

# **PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI**



## **PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES**

### **DAILY HANSARD**

**TUESDAY, 6TH AUGUST, 2024**

**[CORRECTED COPY]**

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**TUESDAY, 6TH AUGUST, 2024**

The Parliament met at 10.40 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

MR. SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

**PRESENT**

All honourable Members were present.

**MINUTES**

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Monday, 5<sup>th</sup> August, 2024, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

**COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE SPEAKER**

Welcome

I welcome all honourable Members to today's sitting and those watching proceedings on television and the internet. Also, I particularly extend a warm welcome to all our distinguished guests joining us in the gallery - *Na Momo Na Turaga na Tui Nadi kei na veiwekani ni tiko ena siga vinaka nikua*. Thank you for taking time to join us today.

Address by Her Excellency the President of India

As honourable Members are aware, Her Excellency the President of the Republic of India will join us later this morning to address Parliament. As unanimously approved by the Business Committee in its meeting last week on the arrival of Her Excellency, we will suspend the Standing Orders and the Order of the day until such time that Her Excellency departs from our Chambers. All will be informed when Her Excellency arrives.

**QUESTIONS**

Oral Questions

Expansion of the Dental Care Programme  
(Question No. 113/2024)

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics inform Parliament whether the Government

has any plans to expand the Dental Care Programme under the Private Public Partnership Health Care Scheme to the Northern, Western and Eastern Divisions in this new financial year?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for his question. The short answer, Sir, is that at the moment, there are no plans but let me just explain the Public Private Partnership (PPP) General Practitioners Scheme very briefly.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this was a COVID-19 measure, and it was a sensible and right thing to do at that time because the hospitals were having difficulties with the availability of the services so the General Practitioners (GPs) were allowed to look after and see the patients and, of course, the Government was paying for those services.

That Scheme, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is still continuing. There are some Dental GPs who are providing those services in Suva. We, obviously, found out that once you start this kind of Scheme, then the expansion and the demand for it never ends and we also found, as the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services would tell you, that a lot of people who could go to the health centres and get the same kind of basic services were choosing to go to private GPs and the bill for Government kept increasing post-COVID-19.

In the last Budget, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we brought a means test and we said that all those people on social welfare schemes could continue with the GP Scheme, but those who can and should use public health facilities, particularly those around health centres, then they should.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, an additional answer to the honourable Member's question, that is something that we can look at but we have to have a good, proper, demand assessment. As I have said about Aspen, for example, in my Budget Speech, on the financial model, the demand assessment was never considered properly when that Scheme was started. So, the cost just kept escalating, the demand kept escalating, so people who could go to a health centre would end up at a public hospital, paid for by Government, when these services are also available in the health centres. So, that is a bit of a background with respect to the question asked by honourable Ravunawa.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to declare my interest before asking this question, as I am a Director of one of the private pharmacies under PPP in the Health Care Scheme. We have seen that when a patient goes to a hospital or health centre, he/she is given a prescription, he/she can come and get those medications that are provided for free from private pharmacies. But if a GP writes the prescription and that prescription is taken to a hospital or a health centre pharmacy, they are not given that medication.

While the burden has actually shifted to the private pharmacies to keep this medication in pharmacies and previously, we used to get 45 cents per item but now we are getting somewhere close to around 20 percent per medication, which is not basically the cost recovered for our overhead in running a private pharmacy, why are public hospitals and health centres not keeping the medications that are provided under the Free Medical Scheme?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I know the question is directed to me, but the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services is here already. I am not aware of that happening but, perhaps, the honourable Minister can answer that very specifically, Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission.

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, if I can just elaborate on the question raised by honourable Maharaj, he knows the difference between the private pharmacy and the public pharmacy, that the private pharmacy will review its essential drug list and that essential drug list will then include some of the medications that are not currently available in the Government Pharmacy but are available in the private pharmacy. When that happens, then it will solve what the honourable Member is saying, that if a prescription is given by the private pharmacy, then they can also source it from the Government Pharmacy by using that programme on Free Medicine.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Speaker, a supplementary question. The honourable Member has asked about the PPP in the Eastern Division as well. The honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics has answered for the Western and Central Divisions. But knowing that we have the *MV Cagivou* - the former Prime Minister had a vision to have a vessel which is state-of-the-art, with a hospital itself inside the vessel, in the past 20 months, did the honourable Minister visit that Vessel and understand that this PPP Scheme can also be utilised in the Eastern Division as well?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do not know what the honourable Member is referring to, and I could not get what he was asking. But if he is asking whether these services are available in the public health facilities, of course, these services are available. Part of the problem, Mr. Speaker, Sir, with respect to GP Scheme was that a lot of the patients who could go to the health centres and get basic services, treatment and medicine, were choosing to go to this GP Scheme and this is what I was saying. That was a COVID measure, and it continued and expanded, and the demand was never ending, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

So, in the last Budget, we took a good decision to say, "Alright, we will have a means test. We will look at those who deserve to get those kind of services paid for by Government". We have done that, and I think it is working well. But with respect to dental services, apart from the Central Division, we do not have this in other Divisions and as the honourable Member has quite rightly said, whether the Government has plans to do that or not, we will consider that, we will look at the demand, we will look at the cost, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and then we will make the decision. Thank you.

HON. V. LAL.- A supplementary question, Sir. What we have noticed is that when patients go to those GPs that are under the Scheme, when those GPs prescribe medicine, they ask their patients to go to some of their own pharmacies, rather than going to the health centres and hospitals. What can be done about that because the patients go to these doctors, and they have their own friend pharmacists? Instead of getting free medicine from hospitals and health centres, these patients are referred to certain pharmacies. Are we educating the patients about this, Sir?

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, you have indicated a very serious situation where you are saying that some of the doctors are referring them to their own pharmacies?

HON. V. LAL.- Yes, they do, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- Do you have evidence of that?

HON. V. LAL.- I can provide evidence, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- Yes, you can provide that because I am not too keen to allow that question to continue because you are basing it on some wild allegations, et cetera. We need to be very careful. Yes, he is a private practitioner....

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Sir, just for clarification, I think what the honourable Member is saying now is that a general rule applies where a prescriber should not be a dispenser. Ever since there was a law passed that hospitals can operate their own pharmacies, what we have seen is that there can be a compromise in a patient's treatment if, for example, a particular medication is not available. And if I am a prescriber and I am a dispenser, having an interest in that, I can prescribe whatever is available in my pharmacy. It does not necessarily mean that I will send them to my pharmacy, but I will prescribe what is available in my pharmacy so that it is convenient to get a prescription from me and get dispensed from the pharmacy that is owned by me.

So, that is something that we need to look at into future because we cannot compromise the health of the patients, whether the prescriber should be allowed to also own a pharmacy, so he or she becomes a prescriber and a dispenser at the same time.

MR. SPEAKER.- Yes, honourable Maharaj, you have declared your interest already, and I can see where you are coming from.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I am glad that honourable Maharaj brought that issue up, Mr. Speaker, Sir. When they were in Government and we were on the other side, we opposed that Bill.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- We actually said, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that that was not a good Bill and it was done to benefit certain people. I am very happy that honourable Maharaj now agrees, and we should look at that. He is right, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Just to add, in the last Budget, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we added an additional item to the 21 zero-rated items - prescribed medicine. So, if you get a prescription from your doctor, you go to a pharmacy, you do not pay 15 percent VAT on it. So, the prescribed medicine is now VAT free.

JICA's Grant Funding for Fiji Airports  
(Question No. 114/2024)

HON. RATU I. TUIWAILEVU 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 on the Grant Funding from the Japan International Cooperation Agency for Fiji Airports?

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Tuiwailevu for his question which is a very useful question because it brings the Government to answer and to let it be known in the House and to the people of Fiji what this development partner had been doing with Fiji and for Fiji.

Like many of our development partners, the Government of Japan have been a very reliable partner for Fiji over many decades and we welcome the constructive approach that Japan brings to its relationships, not only with Fiji but with the region in general, and their contribution towards Fiji's economy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in line with Government's approach to triumph economic growth in our foreign policy prosperity pillar, priority will always be given towards the progression and expansion of key enablers, such as airport infrastructure upgrades to enhance connectivity, travel and to improve

competitiveness and trade.

The role of Fiji Airports, Mr. Speaker, Sir, firstly I would like to convey my sincere appreciation to the Government of Japan and its funding agency, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) for providing support to Fiji Airports through a \$15 million grant for the improvement of aviation safety facilities at major airports in Fiji. Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji Airports plays a fundamental role in the progress of Fiji's economy as it manages the airport operations, oversees the air space and undertakes the transits of goods and services that are significant to Fiji's market.

Fiji Airports and JICA: The initial discussions between Fiji Airports and JICA commenced in 2013 under the FijiFirst Government but was halted because of the global pandemic. It recommenced in 2022 and continued in 2023 when JICA officially dispatched a preparatory survey team to Fiji Airports for discussions and explanations on the Draft Preparatory Report. That culminated in the endorsement of the report by the relevant officials on 17th January, 2024.

Agreement and Due Diligence: Mr. Speaker, Sir, the JICA grant assistance is focused on improving safety at the airports and the procurement of hi-tech aircraft surveillance systems and equipment to enhance Fiji's capabilities and capacity in that face. As per the grant agreement, JICA committed to the following areas:

- (1) procurement and installation of aircraft surveillance systems at the Nadi International Airport and Labasa Airport;
- (2) procurement and delivery of five fire trucks for Nausori, Labasa, Savusavu and Matei Airports;
- (3) procurement and delivery of three rescue boats for Nadi International Airport; and
- (4) provision of consultancy services for improving aviation safety.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the grant documentation received from JICA consists of the Grant Agreement and the Exchange of Notes between the Government of Fiji and the Government of Japan. This has undergone the appropriate due diligence and screened through the relevant agencies including the Office of the Solicitor-General.

Cabinet was also consulted and have appreciatively acknowledged the grants support by JICA, including the conveyance of the official endorsement towards the grant documentation on 15th July, 2024. The official ceremony for the endorsement of the grant documentation is expected to eventuate in the coming days and will be attended by representatives from JICA, the Embassy of the Government of Japan and Fiji Airports, and further discussions on that were done during my visit to Japan for 10th Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting (PALM10).

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in addition to this support, Government has recently signed a cooperation agreement (it was done while I was in Japan) with the Government of Japan purposed to help improve our national disaster preparedness and response capacity. Through this partnership, the Government of Fiji will explore the use of an advanced satellite positioning system to improve its early warning capabilities particularly in relation to tsunami risks.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, increasing our access to satellite data and cutting-edge remote sensing technology is vital for our society and well-being, and we further welcome this cooperation with the Government of Japan. That was also signed while I was at PALM10.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as highlighted by these areas of collaboration, our enduring relationship with Japan is marked by increasing engagement across the various critical sectors and issues, and I take this opportunity to thank the Government, the people of Japan and JICA for their support and

partnership.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Honourable Prime Minister, just a quick question with respect to the aircraft surveillance system. Is this an upgrade or complete overall that will be procured and purchased with respect to the aircraft surveillance system? Does it entail training of our air traffic controllers?

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is not overhaul or overall, it is just the continuation, upgrading of the facilities we already have.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Sir, my question to the honourable Prime Minister is related to passenger experiences. When people travel out of Labasa, there are no security checks done, but when people are entering Labasa through aircraft, there are all kinds of security checks done at Nadi and Nausori. The aid that Fiji will be receiving, will that also include security checks?

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have been told that it is the World Bank project and I had also noticed that and I mentioned it to the Minister responsible for Civil Aviation that we needed to upgrade those security aspects of operations also.

MR. SPEAKER.- Especially from Labasa, Savusavu and Taveuni, cause you never know, drugs might be coming there too. You do not have sniffer dogs as well.

Renovation of Public Toilet Facilities  
(Question No. 115/2024)

HON. I. NAIVALURUA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Housing and Local Government inform Parliament if the Government has any plans to renovate and improve the state of the public toilet facilities in all towns and cities?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the honourable Member for this very important question. The Coalition Government recognises the essential role that public toilet facilities play in all our urban centres. They are not only vital for public health and sanitation, but also contribute to overall image and functionality of our towns and cities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the responsibility for maintaining and upgrading these facilities falls primarily on all the municipal councils of all the 13 municipalities. The Government is committed to supporting these councils through various initiatives.

Firstly, we are provided capital grants specifically earmarked for the construction of new public conveniences and the renovation of existing ones. These grants aim to ensure that public toilets are clean, safe, accessible and environmentally friendly.

I am also pleased to report, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have also seen some changes and tangible results in some of the municipalities. For instance, in Sigatoka Town, because they have got some issues with the current public convenience, as well as planning to construct a new facility with the construction costing around \$75,000.

Similarly with other small municipal councils, Suva City as well as Lautoka, there were also plans in place to upgrade and renovate some of these public conveniences. Also, Mr. Speaker, Sir, like all other 12 municipalities, there are also renovation plans for their public conveniences



within this financial year. This renovation include tiling, painting, replacement of current as well as old toilet seats, cisterns and essential electoral and plant works.

For this new financial year 2024-2025, many councils have strategically planned to complete these renovations in the first and second quarters ensuring that facilities are in optimal condition during peak usage periods such as local festivals and carnivals.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, while large councils are better equipped to undertake comprehensive renovations, smaller councils face constraints due to limited funding. However, these councils are prioritising essential repairs and maintenance to keep facilities operational. Most of these small municipalities have caretakers in place to open as well as close these facilities on a daily basis. When there is a need to repair, they have an internal board, and also have plans in place to upgrade or maintain these facilities.

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we also encourage community engagement in the renovation process, public input on the design and features for renovated conveniences which can lead to more user friendly and appreciated facilities.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the planned renovations and improvement to all our public conveniences and facilities across municipalities demonstrates the Coalition Government's commitment to enhancing urban infrastructure and public health. These initiatives are part of our broader strategy to improve the quality of life for all Fijians, and also promote sustainable urban development.

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Speaker, supplementary question to the honourable Minister, bringing the subject closer to Suva City, there are three public facilities or toilets that supports the capital. Only three from the market to Terry Walk and one at the Botanical Garden. The one at Sukuna Park is closed at the moment. All these facilities, Mr. Speaker, Sir, are dirty, unhygienic and unsafe. May I ask the honourable Minister if close attention or he could expedite to build these facilities fit or good for public use and above all they could build forward. Redirect their prioritisation of the work here in Suva to improving this basic, essential facility.

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member again for raising this, I think it is a very pertinent issue right now. I just alluded to earlier. For this financial year, the Suva City Council should be upgrading some of the other facilities that were mentioned. We are hopeful that we also maintain and upgrade the facility to a standard that is user-friendly and also improve the sanitation as it is communally used by the public and those who visit Suva City. The councils are committed, and we are looking forward to more improvements in this financial year.

HON. A.N. TUICOLO.- Mr. Speaker, in the last parliament sitting a friend of mine sent in pictures of used syringes in the urinal area in one of the public conveniences. With the upgrade plans outlined by the honourable Minister, what security measures are in place or will be implemented to guarantee public safety?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, ....

MR. SPEAKER.- Let me cut it short for you. You indicated that the grants are there and everything, it is just the proper upkeep of this, so we do not get the smells. We were talking about Sukuna Park yesterday, that is the very thing that is happening in Sukuna Park. We find strangers there, plastic bags for drugs scattered all over the place. It is the smell as well, honourable Minister, sometimes it chases you when you want to visit those conveniences, especially in Labasa and other municipalities. I do not know whether it should do with toilet manners, et cetera, otherwise it is just

too late and it is just upon us now with your grant to hire someone to keep cleaning the facilities. This happens in the boats as well. I spoke to the captains and told them, “Clean these toilets, these are public toilets and it should not be like this.” So, that is all we want to have that address from you, Sir. How can you best give us advice on that?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, a very common issue right now in our country comes down to the responsibility of the users of our public conveniences. In some of our municipalities, we have officers who are stationed as caretakers to look after these public facilities. Some are on a user-pay basis, you pay then you use the convenience. Like for Sukuna Park, there will be a security day and night to look after the whole place and also take care of the public convenience. That is something that the Council will take on board to ensure that all public facilities and convenience are safe and also have a proper adequate securities to look after these areas.

HON. P.D KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, now that the boundaries are extended and it is included in towns and cities, my question to the honourable Minister, the honourable Minister just mentioned that the Government grants are given to build toilets. My question to the honourable Minister, can he explain to us, how much grant is given this year and which area these toilets will be built?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do not have the figure right now. I can assure the House that we have the funds and we are also working with the councils especially the medium and small-size ones on the upgrading of their facilities. Like I said, for Sigatoka Town, there is a grant of \$75,000 will be utilised to construct a new public convenience as well as the other municipalities around the country.

MR. SPEAKER.- Government grants have been provided, that is the message from the honourable Minister, but where is directed to is a matter for him to go back and check the books, it is not off hand.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is a serious issue.

MR. SPEAKER.- Everything is serious.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P.K. BALA.- Look at him.

(Laughter)

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we cannot be building toilets in and out of cities or everywhere. But there is some degree of responsibility to the shop owners, and by law, shop owners must provide those facilities. But most of the time you will see on the door, it is written, ‘not in use’. So, I ask the honourable Minister if the authorities can look into this?

MR. SPEAKER.- That is a general question. I understand you will want to know which shop has a notice on its toilet, but it is up to you, honourable Minister, if you would like to answer that question. As he has stated, it is a serious question.

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am just wondering why the honourable Member is raising this issue now, when it should have been raised during his term. I am going to work on that, and I have just said, I think that is also a good idea. We will also request the shop owners and supermarkets to assist in this area.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I have just received word that the Madam President of the Republic of India has left the Government House and she is on her way down to Parliament. As such and as alluded to in my earlier communication, the Standing Orders and Sitting will now be suspended, so as to allow Her Excellency the President of India to address Parliament today.

In that respect, I now call on the honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament to proceed to the Foyer to receive Her Excellency the President of India.

[Leader of the Government in Parliament left the Chambers to greet and escort Her Excellency the President of India into the Chambers]

Honourable Members, as part of this programme of welcoming Her Excellency the President, that is, upon entering the Parliament Chambers, all honourable Members will be upstanding to receive the President.

The Leader of the Government in Parliament will escort Her Excellency into the Parliament Chambers and the order will be, the Leader of the Government in Parliament, then Her Excellency the President of India, and then the ADC.

The Leader of the Government in Parliament will stand next to honourable Vosarogo and await Her Excellency to continue on the right to join the Speaker on the left side of the Speaker's table.

Her Excellency bows to both sides of Parliament, and then I will call out for the resumption of seats. 'You may take your seats again', when I do call that out. That is the process that we have in place, and I hope we just have to follow these steps to make the entrance more interesting and enlightening.

Whilst I am saying that, I extend our welcome once more to the distinguished guests in the public gallery - the members of the Diplomatic Corp who are here, the Chairman of the GCC, the Permanent Secretary of Foreign Affairs, the Permanent Secretary of Health, our friends from Tamavua near Madam Seeto, and maybe our friends from the great Government of India, who have just joined us this morning. We welcome you, and we hope you will make this visit a memorable one, by giving all our best and how we listen tentatively to the message that Her Excellency the President will be sharing with us.

Honourable Members and distinguished guests, may I request that we be upstanding to receive Her Excellency the President of India.

[Her Excellency the President of India escorted into the Chamber by the Leader of the Government in Parliament]

Honourable Members, we are, indeed, honoured and privileged today to welcome Her Excellency the President of the Republic of India, Shreemati Droupadi Murmu, to the Parliament of Fiji. Welcome Your Excellency!

On behalf of the honourable Members, I welcome you to the Fijian Parliament, and also to Fiji for that matter. We look forward to your address to us this morning and anticipate renewed and stronger relations between our two Governments and Parliaments. I hope that you will fully enjoy your short visit to Fiji, Madam.

Honourable Members, I now invite Her Excellency the President of India, Shreemati

Droupadi Murmu, to deliver her Address.

### **ADDRESS BY HER EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA**

Honourable Speaker, Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu; the honourable Prime Minister, Sitiveni Rabuka; the honourable Leader of the Opposition, Inia Seruiratu; honourable Members of Parliament; honourable Ministers; my dear friends; *Namaskar, Ni sa bula.*

It is my great honour to meet you all, the elected representatives of Fiji, in this temple of democracy. I bring to you the greetings of 1.4 billion of your brothers and sisters in the largest democracy of the world, India.

I thank the honourable Speaker for giving me this opportunity. This is a reflection of the close relations between our two countries. I am deeply honoured by the conferment of the Companion of the Order of Fiji this morning by His Excellency the President of Fiji. This honour is a reflection of the deep ties of friendship between our two countries.

I also take this opportunity to thank His Excellency the President of Fiji, Ratu Wiliame Katonivere, on whose kind invitation, I arrived yesterday on my first visit to Fiji. I also have, along with me, our Minister of State, Shri George Kurian, as well as two Parliamentarians from our Lok Sabha, Shri Saumitra Khan and Shri Jugal Kishore.

I would like to express my deep appreciation for the strong democratic ethos in Fiji. Each one of you has a very solemn responsibility of serving the people of this beautiful country.

Despite the vast difference in our size, both our countries have much in common, including our vibrant democracies. Almost 10 years ago, speaking in this same hall, the Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi, had underlined some basic values that unite India and Fiji. These includes, “our democracy, the diversity of our societies, our creed that all human beings are equal and our commitment to the liberty, dignity and rights of every individual”. These shared values are eternal and shall continue to guide us ahead.

I am glad to note that India has been closely associated with your democratic journey, over the last three parliamentary elections in Fiji. As a close friend and partner with rich experience of fostering democracy at the grassroots level, India stands ready to partner at all times.

Honourable Members of Parliament, in my short time here, I can see that the rest of the world has so much to learn from Fiji. The gentle Fijian way of life, the deep-rooted respect for traditions and customs, an open and multicultural environment, makes Fiji so special in an increasingly conflict-ridden world. No wonder, Fiji is the place where the rest of the world come to find its happiness.

Fiji today is recognized around the world for its growing contribution to our common efforts, focussed on two major global challenges - climate change and addressing human conflicts. Whether it is shaping the global dialogue on climate change or voicing the concerns of the Ocean-States, Fiji has been contributing immensely to the global good. India greatly values and applauds the increasingly prominent role played by Fiji around the world.

You have also made major contributions to global peacekeeping efforts in some of the most dangerous conflict areas around the world. We salute Fiji’s contribution in making the world a better place to live.

In the field of sports, while we may have been recently crowned the T-20 World Champions in Cricket, I must say India has a lot to learn from Fiji in rugby. We are very happy that one of your legendary players, Waisale Serevi, is India's new National Rugby Coach. I do look forward to the day when our two teams will play each other.

I take this opportunity to also convey our heartiest congratulations to the Fiji Men's Rugby Team for their wonderful Silver Medal performance in the Paris Olympics.

*Mananye sansad sadasye gan, 145 barso se adhik samay purva, nyati ne hamari dono desho ko ek saath joda jo girmitiyas, paheli baar Bharat se Fiji dvip ke taor par pahunche the. (I think you understand Hindi). Jitne bhi unka yaha ... jeevan khatro aur kathinaiyo se bhara tha, ye jankar khushi hoti hai ki kaese girmitiya aur unko vanshaj ko is desh ne apnaya hai. Badle mein uhnone apni kadi mehnat aur parishram se apne naye matra-bhumi ke nirmaan men vyapak ypo daan diya. Main Fiji sarkar ko Girmitiya Diwas karyekramo ke dvara, rashtriye nirmaan ke prayasak ke liye girmit vanshaj ke apaar yog daan ko prakash mein lane ke liye dhanyevaad deti hoon. 1970s (unnis sau sattar) ke baad is dashak mein hamare dono desho ne milkar ek adhunik aur bahumulye sanjhedhari taiyaar karne ka prayas kiya hai. Mujhe ye jaankar prashanta ho rahi hai ki aaj hamare saubhagyeta rashtriye nirmaan ke sabhi pramukh shetro mein, chahe wo sugarcane ho ya space.*

Speaking of Space, I would like to particularly thank the Fijian government for its assistance towards Aditya-L1 Mission, to place the first Space-based solar observatory last year. Your support in hosting the Temporary Telemetry Tracking and Command Centre in Suva for the historic Mission is greatly appreciated.

Our co-operation in agriculture, capacity building, climate change, clean energy, digital partnership, education, healthcare, manufacturing, research, renewable energy and the SME sector, continues to grow from strength to strength.

Despite the physical distance between us, we have always had a close bond. No wonder, in times of need, we have been among the first to respond. I am glad to note that the COVID-19 vaccines provided by India in 2021 under the Vaccine Maitri initiative played a key role in Fiji's successful National Vaccination Programme.

As we celebrate the 75 years of India's diplomatic presence in Fiji, I am pleased to see the strong growth in our high level engagements, development projects and our people-centric activities.

I am told that in the last 18 months alone, 15 Ministerial level visits have taken place on both the sides. The historic meeting of both our Prime Ministers in May 2023, during the FIPIC-III Summit has given new energy and direction to our bilateral ties.

I am confident that the newly announced projects, including the Super Speciality Cardiology Hospital to be established in Suva, would help to meet the priority needs of the people of Fiji and the wider Pacific region.

Our joint hosting of the highly successful 12th World Hindi Conference last year in Nadi and the high level participation in the Girmit Day National Celebrations, have further helped strengthen the strong bond between our two nations.

Honourable Members of Parliament, we are also conscious of the many serious challenges common to us. The foremost one being the fight against climate change and rise in sea level, which is a threat to many Ocean States.

As a large developing country, frequently exposed to the uncertainties of nature, India also knows very well the deep impact of climate change. That is why we are committed to doing our best as a responsible member of the world. Under our G20 Presidency last year, we have high priority to the two topics of sustainable development and climate change. We made, “One Earth, One Family, One Future”, the theme of our G20 Presidency.

India has considerably reduced its emission intensity and has also achieved 40 percent of installed electric capacity through non-fossil fuel sources. Between 2017 and 2023, India has added around 100 gigawatts of installed electric capacity of which, around 80 percent is from non-fossil fuel-based resources.

In addition to these domestic steps, India has also taken the lead on a number of international platforms for climate action. We sincerely appreciate Fiji for its enthusiastic support to many of these initiatives, including International Solar Alliance (ISA), Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) and Infrastructure for Resilient Island States (IRIS). We hope Fiji will soon formally join the Global Biofuel Alliance as well.

As a powerful voice of the Global South, India will keep pushing the developed countries for both, climate finance and climate technology. We will continue to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with Fiji and other Ocean States for climate justice.

Honourable Members of Parliament, as India emerges strongly on the global stage, we stand ready to partner with Fiji, according to your priorities, to build a stronger, resilient, and more prosperous nation. Let us come together to unlock the full potential in our partnership for the mutual benefit of people of both our beloved countries. Thank you, *dhanyavaad, vinaka vakalevu*.

(Acclamation)

MR. SPEAKER.- Your Excellency the President of India, Shri Mati Droupadi Murmu, thank you for your most insightful Address to the Parliament of Fiji. Your visit today has, indeed, reminded us of the history that binds us, as well as our common goal to prosper our nations through respecting the democratic process.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the Government of India for its commitment to constructing the 100-bed super speciality hospital that you have just alluded to. This facility will not only benefit us, as you have indicated Madam, but also the entire Pacific region. Additionally, we are grateful to India for being one of the first countries to provide us with vaccines during the COVID-19 pandemic. This support was critical for the re-opening of Fiji after the pandemic.

Madam, we wish you well in the remainder of your visit in Fiji. *Vinaka vakalevu*.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will now suspend proceedings for an official photo session with Her Excellency the President of India at the Parliamentary entrance.

[Honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament escorts Her Excellency the President of India out of the Parliament Chambers]

The House is in suspension now. May I ask that we give a bit more time to the Secretariat staff to prepare for the photoshoot at the Parliamentary entrance by placing seven chairs in the front, and hopefully, all of us will be upstanding on the side.

The Parliament adjourned at 11.46 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 12.26 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER.- Before I offer the floor to honourable Ratu Rakuita Vakalalabure to raise his question, may I seek your forbearance, honourable Members, as I shall be asking the honourable Deputy Speaker to preside over this session till the end of the day since I have an appointment with some doctors. I hope you will bear with me on that, honourable Members.

## QUESTIONS

### Development of Medical Tourism (Question No. 116/2024)

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 progress made in the development of Medical Tourism?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Vakalalabure for the question, which is an important one.

Medical tourism is essential when people travel to another country to receive medical care. This market has expanded rapidly over the years for many reasons, such as cost effectiveness, where it is cheaper abroad, some treatments are not available locally, waiting time for surgery and the quality of care. A number of countries are leading in this area and a good example is India where our own people from Fiji and the Pacific travel yearly for treatment, and this is really supplementary revenue for India as a destination.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, medical tourism is much more than hospitals and doctors, you are looking at complementing niches, such as health and wellness, where people cross borders for spa, yoga camps and mindfulness retreats. For medical tourism to work in Fiji and to be a premium medical tourism hub, we need to get the health infrastructure right for the benefit of not just tourists, but our people.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in 2022, we had an estimate of 2 percent of visitors taking part in some form of health and medical activity. In 2023, we had a slight increase to 2.6 percent. In the 2024-2025 National Budget, the Government is investing \$540 million in the health sector, around \$450 million to the Ministry of Health and \$90 million for the Ba and Lautoka Hospitals under Public Private Partnership.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, investments are being made to enhance our healthcare infrastructure. For example, the Indian Government is supporting the construction of a super speciality hospital in Nasinu, focussing on cardiac and kidney care, as Her Excellency the President of India had alluded to this morning. The CWM Hospital is also undergoing major upgrades with the Australian Government funding.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are building robust partnerships with esteemed medical institutions and universities worldwide. A prime example is Pacific Specialist Healthcare (PSH), which exemplifies our commitment to excellence in specialised medical care, and I had the pleasure of visiting the facility a few weeks ago. It is situated right across from the airport and is already adding to its facilities and will soon open an annex, almost doubling its size. Sir, PSH is leading the way in providing state of the art facilities in advanced treatments, helping position Fiji as a centre of medical expertise.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government also has in place incentives to encourage investments in private hospitals. We are looking at investment allowance for capital expenditure in building, renovating or expanding a private hospital. Under the medical investment package, there are concessions and duty-free entry of certain capital equipment, plant and machinery. This is part of our broader efforts to drive private sector investments in healthcare.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, at last year's Fiji Tourism Convention, we discussed the possibility of convening a medical tourism dialogue to explore where we are, where we want to get you and where the gaps are. This is something we will work towards.

Our marketing campaign will highlight Fiji as a premier, safe and an advanced healthcare destination. This market holds great potential because it really is a year-round activity. If properly managed, it can be linked to other products such as cultural tourism.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, while we have made progress on the medical tourism front, there is still much to be done. We are committed to delivering a comprehensive strategy for becoming a leading regional hub in medical tourism.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, a supplementary question to the honourable Minister. Honourable Minister, will we be looking at different sorts of accreditation that needs to be done if we are going to truly benefit out of the medical tourism? Together with ensuring that apart from just medical tourism, we are also looking at wellness tourism where we know that worldwide, it is actually a billion-dollar industry. So, there is issues of accreditation and there are pitfalls and dangers that exist when we start doing medical tourism and the necessary laws also that need to be done to ensure that there is proper protection.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, our standards are quite at levels that are consistent with what is observed in other countries, so accreditation is not a major issue. We know that we subscribe to standards that are observed in our part of the world and we are quite comfortable with that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would urge everyone to take the time to visit PSH in Nadi, right across from the airport. The quality of the service there is world class. That is an indication of what we have today, and the beauty about it is the people there are mostly locals. I was quite impressed with the medical staff in there, they are mostly locals but carrying out care that is world class. You really have to go and see what is on offer. It is something to be proud of, and as I have said in my address, they are already building an annex, doubling its size.

In terms of wellness, Mr. Speaker, most operations in Fiji and most hotels now have their own spa and the likes, and these are, again, market driven - standards that are observed worldwide. Even going forward, a major resort is going to be opened in Namuka, between Shangri-La and Natadola, that will also have some cosmetic surgery, Mr. Speaker.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, whilst talking about medical tourism, I agree with the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation, I did visit Pacific Specialist Healthcare (PSH) in Nadi which is worldclass, and I also visited Nadi Hospital which is, at the moment, pathetic in nature and the service delivery there is more than pathetic.

Recently, we had a case whereby a young lady died because of negligence. She was not transferred to Lautoka Hospital on time, and her parents are still crying for justice to prevail and have an investigation into that case.



Mr. Speaker, Sir, while on one side, we have a private hospital which is of worldclass, on the other side, we have a public hospital which is really pathetic. The honourable Deputy Prime Minister would also remember that during his time, he had also commented about the service delivery at Nadi Hospital. Unfortunately, it remained the same. Doctors have come and gone, nurses have come and gone, staff have come and gone, but for some reason, service delivery at Nadi Hospital is not improving.

If we are looking at medical tourism, there seems to be some core problem that we need to identify and improve on, in order to give a worldclass service at Nadi Hospital. At the moment, I think the Board of Visitors that is managing Nadi Hospital, I stand to be corrected, I think there is some disconnect between the Management and staff. That is why the service is not delivered as per the expectation of either the last Government or the current Government, but patients are suffering. If the honourable Minister can assure that they can look into that before actually going into medical tourism. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is quite an important observation because we cannot uplift the standard only for tourism, we need to see the uplifting of standards across the community.

A huge market segment, Mr. Speaker, Sir, are the baby boomers, people, kind of, my generation. They have retired, they have quite a lot of disposable income, but they only travel to areas where they are assured of medical care. This is where the challenge is for Fiji, and the uplifting of medical tourism will also need the uplifting of what is available to our people. So, the example of CWM Hospital is quite remarkable, very encouraging, and with the assistance from the Australian Government, it will upgrade CWM Hospital to a standard consistent with what is observed overseas.

On Nadi, in particular, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I did mention my experience there. Last week, I went to welcome the Guru from India at Prince Charles Park and I went to Nadi Hospital as I wanted to use the washroom. I could not use it, but I shared it with the honourable Minister, and efforts are being made to improve those areas.

One of the drives now that we will be sharing with you is just to get the basics right. And I shared with him, like I am also a hotelier. People come to my hotel everyday, bathrooms need to work, electricity needs to be there, air conditioning, plumbing, so I have suggested to him that there must be a maintenance team in every hospital in Fiji. So, that is where we are going, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to get the basics right. If a door breaks, fix it. There is a carpenter there to do it. Plumbing is a problem, so there is a plumber there to fix it, like in a hotel. So, likewise, we would all need to see our hospitals. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Honourable Minister, as I said earlier, medical tourism is actually a billion dollar industry. One of the most lucrative parts of medical tourism is cosmetic surgery. This is one of the reasons why I asked about accreditation, et cetera. Will you be looking at ensuring that the honourable Minister of Finance provides the necessary incentives for the private sector to set up such hospital, because there is interest? This is great for Fiji because it takes us to another level. So, will you be looking at making sure that there are incentives provided for those from the private sector who may need to?

Again, when you start doing these things, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the necessary legislation needs to be put in place so that we do not foul of any laws, et cetera, in reconstructive surgery that goes on. It is a great place to come, get a nose job, enjoy the sun and then go back home, and there are people interested in actually getting that done. Will the honourable Minister be looking at probably doing a comprehensive survey as to what is needed and what is not from within, and also the incentivisation

that is required to get these people to come and open up these particular surgeries? There are many different facets to medical tourism.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I have indicated in my speech, there is a lot of concessions to anyone investing in tourism. In actual fact, the IMF says that Fiji provides the most concession in any country towards the development of tourism. Similarly, those concessions are also extended to those who want to invest in medical tourism.

As I have said, there is a five-star or six-star resort that will be opening in the Coral Coast and they are looking at cosmetic. This is an Australian-based operation, so it will be based on Australian standards.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the things that we have seen, for instance, in the development of the Aspen Hospital, it provides services at a cost for people coming from offshore, but for our own population who earn lower income, they will be provided with services free. For the agencies that we have coming across and establishing facilities, is Government thinking of some system where own local population who might not have access to those kind of specialist services they provide, that Government will consider a mean-tested approach for locals who cannot go anywhere else for that kind of service, to utilise from these facilities and have them assisted or subsidised? Is there any notion of doing that for this kind of facilities?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, with Pacific Specialist Healthcare (PSH) as an example, they structure their rates, and it actually has a payment plan for locals. So, all that they have there, Mr. Speaker, is available to locals also rates that we can afford. But that will be important as we move forward, that we consider the local population in terms of affordability for these highly specialised services.

Allocation Utilisation - iTaukei Land Development  
(Question No. 117/2024)

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for iTaukei Affairs and Culture, Heritage and Arts update Parliament on the utilisation of the \$4 million allocation for the iTaukei Land Development in the 2023-2024 Budget?

HON. I. VASU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Leader of the Opposition for his question.

In regard to the iTaukei Land Development grant, I also thank the previous Government for introducing this programme, which was to develop the people and grow the economy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the project is in two phases. The first one is on the documentation which is scoping and engineering documentation. The second phase is on the construction, which deals with land clearing, levelling, subdividing the lots and put in essential services - electricity, water and roads. As we took over the project last year, three projects were still in phase one, that is, on the scoping and engineering documentation. Seven projects out of the ten that was approved in 2015, so three in phase one and seven in phase two.

The one which is under construction when we took over, three have been completed, one is on hold and three are ongoing. The three that have been completed are in Nasoqela, Tailevu, Vuda in Lautoka and Yadua in Nadroga. The project that is on hold is the Vuda II in Lautoka, which was

done by General Machinery Hire. The three that are ongoing are Wairabetia in Vuda done by B.W. Holdings which has been completed; the Tubalevu project in Tavua, also a contract by B.W. Holdings which is about 85 percent completed; and in Saweni which was done by B.W. Holdings but taken over by Vikash Construction which is about 85 percent completed.

Of project that has been on documentation and engineering is the Lovu General Industry in Lautoka which has completed Phase 1 and Saravi in Nadroga, while Veiseisei in Vuda has completed the scoping but still awaiting the engineering documents. The advice that was given to us by the consultants is that the money that was given to us is just enough to complete the three construction works, which is the subdivision for Saweni, Wairabetia and Tubalevu.

As of 31<sup>st</sup> July, our utilization was \$1.6 million, or 39 percent of the budget. The delay was caused by the adverse weather, the slow in the approvals process, and the shortage of the construction materials. Also, adding into it is the hand-over time that was given to us. These projects were with two Ministries - the Office of the Attorney-General and the Ministry of Finance. So, when we took over, we had difficulty in trying to get all the details on how the project was run. As of now, we have been advised by the consultant that the projects should be completed by the end of September.

I visited the sites two weeks ago, I told them that it will never be completed at the end of September. So, that is how the projects have been going on and we are trying our best to complete the two leftover projects. We do not want to introduce any other ones to go into the phase two, because we want to complete the first two, then we will decide on how we go forward.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to thank the honourable Minister for his very detailed answer to question and I wish him well and we leave it on your good hands, honourable Minister, particularly for the completion of the remaining projects.

Just a quick question, honourable Minister, you are aware of the housing and office space shortage in Levuka. If I may ask the question on behalf of the community of Vuma Village because I think in the previous Administration, this is one of the projects that was also in the list. The Government wants to diversify and strengthen its presence in Levuka but we are limited by and office issues. So, I just wish to raise the question about the Vuma Project, if it is still under consideration, if you can just, please, confirm, honourable Minister.

HON. I. VASU.- Mr. Speaker, with the projects that were given to us, we took over the 10 projects that was first approved. Out of 142 applications, there were 10 approved and 132 did not meet the criteria that is set for the grant. So, I will look into the one that you have raised today, honourable Member.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have a supplementary question. Thank you, honourable Minister, for your responses. One of the things that I have been talking about the whole of this week is about the importance of execution and implementation, and 39 percent, I understand the reason that you have given but I think that is something that Government needs to take note of - the importance of good execution, good implementation, to raise those percentages up.

I am interested, Mr. Speaker, Sir, on one of the criteria that we had when the system was put up and would like to know whether this criteria has changed. One of the conditions was that after it has been developed, that the landowners who are taking on the development should not sell the lots at anything below the market value. Is that condition still in place?

HON. I. VASU.- Mr. Speaker, the condition still stands and that is the reason why most of the lots are still not being able to be sold. After this, we will have to look at it because the quicker

they sell the lots, then people can move in and construct their own house.

It has been an issue now because some of them have already made their arrangements in terms of the price, but when we put in the price for valuation and commercial for market price, it is a bit hard for them to sell at this time.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, most of the Ministers are involved in bilateral talks. So, we will skip Question No. 118 and move to Question No. 119.

(Question No. 118/2024 deferred to later sitting)

Sale of Fresh Ginger - Australia Ginger Farmers Association  
(Question No. 119/2024)

HON. S. NAND asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Agriculture and Waterways update Parliament on the progress of the sale of fresh ginger to the Australia Ginger Farmers Association in the last 12 months, as mentioned by the Minister in Parliament in March 2023?

HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to respond to the question raised by the honourable Member.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the talks between the two countries and the relevant organisations continue. However, the Ministry cannot afford to wait for an opening in the Australian market, while harvested ginger continues to go to waste.

The Ministry is looking to amend the relevant legislations which are stringent and non-facilitative for fresh exports to Australia. Currently, Mr. Speaker Sir, there are two main exporters of processed ginger in Fiji - Kaiming Agro Processing and Fresh Pack Trading, while other exporters that send small quantities include Produce Processing Pte Limited, Shahi Foods, Vinaka Farm and Ranadi Plantation, which specialises in organic ginger.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, during the over production and supply of ginger last year, the Ministry through its capital intervention, increased the capacity of our local ginger exports to absorb an extra 100 tonnes of matured ginger, in addition to their annual quota of 400 tonnes. So, the immature ginger quota remains at 1,500 tonnes per year, and all ginger supplied to the market is processed.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Kaiming Agro Processing supplied 300 tonnes matured processed ginger to the United States of America and Canada, while 250 tonnes processed crystal, paste and juice was exported to Australia in the last season. The requirements remain the same, all farmers supplying to registered exporters have a quota. However, meeting the quality criteria remains a challenge. Climatic conditions, management practices and awareness of quality standards is currently being worked on in scaling up to order by the Ministry and the stakeholders in order to meet the market demands and to supply the export markets.

Exporters continue to experience resistance in accessing fresh ginger exports to Australia due to claim of nematode risk of Fiji ginger. However, Fiji continues to facilitate the Australia markets, while the Navua-based Vinaka Farm, an organic ginger provider for local and overseas export has managed to supply eight tonnes of fresh organic matured ginger to Australia in the last fiscal year.

The Ministry is working in partnership with such players, together with the Ministry of Trade, to try and increase the volume of organic ginger production in Fiji, increasing Fiji's competitive edge in the global market and also as a way out of the difficulty in accessing the Australian market.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the bilateral quarantine agreement protocol to supply ginger remains the same, as I have alluded to earlier, and this continues to be supported and executed by the Ministry. When I delivered my Ministerial Statement last year, it triggered bilateral discussions not only with Australia but New Zealand as well, to the effect that the Fiji Crop and Livestock Council hosted a workshop in April this year, inviting a New Zealand-based company to discuss the import of fresh ginger and banana from Fiji. The MOU is currently being developed and expected to be signed between the two organisations. Further discussions with Biosecurity of Fiji and other stakeholders are in progress to send a five-tonne shipment via airfreight to compete with the Italian ginger currently in the New Zealand market.

The Ministry will continue to work with the Fiji Crop and Livestock Council in upskilling our farmers on record keeping, quality standards and registration, to meet the standards for fresh supply to New Zealand. Fiji can further raise its standards through Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) and Organic Certification by 2026 to obtain premium prices.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, while Fiji ginger is highly regarded in the international market, it has been difficult to access the fresh ginger market in Australia. We understand that they also have the interest of their own ginger farmers to protect. So, our way forward is to support agro-processors in Fiji, to increase their capacity to value-add ginger and purchase more ginger from farmers. However, the Ministry will continue to discuss with Australia and the stakeholders to increase its market share for Fiji processed ginger, and it will also explore new pathways to send Fiji ginger into new markets both, local and abroad.

HON. N.T. TUINACEVA.- Mr. Speaker Sir, a supplementary question. Honourable Minister thank you for your response. It appears that Australia is not going to open more for us in terms of our ginger. You truly said and I do agree that for ginger farmers (I am a ginger farmer myself), we cannot wait this long.

I just came back from Indonesia, together with the honourable Speaker, on a trip last week and after a bilateral talk with our Indonesian partners, on the side, I was able to talk with one of the Members of P raising this question about them buying ginger from us. He said, "Indonesia is big, we have enough ginger, we can feed our own market." However, if we think of talking with them to take part of our ginger or a quarter of our ginger, they are ready to talk with us on that. It was very encouraging when I heard that and I shared to the honourable Speaker, "Maybe, it is time for us to move away from Australia and look for other markets."

HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we will consider that opportunity.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, a supplementary question. Honourable Minister, one of the most successful ginger companies in Australia is Buderim Ginger. To circumvent the push back from the Australian ginger farmers, Buderim was actually getting younger ginger out of Fiji - a substantial amount and labelling it and turning it into sweets. The question is, has that expanded somewhat where we are sending more of our younger ginger out to Buderim because they seem to be very keen with respect to Fijian ginger and they hold it in very high regard? They are one of the world's best ginger companies and for purposes of our own farmers producing that kind of ginger that they need.

HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is correct. In fact, in Fiji, the baby ginger market is more lucrative than the matured ginger market, simply because of what we are discussing right now - the non-reluctance of Australia to accept fresh ginger, but we all understand. I have raised it here that the quality of Fiji's matured ginger is equal to none. It melts in your mouth, it is the best ginger in the world, and that is probably why Australia wants to make it difficult for our fresh matured ginger to enter because they simply would not be able to compete.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the opening in the New Zealand market gives hope to ginger farmers. I declare my interest as well, we are in the planting season now, starting in September. Do we have hope in completing this MOU getting it signed so that when the crops starts maturing next year, there is hope that it will access the New Zealand market?

HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- I hope you declare your interest. Yes, we will work on fast-tracking the signing of the MOU because that is a definite offer that has come to us from the company in New Zealand.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister, for the statement made by honourable Tuinaceva, I think what needs to be undertaken first is an MOU. I do not know if it is still there with Parliament or straight from bilateral, because they have indicated there is a market there. If we can shift to Asia, there is a big market there rather than relying on the premium market that we have in Australia. They have so many rules and regulations.

I have met several times with a Chinese descent businessman. We discussed very thoroughly on how best we can advance the stalemate that has been reached in ginger marketing, but it seems that the interest of the Australian farmers, again, is something that the Australian Government readily protects. I think it is an MOU and maybe, that is something for Government to follow up on, on the Indonesian available market and maybe, it is much closer to us because we have their fishing boats, and we have several issues that we have been trading with in Indonesia and the Melanesian Spearhead Group. We are holding one-on-one discussions with them as well. The providing of markets for our readily available agricultural products is one of the things that can be pursued. I just wish to highlight that in this very important issue that has been raised regarding the market availability.

Honourable Members, Question Numbers 120/2024, 121/2024, 122/2024 and 123/2024, I think will have to be rolled over to the next sitting or availability of time where they could be addressed, because most of the Members are in the bilateral talks.

(Question Nos. 120/2024; 121/2024; 122/2024; and 123/2024 deferred to later sitting)

At this juncture, I intend to adjourn the House for lunch. When we resume, Madam Deputy Speaker will be presiding.

The Parliament adjourned at 1.09 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.20 p.m.

**CONSOLIDATED REVIEW REPORT –  
SUGAR CANE GROWERS COUNCIL 2019-2021 ANNUAL REPORTS**

HON. S. TUBUNA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I move:

That Parliament debates the Consolidated Review Report of the Sugar Cane Growers Council 2019–2021 Annual Reports which was tabled on 12<sup>th</sup> July, 2024.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

HON. S. TUBUNA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I am honoured to present the overview of the Sugar Cane Growers Council's 2019, 2020 and 2021 Annual Reports.

The Standing Committee on Economic Affairs tabled its Consolidated Review Report on the Sugar Cane Growers Council's 2019, 2020 and 2021 Annual Reports on 12<sup>th</sup> July, 2024. The Committee is extremely thankful to the Ministry of Sugar Industry for submitting the responses to the Committee's tabled Consolidated Review Report on the Sugar Cane Growers Council's 2019-2021 Annual Reports.

The Sugar Cane Growers Council's reporting period stated that growers recorded a notable 18 percent decline in cane production, compared to the 2020 season. One of the major contributing factors was due to the massive destruction of *TC Yasa* in 2020. The reporting period in 2019 noted that there were 16,631 registered cane growers with only 11,902 active cane growers. This slightly increased in 2020, recording a total number of 16,843 registered growers in the country with 1,875 cane harvesting gangs. Whilst there were 16,684 registered cane growers in 2021, close to 11,622 growers actively grew cane individually and run small to medium cane farms, with a majority producing less than 200 tonnes per year.

The Committee is concerned with the slight growth of cane growers over the period and that 80 percent of the registered farmers produce less than 200 tonnes of cane per year, which is only 20 percent of the total cane production.

The Committee noted with concern the lack of clear KPIs relating to the objectives and functions of the Council against which the Council's performance can be adequately monitored.

During our visit to the Sugar Cane Growers Council's Office, the Committee found deep levels of mistrust amongst the farmers, as well as perceived miscommunication with iTLTB. While the Board assured the farmers of their commitment towards supporting the sugar industry through lease renewals, it was apparent that farmers remained skeptical. The Sugar Cane Growers Council should play a vital role in building trust in this relationship.

The Committee highlighted KPIs and urged the Sugar Cane Growers Council to develop new KPIs for new income streams that will enhance the economic viability of the sugar industry.

Moving on, the Committee recommended that there needs to be a greater integration of new technologies, interventions of specific policies, new farming methods, combined with the traditional knowledge of farmers. New incentives and training needs to be held by the Sugar Cane Growers Council to improve productivity that requires to reverse the declining sugarcane crop production.

The Committee also recommended that the Sugar Cane Growers Council should also work in

building trust with all the sugar-related stakeholders, to allow serious integrated approach at all levels in ensuring continuous economic growth at a large scale in the sugar industry. Therefore, it is vital to identify important policy and practical measures to reform the sugar industry in Fiji and boost farmers' confidence and motivation as critical ingredients for increasing sugarcane crop production yield and performance to continue in the sugarcane farming business. Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for the debate on the motion. I have a list of speakers, as follows:

- (1) Honourable Minister for Multi-Ethnic Affairs and Sugar Industry;
- (2) Honourable S.T. Koroilavesau;
- (3) Honourable Minister for Home Affairs and Immigration; and
- (4) Honourable P.K. Ravunawa.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to address the findings of the Consolidated Review Report on the Sugar Cane Growers Council's 2019, 2020 and 2021 Annual Reports which was tabled on 12th July, 2024.

We have carefully reviewed the Reports and acknowledged the critical areas highlighted by the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, and I thank the Committee for its attention to detail in examining the Annual Reports of the Sugar Cane Growers Council (SCGC).

As highlighted in the 2021 Annual Report, Madam Deputy Speaker, the sugar industry endured a significant setback with an 18 percent decline in cane production, compared to the 2020 season. This unfortunate reduction was a direct consequence of the unprecedented devastation brought about by *TC Yasa* in 2020. The industry has also seen continuous decline in the number of active cane farmers which was attributed to the aging farmer population and the financial hurdles they face.

The Ministry is proactively engaging in measures to attract young farmers into the sector. Our initiatives include promoting farm sharing agreements through the SCGC, new farmer programme and lease premium assistance programme and the promotion inter-cropping. Furthermore, Madam Deputy Speaker, we are championing farm mechanisation to boost the efficiency in the yield, given the massive labour shortage in the industry.

The Report highlights a concerning mistrust amongst the farmers, particularly regarding lease renewals. The Ministry is absolutely committed to re-building this trust. We are working closely with the SCGC, the Sugar Cane Growers Fund (SCGF) and the iTLTB, to ensure that all communications are transparent, accurate and timely. Our goal is to bring about a harmonious and co-operative relations between all stakeholders in the industry.

In alignment with our national global commitments, we acknowledge the importance of integrating Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into the Council's reporting framework. We are particularly focused that the SDGs, Madam Deputy Speaker, will emphasise the gender equality. The Ministry pledges to ensure that future reports capture this essential elements, reflecting the dedication to promoting an inclusive and equitable industry.

In conclusion, Madam Deputy Speaker, the Ministry of Sugar remains steadfast with its objective to overcome the challenges faced by the sugar industry. We are committed to implementing strategic measures that will secure better a future for our farmers and the industry at large. Our collective efforts are aimed at ensuring the sustainable growth and success of Fiji's sugar sector,



which is a cornerstone of our nation's economy and heritage.

I extend my gratitude to the Committee Members for their contribution and deliberation. Based on those remarks, Madam Deputy Speaker, I support the motion. *Vinaka*.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I am a Member of the Committee so I will basically be talking on the discussions and interventions that we carried out during our meeting.

Madam Deputy Speaker, historically, the sugar industry and its activities has shaped the development of Fiji's economy over decades. However, the Committee is concerned that in the past 15 years, cane production has been declining. The Committee strongly feels that the sugar industry's existence needs to be relooked at and a close monitoring system to be put in place to identify the production progress.

Madam Deputy Speaker, therefore, it is vital that we identify important policies and practical measures to reform the sugar industry in Fiji and boost farmers' confidence in the motivation and critical ingredients for increasing sugarcane crop cultivation, production, yield, and for farmers to continue in sugarcane farming as a business.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Sugar Cane Growers Council (SCGC) has the mandate to protect and promote the livelihood of the growers through innovative measures, focussing mainly on growers' welfare, timely redress to grower grievances, negotiations, and support towards increasing farm yield and subsidising cost of production and advocacy.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Committee began its review in May 2024. The review process adopted by the Committee was agreed upon through a consensus by the Members to review of the Report and a summary to be submitted as a follow-up. At the end of the review, the Committee made recommendations based on the discussions with stakeholders on the Annual Report's contents.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the issues surrounding the sugar industry is quite vast and wide. What we had intended to do was identifying the critical areas that we can highlight in this Report and the Ministry of Sugar can then carry on and make changes in accordance with the findings that we have made.

We identified that the 10-acre land that has been allocated to farmers during the colonial days is not substantial enough to produce cane and give returns to the farmers. There is a need to consolidate these, regroup the small acreage into bigger farms so that there is a greater economic means to produce sugarcane that will give the benefit to the farmers for their livelihood and looking after their families.

During our visit, we found a deep level of mistrust among farmers, as well as miscommunication with iTLTB. I was quite concerned about this because within the sugar industry discussion, it seems that the iTLTB is always blamed for the non-continuation of sugarcane leases or the reduction of acreage. In fact, when the CEO of iTLTB came and we had a general discussion, he was very forthcoming. He understood that to be able to bring the sugar industry back, there has to be an increase in sugarcane production. He has suggested that there is a huge amount of land that is available in their pool that can be allocated for sugarcane farming. So, we really need to look into the issues concerning the leases and then come up with some ideas of making use of these land.

One of the other issues, Madam Deputy Speaker, is the actual involvement of traditional landowners for cane farming. We have found that in Nasarayawa in Vanua Levu. They have a new

system where the actual landowners are farming, and it was very successful. In fact, they are one of the major producers of cane to Labasa Sugar Mill. We asked them about intercropping, they had carried out intercropping, but basically there was no market, so they had to leave that intercropping scheme.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the need for greater integration of new technologies is something that has to be emphasised. I understand that the honourable Minister has been to India where they had discussed about the railway system and the positives of re-inventing the railway system because of its emphasis to the infrastructure, and he has highlighted that he is looking at that matter, and I appreciate the comments that he has made.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we need to have new initiatives and training, led by the SCGC. In our visit both, in the Western Division and in Labasa, it seems to imply that the cane growers are isolated and not well connected to the agencies that are involved in the production of sugarcane and the milling of cane to produce sugar.

We need specific policies and interventions to be introduced to urgently boost farmer morale and confidence in the industry for growers to increase crop production. All efforts must be directed in ensuring that farmers produce more than 300 tonnes to remain in the industry. Those farmers who are providing less than 300 tonnes, need to be supported by the Ministry of Agriculture through their alternative livelihood programmes.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I think honourable Kiran, being with FRIENDS, had indicated about mixed cropping. She is looking at me suspiciously. We had brought in the Ministry of Agriculture and sat together in one of the meeting rooms and told them - the Permanent Secretary for Agriculture and the Permanent Secretary for the Sugar Industry, so they have developed a huge increase in the production of mixed crops within their sugarcane farms.

We are going in the right direction, but for small farmers, it is very important for intercropping so that the earnings they get from the other crops, will provide them substantial income during the offseason.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. That is all I can contribute.

HON. P. TIKODUADUA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, first of all, let me thank the Committee for their Report on the consolidated review of the Sugar Cane Growers Council (SCGC) from 2019 to 2021.

I have noted also some of the recommendations they have made. Honourable Koroilavesau had alluded to some of the most significant ones and the honourable Minister also mentioned a few. What I would like to say though is that, if you look at this Report, Madam Deputy Speaker, and if you look at their reports on the SCGC of the previous years and in the previous Parliament, you will find similarities in the recommendations that the Committees have made, which means that these issues that they have highlighted in the recommendations that they have made are not new in this House.

It seems that there has been a whole lot of debate about it. I think we all agree that sugarcane will continue to play a significant part in our development as a nation into the future. I know there is a lot of sugarcane farmers in this House too. They are sugarcane farmers because they realise how important it is, not only to Fiji but to their families as well, and how it is important to the growers on whose report we are talking about. But the discussions has always been in comparing stakeholders, like the SCGC representing the farmers, the Fiji Sugar Corporation (FSC) representing the processors

and, of course, Government on one party.

Amidst all these recommendations, they are really all good. I would like to add on to another, maybe its high time that, apart from subsidising the industry and looking at value adding, we should also seriously look at some other alternative crops that could grow well in this field.

During one of my trips, I was looking at this fruit called durian. It grows well in the Tropics. It earns a lot of money for Malaysia and Thailand. This is a really good substitute, but there are many others as well. The honourable Kamikamica is looking at me. He had talked about macadamia nuts and a whole range of other things, something that will not only entice the farmers. But given also the recommendations of the Committee and finding alternative living out of these things, we could also really make it into a produce that people can grow, and we can export at the end of the day.

Perhaps, that is the one thing I would like to add. It takes political will, and I hope that in whatever direction the sugar industry is going in Fiji, that we will be bold enough to make these tough decisions on behalf of our community, especially for our economy and our people, and the future of this industry as a whole. So, continue to look at it but also look at other avenues that would benefit us into the future. Thank you.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to add my voice to this crucial debate, a debate that centres on the livelihood of our farmers, the health of our economy and the legacy that we want to leave as stewards of this great nation.

I express my sincere gratitude to the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs for their diligent study of the Sugar Cane Growers Council (SCGC) Annual Reports from 2019 to 2021 and also their sensible recommendations. Yet, Madam Deputy Speaker, I stand here as an Opposition Member, tasked with the role of providing checks and balances. It is my duty to say that while the Committee's recommendations are commendable and bipartisan in nature, that alone is not enough - we must do more.

The proposed integration of new technologies and farming methods in the agriculture sector is a vital step but let us also be reminded that while we champion progress, it is the wisdom of our traditional farming knowledge that forms our roots, so let us not abandon them.

As alluded to by the previous speaker, Madam Deputy Speaker, we, indeed, need a new policy intervention to boost the farmers' morale – it is a non-negotiable first step in transforming our sugar industry. Therefore, I urge the Government to ensure that there is transparent and effective communication between all stakeholders, to ensure the successful implementation of the diversification strategies.

The SCGC was established in accordance with the Sugar Industry Act 1984 with the specific function to protect and further the interests of registered cane growers, grow their farming yield and also look after the welfare of their families. I urge the Government not to see farmers merely as producers or statistics, but as the backbone of our economy as well. So, farmers' welfare should be a matter of national priority, not an industrial concern and definitely not merely used as a political football. That must stop, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The recommendation for farmers producing less than 300 tonnes to be supported through alternative livelihood programmes from the Ministry of Agriculture is a valuable suggestion. However, let us go a step further to provide our farmers with an array of support, be it financial, educational or infrastructural. We must invest in them as our future depends on it. Farmers are the backbone of this country, and we must ensure that they have the utmost confidence in their work and

its outcome.

While I fully endorse the pursuit of research and development, let us not lose sight of the critical factors, such as soil health and environmental resilience. These are not just nice-to-have, but they are the bedrock of our agricultural survival. Furthermore, Madam Deputy Speaker, the importance of research and development cannot be overstated, particularly in improving productivity, enhance soil fertility and promoting climate resilience. The measure that the Committee recommended in this regard are essential.

In recognising the need for restructuring the governance of the SCGC, I must also underline the necessity of accountability. A change in structure means little, if not merit with accountability and transparency principle, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker, encouraging collaboration between the Council and other sugar entities is crucial for sharing knowledge. I encourage the Council to work together with other sugar entities, to ensure that the growers receive correct and effective information on farming skills and farming methods to boost productivity. The urgency here should lie in fostering a vibrant ecosystem where every grower feels nurtured, informed and are valued.

Madam Deputy Speaker, each recommendation speaks to key transformational need that is needed in the sugar industry, from overhauling governance structures to instilling the growers' confidence. If followed prudently and coupled with a few additional steps, we can turn our beloved sugar industry into a powerhouse.

Reform is a must for our sugar industry. The Committee's recommendation to identify necessary policy and practical measures to boost farmers' confidence and motivation is the step in the right direction. These are the vehicles to propel us forward towards increased sugarcane production and the farmer's yield.

In the spirit of collaboration, Madam Deputy Speaker, it is further urged that sugar stakeholders develop key KPIs. The new income streams will enhance the economic viability of the sugar sector and to move forward with an auditor change, to ensure independence, objectivity and maintenance of a robust financial control.

However, words are not enough, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Government must critically examine these suggestions and act on them urgently. We owe it to the sugarcane farmers, to our fellow citizens and the generation that will inherit either the fruits or failures of our actions here today. The stakes are high, and the time is now. Let us act decisively. The future of one of Fiji's cornerstone industry is now hanging in the balance.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I support the motion before Parliament.

HON. S. TUBUNA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I take note of the various contributions that have been made by honourable Members and I would like to thank them for their contributions. Of course, some of those issues that have been raised will be covered in the other reports that we will be covering in the next two days or so.

The honourable Minister has raised that a team from FAO is currently in the country undertaking a review of all the issues we have raised. What we will be doing is an overall review of the industry, as well as looking at all the institutions that are linked to the industry, whether there is a need to have those institutions or there is a need to look at the restructure of the industry to ensure that it is sustainable in the long term.

We agree that there needs to be a sugar industry, the industry has to be there, but in what size and what form it has to take, that has to be decided by the Report. Of course, as has being raised by the other side of the House and also this side, it needs a political will from our side. We have to take the hard decision to ensure that we continue with the industry, sustaining the livelihood of our people and, at the same time, providing income and growth to the country.

I do not have any other comments, but I would like to thank the honourable Members for their contributions. I do support the motion, Madam Deputy Speaker.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote to note the content of the Report.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

### **CONSOLIDATED REVIEW REPORT – FIJI SUGAR CORPORATION 2020- 2023 ANNUAL REPORTS**

HON. S. TUBUNA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I move:

That Parliament debates the Consolidated Review Report on the Fiji Sugar Corporation 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023 Annual Reports, which was tabled on 12th July, 2024.

HON. S.T. KOROILEVASAU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

HON. S. TUBUNA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I am honoured to present the overview of the Fiji Sugar Corporation's 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023 Annual Reports. The Standing Committee on Economic Affairs tabled its Consolidated Review Report on the Fiji Sugar Corporation 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023 Annual Reports on 12th July, 2024.

The Committee is extremely thankful to the Ministry of Sugar Industry for submitting the responses to the tabled Consolidated Review Report on the Fiji Sugar Corporation 2020-2023 Annual Reports. While reviewing the FSC Reports, the Committee noted that FSC is insolvent and, without any Government guarantee, the Corporation will be unable to continue its operation.

The Committee noted the deplorable condition of the railway system during the site visits as the investment made on those tracks has contributed to the deterioration of road conditions, traffic congestion and increased transportation cost to the farmers whereby, trucks are left idle during yjr non-harvesting period, wasting valuable resources.

The Committee noted that the sugar industry stakeholders are territorial and working in silos. There is lack of information sharing and coordination that directly impacts sugar production.

The Standing Committee should be empowered to conduct an inquiry to scrutinise all key stakeholders of the sugar sector to pinpoint the root cause of the Corporation's continuous operating in deficit. The Committee will propose remedial measures to improve the financial position of the Corporation with the aim of reducing its heavy reliance on Government guarantees.

The FSC must prioritize the development and implementation of appropriate policies, strategies and plans to improve sector productivity and achieve set targets and outputs. It is crucial

for FSC to ensure that these policies and plans are aligned with the current challenges faced by the Corporation.

The Committee identified several factors contributing to the decline in sugar production. These included the lack of interest by farmers who perceive cane farming as unprofitable; inconsistent cane supply to the mills, resulting in under utilisation of the mill capacity; non-existence of KPIs, and non-renewal and absence of a strategic plan to forecast the Corporation's future targets and outputs.

The Committee strongly suggests that the Corporation develops the KPIs for all sugar-related sectors to ensure the economic viability of the sector. There is an urgent need to review the sugar sector, in particular, FSC to improve its performance through a more enhanced co-ordination, commitment and accountability of all stakeholders.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER.- The floor is now open for debate on the motion, honourable Members, and I have a list of four speakers.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Madam Deputy Speaker, before I talk on the motion, I would like to make an observation about what honourable Koroilavesau had said about the stakeholders and co-operation which was lacking amongst all the stakeholders of Fiji Sugar Corporation (FSC).

When I came in as Minister, I did realise that these five different entities, their officers, staff and CEOs were not in talking terms. I could see that there was a pull between all these entities, so we had to bring them in and give them a bit of a lesson, "unless you do not come together, the industry will fall apart." So, we had our stakeholders meeting, we had some conferences, and I can see that they are now trying to co-operate.

One of the problems that we also found was that the FSC workers on the ground were not supporting the farmers. They would go around in their vans, have grog, have chicken curry and then will come back, unlike in the previous years, the Farm Advisors and Field Officers used to go out to farmers to teach and support them. Again, I have been warning the current FSC staff that if they are not working hard, if they are not doing their job, they must leave the industry.

Another reason why our cane production has gone down is because the farmers are not replanting on time. In Fiji's history, the decline has come down from 100 tonnes per hectare to about 47 tonnes per hectare whereas in other countries, cane production is static at around 100 tonnes per hectare. We need to get the farmers, we do not need big land, and we need the production to go up within that hectare. For that, we are trying to get the mechanisation system, give support to the farmers so that we can increase production, if not 100 tonnes, at least, 75 tonnes to 80 tonnes.

Our farmers, in the traditional way, they are so proud to have a 50-acre farm but the cane is only grown in 10 acres. We are trying to tell them, "you do not need 50 acres, you are paying unnecessary premium for that. Go back and produce more cane within smaller farms but with a higher hectare."

On the railway system, you are right honourable Koroilavesau, even the honourable Prime Minister had messaged me the other day that the FSC should seriously look at bringing the railway system back. One of the decisions that was made by the previous CEO, Mr. Abdul Khan, he was trying to get the railway system out. If you remember, they brought in about a hundred trucks at that time. Now, the railway system is still operational in some parts of Fiji, but as you may have realised that in the Sigatoka area, there is no railway system because of the bridge that was damaged. The honourable Prime Minister and I had looked at the bridge. While the bridge is being built, we can

go up to Sigatoka and then transport cane from there.

You must realise, Madam Deputy Speaker, that the cost of transporting sugarcane from Sigatoka, a farmer pays about \$50 per tonne. In that way, farmers will not be encouraged to plant cane in the Sigatoka area if we do not have a railway system there. For that reason, honourable Koroilavesau, we have started talking to a company in India called RITES and they will be coming shortly to Fiji to look at all the railway systems which are not currently in operation so that they can assist us to re-install all those rails.

On the re-organisation of the sugar industry, as I had mentioned yesterday, through the help of honourable Tubuna, we have two experts who are currently in Fiji from the Food and Agriculture Organization. They will give a comprehensive study of the sugar industry in totality. That is how we will come to know which direction we will take from thereon. As I have said yesterday, the report will be handed over to us by October. Once it comes in, then we will have a very clear picture. Of course, the sugar industry is here to stay, but how and which direction it will take, is something that we will decide after the report is given to us.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to support the motion on the Consolidated Review Report of the Fiji Sugar Corporation's 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023 Annual Reports. It was from my intervention that I got FSC to present all these Annual Reports because if you see, in any business, you cannot have reports that are four years old. You must have report for every year so that you know what direction the company is heading. When we saw the final report of 2023, that was when we realised that FSC is in financial trouble.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this Report, tabled as Parliamentary Paper No. 76 of 2024, provides a comprehensive overview of the Corporation's performance for the past four years. It serves as an essential platform that offers insights into FSC's financial status, operational achievements and areas that require improvements.

First and foremost, I must express my appreciation for the dedication of FSC and its staff in compiling these detailed Annual Reports. Their tireless efforts have culminated in this Consolidated Review Report, which reflects the Corporation's ongoing commitment to transparency and accountability. Despite the challenges and demands of the sugar industry, FSC has tried to operate within the constraints of its own resources - a testament of resilience and adaptability, despite many challenges ahead.

Madam Deputy Speaker, it is crucial to address a significant challenge highlighted in the Report - the decline in cane quality. This issue has adversely affected the sugar production over the years, primarily due to increased volume of burnt cane, aging mills, infrastructure and impacts of climate change. The practice of burning cane cannot only compromise soil health and environment, but also escalates operational and processing costs.

The Ministry, in collaboration with FSC, is actively working to educate farmers about the detrimental effects of this practice. The FSC Field Officers are regularly engaging with those across various sectors in partnership with the Sugar Research Institute of Fiji. It is crucial to provide farmer education, conduct trial plots, implement education programmes and enhance improvements.

Madam Deputy Speaker, moreover, the Report emphasises the need to improve soil fertility to enhance sugarcane production. The FSC Field Officers are actively promoting the integrated nutrient management practices.

After the long span of time, the grant programme has included application of lime to neutralise

soil pH levels to prevent acidic soil in Fiji. This measure aims to improve fertilizer use efficiency, promote precision nutrient application based on soil testing, and enhance soil organic matters through mill mud and green manuring and test conservation.

The FSC also faces challenges related to workforce in both, production and processing levels. To address this, the FSC has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the National Sugar Institute of India to conduct training and development for the workforce. Furthermore, we put in skilled expert trades people to strengthen its technical capabilities and excellence.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to acknowledge the FSC's Annual Report which has not been entirely satisfactory. However, I have full confidence in the current Board led by Mr. Nitya Reddy.

With those words, Madam Deputy Speaker, I, therefore, support this motion.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to thank you for giving me this opportunity to address this august House and give my contribution to the debate on the Consolidated Review Report of the Fiji Sugar Corporation 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023 Annual Reports.

Madam Deputy Speaker, over the four years under review, the Committee noted a significant decline in cane production from 2020 to 2021, followed by a 16 percent increase from 2021 to 2022. Despite this improvement, cane production remains below the desired level of 2.5 million tonnes, and continues to show a declining trend, if no concrete action is taken.

The Committee identified several factors contributing to the decline in sugar production. These include the:

- (1) Lack of interest by the farmers who perceive cane farming as unprofitable.
- (2) Inconsistent cane supply to the mill, resulting in underutilisation of mill capacity;
- (3) Decline in cane quality;
- (4) Non-existence of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs); and
- (5) Non-renewal or absence of the Strategic Plans to forecast the Corporation's future targets and outputs.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this is further aggravated with various underpinning issues that need urgent attention, such as frequent mill breakdowns. Just last week, there were at least two breakdowns, and before that, many more.

Mill breakdowns burden the farmers as their cost increases in terms of paying labourers for extra food and providing accommodation for extended harvesting, which was not planned by the farmers. When new harvesting season approaches, farmers are very optimistic that there will be minimum, or no breakdown.

We all know that mill has an aging infrastructure, but offseason gives enough time to the management to fix all mechanical issues that cause frequent breakdown. This, to my understanding, is not happening.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this is one area the FSC has always neglected. I strongly urge the honourable Minister for Sugar Industry to look into this maintenance aspect of the mill operation. Someone is not doing the job properly. I have seen truck drivers spending days at the mill area to deliver the cane, and I have seen trucks loaded and parked at home to be allowed to deliver.



Madam Deputy Speaker, the Report also highlighted that the decline of the cane quality has reduced sugar production over the years, primarily due to the increased volume of burnt canes. This not only negatively impacts soil health and the environment but also increases operational and processing costs, resulting in the loss of revenue.

Also, over the years many properties have been destroyed due to cane burning. Neighbouring farms have been damaged, as well creating animosity amongst farmers in the harvesting gangs. I would like to thank National Fire Authority for providing the services in protecting properties during fire.

Madam Deputy Speaker, when cane is burnt, the farmers are faced with additional burden to cart the cane to the mill in the allocated time, as once this surpasses, the farmers are charged a penalty. This, in the long run, is a direct loss of revenue to the farmers. The burnt cane penalty deducted should be refunded to the farmers.

I urge the honourable Minister to provide incentives to farmers to harvest green cane throughout the season. In fact, the Ministry of Sugar Industry must create an awareness campaign for farmers to harvest green cane and give incentives, for example, an extra \$5 per tonne, if farmers harvest green cane. This will, no doubt, boost farmers' confidence and create a healthy competition amongst cane harvesting gangs. The current arrangement with the Sugar Cane Growers Fund is not enough.

Madam Deputy Speaker, there are still many gangs that carry their cane via the rail system and tractors cart the rail trucks to the rail pickup point. Since last year, the road levy tax for tractors has increased, and as a result, the tractor operators have increased their per tonne cartage of cane. Therefore, the farmers have to pay more to cart cane to the rail pickup point.

Madam Deputy Speaker, these are trying and testing times for our sugar industry, and I would like to thank all the farmers who have made sacrifices to keep the industry up and running.

I also would like to thank the Government for providing the much-needed funds to boost sugar production. However, there are many challenges that still need to be addressed. Perhaps, Madam Deputy Speaker, this august House could consider empowering the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs to work on a comprehensive document that can address the issues in the sugar sector. This would involve talking and inspecting FSC and their mills, engaging with cane farmers, and consulting with all stakeholders to bring back to this House a viable solution to help revive the sugar sector.

Furthermore, the Committee should focus on implementing sustainable farming practices to enhance cane quality and ensure the long- term viability of the industry. Madam Deputy Speaker, I fully support all recommendations made by the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Deputy Prime Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition and fellow Members of Parliament; I rise to provide a brief contribution on the Consolidated Review Report of the Fiji Sugar Corporation (FSC) from the year 2020-2023.

Madam Deputy Speaker, as I was sitting here, I was watching the light up there flashing and I am always one for symbolism and it kind of suggested to me that a light bulb has gone out on that side of the House.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Hogwash!

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, when we talk about sugar, we are talking about one of the elephants in the room when it comes to the Fijian economy. I was looking at a report by the same Committee before we had a change of Government, and when you looked at it, it did not have any critical thoughts around the sugar industry. None, a very weak report and no constructive criticism.

Now, the criticisms from the other side, Madam Deputy Speaker, are very, very pointed and actually accurate. And I congratulate them for their tender and honesty now since the light has come on. I am reminded of the words of Albert Einstein. He says that the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result. Madam Deputy Speaker, that is the summary of the sugar industry. We have been doing exactly the same thing and expecting or hoping or praying that we get a different result.

Madam Deputy Speaker, when you look at the Fiji Sugar Corporation Report and I am just looking at the 2023 Financial Report, being a Chartered Accountant, you just look at it to get a measure of a business. So, I looked at the statistics, the 10 years statistical review on Page No. 66 of the Financial Report.

Honourable Pillay said, “We have been trying to get the sugarcane crush up to 2.5 million tonnes per year.” For the last 10 years, we have never reached that tonnage.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- The last 20 years.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- There you go! Well, I have just got what I have here and I am talking from what is available.

The net assets, Madam Deputy Speaker, this is the amount of assets the company has versus the liabilities. Generally, when you have more liabilities than assets, you know that you are in trouble.

For the whole 10 years from 2014 to 2023, we have had negative net assets. So, to the point raised by the honourable Tubuna, we have been accepting an insolvent company for the last 10 years, or 20 years if you want to believe honourable Premila Kumar, without doing anything.

Finally, just for the purpose of today’s discussion, I thought to read something, again, from Page No. 33, paragraph 2.1(a) – the basis of accounting which has growing concern. When this note, Madam Deputy Speaker, appears in audited accounts and the honourable Minister for Sugar will know this, you run for the yields. You actually run for the yields, and this is what it says, and I quote:

“The financial statements have been prepared on a growing concern basis on the assumption that the Corporation will continue to receive ongoing support from the Fiji Government.”

For argument’s sake, Madam Deputy Speaker, if the Fiji Government collapses today, there is a big problem with FSC. That is how serious this situation is. We cannot allow this to continue any longer. So, I would like to congratulate the honourable Tubuna that through discussions, he decided to reach out to FAO, and we are now preparing a report that will allow us to have a deep look at sugar and try and come up with something.

This side of the House, Madam Deputy Speaker, we are motivated to try and fix the sugar industry, and I hope that we can work together with the other side of the House. They have so many good ideas, Madam Deputy Speaker, it is only a pity that they did not do anything in the last 16 years.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Hogwash!

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- So, this side of the House can work with that side of the House and solve the sugar issues.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the other thing that is happening is that within FSC, I am aware that there is another review happening by a private sector entity. Again, they are just looking at FSC operators. So, between these two reports, I hope that we can get them completed before the end of the year, which you can certainly sit on this side of the House when it goes to Cabinet, we welcome the other side of the House with their ideas because this elephant in the room does not need politics. It needs bold, brave, courageous decisions so that we do not allow us to collapse if the sugar industry collapses.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I fully support the findings of the Committee, we do accept that FSC is insolvent, it is in trouble, it needs to be fixed but I can assure the people of Fiji that we are going to fix it. I hope that the other of the House, given the experience they have had over the last 16 years, will come alongside and work with us so that we ensure that we can, as honourable Ravunawa put it, hand over a better industry to our children in the future. I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

HON. N.T. TUINACEVA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to contribute to the debate on the Consolidated Review Report of the Fiji Sugar Corporation's 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023 Annual Reports.

Firstly, I want to congratulate the Committee on their work in putting this Report together. I also want to appreciate the Committee for the report format, especially on how they came up with the findings and the corresponding recommendations, which makes this Report much easier to understand and is meaningful.

Madam Deputy Speaker, allow me to address great concerns regarding the sugar industry, especially the persistent issues plaguing FSC. Despite numerous discussions and reports over the years, as already been said by the colleagues from the other side and this side of Parliament, we grapple with the same challenges - declining sugar production; deteriorating soil fertility; inactive farmers; low sugar yield due to burnt cane; and poor cane quality.

According to the latest FSC Report to the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, the cane production is stagnating significantly below the desired 2.5 million tonnes, with the troubling trend of declining. Mills that used to crush up to 1 million tonnes of cane per season, are currently processing only 0.5 million tonnes. This data, Madam Deputy Speaker, is not merely numbers, it represents a failing industry, struggling to meet its potentials, and more critically failing those who depend on it for their livelihoods.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we have heard these issues articulated year after year. We know the problem, we understand the scope of the challenges, yet the question remains, where are the experts who should address these issues? Where and which strategies should be revisited and revised when they fail to deliver?

Madam Deputy Speaker, in this day and age of strategic planning and industry advancements, it is incomprehensible that an industry of this magnitude does not have a robust strategic plan or key performance indicators to measure its performance internally, as stated in the Report's findings in items 2.5 and 2.8.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the situation with the FSC requires more than just financial

investment. It demands a comprehensive multi-disciplinary, multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral approach. Helping FSC will require an overhaul of the sugar industry.

Looking at the roles and responsibilities of our stakeholders and their effectiveness in contributing to the work, of course FSC, in partnership with farmers, is the main driver of this industry. If FSC fails and farmers fail, there will be no sugar industry.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we must recognise that money alone cannot resolve the decline in cane production. The Government must not keep pumping money into FSC without addressing the fractures in the sugar industry system.

Government needs to address several critical areas with an integrated strategy, which include the following:

- (1) Increase cane production numbers, and incentives are needed to supply farmers in boosting cane production. This includes revitalising unproductive farming areas and encouraging greater farmer engagement.
- (2) Subsidise cane production costs. To make sugar farming viable, Government must find ways to reduce production costs. This could include financial subsidies or support mechanisms for farmers which I know is already happening but there is a need to take this to another level.
- (3) Improve cane quality – to improve sugar yields FSC must enhance the quality of cane. This will require research, development and implementation of best farming practices.
- (4) Enhance collaboration – issues within the Sugar Industry are not the sole responsibility of the Fiji Sugar Corporation. It is imperative that all stakeholders including Government agencies, research institutions, including experts, to work together and bring the industry up.
- (5) Trans-institutional and trans-sectoral approach is crucial in addressing the various factors impacting the industry's viability.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the sugar industry is a significant player in our economy and vital to the livelihood of approximately 3,000 workers and 200,000 individuals who depend on it. The situation demands urgent action and re-alignment of strategies, so it is time for a meaningful, impactful measures that go beyond the superficial.

Negative implications of the sugar industry problem are huge and far-reaching. If this industry goes down, we can witness its impacts on other industries and sectors. The sugar industry operates within a web of inter-connected relationships and systems. We must work together to save FSC and save others and our national economy.

To conclude, the challenge is substantial but not insurmountable. By fostering collaboration, revising strategies and focusing on Key Performance Indicators, we can revitalise the sugar industry and secure its future. Let us rise to this challenge and take the decisive steps to save an industry integral to our economy and the people.

All those being said, Madam Deputy Speaker, I support the motion before the House.

HON. S. TUBUNA.- I noted the various comments and suggestions that have been made and I would like to thank the honourable Members for their contributions. Of course, most of these inputs will be part of the report that we will be presenting to the FAO Review Team that is currently in the country.

I wish to comment on one issue that has been raised by honourable Pillay on the mill. The team will also be looking at the right size of the mill that has to be established in this country. All the mills that we have are more than 100 years old and we need to get new ideas, integrated mills where you have mills that can produce sugar, ethanol and other products. So, that is the type of mills that we need and, of course, the team that will be in the country will be looking at all of these issues.

There was also an issue on green sugar raised by honourable Pillay to promote the purchase of green sugar by FSC. As you are aware, there was a system that was established by the previous government, the Cane Quality Payment System. Perhaps, that was not the way forward as we had already spent \$10 million in trying to establish that system but after a while, it was not adopted by FSC for one reason or the other.

I think in the new system, we have to introduce a Cane Quality Payment System whereby those who are producing cane with the utmost quality are the ones that will have to be paid and those who are producing cane of poor quality, their payment will be based on the quality of the cane.

I wish to thank honourable Members for their contributions, and I do support the motion before the House.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

Honourable Members, that brings us to the end of the sitting today. I thank you all for your contributions and for your patience today. Parliament is now adjourned until tomorrow at 9.30 a.m. *Vinaka saka vakalevu.*

The Parliament adjourned at 3.30 p.m.