

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

WEDNESDAY, 7TH AUGUST, 2024

[CORRECTED COPY]

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WEDNESDAY, 7TH AUGUST, 2024

The Parliament met at 9.46 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

MR. SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Members were present, except the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics; the honourable Assistant Minister for iTaukei Affairs; honourable P.K. Bala; honourable S.S. Kirpal; and honourable V. Nath.

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Tuesday, 6th August, 2024, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE SPEAKER

Welcome

I welcome all honourable Members to today's sitting and especially those joining us in the gallery and for that, we acknowledge the presence of His Excellency the Ambassador of Japan, not forgetting the students of Corpus Christi Teachers College. You are most welcome.

Let us hope some of you may be joining us in the Chambers here in the not too distant future. Maybe that is your calling, maybe this is another calling but we welcome those that may want to join us.

We also thank those watching the proceedings on television and the internet. Thank you sincerely for your continued interest in the workings of your Parliament.

AMENDMENT TO THE 2024 CALENDAR OF PARLIAMENT SITTINGS

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

That Parliament adopts the amended 2024 Sitting Calendar for November and December.

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

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as all honourable Members are aware, Parliament approved the Sitting Calendar for 2024 earlier this year

with an amendment made during the July sitting, following discussions at the Business Committee.

As is customary, the Business Committee agreed that if there was a pressing need to adjust any of sittings, this would be subsequently tabled in Parliament for endorsement. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, this motion seeks Parliament's approval to allow for the following changes to the sitting calendar:

- (a) to defer the Sittings scheduled for 18th to 22nd November to 2nd to 6th December; and
- (b) to reschedule the Prorogation date from 2nd December to 16th December.

The reason for this request, Mr. Speaker Sir, is due to the recent confirmation of the COP29 meeting dates, which would coincide with the November sittings. At the initial approval of the Sitting Calendar, the COP29 meeting dates were not out yet.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, COP is a crucial meeting given that climate change significantly impacts the Pacific Islands States. Our vulnerability as small island States to natural disasters such as tropical cyclones, floods and other climate-related events makes it imperative that we participate in the COP meeting both at the Government level and the Parliamentary level.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in terms of some of the issues at COP, which are pressing needs in terms of our nation, we should note that we have a 100 percent electricity target for all Fijians, there is a target of 81 percent renewable energy by 2021 but so far only 60 percent has been achieved and mostly via hydro-electricity. Fiji has been lagging behind in its ability to attract, establish and retain Independent Power Producers. It is critical that we reach out and also secure funding in terms of renewable energy.

Looking at the long term, Fiji will require \$4 billion in investments between 2024 to 2036 to achieve its 100 percent renewable energy targets with cumulative investment cost expected to be \$20 billion by 2050, which is also why we are currently conducting a diagnostic study through the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) in order to move this forward. Of course, we cannot just brush aside the fact that our total imports of fuel is 26 percent of the total import cost amounting to approximately \$1.03 billion.

In terms of water, Sir, climate change impacts also, as we have also highlighted in the 2050 Water Strategy, the rise in the earth's temperatures is estimated Year 2100 to be 2 percent to 4 percent and sea level rise 25 centimetres and the nation estimates \$4.5 billion estimated to strengthen the resilience of our water infrastructures.

Of course, aging infrastructure, again, this is related to what will be discussed in COP29, \$3 billion a total of \$8 billion. So, there is a huge amount of cost in terms of climate, ensuring that our infrastructure is climate resilient, which is why we, as a Ministry, and also other Ministries under the honourable Prime Minister and the Ministry of Climate Change at the moment are engaged in formulating concept papers and proposal which will be taken to COP29.

From that, we are looking forward to securing or at least begin the initial discussions to secure funding to move us forward. Not only in the term of this government but also for the next government in case there is a change of government. We are preparing the groundwork and the base for that in this COP.

(Honourable Opposition Member interjects)

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- We prepared it for you.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- We are preparing it for you because you did not prepare it for us.

(Laughter)

There were some major projects, thank you to the last government. As a government, we continue the good work of the previous government. In light of these brief salient points, I seek the indulgence of the honourable Members to support this motion.

I commend the motion to Parliament and urging approval of the proposed amendments. I believe this is a very critical COP that we are preparing for in terms of preparation, and we are, in fact, preparing various proposals which will be moved forward at this COP, in order to secure not all the funding we need but at least the critical funding to take us forward for the next 10 years to 20 years.

I extend my gratitude to the Members of the Business Committee for their support, and I look forward to the support of this Parliament.

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

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise on behalf of the Group of 16 to show support to the motion. This has been discussed in the Business Committee and the Government has justified the reason why we need to change the Sitting Calendar and, of course, we have accepted it. The good thing about this change is, it does not mean a loss in the number of sitting days or weeks as the case in the previous adjustments, but this is just a postponement of the sitting dates and shifting it from November to December.

The honourable Minister has spent quite a considerable time talking about COP and honourable Prime Minister, I think he should attend the next COP in Baku, Azerbaijan. He has talked about water and energy which are critical, but I would urge Government honestly the honourable Prime Minister, Sir, our preparation last year was not good.

I know it comes under your portfolio, talking to the officials, there was no meeting at all prior to our departure. A lot of technical meetings should be happening and even the politicians, the Ministers who would accompany you, Sir need to be well briefed because COP is not a holiday. We need to go and fight our issues because this is the biggest existential threat as we admit, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

So, I would urge the Government, we still have a few months now to prepare because there are a lot of issues and the technical staff will help those senior officials. The Ministers that will be attending COP, particularly now we have progressed in Loss and Damage, Just Transition, you are well aware, honourable Prime Minister, is one of the key issues that is under the lens now.

Of course, for us, carbon trading, forest issues and deforestation and the issue on resilience and adaptation, although we are doing our best in terms of the mitigation plans, I would just urge the Government, let us prepare well for this year.

We are fortunate that we have experienced people like Ambassador Yauvoli who led the team last year and we thank him for his leadership, but there needs to be a lot of preparation and maybe through the honourable Assistant Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister if we can take responsibility in ensuring that we convene the meetings prior to departure because that will be very important for us. This is not the only one, honourable Minister, all COPs are important, not only

COP29. Every COP is important to every Pacific Islander and every member of Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS).

We have just finished the 4th International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS4) meeting in Antigua and Barbuda. I had some very good discussions with the High Commissioner of Samoa last night in the reception at Government House because they are currently Chair of AOSIS. That synergy, when it comes to the voices of the Pacific Islands into AOSIS and the G-77 plus China, plus the other geopolitical groupings will be very important.

We support the motion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and we wish the Government all the very best in terms of preparation for COP29.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to speak in support of the motion. I thank the honourable Leader of the Opposition as well as the Business Committee for moving the dates as is mentioned, we are not going to forego any sittings but moving it to December.

Mr. Speaker, an equally important platform that will be marked next year (2025) is the Beijing Platform for Action on Gender Equality. That was the Beijing Platform for Action was in 1995, there was a global commitment to achieving gender equality or SDG5 and next year 2025 is 30 years. In that very same week, the dates have also been set for global leaders to meet to prepare for 2025 on the Beijing Platform for Action +30, so that will be happening also in that week.

I fully support this motion to be able to have our Government represented at that particular meeting. It is being hosted by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) along with UN Women. More importantly, Mr. Speaker, as our Pacific leaders continue to commit where they have made a pledge for gender equality in the Pacific, this supports our work as we prepare for Beijing Platform for Action +30.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the Business Committee and I also seek the support of the Members of the House to agree to this motion as we look forward as a Government to prepare for this very important platform.

(Honourable Opposition Member interjects)

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Honourable Premila Kumar would like to speak after this, I am sure.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as a woman Member of Parliament, I would hope she would support the very important work of the Government as we prepare for this historic occasion next year as we mark the 30th Anniversary of Beijing Platform for Action, and on that very week we are convening for this particular event. I do support the motion before the House.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, just to share a few ideas of preparing for this COP29 meeting as alluded to by the honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament, the last COP we attended in Dubai, the honourable Prime Minister, including myself, were astounded by THE 38 members of our delegation attending the meeting. I even met one and said 'hello' to her. I said to her, "You come from the United States or what, because I follow your page on *Facebook* and know that you sell food online." She said, "No, Sir, I am part of your delegation." I said, "Oh!", so there were 38 there, and we could not figure out where they were from and what organisation they were there for. It was an amazing incident there, but quite costly as well. We were all meeting up on the other side of the world.

But, again, as the honourable Leader of the Opposition has stated, it was not really well prepared but, hopefully, I understand this one here would be a better one in the hope that we better prepare our Prime Minister because the Prime Minister leads the delegation. And when it comes to Government one-on-one, that is when you get to understand how important it is and we also get a lot from whatever the rich countries that are there and are very much trading in fossil fuel because the aim is to reduce that, and their aim is to ensure that they dangle carrots in front of us and that will keep us quite for another year – smoke emission, et cetera.

However, we are on this side of the world where we are at the whim of the big smoke polluters. We cannot do anything. They smog the whole world, and we suffer. That is something that we should badly prepare for when we go into this kind of meeting, and that has been, kind of, a reminder to us by the honourable Leader of Government in Parliament, as well as the honourable Minister for Women.

That is all I have to say, and I now call on the Leader of the Government in Parliament to speak in reply, if any.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, in response, I thank the honourable Leader of the Opposition for his comments. Under the Office of the Prime Minister, the Ministry of Climate Change has definitely taken measures to ensure that we are well prepared in moving forward. Not only that, but also in terms of the specialised personnel and the coordination between the Ministries, because at the end of the day, in a lot of the international fora, developing countries are always asking, “what are we getting out of it? This is in terms of the complexities related to accessing climate finance.

In light of that, we have also had a few workshops regarding that. Currently, there is one going on in terms of the modalities and processes involved, so when we get there, at least, what we need to have are concept papers and proposals. But linking that up technically before we get there so that when we get there, there is at least some movement forward in terms of mitigation and other avenues where we could benefit from as a nation because I believe discussions have been going on for number of years and we are at a stage where some of the financing mechanisms are at a maturity stage, I would say, and it would be really, really good for us to take advantage of the opportunities at this point in time and ensure that whatever we are able to secure as a Government also benefits our people, moving forward, no matter whatever government is in power in Fiji.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Honourable Members, the following Ministers have given notice to make Ministerial Statements under Standing Order 40, the:

- (1) Honourable Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Climate Change, Environment, Civil Service, Information, Public Enterprises and Veteran Affairs;
- (2) Honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation;
- (3) Honourable Minister for Youth and Sports;
- (4) Honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade and Co-operatives and Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications;
- (5) Honourable Minister for Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management; and
- (6) Honourable Minister for Fisheries and Forestry.

Honourable Members, Ministers may speak up to 20 minutes and after the Minister, we will then invite the Leader of the Opposition, or his designate, including the two groups, to speak on the Statement for no more than five minutes. As I have just said, I will also invite the leader of Group 9 Bloc to speak for five minutes and there will be no other debate.

I now call on the Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Climate Change, Environment, Civil Service, Information, Public Enterprises and Veteran Affairs to deliver his Statement.

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, the honourable Deputy Prime Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Members of Parliament; and I also warmly welcome the students who are with us this morning and we wish them well in their studies. I also acknowledge the presence of the Japanese Ambassador with us this morning, and also those who are watching us on livestream or listening to the radio.

Mr. Speaker, I take this opportunity to say a few words on my recent three-day visit to Japan for the 10th Pacific Island Leaders Meeting or PALM10, and I thank His Excellency the Ambassador for pushing for me to go as I was thinking that I should not go. But when I went, I knew it was a good decision to go as I was there in the 1st PALM, and the only remaining Pacific Leader from that group that went to the 1st PALM.

Japan, like many of our other partners, has consistently been a reliable partner for Fiji over many decades. We appreciate Japan's constructive engagement in the region and its significant contributions to Fiji's socio-economic development.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this year marks the 54th anniversary of our bilateral relations with Japan which, over the recent past, has been nothing short of impressive, while our multilateral relationship has been strengthened via the PALM Summit held every three years over the last 27 years.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in 1997, as Prime Minister, I led the Fiji Delegation to the 1st PALM Summit, held in Tokyo in that year, but three years prior to that, we had formed the foundation of the group that we eventually called PALM, also held in Japan and I was also there, and I had the honour of visiting His Majesty the Emperor at that time. His young son was not in the palace, he was touring in Fiji at the time, and this time I met him as the Emperor.

The relationship between Japan and the Pacific Island countries have developed along two tracks - the bilateral and regional. I proposed, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to focus first on the bilateral relationship before I elaborate on the PALM Summit itself.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, since the inception of our bilateral relationship in 1970, Japan has provided approximately USD1.6 billion worth of development assistance to Fiji, for which I express our sincere appreciation.

I am also pleased to acknowledge the ongoing positive collaboration and exchanges on a possible Strategic Partnership Agreement between our two countries. A Strategic Partnership Agreement would be a landmark achievement in advancing our bilateral relationship to greater heights.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on Wednesday, 17th July, 2024, I was privileged to lead our delegation to a bilateral meeting with the Japanese Prime Minister, the honourable Fumio Kishida. In discussions with Prime Minister Kishida, I acknowledged the continuous and continuing support of the Government of Japan with our infrastructure needs in critical sectors including

healthcare, education, fisheries, aviation, and disaster management capabilities. I also expressed gratitude for the approval for a stand-by loan for disaster recovery and rehabilitation. The honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics elaborated on that during the 2024-2025 National Budget presentation.

In addition, the establishment of a seamless disaster prevention system in Fiji through initiatives such as the Disaster Risk Management Reporting Service using the Quasi-Zenith Satellite System (QZSS). It is called “Michibiki”, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The QZSS enabled disaster reporting service, will enable our people to be better informed of imminent natural disasters, facilitating better preparation.

To further our bilateral cooperation, three documents were signed, the:

- (1) Minutes of Meeting for a study on feasibility of utilising Japan's renewal, maintenance and repair technologies to extend the lifespan of the bridges, and feasibility of public private partnership projects. This is between the Ministry of Infrastructure of Japan and the Fiji Ministry of Public Works and the Fiji Roads Authority.
- (2) Memorandum of Cooperation in Emergency Warning Satellite System using QZSS. This is between the National Space Policy Secretariat, the Cabinet Office of the Government of Japan and Fiji's Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Fiji's Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources.
- (3) Memorandum of Cooperation on Trade and Investment Promotion between the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) and Investment Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Prime Minister Kishida and I also exchanged views on various regional issues, including the proposal for the ‘Zone or Ocean of Peace.’

I also informed Prime Minister Kishida, Sir, of our gratitude to the Government of Japan for its transparency and honesty in dealing with the Advanced Liquid Processing System (ALPS). We acknowledge Japan's commitment to keeping the Forum Leaders and the global community fully informed of the measures being taken to ensure the safety and effectiveness of the ALPS process.

I noted the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) 4th July, 2023 report and the IAEA Taskforce's first full report issued in January of this year, since the discharge began last year. The IAEA Task Force concluded the discharge to be consistent with the international safety standards and reaffirmed the conclusions from the Agency's comprehensive safety report issued last year.

We continue to request the Government of Japan to continue to take measures in accordance with international safety standards and to take all possible measures to ensure no transboundary harm to the Blue Pacific Continent happens.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the PALM Summit held every three years since 1997, has developed into a central platform for regional policy dialogue. I commend the Government and the people of Japan for the consistent delivery of its commitments throughout the PALM process for nearly three decades.

On Thursday, 18th July, 2024, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the 10th Pacific Island Leaders Meeting was held under the co-chairmanship of Mr. Kishida Fumio, Prime Minister for Japan, and the honourable Mark Brown, Prime Minister of Cook Islands and current Chair of the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting.

I attended the Summit with Leaders and representatives of 14 Pacific Island countries, as well

as New Caledonia, French Polynesia, Australia and New Zealand, and the Secretary-General of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF).

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to acknowledge the Government of Japan for agreeing to incorporate the seven priority areas of the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent and its Implementation Plan into the PALM process. This was achieved via a series of preparatory meeting of Senior Officials of PIF Member States, with representatives of the Government of Japan at the Forum Secretariat in the months and weeks leading up to the Summit.

The outcomes of Senior Forum Officials discussions were tabled to the Caucus Meeting of Pacific Leaders in Tokyo on Wednesday, 17th July, 2024, prior to the PALM Summit on 18th July, 2024. As an aside, that Caucus Meeting allowed Pacific Leaders to also discuss other urgent matters, including the situation in New Caledonia, while we were still in Tokyo.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Leaders issued a Declaration and Joint Action Plan as the outcome of our discussions. The PALM10 Joint Action Plan is the basis for mutually acceptable projects for cooperation and exchange. The honourable Leader of the Opposition pointed out this morning that perhaps we did not see indications of the success of our participation in COP Meetings, but the same was true for PALM. Most of the actions take place after those consultations at those meetings, and the result will come when there is direct consultation with the officials of the various Governments participating.

The Plan includes multiple concrete projects for cooperation and exchange, in line with the 2050 Strategy and its Implementation Plan.

Moving forward, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Joint Action Plan endorsed at the Summit, forms the basis for mutually acceptable projects for cooperation and exchanges.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in addition to the PALM Summit and bilateral meeting with the Prime Minister of Japan, there were an additional 13 engagements and meetings that were made for a very busy three-day visit to the 'Land of the Rising Sun.'

Along with the other Pacific leaders, Mrs. Rabuka and I were also honoured to meet their Royal Majesties, the Emperor and the Empress of Japan, in a brief audience. And as I have mentioned earlier, he was a young man when I visited his father, the late Emperor.

The Prime Minister of Japan, honourable Kishida, also hosted Pacific Leaders to a State Banquet, and I must express my gratitude to the Prime Minister and the Government of Japan for all the full courtesies and privileges given to me and my delegation. I do not know whether he will get the *Letters to the Editor* questioning the cost of the banquet, but that is for him to deal with.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I held fruitful discussions with the Chairman of the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Dr. Akihiko Tanaka, to discuss ongoing and new areas of development cooperation. One area, Sir, that has been successful is the area of people-to-people exchange and human resource development. While I was there, part of the discussions for the return of the remains of a young man who was playing rugby there. We thank the Government of Japan for their cooperation and also the Ministry of Health of Fiji in their cooperation for the return of the remains of that young man.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, my close observation of the strength of the Japanese economy and infrastructure, which must be described as the miraculous transformation from the struggles after World War II. I was impressed that despite the economic success, the people of Japan have retained

their culture of discipline, hard work, respect and civility. In this regard, I sought more opportunities for people-to-people exchange, in particular for our young people, including sports exchange.

Just as an aside, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it was very peaceful and orderly on the roads in Japan. They have much better roads than we have, they are much cleaner, and the drivers are so courteous. Even in traffic, we did not hear anyone honking as they respected the law that exists. It is used only in an emergency or dangerous situation. I was travelling in one of the new energy cars and I hope we will be able to buy, we have charging facilities in Fiji, all the cars were clean - very clean.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the presents of PIF leaders in one location allowed me to catch up briefly with the Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Senator Penny Wong and a few other leaders. I also had the opportunity to meet with the Speaker of the Japanese Legislative Assembly, honourable Fukishiro Nukaga and the Chairman of the Japan-Fiji Parliamentary Friendship League and other senior members enthusiastically attended our meeting.

They have invited you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to send a delegation from Fiji to continue the conversation in the league I conveyed to honourable Nukaga your greetings, Sir, and I also conveyed his reciprocals greetings to you. I also took the opportunity to invite the honourable Nukaga and members of the Japan-Fiji Parliamentary Friendship League to visit Fiji, perhaps on the 55th Anniversary of our Independence which is next year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also took the opportunity to meet with key Non-Profit Foundations who have been long time friends and supporters of Fiji and the Pacific. These are the Sasakawa Peace Foundation and its parent, the Nippon Foundation. I looked around and I felt that I was the oldest in the hall, then I went to these two leaders and found out that I was very young.

The Sasakawa Peace Foundation hosted the Japan-Fiji Nations Conference in Tokyo in 1988, attended by the late former President, Prime Minister and *Turaga Bale Na Tui Nayau*, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, nine years before the first Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting (PALM) Summit held in 1997 and its still there.

Sasakawa Peace Foundation hosted a special week of seminars and lectures during the PALM10 Summit to which it invited Pacific Leaders, academics and researchers. I was honoured to attend to give my view on the PALM Summit and the challenges that we faced in Fiji and in the Pacific. The Sasakawa Peace Foundation carries out extensive work on oceans related projects as well research related to the blue economy and Scholarships for the World Marine University.

I was also honoured, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to meet Dr. Yohei Sasakawa, the Chairman of Nippon Foundation which facilitates development cooperation in Fiji and other parts of the world on ocean-related projects as well as disaster preparedness, quality education and health, particularly on leprosy and poverty.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I always relish the opportunity to meet our people who have made Japan their home or the country that I visit as their home and Japan was no exception. My meeting with the diaspora in Japan at Fiji House, the residence of our ambassador, was a joyful one. I also met my grandson (honourable Minister for Education's son), who was mixing the *yagona*. I thought he would make the presentation, he told me, "*Au sega ni kila na vosa vaka noqu.*"

I also noted that this is a subjective observation that they are the most polite diaspora group that I have met. I think the culture of the Japanese has got onto them. They are very courteous and polite. I do not know what will happen when they come back to Fiji. I hope they retain that culture or respect. I believe the respectful manners, hard work and discipline of the Japanese people have or

influenced them really positively.

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

MR. SPEAKER.- I now call on the honourable Leader of the Opposition or his designate.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, first let me thank the honourable Prime Minister on his Ministerial Statement on the recent Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting (PALM10) that was held in Tokyo.

Before I speak on some of the issues that he raised, Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me just clarify our non-attendance to the *veiqaravi vakavanua* yesterday because we were confronted with so many questions from Members of Government. Let me clear the air that we did not boycott the *veiqaravi* yesterday. Simply we did not receive any official invitation from Government. And, honourable Prime Minister, Sir, this has been the case in the three recent visits – visit by the honourable Prime Minister of Australia, honourable Prime Minister of New Zealand and, again, yesterday. Someone in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs needs to answer to this, Mr. Speaker, Sir. We are equally concerned and disappointed too and I need to raise it.

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- I will see to it.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Sir.

Sir, PALM plays a very important role in strengthening our cooperation within the region and indeed with our bilateral partners. I, therefore, thank the honourable Prime Minister for his participation in the PALM10 Summit and for having committed Fiji to the Leaders Declaration and Joint Action Plan as agreed to by the leaders during the Summit.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have to acknowledge the leadership of the Government of Japan and I convey that through His Excellency the Ambassador who is in Parliament this morning for hosting the Summit and, of course, indeed Japan plays a very crucial role in our development as Small Island States and has demonstrated that through the years. I thank the honourable Prime Minister for clarifying the bilateral and, of course, the regional cooperation that we have with Japan as well.

For Fiji in particular, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister has alluded to Japan's contribution towards our Disaster Management Programmes and relief over the years that have been immense. I benefitted a lot from the exchanges with Japan, particularly with the Father of Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), the old Professor, and Fiji through the NDMO has learnt a lot, and of course, with the signing of one of the three MOUs particularly, honourable Prime Minister, Sir, on the Quasi-Zenith Satellite System (QZSS) satellite system. That is most welcomed because Japan also played a key role in the development of our Disaster Risk Reduction Policy that is consistent with the Sendai Framework of 2015. A particular element of the DRR Policy is on Early Warning Systems and that relates to our resilience particularly, and of course, that is a welcome move.

Thank you, honourable Prime Minister for highlighting the issue on the Fukushima Nuclear Waste. That was one of the questions that I would want to raise because last year, I thank the Japanese Ambassador, my office was provided with an update on the scientific assessment of the waste; science is science. It is actually the effects on the ground that we want to hear, and of course, with the leaders present, we thank you for providing that update because it will probably provide some

relief to those concerned Pacific Islanders and environmentalist. We hope that we will continue to have dialogue with the Japanese Government as we progress when more of such waste is dumped into the Pacific.

I have heard about the three MOUs. One of the major projects, honourable Prime Minister, Sir, that was discussed previously is the Nadi River Realignment, whether that was also brought up in your meeting with JICA President, but His Excellency the Ambassador is listening this morning, that is a major project for Fiji; the Nadi River realignment. The scoping has been done already, the Ministry of Agriculture with the Department of Land and Water Resources was heavily involved before the formation of waterways and that is something that is hanging in the agenda between our two countries. I hope that this is something that can be pursued further and, of course, the Ministry of Waterways and Rural Development will also be very keen to see how this will progress.

Thank you, honourable Prime Minister, for your Statement this morning and of course we acknowledge once again our cooperation with the Government and the people of Japan.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Leader of the Group of Nine.

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr Speaker, Sir, I stand on behalf of G9 plus 2.

(Laughter)

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Sorry G9 Bloc, just a slip of the tongue.

(Laughter)

MR. SPEAKER.- It is increasing or is it your tongue?

(Laughter)

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- I rise to say thank you and acknowledge the Ministerial Statement by the honourable Prime Minister on his back brief to this honourable House on his visit to Japan which has covered the bilateral relationship between the Fiji Government and the Japanese Government, and likewise an overview of the PALM discussions in the meeting that he had attended.

What is of great interest to our side, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is really the issue on the Zone of Peace. I think Japan plays an important role in supporting Fiji in ensuring not only the Indo-Pacific is a peaceful, stable and prosperous nation or zone, but has a very effective role to play in supporting our zone here as the Zone of Peace or the Ocean of Peace.

On the bilateral issues, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Prime Minister for highlighting the Agreements or the Memorandum of Cooperation that has been signed. We know in this honourable House that our National Budget is not able to support all our needs, wants and there is an endless list. I take this time to thank the Japanese Government for their support in the past years in the areas that we have asked for their support and cooperation, and this has covered many areas and fields.

I would like to highlight a specific one which just happened recently, that is, the visit of the Commander of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces to Japan. What has been highlighted in his visit that an agreement where both Japan and our small country here recognised the importance of maintaining our region, our zone and our home as a place where there is peace, stability and prosperity.

I also take this opportunity, Mr. Speaker, Sir, perhaps in the presence of His Excellency the Ambassador this morning to raise a point and request for the assistance to Black Rock. There is a great need to build a hospital in Black Rock, the honourable Whip on my side here when he was the Commander, he had brought this issue up. I wanted to take this opportunity if they are able to support us in building a good hospital inside there and it will help the hospitals in the Nadi and Lautoka areas. I also acknowledge the support for the Search and Rescue. Thank you very much Your Excellency for that particular role that your Government has played.

Last before I sit, Mr. Speaker, Sir, a point that was raised that perhaps excited me is the People-to-People Exchanges of Cooperation which has been spoken at length by the honourable Prime Minister. If there is something that we should learn from, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is the people. Japan, they are unique in many ways; their character, the way they behave, the way they act.

Yesterday, we spoke about the toilets here and our inability to use the toilets properly perhaps is of great concern. The cleanest toilets I know of, is in Japan. People know how to behave, how to act because of their character and what they have been taught to do. So, I would encourage more People-to-People exchanges between our country and this wonderful place, Japan. I thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the opportunity to highlight a few of these issues in response to the Ministerial Statement by the honourable Prime Minister.

MR. SPEAKER.- If I may just add a bit on what you have stated and that is the state of our toilets yesterday. Honourable Members, I forgot that the state of the toilets here in Parliament too is something for you to see, it is so dirty. We are talking about public toilets, yet our toilets right here are not clean. Maybe my staff or maybe the members of the public are not careful in how they utilise this public convenience.

At the same time, I am taken by a line stated by the honourable Prime Minister on his visit to the great country of Japan in that given that the people who are responsible for PALM who initiated the PALM project, they are still around. That is why the honourable Prime Minister mentioned that he was still young...

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Still young.

MR. SPEAKER.- ... very young. I like that because the energy now in Fiji is to get more youth into Parliament but at the same time, the lesson learnt from Japan is the longevity of life and how they rely on the wisdom of the old people to guide them through, that is overwhelming and interesting. Maybe those are some things that we need to learn from as highlighted by honourable Naivalurua of the great country of Japan and we thank you His Excellency for all that you have rendered to the country of Fiji.

Honourable Members, on that note, I would like to adjourn the House for morning tea and we will resume when the bell is sounded.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.45 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.23 a.m.

MR. SPEAKER.— I now call upon the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation to deliver his Statement.

Northern Air Britten Norman Islander Aircraft Incident - Gau Aerodrome

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Members of Parliament, fellow citizens, ladies and gentlemen; before I commence, let me just comment on the visit by Her Excellency the President of India. Actually, a delightful lady, I was honoured to be given the privilege to meet her at Nadi Airport and at Sheraton, a truly, truly delightful experience. I was quite saddened that I did not see the Opposition at the traditional ceremony yesterday and as you know, going forward, this Government now does not exclude anyone. So, we made a commitment to correct that going forward, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. P.D. KUMAR. – Like you boycotted Moti?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- On the visit by Prime Minister Modi, the arrangement was such - in writing, delivered to the SODELPA people at that time, that the Leader of Opposition, Ro Teimumu Kepa, would deliver the Vote of Thanks. But two days before the event, government said “Opposition, you have no role to play in this, we will do it all”. We were boycotting the heavy-handedness of the FijiFirst Party, not of Prime Minister Moti. Let me clarify that.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- –The programme came from Parliament, which is sovereign. Parliament said, “Leader of Opposition, you give the Vote of Thanks.” But then the Prime Minister came and said, “No, we will do it all.” So, that is it, not against Prime Minister Modi who we cherish very much, but the heavy-handedness in which it was handled. We were protesting that. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to clarify that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as the Minister responsible for Civil Aviation, I rise today to shed light on the recent incident involving a Northern Air Britten Norman Islander (BN2A) Aircraft at Gau Aerodrome on the morning of 23rd July, 2024. This incident has understandably raised concerns, but it also presents an opportunity to reaffirm our unwavering commitment to aviation safety and our collective resilience in the face of challenges.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on that day, the aircraft overran its designated landing area and collided with a rock mound at the end of the runway. Despite the significant damage to the aircraft, I am glad to report that the two crew members and three passengers on board were swiftly and safely evacuated without any injuries by airport personnel. This outcome is a testament to the rigorous emergency response procedures and the exemplary professionalism of our aviation personnel.

I want to assure this august House and the people of Fiji that aviation safety is paramount for this Government. Fiji is a signatory to the Chicago Convention and is bound by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) standards. These standards are the bedrock of our national aviation regulations, ensuring that all aircraft operators and personnel meet stringent safety requirements.

To operate commercially, Mr. Speaker, Sir, an aircraft must possess a valid Certificate of Airworthiness, the airline must hold a valid Air Operator’s Certificate, and the pilot must be appropriately licensed. Moreover, the airport itself must be certified to accommodate the specific

type of operation. This rigorous certification process is overseen by the Civil Aviation Authority of Fiji (CAAF), as part of our robust aviation safety oversight system.

I want to reiterate that the safety of our citizens and visitors is of utmost importance. While the recent incident in Gau Aerodome is deeply regrettable, it is crucial to understand that a comprehensive investigation is underway to determine the exact cause of the overrun. The findings of this investigation will inform any necessary corrective actions and enhancements to our aviation safety protocols.

In line with the Civil Aviation (Occurrence Reporting and Investigation) Regulation 2009, Captain Norman Walding has been appointed as the Aircraft Accident Investigator. Captain Walding has been involved in the aviation industry for five decades, starting as a pilot and flying instructor on light aircraft, and later as captain on medium-sized twin turbo-prop aircraft. He spent over 15 years as a Senior Flight Operations Inspector at the Civil Aviation Authority of Fiji (CAAF), regulating the domestic aviation industry during which time he had been engaged to conduct several investigations in the past.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, accident investigations are pivotal in our quest to enhance aviation safety. They are not about assigning blame, but about uncovering the causes and implementing safety recommendations to prevent future incidents.

Fiji's effective safety oversight implementation rate is currently sitting above the global average of 61 percent. The ICAO audit for Fiji is sitting at 78.72 percent since 2019, which is a testament to our adherence to international standards and our proactive safety measures. Our skies remain among the safest, and this investigation will only serve to strengthen that assurance.

The aircraft involved, a 43-year-old model, was maintained diligently by CAAF, underscoring the importance of rigorous maintenance and operational standards. Northern Air, which owns and operates four aircrafts, also owns and operates an additional three Cessna aircrafts for its South Pacific Aviation Training Institute (SPATI) Flying School, which operates out of Nausori Airport aerodrome. The airline continues to uphold these high standards, ensuring that our aviation operations are conducted safely and efficiently.

Our pilots, including those involved in this incident, are experienced professionals dedicated to the highest levels of safety and competence. Northern Air's aircraft has been certified as airworthy, confirming that the aircraft is in good operational condition. Additionally, the airline's Air Operator's Certificate is valid. These valid safety documents reflect our stringent regulatory oversight.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the investigation process, which is currently underway, is aligned with the Civil Aviation (Occurrence Reporting and Investigation) Regulations 2009. The State of Occurrence, Fiji in this case, is primarily responsible for the investigation, which includes the notification of the accident to the State of design, manufacture, and to the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO).

The Minister responsible for Civil Aviation appoints the Investigator-in-Charge, who is granted extensive powers to access and analyse evidence, issue safety recommendations, and produce both, preliminary and final reports. Captain Walding, our appointed Investigator-in-Charge, will ensure a comprehensive examination of the incident, preserving evidence, inspecting aircraft and components, and accessing manufacturing and maintenance premises as needed.

The investigation process typically spans over a year, to ensure thoroughness in line with ICAO standards. A preliminary report is expected to be produced in the first phase of the

investigation, which is 30 days after the appointment of the investigator, while a final report is expected to be produced by the Accident Investigator at the end of the investigation, typically after 12 months.

As normally expected after an investigation is carried out and a final report is produced, the Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation ensures that safety recommendations are addressed appropriately, and preventative actions that are considered necessary, are taken promptly to enhance aviation safety. In addition, the final report is also submitted to ICAO as a guide to future global safety measures.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to conclude, allow me to highlight an element that is needed for dissemination for public consumption with regards to subsidies. Gau Aerodrome, like several others, including Vanuabalavu, Koro, Cicia, Lakeba, Rotuma and Kadavu, operates under a subsidy. These island routes, which are not regularly serviced by sea transport, are applicable under the air subsidy scheme. These subsidies are not merely financial support - they are investments in connecting our communities, fostering economic growth and ensuring that every Fijian, regardless of their location, has access to safe and reliable air travel.

Fiji Airports operates the Nadi International Airport and manages Nausori International Airport and 13 domestic outer island airports on behalf of the Government. These airports are overseen by CAAF to ensure they are safe and secure.

This incident, while unfortunate, is a poignant reminder of our shared commitment to safety, our resilience, and our continuous pursuit of excellence. It is through these challenges that we grow stronger, reaffirming our dedication to the safety and wellbeing of every passenger who takes to our skies.

I wish to re-emphasise that the objective of the accident investigation is to generate safety data and information to aid with the prevention of future and similar accidents from occurring. It is not to apportion blame or liability.

MR. SPEAKER.- I now call on the honourable Leader of the Opposition or his designate to speak in reply.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the honourable Leader of the Opposition for giving me this opportunity to respond to the honourable Minister because I had posed the initial question that was supposed to be addressed by the honourable Minister a day before.

Mr. Speaker, before the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation gave his Ministerial Statement, he spoke about the recent visit of the President of India to Parliament, and then tried to justify their actions back in 2014 when they were not present in this Parliament.

(Honourable Government Member interjects)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- I am just responding to the honourable Deputy Prime Minister.

MR. SPEAKER.- I was sitting there too, honourable Maharaj.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, the fact remains that when the honourable Prime Minister of India, Mr. Modi, came to this Parliament, the Opposition were missing, but when the President of India came the Opposition were present, although we were not invited for the traditional welcome.

Mr. Speaker, now going on to the substantive matter of what transpired in Gau, it is good to know that everyone is safe. While flying in the maritime areas and navigating through the terrain, especially rough terrain, it is not easy.

Mr. Speaker, Northern Airline has been providing services in the maritime areas for some time now. We need to look at the safety, visibility needs to be clear when pilots are approaching the airstrip and Government needs to actually start thinking of investing in the lights at the airstrip. It is much more easier to land a plane in Nadi, Nausori or in Labasa, but it is really difficult for a pilot to land a plane in this kind of terrain.

Mr. Speaker, we also note that Northern Air is the only Airline that provides competition to Fiji Link. Previously, Northern Air used to provide a daily service on the main routes - Nadi to Suva, Nadi to Labasa and Labasa to Suva.

Mr. Speaker, if we look at Fiji Link, their parent company - Fiji Airways, has lucrative routes to fly to, like Nadi to Auckland, Nadi to Sydney, Nadi to Los Angeles, Nadi to Singapore, et cetera. The profits that are obtained by Fiji Airways are invested in the new fleet. Unfortunately, the Government is using Northern Air as their social responsibility tool to subsidise the flights and fly them to maritime areas.

Unless and until we allow Northern Air to fly on lucrative routes, such as Nadi to Suva, Nadi to Labasa, Labasa to Suva ...

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- What did you do for 16 years?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- It's deregulated – no restrictions.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- ...they are not able to fly out of Suva to Labasa on a daily basis. They need to start flying on daily basis and, at least, three times a day to provide a better competition to the passengers who are actually travelling.

Mr. Speaker, before speaking, I did a bit of research on my phone. If I have to travel to Labasa tomorrow and return the day after, the minimum fare that I might be paying to Fiji Link is \$350 and the maximum is \$1,220. How is this justified, Mr. Speaker, Sir

If more conducive environment is provided to Northern Air to fly more on this lucrative flight, they can then invest in the new fleet and not rely on the fleet, as mentioned by the honourable Deputy Prime Minister that was more than 40 years old. They need to make profits on lucrative routes in order to invest in the new fleet. And if we are able to produce or give this kind of conducive environment to Northern Air, Mr. Speaker, they can invest in new planes and such an incident can be prevented in the future. That is all, Mr. Speaker, *vinaka*.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Deregulated, my friend. They can fly anywhere they want.

MR. SPEAKER.- And I now call upon the leader of the Group of 9 Bloc, or his designate.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to extend my sincere appreciation to the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation for his dedication and relentless effort in leading the investigation related to the unfortunate accident involving a Northern Air Britten Norman Islander (BN-2A) aircraft at Gau Aerodrome, where two crews and three passengers were on board. This is in accordance with section 16 of the Civil Aviation Act 1976 which deals with liability for loss or damage caused by aircraft.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the timely submission of the preliminary update report to Parliament this morning will be instrumental in reinforcing our commitment towards aviation safety. The detailed insights, as well as the in-depth analysis encapsulated in the report so far, offer us essential tools for the effective prevention of future accidents of a similar nature.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, furthermore, the comprehensive nature of the investigation has underscored the need for thorough review of our existing safety protocols, not just at Gau Island, but across the aerodromes domestically, thus, setting in motion the appropriate plans for improvement.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in response to the finding and recommendation in the preliminary report, as we have heard this morning, I am sure that necessary steps will be taken promptly to implement the proposed changes. This will be done to improve the safety of our domestic aerodromes, and to continuously ensure the protection of passengers and the crew, alike. Despite, this unfortunate circumstance that led to this, it is commendable that we have turned a challenging scenario into a learning opportunity, thereby, enhancing our aviation standards.

Once again, I extend my sincere gratitude to the dedication and the earnest endeavour shown by the honourable Minister during this investigation process. I am positive that with such continuous leadership, we will successfully navigate the improvements, to ensure the safety of our aviation industry in Fiji.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the opportunity to respond to the Ministerial Statement this morning.

MR. SPEAKER.- I only hope that it was not stray dogs that led to that accident in Gau. They usually have a problem with stray dogs there. They took care of it and ate all the dogs.

(Laughter)

National Sports, Recreation and Physical Activity Policy

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Members of Parliament, I acknowledge those sitting in the public gallery and viewers who are watching through television broadcast live from their comfort zone; it is with a profound sense of duty and optimism that I stand before you today, through the Grace of God, to present and discuss the National Sports, Recreation and Physical Activity Policy, which we have recently launched as a Ministry in July 2024.

Before, I do that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, kindly allow me to congratulate and to thank our men's Rugby Sevens Gladiators. Congratulations for winning the Silver Medal, and we thank you most sincerely for making our nation proud of your achievement. I also wish to commend our Fijiana Sevens Team and other Olympians representing Fiji for giving their best efforts on the field.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Policy has been a long time in the making, reflecting years of dedication and collaborative effort since 2017. Its launch represents the culmination of a vision that has been patiently nurtured and stands as a testament to our commitment to fostering a vibrant, inclusive and sustainable sports culture for all Fijians.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this policy is not just a formal document, it is a bold and comprehensive plan that reflects our commitment to the future of sports, recreation and physical activity in Fiji. This policy is designed to be a blueprint for the development of sports across all levels, from grassroots participation to elite performance, to ensure that physical activity is woven into the fabric of our daily

lives. Sports in Fiji, Mr. Speaker, Sir, has always been more than just competition. It is an integral part of our national identity, a source of pride and a means of fostering unity among our people. With this, we are not only looking to the future of sports, but also addressing the present challenges and opportunities that lie before us.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with the significance of the National Sports Creation and Physical Activity Policy, the importance of this policy to sports development in Fiji cannot be overstated. Sports recreation and physical activity are essential elements of healthy, dynamic and prosperous society. They contribute to the physical and mental well-being of individuals, strengthen social ties within communities and have a significant impact on our economy. The policy also embraces the fact that sports play a crucial role in addressing the youth issues facing Fiji today, such as unemployment, substance abuse, social isolation, et cetera.

By engaging young people in structured sports programmes, we provide them with positive outlets for their energy and creativity, helping to deter them from negative behaviours. Sports teach valuable life skills, like discipline, teamwork and leadership which are essential for personal development and future employment. Moreover, by fostering a sense of community belonging, sports help to build self-esteem and resilience among youth, empowering them to overcome challenges and contribute positively to society.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on its economic impacts, the potential of sports as a catalyst for development is immense. Studies have shown in Fiji that for every dollar invested in sports, there is a return of \$20. This return comes in the form of economic growth, job creation and the promotion of tourism. Sports events both large and small attract visitors, generate revenue for local businesses and creates jobs across a range of sectors from hospitality to retail, from event management to media coverage. Moreover, investing in sports infrastructure and programmes can lead to long term savings in health care cost. As a nation grappling with the rise of NCDs, we must recognise the preventative power of physical activity.

The social and cultural benefits of sports, Mr. Speaker, Sir, are equally significant. Sports have a unique ability to bring people together, transcending differences of ethnicity, religion and socio-economic status. They foster a sense of community belonging and shared purpose. Through sports, we can build bridges between different groups within our society, promoting social cohesion and national unity. This policy is designed to ensure that sports and physical activities are accessible to all Fijians, regardless of age, gender, ability or background. By promoting inclusivity, we are not only enriching our sports culture, but also ensuring that every citizen has the opportunity to lead a healthy and active lifestyle.

On health and well-being, the health benefits of regular physical activity are well-documented, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Physical activity is not only essential for maintaining physical health, but it also has profound effects on mental health. In a world where stress, anxiety and depression are increasingly common, sports and recreation offer a vital outlet for stress relief and emotional well-being. This policy aligns with our national health goals by encouraging Fijians to engage in regular physical activity which will help reduce the prevalence of Non-Communicable Diseases. By promoting active lifestyles, we are making a long-term investment in the health of our nation. This, in turn, will lead to a healthier, happier population, with fewer healthcare costs and a stronger and more resilient workforce.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, allow me to delve into the key components of this policy which are designed to address the diverse needs of our population and the various challenges we face in sports development.

(1) Infrastructure Development

The availability of adequate and modern sports facilities is the foundation upon which all other aspects of sports development rest. Without proper infrastructure, even the most talented athletes cannot reach their full potential. This policy prioritizes the construction and upgrading of sports facilities across the country, ensuring that both urban and rural areas are equipped with the necessary resources to support sports and physical activities.

Through this policy, the Government is committed to ensuring that these facilities are accessible, safe and well-maintained. This includes building new stadiums, sports complexes and recreational centres, as well as upgrading existing facilities to meet international standards. These investments will not only benefit our athletes but also provide communities with spaces where they can come together, be active and enjoy the benefits of physical activity.

(2) Talent Identification and Development

Mr. Speaker, identifying and nurturing talent is crucial for the future of sports in Fiji. Our nation has a rich history of producing world-class athletes, and this policy aims to build on that legacy by creating pathways for our young athletes to excel. We will invest in talent identification programmes that reach out to schools and communities across the country, ensuring that no talent goes unnoticed.

In addition to identifying talents, this policy places a strong emphasis on development. We will provide our athletes with access to high quality training facilities, expert coaching and the resources they need to compete at the highest levels through the establishment of the Fiji Institute of Sports. This includes partnerships with international sports organisations which will allow our athletes to gain exposure to global standards and compete on the world stage.

(3) Inclusivity and Accessibility

Inclusivity and accessibility are at the heart of this policy, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The policy states that sports and physical activity should be accessible to all, regardless of physical ability, gender or socio-economic status. This policy outlines specific strategies to ensure that marginalised and under-represented groups are actively included in sports programmes. For example, we are committed to adapting facilities for people with disabilities, ensuring that they can participate in sports without barriers. We will also promote women's participation in sports, breaking down the stereotypes and cultural norms that have historically limited their involvement.

(4) Integration of Sports and Education

Mr. Speaker, the integration of sports and education is another key aspect of this policy. Schools play a crucial role in shaping the future of our nation and by embedding sports into the educational curriculum, we are not only fostering physical fitness but also teaching valuable lifeskills such as teamwork, discipline and resilience.

The policy highlights the need to closely collaborate with the Ministry of Education to ensure that sports programmes and, in particular, physical education programmes are effectively implemented in schools across the country. These includes providing schools with the necessary resources such as sports equipment and trained coaches to

deliver quality physical education programmes. By doing so, we will create a generation of young Fijians who value physical activity and carry those habits into adulthood.

(5) Good Governance and Safeguarding

Mr. Speaker, the policy ensures that sports organisations operate transparently, ethically and with accountability fostering trust and integrity at all levels.

In addition, it prioritizes the safety of all participants particularly children and the vulnerable group by implementing robust measures to prevent abuse, discrimination and exploitation.

(6) Promotion of Physical Activity Across All Ages

Mr. Speaker, promoting physical activity across all ages is essential for the long-term health and wellbeing of our population. This policy supports community-based programmes that encourage lifelong participation in physical activity from youth sports leagues to senior fitness classes.

The policy ensures to create a culture where physical activity is seen as a normal and enjoyable part of daily life. This includes initiatives to make our cities and towns more walkable, creating more public spaces for physical activity and promoting active transportation options like cycling and walking. By making it easier and more enjoyable for people to be active, the policy will help to reduce the barriers to physical activity and encourage more Fijians to lead active lifestyles.

(7) Strategic Implementation

Mr. Speaker, the success of this policy lies in its strategic implementation. This will include the active involvement of all stakeholders, not only the sports community but also businesses, schools, healthcare providers, and community organisations. We have established a robust governance and organisational structure to oversee the execution of the policy. This includes the development of a Policy Action Plan that will guide the implementation of the policy and ensure that the policy's objectives are met.

The Ministry of Youth and Sports, Fiji Sports Council and the Fiji National Sports Commission as statutory organisations mandated for sports development will work closely with the various stakeholders including sports federations, educational institutions, private sector partners, civil society organisations and international partners. By fostering partnerships and encouraging collaboration, we will be able to leverage the strengths of each sector to achieve our common goals.

The policy highlights the need to build strong partnerships with these stakeholders, ensuring that everyone has a role to play in the implementation of the policy.

(8) Timeline and Milestones

Mr. Speaker, this policy is designed with a clear timeline and milestone to ensure that progress is measurable and transparent. We have set specific targets for infrastructure development, participation rates and talent development over the next five years. For example, we aim to have new sports facilities built or upgraded in every major urban center and centralised rural areas within the next five years. We also aim to increase

the participation rate in sports and physical activity by 20 percent over the next three years with a particular focus on increasing participation among women, children and people with disabilities.

(9) Monitoring and Evaluation

To ensure that the policy achieves its intended goals, Mr. Speaker, we have put in place a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework. Performance metrics have been established to track progress in key areas such as infrastructure development, participation rates and health outcomes.

Regular evaluations will be conducted by the Multi-Sector Coordination Committee (monitoring & evaluation mechanism) comprising of senior officers from the line ministries that will coordinate efforts across different sectors and findings will be used to inform policy adjustments and improvements. This will ensure that the policy remains responsive to changing needs and challenges, and that we are always working towards our ultimate goal of promoting sports and physical activity for all Fijians.

(10) Policy Principle

Accountability is a cornerstone of this policy. We are committed to transparency and will ensure that all stakeholders are held accountable for their roles in the implementation of the policy. These includes regular reporting to Parliament and the public on the progress of the policy and its impact on the nation. We will also work to ensure that resources are used effectively and efficiently, with a focus on achieving the best possible outcomes for our citizens. By maintaining high standards of accountability, we can build trust and confidence in the policy, ensuring that it has the support it needs to succeed.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the many individuals and organisations who have contributed to the development of this policy. Special thanks goes to the dedicated team at the Ministry of Youth and Sports who have worked tirelessly to bring this policy to fruition, including the support from the Fiji National Sports Commission and the Fiji Sports Council. Their hard work, expertise and commitment have been instrumental in shaping this comprehensive and forward-thinking policy.

I also extend my gratitude to the sports federations, educational institutions, private sector partners and civil society organisations that provided invaluable input and feedback during the policy review process. Their insights have ensured that this policy is grounded in the realities of our nation and reflective of the needs and aspirations of our people.

Furthermore, I would like to acknowledge the support of our international partners, who have shared their expertise and experience, helping us to learn from global best practices and adapt them to our unique context. Their collaboration has been vital in ensuring that this policy is not only ambitious but also achievable. There is a call to action, as we move forward, Mr. Speaker, I urge all Fijians to embrace this policy and the opportunities it presents. This is not just a Government initiative; it is a national movement that requires the participation and support of everyone; whether you are an athlete, a coach, a parent, a stakeholder or simply a sports enthusiast, your involvement is crucial to the success of this policy.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the National Sports, Recreation, and Physical Activity Policy is more than just a framework for sports development; it is a vision for a healthier, stronger and more

united Fiji. By investing in sports and physical activity, we are investing in the future of our nation. We are creating opportunities for our youth, promoting health and well-being, and building a legacy of excellence that will inspire generations to come.

Mr. Speaker, I seek your indulgence and approval to submit a copy of the National Sports, Recreation and Physical Activity Policy for Parliamentary recording purposes and I also offer my best wishes to all stakeholders, all sport organisations, donors and resources providers in expediting the policy objectives. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you honorable Members for your attention and commitment to this important initiative.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you for that Statement, honourable Minister, it is reassuring, since payment as promised by the honourable Prime Minister is still coming. You have indicated that is not part of your budget?

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Yes, Sir. We are planning for the national celebration in consultation with the Office of the Prime Minister, before we pay out the rewards for the boys.

MR. SPEAKER.- You should have done that when you made that statement. I now call on the Leader of the Opposition or his designate.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise as the Opposition Shadow Minister for Youth and Sports to respond to the honourable Minister's Ministerial Statement.

MR. SPEAKER.- I hope you would not mind, it is five minutes only. You really went overboard there.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Yes, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I applaud that the honourable Minister's comprehensive articulation on the ideology of boosting a career for youth in sports, and I applaud all the relevant stakeholders who have been part of this.

The National Sports Recreation and Physical Activity Policy was recently launched by the Ministry and the Policy has been in a long time of the making and the years of dedication and collective efforts since 2017 and has also been in line with the National Development Plan 2017-2026, the Ministry of Youth and Sports Strategic Plan 2018-2020 and the Fiji Youth Declaration 2019.

Recognising the multi-sector nature of youth development in Fiji, it takes the whole of Government approach, bringing together key Government Ministries, Departments and authorities to work in a coordinated way towards achieving strategic goals for Fiji's youth.

Implementing this Policy will involve a diverse range of programmes in key areas such as health and wellbeing, education, skills and employment, safety, protection, environment and climate change, participation and empowerment, inclusion and non-discrimination, and strengthening the enabling environment for youth.

In developing policies and programmes and in allocating the necessary resources, the Ministry of Youth and Sports needs to also focus on relevant key strategic areas where we need efficient, effective, sustainable and socio-economic and cultural development for youth. Also, in the

areas of strengthening to develop virtual delivery of education, practical skills, soft skills, education curriculum, and also to improve financial literacy and management in our schools and especially for our athletes. Also, to maintain and build more sporting facilities, as highlighted by the honourable Minister.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we must know that the Super Rugby match that was held in Fiji for the first time was between Crusaders and Chiefs on 1st July, 2016. Government needs to realise that hosting international rugby games has boosted economic activity and economic generations for our nation as a whole. It has inspired the younger generation for a future in sports because our youth are dynamic, ambitious, innovative and talented, so as Government, we need to promote various sports in Fiji to unlock this potential.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, when I look at the Paris Olympics, only two representatives have represented Fiji in the swimming category. Had Fiji had another Olympic standard swimming pool, we would have encouraged more youth to have a career in sports because, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we cannot expect our youth to swim or practice in lakes, rivers and in the ocean and dream for the Olympics. That is why I urge the honourable Minister to build the Lautoka Swimming Pool to international career standard so that it is for our youth of the country.

I would like to congratulate the Fiji Sevens Team for their achievement and the various other representatives of Fiji. I also would like to congratulate the Lautoka Team for winning the BOG since 2016, although my father called me and said, "*Ba toh Ba hai*".

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government needs to urgently look at key areas of school violence where it can be tackled by students being exposed to sports, rebellious behaviours of students in public places, especially in buses where you see buses swinging from left to its right after their celebrations as it is really dangerous for the public.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the youth also involved in abuse and hate on social media, and I feel like sports is one of the key ways to get students from out of this.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the youth play integral role in the decision making and process and their potential for key agents of social change, innovation and future leadership, providing these facilities and education that increase participation through sports for our younger people, are key factors in achieving this global progress.

I have expressed my concerns to the honourable Minister for Youth and Sports in Parliament, and I am hopeful that there is a multi-sectoral approach so that we are able to create a Fiji in which all youth are healthy, respected, safe, included and empowered to reach their full potential and meaningfully engage in and contribute to the civil, political, economic, social and cultural growth our beloved nation.

MR. SPEAKER.- I call on the leader of the Group 9 Bloc or their designate.

HON. A. BIA.– Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to respond to the Ministerial Statement by honourable Minister for Youth and Sports on the National Sports Recreation and Physical Activity Policy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as alluded to earlier by the honourable Minister, this will enhance sports and physical activity delivery at all levels of participation. Not only that, Sir, sports play an important role in our national unity.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Policy, if rightfully followed as well as executed, can very well provide the pathway for every minor sporting body to achieve high honours in competitions around the region, and even qualification for the Olympic Games of any international competition.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we all know that our nation's passion for sports and support from Fijians and athletes have propelled Fiji onto the global sporting stage. I agree that the honourable Minister mentioned about the many challenges that are there to ensure that the Policy is formulated, is well followed and carried through by various sporting bodies in the country.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will just highlight three key challenges that can further consolidate or strengthen the National Sports Policy, in my view:

- (1) Limited resources and funding - the lack of funding for smaller and minority sporting bodies and also various clubs and sporting teams in our communities. Also, as mentioned by the honourable Minister in his Statement, there has also been a challenge for the various minority sporting bodies to provide acquittals to the sporting organisations that is looking after the allocation of funds to the various sporting bodies.
- (2) Lack of sporting facilities, which was also highlighted by the honourable Minister and I am thankful that he did mention that in the next five years, Government is looking forward to build more sporting facilities in every community and rural areas around Fiji.
- (3) Talent Identification and Development Programme: This is very important and also mentioned by the honourable Minister. We need to ensure that every sporting body needs to have a Talent Identification and Development Programme, which will ensure that we have a pool of athletes whom we can groom and train to perform at a level that is required regionally and internationally.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for the National Sports, Recreation and Physical Activity Policy, and very much looking forward to the progress and its implementation.

Efforts to Target Impact Investments in Fiji

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, *Na Turaga na Tui Cakau*, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Deputy Prime Ministers, honourable Cabinet Ministers and Assistant Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition and honourable Members of Parliament; before I begin, I just thought that I also acknowledge the presence of the students from Corpus Christi, who are training to be teachers. All I can say to them is, welcome to your Parliament. Just remember that you have a profession that the whole of Fiji relies on. You will be training the next few generations of people in Fiji.

Also, on top of that, some of your very highly respected professionals have ended up in this House as Leaders of the Opposition, Cabinet Ministers, Deputy Prime Ministers, and who knows one day, even as Prime Minister. So, welcome, and I hope you will find today instructive.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to provide a Ministerial Statement on the significant strides that Government continues to make in terms of fostering a robust investment climate to drive impactful economic development and sustainable development growth. I will be talking specifically about one particular initiative that we have developed and has been passed to Cabinet, called the Significant Investment Policy, which forms part of the discussion here today.

As one of the leading nations in the Pacific, the Fiji Government is actively working towards attracting investments that will bring economic benefits and promote sustainable development and inclusivity in our islands. Our approach involves improving the investment climate, strengthening partnerships and pursuing opportunities aligned with our national development goals.

Over the last few years, some businesses have hesitated to invest and commit to Fiji. This, perhaps, stems from uncertainty, Government overreach and excessive control, mismanagement, perhaps, and unfriendly business environments. Due to these factors, Sir, there have been challenges which we are trying to resolve.

Mr. Speaker, when we formed Government 19 months ago, we promised the people of Fiji that we would listen, and we are listening. We also understand that the economy needs to promote economic growth and development, and we also that we need to make the environment in Fiji a lot more investor friendly and predictable. So, we remain committed, Mr. Speaker, in terms of ensuring that these objectives are met.

Mr. Speaker, Cabinet, in its sitting on 7th May, 2024, approved the Significant Investment Policy framework for Fiji. This Policy Framework will provide comprehensive guide for promoting and managing significant investments in the country. With the focus on enhancing economic development, sustainability, social impact, this framework will serve as a foundation for attracting investments across critical sectors.

The policy framework, Mr. Speaker, defines clear objectives for significant investments to align with national priorities, create a conducive environment for attracting and retaining investors in Fiji, and ensure sustainable and socially responsible investments contribute to the country's long-term development.

Under this Policy Framework, Mr. Speaker, Government will provide support on a case-by-case basis to investment projects that meet specific criteria which include:

- Economic impact and strategic importance which must align to the country's priorities and contribute to growth and development.
- Technological Advancement - Priority investments in new technologies, know-how, or expertise that can benefit local industries, contribute to Fiji's skill development, or enhance our overall competitiveness.
- Environmental and Social Sustainability - Investment projects prioritising environmental sustainability, social responsibility, and community wellbeing will be considered.
- Risk Mitigation - Investment mechanisms to mitigate risks and ensure long-term viability, promoting stability and growth in the local market.
- Minimum Investment Threshold – For these projects which are considered significant investments will be around \$200 million or above.
- Local participation - such as partnerships with local businesses and employment of local talent will be encouraged. Local expertise in the architectural, engineering and construction sectors, while sourcing materials and employing local workers is also of keen interest.

Under the Policy Framework, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is also an Investment Facilitation Committee (IFC) which had been earlier created by this Government which is crucial in promoting

and facilitating investments in Fiji. Representatives from key Government Ministries and agencies are represented in this Committee.

The Committee has the overarching mandate to identify hindrances to investment, and provide guidance, support and coordination throughout the investment process, instilling optimism about future investments in Fiji. I was interested to note a positive comment from Mr. Brent Hill, the Tourism Fiji CEO, talking about a more friendly business experience and I got some congratulations, Mr. Speaker, on that remark. But I told them it is early days, and it is still very much a work in progress, as I will explain in more detail.

In addition to this, apart from the Government representatives on this IFC, there are also members from the private sector, who leverage their expertise and resources to assist in investment bottlenecks. By collaborating with other agencies, expediting critical approvals and removing bottlenecks, the IFC will continue to contribute to a more efficient and effective investment process, ultimately speeding up investment and driving growth in the economy.

The recommendations of the IFC are channeled through the Ministry of Trade and the Minister for Finance, Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics, who also then tabled these significant investments on the Economic Strategic Committee (ESC). This is another creation of this Government in an endeavour to continue to support high level business activities. Once the investment projects are overseen or considered at the ESC, then the Government moves forward in terms of assisting these significant projects.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, what I have just mentioned is something that has never been done in this country and I think it positions us well in terms of the way investment will go forward in Fiji.

What does the Significant Framework mean for Fiji and interested investors? Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government, of course, will provide the mechanisms on a case by case basis to look at, obviously, financial incentives, infrastructure development, and take away some of the mystery that normally happens when investors come to Fiji particularly when there are infrastructure requirements.

Regulatory and logistical support is also provided, Mr. Speaker, and these are the support mechanisms that are being put in place to ensure that going forward, the investor climate continues to improve.

There is already one significant investment on the table, Mr. Speaker, which I will be tabling at the ESC very soon. It is the first of our hope for the many significant investments in the country. It is worth about \$300 million and, potentially, it will create 500 jobs, and that is what we are trying to do.

Mr. Speaker, I thought I would just touch on the other types of efforts that are going in by this Government in terms of trying to improve the investment climate in Fiji. I would like to talk about the Ease of Doing Business or the reform of our processes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, right now through the businessNOW FIJI initiative, which is a new initiative to digitise the whole of government business processes. We are actually working at the moment on automating the first or hopefully will be many digital processes in Fiji, starting with starting a business process and also obtaining a construction permit process. If we are able to complete those two processes, there is particular enthusiasm about the second opportunity, Mr. Speaker, Sir, which is obtaining a construction permit. I truly believe that in Fiji, one of the major obstacles to doing investment in Fiji is how difficult it is to obtain a construction permit.

Sir, you have to comply with documents which are probably up to this level high, make three copies, give it to the Department of Town and Country Planning then it circulates around with all the agencies. Documents go missing, people go missing, everything happens. What we endeavour to do with the new automation, Sir, hopefully by the end of next year, we will actually allow investors to load their documents once and it is processed right through seamlessly by each agency online. If we are able to do that, we will make significant headway in terms of creating the Ease of Doing Business experience in our country.

I just thought I would also just like to touch on some of the things that we have been able to achieve. Through the honourable Prime Minister's leadership, before environment used to be a major challenge in terms of approvals. It was the top most significant issue when it came to Ease of Doing Business. Sir, that is no longer an issue. Delays in approvals have come down to about 20 from what I hear, they are more proactive in terms of their execution. That is credit to the honourable Prime Minister and his leadership that we have brought that down in terms of addressing that particular issue. This is why we are listening.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, immigration is a challenge. The two Deputy Prime Ministers have been working with the honourable Minister for Immigration at the moment and what we are trying to do, Sir, is bring about some transformative changes in the way we are doing processing in terms of work permits and the like. I am hopeful that, that will come through very quickly, we are giving ourselves till the end of the year and I hope that by then the experience and the ease with which we are getting our work permits done will be a lot more seamless and a good experience.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I say this not because I am in charge of investment, but I say this in all sincerity. We are sitting on the edge of a major construction boom in this country. All that my Ministry and the stakeholders has to do is to unlock that potential. We have significant investment in the pipeline, there are about four major hotels about to be constructed, we are now seeing opportunities in the housing sector.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Unlock.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- We are actively working with them to see what can be done. Right now, we are sitting at about a \$6 billion pipeline.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, things are looking up.

Apart from that, one of the things that we have endeavoured to do is genuinely broaden up the Fijian economy. In other words, try to re-engineer the economic architecture in Fiji. When we say that, I talk about what Fiji Water is now doing with commercial agriculture in Fiji. I can confidently say, I have got two other large investors who have met us that are saying that they will also do commercial agriculture in Fiji. If that happens, Sir, we will have an opportunity to genuinely broaden out the economy of Fiji, particularly in economic agriculture.

The hope is, Sir, that we will actually be able to reach down into the rural community and create supply chain and the change that comes through from our rural communities and create a stable income for all our people. I have talked about the Kava Bill, I am working very busily with the honourable Minister for Agriculture to bring forward the Kava Bill. Like I have said on numerous times here, it is a billion-dollar industry for our country. I cannot understand why the Kava Bill was not passed by the previous government, but that is okay, we will do it. By the end of this year, it will be done.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in terms of medicinal cannabis, I am happy to report that we are at the final stages of starting the legislative process. That, Sir, to me opens up another opportunity for our country, not only in terms of the medicinal cannabis, but the research into the nutraceutical industry. That has a big potential for Fiji. Just imagine, Sir, if we can commercialise things like some of our natural medicines and share it on the national stage.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Deliver.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Deliver.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, they are saying deliver, I am doing this in 18 months, they have done nothing about this in 16 years. I think in terms of the timeline, there is a bit of a disparity when it comes to timeline and execution. Let us not forget Google and also Starlink that is now here, and these are the types of things that create an environment that I believe suits Fiji well in the months and years to come.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these initiatives are not just about creating economic growth in the country, it is also part of ensuring that development in this country going forward is sustainable, inclusive and beneficial to all Fijians. We are on a promising path, and with continued collaboration and commitment, we will ensure that Fiji attracts significant investments and secures a position as a leading economy in the Pacific. Let us all work together towards a Fiji that is prosperous, has a stable future and of course, a sustainable future.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I only have five minutes, let me just quickly refer him to a World Bank Report on investment in Fiji. Just a line that comes out of it, this is something that is extremely important to create that particular investor climate and I quote:

“Risks to the outlook including persistent out migration and skilled labour shortages, global commodity price shocks, and natural disasters. Structural reforms, economic diversification and fiscal consolidation are essential for building resilience, enhancing growth, and reducing poverty.”

I hope he takes heed of what is being said there. Mr. Speaker, Sir, what can we deliver to the investor? We have to have a ready-workforce but we are facing problems because of migration. I understand the work that has gone on with respect to the digital infrastructure that is going on, I commend him to ensuring that that has actually completed. These are some of the basic incentives that are needed to create a conducive environment.

The creation of that investment climate, the one that is friendly and the one that is swift, is extremely important for Fiji. We all know that, Sir, we all want it to succeed. Incentivisation is not quite there, Mr. Speaker, Sir, with respect to bringing in more FTIs, especially for those industries that we are actually targeting. Training of our local workforce has to be relooked at.

Most importantly, in the current state that we are in, one of the most important things that are actually being looked at is the volatility. There is a way that it is measured, volatility is actually measured. We have to look at how volatile we are. That volatility can be negated or neutralised if we have something that we can say to the investor that says with confidence that there is one thing that you can rely on and be safe and that is the necessary legal framework that will protect them.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our legal system also must be brought up the speed so that investors look at Fiji and not worry about it at all. At the moment, there are deficiencies, et cetera that need to be looked

at importantly and these are the things that create a better investment climate, these are the things that larger companies from overseas look at. They will hold-off on the investment if they see anything dubious that is happening within those particular circles.

One of the most important things that are actually looked at by any company that is going to come here is risk tolerance. They will look at that before they invest, they will look at that before they start any kind of investment. They also look at what kind of returns there are in terms of whatever objective to take, they also look at the kind of treatment that they are going to get, the kind of protection they get and I understand where the honourable Minister is coming from; all of these things are important.

It is not something that is born today, it was born many years ago, so it is advise that has been given to us by IFC, World Bank, et cetera. It is not just this Government that has to deal with it, we have also had to do deal with it, but gradually it has been done and I must say, Sir, I am glad that the honourable Minister is taking heed of all of these and he will ensure that these particular things are actually dealt with properly in order for us to do it.

In terms of business facilitation, the digital Government solutions I know he is looking at, that is also very important, but we must remember that we cannot look at digital solutions with respect to Government from a top-down approach, it must be looked at from the bottom-up approach.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is a particular line that I want to quote, Sir, and it comes from the UN Trade and Development Secretary-General, her name is Rebeca Grynspan and I quote:

“Investment is just not just about capital in-flows; it is about human potential (which we must look at), environmental stewardship (which he actually just spoke about, it is actually very important) and the enduring spirit of a more equitable and sustainable world.”

Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is not just very hollow words, that is very important to Fiji. We have actually ticked the boxes of quite are few of those things. I know the honourable Minister understands exactly what I am saying with respect to the ones that we have not.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the World Bank recently has supported us with a new package, we have got about US\$95 million worth of support that is coming towards our budgetary support. What is more important, Sir, is we must also look at how much of that budget support goes towards creating this better investment climate.

Mr. Speaker, I wish him well, it is for Fiji that it has to be done but there are so many other important things and that is just a brief from our side to say that please look at those things when we are actually doing them.

MR. SPEAKER.- I now offer the floor to the Leader of the Group of 9 bloc or his designate.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to deliver my response to the honourable Minister for Trade, I know it is not easy to respond given the two former Ministers for Trade, one has just given his response and also the current Minister for Trade, but I will try my best.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- I am not saying that I am going to be the future Minister for Trade but again Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the honourable Minister for Trade

MR. SPEAKER.- It is to do with trade, honourable Bulitavu.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Okay!

MR. SPEAKER.- It is to do with trade, you cannot be a win-win situation all the time.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- It cannot be a win-win situation!

(Laughter)

The big terms that have been used by the honourable Ministers, but I will try to get it down to our understanding to those who will be listening on television. I thank the current honourable Minister for Trade and the Coalition Government for putting in place these investment facilities and committee. It is very important, given that it creates ease of doing business and also the processes that were there.

Even the previous administration had also brought in the National Single Window System (NSWS), I think it is still available. It gives that opportunity for those investors. Most of the investors when they come to Fiji, they are somewhat turned back, given the red tapes that we have, but this particular committee will try to remove that and give confidence to potential investors that are coming in.

The whole idea, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in a way of how we can promote a positive image of Fiji as a profitable investment destination. At the same time also, the systems and processes in Fiji to be more efficient to those investors. Those are the two big links that Fiji needs in its investment policies that needs to be in place.

I would like to thank Cabinet too for passing this significant Investment Policy framework given that it provides the guidelines for our local interest and what our interest will be in terms of sustainable development, friendly businesses and attracting those and providing for those investments in creating employment for our local people and the knowledge that they will gain from those who will be coming from overseas.

Yesterday I responded to the honourable Minister for Education in terms of TSLs. There is also a provision of the new scholarship on micro grant. That particular policy is for areas where we have a shortage of labour and skills, that particular facility will also encourage competency-based training for our locals so that when these particular investments come in, they are able to fit in and are qualified for those particular jobs. Much has been said in terms of losing our brain-drain overseas, as alluded to by the honourable Koya, but again the Government can take on board something to this effect. It could put in a policy called the “brain drain gain” where we can bring back those in our diaspora overseas, attract them back to Fiji to further invest and provide back to their communities in various ways.

We totally support the Government’s policy and the framework that has been announced by the honourable Minister for Trade and Investment this morning. We look forward to more investments coming to our country, creating more employment and also more developments in the various communities where natural resources and the various resources can be developed especially in areas where we can connect roads and other accessibilities so that the people can participate in the bigger economic spin and economic growth.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I intend to adjourn the House now for lunch. We will resume when the bell is sounded. The members of the Corpus Christi Teachers College you are also invited to join in with the honourable Members of Parliament.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.43 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.30 p.m.

Update on Ministry's Key Capital Programmes

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Mr. Speaker, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Deputy Prime Ministers, honourable Ministers and Assistant Ministers and honourable Members of Parliament; I rise today to provide an update to this august Parliament on the work of the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management in serving the citizens of our rural and remote areas across our beloved nation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the last financial year, the Ministry's capital development project budget was increased to include the Rural and Outer Island (ROI) Development Programme and the Rural Housing Assistance Programme. These were for \$2.5 million and \$3 million respectively. Also, there was a budget of \$0.5 million for the Seafaring Entrepreneurial Assistance (SEA) Subsidy. The existing programmes of addressing access to clean water and sanitation, new pilot roads, footbridges and footpaths, and economic empowerment for our rural people were maintained.

Rural and Outer Island (ROI) Development Programme

Mr. Speaker, Sir, when we invest in infrastructure, it helps connect people with opportunities, promotes economic growth, and improves livelihoods. Through the allocation of a \$2.5million funding for the ROI Programme in the 2023-2024 Budget, the Ministry was able to implement a total of 50 projects across the country, focussing on three main sectors including agriculture, fisheries and forestry sectors.

Access to basic infrastructure is key to develop these sectors for farmers, markets, women, children, the senior citizens and those with special needs. The two focussed areas of support that were provided for the agriculture sector in the last financial year, include assistance intended for livestock farmers and the construction of rural farm access roads. The forestry sector is also supported under the Programme to strengthen the manufacturing of logs and mahogany waste, to enhance the key roles of wood carvers, and those operating in processing timber to make household furniture.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to update this august House on how the Ministry's ROI Programme has had an enormous impact and has also helped to transform the lives of our rural communities across Fiji for the better.

In the Northern Division, 75.5 kilometres of rural farm access roads were constructed, connecting the interior of Macuata and Cakaudrove Provinces. The road construction, as I had mentioned during my reply to the honourable Minister of Finance's Budget Address, cuts across three major different routes – the Kedra-Sese Road, the Nasasa to Valevoni Road, and a connecting road to Nubusoqosoqo. Communities in these regions used to walk more than 10 kilometres to reach the main road for transportation. More than 77,000 people reside in these two rural Provinces.

In the Western Division, 16.9 kilometres of rural farm access roads were constructed, covering the highlands of Ba in Nadala, Ratalevu, Nadrau, Natawa, Navunitawa and Nasaucoko.

The main rural farm access roads constructed in the Central Division were at Mau, Nakavika and Vunidavo in the Province of Namosi. For thousands and thousands of our rural Fijians, these investments are not just farm access roads, but a new lifeline, and a path to a better future.

In the Eastern Division, the construction of Rural Farm Access Roads focussed on the island

of Ovalau in the Lomaiviti Group, with the infrastructural development spanning 5 kilometres, covering the communities of Nasaumatua, Vuniivisau and Navuloa.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a key component of the ROI Programme is to promote and support value addition activities in the rural sector. This includes the provision of support for the processing of turmeric and ginger powder, cassava and dalo chips, and kava pounding machines in potential areas that have been identified. The procurement of 12 sets of food processing units is the initial step to provide equipment and resources to support value adding economic activities in the rural and outer islands. We do this in cooperation with other Ministries and other agencies, such as the Department of Co-operatives.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to support the forestry component of the ROI Programme, four portable sawmills were procured through the approval of the Government Tender Board. Under the Programme, the portable sawmill will support resource owners to log and process their own timber for rural housing and other value adding processes.

The provision of these equipment is expected to assist the Ministry of Forestry's logging and milling programmes in rural areas. The portable sawmills will also support the supply of materials and household furniture demanded by the growing rural households across the four Divisions.

The Ministry has noted an increasing demand for wood processing machines for value adding activities, particularly from the islands of Kabara, Ogea and Namuka in the Lau Group. These maritime islands are renowned for their supply of wood-made souvenirs to most souvenir retail outlets in Fiji, and this has been considered in this new financial year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we continue to improve our ROI Programme, a new component of the Programme will be introduced in this new financial year. This new initiative includes the incubation of our ROI farmers and recipients for the next three to five years. This is crucial to ensure that the Government's rate of return on investments from these Farm Access Roads and the provision of value adding machineries are realised in the next three to five years.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this incubation programme will include the close monitoring of their production plan for the next three to five years, facilitation of market access, training and awareness, especially on good governance, financial literacy, leadership, time management and changing mindset towards self-sufficiency.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in order to measure the impact of the ROI Programme in the future, a baseline survey will be conducted in all our communities assisted under the Programme, to ensure that the programme objectives are realised as planned, particularly in the programme contribution towards addressing rural poverty, improve living standard and reducing rural-urban drift.

Mr. Speaker Sir, given the ROI Programme's shift towards result-based development approach, some of our key development partners are now onboard to support the Ministry in this Programme and this is encouraging to note.

Rural Housing Assistance

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Rural Housing Assistance (RHA) Programme was re-introduced in the Ministry last year through the Coalition Government. The Ministry worked hard to get the necessary resources to deliver the expectations of the Government for our people.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, whilst the Ministry is working on completing the recruitment of all

personnel, we are pleased to note that the Programme has been able to assist our rural families have access to affordable and safe shelter, whether in the form of full house construction, house completion or retrofitting.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the last 12 months, over 160 applicants have been assisted. These were as follows:

- (1) Central Division
29 full houses constructed, four houses completed and four retrofitting.
- (2) Eastern Division
25 full houses constructed, additional five houses completed.
- (3) Northern Division
23 full houses constructed.
- (4) Western Division
12 full houses constructed, 12 applied for house completion and 54 applied for retrofitting, which were also completed.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, last month, I had the opportunity to witness the commissioning of four newly constructed houses in the village of Nadoria in Rewa by the honourable Prime Minister, the honourable Minister for Public Works and the honourable Assistant Minister for iTaukei Affairs. Those were houses that were initially destroyed in a massive fire in July 2023. It was immensely satisfying to personally witness the joy on the faces of the household members as they took ownership of their new dwellings.

As we continue to improve our Rural Housing Assistance Programme, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is also important to note that the Ministry recently completed a site visit to New Zealand to physically inspect some of the new models of designing rural housing that will not only improve our rural housing resiliency with regards to cyclone certification due to the quality of materials and construction techniques, but also address fire risks and the impact of termite infestation in the country. The Ministry is also working closely with the Ministry of Housing and our development partners in improving our rural housing design.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry is also finalising a Memorandum of Association (MOA) with the Fiji National Provident Fund (FNPF) and SOLE FINTECH in terms of supporting our rural dwellers to save and meet their one-third contribution for housing assistance.

We are dedicated to ensuring that our people have access to resilient homes and feel safe in their environment. We are working on achieving targets associated with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11 – access to sustainable communities.

High Risk Water and Sanitation

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in aligning to our global commitment to SDG6 on achieving clean water and sanitation, the Ministry remains dedicated to addressing high-risk water and related infrastructure needs. We are grateful to the Ministry of Finance for allocating \$1 million, an increase of \$0.2 million from the last financial year, to continue this initiative.

Since the inception of the programme in the 2021-2022 financial year, the Ministry has implemented more than 70 projects across our rural and maritime communities, totalling \$1.3 million.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry had been installing Ecological Purification System recently in various communities across the country, as follows:

- Central Division: 3 villages, benefitting 872 people.
- Eastern Division: 2 villages and 2 settlements, benefitting 1,047 people.
- Northern Division: 9 villages and 3 settlements, benefitting 690 people.
- Western Division: 15 villages, benefitting 676 people.

Similarly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to assist in the reduction of occurrence of diseases and access to better hygienic living conditions, the Ministry provided communities with better sanitation facilities in the following areas:

- Central Division: 1 village and 2 settlements;
- Eastern Division: 1 village, benefitting 16 families;
- Northern Division: 2 villages and 1 settlement; and
- Western Division: 3 villages, benefitting 12 families.

Investment in Rural Infrastructure

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as the Government, we are responsible to make sure that our people are provided with good roads and necessary infrastructure, which will allow them access to so many other services to the world out there.

With the budgetary allocation of \$2 million, the Ministry utilises this for our CARFF Programme in terms of construction of new pilot access roads and construction of footbridges and footpaths where these are necessary to provide safe access to our rural people.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the recent financial year alone, the Ministry was able to complete a total of over 50 projects, as follows:

- Central Division
Four new access roads, four repairs and upgrading of existing roads, 11 footpaths and footbridges which benefitted 18 villages and one settlement with a combined population of 4,559 people.
- Eastern Division
One new access road, one repair and upgrading of existing road, six footpaths and footbridges which benefitted eight villages with a combined population of 1,182 members of the community.
- Northern Division
Three new access roads, six repairs and upgrading of existing roads, one footpath and footbridge. These benefitted 5 villages and 5 settlements.
- Western Division
Two new access roads, 10 repairs and upgrading of existing roads, three footpaths and footbridges and two Irish Crossings. These benefitted seven villages and 10 settlements with a combined population of 6,350 members of the community.

Searing Entrepreneurial Assistance (SEA) Programme

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the financial year 2023-2024 was the first year that the Ministry was allocated a budget for this Programme. With \$0.5 million allocated, the Ministry was able to assist 39 applicants across the four Divisions:

- Central Division
Five boat and engines; one applicant applied only for boat and one applied only for engine.

This is under the one-third and two-third scheme.

- Eastern Division
Six boats and engines, three only applied for the outboard engines.
- Northern Division
Five boats and engines, one applied for a boat, three applied for only outboard engines.
- Western Division
Eight boats and engines and one only applied for boat and four for outboard engines.

Empowering Rural Communities

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry's Self-Help Programme is one that assist individuals or communities through partnership arrangement of Government, providing subsidy in the form of paying two-thirds of the project costs.

In our first year in office, the Ministry has been able to assist over 50 communities across the country. The assistance was in the form of water projects, resource centres and income generating projects, such as bread ovens, bread mixing equipment, et cetera.

These projects achieve several multiple objectives under the SDGs, namely, reduction in poverty, food security, access to clean water and sanitation, affordable and clean energy, and decent work and economic growth.

In the last 12 months, the Ministry was able to subsidise the following number of projects across the country:

- Central Division
Eight income generating projects, one resource centre, one community solar light project, one waiting shed and one evacuation centre retrofitting. These benefitted 10 villages and three settlements, with a combined population of 1,120.
- Eastern Division
Seven income generating projects, seven water projects and two evacuation centre retrofitting projects which has benefitted 10 villages and one settlement, with a combined population of 1,475.
- Northern Division
Seven water projects, three income generating projects and six evacuation centre retrofitting projects, which has benefitted six villages and six settlements, with a combined population of 1,329.
- Western Division
12 water projects. These benefitted six villages and six settlements, with a combined population of 1,329.

Resilient Rural Infrastructure

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we continue to invest towards resilient rural infrastructure, the Ministry is also now working with the Infrastructure and WASH sectors, to establish minimum standard designs that ensures sustainability and resilient rural infrastructure.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management is determined to achieve its aspirations for inclusive development for productive and

resilient rural communities for an integrated manner.

MR. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Leader of the Opposition or his designate to make their response.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Sir, unfortunately, honourable Vijay Nath is sick and I will respond to the Ministerial Statement.

I wish to thank the honourable Minister for clearly highlighting the achievements of the Ministry. Most of these programmes are not new - the six capital projects, and I just wish to thank the honourable Minister for his Ministerial Statement.

I will respond in the same sequence that the honourable Minister delivered his Statement. Firstly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, on Rural and Outer Island (ROI) Programme, we are thankful that now, the Ministry has other options, particularly in addressing the needs out there in the rural communities.

I have been listening to few of his previous statements and one of the concerns that I had was the focus on infrastructure, but of course infrastructure is needed as well because initially when ROI was with the Ministry of Agriculture, it was focussing on food security for our people in the rural islands and then, hopefully, graduating them into market-oriented farmers and fishermen, and then looking at other programmes in the other Ministries to pick up from the ROI Programme.

But I am thankful for the various programmes and particularly, the inclusion of fisheries and forestry, because when ROI was with the Ministry of Agriculture, perhaps, it was more on the Ministry of Agriculture. The honourable Assistant Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister and the honourable Assistant Minister for Agriculture would know this very well. We are thankful that now you are able to buy circular source, and of course, the value addition as well. So, that is very, very good to hear, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

On rural housing, I wish to thank the Government for the increased allocation in rural housing. This is something that we have been raising as a Ministry previously because this is good for our resilience programme, particularly when we want to get our people out of the poverty cycle post-disasters. So, it is very, very important that this increased allocation is provided to the Ministry because it will help us in the long term, due to lessons learnt from *TC Winston*, *TC Harold* and *TC Yasa* as well. Some of our people in the rural areas just simply leave. The internal displacement was simply because years of hard work and investing in their homes was just lost within 24 hours or so, and that contributed to the shift.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on high-risk water and sanitation, I just wish to perhaps remind the honourable Minister that this programme he will need to work very closely with the Ministry of Health because this is particularly on the high-risk areas where there is typhoid and other water-related diseases. We have hotspots identified by the Ministry of Health.

On Self-Help, perhaps the only comment, honourable Minister, Sir, looking at both budgets, I think I had raised this. Previously, because Multi-Ethnic is back now, the same allocation is also provided with Multi-Ethnic Affairs. So, hopefully in the next budget, we will also have that allocation of \$1 million or whatever the amount is available with the Ministry of Multi-Ethnic Affairs as well because of the diverse needs out there in the communities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the other two programmes – Seafaring and CARFF as well as Self-Help, these are important, but I think going back to my address in the Budget response, we need to focus now on the outcomes. It is good that we are spending the money. Honourable Minister, you had

stated so many times in your previous addresses about taking out people away from the culture of dependence so that they can be sufficient and be able to sustain themselves. This is why the monitoring is so important, so that we can be more focused on the outcomes rather than the outputs which we are delivering, and you have correctly stated, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I think that is very, very important for us in terms of the way forward, and documents such as the Household Income and Expenditure Survey Report and also previous Poverty Reports will help the Ministry in concentrating in the critical areas and in the geographical regions as well, so that we can be more surgical in the way we do rural development.

MR. SPEAKER.- May I now call on the Leader of the Group of 9 bloc or his designate.

HON. N.T. TUINACEVA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to respond to the Ministerial Statement by the honourable Minister for Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management. Firstly, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for the update and the insightful statement. *Vinaka vakalevu Turaga Minisita.*

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the need to improve the quality of life for the rural population cannot be overstated. The \$9.8 million used on the project as mentioned by the honourable Minister on the six capital programmes is more than a figure. I look at it as a commitment towards equitable development and equitable access to opportunities to all Fijians, a point that was highlighted by His Excellency the President in the Opening of Parliament this year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as mentioned by the honourable Minister, the programme impacted the lives of around 390,000 people; that is inclusive development. I want to sincerely thank the Government for serving our rural and maritime communities diligently.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is encouraging to see that the Government continues to place emphasis on rural housing programme with a new phase, community access roads and the water sanitation programme. I know these are the touching areas with our rural people, and I call on the honourable Minister to ensure all rural communities are assisted. Perhaps at this point, I appeal to the honourable Minister to visit some villages and settlements such as Valewaqa, Tacilevu, Cakaudrove, Nautoloulou, Wainunu, Bua, Nukubolu and Naikawaga, Koroalau, Cakaudrove, the villages in Matuku in Lau and the Uluisavudua community in Sawani, Naitasiri. There are some issues and concerns on their drinking water and access roads.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, once again, I want to thank the honourable Minister for his Ministerial Statement and I do wish him well and his entire team in the execution of the programmes and upcoming projects planned in the 2024-2025 Financial Year.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Point of Order!

MR. SPEAKER.- Yes.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Standing Order 40 on Ministerial Statements where it says and I quote:

“A Minister who wishes to make a statement on a public matter of national importance ...”

For this particular Ministerial Statement, Sir, I do not think this is really a matter of national importance right now, but I think the statement being made is to avoid being asked the question which is Question No. 126/2024. I think a lot of statements that have been taking place so far are the

issues that are urgent, national importance. This particular topic, Sir, I would suggest, is not of that nature.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hogwash.

MR. SPEAKER.- And also at the same time, honourable Usamate, like previously done. When a Statement is made, the questions that we have usually takes care of it. So the question is not raised. It will be a similar one too on this particular case. After she makes her Statement, that takes care of the question that has been proposed here. We used to do that in the past and I hope we will continue doing that; whether it is a matter of national importance, these are the rights of the Ministers.

For sure all that they are trying to raise in their Ministerial Statements are of importance to them in their role and to the people that they look after. I hope we can just continue and let us hear her out, but at the same time, as you have alluded to, that will take care of Oral Question No. 126/2024.

Fish Cage Culture System

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to assure the honourable Member that this issue or this subject is also important not only for the Ministry, but for the nation as a whole. I know it has been talked about since the Budget Debate, so I am just here to clarify some of the issues and views that the honourable Members on the other side have.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Ministers and Assistant Ministers, honourable Members of Parliament, ladies and gentlemen, *ni sa yadra vinaka*. This afternoon I am pleased to deliver a Statement on the Fish Cage Culture System that are currently being practiced around the world and the challenges we face in the development of this concept in Fiji.

Fish Cage Culture of farming involves culturing fish in a captive environment where free exchange of water can take place. The cage has five sides, the bottom, and the four vertical sides are enclosed with nets. These nets are suspended in the water column with a flotation system around the perimeter. Pen Culture is similar to cage culture but with an open bottom allowing direct contact with the water body. We are more familiar with pond culture which involves rearing fish in an artificially constructed pond, where water is maintained in an enclosed area mainly on land and coastal areas and this is currently being practised in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these fish culture structures are globally used including the Pacific Island countries that have ventured into finfish aquaculture and mariculture. As global fishery resources are harvested at an accelerating rate due to technological advancement in harvesting gear, culture systems have been proposed as innovative solutions to counter over-fishing.

Increasing pressure on marine finfish resources driven by global and domestic demand encourages many Pacific Island countries to venture into aquaculture of several candidate fish species. The following candidate fish species have been trialled and cultured on a low scale in some Pacific Island countries including Fiji:

- (1) Milk fish or *Yawa* – In Kiribati, a hatchery was constructed and sea cage trials were constructed in support from Taiwan and now China. The Government of Tuvalu also conducted fry collection and sea cage trials with support from the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization. The Government of Nauru conducted fry collection and recirculating aquaculture system on land culture with the European Union (EU) support.

Fiji was also part of this development, conducting fry collection and pond culture in Vitawa, Ra which was destroyed by *Tropical Cyclone Winston* in 2016. Currently, the Ministry of Fisheries is conducting pond culture of milk fish at Caboni Research Station in Ra.

- (2) Rabbit fish or *Nuqa* – The government of New Caledonia constructed a hatchery and sea cage culture processing and marketing. The government of Solomon Islands initially trialled fry collection and cage culture. The Ministry of Fisheries is currently undertaking pond culture and broodstock management for natural spawning in a hatchery at Caboni in Ra. This was also trialled in fry collection and pond culture in Raviravi, Ba in the 1970s. Mr. Speaker, Sir, other species currently trialled by our Pacific Island partners include Pacific threat fish, red emperor and yellow kingfish.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fish Cage Culture Research Project previously known as the Makogai Development Project was budgeted for in the 2021-2022 fiscal year. It focuses on diversifying from giant clam culture to culturing candidate fish species such as king fish, coral trout, grouper and rabbit fish in collaboration with local and overseas partners and institutions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, discussions with the South Pacific community were conducted to undertake a preliminary assessment of the economic feasibility of marine fish farming in Fiji and to identify candidate species for culture.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the sea and lagoon areas along Makogai Island provide an important and suitable site for fish cage culture. However, the main drawback is the lack of proper modern hatchery and laboratory facilities to undertake finfish culture on the island, along with the need for reliable power supply to operate the hatchery and aquaculture work.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in 2020 a request was made to the government of Korea through the Korean Embassy for the development of Makogai Island Research Station. Discussions are currently underway and the Ministry will report back to this august House on the implementation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji's aquaculture sector has the potential and demand to grow further due to the rise in global demand for seafood and the over expectation of coastal fisheries resources. The main challenge for marine fish farming in Fiji is the unavailability of the high cost of feed. This is the most significant economic and logistical challenge to be managed for marine fish farming in Fiji. There is a need for more research on feed quality and the development of low cost feed with high nutritional value.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Sea Cage Culture Project for milk fish were trialled in Tuvalu with the support from the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization. In one production cycle, which is about 160 days, they were able to produce 3.2 tonnes of fish with a total operating cost of US\$72,168.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, other adverse factors contributing to the difficulty of establishing cage culture in Fiji include the threat of diseases that vary among candidate fish species. Fiji's geographical position being cyclone prone also hinders the progress in this aspect of fisheries development due to frequent adverse weather conditions and natural disasters that may destroy the significant investments in marine fish cage culture. Mr. Speaker, despite these challenges, the Ministry of Fisheries is optimistic about the future of cage culture in Fiji. Fiji has potential sites for Fin Fish Sea Cage Culture.

Mr. Speaker, it should be noted that fish cage culture in Fiji has several vital aspects that needs to be addressed.

- (1) The improvement of hatcheries and laboratories facilities;
- (2) The establishment of smart partnership with regional and international partners to share ideas and best practices through the South-South Cooperation;
- (3) Specialised training and internship for staff on feed formulation, hatchery and brood management;
- (4) Encouragement of investors to invest in aquaculture with noted interest with some potential investors requiring further dialogue; and
- (5) Research and further development of candidate fish species proudly noting that the Caboni Research Station in Ra successfully produced Rabbitfish in the last fiscal year which was stocked at the Vitawa Aquaculture Farm in Vitawa, Ra.

Mr. Speaker, the additional budgetary allocation of \$400,000 for the Fiji Cage Culture Research Project is for the establishment of a solar farm at Makogai Research Station. This project will provide consistent power supply for the water pumps and aerators needed for the proposed cage culture species. Makogai Research Station is situated in the bay of the mainland therefore simplifying the monitoring of assets.

Mr. Speaker, there is a lot of work to be done but the Ministry is determined to deliver what is expected. It will ensure the proper fundamentals are set to support these projects, ensuring its longevity and effectiveness in relieving pressure on our depleted fish stocks.

MR. SPEAKER.- I now call on the honourable Leader of the Opposition or his designate.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to thank the honourable Minister for her address on cage farming and how the Ministry is addressing this.

Mr. Speaker, cage farming is something that has been talked about and there has been a lot of discussion over the years. I think the advantages of cage farming are obvious but she has articulated very well the various challenges that are faced in terms of cage farming; the issues of hatcheries, diseases, proclivity of cyclones that we have in our part of the world and the danger that this has on the cages and the people that have to manage it and also the lack of skills available to be able to manage this.

As the honourable Minister has pointed out, this has been going on at Makogai for clams but now they are going into fish and I am glad to hear some of the successes that have happened in the past. The *Yawa* fish in Vitawa which has cultivated in ponds and also the *Nuqa* in Caboni. So, there has been some success. I think the big challenge for us in terms of fisheries and a lot of these things, is the ability to take it from research and to make it actually exist where it needs to be done. We are talking about fish, you are talking about anything else. A lot of time is spent in research but you are not able to get to that particular stage to move from the research phase into the extension phase.

She has articulated a lot of the challenges. It has been ongoing for a long time. I know that we have in the past here in Fiji, there has been a lot of talks about cage fishing in various place. They always talk about it, for instance, in that pond that you have up in Deuba, the reservoir that you have, there was talk about doing it there in terms of cage fishing and ponds. There has been talk about doing it in places like Monasavu. They can put the cages in on other places of that sort. There is another place that I had here. I cannot remember what the third one was. Also, in Dreketi where we do the rice farming. You have the lake the possibility of doing that in that particular area.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think the other advantage of doing cage farming, if you are able to get there is that in some other parts of the world where they have this cage farming of fish, it also has infection to other areas. When you have the fish in the cage farming when they spawn and the eggs

go out, the fish itself is captured and harvested but the offspring can spread the thousands of eggs, it can be used, it can cover that whole area. So, that also gives fish supply to people who live in that particular vicinity of the area.

In other part of the world where you cage farming of fish, it is also an opportunity for tourism. Tourists can come to pay to come and feed the fish or watch the fish where it is in the water, so, there is a whole lot of things that is here. I know that the Ministry has a lot of challenges in retaining its staff. But one of the things that I always mention is the importance of execution.

When the Deputy Prime Minister was taking about all his plans, I was saying they are very good plans but the important thing for us is it to execute - not to execute to chop the head, to execute the implementation to be able to deliver things.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, yesterday, when the President of India was here, there was a lot of things that was not executed well by that Ministry. There was no invitation for the Leader of Opposition. When she sat down for the kava ceremony, they did not give one *Vadawa* for her. They did not have a Vada -very small things, but they mean a lot. They gave the wrong kind of fan, the fan that you put on the wall. That is poor execution. Good plans - poor execution.

We had poor execution, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the bringing of Bills into this House. The Heritage Bill had so many flaws - poor execution. They put a Bill here that is still not been able to come back into Parliament because we have so many problems with it.

The requirement for us in Ministries, you have your big plans, you have to have the right people on board, you have to have the right processes and you must have good management of all those processes. If not, you have your big plans and I will tell you, you will produce nothing because you are not executing well.

You must have your plans, you must have your outputs and outcomes and you have the right people in leadership. If you have the wrong people in leadership, the wrong person driving the bus, the bus will end up in the wrong place. Have the right people in, make sure that you can execute so you can deliver for the people of this country.

MR.SPEAKER.- Thank you very much, honourable Usamate, that is a lively one. Let us hope we will board the right bus and we get off at the right place.

(Laughter)

Before I offer the floor to the leader of the Group of 9, I just share a story on this cage farming. So much interest has gone into it. I did put a request to honourable Koroilavesau when he was the Minister of Fisheries sometimes back, if you could bring in some giant clams to be raised in my shoreline in the village of Somosomo. He arranged the bringing over of the giant clams – it was in boxes or cages. So, we had two big cages, one near to the end of the village of Somosomo which is known as Lamini and another one near the hotel. This is to ensure that it could become a major tourist attraction because we do not have any more giant clams in my village, so we had it there.

After a couple of months, I visited the village and I went down to Welagi. I met the ladies in the village. They asked me, “where are you going, Sir?” I want to see this cage that we have put here. So, they never uttered a word, they remained silent. Automatically, I knew something was wrong.

When I went there, I could not find any cage, only the bottom of the ocean. I turned around, I saw the ladies there. I said, “Looks like this thing has disappeared.” They never said a word. I said, “Did it taste good?”. The immediate reaction, “Oh, very nice, Sir.” So, the villagers did not have a clue as to what we are trying to do there with this cage. They need to be properly led and properly taught that the giant clams takes a while before it reaches that big giant clam.

The other cage that was placed near the hotel, when I visited the site, the same thing - there was no cage there. When I asked the people working in the hotel. They said, “No, it did not grow well here because of the noise of the outboard going up and down. It affected its growth.” I asked, “Was it good?” They said, “Yes, it tasted nice.”

(Laughter)

So, they ate that. This is again what this new development brings to us in the village, especially for my village in Somosomo, the population has really grown. Even seaweed, the *lumi boso*, *lumi cevata*, et cetera, they have disappeared because it is an ongoing thing. Day in and day out, the women are there in the sea to sustain their livelihood. It is our negligence, so to speak, that we are causing all these problems now. I think you better bring some of us to feed on before we start raising these things.

I now call on the leader of the Group of 9 Bloc or his designate to make their contribution.

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will just add on to the story that you have shared with us. Aquaculture whether it is mariculture, brackishwater culture or even freshwater culture, is an important direction for Fiji. I think it is a direction that the world is taking as we try and ensure that the wild stock of our fisheries is sustained and that our future generation also enjoy what we are enjoying now, to help to regulate the wild stock that we have.

There is an important point when we talk about aquaculture. One of the natural spawning places for fishes are mangroves. As we balance between development and keeping our mangroves, when we remove our mangroves, we remove the spawning ecosystem for most of the fish that we catch out in our reefs. So, it is worth also looking at preserving the mangroves that we have.

As the story, Mr. Speaker mentioned, aquaculture is not only for finfish but also for non-fish. I know that in collaboration with James Cook University, the Ministry of Fisheries way back then I was there, looked at sand fish (*dairo*) in Wailevu, Cakaudrove, we hatched them in the hatchery and just take them back to their natural environment which was quite a successful programme. The products that we raised out of fish where we call it cage culture, it is used also to reseed the reefs that are barren or even ecosystems that are running out of fish that we enjoy. So, it is not only for consumption, but it is also to ensure that our ecosystems are revived so that they can last into the future.

I also would just like to add to that, perhaps, we should look at the bigger cage fish farming, as you have explained, honourable Minister and see how we can farm perhaps, archipelagic fish which are quite the high-end market of fish and maybe in there would be a niche market, but I thank the Ministry for Fisheries for pursuing this aquaculture direction. It is very good for Fiji for sustainability of our resources and also a source of income for those who are into pond culture for tilapia and prawns, and I wish the Ministry well in its drive towards aquaculture.

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Members, please, take note that Oral Question No. 126/2024 on today’s Order Paper will be dropped, as the statement made by the honourable Minister for Fisheries and Forestry is well enough to take care of that question.

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

Critical Shortage of Dental Hygienists (Question No. 124/2024)

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

Can the honourable Minister inform Parliament on the strategies to resolve the critical shortage of Dental Hygienists in public hospitals?

HON. DR. RATU. A.R. LALABALAVU. – Mr. Speaker, Sir, in answering the question, allow me to please elaborate on why the critical shortage and the strategies the Ministry is undertaking to address the critical shortages.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Dental Assistants and Dental Hygienists posts and responsibilities are almost the same, it is a one year course dental hygienists. Dental Assistant and Dental Hygienists is a two-year programme. Prior to 1998, there were Junior Dental Assistants graduating from Fiji School of Medicine (FSM) back then with Certificate in Dental Assistant which is a one-year programme and very few Dental Hygienists in Fiji, then, with the total number less than ten while Junior Dental Assistants dominated the dental workforce.

In 1998, six month bridging course was developed by FSM engaging dental staff from the Ministry of Health and Medical Services. These all upgrade into junior Dental Assistant in the public hospitals. These junior dental assistants were all upgraded to Dental Hygienists graduating with a Certificate in Dental Hygienist at the end of 1998. Dental hygienists then performed the duty of both, junior dental assistants as well as dental hygienists.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in 2018, the last batch of dental hygienists graduated from the Fiji National University and the programme ceased from continuing. The reason for ceasing was that there were not many interested in the Dental Hygienist programme and most high school leavers opted for Dental course to become full Dentists or Dental Officers and then the FNU introduced the new enrolment system where all school leavers offers to undertake Bachelor in Dental Surgery programme to undergo the first two years together with those attaining high marks at the end of the second year proceeding to the Bachelor of Dental Surgery programme with a total of five years training to become fully-fledged Dental Officers.

Due to the shortage in dental hygienists in Fiji, the government in 2014 offered 20 scholarships, with fourteen being enrolled at FNU and 7 completed the course and graduating after two years.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in 2022, Fiji National University has commenced training of dental assistants in a one-year programme. So, at the moment the total establishment for Dental Hygienists is 80, total filled is 27, temporary vacant is three and vacant post is 50.

In answering the strategies, the Ministry is re-engaging dental hygienists retiring at 55, re-employing dental hygienists not vaccinated, re-engaging dental hygienists over 60 but who are certified medically fit, and we are working with our own Human Resource Department and their submission will be made with regards to the strategies in the next few months. Nevertheless, we are being active in those initiatives that I mentioned, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

In terms of there are also plans in creation of the Dental Assistant posts within the Ministry of Health and Medical Services and they will perform duties, roles and responsibilities of Dental Assistants currently undertaken by Dental Hygienists in the public hospitals. So, in a nutshell, FNU has ceased the programme and the Ministry is strategizing how it will cater for the current vacancy as it is. Like I mentioned, re-hiring 55 and above, ensuring that those who were not vaccinated get hired back and ensure that those over 60 who are still medically fit are hired on a contractual basis.

Update on Public Service Broadcasting Grant
(Question No. 125/2024)

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA 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 Public Service Broadcasting Grant?

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, before it was brought up as part of our Cabinet recommendation to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics, I took a paper up to Cabinet and the release made after that Cabinet meeting said this, and I quote:

“To ensure fairness and a level playing field in the Media Industry, the Cabinet has agreed to open up Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) Grant to all the media organisations other than the Fijian Broadcasting Corporation.

The Prime Minister said, the People’s Coalition Government intends to engage other service providers to ensure a wider reach on issues of public interest and fair competition in the Media Industry. In the past, the Government had exclusively engaged Fijian Broadcasting Corporation to provide public service broadcasting through radio and TV.”

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in response to the question, I thank the honourable Member for allowing me to elaborate on this issue. Prior to financial year 2023-2024, Government had exclusively engaged Fijian Broadcasting Corporation (FBC) to provide public service broadcasting through radio and television at an annual cost of \$10.4 million, with the intention to inform and educate the Fijian public.

In accordance with the previous PSB contract, a sum of \$6,677,400 (VAT exclusive) per year was paid to FBC as fees for producing PSB radio programmes, and operating and maintaining two PSB radio stations, including the AM services.

The FBC also paid a fee of \$4,600,000, also VAT exclusive, to produce, procure and broadcast an extensive range of PSB TV programmes and for the operation of a brand new non-commercial PSB TV channel - FBC 2. In essence, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the fee under PSB contract is paid to FBC for the production, broadcast and transmission of Pacific local radio and TV programmes that are of benefit to all the people of Fiji.

From August 2023 onwards, after considerable deliberation and assessment, the Coalition Government and the new FBCL Board, appointed on 11th January, 2023, in consultation with the Ministry of Finance, Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics proposed a 44 percent reduction in PSB fees to radio and television with the reduced contract price. The contract came into effect from August 2023.

The new allocation for the Public Service Broadcast Grant is a total of \$7,206,407, inclusive of VAT, for a term of three years from 1st August, 2023 to 31st July, 2026. The PSB TV - \$2,599,001 (VIP) and PSB Radio - \$4,670,406 (VAT Inclusive) with a total of \$7,206,407. The main objective, Mr. Speaker, Sir, of this decision was to reduce FBC's reliance on the PSB fees and to build a self-sustaining business as the country's national broadcaster. This has been done without any disruption to the current operations of the organisation and its people and are now working hard to become more self-sustaining and to operate as a commercially driven organisation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is important that I highlight the allocation that the Government has made for the 2024-2025 Financial Year for Public Service Broadcast (TV and Radio). This is reflected under Head 50 (if you still have your blue book around). You will see that on Page No. 284 - Head 50 – Miscellaneous Services, SEG 5 – Public Service Broadcast (TV) - \$3,766.7 million; Public Service Broadcast (Radio) - \$6,677,400. So, that is the total of \$10.4 million (VAT exclusive) for both PSB Radio (\$6.67 million) and PSB TV (\$3.76 million).

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Cabinet on 15th July, 2024 approved that while \$10.4 million will be maintained for Public Service Grant Broadcasting, \$6.2 million (VAT exclusive) will be utilised for the engagement of FBC while \$4.2 million will be utilised to engage other media service providers. The Government will conduct the required tender process through an Expression of Interest and public tender for the provision of public broadcasting services. In the past, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government had exclusively engaged FBC to provide Public Service Broadcasting for radio and TV. To ensure fairness and a level playing field, it was stated in the Cabinet Release after the Cabinet meeting, the Government intends to engage other service providers to ensure a wider reach on issues of public interest and fair competition in the media industry.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Prime Minister for his elaboration on the Public Service Broadcast Grant. I am just interested to know if there is an allocation already of \$6.6 million for FBC and the other is \$4 million? Do you pre-determine what is going to FBC and what will be tendered? I am interested because the issue of AM Radio stations which go out into the islands. Is that just given to FBC or is that something that is open for tender amongst all the other radio stations?

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, your assumption is correct. That amount to FBC and the rest is opened to tender.

HON. V. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister has just alluded to that they want to open up, especially in times of disaster. We know the FBC has the AM station and the reach. So, my question here is, most of our people depend on FBC because of its AM transmitter for information during disaster. With the other service providers, do they have the reach or the capability to provide this service during times of disaster?

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the ongoing discussions with the Ministry of Regional Development and Disaster Management, I have also taken into account those emergency needs at the time of emergency. At the moment, we have ongoing discussions with some of our aid development partners who will enhance our capabilities in those areas. Whether we will continue to rely on the AM or FM or other frequencies and other systems of broadcasting and telecasting, that will come up in the discussions that are ongoing at the moment.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, maybe I ask the honourable Prime Minister to direct the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Communication to look at the Walesi issue because that will help the coverage in the remote islands as well. My question to the honourable Prime Minister is on the Ministry's specific programmes. I will use Ministry of Agriculture because

they have a Department of Information in the Ministry in terms of the dissemination of information. One of the earlier discussions was the use of FBC, for example, for *dalo* diseases et cetera, but the charges they give is so high. Is this part of the consideration later on, on Ministries specific programmes to be included rather than just the normal broadcasting that we do?

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, that has now been brought to my attention and I intend to do something about that and make it more useable for those in difficulties.

MR. SPEAKER.- Perhaps the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Communications would like to add to that. It is the high cost for Walesi, it should be free.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am not too sure what the honourable Leader of the Opposition is alluding to, but, in terms of the cost of Walesi, once you hook up there is no cost involved. I guess he is referring to the coverage issue. That has been packaged as part of the full review of Walesi at the moment, and I am hoping to bring that to Parliament in September or the sitting after that. I know that they had some coverage issues, I am aware of that, Sir, and we are trying to incorporate that as well, as part of the holistic look at Walesi.

Just to add on, Sir, the Walesi going forward is going to be a very professionally-run organisation. We now have a Board that has Taito Tabaleka as its Chair. He is probably the foremost authority on telecommunications in Fiji. I am not sure what they had before, but it is nothing like the calibre of the Board that is there now. I think the assurance in terms of execution to the Opposition, is the execution will be far better going forward.

MR. SPEAKER.- We encountered that here and we looked at the streamlining of this and we are hooked up to Walesi and it should be a free to air service, but they were charging our Parliament a really big sum of money. It was in the hundreds of thousands. Every year, Parliament pays them for that service to get this streamlined into their system out into the whole of Fiji. That was Radio Fiji at that time, but luckily that has been stopped by the honourable Deputy Prime Minister coming in and having discussions with both sides.

MOU on Defence Pacific Air Programme
(Question No. 127/2024)

HON. I.S. VANAWALU asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Home Affairs and Immigration update Parliament on the Memorandum of Understanding between Fiji and Australia on the Defence Pacific Air Programme?

HON. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Iliesa Vanawalu for his question on the Memorandum of Understanding between Fiji and Australia on a Defence Pacific Air Programme (DPAP).

Mr. Speaker, Sir, at this moment, I would like to begin by expressing our gratitude to the Government of Australia for the support they have provided to Fiji through the Defence Pacific Air Programme. This exemplifies the cooperation that we share under the renewed Vuvale Partnership in the areas of defence and security and the strong bonds between our two nations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to update Parliament that on 27th July 2024, the Government of Fiji signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Government of Australia on the Defence Pacific Air Programme. The MOU provides the overarching governance framework that

will facilitate the rotation of the Australian C-27 Aircraft in Fiji.

Under the programme, our counterpart the Australian Department of Defence will operate on a rotational basis a C-27 Aircraft within Fiji. The aircraft undertakes a whole range of taskings that are requested by the different government ministries. The aircraft provides support in areas that includes, protecting Fiji's maritime domain, delivering government services in remote areas, and supporting humanitarian assistance and disaster responses.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the success of the Defence Pacific Air Programme is due to the efficient coordination of its operations across government. It is truly a whole of government exercise coordinated through my Ministry. This year a total of 12 government agencies have utilised the aircraft to support their activities. These includes the Ministry of Health and Medical Services likewise the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the C-27 has successfully completed three rotations in Fiji with its inception flight in February this year, with the second flight in April and the third in June. Under the programme, there were over 36 flights to areas such as Rotuma, Labasa, Savusavu and also to Nadi. Through these flights, over 200 Government officials and members of the Disciplined Forces have been transported throughout Fiji to deliver critical services to the communities.

Key activities includes:

- (1) providing emergency medical care;
- (2) maintenance and repairs to our schools and hospitals; plus
- (3) engineering assessment of our critical infrastructures to ensure Fijians remain safe.

Furthermore, our Military Forces has been able to resupply its remote bases, establish communication links, conduct search and rescue exercises and undertake community engagements. Moreover, five maritime aerial patrols have been conducted for the surveillance of our vast Exclusive Economic Zone and disrupt illegal fishing, identify suspect vessels and respond to maritime hazards and pollution.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, most importantly the Defence Pacific Air Programme has assisted the Government in accessing some of the remote areas of Fiji, delivering water tanks, school supplies, communication equipment and training activities to Rotuma.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to inform this august House that the fourth rotation commenced on Monday, 5th August and is scheduled to conclude on 17th August. So, the plane is in Nausori right now. This morning the aircraft transported the Ministry of Education and Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji personnel to Rotuma.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to highlight that the rotation present valuable learning and development opportunities for Fijian Government personnel. This rotation enables our personnel to gain diverse experiences, broaden their skills and contribute to their overall professional growth and effectiveness in serving our nation. We will carefully assess the results and the findings from each rotation to inform the Ministry future considerations aimed at strengthening and advancing our potential future air capabilities.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, I wish to emphasise that this august House, security continues to be a top priority for the Fijian Government. We are committed to working closely with our development partners such as the Government of Australia to enhance a defence capabilities and maritime security.

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- Just a supplementary question. How do the Ministries access that flight? Do they come to the Ministry of Home Affairs to request or what is the process?

HON. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr, Speaker, I thank the honourable Member for his question. Yes, you are right. We are only the coordinating centre. The schedule goes out to all the Ministries in terms of the time available that the aircraft will be here. It is two weeks in every two months. It is up to them to give us a list of tasking that they want to use the aircraft for. So, it is operated by the Australians but it is for us to decide the missions to which the aircraft flies.

HON. S. KUMAR.- Just a supplementary question to the honourable Minister. What form of air assistance do we get from our partners in the event of disaster in Fiji?

HON. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Speaker, our defence partners are many, Australia is just one of them, New Zealand is another and France also. In the emergencies of the past, the closer countries that are closer to Fiji would normally provide air support to us whether it be in strategic lift or just normal cargo and people transportation. So, countries like Australia would normally provide a C130 Aircraft. In this case they are providing us with C27 which is a slightly smaller aircraft which can land in much smaller airfields and New Zealand also does.

They also have surveillance aircrafts that do surveillance of our maritime zone so they do a survey as well after the times of disaster. Not only but they also have rotary-wings too. So, in the past there have been helicopters that they provide to Fiji from the Royal New Zealand Airforce by the same token as well. The Americans have been here with their Seahawks and Black Hawks and the Australians too.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- My question to the honourable Minister is, how many passengers can travel on this aircraft and whether it can carry cargo?

HON. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Speaker, this particular aircraft that we have can carry 40 passengers. Of course it can carry a small vehicle like land rover. It can carry a bit of cargo too. If it carries both there is a limitation in terms of how much of which it can take but no cargo 40 people can travel.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Honourable Minister, I am not too familiar with the technicalities of the aircraft but there was an exercise that we also had done with the Australians was the status of all our airfields in Fiji. I remember Australia used to have the creamer which is a short take of aircraft and particularly during emergencies. So, I am not sure whether that programme will continue now because of the aircraft that is already in place given that the remote islands needs to be serviced as well, the status of our airfields in the rural areas which the survey has already been undertaken by Australia?

HON. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Leader of the Opposition for that question. He is right. Towards the end of the term of the last Government when the honourable Member was Minister for Defence, Government had commissioned the Royal Australian Air Force to conduct a study of the capabilities of all of our landing strips.

That study has been completed, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and we have the report. On 26th May, 2024, under Cabinet Decision 219/2023, Cabinet had endorsed this decision to develop our air capability for Fiji, based on that study that had already been made. Now, Cabinet had already said, 'yes', but in the interim before this study is going to be put into place, because that was the study made by the Australians. We have to decide what we need, and we will need experts both from locals and the Australians to help us decide on the kind of air capability that we need. I hope you understand that.

Right now, we do not have any determination on the kind of aircraft we have, you mentioned Caribou, so Caribou has been replaced by the C-27. It is a short landing and short take-off aircraft. So, you could say that the C-27 is the kind of aircraft that we need in Fiji. That depends if we do need the fixed-wing air capability, but it is actually quite a good aircraft. But until that study is completed, we will not make any determinations in terms of what Government actually needs for its purpose.

Government is also thinking that what is the best way to support these capabilities once they come to us. Because if you remember in the past, RFMF had two helicopters and they were the only aircrafts that belongs to the State at that time. So, we need to decide in terms of what we have in Fiji, integrate that with what the Australians might want to offer us in terms of capability and decide what we need in terms of rotary or fixed-wing aircrafts that we could use. But that is already on Government's pipeline, I want to assure Parliament in that regard.

In the interim, before this comes online, Government had decided that it would seek Australia's assistance under the Vuvale Partnership. So, I have written to the Australian Minister for Defence – honourable Richard Marles, and he had agreed to send this aircraft in the interim for us to use. But in the long term, we will need to finish this study and decide for us the kind of air platforms we need that will get the greatest reach in the way that our islands are spread within our maritime group.

HON. N.T. TUINACEVA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is on drugs trafficking and its getting more complex, more sophisticated nowadays and most of these are done under water. I am just wondering if part of this arrangement and the capability of this service to track those. I know that they use technology, GPS, et cetera, below the sea, could it be part of that? I know most of the drugs coming into Fiji are transported under water.

HON. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am not quite aware that they are using submarines to comes to Fiji but jokes aside, I think honourable Naupoto will inform honourable Tuinaceva that in the maritime capability, there are these capabilities of detecting what is in the water from the air. That is available, that is not being used in this particular aircraft, except that it also has the capability to do that, if you want it to do that. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, just a bit of housekeeping and for the purposes of complying with the Standing Orders with respect to sitting times, I now call upon the Leader of the Government in Parliament to move a suspension motion

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

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

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

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

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, briefly, we have about six Oral Questions, three Written Questions and the two motions which my colleague, the honourable Minister for Multi-Ethnic Affair and Sugar Industry is ready for those motions

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

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

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- I have no further comments, Sir.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I intend to adjourn for a short break so that you can have your afternoon tea before we continue. The House is adjourned.

The Parliament adjourned 3.57 p.m.

QUESTIONS**Restoration of Water Supply in Parts of Suva
(Question No. 128/2024)**

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

Can the honourable Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport inform Parliament as to when will people enjoy undisrupted water supply in parts of Suva like Raiwaqa, Tamavua, and Wailoku?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU. – Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for the question. The undisrupted water supply in Suva, Raiwaqa and areas as mentioned, we cannot really 100 percent guarantee that because it will always be disrupted by natural disasters, et cetera. So, the question is really a hypothetical question.

In terms of undisrupted water supply or interruptions, of course, it is a matter of significant importance and I thank the honourable Member for that question.

In terms of current situation and challenges, the Tamavua Water Treatment Plant is a critical component of these areas, currently operating at a capacity of 75 mega litres per day, despite its original design capacity of 60 mega litres per day. So, this is an overextension, but is necessary to meet the demand.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it also presents challenges, especially during dry periods, as you have seen, when the raw water sources experience lower yield. Consequently, areas including Tamavua, Wailoku, Samabula and Raiwaqa are directly affected.

However, we, as a Government, note the critical importance of this and, of course, extending from the work of the previous government, there are two specific projects – one is to alleviate this situation which is the Elevated Princess Road Water Infrastructure Project. This has already been tendered and we are looking at finalising the contract by November or end of November.

This basically is the laying of pipelines from the Sawani Junction to Khalsa Road Junction along the Princess Road. We had a walk through these locations a few weeks ago. The cost is \$35 million, project duration is 24 months and it will also benefit any future developments, moving forward.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it involves installation of new pipelines which will tee off from the existing Viria gravity main at Sawani, and there will be a pump station. From the pump station to Colo-i-Suva Reservoir site and gravity lines. It will involve, as I have mentioned, design and build new gravity pipes of 1.43 kilometres, Diameter Nominal (DN) 630, high density polythene pipe and moving from the Sawani junction to the proposed pump station at Buresasa, which is as you come up Princess Road about halfway before you reach the corner towards Colo-i-suva.

Also, the new rising main water pipeline from that pump station to the current Colo-i-Suva Reservoir site where two 5 mega litre steel tank reservoirs will also be built. That is the current project which the Government is working towards with Water Authority of Fiji (WAF) towards alleviating that.

In addition to that, there will be performance-based contract initiatives in terms of alleviating the leakage which is 47 percent. Over the next five years, it is targeted that it will be reduced to 20

percent. Basically, working on hydraulic improvements and also locating the leakages through various methodologies and progressively working on this for the next five years.

With these plans, we are looking forward to the improvements in terms of those areas as indicated in the question. Apart from that, the Viria Project is also covering up for the shortfalls in the water supply. I believe there has been noticeable improvements in terms of that.

But there are also current water tank assistance for those areas with intermittent water supply. These have been delivered to areas such as those in need in Sakoca and some other areas and it is available there and people have been applying for it. Those are some of the measures taken to address the water disruptions in the areas as questioned.

HON. S. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question; can the honourable Minister enlighten Parliament that apart from ensuring regular water supply to the metered areas, what plans are there in place for connecting water to the non-metered areas? In other words, how many residential areas have been identified to get connected to the water supply in this financial year?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do not have the list of areas. Of course, there is a list there in terms of those who have applied and also the prioritised areas. For example, just related to Viria, as agreed with the landowners, we have extended the pipeline too. This pipeline covers the villages of Viria, Waitolu, Naqali, Navatuvula, Naqali Government Station and all households and communities along Sawani and Naqali. For those, they need to apply for the water meter connections and WAF is currently going through those community. As the extensions are done, the awareness and also discussions with the communities along that are happening in terms of the applications and facilitating the connections under water meters.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. While we are still speaking about WAF, I would like to bring to the attention of the honourable Minister that the open trench in Kaunitoni Street still exists. It was opened in January last year, it is almost close to two years now. Or vehicles are being damaged, so if he can actually look into that.

Along with that, there was a complaint lodged of a leakage in Kaunitoni Street around two weeks ago which is still unattended. Am I being victimised of being an Opposition MP that you are not fixing the Kaunitoni Street? Please clarify.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- My apology for that. That has already been raised with Water Authority of Fiji, but the word “victimisation”, sort of, rekindles bad memories when we were in the Opposition.

(Laughter)

I do not want to say victimisation specifically, but you should not have raised that because it brings bad memories to some of us here, especially related to Bill No 17 and being taken to CID.

(Laughter)

Anyway, that is besides the point. As a Government, definitely, we do not victimise or specifically withdraw services from certain areas because of political affiliation, that is not in our DNA. Definitely, we will look into that.

(Laughter)

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, to the honourable Minister, I am very interested and I am glad to see that they are targeting non-revenue water from 47 percent down to 20 percent. Can you just explain what are the broad strategies that will be used to do this to get that non-revenue water down?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- I am not really familiar with the technical methodology, but what I understand is the hydraulics will be monitored in terms of differences in pressure and all that to try to specifically identify the areas with potential leaks. I think they are also using infrared with the contractors to try to locate the areas where there the leakages are specifically when there is a difference along one line in terms of water pressure from one point to another; with a significant difference. So, there must be a leakage in between, apart from those ones which are already identified as we move forward.

HON. G.E. LEUNG.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to apologise to you personally and to honourable Members of the House for inadvertently breaching protocol when I exited the Chambers earlier today. Please accept my apologies.

MR. SPEAKER.- Yes, certainly, honourable Attorney-General. But I was thinking of giving you a red card.

(Laughter)

You traversed the whole Chambers. Thank you, honourable Attorney-General.

Progress of Informal Settlement Upgrade Programme
(Question No. 129/2024)

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE asked Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Housing and Local Government update Parliament on the progress of the Informal Settlement Upgrade Programme?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for the question. Informal settlements around the country are becoming a mammoth challenge for any government due to their unplanned structure, poor access to basic amenities and infrastructure. To-date the Ministry of Housing has acquired development leases as well obtained consent from the Department of Lands for 48 informal settlements since 2010. Out of these, 44 are located on iTaukei land and four on State Land.

These development leases, Mr. Speaker, Sir, are spread throughout Fiji with 13 settlements located in the Central Division, 14 settlements located in the Northern Division and 21 settlements located in the Western Division. Just by way of background, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is very interesting to note that 48 government leases, 31 were acquired in two years (2017 and 2018).

Mr. Speaker, Sir, three out of the 48 informal settlements, Cuvu in Nadroga, Ledrusasa in Votualevu, Nadi and Waidamudamu in Nausori have had their upgrades completed in 2022. These settlements are now in the process for lot allocation.

With regards to these settlements, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Cuvu Informal Settlement Lot Allocation Committee had completed assessing these applications. The Waidamudamu sitting residents have submitted their applications for their house blocks as well as their Expressions of

Interest were accepted until 10th July, 2024. Upon the completion of the Waidamudamu Lot Allocation process, the Ministry will then commence with Ledrusasa Lot Allocation.

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, four informal settlements are presently in construction phase. These are:

- (1) Sakoca, Nasinu- 174 households;
- (2) Tavela, Nadi - 68 households; and
- (3) Field 4, Lautoka - 77 households; and
- (4) Tore, Lautoka - 59 households.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, additional two informal settlements are to commence with construction phase this financial year are Vunika in Labasa with 101 households, and Valewaquyaya in Ba comprising of 35 households. The total cost of these upgrades in these settlements is around \$30 million.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, planning works is underway for 16 informal settlements. These are located in Lovu seaside, Bare, Delaisaweni, Tukutoro, LULuisila, Delainamasi informal settlements in Lautoka; Valewaquyaya in Ba, Vunivau A and Vunivau B, Siberia and Vatia in Labasa and Veivauceva, Caubati River Road, Wakanisila in Nasinu, Sasawira in Nausori and Nadonumai in Lami are earmarked for completion up to engineering plans by the end of this years before progressing into construction phase. The estimated cost towards upgrade of these settlements is around \$200 million.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, completion of preparation works indicates that topographic surveys, scheme plans, EIA, geotech survey and engineering plans are completed, allowing the commencement of construction works. Hence, all settlements are earmarked to be formalised over the next five years subject to budget allocation.

The remaining 23 informal settlements are in preliminary phase to begin their planning works in phases over the next five years, subject to budget approval. The preliminary phase includes the acquisition of development lease, socioeconomic survey done by the Ministry officials and preparation of terms of references for consultancy work.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry also pays the lease premiums and yearly rentals for the 44 development leases on iTaukei land. The total of \$4.1 million in premium had been paid in addition to \$921,000 in yearly rentals. I wish to highlight the Ministry of Housing's informal settlement upgrade programme aims to improve livelihoods through the provision of a 99-year lease to fully service lots to those living in these development areas.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are few informal settlements in Delaisaweni, Nabare and nearby areas. The last meeting with the sitting tenants was held in 2022. The sitting tenants are still not aware of the progress and other details. Is it possible for the Authority's concerned to have meeting with the sitting tenants to provide them with an update and answer their questions and concerns? I met them two weeks ago, they had lots of questions and concerns and I was not able to answer their questions. Is it possible to meet the siting tenants and answer their questions and concerns?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think I have also highlighted in my response that some of these areas are on planning stage right now. Based on the request by the honourable Member, there is a need to also go back and share the status of the project so that the residents are also aware of what the Ministry has done or what the Ministry is going to do with regards to

their settlements.

Staff Welfare and Concerns – USP Council
(Question No. 130/2024)

HON. H. CHAND asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Education inform Parliament what is Government doing to ensure our Fijian staff welfare and concerns are taken to the USP Council through staff representatives?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, to start of with, the Coalition is committed to ensuring the welfare and concerns of our Fijian staff at the University of the South Pacific are adequately addressed and represented at the Council. Just by way of background, being a regional University with 12-member countries, the Council is the executive governing body of the University. It has all the powers and exercises it, conferred on the University by the Charter, subject to the powers, duties and functions conferred upon by its statutes. The Council makes ordinance to direct and regulate the University and its authorities and members. The Council meets twice a year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the statutes of the University clearly states the membership of the Council and the determination of the membership. There is also a provision in the statutes of the University of the South Pacific for the appointment of a visitor and I quote:

“10.1 The last visitor appointed was Sir James Bruce Robertson who is a retired Judge of the Court of Appeal of New Zealand.”

Even the process of appointing a visitor is quite different from the normal expressions of interest because member countries used to nominate names and then once the name is nominated, they are agreeable to their names being nominated, then they are requested by the Secretariat to submit the EOI and their CVs. We currently do not have a visitor because of the process involved.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, according to the USP Council’s Standing Orders, the representatives from Fiji can also call for a special meeting of the Council to be convened and the written request to the Secretary who counselled by the Chair over any member of the Council. The reason for a special meeting and business is to be discussed at the special meeting, it must be clearly stated in all requests.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government is aware of the concerns raised given that USP has around 75 percent of staff who are Fiji citizens working at the University. There are a lot of issues that has been raised, in particular the strike threat that has been addressed. We also understand that staff that had been terminated had taken the matter to the Ministry of Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations and I would like to leave it at that. Maybe the honourable Minister for Employment may elaborate more on the processes involved in handling such cases.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, given the background that I have just alluded to, it is my intension to try and resolve the issues that has been raised and the welfare of the Fijian staff and concerns by calling a special meeting of the University to address the issues that has been highlighted regarding termination and strike threats.

I have this morning briefed the honourable Prime Minister on the various issues pertaining to the University of the South Pacific and together with the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance and maybe with the honourable Minister for Labour, we will be convening a meeting and thereafter requesting a Special Council Meeting as it is my intention to resolve the many cases in

particular the welfare and concerns of the Fijian staff.

We have also taken into account the advice by the honourable Minister that we respect the honourable Prime Minister and all other member countries of the USP Council and to ensure the smooth running of USP with the teachers and students welfare also taken seriously to achieve a healthy environment of learning and employment.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, a supplementary question. The employment contract of all staff, it very clearly states that proper process with procedural fairness and natural justice is accorded to staff. Can the honourable Minister inform Parliament if due process was followed in the academic's termination case?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, I think that is an operational matter which we would not like to delve into but maybe if you allow the honourable Minister for Labour to enlighten the Members in terms of the processes involved in addressing this.

MR. SPEAKER.- Before you do so, honourable Minister, honourable Hem Chand, this is a very sensitive case. This will get out of hand because the media may be able to twist things around considering how sensitive the case is. Yes, we will give the honourable Minister for Labour to have a go, but I think that it should remain there rather than us discussing it here because it has not been resolved. We are trying to find ways to get it resolved, we have not really convened the meeting. It is only after that then we can come and talk and say, "alright, this was successful, this was not successful" because staff are involved here. They have a Charter to follow. Can we leave it at that, honourable Hem Chand?

HON. H. CHAND.- Yes, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you very much.

Ministry's Assistance to the Unemployed
(Question No. 131/2024)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity and Workplace Relations inform Parliament on how the Ministry intends to assist the unemployed persons in finding suitable employment locally.

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to thank the honourable Assistant Minister for asking the question. Given the significant number of students graduating from the different training institutions annually, I acknowledge the important work the team in my Ministry is undertaking in helping secure suitable jobs for unemployed Fijians within the local employment market.

We are committed to establishing employment opportunities through partnerships with other agencies, developing effective pathways from education to employment, formulating policies that support job creation initiatives and implementing programmes that encourage the involvement of unemployed individuals in different workplaces.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, during the financial year 2023-2024, my Ministry successfully executed the Student Employment Exposure Programme in partnership with the Ministry of Education, the Fiji Commence and Employers Federation and the International Labour Organization.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to acknowledge the collaboration with these stakeholders on the success of this Student Employment Exposure Programme, which allows workplace placements for Year 11 students, to experience the world of work during the two weeks school holidays. This initiative aims to facilitate the transition from school to employment of Year 11 students and this will be further extended to the Western and Northern Divisions in this financial year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we would also organise a Mini Job Fair in the Western Division in Koroivolou Park in Nadi last month. Through the National Employment Centre, my Ministry invited 20 employers and exhibitors to conduct walk-in interviews and offer immediate hiring opportunities. However, the number of employers doubled to 40 on the day of the event, signifying the high interest from our local employers to be part of this platform.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, remarkably, the two-day event resulted in the employment of 612 individuals, while a total of 1,582 unemployed persons were registered in the work-ready pool for the participating employers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Mini Job Fair serves to strengthen partnerships between the Ministry and the key stakeholders, including private sector employers, educational institutions and international organisations to improve employment opportunities in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, looking ahead, my Ministry plans to organise similar events in Suva, as well as in the Northern Division in the new financial year, to ensure inclusivity of all individuals.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, apart from this, we also have a Workplace Attachment Programme whereby those who hold certificates, diplomas and degrees can register with the National Employment Centre and we assist them with attachments at suitable workplaces for three to six months. Employers pay 50 percent and we pay the other 50 percent of the weekly wages. Certificate and Diploma holders received \$150 a week and graduates received \$180 a week. At the end of the three or six months, the employers may decide to employ the worker full time or permanently.

Furthermore, in collaboration with the external partners, Cabinet has sanctioned a review of the National Employment Policy of 2018 to tackle economic disparities and encourage self-employment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Policy will be developed through comprehensive consultations, and it aims to align with international best practices, ensuring that it meets the needs of all Fijians and empowers our citizens to engage actively in the local labour market.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, my Ministry is committed to developing initiatives to bridge the skills gap among our graduates, ensuring that they possess the necessary skills to meet the labour market demands. We will also be implementing and overseeing policies to ensure fair compensation to our workers in accordance with the established wage guidelines.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, moreover, we will be working with the various stakeholders to promote the participation of Fijians in the labour market through initiatives such as micro-skills training, upskilling, re-skilling and facilitating connections between workers and potential employers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are collaborating with the training institutions, with the TSLs, with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Youth. Together, we intend to move this forward. I thank you for the opportunity, Sir.

HON. J.N. NAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, my question to the honourable Minister is what is the

current rate of employment in Fiji at the moment?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I thank the honourable Member for the question. I will get the answer for it later on.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, a supplementary question. I noted from the presentation that there were thousands of students graduating with Certificate, Diploma and Bachelor who are still waiting. We thank the honourable Minister for encouraging these new graduates to be introduced into the labour market. My question is, while they are waiting or while they are enrolled into the areas of work that are opened up for them, is this part of the bond system that is being introduced by the Coalition Government, even though the area they are working in is not relevant to their area of study?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are burdened with the unemployed graduates or Diploma holders because of the poor planning in the past. We did not plan according to the demands of the job markets. We have now got a comprehensive study done by Professor Hitendra Pillay, as was alluded to by the honourable Minister for Education yesterday, and according to that we have a 5-Year to 10-Year plan. We know which areas will be needing graduates and that is the way we are now awarding scholarships to students.

Those who are still unemployed, opportunities will come as we go along. That is all I can say now, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I have also alluded to the fact that we are also reskilling and upskilling people. So, there are opportunities to look at areas where there are opportunities.

HON. S. NAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, a supplementary question. The honourable Minister just alluded that because of poor planning, they have graduates not being employed. Could the honourable Minister, please, advice on which areas we have abundance of graduates and where can they get employment?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, actually the statement came from the other side, that there are unemployed graduates and now let me tell you, Sir. I know one area very well and that is Education because I was involved there. In Education there are certain subjects in the secondary school, the teachers have been waiting for three to four years now after graduating waiting with no jobs. There are other areas where there is extreme shortage.

In the primary schools, we have secondary school teachers who are unemployable in secondary schools and teaching in primary schools, filling the gaps because there is big shortage in primary schools. So, that is a clear example.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Poor execution

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Other examples?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, one example is enough

(Laughter)

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister in explaining all the measures that they have been taking for employment. I congratulate him, but all those measures, there is nothing new there. Those kinds of measures have been implemented for a long time and he will find that no government is perfect. The world is always changing, and the role of every government is continual improvement.

I am very interested in the 600 that got jobs. Do you have any tracking system later on to get some sort of feedback of how well they have fared so we can do some sort of analysis in terms of the selection process and what the outcome was for those that got their jobs? I am just interested if there are any kinds of studies like those taking place.

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for that question. Of course, honourable Usamate has been an Educator and he knows.

Our National Employment Centre has got all the data, all the information on where the workers are placed now, and we have the ability and the capability to follow and see how they are doing.

Update on Progress of Work for Gas Crematoriums
(Question No. 132/2024)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Multi-Ethnic Affairs and Sugar Industry update Parliament on the utilisation of the \$500,000 in the 2023–2024 financial year for the progress of works for gas crematorium in Navua, and the Western and Northern Divisions?

HON. C.J. SINGH. – Mr. Speaker, Sir, this morning when I heard from the leader of the Group of 9 Bloc, honourable Naivalurua that he had 9 plus 2, it gave me a little bit of comfort that I am in a comfort zone in Parliament now. So, I can relax and answer.

MR. SPEAKER. – Do you believe that?

HON. C.J. SINGH.– Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the next voting, we will probably know.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to respond to the question raised by honourable Sachida Nand and I thank him for raising this question. Indeed, this question gives me an opportunity to highlight in this august House some of the key developments my Ministry has undertaken in relation to the crematorium project so far.

As we all know, the funding in the previous budgetary provision was a study project on crematoriums. In fact, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there was a budgetary provision of \$500,000 just for the study but I will tell this august House that I hardly use \$50,000 for the study because this project is not a new project in Fiji.

We looked at the three Crematoriums - in Raralevu, of course, the Dignified Crematorium, so it is not a rocket scientist project. I got the help of the committee of Raralevu and Mr. Rosario who gave me the assistance with my team to see that we can do the project training at a very minimum cost.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have accomplished all the necessary paperwork for the Tuatua Crematorium project, including design and engineering plans and a tender for the project was also called. The tender opened on 9th March, 2024 and closed on 27th March, 2024. It was re-advertised on 4th May, 2024 and closed on 5th June, 2024 as the bidders did not meet the required specifications.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to report that the evaluation of this tender has been completed and the Ministry has submitted the Evaluation Report to the Government Tender Board for approval. The Ministry is expecting a response from the Government Tender Board by next week.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the last financial year, the Ministry also called for tender for supply of installation, commissioning and training of four gas pipe cremators from India. The tender was called on 23rd March, 2024 and closed on 17th April, 2024.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am also pleased to inform Parliament that the Government Tender Board has approved a contractor to supply, install and commission and provide training for the use of the four gas pipes cremators. The Ministry and supplier have signed a contractual agreement on 25th July, 2024.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as the requirement of the Ministry of Environment, my Ministry is engaging a consultant to develop the Environment Management Plan (EMP) before initiating any construction work at Tuatua or other cemeteries for these gas pipe projects.

Just last week, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry received an Expression of Interest from consultants to undertake the EMP. A successful bidder will be identified by the end of this week to commence the EMP process. Once the EMP process is completed, the ground-breaking ceremony for Tuatua Cemetery will be conducted by the Ministry, hopefully, by the end of this month or early next month.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in relation to the installation of other gas pipe projects in this financial year, I am pleased to inform that the Ministry is working closely with the management of Lovu Cemetery in Lautoka, Varoko Cemetery in Ba and Raiwaqa Cemetery in Navua. The committees of these cemeteries are expected to carry out the construction works themselves, while the Ministry will only cover the cost of procurement and installation of the gas pipe cremators.

We have completed all due diligent and are in process of completing all mandatory documentation for the project. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are processing as per our plans and expect to achieve full implementation before the end of this financial year.

HON. S. NAND.- Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the honourable Minister for the detailed explanation. Just last week, I returned from Labasa. I was slightly worried that the Tuatua Cemetery where the crematorium has been identified to be erected, what about the parking area? Is there sufficient parking because most of the time, people going to Tuatua Cemetery park their vehicles on the roadside and that is a disaster waiting to happen. Are we providing enough parking for people to come and park inside?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have got a parking lot next to the Cemetery itself. So, there is one big lot next to the Cemetery and, of course, when there is overcrowding, then some people park on the road but a lot of people prefer to park on the road because as soon as the body is burnt, they want to get out of the place. But if they park inside the parking lot, they will have to wait for other cars to move out.

Construction of Seawalls – Natewa Bay Peninsula
(Question No. 133/2024)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Agriculture and Waterways update Parliament on the construction of seawalls in the villages situated in the Natewa Bay Peninsula?

HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I must applaud the honourable Member for his interest in the seawalls in the villages situated in the Natewa Bay Peninsula and I congratulate him

for the question.

(Laughter)

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry has completed the construction of a 400 metre boulder retaining wall at Drekeniwai Village, in the Savusavu District. The project marks a significant milestone and the Ministry's efforts to protect coastal communities from the impacts of climate change and coastal erosion.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry is working closely with the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and anticipates signing a grant agreement worth US\$1.5 million for the Nature Based Solutions Seawall projects in this financial year.

This donor-funded initiative will fund the construction of six Nature Based Solution seawalls, which include two sites within the Natewa Bay Peninsula in Vanuavou Village, in the Vaturova District, and Navetau Village in the Saqani District.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the first quarter of 2024-2025 financial year, the Ministry is set to sign a grant agreement worth US\$5million with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Adaptation Fund through the Pacific Community. This project will construct 14 Nature Based Solution seawalls with Tawake Village in the Saqani District being one of the sites in the Natewa Bay Peninsula.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in conclusion, this project demonstrates the Ministry's commitment to enhancing the resilience of coastal communities through sustainable and environmentally-friendly infrastructure and the Ministry is grateful for the support of international partners that enable the implementation of these critical approaches.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for the update but remember there are villages too on the other side of the bay. Please make sure that they get assistance as well. I will ask the question on behalf of Kanakana Village, Sir. Honourable Minister, you have stated a few projects but Kanakana Village has been on the list for quite a while. Kanakana Village has the same threat as Vunidogoloa because it is at the mouth of the river and, of course the sea as well. I ask the honourable Minister if he can consider Kanakana Village as one of the priorities.

HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I must applaud the honourable Leader of the Opposition for his interest in the Natewa Bay peninsula, in particular, on the other side. Of course, we will include Kanakana Village in the list like you have stated.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, supplementary question. We thank the honourable Minister for the work of doing the retaining wall for Natewa. He has already mentioned about Viani, Drekeniwai up to Natewa; there is a Natewa Health Centre. In my last visit there, there was evidence of coastal erosion along the boundary of the Natewa Health Centre. My question to the honourable Minister, will that be included or will they relocate the health centre?

HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I hope the honourable Member does not have the same interest like the previous honourable Member.

(Laughter)

Yes, we will see what the honourable Member has raised is looked into and included in the list, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Written QuestionsSugar Mill Operations and Sugar Production
(Question No. 123/2024)

HON. V. PILLAY asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Multi-Ethnic Affairs and Sugar Industry inform Parliament on the following:

- (a) tonnes of sugarcane crushed in the 5 years;
- (b) the amount of sugar and molasses produced; and
- (c) the downtime of the mills, dates and cost of repairs.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, despite being very busy this week, I am pleased to advise the House that the answers are ready.

List of WAF Capital Projects for 2024-2025
(Question No. 134/2024)

HON. J. USAMATE asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport provide Parliament the complete list of Capital Projects to be undertaken by the Water Authority of Fiji in the 2024-2025 financial year indicating the following for each project:

- (a) the project's budget;
- (b) the anticipated completion date; and
- (c) the projected benefits and beneficiaries of each project

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank honourable Jone Usamate for the question, due to ongoing pressure, I will continue to provide the questions and I will provide it.

MR. SPEAKER.- His fronted with water pressure.

Statistics on Yachts Entering Fiji Waters
(Question No. 135/2024)

HON. J. USAMATE asked the Government, upon notice.

Can the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation inform Parliament on the number of yachts that have entered Fiji waters?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will table my response at a later sitting date as permitted under Standing Order 45(3). Let us be mindful, there is no period stipulated in this. I work on the assumption that we are asking for 12 months. I will work on that assumption, if you agree with that, 12 months because the way it is here now, it is from the beginning of time to today.

(Laughter)

**CONSOLIDATED REVIEW REPORT-
SUGAR INDUSTRY TRIBUNAL 2016 TO 2020 ANNUAL REPORTS**

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

That Parliament debates the Consolidated Review Report of the Sugar Industry and Tribunal 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020 Annual Reports which was tabled on 12th July, 2024.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

HON. S. TUBUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am honoured to present the overview of the Sugar Industry Tribunal 2016 to 2020 Annual Reports.

The Standing Committee on Economic Affairs is extremely thankful to the Ministry of Sugar for submitting the responses to the tabled Consolidated Review Report. The Sugar Industry Tribunal (SIT) serves several and crucial purposes within the Fiji Sugar Industry. This includes:

- (a) Dispute resolution – the Tribunal mediation resolves disputes between the Fiji Sugar Corporation and cane farmers.
- (b) Setting standards – the Tribunal establishes standards for mutual rights and obligations between FSC and farmers.
- (c) Conciliation - it encourages conciliation between various parties.

While reviewing the SIT reports, the Committee recommended that the Tribunal has failed to meet its obligation to provide up to-date annual reports. The Committee has found that SIT is performing basic tasks and responsibilities that could be handled much more effectively by the Ministry of Sugar. The SIT should be disbanded and the Ministry of Sugar takes the responsibility to appoint a Tribunal.

From the discussions the Committee has had with the Ministry of Sugar, the Committee is confident that the Ministry has the capacity and the expertise to effectively manage Tribunal functions related to sugar industry. This will optimise the resource utilisation considering the industry is insolvent. The review of SIT 2016 to 2020 reports revealed the lack of a centralised database accessible to all institutions in the sugar sector, which is causing confusion amongst the stakeholders. The Committee reviewed the annual reports and is deeply concerned about the various issues that has been identified.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion. I have the list of speakers in front of me provided by the Whips:

- (1) Honourable J.N. Nand;
- (2) Honourable Minister for Multi-Ethnic and Sugar Industry;
- (3) Honourable P.D. Kumar; and
- (4) Honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for External Trade, Co-operatives, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications.

HON. J.N. NAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the debate before the House. The Sugar Industry Tribunal was established under the Sugar Industry Act 1984. The function of the Tribunal are prescribed in sections 21, 22 and 26 of the Act. The Sugar Industry Tribunal serves various crucial purposes within the Fijian sugar industry. These include:

- (1) **Dispute Resolution:** The Tribunal mediates and resolves disputes between the Fiji Sugar Corporation (FSC) and cane farmers. It ensures fair treatment and adherence to contractual obligations.
- (2) **Setting Standards:** The Tribunal establishes standards for mutual rights and obligations between the FSC and farmers. This helps maintain transparency and consistency.
- (3) **Efficiency Promotion:** By advising the Minister for Sugar on industry objectives, the Tribunal contributes to improving overall industry efficiency.
- (4) **Conciliation:** It encourages conciliation between parties, aiming to prevent prolonged conflicts.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the recommendations is that the SIT to be disbanded and the Ministry of Sugar takes the responsibility to appoint the Tribunal. From the discussion the Committee had with the Ministry of Sugar, the Committee is confident that the Ministry has the capacity and the expertise to effectively manage Tribunal functions related to the sugar industry. This will optimize resource utilization, considering that the industry is insolvent.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I fully support this recommendation, as over the years there has been numerous complaints from the farmers regarding how the Sugar Industry Tribunal handles the disputes of the farmers. The Sugar Industry Tribunal is having too much authority and a one man show.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as stated earlier on, a crucial process and the purpose of the Tribunal is conciliation which means it encourages conciliation between parties, aiming to prevent prolonged conflicts. I cannot vouch for this, recently due to a dispute, a farmer Mr. Abdul Faroon of Maro, Sigatoka was suspended from the harvesting gang indefinitely. This means that Mr. Faroon has been left with no choice but to harvest his cane on his own.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Very poor!

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Mr. Faroon even sought the assistance of the honourable Minister for Sugar on numerous occasions but until to-date, the honourable Minister has not responded with any concrete solution.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Follow the process!

HON. J.N. NAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is the issue that Mr. Abdul Faroon has raised with me through a viber message, if I can be allowed to read it which says, “since I have been expelled from the gang, I gave a call to the Sugar Minister, he said that he will be coming Lomai Flood Gate. All papers were given to him and he promised me that he will give me a call. This year, 5th April a meeting was held in the Lautoka Growers Council office hall I spoke there regarding my issue to the Sugar Minister and another person and they promised that they will look into the matter yet after 5th April till to-date, I receive no response from the Sugar Minister and the other person.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Change the Minister!

HON. J.N. NAND.- “We are the family of six and no finance for groceries, I have been requesting help from my friends and I even asked you to assist me which you have done. Thank you for assisting me in this matter though you are not the Sugar Minister. Thank you, once again and God bless you.”

Mr. Speaker, Sir, 5th April the issue was raised with the Minister, this is the mid-season of the crushing season, the season is about to end and the honourable Minister is still looking into it.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Change him!

HON. J.N. NAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, my intension is to buy a pair of goggles, a pair of binoculars, microscope and telescope and give to the honourable Minister so that he can see the problems thoroughly and respond to the farmers in a timely and appropriate manner.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do not dispute the ruling of the Tribunal, I believe them, but Mr. Faroon is 60 years old and he has been asked to harvest his cane on his own. My question is, if the Tribunal has made a decision, there should be some alternative for the farmer to harvest his cane. How on earth, this particular farmer can hire a labourer and harvest his cane? The season is about to end, I think the honourable Minister will keep on looking into it, when the season will end, he will give him the answer.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is very sickening and despite numerous calls, the honourable Minister for Sugar has not answered.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I agree with the honourable Pillay, to change him and replace him with honourable Assistant Minister for Agriculture. He is doing a very good job.

Honourable Prime Minister, Sir, you do not fire him, give him another portfolio; a Minister without portfolio so that he can keep on looking at the problems, looking busy doing nothing.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, once again I fully support the recommendations in the Report. The Sugar Industry Tribunal disbanded and the Ministry of Sugar takes responsible to appoint a tribunal.

In this way, Mr. Speaker, Sir, farmers like Mr. Faroon can be served better.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I firstly like to say one thing to the honourable Member who just spoke, his statement was sickening. That farmer only cuts or harvests 25 tonnes of cane. I know the story about it. I actually went to his place but he had not given the full story to you. Nowhere a gang will get rid of a farmer unless you are a troublesome farmer and he is. So, please do not come and teach me about what happened there.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I speak on the motion, I would like to say something about honourable Pillay last night when he finished off. He has been talking about the stoppage of Ba Mill and I think tomorrow morning honourable Bala will also question me on the same issue. But I would like to say one thing, Mr. Speaker, that we really feel sorry for the farmers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, 18 years of the last government, they had not finished the mill.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Do you know the heart of a sugar mill is its boiler? The boiler has not been replaced and that is the real problem of the sugar mill.

(Honourable Opposition Member interjects)

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, if the boiler had a mouth to speak, it would have told them the problem. A human being, if his stomach pains, he will go and tell the doctor, "I have pain in my stomach." But with this boiler problem, once you fix one side of the boiler, something else breaks down. If you had replaced the boiler then the mill problem would have been solved.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. C.J. SINGH.- What I am saying, Mr. Speaker, without knowing the full facts, they will try to politicise the farmers. No amount of politics this time will get them any votes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to support the motion on the Consolidated Review Report of the Sugar Industry Tribunal 2016-2020 Annual Reports as outlined by Parliamentary Paper No. 77 of 2024. This comprehensive review offers a critical assessment of the Tribunal's performance highlighting areas which need improvement.

I acknowledge the recommendations provided by the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs and I can assure you that my Ministry is committed to implementing the recommendations of the Standing Committee.

The Ministry has noted the request of the SIT to establish a standalone database. We agree with the Committees recommendation for a centralised database system and this proposal will be evaluated alongside the current collaboration with FSC which shares a database infrastructure with Sugar Industrial Tribunal.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in regards to the submission to update the Annual Reports, the Ministry concurs with the Committees' concerns. We are working to resolve the issue highlighted by the auditors to ensure timely and accurate reporting will be done. This includes addressing the backlog of the annual accounts and aligning future reports with the Sustainable Development Goals particularly SDG5 of the Gender Equality.

The outdated Master Award, a cornerstone of industrial regulation is also under review.

The Ministry is committed to modernise this legislative framework is part of the broader policy overall to better reflect the current reality of the sugar industry. Furthermore, we acknowledge the complexities surrounding the SCGF trust fund. While the Ministry does not directly oversee this Fund, we support the call for transparency and accountability. Discussions will be held with relevant stakeholders, including the Sugar Cane Growers Council and Fiji Sugar Corporation, to ensure that proper management and necessary further investigation is forwarded to FICAC.

The Committee's to disband the Sugar Industry Tribunal and transfer its responsibilities to the Ministry has been noted. It recognised the importance of optimising resources, especially given the industry's current financial challenges, and this proposal will consider a comprehensive study on the sugar industry by the FAO, as I had mentioned on Monday, with the goal of transparency, efficiency and governance.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Sugar fully supports the Committee's Report and is dedicated to addressing the recommendations to improve the sector's governance and its operational effectiveness.

The ongoing reforms and the strategic initiatives will be critical in ensuring a sustainable and a prosperous future for Fiji's Sugar Industry. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I urge all the honourable Members of this esteemed House to support this motion of this important work that lies ahead.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak on this motion. We all know the importance of Sugar Industry Tribunal. As we have heard, it is a body

that deals with dispute resolution. The function of the Tribunal is to regulate a Master Awards, and to ensure fair treatment and adherence of contractual obligations between farmers and growers, and this function is vital for maintaining harmony and co-operation within the sugar industry.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee reviewed the Sugar Industry Tribunal Annual Reports from 2016 to 2020, and the Committee had put forward eight recommendations, but I will speak only on four of these recommendations, because some of these recommendations was already covered.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a significant concern highlighted in the Report is the lack key performance indicators for most stakeholders in the sugar industry, including the Sugar Industry Tribunal. Sir, just to give you an example, the vision of Fiji Sugar Corporation, and let me read it out, I quote:

“The vision of Fiji Sugar Corporation is to transform sugarcane farming to a sustainable and profitable farming activity for cane growers with sugar as a world class brand now and in the future.”

What a beautiful vision! And what do we find? Most of these organisations will have their vision and mission, put in a bigger words and staple on the wall, but what is the problem here? The problem is this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, if there is no KPI, how will they work towards their vision?

HON. J. USAMATE.- Absolutely!

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- All these organisations are directionless, they do not have a direction. They do not know where they are going. The honourable Minister is working hard to improve the industry, I can see that. He has got his mind and heart there, but he alone cannot fix it. That is the thing that I am trying to say. Unless and until all these CEOs of different sugar institutions sitting there, start fixing their area of work, they have to work towards that vision and without KPIs, they lack clarity, they lack focus and what does that do? It results in scattered efforts and wasted resources.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we all know this inefficiency hampers our industry’s performance which is actually visible in the sugar sector.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is unacceptable that the Sugar Industry Tribunal and other stakeholders operate without targets, especially when taxpayers’ money is involved. It is not their own money, it is the taxpayers’ money. We need to ensure that taxpayers’ funds are yielding tangible results. They must get value for money, which they are not getting that kind of return, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

The Committee has also recommended the development of a centralised statistical database which the honourable Minister has mentioned, and our experience is in each and every report when they come up with the Annual Report, beautiful data is given, with graph, with tables, colourful. But when you read one report to another, they are talking about the same thing but the information is different. The number of growers is different, number of hectares of land being used is different. So, that is why it is very important to have this data at one place - at one repository spot, where everyone else can access.

The honourable Minister has already said that he is looking into that because with single data, there can be innovation, there can be problem solving because then, you will know what the issue is and you can work towards solving that problem. But when the data is different, you do not know what you are doing with the data.

Another critical recommendation which the honourable Minister has also touched on is the outdated Master Award. I believe, and this is my personal believe, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the critical issue

is the Master Award. The 35 year old Master Award, developed in 1989, and we are trying to use that Master Award to solve today's problem and the farmers are complaining....

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- You should have done that 16 years ago.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Yes, we were trying to review. Go and read the *Daily Hansard*. Honourable Minister, go and read the *Daily Hansard* which you are not doing. Read the *Daily Hansard* then you talk in this Parliament.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Very poor!

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, if you go through the *Daily Hansard*, it is very clear that the Master Award was being reviewed but NFP stopped it. And I can assure the honourable Minister for Sugar, NFP will, again, be the spanner in the works because that is sugar politics.

What I am trying to say here is that the Master Award is 35 years old, it needs to be fixed and we have already made the recommendation to review the Master Award, along with the new Sugar Policy. So, when the new Sugar Policy is established, review the Master Award and that will set the direction.

One of the disputes that the growers normally have is on mechanisation. But mechanisation is not covered in the Master Award. That is how outdated the Master Award is. It does not take into account technological advancement that has happened over the years.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am also disappointed, very disappointed actually, that the sugar industry, whether you talk about FSC and the various other institutions that exist within the sugar sector, they have failed to report on Sustainable Development Goal 5 on Gender Equality in the Annual Report. This oversight is a significant issue. That is why when you go into any of the sugar industry bodies, you will just find men, everywhere, and that is the state of the sugar industry today. Research has shown that if you have women in the organisation, they will bring different perspective, and they can improve the system because they will look after your homes, they look after the community, then why are they put aside when it comes to sugar sector? Just because it is a men's job?

The worst is, they do not even report because they do not want anyone to pick that up. So, do not tell them, no one will know, but you and I know that it is a requirement of Parliament, it is a commitment to SDGs that it must be reported.

So, I am urging all these institutions, please, wake up and start reporting on the SDGs so that we can see whether gender equality is in your organisation or not, whether you are giving equal opportunity to women to work in that organisation.

Before I take my seat, there is something else that I wanted to speak about. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have heard twice in this House, the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics has mentioned that when we had politics we were doing well. He has said it. When we had politics, the sugar industry was doing well. He fails to understand that when politics was there, they were getting preferential sugar price.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Absolutely!

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- You can have as much politics as you like because you were getting more than the market price for that sugar. But today, we cannot allow this politics, simply because its taxpayers' money you are talking about.

HON. J. USAMATE.– Hear, hear!

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Imagine each and every household, when they get a paycheck, their money is deducted and it comes into the Government's coffers. They can use that money to build their house but no, they are contributing to the Government's coffers so they must get that return.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I support the motion.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.– Mr. Speaker, Sir, I stand to provide some comments regarding the Sugar Industry Tribunal Reports and just a fact that we are looking at the 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020, basically says a lot, and we do not need to say much more. But, of course, being me, Sir, I want to say a bit more.

Firstly, you went around, Mr. Speaker, Sir, yesterday and I used the analogy of the lights that goes on, on the indicator. Honourable Usamate was talking about execution today and I thought I would just respond respectfully to honourable Usamate on execution.

Sir, the sugar industry is on the precipice of collapsing and 16 years of that was under the other side - that is execution. The only thing that this side of the House can say, we have seen what the other side of the House can do with execution, Sir, and we will definitely do better.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point I wanted to raise, just to educate honourable Usamate on execution, the honourable Prime Minister is always very humble when he talks in Parliament. When he talked about the \$10 million Public Service Broadcasting Grant, he sort of politely did not really say what he should have said which was, you were giving away \$10 million to one entity for 16 years or more.

Through the honourable Prime Minister's leadership, he gave a brief to the Board and said, "you need to turn this entity around, make it self-sustaining". So, what the Board did in one year, Mr. Speaker, Sir, they came back to the honourable Prime Minister and said, "We can live with \$6 million. The \$4 million is a saving." The honourable Prime Minister said, "Alright, there is a saving, let us put it back in the pool for the other broadcasters." That is execution, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, regarding the report before us, I think honourable Premila Kumar has actually said what has to be said about the Report. It is just very troublesome, it is symptomatic of what has been happening in the industry for some time. Their Annual Reports have not been submitted on time, the Master Award is outdated, the Audit Report from 2016, I believe, were all qualified and we talked about the qualification of the Fiji Sugar Corporation (FSC) report yesterday, and here we go.

Sir, in some ways, I will use another, sort of, saying, the fish rots from the top. So, because we failed to actually manage FSC well, that resulted in so much losses for over 20 years, it is happening to all the other entities. So, the need for the report of the FAO, again, something that is initiated by this side of the House will actually plot a way forward for the industry.

I thought I would end on a positive note, Mr. Speaker, Sir, after all of that. I will just talk a bit about something that I have seen in the industry that can provide a template for the rest of the agricultural sector actually. It is one of the most organised industries in Fiji. It is set up quite well. It has a Tribunal, it has got its own funding mechanisms, it has a council, it has got its own Act, and

that is the future for the agricultural sector in Fiji, Sir.

We need to commercialise it, bring in these kind of support mechanisms, and then we will see the type of growth that we know we are capable of in the agricultural industry. By bringing in partners, such as Fiji Water, which I have talked about, and some others, we will surely be able to actually execute on them. Through the capabilities of the honourable Minister for Agriculture, you will see some transformational change happening, Sir, certainly in this term of Government and beyond.

With those few words, Sir, I thank the Committee for being very honest about the status of the Sugar Industry Tribunal. Perhaps, if anything, my suggestion is, “Let us get a Cabinet paper together tomorrow and shut this down, if it is not working. Let us move on and try and make this industry profitable or at least self-sustaining, and then we can move on and develop the other agricultural sectors that offer so much potential for Fiji. I thank you, Sir.

HON. S. TUBUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the comments are noted. However, I just wish to talk on the issues that has been raised by honourable Premila Kumar when we were going around visiting the stakeholders in the industry and, of course, meeting up with them – the need for more harmonious relationship between all the various stakeholders in the industry. There is a lot of fragmentation and what I have been saying in the Committee, is the need for all these stakeholders to be singing from the same hymn sheet, to have some sort of clear policy so that everyone will be singing from.

So, it is a lesson for those in an industry which is quite huge like this. I think once we have the policy in place, the policy will be directing all the stakeholders to be singing from that same hymn sheet.

I would like to thank the honourable Members for their contribution and, of course, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do support the motion before the House.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

CONSOLIDATED REVIEW REPORT – SUGAR RESEARCH INSTITUTE OF FIJI 2016-2021 ANNUAL REPORTS

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

That Parliament debates the Consolidated Review Report of the Sugar Research Institute of Fiji 2016-2021 Annual Reports which was tabled on 12th July, 2024.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- I second the motion, Sir.

HON. S. TUBUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am honoured to present the overview of the Sugar Research Institute of Fiji (SRIF) 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021 Annual Reports.

The Committee is extremely thankful to the Ministry of Sugar Industry for submitting the responses to the Consolidated Review Report of the Sugar Industry Research Institute of Fiji (SRIF). The Committee commends SRIF for its thorough research. However, it is imperative that technology transfer be used by farmers, as research could only be useful if farmers are able to use innovative knowledge to improve productivity. We hope that in the coming years, the Extension Officers from FSC can join SRIF to facilitate the knowledge and technology transfer to farmers.

While reviewing the SRIF Annual Reports, the Committee documented that SRIF has not been fully engaged with farmers in crop diversification, resulting in poor soil health and limited stream of income. While the sugar sector is not profitable, it could be due to lack of technical support and hand-holding our farmers.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Sugar Research Institute of Fiji needs to engage in training our farmers to adopt integrated personnel management and integrated decision response to control and eradicate best decision which SRIF also needs to invest in social media for outreach programmes, and their contingency plan should there be any future pandemic to ensure business continuity.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion but I also received a list of speakers identified by the various Whips:

- (1) Honourable Leader of the Opposition;
- (2) Honourable Minister for Multi-Ethnic and Sugar Industry;
- (3) Honourable Ratu J.B. Niudamu; and
- (4) Honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, first let me thank the Committee for the great work – the Chairman and Members of the Committee for the efforts that we have seen through the Reports that we have debating throughout the course of the week. Since this is the last of the Sugar Report, I asked our Caucus if I can take up one of the speaking slots so that maybe I can help the honourable Deputy Prime and Minister for External Trade, Cooperatives, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communication to understand things about the sugar industry better and of course perhaps also assure every Fijian that we all know and understand very well the importance of the industry.

The role of government, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as you are well aware, growth is so important to this. But let us not only look at FSC in isolation. The Government has done so much with other Government Commercial Companies.

Energy Fiji Limited (EFL), the status in which EFL was in and how it has progressed over the years to where it is now; Fiji Rice, AMA, Food Processors Limited, Fiji Pine Limited, but when it comes to FSC, Sir, this is one thing, and I know the honourable Prime Minister cannot come up with a Cabinet Paper to shut FSC down tomorrow because Government has a social responsibility.

We want FSC to be profitable, but when it comes to hard decisions of the approximately 250,000 individuals who directly or indirectly depend on the industry, because of the Government's social responsibility, it will continue to support FSC. That is what previous governments have been doing all these years, Mr. Speaker, Sir. That needs to be made clear to everyone.

As I have stated, we want FSC to be profitable, but there are so many factors, Mr. Speaker, Sir and it has been discussed so many times in this House. Let us not forget the fact that the Government has a social responsibility and only Government can afford that, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Though it may be operating at a loss, but we have, because it is important to keep the economy functioning. It is important because of the people who are dependent on the industry. Let us not discuss issues in isolation. Let us contextualise it so that it makes a lot of sense, particularly when we are dealing with policies and strategic directions in this Parliament.

Yesterday we were told that we had been doing nothing in the last 16 years or so. Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the key things that Government did when it came in 2006 was the land and the *iTaukei* landowners have benefitted from CBUL. Land was heavily politicised. I will not go into

the past issues, but every Government that comes in, the subject is that we see now, most of those were initiated under the term of the previous government. The mill upgrades, I know that there was an upgrade during the Labour Government but that did not work out well, so the incoming government has to take over the responsibility. These are past issues and problems that we can learn from, but we have to take the responsibility.

Let me just focus on the report, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have about five minutes left. I will just focus on some of the key roles of SRIF, not on the recommendations, as it was established in 2006. I want to focus on dissemination of technology and information needed for increased productivity, profitability and sustainability of the sugar industry. I have some recommendations to the honourable Minister. As highlighted by the honourable Usamate, one of the key problems that we have, particularly in the primary industry sector, is the transfer of technology from research to extension. We visited two universities in the Philippines a few years back. To honourable Tunabuna, this is the Philippine National University in Los Banos and Pampanga State Agricultural University.

One of the key lessons that we have learnt from there is the Research Division also have their Extension Division. Honourable Minister, one of the problems in Fiji is Research does their research and then they convene the Extension workers and then they transfer the information under technology to them. How it is disseminated depends on the Extension officers. But Philippines came up with this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, because of this issue. Probably this is something that Fiji can learn from. Research must have its own extension so that there is no gap in between, and Research ensures that the transfer of technology is expedited and ensures that it reaches the target groups as well. That is something we can learn particularly from the role of SRIF.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also wish to talk on the issue of soil and leaf analytical services, particularly in the role of SRIF. It states that SRIF is responsible for a few areas and I will just speak on a few areas. I will just start on soil and analytical services, crop diversification and effective land utilisation. On soil and leaf analytical services, again honourable Minister, there was a Mr. Bunda, he did a good article on sugar production in Fiji when he was in charge of Extension Services.

I hope, honourable Minister, if you can get hold of that report because that is something we have been arguing for a long time. The soil condition in Fiji is one of the major contributing factors to the low production level, because of the pH level. Most of the land in Fiji has a problem with either acidity or alkalinity. Therefore, the intervention must be correct as well, whether we do aglime, which is calcium carbonate or we do gypsum which is calcium sulphate for alkalinity. This is a big issue because we keep chemical fertilisers year in, year out. One of the problems in sugar production in Fiji is the pH level. We fix the pH level, you will see a definite increase in sugar production, that is guaranteed. Mr. Speaker, Sir.

The other one is on crop diversification. Sir, crop diversification has been there for a long time. When I came out of Ratu Kadavulevu School, I joined Native Land Development Corporation (NLDC) which is an extension arm of NLTB. Sir, Ratu Mara back in the Development Programme 8 (DP8) he had already predicted that we will one day lose the preferential arrangement and secondly the diversification in the sugar industry is on tropical fruits. I was part of that project, we did papaya and mangoes in Legalega.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Tikoduadua talked about macadamia nuts or duriano. That was the diversification programme but then over the years, nothing happened. Some strategic decisions should have taken place long time ago, but it did not happen. The diversification, let me repeat, was predicted and put in place by Ratu Mara way back in the DP8 (tropical fruits). Now I would insist, let us look at the potential in Vanua Levu. If can beef up the production in Vanua Levu, we can have other options on Viti Levu, particularly when it comes to diversification.

We can discuss this later, Mr. Speaker, Sir, but that is something that we need to seriously consider. That diversification as I have stated, it has been there for a long time but that political will and decision needs to take place and I am thankful. We look forward to the FAO Report and, of course, perhaps the convening of a Special Committee as well, not only to look at sugar, but the whole agriculture sector.

May I just conclude, with effective land utilisation. Honourable Minister, back in 2014 a database has already been drawn for FSC. The current Director for NDMO, that was her project when she came out of University but I do not know what has happened to that database. We were there during the launching in 2014, excellent database but how do we translate that database into execution; that is a big problem. If we can dig into that, I have some information, I can help you honourable Minister, but of course definitely we need to take the industry forward and I thank the Committee for their work.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I give my statement on SRIF, I would like to comment on honourable Premila Kumar's comment about gender balance or gender equality in the industry. We have re-instated mill area committees now in all three Mills and a majority are ladies. They have also appointed the first lady iTaukei Director on FSC Board, so I am trying to go in that direction.

I did enquire about the database, in fact it was sitting in the FSC and FSC workers were not trying to share that. This is the problem that these five organisations had; they were not talking to each other. When I came in and saw that the left hand did not know what the right hand was doing, that is why I am saying, why should we duplicate projects when we have already invested in those projects. Again, I am heading towards that direction as well.

On crop diversification, in Thailand we realised that when the sugar price is low, they go and plant cassava. That was what I saw but currently sugarcane prices from last year is good so they went back to cane. But we cannot basically encourage them to go into cassava otherwise Labasa Mill will close in no time.

On the soil conditions, yes, that problem we have come to know. We have to encourage farmers to add aglime but they are not willing to because it will cost them extra money. They are expecting the Government to give it free.

Mr. Speaker, from last year, Professor Santiago Mahimairaja (CEO), he tried to promote that. So, when we went out to the farms to talk to the farmers, they said that they could not afford \$25. So, we had to look at another set of subsidies; honourable Kamikamica, you are laughing. Another thing, honourable Kamikamica said yesterday about the balance sheets of FSC.

I would like to inform Parliament today that for the first time FSC will present its 2024 balance sheet by September (the closing period is June). Just another information, FSC's balance sheet was very weak and no bank was willing to touch it because of what had happened; FSC's valuation of assets was 15 years old so we revalued FSC's properties. It has jumped from \$190 million to \$600 million which will be reflected in the balance sheet and, of course, the Government has written off \$200 million of that. So, come the next balance sheet, honourable Kamikamica you will be very happy to see. That does not mean that the balance sheet is right, we lose our interest on the farm itself. We have to work hard to make it possible. So, now with the balance sheet, I am pretty sure all the local banks will be willing to lend money to us.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to support the motion on the Consolidated Review Report of the Sugar Research Institute of Fiji 2016 to 2021 Annual Reports. As we delve into the details of these Reports,

I would like to underscore the critical role SRIF has in our sugar industry.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the SRIF stand as a sole Sugar Research Institute in Fiji. Its contribution ranges from the development of 19 commercial sugarcane varieties towards advancement in crop improvement, pest and diseases management, soil health research mechanisation and sustainable farming practices. These initiatives are crucial for the increase in productivity ensuring the long term resilience of the sugarcane sector.

The Ongoing Research Innovation provided by the SRIF have equipped our farmers with necessary tools and knowledge to navigate the challenges posed by the climate change, market fluctuations and other external factors.

I would like to extend my appreciation to the recently appointed CEO, Dr. Vinesh Kumar whose proactive approach has been instrumental in disseminating critical information on the sugarcane varieties, pest and disease management and best farm practices to our farmers.

Just two weeks ago, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I had the pleasure of immigrating the Wairuku Pest and Disease Station and Cane Breeding Section in Dobuilevu. These initiatives reflect Dr. Kumar's commitment and the institute's dedication to providing good services to our farmers. As elaborated in the Report, we recognise the necessity of establishing a formal Key Performance Indicator (KPI) with Research Institute of Fiji and are actively working towards this goal.

This KPI is part of the broader initiative to create a comprehensive Fiji Sugar Industry Strategic Plan that involves all stakeholders. Our commitment is to implement smart KPIs and regular monitoring mechanisms to ensure accountability and effectiveness across all operations.

Furthermore, we support a clear demarcation of roles between the Sugar Research Institute and Sugar Corporation. SRIF will focus on science, extension and advisory service while FSC will concentrate on milling and sugar marketing. This clear division is aimed to improve efficiency and streamlining operations. Additionally, we endorse the transfer of Field Officers from FSC to SRIF to enhance the Institute's capacity to provide consistent research-based guidance to farmers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our Ministry is fully committed to implementing these recommendations and develop strategies for the industry's betterment. We acknowledge the challenges but remain steadfast in our efforts to enhance the performance and sustainability of the sugar industry.

We will continue to work closely with all stakeholders, including the Opposition, so that we can achieve our shared goals. Based on those remarks, I support the motion.

HON. RATU J.B. NIUDAMU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I support the motion before the House, I wish to share in this august House my personal experience, in realising the existence of such institutions, like the Sugar Research Institute of Fiji (SRIF).

Recently, I was invited to the commissioning of an accommodation facility of SRIF Dobuilevu Cane Breeding Station in Ra, together with honourable Matasawalevu, where the honourable Minister commissioned this Station.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this station is the birthplace of all 19 cane varieties that were released in Fiji. Currently, the Station has a germplasm consisting of 727 varieties, collected over the years around the world. I was told that it takes around 12 to 15 years to release a cane variety. It is a hard and dedicated work, and I want to thank the dedicated scientists and technician who camped at this site for 7 months to make sure that the sugar industry continues to have improved varieties of cane

that gives us good sugar, resistant to pests and diseases, as well as remain productive amid climate change.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I stand to fully support the recommendation of the Standing Committee, especially on the need for extension services of FSC to be under SRIF, as alluded to earlier by the honourable Leader of Opposition and I am grateful that the honourable Minister for Sugar has informed the House.

The FSC by far, Mr. Speaker, has too many problems on its own. It should remain focussed on its core business and that is milling. Let SRIF handle the extension services.

Recently, I have seen in the papers, and I was personally told as of now by the honourable Minister for Sugar about the opening of the new pest and disease screening facility at Wairuku in Rakiraki. It will also be a hub for technology transfer. This is exciting times for sugarcane farmers in Ra, as we hear about the plans of opening a new mill in Rakiraki, not only for sugar but other sugarcane products.

I would like to thank SRIF its new local CEO, Dr. Vinesh Kumar, and his dedicated team of mostly local scientists for their hard work.

I fully support the recommendation of the Standing on Economic Affairs and I fully support the motion before Parliament.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, with your permission, Sir, let me take this time to pay tribute to two of my colleagues in the Tourism and Civil Aviation, who have recently left us. Firstly, Mr. Eliki Kaumaitotoya of Kabara, who was one of the first trainee engineers with Qantas back in those days. He became an aircraft engineer, came back to Fiji, served with Qantas, and he was one of the founding members for ATS which is now a well-established organisation with the shareholding built by the Government and the workers.

Eliki had served as chairman of CAAF and did a great job in ensuring that CAAF lived up to its Charter. He was a person known for the standards that he set, and we pay tribute to him for his contribution to tourism and civil aviation.

Secondly, Mua Ieli Taukave, has also passed away. A true son of Fiji and Rotuma, a dear friend who played a big role in Air Pacific back in those days from the 1970s and until recently, he was managing the Rotuma Airport. So, I would like to ask the House that we pay tribute to these two larger than life personalities, who have contributed so much to tourism and aviation in Fiji.

Still on Aviation, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I just wish to share with the House with great joy that the negotiations with the Americans in terms of the service to Dallas has now been approved and Fiji Airways should be flying to Dallas on 10th December, 2024. So, that is quite significant.

As we know, the Americans would only talk to us if we liberalise our aviation policy which we did. Cabinet approved the liberation and dialogue with the Americans started in December last year in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Now, it is approved, and the service to Dallas will be on 10th December so within 12 months, we are able to negotiate and have Fiji Airways fly to Dallas. So, it is the execution, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in terms of the Sugar Research Institute of Fiji, I am very passionate about Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) and sugar is a significant feedstock into the production of aviation fuel. I would like to see FSC thrive so that Fiji can produce its own aviation fuel, going

forward, being a country that relies on aviation come tourism.

As you look at the report here, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I noticed a very significant statement here, where SRIF says, and I quote, "...it is not about increasing the size of land but increasing productivity", which in this case is yield.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for Fiji, the yield is 47 tonnes per hectare whereas the global standard is 90 tonnes per hectare. In Labasa, when we did the consultation on the Sugar Bill, in Labasa around the Waiqele Airport area, there is a farmer there, who was yielding about 130 tonnes per hectare. In Nadi, there is a farmer who is doing 150 tonnes per hectare. So, given the size of the amount of land that is available for cane farming, if you increase the yield, we can easily reach our target. We need about 3.5 million tonnes to produce ethanol. So, we need to reach that, we need to go to 3.5 million tonnes to enable us to really produce sufficient ethanol for SAF. So, from aviation perspective, this is very, very important and I would like to see this happen.

What is being shared today by the honourable Leader of the Opposition and the honourable Minister for Sugar, the extension arm, role of SRIF, I think we should encourage that. It is also mentioned here in the Report, Mr. Speaker, Sir, on their long-term establishment of business arm of SRIF. If they can do that, Sir, I believe we can do 3.5 million tonnes of sugar and reuse sufficient ethanol for aviation.

I do not want to visit the old days, Mr. Speaker, Sir, but remember when you were sitting on the other side, we pleaded for a bipartisan committee to look into sugar, but we were told to go and fly kites. They could not agree to include us in a bipartisan committee. That was eight years ago, we were pleading with them. But now, with the new way of leadership, we are more inclusive, let us work together to make this happen.

I am quite encouraged by what I see here with SRIF, the technology we can introduce and to fully manage the work of SRIF, extend to the cane farmers to produce the cane crop that we want. I am quite pleased with the recent announcement by the honourable Minister that the focus will be on Sigatoka to increase production.

Nadroga/Navosa are also big in sugar production. It was only possible, Mr. Speaker, because of the efficient rail network. You know you have this main trunk and then it goes right into the valleys. A company was picking their crop right on their doorstep and that is how my Province was able to be a huge part of sugarcane crop.

I would like to see more of that to come back. It is unfortunate we did not repair the Sigatoka Bridge, but you need to go into areas like my Province of Nadroga/Navosa and Ra to enable us to make that target.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am quite encouraged by the SRIF Report. I think it can be done with commitment and new systems, scientists and all that running the show, we should be alright. So, I support the Report.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the Sugar Research Institute of Fiji was one of the top research institutions in the world. That is when we were working very closely; all the stakeholders with the industry.

As alluded to by the honourable Leader of the Opposition, Extension needs to do thriving work. The Extension Officers, the area, vehicle and everything and they were fully backed by the Industry. You had good educated people in their Extension Division, as apart from the Field Officers

for the milling area. When these two combine well, things work out well for the Industry.

Then you have a very robust sugar industry with the growers, and the landowners were slowly stepping into their area of getting direct deductions straight from the industry whenever there was a cane payment. So, everyone benefited, right down to the landowners. We at iTLTB knew quite well. That was when Deo Charan Singh was the Accountant with FSC in Lautoka. He was later posted to Brussels, and I do not know where he is now. So, those were the days when SRIF was really up there - top notch.

Honourable Members, I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs to speak in reply.

HON. S. TUBUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would just like to add into what you have just said on research. Of course, I agreed that there was quite a lot of research being undertaken with SRIF. When we went there, they were discussing the findings and, of course, they improved the varieties that they have.

However, one of the problems that we noted from the Committee, is the low uptake of the new varieties. This is where we see the need to review the overall structure of the industry. You have heard yesterday that I alluded to the cane payment system. Farmers will only improve their variety if they are being paid. If they are not sufficiently paid, then they will not improve their varieties.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the issues that has been raised by the honourable Leader of the Opposition is on diversification. There has been quite a lot of work already done by farmers. With the assistance of the Ministry of Agriculture, some farmer groups are already established.

Last week, I was at Nubutautau and this farmer group from Sabeto came all the way there to train the villagers in planting bongo chillies. This co-operative, the New Valley Co-operative, they are based at Sabeto, they will be purchasing all those bongo chillies that will be planted by the people in the highlands. So, it is already happening, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Of course, with the Ministry of Environment, we are developing a new project under the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) and, of course, with Ministry of Agriculture on a \$20 million project to target Vanua Levu on diversification. If you can do it in Vanua Levu, as the honourable Leader of the Opposition had just said, then we can upscale it into Viti Levu. Try to do it on a small scale, then upscale it on a big scale. Of course, the honourable Leader of the Opposition will be happy about what we are trying to do there.

The honourable Leader of the Opposition has mentioned about the social responsibility of Government. Of course, we have the social responsibility, but we also have to look at the economic benefits and cost to the people of this country. I think, over time, we have been subsidising this industry for long and we need to look at the economic costs and benefits.

The honourable Deputy Prime Minister yesterday, mentioned about the elephant in the room and I totally agree with him on that. The elephant in the room in Fiji politics is the sugar industry.

Of course, there is also the Greek mythology of the Pandora's box. I think the Pandora's box in Fiji politics is the Fiji sugar and I think it is time to open the box now, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

I would like to thank the honourable Members for their contribution, and I do support the motion before the House.

MR. SPEAKER.- You were quick to point towards the Leader of the Opposition, but you should have declared your interest too, especially for Vanua Levu.

(Laughter)

Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote to note the content of Report.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, that brings us to the end of our sitting today. First of all, I must thank the honourable Deputy Speaker for presiding in my absence during yesterday's afternoon session and I thank all of you for your contributions. I like this debate on the sugar industry. It was after a while then we started getting factual arguments here, which was really good, and I encourage you. I thank you all for those great contributions.

Parliament is now adjourned until tomorrow at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 6.39 p.m.