker, upon our inquiry into the beneficiaries who are on the Programme, there are beneficiaries who have passed on or deceased, but they continue to be paid out to the beneficiaries.

Now, because there was a lack of monitoring by the previous Government, we are now working with Fiji Care, and I want to thank Fiji Care for coming forward to help us with an online portal, where the Social Welfare Officers are now able to access information on those who have deceased that have their beneficiaries come to claim.

In that particular portal are information of the thousands of people who have been on it. They can now provide that information so that we can remove the beneficiaries from the system. That was not done by the previous Government, so there were a lot of beneficiaries who were receiving under Programme who were not being monitored and, therefore, Fiji Care is now providing that information.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, we have found from our beneficiaries that, yes, there are beneficiaries on the Social Welfare Programme who are able-bodied and are able to be employed. That is, in the full picture of it, is what the Ministry will undertake.

We have a Social Welfare Graduate Programme which the previous Government did not really explore which needs to be done. It is part of the Ministry's mandate to use the Budget to ensure that there are people in the Programme who are able-bodied. Yes, there were many who were not in the Programme because of COVID but now, Mr. Speaker, we are out of COVID, there are now jobs available, we can train our people in the Welfare Programme to graduate out of the Programme.

That is what the Ministry is now committed to do. Yes, I support the statement stated by the honourable Assistant Minister because we need to move them out of the Programme and that is the commitment by the Coalition Government - to take people out of poverty, ...

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Yes.

HON. P.K. BALA.- You go and tell the people.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- ...to educate them in the TVET Programmes that are now going to be available so that they can be employed to fill the labour market shortage.

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- A supplementary question; can the honourable Minister confirm whether the figures that the honourable Assistant Minister mentioned is correct?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Speaker, I think the honourable Assistant Minister said not all the 96,000 people should be on the Programme, she did not state an actual statistics, so it was not misleading.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Listen to what she is saying.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- But I will tell you, Mr. Speaker, what is misleading.

I thank the honourable Member of the Opposition who had asked the original question and who has brought it now to the proper forum about whether we are going to reduce their assistance because this was not the experience during the campaign. I will tell you what the candidates were doing - they were going around misleading the public that we, as a Government, when we would come into power we would reduce.

HON. P.K. BALA.- That is what you people are doing now.

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- No one ever said - they misled by misinforming the voters. The voters came to us when we were going to meetings around in our campaigns, they were telling us and asking us the question, "Are you going to reduce the pension scheme? Are you going to reduce social welfare?" We ask, "Where are these questions coming from?" They said, "Oh! There are candidates from FijiFirst and they are going around saying it." Lying, because they were hoping to get ...

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Lying before the Election and lying in Parliament now.

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- And even further, Mr. Speaker, during the blackout period, the Advisory Councillors were going around to tell people that this is what was going to happen - creating fear and intimidation and lies.

Mr. Speaker, yes, so they want to come and talk about an Assistant Minister who they are saying is lying and misleading? They were doing that during the campaign. Yes, so that is a long of it. We are not going to reduce it - stop misleading the public!

MR. SPEAKER.- We move on to the eighth question and that question has been withdrawn. We now move on to the first Written Question.

(Question No. 18/2023 was withdrawn)

Written Questions

Youth Community Development Assistance Programme (Question No. 19/2023)

HON. S. TUBUNA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Youth and Sports inform Parliament on the:

- (a) dollar value of every boat, farming and sports equipment handed out by the Ministry – by date, locality (village or rural community centre), Division, ethnicity and gender for the period January 2018 to 23rd December, 2022; and
- (b) the progress to-date of every one of those community development assistance programmes for young people?

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for his question. I¹ have my response with me, and I wish to table it in Parliament.

Salary and Entitlements for Municipal Council Staff (Question No. 20/2023)

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Housing and Local Government inform Parliament on the annual pay and other entitlements for all past and current Councillors, Special Administrators and Senior Executives for each Municipal Council for the period January 2007 to 23rd December 2022?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have my response to the question and I now² wish to table it in Parliament.

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you, honourable Members. That brings us to the end of the Sitting today. I thank you all for your contributions. Parliament is now adjourned until tomorrow at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 9.34 p.m.

Editor's Note: ¹ Reply to Written Question No. 19/2023 was tabled by the honourable Minister for Youth and Sports and appended as Annexure III.

²Reply to Written Question No. 20/2023 was tabled by the honourable Minister for Housing and Local Government and appended as Annexure IV.

ANNEXURE III

Reply to Written Question No. 19/2023 tabled on Wednesday, 29th March, 2023 by the honourable Minister for Youth and Sports.

(Ref. Page 557)



MINISTER FOR YOUTH AND SPORTS
HONOURABLE JESE SAUKURU

Parliamentary Response - Wednesday, 29th March, 2023

Mr. Speaker, with reference to the question raised by the honourable Member, the answers are as follows:

(a) (i)

EASTERN DIVISION						
Assistance	2018 (\$)	2019 (\$)	2020 (\$)	2021 (\$)	2022 (\$)	Total
Boat Assistance	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Farming Assistance	34,435.68	48,863.65	14,755.74	26,209.39	59,822.45	184,086.91
Sports Equipment	1,883.29	8,044.47	6,165.00	Nil	Nil	16,092.76
WESTERN DIVISION						
Assistance	2018 (\$)	2019 (\$)	2020 (\$)	2021 (\$)	2022 (\$)	Total (\$)
Boat Assistance	Nil	Nil	Nil	29,416 (2 boats-Ba & Tavua)	61,000 (4 boats-Tavua, Ba, Ra, Lautoka)	90,416
Farming Assistance	29,510.68 (13 Youth Clubs)	5,762.88 (4 Youth Clubs)	17,547.49 (6 Youth Clubs)	102,790.84 (62 Youth Clubs)	35,963.11 (44 Youth Clubs)	191,575
Sports Equipment	Nil	9,386	10,405	Nil	9,083	28,874
NORTHERN DIVISION						
Assistance	2018 (\$)	2019 (\$)	2020 (\$)	2021 (\$)	2022 (\$)	Total (\$)
Boat Assistance	Nil	Nil	Nil	29,416 (2 Youth Clubs)	29,416 (2 Youth Clubs)	58,832
Farming Assistance	91,053.37 (39 Youth Clubs)	90,079.63 (12 Youth Clubs)	26,828.68 (7 Youth Clubs)	41,169.04 (45 Youth Clubs)	29,134.41 (18 Youth Clubs)	278,265.13
Sports Equipment	Nil	361	Nil	Nil	3,610	3,971
CENTRAL DIVISION						
Assistance	2018 (\$)	2019 (\$)	2020 (\$)	2021 (\$)	2022 (\$)	Total (\$)
Boat Assistance	14,708 (1–Beqa Village Council)	Nil	Nil	Nil	29,416 (Tailevu)	44,124
Farming Assistance	80,857.82 (32 Youth Clubs)	26,773.42 (12 Youth Clubs)	15,544.88 (6 Youth Clubs)	24,601.29 (18 Youth Clubs)	61,776.40 (29 Youth Clubs)	209,554.31
Sports Equipment	9,386	5,776	Nil	Nil	6,859	21,751

(ii) Ethnicity and gender statistics is as follows:

- Eastern Division: 95 percent of the population are iTaukei, 90 percent of the Youth Clubs are iTaukei, with a gender spread of 43 percent female and 57 percent male.
- Western Division: 88 percent of the recipients are iTaukei and 12 percent are Indo-Fijians, with a gender spread of 45 percent female and 55 percent male.
- Northern Division: 92 percent of the recipients are iTaukei and 8 percent are Indo-Fijians, with a gender spread of 47 percent female and 53 percent male.
- Central Division: 97 percent of the recipients are iTaukei and 3 percent are Indo-Fijians, with a gender spread of 45 percent female and 55 percent male.

(b) The progress to-date for all Community Development Assistance is as follows:

Boat Assistance

All clubs assisted across the Divisions are actively engaged in utilising this assistance to generate income and help improve livelihood.

Farming Assistance

- (i) Eastern Division: Out of the 77 Youth Clubs supported under this programme since 2018, 52 are still active (67.5 percent), while 29 have become inactive.
- (ii) Northern Division: Out of 131 Youth Clubs supported under this programme since 2018, 84 are still active (64.1 percent), while 45 have become inactive.
- (iii) Western Division: Out of the 129 Youth Clubs supported since 2018, 73 Youth Clubs are still active (57 percent), while 56 have become inactive.
- (iv) Central Division: Out of the 97 Youth Clubs supported since 2018, 54 Youth Clubs are still active (56 percent), while 43 have become inactive.

Sports Equipment Assistance

As of today, majority of the basic sports equipment have experienced wear and tear. Some recipients have replenished their own. However, proper monitoring will need to be conducted to ascertain the status of this assistance.

Mr. Speaker, resources relating to monitoring and evaluation needs strengthening within the Ministry of Youth and Sports, to ensure that proper checks are in place to regulate the effective implementation of programmes and activities within the Ministry.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, youth and sports development should always be high on the agenda of priorities, given its cross-cutting nature and its huge potential in projecting socio-economic benefits that could be realised when aligned with appropriate resources.

ANNEXURE IV

Reply to Written Question No. 20/2023 tabled on Wednesday, 29th March, 2023 by the honourable Minister for Housing and Local Government.
(Ref. Page 557)



MINISTER FOR HOUSING AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT
HONOURABLE MACIU KATAMOTU NALUMISA

Parliamentary Response - Wednesday, 29th March, 2023

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Local Government Act was reviewed and amended in 2009. This amendment put in place the requirement for the appoint of the Special Administrators (SAs) in accordance with section 9A of the Local Government Act 1972.

The amendment to the Act allowed the SAs to be the Council in the absence of elected Councillors. The then Government in 2008 decided to rescind the 12 months extension granted to all Municipal Councils, so the life of elected Councillors expired in October 2008.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, prior to October 2008, the remuneration of Mayors and Councillors was published by the Minister through a gazette. This set the allowance that the Councillors would be entitled to for meetings that they attended. The Mayors could, according to section 21(5) of the Act, be paid a quarterly allowance as prior approved by the Minister.

From 2009, the SAs were appointed by the Minister as per section 9A by an order. The minimum number of SAs was set at 2. And as per section 8A(2), the SAs were given the powers to perform and discharge all the rights, privileges, powers, duties and functions vested in or conferred or imposed on the Council, the mayor and any office of the Council. Hence, the SAs were entitled to remunerations as determined by the Minister.

Determining the suitable remuneration for Councillors, SAs and senior executive members of Councils is a challenge. Prior to the appointment of SAs in 2009, Councillors were paid a sitting allowance ranging from \$5 to \$35 per ordinary meeting in accordance with the Act.

It is sad to note that former Councillors for the two large Councils namely Suva and Lautoka were paid as low as \$35 and \$25 per meeting respectively. Councillors for medium Councils were paid \$25 per ordinary meeting and most of the small Councils were paid \$10 per meeting. Councillors for Levuka Municipality were only paid \$5 per ordinary meeting. During that time, there was no fixed salary for the Councillors and only few were provided with entitlements. Since Rakiraki was declared a town in 2010, there were no allowances set for Councillors and Mayor. Please refer to **Annex 1 for details Mayors and Councillors allowance and entitlements.**

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the change in 2009 saw an increase in the remuneration package for the appointed SAs. This is to create an opportunity to modernise local government, improve accountability and transparency and examine the regulatory system to ensure the legislative framework is relevant to shape the local government that we want in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the SAs from 2009 to 2018 were paid salaries with allowances. In 2019, this was changed from salaries to annual allowances, which was paid quarterly.

The Ministry of Local Government from 2009 till to date has paid the salary and then allowances for the SAs. Councils such as Labasa/Savusavu, Nasinu, Nadi and Rakiraki paid additional allowances to the SAs. This was a top-up to what the Ministry paid. For example, Labasa/Savusavu, the Ministry paid \$45,000 and Council paid \$8,500.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, prior to the appointment of the new SAs in 2019, the SA for Suva City Council was paid a salary of \$45,000 per annum in 2009 and 2010, which was doubled in 2011 until 2018. For Labasa, Savusavu, Rakiraki and Nausori Town Councils, the SAs were paid \$45,000 from the Ministry and topped up by the Council, whereas the former SA for Nasinu was receiving \$60,000 per annum (\$45,000 paid by the Ministry and topped-up by the Council). The Lautoka City and Ba Town Council SAs were paid \$13,000 and \$25,000 respectively.

Records show that the SA for Levuka Town Council was paid \$5,000 from 2009 to 2011. For Lami Town Council, the former SA was on volunteer basis and did not receive any salary from 2009 to 2019. In addition to the salary, the SAs were also provided with housing allowance, telephone phone limit, vehicle and entertainment allowance.

In August 2019, the new team of SAs were appointed by the Minister for Local Government. The team consisted of 4 members and a Chairperson appointed for Suva and Lami Town Councils; Nausori and Nasinu Town Councils; Lautoka and Ba Town Councils; Sigatoka and Nadi Town Councils. The SA Teams for Rakiraki and Tavua Town Councils, and Labasa and Savusavu Councils consisted of 2 members and 1 Chairperson. The Levuka SA Team consists of only 2 members, one of whom was the Chair.

The remuneration offered to the SAs are paid quarterly on a pro-rata basis at a rate approved by the honourable Prime Minister in accordance with the Higher Salaries Act 2011. In addition to the quarterly allowance provided, the SAs are also entitled to meal and travel allowance for out of town or city expenses for any meetings such as local government forums, payable by the Council. Salary and allowances for the SAs is attached as **Annex 2**.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, section 35(2A) of the Act provides that the Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) of the Municipalities shall be paid such salary as is determined in accordance with the Higher Salaries Act 2011. The salary is determined in accordance with the approved Bands (as per **Annex 3**) depending on the size of the Councils such as large, medium and small. In the past, the CEOs were paid low salaries when compared to the responsibilities they had to undertake.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, over a period of time, several CEOs play a dual role attempting to cover the tasks of SAs, whilst also dispensing the CEO responsibilities. The initial expectation for this role was for it to provide an overall chair to oversee the work of the Council, actively attending to the civic engagement and have a strong grasp over the councils' service deliverables and stakeholder management mechanisms in an accountable and transparent manner. As such, the Ministry in consultation with the Councils decided to evaluate and determine the salary that is applicable to responsibilities of the CEOs. This is detailed in the CEO Salary as per Annex 3.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the above response is submitted. Thank you.

Annex 1

	Council	Year	Allowance (Mayors and Councillors)	Mayors additional Entitlements
1	Suva City	2007-2008	\$35/ordinary meeting	Vehicle Deputy Mayor - \$1,000/annum to be paid quarterly
2	Lami Town	2009-2009	\$10/ordinary meeting	Vehicle
3	Nausori Town	2007-2008	\$10/Ordinary or Standing Committee meeting	None
4	Nasinu Town	2007-2008	\$18/ Ordinary or Standing Committee meeting	None
5	Lautoka City	2007-2008	\$25/Councillor/ Ordinary or Standing Committee meeting	
6	Ba Town	2007-2008	\$15/meeting/councillor – Ordinary/Standing Committee \$25/meeting/Councillor for Full Board Meeting Travelling allowance - \$10 per ordinary meeting/standing committee meeting	Vehicle/Meal/Driver
7	Nadi Town	2007-2008	\$25/Ordinary or Standing Committee meeting	Mayor - 3,600/annum Deputy Mayor - \$1,440/annum
8	Sigatoka Town	2007-2008	\$20/Ordinary or Standing Committee meeting	None
9	Savusavu Town	2007-2008	\$25/Ordinary or Standing Committee meeting	\$3,500/annum
10	Labasa Town	2007-2008	\$25/Ordinary or Standing Committee meeting	None
11	Tavua Town	2007-2008	\$15/Ordinary or Standing Committee meeting	None
12	Rakiraki Town	None – Rakiraki declared in 2010 – hence no allowance was set for Councillors or Mayor		
13	Levuka Town	2007-2008	\$5/Ordinary or Standing Committee meeting	None

Annex 2

	Council	Year	Allowance (Mayors and Councillors)	Mayors additional Entitlements
1	Suva City	2009-2010	\$45,000	Housing/Vehicle/Telephone Mobile Limit/Entertainment
		2011-2018	\$80,000	
		2019-current	SA Chair - \$30,000 SA Members - \$23,000	Mileage claims, meal and accommodation, travel cost for meetings outside council
2	Lami Town	2009-2019	Volunteer Basis (only one SA)	Housing/Vehicle/Telephone Mobile Limit
		2019-current	SA Team for Suva and Lami	Mileage claims, meal and accommodation, travel cost for meetings outside council
3	Nausori Town	2007-2014	\$45,000 (only one SA)	Vehicle/Telephone Mobile Limit/Housing/Entertainment
		2015-2018	No SA appointed	
		2019-current	SA Chair - \$30,000 SA Members - \$23,000	Mileage claims, meal and accommodation, travel cost for meetings outside council
4	Nasinu Town	2009	Transition period	None
		2010-2019	\$60,000 (only one SA) also acted as CEO	Vehicle/Telephone Mobile Limit/Internet [2017-2019 including Housing]
		2019-current	SA Team for Nasinu and Nausori	Mileage claims, meal and accommodation, travel cost for meetings outside council
5	Lautoka City	2010-2014	\$25,000	Vehicle/Telephone Mobile Limit/Housing
		2019-current	SA Chair - \$30,000 SA Members - \$23,000	Mileage claims, meal and accommodation, travel cost for meetings outside council
6	Ba Town	2009-2013	\$13,000	Vehicle/Telephone Mobile Limit/Housing
		2014	No allowance paid to the SA	
		2015-2018	No SA appointed	
		2019-current	SA Team for Lautoka and Ba (only one allowance is paid)	Mileage claims, meal and accommodation, travel cost for meetings outside council
7	Nadi Town	2009-2013	Sigatoka SA was given Nadi responsibility	
		2014-2019	\$59,554	Vehicle/Telephone Mobile Limit/Housing
		2019-current	SA Chair - \$30,000 SA Members - \$23,000	Mileage claims, meal and accommodation, travel cost for meetings outside council

	Council	Year	Allowance (Mayors and Councillors)	Mayors additional Entitlements
8	Sigatoka Town	2008	\$30/meeting allowance (only one SA)	None
		2009-2012		
		2013-2015	Volunteer basis	
		2015-2018	No SA (CEO acted as SA)	
		2019-current	SA Team for Nadi and Sigatoka	Mileage claims, meal and accommodation, travel cost for meetings outside council
9	Savusavu Town	2009-2019	\$45,000	Vehicle/Telephone Mobile Limit/Entertainment
		2019-current	SA Chair - \$25,000 SA Members - \$18,000	Mileage claims, meal and accommodation, travel cost for meetings outside council
10	Labasa Town	2009-2019	\$45,000	Vehicle/Telephone Mobile Limit/Entertainment
		2019-current	SA Team for Labasa and Savusavu	Mileage claims, meal and accommodation, travel cost for meetings outside council
11	Tavua Town	2009-2013	SA - \$13,000	
		2019-current	SA Chair - \$20,000 SA Members - \$12,000	Mileage claims, meal and accommodation, travel cost for meetings outside council
12	Rakiraki Town	2010-2012	\$30,000	Vehicle/Telephone Mobile Limit/Internet/Housing
		2013-2014	\$40,000	Vehicle/Telephone Mobile Limit/Internet/Housing
		2015-2019	None	
		2019-current	SA Chair - \$20,000 SA Members - \$12,000	Mileage claims, meal and accommodation, travel cost for meetings outside council
13	Levuka Town	2009-2011	\$5,000	Vehicle/Telephone Mobile Limit/Internet/Housing
		2019-current	SA Chair - \$10,000 SA Members - \$8,000	Mileage claims, meal and accommodation, travel cost for meetings outside council