

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

FRIDAY, 9TH AUGUST, 2024

[CORRECTED COPY]

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FRIDAY, 9TH AUGUST, 2024

The Parliament met at 9.50 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 Tourism and Civil Aviation; the honourable S.T. Koroilavesau and the honourable S. Nand.

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Thursday, 8th August, 2024, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE SPEAKER

Welcome

I welcome all honourable Members to this final sitting for this week. I also welcome those sitting in the gallery, *bula vinaka*. I acknowledge the presence of Mrs. Kamikamica and Ms. Makereta Waqavonovono. I also welcome all those joining us in the gallery and those watching the proceedings on television and the internet. Thank you for your continued interest in the proceedings of Parliament.

2024 Women's Mock Parliament

Honourable Members, last week, we conducted the 2024Fji Women's Mock Parliament after a lapse of seven years. Under the direction of the Steering Committee, 58 women were chosen from a total of 140 applications received. The number gave us an indication that women are eager to take up leadership positions and participate in our democratic processes.

The Women's Mock Parliament gave them the opportunity to learn more about parliament, its key functions and procedures, the important role of Parliamentary committees and understanding some key policy issues.

Some of us sat in the gallery during their debates and it was encouraging to hear the issues discussed and the research done by these women in the short time given to them. I am amazed of the confidence that they portrayed, their poise and how they delivered. These kinds of opportunities, if provide, more women will participate in the democratic and decision-making processes, and they will become change makers in their communities.

I also acknowledge the generous support of the governments of Australian, Japan and New Zealand through the UNDP under the Fiji Parliament Support Project towards the Women's Mock Parliament, and given that the project is not permanent, I call on the Government through the Ministry of Finance to acknowledge the significance and importance of such an activity and therefore support Parliament's budget submission for such events in the future.

Review of Membership of Committees

Honourable Members, as I had alluded to on Monday, I have now undertaken a review of the membership of the six Standing Committees and the four Select Committee to ensure fair representation of the two working groups or blocs in the Opposition. Please, take note of the changes as follows of the Standing Committees.

Standing Committees

- (1) Standing Committee on Public Accounts
Honourable N.T. Tuinaceva will replace honourable Hem Chand
Alternative Members - honourable T.R. Matasawalevu and honourable Hem Chand
- (2) Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights
Honourable J. Usamate will replace honourable Ratu J.B. Niudamu
Alternate Members - honourable A.N. Tuicolo and honourable S.T. Koroilavesau.
- (3) Standing Committee on Economic Affairs
Honourable Aliko Bia will replace honourable S.T. Koroilavesau
Alternate Members - honourable V. Nath and honourable N.T. Tuinaceva
- (4) Standing Committee on Natural Resources
Honourable S. Nand will replace honourable J.N. Nand
Honourable T.R. Matasawalevu will replace honourable J. Usamate
Honourable K.V. Ravu will replace honourable I.S. Vanawalu
Alternate Members - honourable V. Lal and honourable A.N. Tuicolo
- (5) Standing Committee on Social Affairs
Honourable I.S. Vanawalu will replace honourable A.V.B.C. Bainivalu
Honourable I. Naivalurua will replace honourable P.K. Bala
Alternate Members - honourable S. Kumar and honourable P. Ravunawa
- (6) Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence
Honourable R.R. Sharma will replace honourable I. Naivalurua
Alternate Members - honourable J.N. Nand and honourable A.N. Tuicolo

Select Committees

- (1) Business Committee
Honourable I. Naivalurua will replace honourable F.S. Koya

Following the amendment of the Standing Orders on the Membership of the House Committee, the Whips of each Party will now be represented on the Committee.

- (2) House Committee
Government Whip, honourable A.V.B.C. Bainivalu;

National Federation Party Whip, honourable P. Tikoduadua;
SODELPA Whip, honourable I. Vasu
Group of 16 Bloc Whip, honourable J. Usamate;
Group of 9 Bloc Whip, honourable V. Naupoto.

(3) Standing Orders Committee

Group of 16 Bloc Whip, honourable J. Usamate
Group of 9 Bloc Whip, honourable V. Naupoto

(4) Privileges Committee

Honourable Ratu J.B. Niudamu will replace honourable F.S. Koya

Thank you Honourable Members and we will proceed to the next item.

HON. J. USAMATE. - Point of Order.

MR. SPEAKER.- Yes.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would just like to raise a Point of Order on Standing Order 114(4). This is a Point of Order and also a dissenting motion. The Standing Order 114(4) reads:

“Each party is, as far as possible, entitled to be represented on each standing committee in a way that fairly reflects that party’s representation in Parliament.”

In Standing Order 4, in the Definition of party, Standing Order 4(2) allows:

“... three or more independent members who have formed a working relationship for the purposes of participating in parliamentary business in relation to which these Standing Orders ... must be treated as a party...”

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank you for allowing us to remain here as Independent Members of Parliament and for allowing us to work in different blocs that we have decided to be in the bloc on our side, the bloc of 16 and the bloc of 9. We really thank you from the bottom of our hearts. But in Standing Order 114, it is clear that it says, the intent of this is representation in Standing Committees should be proportional to the party’s representation in Parliament. In this case we are not a party, we are just a bloc, but if you look at the totality of the Opposition Independent Members, we are a total of 26. If we look at the percentage in that 26 that comprises of the Group of 16, we make up 61.5 percent.

I would submit, Sir, in accordance with this Standing Order that the proportion of places in Standing Committees for this bloc of 16 should be 61.5 or close to 62 percent, and that is the ground on which I am making this Standing Order. I do not know how else to suggest it in accordance with the Standing Orders.

MR. SPEAKER.- I thank you for raising that issue again. That has been raised with me by honourable Koya several times because of the numbers, but again, let me make myself very clear here. Before all this happened, I had written a letter to each and every 26 honourable Member for you to decide when the axe falls from the Supervisor of Elections on the deregistration, what would you choose yourself to be, either you become an Independent or you join other political parties. All of you decided, some wrote to me, some stated during their participation of the debate in the House that all elected to be Independents.

By being Independent, honourable Usamate, you are not a political party. By operation of law, you have decided. You came in through the party system but by operation of law, you are now deemed as Independent. So as such, we have played it our level best to see how we can have you all participating effectively in these Standing Committees, et cetera.

First of all, I have decided that you all remain Independent, and you become the blocs - Bloc 16 and Bloc 9, and each of you select your Whip, even your Leader and most of all, it has to have the written approval of all your Members. The 16 I have received with the exception of one, honourable Alvick Maharaj, who is still pursuing his case of appeal with the Supervisor of Elections. The rest, you are all Independent and you are categorised according to your wish, you go with the 9 or the 16, and I hope if we could stay that way until we finish this term. It is a bit difficult for us, but we just have to make do with whatever is there to help us decide on the best course that you maintain the way you think and the way you want to decide as well as the Group of 9.

Sometimes I hear that it is good, that you have agreed to come together. You have even agreed to come together during the Business Committee in sharing the questions, that is the way to go because effectively, you all come from one party, but as I stated, by operation of law, when the Supervisor of Elections has to deregister the party, it is the voters that put you in Parliament, you are not sacked from Parliament. You are still a Member of Parliament, but you now work in groups because you cannot be working together as one, even though you came through one party, but this is how you operate. That again, is democracy. You are just showing the true colours of democracy that exist now, otherwise this would not have happened.

Maybe we could be going for a by-election for all the 26 seats and that will not happen because that is the way I see as you being deemed Independent. When you came through, you came through FijiFirst Party, but the stage of events has happened, so you are now still in the House as Independent under the two working groups. I hope you can continue to work together. That is all my reply to you honourable Usamate and also for the queries being raised by honourable Koya to me after the Business Committee. I hope that provides a satisfactory answer to all your queries about who you are now in the House.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, can I raise another matter?

MR. SPEAKER.- Yes.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for your explanation....

MR. SPEAKER.- Usually honourable Usamate, the directive given by the Speaker is not questionable. If you want to question, take it to the Courts. I made that decision, but I am allowing it, since I want to encourage more conversation. What is your next point?

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Sir, for your magnanimity in allowing me to just ask this question. The question, Mr. Speaker, Sir, my understanding, forgive me for my ignorance if I am wrong, is that the honourable Leader of the Opposition would be the one that would nominate the people to take up the seats in the Standing Committees, so in this particular case, is that still in order or is that no longer in order?

MR. SPEAKER.- In the Standing Committees, the honourable Leader of the Opposition was elected through the Constitution and that was done in this august House. By virtue of that, he still maintain his seat because none of you have come forward with the suggestion that you change it. That is the only way we will change it - in the House. But inasfar as his role, that is now being kind of curtailed by that operation of law, you are all deemed as Independents including him, but by virtue

of him being selected or elected in the House under the Constitution, he still maintains his Leader of the Opposition. The rest, you and I can understand, it is a bit difficult for him to continue in that regard when the rest of the Members are all regarded as Independent. Am I making myself clear?

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Yes, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- Anyone else is still not clear of who they are right now in the House?

(Laughter)

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND CERTAIN DOCUMENTS

The following reports were tabled by the Ministers responsible in accordance with Standing Order 38(1), and referred to the relevant Standing Committee for deliberation, in accordance with Standing Order 38(2):

Standing Committee on Social Affairs

- (1) Fiji Airways Annual Report 2023 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 114 of 2024*)
- (2) Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport Annual Report 2017–2018 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 118 of 2024*)
- (3) Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport Annual Report 2018–2019 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 119 of 2024*)
- (4) Fiji Roads Authority Annual Report 2019–2020 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 60 of 2024*)
- (5) Fiji Roads Authority Annual Report 2020–2021 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 61 of 2024*)
- (6) Land Transport Authority Annual Report 2017–2018 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 115 of 2024*)
- (7) Land Transport Authority Annual Report 2018–2019 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 116 of 2024*)
- (8) Land Transport Authority Annual Report 2019–2020 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 117 of 2024*)
- (9) Lautoka City Council Annual Report 2015 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 70 of 2024*)
- (10) Lautoka City Council Annual Report 2016 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 71 of 2024*)
- (11) Lautoka City Council Annual Report 2017 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 72 of 2024*)

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

Assistance to the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
(Question No. 149/2024)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Agriculture and Waterways inform Parliament on the types of assistance the Ministry can provide to the public to assist in the prevention of cruelty to animals?

HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for the question.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, animal ownership comes with responsibility, practised with the five principles of animal freedom. This was developed in 1965 by the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) and widely recognised. The five Freedoms described society's expectations for the conditions animals should experience when under human control, namely:

1. Freedom from hunger, malnutrition and thirst;
2. Freedom from fear and distress;
3. Freedom from heat stress or physical discomfort;
4. Freedom from pain, injury and disease; and
5. Freedom to express normal patterns of behaviour.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is rather unfortunate to observe that as a result of owner's negligence, animals are vulnerable to mistreatment by the public and often results in animal straying on to plantations, causing damages to crops, as well as getting involved in vehicle accidents on the highway.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Protection of Animals Act 1954 requires a comprehensive review due to its outdated provisions. For example, the minimum fine for offenders is set at \$10. Additionally, it is important to note that Fiji currently lacks an Animal Welfare Act.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry advocates responsible animal ownership by raising awareness, ensuring animal identification through licensing, or branding and ear tagging, as well as installing fencing and providing sufficient feed, water and nutrition.

To ensure the safety of the public, a programme to capture stray animals is currently underway by the Ministry to manage stray animals, primarily, addressing those that pose a threat to agricultural land, roadways and human safety.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry works closely and supports the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) with financial grants to handle cases that are reported to them and are mostly targeted at pets. These are for the treatment of sick and injured dogs and cats, as well to desex them, to control the population of strays. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, in fact, I would like to thank honourable Naupoto for raising this question. We have SPCA, we have the Greater Good Animal Sanctuary, and we have another one in Nadi as well, the Animal Fiji, and they have gone around and done a lot of spay and neuter programmes.

I have seen the budget, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that the stray animal campaign has an increase allocation from \$430,000 to \$530,000. Could the honourable Minister inform Parliament, and I am sure a lot of people are listening too, but I agree with the honourable Minister that the cruelty begins from those pet owners when the pets are babies, they give the babies out, I mean, the babies are thrown in the rubbish dump, which has been some of the cases. The cruelty begins from there and it comes down to authorities and authorities get blamed for this.

So, with that new allocation, can the honourable Minister highlight in Parliament on some of the initiatives or partnerships with these organisations in going forward to prevent cruelty to animals, especially stray animals?

MR. SPEAKER.- This has been a very long and outstanding issue because most of the farmers out there in the rural areas, they have now gone to the extent of buying fences to fence off their vegetable gardens, et cetera, from stray animals.

Most of those stray animals started off as pets but slowly, they become a nuisance to the people, especially in the rural areas. That is why the Government has set aside funds for them to shoot down all these animals. Either, they are taken to an animal pound, I hope you understand a pound because you come from the rural area. They put them there until the owner goes there and claims the animals and they have to pay a certain kind of fee to get their animals out. So, I have allowed your supplementary question to go, but let us hear from the honourable Minister for Agriculture.

HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the issue of stray animals, like you have said, has been a longstanding one. Sometimes, I personally feel sorry for the farmers, especially livestock farmers, because when there is a dog attack, they lose hundreds of animals - goats, sheep or cattle. So, for a livestock farmer, that has been a lifetime achievement to get those numbers up to that level and for a few stray dogs to just to come in, attack the flock and then kill those many numbers, it is quite disheartening, to say the least.

The question here is, which one is more important, to protect the stray dog or protect the livestock farmers who contribute to the livelihood of this country? The gist of the whole matter is that, when you own an animal, learn to be a responsible owner. That is the gist of the matter.

What I have stated in my earlier answer, feed your animal, look after them because they are just like you. We are all part of the animal kingdom, anyway. When you do not look after them, they will go somewhere else, they will start hunting for their own food, after all, that is what they were made out to be, especially dogs. So, do not get me wrong, dogs are very, very smart animals. We have placed cages and we have observed how dogs react to cages. One will walk and lift up the back, the other one will go, bite the bait, get it out and then the big one comes up. They are very smart. And when they go in packs, that is the most dangerous one because they will go into a livestock farm, they will find a real nice place to observe the movement of the animals and the owners of the animals, then when everything is set, they will attack.

This is what we, in the Ministry of Agriculture, especially livestock officers go through. So I take my hats off to them for operating within very challenging circumstances. Then there are the Acts. Most of them are archaic, and the Pound Act is one of them. We are working on the review of the Pounds Act and like many other Acts that contribute to the control of stray animals, we need to review them as fast as possible so that, at least, it can cover our backs when it comes to the stray animals' issue.

Then you have the pet lovers, animals' rights, and I know they love their animals but at the end of the day, when stray animals start attacking livestock, that is when we do not see eye to eye.

MR. SPEAKER.- I still want to elaborate more because this is honourable Naupoto's passion - stray animals in the urban areas. However, out in the rural, it is a different thing.

They are trying to encourage sheep farming, especially in Taveuni, but the problem is stray dogs. Dogs are smart animals, and they operate, just like they had been taught, and that is through their dire need of food. They kill the sheep, drink the blood and leave the carcass out there. So it becomes a very horrific kind of way to finding food because they only drink the blood and leave the carcass out there.

Also, in the beef farming in Yaqara, the dogs are smart. They know how to lead the animals down a steep cliff for them to fall and they pick the animal down from the bottom of the cliff. I think this is the umpteenth time that you have raised this in the House, honourable Naupoto, but I

just ask you to liaise with the relevant bodies out there - SPCA, just to ensure that that particular animal that you want to be looked after is taken care of.

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir , if I can just ask a very quick supplementary and a plea; he mentioned that Fiji lacks an Animal Welfare Act, and if there is no plan to bring in that Act right now, I plead with the Government if you can work on an Animal Welfare Act and bring it to this House.

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you, so let us leave it at that.

HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- Yes, Sir.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, just one question. Given the responses by the honourable Minister for Agriculture, I am wondering, is it then the Government's position if we have stray animals, we should just eradicate them?

HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- May be, if you become Minister for Agriculture someday, but not under my watch. We will have to consider the animal welfare societies. Even one time when I was interviewed, then out of frustration I said, "Shoot", but that was after receiving complaints after complaints. But really, we have to consider the animal welfare societies.

MOU Between Fiji and International Peace Institute
(Question No. 150/2024)

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE 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 Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of Fiji and the International Peace Institute?

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- I thank the honourable Vakalalabure for his question. Mr. Speaker, Sir, Cabinet, on 15th July of this year, approved the execution of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Government of Fiji, through the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, and International Peace Institute (IPI).

The MOU focuses on building Government capacity and strengthening its institutional arrangements, to ensure that we have the capacity to effectively engage in international climate change negotiations through trainings and workshops facilitated by the International Peace Institute in preparation for the 29th Conference of Parties (COP 29) in Baku, Azerbaijan.

As the honourable Leader of the Opposition had implored us to do this week and to be prepared well for the COP29, I hope he is preparing well, because he will again be part of the delegation or he may delegate someone to go on his behalf.

The MOU is intended to focus on several areas of cooperation and capacity building through stakeholder meetings and negotiations training, including climate actions, climate change advocacy and communications, negotiations related to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), organisation support and participation in mission aligns climate action meetings and events, development of select communication documents and activities, provision of advice on ways to strengthen the response of the multilateral system to the climate emergency and institutional strengthening support and capacity building.

Some may ask, why IPI? Mr. Speaker, Sir, IPI has a track record in supporting Small Islands Developing States directly in negotiations and enable further potential to lead key elements of the process.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the IPI and its academic partner - University of Pennsylvania, were involved supporting the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) in our efforts to establish a new fund, and funding arrangements for Loss and Damage. One of our Ambassadors stationed in Jakarta now is instrumental in the formulation also for the promotion of the Loss and Damage funds.

It is a non-profit think tank closely associated with the United Nations and focus on addressing most pressing issues affecting international peace and security, advising both, member States and UN Secretariat of policy issues, and in a non-partisan way.

Sir, through the IPI, we were able to leverage our leadership and representation in climate international forums, for instance, Fiji was appointed Co-Chair of G-77 and China Group for Global Goal on Adaptation, negotiate and track at COP 27, Fiji is also the AOSIS representative on the Board of the Fund for responding to loss and damages.

The relevance of the MOU, Mr. Speaker, Sir, given the continued increase in migration and skills shortages, the onus should always be on Government to continue training and upskilling our workforce. It is imperative for the Government to explore and consider such partnerships and opportunities to continuously strengthen institutional knowledge and capacity of our civil servants. This partnership with IPI will offer additional support in enhancing the knowledge, skills and capacities of our civil servants, who will represent Fiji as negotiators to extend their engagements, as the complexity of climate change negotiations continue to grow.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as a regional and global leader in addressing climate change, there is a need for a strengthened delegation that can meaningfully participate and engage in the negotiations process as well as promote national initiatives and the unified Pacific position.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the MOU will be signed on behalf of the Fiji Government by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change next month, September 2024. The MOU between Government and IPI is mutually beneficial to both parties. Following the signing, the IPI will commence its work as per the MOU in assisting the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change. The main focus after the signing in September will be to prepare our technical negotiators through inter-agency collaboration in the lead up to COP29.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, up to three fully funded IPI representatives will be able to join Fiji COPs delegation to provide flexible support to Fiji's climate change negotiators under guidance from the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji needs a strong delegation to continue building momentum as the regional and international leader in our effort to manage the inequality and the multitude of threats posed by climate change, not only to Fiji but to the Small Island States in the Pacific.

Through this MOU, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government stands to benefit from an arrangement and relationships that has been beneficial to many governments before us, and we aim to use that collaboration to further advance a strong and unified Pacific voice and position at the COP29.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, just a supplementary question to the honourable Prime Minister. Thank you indeed, honourable Prime Minister for the MOU with International Peace Institute. I understand that the IPI has been in existence since 1970. Unfortunately, they are still in

New York rather than moving out into the region and that will be my question, Sir. If there are considerations for asking IPI the possibility of perhaps moving into the region either Caribbean or even here in the Pacific because of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) issues in as far as climate change is concerned.

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, I thank the honourable Leader of the Opposition for that question. As one who was there from the beginning of the discussions and negotiations, I believe he will be in a very good position come next COP to be Head Negotiator in the move in trying to convince them of the need to shift their headquarters from where they are into one of the areas covered by AOSIS.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the honourable Prime Minister for his response to that particular question and highlighting the work of the International Peace Institute and the training of the people that negotiate at these treaties because what they negotiate, that ultimately will have an impact on us.

Mr. Speaker, I am just looking at the website for the IPI, I also noticed that they do a lot events and research. I am just wondering also, is that part of the understanding to try to get events organised by them and research that relate particularly to our climate challenges here to be conducted by Fiji.

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I can only assume that they are part of the formulation of those events that take part around the COP Conference. This year, it is going to be a lot on funding so the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance will be heading the Fiji delegation with the support of the honourable Leader of the Opposition and those that we feel will be able to actively participate in those negotiations.

Plans to Regularise Turmeric Prices
(Question No. 151/2024)

HON. A.N. TUICOLO asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-operatives, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications inform Parliament on plans to regularise the turmeric prices so that it can be a viable commodity for the local communities?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will probably use it as an opportunity to shed the House some light on where Government decided in terms of potential in the agricultural sector.

Firstly, Sir, the turmeric is emerging as a significant export for the country, according to the Bureau of Statistics provisional data. Fiji exports to United States of America, New Zealand, Australia, Canada, Singapore and Tuvalu. In 2023, was around \$24.8 million with an export value in terms of volume of 3, 216 tonnes. In 2022, it was \$21.6 million with about 2,500 tonnes.

Before COVID-19, this export was somewhat quiet and I believe during COVID-19, the turmeric emerged as somewhat of a lifesaver for the agricultural sector and was being exported to the US in quite significant volumes. The Ministry of Trade has a bit a theory in terms of agriculture, if we can identify 10 exports that generate about \$100 million in terms of export a year, that is a billion dollars in terms of opportunity.

Turmeric is certainly one of those products that has that opportunity. To the question that was

raised by the honourable Tuicolo, it is a good question, Mr. Speaker, and talks to a great question about how we support a non-sugar industry. Right now, the challenge with the farmers is that the price fluctuates. In terms of trying to maintain a living, ensuring that you get the right level of income from your effort, that has been a challenge with turmeric and some other product as well, Sir.

In terms of budgetary allocations, I know there are some allocations with the Ministry of Agriculture for turmeric, Sir, but nothing to regularise pricing. I am sure the honourable Minister for Finance will agree, going forward, it is perhaps something that the Government will need to consider, if we are to expand other sectors in the economy. Sugar does get assistance in terms of pricing, and it is only fair that the other products particularly products with good potential get some level of support as well, Sir.

Certainly, in terms of the Ministry of Trade, Sir, it is definitely on the radar as one of the top ten products that we are trying to sort of push. Of course, at the moment turmeric is grown wild and so there is a marketing around organic turmeric which is quite attractive, but there needs to be consideration around developing farms as well going forwards, Sir, so that we try and reach a greater target, say we go for \$50 million and then go beyond that in terms of export potential.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, honourable Minister the turmeric industry as you rightfully pointed out is actually quite a substantial industry around the world, I think it is about AU\$75 a kilogramme with respect to organic turmeric. My question is, if you are going to undertake this price issue that is being spoken about, will it be a comprehensive study done because there is a difference between the organic turmeric and also just the normal turmeric, and the export market into the US and Australia is actually quite huge. With respect to organic status, we do have a Fijian organic labelling. The certification currently, I think, only sits with Podcom. Will we be undertaking the proper certification through our own Ministry of Agriculture, I am wondering how far that has gone?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker Sir, the honourable Koya raises a good point in terms of study. There is now a commercial agriculture/aquaculture taskforce in the Ministry of Trade and what we have been doing is actually, once we identify a product that is of interest, we try and move ahead with some sort of study particularly depending on the products and turmeric is certainly one of them.

Right now, we are involved in a study for pineapple, we have just kick started one on kava as well through the assistance of Market Development Facility (MDF). What we are finding is they becoming quite a very good repository of assistance in terms of trying to align our commercial ambitions with some good strategy. It is on the card but we will circle back once the findings are known.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Honourable Deputy Prime Minister, you have mentioned organic, efforts were made in the previous years on the development of the Fiji organic standard. I do not know how far that has progressed. For now, without the Fiji organic standard, the price is better, but we are not hitting the premium price. One of the priorities is the completion of the Fiji organic standard so that after that, then we can graduate it into other standards that are recognised in the world market. So, how far have we progressed with the Fiji organic standard, honourable Deputy Prime Minister?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, right now, I cannot remember the name of the organisation but we are using an organisation for the Fiji organic for the branding. There is a Singaporean company in Fiji at the moment, they are experts in organic certification. We have had some initial discussions, and we will see where that progress is, but yes, the certification of organic is quite important. As you correctly point out, it does attract the premium pricing.

HON. A.N. TUICOLO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, my supplementary question, as alluded to by the honourable Minister that turmeric in Navosa grows wild. Most of these areas are only accessed by horse and foot and women and girls are the ones who are mostly engaged in the harvesting. When exporters come to buy, they only pick what they want, and the rejected ones are thrown away. Can the Ministry assist our farmers in finding other markets that will address this issue faced by the farmers?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- I will use the words of honourable Usamate, “absolutely, Sir”. N

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Hogwash.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Not hogwash.

(Laughter)

We will connect up, honourable Tuicolo, actually you have raised quite a few good points there and I can tell you that the Ministry of Rural Development and the Ministry of Agriculture have been actually quite active in creating rural roads and moving very fast. You would have heard the update by the honourable Minister for Rural Development on the significant number of roads that they have started doing over the last few months. I am sure we will try and connect up and assist. We are happy to have a look as well in terms of the access turmeric, I am sure there might be even a local market for it.

National Taskforce on Food Safety
(Question No. 152/2024)

HON. K.V. RAVU asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister for Trade, Co-operatives, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications update Parliament on the progress and activities of the National Taskforce on Food Safety?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I guess I normally get this by the other side of Parliament on the number of taskforces that Ministry of Trade has created. Let me assure Parliament that these are not idle taskforces, they are actually a reaction to issues that we find on the ground. For certain taskforces, such as the National Taskforce on Food Safety, my brief to them is, it is a limited timeline taskforce. Our job is to flush out the issues that we are currently facing in Fiji and hopefully look at the legislations, make changes and move on.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just allow me to elucidate a little bit on the progress and activities. Last year in October, we created the National Food Safety Taskforce which was really a reaction to a lot of reports that we were seeing on the ground and challenges faced by consumers. This is regarding modification of labelling, sale of near expiry items, importation challenges, food handling issues, distribution and storage challenges as well.

This taskforce, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is a very comprehensive taskforce. It involves all the key stakeholder agencies: Ministry of Health, Ministry of Fisheries, Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways, Biosecurity Authority of Fiji, Ministry of Local Government, Consumer Council of Fiji, Fiji Revenue Customs Service (FRCS) and Fijian Competition and Consumer Commission (FCCC) working together to try and flush out this issue.

We have finalised a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the agencies just to be very clear in terms of what we are trying to do, looking at the current legislation and promoting a lot more consumer engagement and collaborating with each other to ensure that food safety is paramount. Some of you might recall, quite recently there was a lot of inaccurate and deceptive labelling on some food products. So, the consumer watchdogs, which is FCCC and Consumer Council of Fiji have been actively talking to these misbehaving wholesalers and they are being dealt with.

We have also received a lot of complaints on imported tuna. The Pacific Fishing Company (PAFCO) came and met us and were quite concerned with the level of imported tuna. Some of the tuna entering the country, you can almost argue that it is not fit for human consumption. We are trying to target that as well through this taskforce and try and remove them off the shelves.

There is an elevated inspection process that has been going on for a couple of months now. The Consumer Council of Fiji, FCCC, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Local Government have been working together to start the monitoring of labelling, expiry, quality of food, and as a result, some shops have been reprimanded.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, recently as well, we have started trying to engage with the private sector directly. Just to sort of express the Government's concern perhaps, in terms of the food safety and beyond that. We are seriously looking at how we can strengthen laws to ensure that food safety which is paramount for our people is protected.

HON. J. USAMATE.- I thank the Deputy Prime Minister for his elaboration. I thought we were going to refer to him as the Minister for Taskforces, but as I was listening, I was thinking about the issues of food safety that have been something that has been around for a long time. I was thinking, a lot of the issues that you are raising - food labelling, the quality of food, the handling of food which has been covered by programmes, like Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP), et cetera, there are already existing legislations that cover this. So, is a matter of lack of execution of those, or is it lacunas in the law themselves that are allowing these things to filter through? What is the findings of the taskforce in these areas?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, as I have said, what we try to do immediately is escalate the level of scrutiny around the country which has happened just to make people aware that they cannot bring in substandard food into our country. The laws are still a bit weak, for example, I am told when Customs sees expired items that come into the country, they do not have any guidelines at the moment to stop them at the border. That is just a simple example of what we are dealing with. So, we intend to tighten up these laws and hopefully, in the next couple of months, I can bring forward possibly some regulatory changes or even legislative changes, to try and tighten up that whole area.

The bulk of the food safety monitoring sits with the Ministry of Health and I would just like to thank the Ministry for Health and Medical Services for collaborating with the other agencies because we do have inspectors in the Ministry of Trade, the FCCC, Consumer Council of Fiji and also Ministry of Local Government. Right now, we are trying to work together because obviously, if you hunt in a group, there is a lot more of it, so we are finding that quite effective and we will continue to do that.

I intend to have a meeting with some of the very big retail wholesale companies in Fiji soon, just to, sort of, continue the pressure of what we see in an endeavour to make sure that food safety concerns in the country are allayed.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- My question to the honourable Deputy Prime Minister, for agricultural products, two of the key issues are in as far as food safety is concerned is on the use of harmful chemicals and antibiotics with livestock. How does the taskforce look at addressing these issues?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Thank you for raising that, perhaps, it is something that I can talk to the Ministry of Agriculture about it. At the moment, our concern is more about the imported products into Fiji, but I do take your point on the concerns around getting substandard products from within Fiji as well.

Certainly, there is a significant issue around imported food items and the reason why we raise this question is just to ensure the House and also the people of Fiji that this Government is actually very serious in trying to do something about it. I think some of the retailers and large companies have been getting away with it, and that is going to stop.

MR. SPEAKER.- I remember quite well when we were in the Opposition, honourable Qereqeretabua brought up a case of tinned tuna that penetrated the market here in Fiji. It had quite a terrible smell that she produced that can of tuna in the House. Those are the examples of how there are existing gaps in the way we conduct ourselves by ensuring that nothing of this sort infiltrates our market, but there again that is a glaring example.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, just a quick question to the honourable Minister; what level of engagement do we have with the FAO, a UN agency, with respect to ensuring that we get this right in terms of our Food Safety Regulations, et cetera?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- We are not on the Taskforce, if that is the question, but certainly once we crystallise some of the issues that we are trying to deal with, we will certainly reach out to other agencies for help. But right now, I think we are managing well, there is a quite a bit of expertise on the ground and our priority is just to remove any inferior products from the shelves because our Fijians deserve better. *Vinaka*.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, while this Taskforce is operating to look into the safety of the food products that are imported in Fiji, there are also a concern by wholesalers and retailers that there are times when their product is already in Fiji, it is held back and not just for one or two days, the shipment is sometimes delayed to close to around 30 to 60 days and it goes into bond. When they have to pay for the bond fees and everything, the cost of the goods goes up. So, if the licence or approval can be given in the timely manner, the consumers will not be affected by the hike up in the price that is actually caused by the delay in the process. So, if they can also look at the process that is being followed to give the approvals to the wholesalers and importers in a timely manner would be very much appreciated, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- is that supplementary question is part of the initial one?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- It is bordering, Sir, on a new question but what I will say is that, I will take that on board as noted but in terms of complaints. What we are trying to do now is to attend to issues that are reported by the regulators, particularly FCCC and Consumer Council. That issue has not come up but we will take that on board and see what can be done.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I intend to adjourn Parliament now for morning tea. We will resume when the bell is sounded. Parliament is adjourned.

The Parliament adjourned at 11.02 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.36 a.m.

Investigation on the Ferries Wheel Incident
(Question No. 153/2024)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity and Workplace Relations update Parliament on the progress of the investigations on the ferries wheel incident a year ago?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank honourable Chand for that question. Let me begin by saying that there has been a lot of public interest in this matter and there have been questions raised outside Parliament. Despite us giving several progress reports, people have still been questioning and I am happy that it has come up here so that I can clarify this once and for all, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry, through the National OHS Service, completed the conduct of the full investigations into the ferries wheel accident that occurred on 30th June, 2023 at the Vodafone Arena during the showcase event.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the full Accident Investigation Report was compiled and submitted to the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions on 18th December, 2023. The Ministry had identified and filed the alleged breaches that contributed to the accident, in line with the Health and Safety at Work Act 1996 and its associated regulations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport also conducted their investigation on the mechanical components or engineering examination of the ride. The Fiji Police Force has been carrying out its own investigation as well.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, since the occurrence of the accident, the Ministry has given media updates on both, the preliminary and full investigations on 1st July, 2023; 8th July, 2023; 9th July, 2023; 18th August, 2023; and 15th June, 2024.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have been advised by the Office of the Director of the Public Prosecutions that we cannot release the full report to the media or to the public because it is a trialable case. That is why we have submitted it to the ODPP.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have been following up with the ODPP on the progress and have also followed up with the Fiji Police. The ODPP, as of this morning, had advised that they are still waiting for the Police to complete their investigation and hand over their recommendations to the ODPP. The Police, I know, is still investigating because our staff had been interviewed just in the last few days.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry has a stringent process of carrying out all inspections for all plants, equipment and machinery, including all amusement rides and structures. Prior to any amusement ride installation, the National OHS Service Inspectors go through the standard operating procedures on the design and layout of the rides at the proposed sites with the organisers of the amusement rides and the facility owners. This is to ensure that proper and adequate facilities, such as ground levelling, water, electricity supplies, traffic and public movements are in place.

This also includes the review and evaluation of rides to be used, especially in its structures and operation mechanisms. All ride owners must ensure the validity of the Non-Destructive Testing (NDT) certifications conducted by the Ministry prior to any installations, to ensure the integrity of all the load-bearing metals and structures.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the National OHS Service conducts initial ground inspections using standardised checklist for the right individual components, such as the transmissions, drives, seats, bolts and nuts, locks, pins, springs, lock washers, wires, fasteners, rollers, et cetera, to name a few. The rides, after its assembly, are then inspected again to confirm the functionality of all the components whereby checks are conducted on the operations of seats, safety bars, belts, pins and lock speed, transmission assembly, control devices, breaks and clutches, electrical wiring and lighting, isolation barriers, entry and exit points and emergency procedures.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the amusement rides are put through operational test, including load test. In addition to the above, relevant awareness and trainings are also conducted for the amusement ride owners, workers and operators. I wish to assure that all the rides are thoroughly inspected and tested prior to any operations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry has taken preventative measures to ensure that amusement ride owners, as part of their duty of care, protect their patrons from reasonably foreseeable risks created by their amusement rides when in operation. All rides are continued to be inspected to ensure that the rides are operating with all reasonable safety measures.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry ensures that all rides have been constructed properly and are in good condition. Amusement ride owners are also obliged, under the law, to provide and maintain plants and systems of work that are safe and without risk to anyone's health.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in preventing similar accidents and strengthening OHS compliance, the Ministry continues to ensure that the health and safety policies and procedures are in place to protect the workers and their patrons at all times, and set clear guidelines for patrons, such as any restrictions while on the rides and rules against reckless behaviour or any other unwarranted situation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in addition, my Ministry continuously provides the necessary health and safety awareness and training to all the amusement ride owners and their operators, as alluded to earlier. Mr. Speaker, Sir, unfortunately non-workers and in this case, the victims of the accident can only seek redress through civil action after the courts have convicted the persons responsible. This is in accordance with the current law. They are not covered by Accident Compensation Commission Fiji (ACCF) because they are not workers. We have also tried with all the insurance companies to get them to get insurance against accidents but unfortunately none of the insurance companies are prepared to ensure. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to assure this august House and the general public that the Ministry takes all possible actions to prevent mishaps of this nature within the provisions of the OHS laws.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, first of all I would like to thank the honourable Minister for the comprehensive Report. Family members of the victim and the public strongly criticise the manner in which this case has been handled. The family of the victim are still waiting for the justice and also for the report. Can the honourable Minister inform Parliament whether the machine was inspected before it was allowed to be used and was a certificate to this effect issued?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- That is the normal thing to be done, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I have alluded to earlier.

MR. SPEAKER.- It is still before the courts, Sir?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Yes, we leave it at that.

NDMO Partnership with Japan's QZSS
(Question No. 154/2024)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management update Parliament on the National Disaster Management Office partnership with Japan's Quasi-Zenith Satellite System for early warning system?

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you for this opportunity to address this august House on the Memorandum of Cooperation that was signed on the margins of PALM 2024. It is effective for three years with the National Space Policy Secretariat (NSPS) of Japan, a Government institution responsible for planning, designing and coordinating space policy and the development, maintenance and operation of the Quasi-Zenith Satellite System (QZSS) with our Government to improve our early warning systems. The honourable Prime Minister had stated this in his Report on the PALM trip earlier in the week.

In Fiji, the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management through the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) and the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources through their Seismology Unit are the key Government agencies responsible for managing National Disaster Risk Reduction and Disaster Management Activities related to tsunami.

Our mission is to ensure the safety and security of our nation against geological hazards. These three entities, the New Source Performance Standards (NSPS), National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) and Mineral Resources Department (MRD) have agreed to initiate cooperation in the field of emergency warning systems using the advanced QZSS technology, and through close consultation and collaborative activities, this partnership aims to significantly enhance our ability to respond to emergencies and protect our communities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the QZSS is renowned for its precision and reliability in providing real time data which is essential for effective disaster management. This partnership underscores our commitment to adopting innovative solutions to safeguard our nation against natural disasters.

Mr. Speaker, the Early Warning System Service (EWSS) disseminates crucial disaster and crisis management information from disaster management organisations to help prevent disasters. This include data on earthquakes and tsunamis transmitted by the Japanese Government's QZSS (Michibiki) which began operations in 2017. In 2018, the disaster and crisis report service was launched by QZSS to provide early warnings on hazards such as earthquakes, tsunamis and floods and to address communication challenges following significant disasters. The National Space Policy Secretariat initiated discussions to establish a National Committee to explore QZSS applications for disaster risk reduction.

This Committee includes experts in satellite technology, communication, DRR and disaster management and international affairs. Fiji was selected for feasibility studies to understand the Early Warning System and address technical challenges. The National Disaster Management Office is responsible for facilitating and managing disaster risk reduction activities, whereas the Mineral Resources Department serves as a National Tsunami Warning Authority. In 2019 after extensive discussions and site visits, Fiji and Japan agreed to formulate a Memorandum of Cooperation to

explore the use of QZSS in Fiji's Early Warning Systems. The National Committee reviewed the feasibility study results and devised a strategy for implementing this technology, demonstrating its application in Fiji using data provided by Nippon Telegraph and Telephone (NTT).

Mr. Speaker, Sir, some of the key activities of the National Committee are as follows - the NTT group will work in collaboration with NDMO and MRD to conduct demonstration campaigns, assessing the operational effectiveness of the EWSS in various emergencies scenarios. Responsibilities, the NTT group will conduct surveys, address technological standards and regulatory requirements, develop demonstration scenarios and prototype systems and cover costs related to labour, equipment, travel and accommodation for the Japanese team involve in demonstrations. They will also gather feedback from relevant organisations for further improvement.

On complementary data source in Fiji, the MRD relies heavily on the Pacific Tsunami Warning Centre for seismic information. Utilising the QZSS as a secondary data source will complement the PTWC data enhancing our ability to pinpoint wave arrival times and impact areas. Sir, MRD will provide technical advice to the NDMO allowing for simplified targeted public advisories or preparing for incoming tsunami hazards.

The QZSS, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is a satellite system that the Japanese Government uses and which we are privileged to be part of now. It only hovers over the Pacific, reaching only up to Japan and then coming back down to the Pacific, just South of Australia. That is the extent of where it goes, it does a figure eight movement around that area and that why it is very accurate in looking at wave patterns and all that kind of things, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The QZSS Early Warning System service, collaboration between the NDMO, MRD, National Space Policy Secretariat and Nippon Telegraph and Telephone group aims to enhance tsunami information, dissemination in Fiji through coordinated demonstrations.

These demonstrations will use different hazard scenarios to illustrate the operation of QZSS in coordination with NDMO and MRD. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this partnership is the testament of our commitment to leveraging advance technology and international cooperation to protect our citizens and enhance our disaster management capabilities. We all look forward to seeing the positive impacts of this collaboration and strengthen resilience of our two nations.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker, to the honourable Minister. I have acknowledged the Japanese Government for the assistance of the QZSS, but honourable Minister prior to this, there has also been an arrangement with the Japanese Government about the siren system to extend from Suva to Lautoka and if I remember correctly, probably down to Rakiraki. How far has that progressed, Mr. Speaker, Sir?

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the discussions regarding the extension of the early warning system, the sirens and the speaker system that we see up to Lami, discussions are continuing at the moment but there are some misgivings about the use of sirens at the moment in the national disaster management space. We have been having some bad experiences in some areas in Hawaii, when they had the fires. What they found was when they sounded the sirens, instead of them fleeing, they actually went towards the places they were not supposed to go. So, there are some explorations in how that can be mitigated in the future. In the area of disaster management, this is a topical issue at the moment, and we are seeing how other technologies can be used, maybe the use of mobile phones with personal messages being sent to each one of us to warn us of that.

I think in New Zealand, that is what they are preferring to do. We are in a flux at the moment, we are looking at how we are going to be progressing, but at the moment the Japanese Government has continued to progress the siren, the early warning system that they had committed to and it will

be going right up to Ra. I think that was stage 2 of the project. The discussions are continuing.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, a supplementary question. I thank the honourable Minister for his comprehensive answer, but I believe he has missed one thing, a national phenomenon such as earthquake, tsunami and volcanic eruptions.

My question to the honourable Minister is, there will be many challenges but the two challenges which we were discussing when we were in the Ministry was environmental and geographical challenges. Can the honourable Minister explain how will NDMO address this, have they got any plans to address these two phenomena?

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Can the honourable Member clarify that - what does he mean by environmental and geographical challenges? Can you just explain that further?

HON. V. NATH.- There are about nine challenges, it is data information management, environment and geographical challenges, coordination and complication challenges, public awareness, et cetera.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Question?

HON. V. NATH.- Geographical, Fiji is unique with its many islands and remote communities. It will definitely not give accurate information....

HON. V.T. RAYALU.- Question?

HON. V. NATH.- I already had asked the question, you wait, *wawa*. Because we have many islands, some of the remote areas will not be covered accurately. I am asking how will you cover that?

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is a good question but it is something that we are all working towards. It is going to be a fusion of all these technologies that we use. As I had mentioned, we can use mobile phones and if there are black spots that are being experienced, we can also use radio technology.

I think in just a last few sessions, we have heard of radio technology VHF and HF radios being used as well. These are the kind of technologies that we will be exploring to see how we can reach into the geographical nature of Fiji and how all the islands are scattered around the Pacific and that is how we hope to deal with that.

MR. SPEAKER.- It is quite difficult. It is an act of God, and it strikes us in seconds, whether you are waiting for the siren to be blown across to notify you that a tsunami is coming or what, it will be too late. Even coming down the steps of the three-storey building will be too late. So that is what they are doing.

(Honourable Opposition Member interjects)

MR. SPEAKER.- Trigger system - good. You have asked for the whole 300 islands; it is quite a challenge.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- We have got traditional systems.

MR. SPEAKER.- Like in Yasawas, they get notified when a tsunami or earthquake is about

to happen by the signs on the reef.

Progress of the Dairy Production Facility Project
(Question No. 155/2024)

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

With the Ministry having embarked on an initiative with investors from Israel to address large scale production technologies, can the honourable Minister for Agriculture and Waterways update Parliament on the progress of the dairy production facility project in the Central Division?

HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish the honourable Sachida Nand a quick recovery. The dairy industry in Fiji is encountering challenges, like low milk production, poor quality feed, lack of modern technology resulting in low productivity and a shortage of fresh milk supply. Moreover, there is a demographic change with numerous youths showing little interest in pursuing careers in Agriculture, which includes dairy farming. In addition, the dairy sector has been hit hard by the bovine brucellosis and tuberculosis diseases, drastically reducing the numbers of dairy cows in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the annual milk requirement in Fiji is around 77 million litres, whereas local farmers manage to produce approximately six million litres per year. The issue of low productivity is primarily due to the absence of modern technology and best practices. The continued use of hand milking and reliance on traditional methods also contribute to low milk yield per cow.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, despite the challenges at hand, there are opportunities to improve the sector and cater for domestic needs and decrease reliance on imports. This can be achieved through the creation of Public-Private Partnerships through investments of large producers that will bring in cutting edge, environmentally friendly technologies and sustainable methods for dairy production. Fiji's dairy sector has the potential to become a front runner in the Pacific region, boosting our exports to neighbouring islands and lessening the need for imports through this initiative.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is really a large-scale production technology project proposal currently under discussion with the Ministry of Finance, including the Israeli Government. However, there needs to be consensus on the interest rates proposed before the commercial agreement can be signed. The proposal is to establish an intensive dairy production facility at Navuso Agricultural Technical Institute.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the information of the House, the selection of the Navuso Agriculture Technical Institute was done in collaboration with the Israelis early this year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Dairy Co-Op Integration Project in Fiji aims to enhance the local dairy industry, through the creation of a sustainable 200 dairy cow farm, equipped with advance technology from Holland, Germany and Israel. The project includes a milking power, a 300-acre irrigated field for feed production and a modern milk processing plant.

The farm will implement an intensive scheme using an Israeli automated model system for management, providing real time data on health, fertility, milk quality and productivity. The goal is to establish a self-sustainable enterprise that produces premium dairy products for the local and international markets.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, learning from past experiences with the Fiji Dairy Limited Company, we

are of the hope to make improvements to the setup of the Israeli Dairy Facility. The Ministry looks forward to your support and anticipates that this Dairy Facility will be established soon.

HON. J. USAMATE.- I thank the honourable Minister for his reply. We are all familiar with the problems that we have with our dairy industry, its huge potential and the problems that had besotted it over the years. This issue was first brought up in the 2023-2024 Budget discussion and in June 2023, the honourable Minister had mentioned that it would be finalised in the next two weeks. We are now in July of this year, so can we have clarity from the honourable Minister as to when it is likely that this deal be signed so that we can progress?

HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- We are already into the commercial agreement, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and we are just ironing out, like I have said, the interest rates to be employed under the commercial agreement. The Israelis will be here by the end of the month.

The honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics is fully aware, and he is very supportive of the project. So, we anticipate having it off the ground this year.

MR. SPEAKER.- We are trying to do away with hand milking. Honourable Usamate, that is the idea, to bring in this Israeli development to help us because hand milking is not really taking out the full milk from the cow. That is why we are always short of milk all the time.

HON. V. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, in regards to the dairy industry, the dairy farmers in Fiji are struggling to get dairy animals for their farm and we cannot get animals from Australia and New Zealand due to various reasons. How is the honourable Minister planning to get dairy animals for this large-scale production?

HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member that question. We have a number of ways to get in animals and getting in live animals is what the honourable Member is talking about. With Australia and New Zealand, given the disease status, we have some diseases that we do not want to be brought into Fiji.

You will remember that the four breed that we currently have, one of them is the dairy breed, the Brown Swiss, and we brought those four breeds in through embryo transfer, which is quite safe when it comes to transferring zoonotic disease. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will skip Oral Question No. 156/2024 since honourable Vocea has made a withdrawal on that question because that has been fully covered by the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for External Trade, Cooperatives, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications in his earlier statement. We will now jump right to the ninth Oral Question for today, I see you smiling, honourable Premila Kumar.

HON. P.D. KUMAR- Sir, I am just exchanging smile with the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for External Trade, Cooperatives, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications.

(Question No. 156/2004 withdrawn)

Utilisation of \$2 Million - Village Improvement Scheme
(Question No. 157/2024)

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

Can the honourable Minister for iTaukei Affairs, Culture, Heritage and Arts update Parliament on the utilisation of the \$2 million allocation for the Village Improvement Scheme in the 2023–2024 Budget?

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

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government revived the Village Improvement Scheme (VIS) in the 2023-2024 financial year. A sum of \$2 million was provided in the Budget. The VIS has three components - Village Beautification, Sanitation and Community Hall.

The VIS was advertised and applications were assessed through the Cabinet-approved criteria by a Committee. Under that criteria, our Ministry approved 30 out of the 283 applications that was submitted to us. The applications are required to provide one quarter of the cost, with the Government giving the other three quarter.

The VIS 30 approved projects, there was 14 village beautification projects approved for:

- (1) Nasesara in Moturiki;
- (2) Vuya in Bua;
- (3) Vivili in Savusavu;
- (4) Levuka-i-Yale, Kadavu;
- (5) Navuti in Moturiki;
- (6) Cawaru in Udu, Macuata;
- (7) Nacokaika in Naitasiri;
- (8) Namuaira, Viria in Naitasiri;
- (9) Waikalou, Soloira, Naitasiri;
- (10) Tailevu, Matailobau, Naitasiri;
- (11) Waisomo, Raviravi, Beqa;
- (12) Namaqumaqua, Serua;
- (13) Naviti, Saivou, Ra;
- (14) Kiuva, Bau, Tailevu.

With the Village Sanitation Projects, we have seven, that is in:

- (1) Yaroi in Savusavu;
- (2) Vuya in Bua;
- (3) Yavulo in Sigatoka;
- (4) Navolau, Viria, Naitasiri;
- (5) Wainimakutu, Naitasiri;
- (6) Sawanivo in Ra; and
- (7) Lutu, Wainimala.

The Community Hall Projects, there was nine, and that is in:

- (1) Nakorotiki, Wainunu in Bua;
- (2) Soso, Naceva in Kadavu;
- (3) Muaninuku, Nabukalevu in Kadavu;
- (4) Nakavika, Wainikoroiluva in Namosi;
- (5) Matailobau, Naitasiri;
- (6) Nakorokula, Rakiraki, Ra;
- (7) Dakuni in Beqa;
- (8) Soliaga, Sawau in Beqa; and
- (9) Vuci, Tokatoka in Tailevu.

To-date, all the funds have been committed. The actual utilisation is \$1.7 million, we will utilise all, once the materials from the suppliers are delivered.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry continues to monitor all the projects. They should all be completed by the end of October 2024. *Vinaka vakalevu*, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, before we proceed further, just for housekeeping purposes and for the purposes of applying the Standing Orders with respect to sitting times, I now call upon the Leader of the Government in Parliament to move his suspension motion.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

HON. LEADER OF 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 12.30 p.m. today, to complete the remaining items listed on today's Order Paper.

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

HON. LEADER OF GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we still have one Oral Question and two Written Questions in front of us, and also for Schedule three, we have four- End of Week Statements, as well as the replies to that, so the need to extend the session.

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

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

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Sir, I do not have any further comments.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

QUESTIONS

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for his response to that question. My question is related to what he has just mentioned, that for village improvement and sanitation, the Team monitors until it is completed. My question to him is, once the improvements are made, how do you ensure that, that improvement continues and not that it reverts back to what it was before?

HON. I. VASU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, with the Village Improvement Scheme, what we have seen for the past few years is the deteriorating of the standard of our village. This programme, we will try and continue. Once you are being assisted, that is not the end of it. We will continue to make sure the overall village improves.

We the *Turaga ni Koro* and the *Nasi ni Koro*, whom we will be relying on to help us in maintaining. The actual reason behind this is, we need to improve the standard of living of our people

in the communities.

In the last two days, we have discussed about the ablution in the city and towns. We really need to look at that. If we need for them to come and use the public toilets in the towns, we need to improve those that are in the village. It is an issue for Fiji realistically. If we go anywhere, we have seen how clean is the public space, especially when everyone is using it. The Ministry of iTaukei wants to take it to the village level, to make sure they look after it, because that is very important.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, just a question to the honourable Minister on community halls. Given the experience in the past, community halls are used as evacuation centres. My question to the honourable Minister is on the standards and the plan, whether it goes through the same approval process in terms of housing, because previously we had community halls that collapsed, but they were used as evacuations centres? My question is basically on the standards of these community halls.

HON. I. VASU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is a good question. We have already discussed it with our team. From the next budget, we will not be touching community halls, it is just because of that. We need an engineer and a specialised team to look at the structure and things like that.

We will leave the community halls to the Ministry of Rural Development, and we will just take care of the small ones, because we do not have the expertise. But for the ones that we are doing now, we have advised the team to make sure the structure is done properly, but for the next one, we will leave it for the Ministry of Rural Development to take care of the community halls. We might just be doing the repair to make sure it is in a good standard.

MR. SPEAKER.- That is a good question. In my village in Somosomo, we take it upon ourselves to do the maintenance of all our meeting our houses, the Church and everything, because help from the Government should go elsewhere because we can do it on our own. That is how we should be ensuring that the small money that is set aside for such purposes is distributed to those who are really in need, especially when it comes to disaster centres. It is not easy, but we have been doing it for the last so many years.

We took a leaf from Buca Village in Natewa - Niko Nawaikula's village, and in Drekeniwai. They do their own fundraising to see that these village halls and churches are fully funded, because they also act as disaster centres. I think it is upon us, leaders, that we should be ensuring that we continue to forge ahead in this area without relying too much on Government funds.

Training Offered for PRB Tenants
(Question No. 158/2024)

HON. I. TUIWAILEVU.- Mr. Speaker, before I ask my question, I would like to wish the people of Fiji the Happy World Indigenous Day.

Can the honourable Minister for Housing and Local Government inform Parliament on the type of training offered to tenants of the Public Rental Board?

MR. SPEAKER.- Is that from SDGs - the World Indigenous Day? What do you mean by this, honourable Member?

HON. I. TUIWAILEVU.- United Nations.

MR. SPEAKER.- That is interesting. So, it is World Indigenous Day today. I think we should

be celebrating that and be happy as well as we live in a country that recognizes indigenous freedom, et cetera.

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Tuiwailevu for the question. The Public Rental Board (PRB) was established in 1989 to provide transitional rental housing accommodation to low income earners around the country. The PRB flats are rented out to low income earners at a very affordable weekly rate and they are assisted in annual Government funded rental subsidy assistance. In the last financial year, there were 813 families or tenants that were assisted with the Government subsidy of \$1.2. million.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, since the purpose of the flats are to serve as transitional flat for tenants, occupants or tenants are expected to exit the PRB flats after six years to allow others on the waiting list to be accommodated. The migrating tenants are expected to move into the new homes after six years in any PRB estate. Unfortunately, due the challenges of accessing affordable homes in the real estate market, there has been a low rate in migration to home ownership by the PRB sitting tenants. To assist and promote economic and financial empowerment to the sitting tenants, the Board continues to liaise with financial institutions and the Ministry of Trade and Commerce to conduct financial literacy trainings for the past 18 months.

The sole objective of these trainings is to improve budget management skills as well as promote savings among the tenants. Some of the tenants that attended the trainings can access Small Business Grant from the Ministry of Trade and Commerce after being awarded training certificates. I thank the honourable Minister as well and his Ministry for assisting and also providing tenants to some of the sitting tenants around our PRB estates. Such initiatives, Mr. Speaker, Sir, by the PRB helps in preparing tenants to access a stable income to support their families and to know the significance of savings which will allow them to purchase their own home after migrating from the PRB estate.

There was a total of four financial literacy trainings conducted by PRB on financial literacy training and small business in the Central Division. These trainings were accommodated by the Ministry of Trade and Commerce. The trainings were held in the following Estates - Raiwai, Newtown, Mead Road and McFarlane Estate with a total of 123 tenants attending the training and around 60 percent of the tenants applied for the grant and awaiting outcome of their applications. The effectiveness of these trainings has led four tenants from Mead Road Estate to receive Government grants and are currently running their own small businesses; two of the four tenants have their own vegetables and fruits stalls along Mead Road.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Board has also a PRB office in the North and also conducted eight financial leaderships trainings which were hosted by the Fiji Development Bank and Consumer Council. A total of 323 tenants participated in these trainings in four estates. They are in Tuatua in Labasa, Naqere in Savusavu, as well as Naodamu and Vunimoli Estates. The result of these trainings has shown in the number of tenants that have started their own small businesses such as planting, selling produce in the market to assist in their rent payments and women's clubs also being formed in Naodamu Estate in Labasa that allowed women in this estate to sell their farm produce, mats, food packs and also assist them in their savings for their respective families.

The Fiji Development Bank and Unit Trust of Fiji have also carried awareness in several estates in the Western Division. Various programmes include assistance that institutions are willing to offer to the tenants. The Public Rental Board, Mr. Speaker, Sir, will continue its work to assist their tenants in practicing skills related to budgeting, savings and to prepare them for uncertain times consequently enabling them to achieve important financial goals.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir and I also thank the honourable Minister for his response. Honourable Minister my question to you is related to the programmes that you deliver in the Public Rental Board. How do you gauge the change in financial behaviour of the tenants who have received this training? you.

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for the question. An interesting feature about families or tenants that live in these Public Rental Board Estates, these are all low income earners and some do not have fixed employment and

MR. SPEAKER.- Order! There is running commentary going on in front of me.

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- The programme that has been initiated by Public Rental Board is a new initiative and because they are mostly low income earners, some are just single income earners with their families, some have struggled and with this type of assistance, especially the women, they have gone further after obtaining certificates. They have assisted their families, not only in the repayment of their monthly rental, they have also assisted in other family needs in their respective families. So overall, there is financial as well as economic empowerment to all those who have attended the trainings.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for the information that is provided about the training of tenants at PRB. The question is, during COVID some of the tenants had accumulated in arrears and if the Ministry or Government can consider forgiving those arrears, given most of them are low income earners - security guards, elderly women and some are single mothers.

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think that is a very valid statement that has been provided to us this afternoon by the honourable Member. Because of the financial background of these sitting tenants, majority of them faced financial difficulties in trying to pay or meet their monthly repayments and some of their payments have gone into arrears. The Board in the last financial year have also assisted in forgiving some of the arrears that were accrued by some of the sitting tenants.

MR. SPEAKER.- We will press on, honourable Members.

HON. MEMBERS.- *Vinaka*.

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Some have requested to attend their midday prayers, and I have allowed that as well.

Written Questions

List of MSAF Capital Projects for 2024-2025 (Question No. 159/2024)

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 MSAF 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 project benefits and beneficiaries of each project.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to ask for permission to make some general comments before I answer the written question?

MR. SPEAKER.- Alright, you do not like the question or what?

¹ HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- I do have the answer. The pattern of the questioning in terms of what the Opposition has been asking, so throughout my Ministry, we have provided the details to-date of the breakdowns. I am thinking about the separation of powers of the Executive, Parliament and the Judiciary. In the last Parliament when we were in the Opposition....

MR. SPEAKER.- Is full of wisdom, what you have stated.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- When we were in Opposition, these kinds of questions never got through from our side in the Business Committee. I know that you are not the individuals you were at that time.

(Laughter)

You are now reformed. I noticed a big change have overcome you so the whole nation is grateful for that, but still I am

MR. SPEAKER.- They have seen the light.

(Laughter)

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Even though the light has resulted in sort of disintegration but still we have seen the light. That is the question. Just from my perspective as a Minister in terms of Parliament and the Executive, the principle there is as a government, we are elected and the Parliament oversees, but we run, I suppose uninterfered as the Executive or the management of the ministries.

Secondly, when we are given the authority to operationalise the budget into programmes and implementation, we do it on the assumption that there would not be any political interference, but with the provision of these kinds of detailed information, there is the danger in that, that the prioritisation according to what the civil servants have given us in the budget can be politicised in this Parliament with

HON. P.K. BALA.- Be transparent, don't worry.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- That is what he is trying to say.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- I am not saying that it will happen, what I am saying is there is the danger of that. It relates back to the separation of powers.

The last point, as the Executive, in any organisation structure you report as a manager to the Chief Executive. So, I report to my Chief Executive who is the honourable Prime Minister, but now I feel I have two Chief Executives - the honourable Prime Minister and honourable Usamate.

¹ Editor's Note: Reply to Written Question No. 159/2024 tabled by the honourable Minister for Public Works and Meteorological Services and Transport under Standing Order 45(3) is appended as Annexure I.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- This is Parliament.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Yes, that is what I am saying, exactly that is what I am saying. Now the Parliament is infringing on my reporting line because of the provision of this information which can result in them doing that. So, these are just some general observations.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Now, you are begging us even to ask more questions.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- I am just making some general observations in terms of the management of the State as per the Judiciary, the Executive and Parliament. The demarcation is becoming confused because now I feel that someone else is monitoring my performance when Parliament should really be referring to the Annual Report of the Ministry to oversee and the Auditor-General's Reports. When those reports on the Ministry and the Auditor-General's Reports comes in, that is when the Opposition comes in.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- That is right.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- But now with that information, it is like

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- How do we hold you accountable?

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, has given me the right to raise these fundamental issues of democracy. The demarcation is there but we are crossing the lines, and it can result in confusion, which is what is happening now. Because we are a Government with a good heart, we are not like the last government which did not provide information and blocked things at the Business Committee, I hereby give you the information.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I have stated this on more than one occasion and that is for the Opposition, the only punch that they can score with is on questions. For the Government side, whether we like it or not, we just have to ensure that we have everything on the fingertips so when question time arises, that is when they throw everything at us. I remember when we were in the Opposition, the Government needs to change their tactics in answering questions. They did not want to ask specifically for roads from our constituents but rather for the whole of the nation roads, it is quite difficult but that is the game that they played in the past government. We had to follow, but it kept us raising questions all the time. So, honourable Minister, with due respect to your answers being supplied on time, I humbly ask you that you please take on the questions, come what may and just reply; that is all.

HON. V. NATH.- Before I ask the question, may I congratulate the Baby Bula Boys Under 16 soccer team and the management for their fine performance against Tahiti. This is the first time in history they have qualified to play the Under 17 World Cup in 2025. I was watching Junior Shankar playing and it really inspired my son, Krish who is at Nehru Primary School.

MR. SPEAKER.- Were you watching soccer during Parliamentary hours?

(Laughter)

HON. V. NATH. – No, this game was yesterday. I was not watching today but I did watch it yesterday evening and I enjoyed the game. So, I would like to congratulate the coach, the managers and the players as well. Fine job boys, keep it up!

Before I ask my question, I was just hoping that the honourable Minister will not argue, like how he argued with his Lelean OB.

Status of Lighthouses Around Fiji
(Question No. 160/2024)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport inform Parliament on the status of the various lighthouses around Fiji, how many are operational and how many are not, and what are the plans to repair, replace and maintain the lighthouses?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Just to clarify, I was not arguing with honourable Usamate, it² was just some observation. Sir, I have the answer to the written question, and I have been very cooperative. The next time, I will not give it when it comes to this session.

END OF WEEK STATEMENTS

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, each Member may speak for up to 10 minutes, with a 10 minute response by the Minister responsible for the subject matter of the Member's speech. No seconder is required and there will be no other debate.

Review of the 2013 Constitution

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I do deliver the Statement, I wish all the schools that are at the knockout stages for Deans, I will not mention a particular school in the interest of my safety, and I also would like to wish the honourable Alitia Bainivalu a happy birthday.

MR. SPEAKER.- Are you talking about QVS?

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- Maybe, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you for this opportunity to make a statement on what I firmly believe is a priority issue for Fiji and, that is, that the 2013 Constitution is to be reviewed as soon as practically possible. I will take one step further and say the truth and reconciliation should only be attempted after the Constitution is reviewed.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we all know that this process of review will have to commence from this House under your leadership, as the Head of our Legislature, where we will have to agree and give our blessings for the review of the 2013 Constitution, of course, when the required Bill is tabled in this House.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am of the view that this Constitution does not have a unifying effect on the people of Fiji. There is a big divide, mostly along political lines, on the support or otherwise on

² Editor's Note: Reply to Written Question No. 160/2024 tabled by the honourable Minister for Public Works and Meteorological Services and Transport under Standing Order 45(3) is appended as Annexure II.

this Constitution. One of the reasons is because there is this perception that this Constitution is attached or aligned to one political party. I have held that view well before I became a Member of Parliament.

Since the first Elections under this Constitution in 2014, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Constitution has been the subject of criticism and, sometimes, even ridiculed in this House and outside of this House. There has been a constant chorus of voices from individuals and organisations to review this Constitution.

Recently, a political party, not represented in this House, publicly announced that they are putting together a team to push for a way to change or amend this Constitution. In the last few days, when the media got wind of the fact that I will be making this statement today both, criticisms and praise had come from the members of the public on my statement.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to take advantage of this privilege given to MPs to make statements in this House, to add my voice to the call for a review of the 2013 Constitution and I thank my fellow colleagues, who also wanted to make a statement today, who are giving way to me to make my statement. I will provide a few reasons on why I think this Constitution needs to be reviewed.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Constitution has to be reviewed to remove its perceived connection to one political party. This has been a downside to this Constitution, perhaps, because of the process that was followed to create it. When there is, at least, a perception that this Constitution, or any Constitution for that matter is connected to a political party, the Constitution becomes a political pointscore issue. In the last Election, the Parties on the Government side campaign on changing the Constitution and this side, maintained that this Constitution is good.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- You are one of them.

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- Yes, I was one of them.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am of the view that the Constitution should never be used as a political campaign point because that will make one supporter of the Constitution contingent on which political party one supports. In the perfect setting, I believe that a constitution is supposed to be supported and respected irrespective of political affiliation.

This perception of attachment of the Constitution to one political party will only be removed if this Constitution is taken back to the people and it comes back to this House from the people, and when we and those that come after us to this august Chamber, hold our Holy Books and swear an Oath to uphold the Constitution, we swear an Oath to uphold the will of the people rather than the will of a few. Mr. Speaker, Sir, if we learn that lesson, then we know that it will be a big and grave mistake for the Government of the day, should they lay claim to the reviewed Constitution.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the situation that this House is in right now, where we have an Opposition (26 in total) that are all independent Members of Parliament and there is no political parties in Opposition, is not covered in the Constitution. The only reference in the Constitution closest to this situation that we are in is in Section 78(c), which refers to Independent Members of Parliament not in support of the Prime Minister to be included in the voting process to appoint the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we heard your ruling this morning and the discussions that ensued. I must thank you, Mr. Speaker, for your wisdom and insight in guiding Parliament to adjust and accommodate this unprecedented situation that we are in, especially given the lack of guidance

provided in the Constitution.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, upholding the Constitution does not mean that we should not amend it. Upholding it, in my view, means that we must also ensure that the Constitution remains relevant to the situation that the nation encounters.

When the Constitution's capacities to cope with new issues and demands thrust on it is weak or lacking, there is an inherent need to strengthen it, and that strengthening process is through a review and amendment, if necessary.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Constitution is not all bad, but not all good either. Let me quote a few sections to illustrate this point:

Chapter 1, Section 6(a) and (b), in my view, is a section that is worth retaining. It reads, and I quote:

“Any attempt to establish a Government other than in compliance with this Constitution shall be unlawful, and –

- (a) anything done to further that attempt is invalid and of no force or effect; and
- (b) no immunities can lawfully be granted under any law to any person in respect of actions taken or omitted in furtherance of such an attempt.”

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this section is what I refer to as the anti-coup clause. It is worth keeping, and there are many more good Sections in this Constitution that we should keep.

A Clause that could be or should be amended, in my view, is in Chapter 5, Section 113(2), which refers to the remuneration and benefits to Judicial Officers. It reads, and I quote:

“The salaries and benefits payable to the Chief Justice and the President of the Court of Appeal shall be determined by the President on the advice of the Prime Minister following consultation by the Prime Minister with the Attorney General.”

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me declare that I am not imputing any wrongdoing or any sinister motive on any of those high office holders mentioned in this section, and I respect all the past and serving holders.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in my view, this Clause breaks important democratic values that a constitution should protect. It breaks the very important rule of the Separation of Powers, in my view. It puts into question the independence of the Judiciary, at least, the Head of the Judiciary. In my view, the Head of the Executive cannot and should not determine the salaries and benefits of the Head of the Judiciary, and this clause also, Mr. Speaker, opens up the high office in the land to unfair criticism.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Section 131(2) on the role of the Military has been the subject of criticism and discussion. It is, in my view, as the former holder of the Head of the Military, in my view, it is too broad, and a lot of our hope is dependent on the character and the good judgment of the Head of the Military to exercise his powers correctly.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, those two Clauses that I had mentioned, alone warrants an amendment in this Constitution and, sadly, there are a few more. I urge all Members of this august House to seriously think about the importance of and the urgent need to take this Constitution back to the

people to be reviewed and amended as necessary.

It is our duty as representatives of the people to do so. It will come back to this House from the people and, as I have mentioned at the beginning of my statement, we and those who will be elected to this House in the years to come, will hold their Holy Books and swear that they will uphold a Constitution that truly encapsulates the will of the people.

The 2013 Constitution has brought this nation back into a democratically elected Government in 2014 until now.

To review and amend this Constitution, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is never 'anti' anything, it is not anti-anyone or anti-any group or anti-any political party. In fact, it is pro – pro-the people, it is pro-nation building, it is pro-democracy, and this is the way we perfect our young democracy.

The work of perfecting our democracy is never-ending, it will continue well into the future by those who will come after us. But now, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is our turn - the whole 56 of us on this floor, including you, Mr. Speaker, as the Head of the Legislature.

In closing, to use the analogy of a potter who puts his hand on the clay to help remove its imperfection. It is now our time, our turn to put our hands on our imperfect democracy and remove its imperfection. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- And I now call on the Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Climate Change, Environment, Civil Service, Information, Public Enterprises and Veteran Affairs to make his response. The floor is yours, Sir.

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I reiterate my words of congratulations to all the indigenous peoples of the world on World Indigenous Day.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to respond to the End of the Week Statement by the honourable Naupoto, calling for review of the 2013 Constitution. I was going to ask the honourable Attorney-General to do this for me, but I found that I still have time to contribute before I go to the next appointment with my colleagues from Tonga and the Cook Islands, and Troika of Pacific Islands Forum.

At the outset, Sir, allow me to place on record that I already have agreed to the proposition. I am very much in favour and also commit the Government to the various efforts that will go into working towards the completion of this task.

The 2013 Constitution, Mr. Speaker, Sir, sets out the power to the State, limitations on the State in relation to citizens and must protect the fundamental rights of the citizens. Further, those who exercise power must be held accountable to the people they serve.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is particularly important in a multiethnic, multireligious and multicultural nation like Fiji, to have a constitution brought about by consensus, and with consent and ownership from all constituent communities.

We are seeing right now around the world, Sir, the coming into conflict, the various interests in the various societies and communities around the world. Recently, we saw the disturbances in Bangladesh and in the United Kingdom.

We could be blamed for starting all these in 1987, but since then, everyone has realised the dynamics of ethnicities around the world. Wherever we are, if we are involved in the formulation of constitutions, or the foundations of lawmaking and governing in all these communities, none of which now, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is monogamous. We are all multiethnic, there is no other monoethnic society in the world right now. And we must expect that there will continue to be uprising, may be not violent, it will be uprising anyway. People and groups are coming up and voicing their concerns - the French revolution, the war of independence in America.

This morning in Caucus I mentioned to my colleagues those two upheavals happening in Bangladesh and the United Kingdom. People will continue to question, why? Why is this happening in my home? How do I define my home?

I am reminded of what the late Archbishop Mataka said in the process of working towards a constitution after the 1997 Constitution was put out of place. He said this, and I quote:

“No matter how we come to be in Fiji, or how long we have been here, we are all part of this land. It is the land of our birth or the land of our adoption, the land to which we belong.

That brought home to me the need for national not just communal leadership. I was looking at communal leadership in the beginning of my journey or my venture into politics, Mr. Speaker, Sir. My first political party was ethnicity based but since I became elected to be the Prime Minister for all races, all ethnicities in Fiji, my perception changed. But since then, there have been other dynamics applied on our leadership role.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Naupoto mentioned this morning his role as the Commander of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces under this Constitution and what the current Commander in General, Ratu Jone might be thinking at this time. There is that thought within the military, what about us? How will we fair in any new arrangement, probably thinking about the immunity clauses taken away, whether some of them or some whom they know might have been involved in those things that they could be brought to trial on so many years after the event. These are things that we will have to think about as we grapple with the reconstruction of our Constitution.

Mr. Speaker, recently we had a Professor from the Australian National University who spoke to some of us who went there in a presentation that was organised by the Fiji National University at the University Campus in Nasinu. He gave us some very clear thoughts, but they were his own thoughts. Most of us were there and a lot of people noticed that I was taking down a lot of notes. The notes I was taking, Mr. Speaker, Sir, was not for me to ask the questions later that night but for me to be able to use as we continue on this journey.

Sir, the requirements of the Constitution, we are at leisure to look up those requirements for the amendments. Some of them, as he said that night, are pretty impossible to achieve. We are talking about three-quarters of the membership of the House which we know we have, we easily calculate that. We are talking about three-quarters of the registered voters, depends on what day, what time we make the count. How many died since we took the count and before they cast their votes? What figure will we be looking at? It is so, so difficult.

I am hoping that before we get to that stage, we will have worked out the formula or more achievable formula to be able to execute the tasks that we have given ourselves and I must congratulate the honourable Naupoto for bringing this up. We said that it was part of our manifesto. His party did not say it that they would do it but he has said this morning to this honourable House that the responsibility for laying the foundations of governance in any country must come from the

people themselves. It is not necessarily the duty of one political party to be defending a constitution nor any other political party to try and amend it.

Mr. Speaker, I mentioned various upheavals happening around the world. As a former peacekeeper, I have seen the destruction of ethnic differences being taken out and weaponised. I hope we do not get to that stage, I was hoping I would be able to put a fullstop there, but this time, I cannot put the fullstop. I will have to say, “we do not get to that stage again.”

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, that is all about democracy. We sit and listen to the various views whether it is for or against. That is why we are here; to listen to this kind of opposing views and supporting views, just to how best we can continue to move ahead. I thank you for that statement, honourable Naupoto. It has been a while since we have now heard this in this august House and I am so happy to be part of this team. I only hope that those who will be deciding this will certainly have a heart to hear this and continue to hear it and continue to prepare to make adjustments. This is all for us.

Government Grant to Tertiary Institutions

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, honourable Prime Minister, honourable Deputy Prime Ministers, honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Ministers, honourable fellow Members of Parliament, a very good afternoon to you all. Mr. Speaker, for many years the governments have been giving grants to tertiary institutes and not small amounts but figures amounting into millions of dollars.

Mr. Speaker, when not enough scholarships were awarded to students and when the tuition fee was not as massive as it is today, it made perfect sense to provide grants to tertiary institutes to support the student in subsidising the tuition fees and paying for the salaries of lecturers and support staff. Mr. Speaker, the world has changed. Since the inception of grants system to tertiary institutes, the demand has increased and the grounds for applying grants has changed as well.

Mr. Speaker, I believe we need to revisit the formula and criteria that is used to determine the grants to tertiary institutes. If we look at the school grants given to primary and secondary schools, it is well defined and very clear. Where and how the money can be utilised is clearly documented. This system allows proper scrutiny and leaves no chance for abuse of funds. Now that the Government is providing scholarships to students and paying tuition fee at a rate that is determined by the universities, should we continue with current grant system is my first question. I am not saying we should stop the grant, but what we need to do is to revisit the criteria.

Investing in the education sector is one of the best investments a nation can do to improve the socio-economic status of the country. Investing in education is investing in the future. A knowledgeable society with a high rate of literacy allows the nation to develop at a much faster rate.

Mr. Speaker, during my time when I was a student at the Fiji school of Medicine, even as a private student, two-thirds of my tuition fee was subsidised through the grant that was provided to tertiary institutes. With an unfortunate reason, the grant is no longer used to subsidise the private students. We all know that there are close to 19,000 students who are studying privately and around 15,500 students who are on scholarship. The number of private students are as follows:

- (1) University of Fiji - 1,550;
- (2) Fiji National University - 9,310; and
- (3) University of the South Pacific - 8,120.

This number does not account for those students studying privately or in other tertiary institutes, such as technical colleges. These statistics suggest that we have more students studying as private student compared to those students who are on scholarship. This raises serious concern on what this Government has been preaching about making tertiary institutes free for every student. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the following words may sound very familiar to our ears, "We will remove TELS, we will make sure that every student studies through scholarship, we will make tertiary education free." How can we justify that there are more private students than those on scholarship under this government?

One may argue that during FijiFirst's time there were private students, but the difference is that at that point in time, they at least had a choice to either take loan or study privately, but now there is no such option. It is either one gets scholarship or forced to study privately.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, now that this government has removed the loan scheme, just imagine what parents must be going through to pay for tuition fees. The very policy that they criticized, that by giving loans to students, we were putting burden on the students, and now that they have removed TELS forcing students to study privately resulting in draining out parents of their savings and FNPF. What did the Government achieve by making this blunder when TELS was removed? Where is the free education from pre-school to tertiary institute, Mr. Speaker, Sir?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on that same note we were also informed that 50 percent of the school grant to the primary and secondary schools is still pending, and we are almost closing second term. Parents are even forced in primary and secondary schools to take part in fundraising. They are forced to pay tuition fees in the name of school levy, ground fees and building fees.

(Honourable Government Member interjects)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- It is, they are.

If you do not pay these fees or levies, students are not taken into school, and we had raised these concerns.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Stop lying!

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- I had given the example of Mahatma Gandhi Memorial School (MGM) whereby two students were not allowed.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Which school?

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- MGM. Two students were not allowed to be enrolled because they were not agreeing to it.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the total tuition fee I paid to complete my four years Bachelors programme in pharmacy, the students now are paying the same amount as tuition fee for just a single year. How can we expect the parents of these 19,000 students to all of a sudden start paying tuition fees from their pockets, withdrawing from their savings in the banks and FNPF that was there to secure the parents future. If parents utilize their FNPF to pay for tuition fees, after retirement, they will not have any option but to fall back on the Government for social assistance thus increasing the burden on the Ministry of Social Protection.

My second question, if the taxpayers fund is not used to subsidise the students, then what is given for? Is not there some kind of double dipping that the Government now provides full

scholarship and paying large sums as grant to tertiary institutes? Around \$160 million a year and then additional grants to tertiary institutes as well. Is this justified? These are questions that we need to ask ourselves as we move forward.

My third and most important question is, should we convert this grant as subsidy towards the private student? The main source of revenue for tertiary institutes is through tuition fees. They must be having other source of income that should be used to cover operation cost, travel expense and not use Government grant to cover operational cost. If we continue to provide grant, we should ensure that private students tuition is subsidized, lecturers' pay is improved and those students already on scholarship, their allowances is readjusted

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we also note that use of grant is not scrutinised by Parliament, we have been hearing a lot about accountability and transparency, so these grants should be scrutinised by Parliament. We are dealing with public funds, and we need to be accountable as parliamentarians. Lecturers in certain universities are merely paid peanuts. For example, compare the salary of a lecturer with PhD at FNU to a Vice-Principal in a High School and an Assistant Lecturer's salary to a High School Teacher.

Tutors and support staff too are at a very low salary, Mr. Speaker, Sir. There has been a lot of talks that these grants are being abused, and we as legislators need to scrutinise the use of these grants, the type of course offered, the length of course offered, the job market (if any) when the students graduate, capital projects, et cetera. These grants have been given for too long now without proper accountability and transparency,

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just yesterday the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts stated, "wherever taxpayer's money is given directly or indirectly, it should be audited by the Office of Auditor-General." All grants given needs to be clearly scrutinised. If there is no abuse, no mismanagement of the fund, I do not think there should be any issue with these institutions in allowing Office of Auditor-General to audit the use of these grants. This is something that we need to start exploring in future and let us make an informed decision on the future of the grants given to tertiary institution, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Currently, the Higher Education Commission determines the amount, but the criteria used is not something that is vetted by this august House.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I suggest that we form a Parliamentary Committee to investigate the funding structure and criteria. Let the Committee do its report and present it back to Parliament and we as legislators make an informed decision. I still stand that we need to use this grant to subsidise the tuition fees of close to 19,000 private students in Fiji.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise in response to the End of Week Statement by the honourable Member in accordance with section 35(2) of the Standing Order. Before that, I would just like to give a quick response on some of the issues that has been highlighted.

I just wanted to clarify the 50 percent education grant, the grant has been paid of time for 100 percent for Term 3, 100 percent for Term 1 and 50 percent up to July. So, when the new financial year starts, that is when the other 50 percent, which is, August, that will be paid out. It should be paid out some time next week.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the accountability issue, the honourable Member knows very well when he was part of the previous government, there was no accountability, lack of it, in terms of the funding from the Higher Education Grant. I think if he had listened to my Ministerial Statement on Monday, he would have noted the new initiatives that were undertaken by the Tertiary Scholarships Loan Scheme (TSLS) that will capture over 10,000 students in the new initiatives and also the Hardship

Scholarship that has been given for those students who have been studying on private arrangement.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- You need to listen, there are 19,000 private students.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- You should have listened on Monday to understand what was mentioned.

The Ministry of Education is conscious that the grants released to tertiary institutions are taxpayer's money. As a Minister for Education, I have emphasised to all tertiary institutions to ensure that the funds are being used as intended and to ensure students are provided with education support. Fiji has a well-oiled workforce available for our future needs.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the 2024-2025 Financial Year, Government grants have been provided to 13 training institutions, three universities and 10 smaller Higher Education institutes. The basis of the grant assessment, as per the guidelines of the Higher Education Commission of Fiji Regulations, they call for grants made each year and the training institutions submit detailed applications including their annual costed Operating Plan, a yearly budget, current Annual Report, Annual Business Plan and the overall strategic plan. The Higher Education Institutions assesses the relevant documents and recommends the grant amount to be provided to each training institution. Grant request from the training institutions are usually much higher and the grants are usually given out based on the Higher Education Commission of Fiji's assessment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, once the grants are approved in the National Budget, the grant agreements are prepared, vetted by the Solicitor-General's Office and funds are disbursed on a quarterly basis. The total grant for the 2024-2025 Financial Year amounts to \$90.7 million. The grants are assessed based on the costs and the purposes intended.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, each tertiary institution is different from their varying courses offered and faculty sizes, so cost for each tertiary institution will be different. This cost given to tertiary institutions via the grant will always cover the operational costs, including salaries, programme delivery, development of new programmes, research, rents, utility bills, advertisements, upgrading of IT systems, and the list goes on.

How do we determine how much should be given to each higher education institution? The process of grant is one of the Higher Education Commission Fiji's mandated functions, as enshrined in their Regulation, is to analyse the grant usage from the previous year and following careful assessment by the team, their acquittal is submitted against their costed operation plan, the strategic plan, the budget, and that is when they decide the grant that is given to that training institutions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, of course, there will be a different amount given to higher education institutions which is based on the utilisation rate and the programmes that they run. For example, in the year 2024-2025, some education institutions requested higher amounts and some lower amounts. For example, for Fiji National University, Higher Education Commission of Fiji ascertains surplus funds from the analysis of their financials, then added back that surplus and then reduced the grants that are given to them.

Disbursements of grants, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Higher Education of Fiji's legislation has provisions for fines and suspension of registration if any Higher Education institute is caught for fraudulent act. In terms of the calculation of grant on the fees, this can be part of the review of the universities that is currently conducted by the Higher Education of Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, universities are regularly increasing their fees approved by their Councils, at the same time, requesting for grants. This needs to be managed better and hold the training institutions to be accountable and the Higher Education of Fiji, through the current review exercise, will ensure that strategies are identified and implemented that will have stronger accountability on the use of taxpayers' funds. The Government representatives on the respective university councils continue to be vigilant with the increasing fees or change in programmes.

The Higher Education Commission of Fiji's legislation do not have the powers to monitor fee increase and this can be considered as a proposed way in the current review that is currently being conducted. Government needs to consider investigating issues of increasing fees. The review of the university is currently being conducted by external review team.

On the same note, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the tertiary institutions need to monitor academic progress and provide intervention and learning support to the students, as I have mentioned on Monday, and we all should equally share in encouraging our students to excel academically, as the future of our country depends on them.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I assure this august House that the Ministry of Education, together with the Higher Education Commission, is more than ever vigilant about ensuring that the taxpayers of this country benefit from the Government Grants provided to the universities and other training institutions around Fiji. *Vinaka saka vakalevu.*

National Statistics on Child Sex Abuse

HON. S. KIRAN.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also would like to pay tribute to the indigenous people of the world on this International People's Day, especially to the *iTaukei* people of the land, the Chiefs and its people.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to talk about an issue that is difficult and has been a taboo, and I thank you for this time. Sir, it is time for all of us, those of us in this House, but also our Civil Society Organisations, our communities, families and faith-based organisations, to confront the serious issue of child abuse and child sexual abuse.

Each month, the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions release a shocking data that exposes the fact that we are failing our children on a daily basis. Data from the Office of the DPP indicate that average age of the youngest victims of child sexual abuse in the past six years is two years old, and the youngest victim was six months old. The average age of the youngest accused person is 12 years old.

Three out of five rape cases reported are against children and 23 births out of thousand females are below the age of 18 years of age. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) data reveals that five out of every six children in Fiji suffer abuse or neglect by their family.

Let me share more specific data obtained from the Fiji Police Force on child sexual abuse by specific offence reported in the years 2021 to 2023, including January to June 2024. The year 2021 recorded 729 cases, followed by an increase in 2022, with 1,034 cases, and then a decline in 2023 with 844 cases. The first six months of 2024 has so far recorded 324 cases, Mr. Speaker.

The monthly average of recording child sexual abuse cases is 54, with rape being the most problem offence targeting children in Fiji. Let me give some breakdown of the CSO's data of the 324 child sexual abuse cases that were reported during January to June 2024 period, that 13 to 17

years age group had the highest number of reported cases, that is 215, followed by the 6 to 12 years age group - 94, and the infant, Mr. Speaker, that is, zero to five years age group - 15.

Rape was the most prevalent reported offence of 104 cases, followed by Indecent Assault of 71 cases, and Sexual Assault of 60 cases. Females were the overwhelming victims of child sexual abuse, accounting for 297 or 91.7 percent of the reported cases. Male accounted for remaining 27 or 8.3 percent of the cases.

Even though there appears to be a declining trend, raw statistics do not always tell the whole story, Mr. Speaker. It is possible that with greater awareness of the dangers to young children, their parents or grandparents understand more clearly the threats to them and are exercising more care.

However, Mr. Speaker, any child that has to go through the trauma of abuse is one too many. These figures should be a source of shame and soul searching for us as a nation, and most importantly we must look seriously at what we are doing about it.

As a nation we have to do better to protect our children. Fiji has rectified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1993, and more recently, is committed to National Action Plan to prevent violence against all women and girls. Fiji, in 2001, has been committed to the Stockholm Declaration - an agenda for action against commercial sexual exploitation of children.

The Coalition Government takes the matter of protection of our children as a high priority, and our Ministry has developed a separate Unit for Children. Director and Child Protection Officers have been appointed.

There are two Bills before Parliament - Child Protection Bill 2024 and Child Justice Bill 2024, which will enable better care of children that come into State care or are in conflict with law. However, these children should not have to come through a legal system, Mr. Speaker.

We are a nation that prides itself in communal ties and love for our children. All our different traditions speak of high regard for children. Then why, Mr. Speaker, are children suffering from abuse and trauma?

We find children on the streets suffering neglect, children involved in drug trade, children as victims and children as perpetrators of crime. When we trace the children found on the streets, they are from single or broken families. Single parentage is not a new phenomenon, but in the past, we saw stronger ownership from community and extended families.

Mr. Speaker, our society is changing rapidly, in some ways for the good and in other ways not so good. Many of the assumptions we make about family life are no longer whole, there are many single parent families passes or sometimes separated for work or other reasons, including working overseas. Children are being sent to relatives in urban centres for education or back to rural areas for economic reasons. Sometimes to situations where unknown to them, there are sexual predators.

Mr. Speaker, we cannot generalise the choices some parents make or may be forced to make under the circumstances. There are many reasons for these choices and many parents may not realise the dangers which they are exposing their children to. It is the responsibility for all of us, to ensure children are protected from these dangers.

There are many studies that indicate that many abused children will go on to become abusers themselves. In a recent case, a 13 year old accused was a victim of rape at 6 years old by her own

grandfather, who is still doing jail time.

It is reported that five out of six children in our community go through abuse. This case teaches us a lesson. These children who are abused, if not rehabilitated and supported, could become abusers and we already see high levels of abuse in our community. While perpetrators get a second chance at life, a child that is abused loses his or her innocence and is traumatised for life.

It is most challenging to counsel and rehabilitate infants, who go through these traumatic experiences at the hands of those who should have been their protectors. Sadly, we find that society, family and community members of the victims often blame them for the offence and ostracize them within their own homes, instead of offering them kindness, empathy and an environment of love and healing.

Each child abuse is traumatised for life. We are dutybound to make every effort to look into the issues surrounding the matter and to develop protection mechanisms.

Mr. Speaker, we have to look deep within our communities for help. This is matter I have been working on with some stakeholders to see how we can create more awareness and build protection programmes, and I am calling for all interested people, community organisations and agencies to assist and look for comprehensive community-based solutions, which will help protect our children and bring down the incidences of child sexual abuse.

There is a great movement on creating awareness on the issue of drugs through Churches, through the *Vanua* and through the faith creations. I call on all stakeholders and all religious state bodies to also add to the agenda the issue of child sexual abuse and create a network of protection.

When we see suspicious circumstances surrounding children, it is each of our responsibility to take responsibility and report the matter to the Police. We also have a 24 hour toll free helpline number dedicated to the welfare of children. Anyone can call and speak with professional counsellors who are ready to listen to challenges faced by our children and refer for help and support. This number is 1325, Mr. Speaker.

Children are precious gifts entrusted in our care. We owe it to the future to ensure our children receive the best care and protection. I strongly believe that if we all commit, we can achieve it. If I may quote Wesley Kenneth or West Stafford as he is known, the former President and CEO of Compassion International and an advocate for children, I quote: "If we nurture the dreams of children, the world will be blessed. If we destroy them the world is doomed". Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- *Ni sa tiko saka na Vunisalevu Na Turaga Bale na Sipika ni Bose Lawa, Vunisalevu Na Tui Cakau na vuvu ni vanua o Cakaudrove; Vunisa na Madamada ni Matanitu; dou saka na Vukevuke ni Madamada ni Matanitu; na Madamada ni To ni Veisaqa, na Madamada ni lawalawa e lewe ciwa; ni tiko saka na lewe ni Bose Lawa; muru le bula.*

Qilavu e marautaki tiko e vuravura na noda siga na i Taukei ni vanua. Vakanuinui vinaka ena kena vakananumi na noda dodonu na i Taukei, ka marautaki tiko ni se bula vinaka sara tu ga na noda i tovo ni bula eda kilai tani tu kina na i Taukei.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, and honourable Members of Parliament, happy World Indigenous Day today, 9th August 2024 - a day to promote indigenous people's rights and celebrate indigenous communities. I stand in solidarity with the people of West Papua and the Kanaks of New Caledonia.

Mr. Speaker, and honourable Members of Parliament, we have heard from the honourable Assistant Minister regarding the prevalence of the abuse of children in our nation, and what it means for the future of this country. Yet, we still keep going and doing the same thing day after day, or we can draw a line in the sand now. We can do that by recognising that protecting children is everyone's business.

As you have heard the statistics, five out of six children in Fiji are abused or neglected by their family. Surely, every honourable Member of this Parliament cannot accept this statistic. Every one of these children carries a story of lasting hurt and trauma that will impact their adult lives. If we do not act urgently, we risk a deeply traumatised generation where cycles of abuse will continue on to their children and their children's children.

In May this year, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in this very Parliament, as mentioned by the honourable Assistant Minister, we introduced two landmark Bills - the Child Care and Protection Bill 2024 and the Child Justice Bill 2024. Laws to protect children are indispensable to changing the landscape, but laws alone will not protect children. Every Ministry and every member of our community needs to commit to this journey.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we cannot just stand by and tolerate this, because the standard we walk past is the standard we accept. But it will take all Ministries working together, not just the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection. It will take both sides of the House working together, taking leadership in your role in keeping our children safe.

I am relieved that finally after 18 months, the Opposition has appointed their Shadow Ministers for the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection. I acknowledge the honourable Virendra Lal from the C-16 and honourable Ratu Josaia Niudamu from the C-9 plus two or three. I look forward to working with you both honourable Members to advance the welfare of our children in our beloved Fiji.

We are going to need the help of our traditional structures, the strength of our diverse cultures, and of the many strong faiths across our country, to help us drive this change. This is why it is with great honour, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to announce to you today that the Government through the Ministry, plans to embark upon a National Action Plan to eliminate violence against children.

The world's largest study on Childhood Adversity shows that adults who experience abuse, neglect and traumatised children are far more likely to suffer long term intellectual, behavioural, physical and mental health problems.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this plan is not just the Government owned action plan. We need every community and every citizen to feel that it is also part of them too. The pillars of the Action Plan will be strengthened by our cultures, by our identity, but its substance also needs to embody children's rights, their development and their wellbeing. We want to give all of Fiji's children the best future they can possibly imagine. The plan will be grounded in all the elements that science, our culture, communities, faith, tell us will support families and communities in raising children to protect them from harm.

Mr. Speaker, our National Action Plan should hold the ambition that every dimension of Fiji's Government, traditional structures and community mechanisms, faith-based organisations, civil society organisations must see to protecting children from harm as their responsibility.

Why should every part of our society want to embrace this Plan? If we support our families in our communities, stop abusing and neglecting children, I believe we will see a safer Fiji. It cannot

just be the role of the Government, of the Minister, of the Fiji Police Force, of the DPP, of Civil Society Organisations - it will be a call to return the responsibility back on our families and our communities.

This Plan together with the two new Bills that are being proposed will put us on the cusp of generational change. Children who grow up protected, nurtured, supported and loved will become adults who create a stronger and even more successful Fiji. So, as I mentioned, this would need to be a whole of Government, whole of society and whole of community approach.

I look forward to the convening next month of our National Taskforce on Pornography between the Ministry of Communications and our Ministry as co-chairs, to look at the harmful effects of pornography and to ban the access of pornography to children as well as regulating the access of pornography in our country. There is anecdotal evidence of the will be connection between pornography and violence against children and women. Mr. Speaker, I thank the honourable Minister for Communications for the commitment to that.

We have to make sure that every system and workforce that deal with children everyday are held to account and I am not just talking about our schools, but when we are talking about our sports fields, communities, faith-based organisations and even families.

Mr. Speaker, 90 percent of perpetrators against children are family members. So, the homes are not safe. What are we going to do about it as a nation? This is a call to action. The National Action Plan will need to be able to look at this and how we can support families to keep our children safer.

Mr. Speaker, our Child Justice Bill takes us so much closer to dealing with our children in conflict with the law. Looking at a diversion programme to divert our children away from the criminal justice system and to be put safely where they will be nurtured and re-integrated back into their families and communities because putting them in the criminal justice system is not working. The rates of recidivism and reoffending is much higher.

Mr. Speaker, for a diverse unified Fiji to prosper, we cannot traumatise this generation. I call on all Members to unite together in this purpose and vision to be able to help our children to be safe and to look at their welfare and wellbeing for a better future for Fiji.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister, I am just wondering what has happened to the cybercrime that we are signatory to? Is that something that we have tapped into? And hearing all these crimes from both you and your honourable Assistant Minister, it kind of bothers me whether we have been taking effect of our signatory to that Budapest Convention or not. I would rather we hear from you on what has happened to the reports that you have lodged, because we are signatory to the Budapest Convention.

Role of the *Vanua* in the Fight Against Illicit Substances and Drugs

HON. I. TUIWAILEVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to deliver my End of Week Statement in *iTaukei*. Ni sa tiko saka na turaga na *Speaker*, turaga na *Prime Minister*, kemudou saka nai Vukevuke ni *Prime Minister*, ni sa tiko saka na i Liuliu ni To ni Veisaqa, ni tiko na Lewe ni Bose Lawa, au tu meu veivakararamataki ena itavi ni vanua ena kena valuti na wai gaga ni veivakamatenitaki. Ni cavuti na vanua, e ologa taucoko na vakanananu ni iTaukei, na noda i yau bula, na noda itovo kei na noda i vakarau. Ena yavu ni noqui tukutuku e daidai, tolu na yavu bibi, na sega ni taucoko ke yali e dua vei ratou. Era sala taucoko ni vanua kei na kena wali na leqa ni vakayagataki ni wai gaga.

Na duruvesi ni vanua na veiliutaki vakaturaga. Ni tawani na i tutu vakaturaga, ena tuberi vinaka na veiliutaki ena bibi ni nodra itavi, na matau ka taucoko na nodra liutaka na vanua. Era na dau itakele ni bula sautu vei ira na nodra tamata. Ena macawa saka oqo, era vakaraitaka tiko na Turaga *Minister* ni veika vaka iTaukei ni dua na gauna balavu na kena sagai tiko me tawani nai tutu vakaturaga. E sega ni sivia rawa tiko na 50 na pasede. Ia ni sa curu saka mai na lewa ni Bose Levu Vakaturaga me tawani na veitutu vakaturaga, ka sa tubu totolo sara ka sivia yani na 50 na pasede. Na lala balavu ni i tutu vakaturaga e sikabotea rawa mai kina na leqa levu ni waigaga ena noda vanua.

Ia eda nuidei ena vuku ni veivakadeitaki e qarava tiko na Veitarogi Vanua ni sa sikovi oti e lima saka na yasana kei na kena veikoro. Ena muri tale yani na veituberi ni Tabacakacaka iTaukei ena nodra tuberi na turaga era sa vakadeitaki vakamatanitu. Na vuli, veituberi vakacakacaka kei na bula vakai vakarau e vaqacotaka na liutaki matau ni vanua ka vakadinadinataka oqo na Matanitu. Ia sa balavu mai na gauna, e sega ni liaca rawa ena noda ituvatuva vakavuli ni yali tiko kina na noda itovo kei na kena itukutuku makawa. E da duavata kei na Bose Vakaturaga ena kena vakacurumi ena koronivuli mai Vulinitu kei Ratu Sukuna Memorial School na vuli ni veiliutaki. Ena cakacaka vata tiko kina na mataivalu ni noda vanua kei na Bose Levu Vakaturaga ena vuli ni veituberi oqo ka mai vakadonui oti ena bose mai Deuba. Na rai lesuvi ni veitabana vaka iTaukei e qarava tiko ena gauna oqo me tokona na toso oqo, na veikauwai e sotavi me na walia na railesu oqo, na Matanitu iTaukei, Veitarogi Vanua, na Matabose ni Qele Maroro kei na koronivuli mai Nadave ena kena yavutaki e rua na vakananau:

- (1) Vueti na bula vakailavo, valuti ni bula dravudravua; kei
- (2) Vaqavutaki ni veiliutaki ni vanua.

Turaga na *Speaker*, me vakayagataki na i yau bula me vueta na iTaukei, vakatubura na bula vakailavo ena gauna drakidrakita oqo. Na tubu ni bula vakailavo ena vei tikotiko ena taudaku ni vei koro lelevu e sala ni kena vakalailaitaki me siwati ira laivi mai na itabagone ena ivesu ni waigaga. Sa raica votu o Viti na yaga ni yau bula oqo i na Matanitu, sa kena gauna donu me sa yaga vua na iTaukei na nona i yau bula. Me laurai votu na nona vakaiyagataki me rawati kina na tiko vinaka kei na bula sautu me sabaya na revurevu ni wai gaga.

Turaga na *Speaker*, meda maroroya na noda itovo. E yavu ka uto ni noda kilai keda. Meda viria tale mada na bai ni noda vanua, keda vakawelewele voli ga, eda na rusa vata kaya. Ni sa yavutaki tale na vanua ena itovo, ena lutu ga mai na veika e gadrevi. Sa tiko ena ituvatuva ni Matanitu ena ruku ni *National Cultural Policy* me rawati na veika oqo.

Na isevu talega ni gauna na yabaki oqo me sa vakaillesilesi me qarava vakatabakidua na itovo, ka lesi kina vei valenivolavola ni yasana, era na lai qarava na kena maroro ni veika me baleta na noda itovo. Ena vakabulabulataki tale na solevu ni vakaraitaki tovo ena noda veiyasana ka vakabibi ena veikoro e nanumi me sa lewe ni nodra vuli talega na luveda.

Turaga na *Speaker*, me yavu ni noda tiko vinaka vakailavo kei na noda liutaki vakamatau na itovo, e duru ni kena sauvaki na vanua, ka na rawa ni walia na leqa ni wai gaga. Sa ikoya qori na cau ni vanua ena kena valuti na waigaga ni veivakamatenitanitaki.

HON. I. VASU.- Ni tiko na Turaga na *Speaker*, tiko na turaga na *Prime Minister*, dou tiko nai vukevuke ni *Prime Minisita*, ni tiko nai Liuliu ni To ni Veisaqa, ni tiko na *Minister*, dou tiko talega nai *Assistant Ministers*, dou tiko talega na lewe ni Palimedi ena siga vinaka nikua.

Turaga na *Speaker*, au taura na gauna vinaka oqo meu vakananuma talega kina na noda siga nai taukei ni vanua e vuravura baleti keda e Viti. Na yabaki oqo nai matai ni yabaki esa qai laki vakayacori kina na taudaku kei Suva na kena vakananumi na siga me baleti keda nai taukei e

vuravura. E vakayacori tiko mai Bua ena mataka vinaka nikua, ka vulagi dokai saka tiko kina na Turaga na Tui Bua, kau tauca tiko noqu vakanuini vinaka ni na qaravi vinaka na soqo me baleti keda, na kena vakananumi o keda na ittaukei ni vanua e vuravura ka vakayacori tiko mai Bua ena siga vinaka nikua.

Turaga na *Speaker*, niu na sauma tiko na veika e mai vakaraitaka tiko na honourable Assistant Minister nikua, au nanuma meu na taura na kena vosa vaka Vavalagi mera na rawa ni matata saka tiko vei ira na noda era vakarorogo saka tiko ena siga vinaka nikua. Na veika e vakaraitaka na *honourable Assistant Minister for iTaukei Affairs* e dua nai valu levu ka valuta saka tiko na Tabacakacaka i iTaukei kau nanuma meu vakaraitaka na kena bibi vei keda.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, three pillars of the *vanua* are very closely laced together - the *iTaukei*, our natural resources and our culture. Drugs have easily penetrated the *vanua* because of the cracks in our societal structure which have allowed this to spread unchecked. The present Government recognised this very early when we came into office particularly the damage it had caused, not only in the urban environment but also within our *iTaukei* communities. This problem is further enhanced by the decline in traditional *vanua* governance seen in the past few years. People have accused the *vanua* of neglect assuming it has not done or taken any action to address the drug problem. Drugs in the *vanua* is a massive problem and requires a comprehensive approach and we will use the tools at our disposal to confront the problems.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, what we have done, we have taken a proactive approach with the *Veitarogi Vanua* visiting villages to fill vacant traditional titles. Previously, they only entered the village when there was a title dispute. This approach was entirely new to villages and was met with great enthusiasm and gratitude. We need to demonstrate that we are committed to filling the vacant traditional titles as it is a crucial step in addressing the drug problem in Fiji, but we will not rest there. Our training team will follow shortly. Traditional leaders must be capacitated. Mr. Speaker, that is hands on actively for us.

At the policy level, the localisation process is currently underway for the United Nations Declarations on the Right of Indigenous People. The consultations are almost completed, and we will soon take it to Cabinet with the village guidelines. Laws and legislations will be reviewed particularly those dealing with natural resources. There is no other way to alleviate poverty for the *iTaukei*. A dynamic rural economy that utilises natural resources from the land to sea will provide another option for our villagers.

“Say No to Drugs” is not just about traditional leadership, it is also about commercialising our natural resources to fight poverty. The Government is already taking concrete steps towards achieving it. The review of the *iTaukei* institutions is currently underway with two primary objectives being the economic empowerment and the strengthening of traditional governance.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, culture can play a significant role in the fight against drugs by providing a strong sense of identity and community. Last year, I attended the Melanesian Arts Festival and this year the Festival of Pacific Arts. It was an eye opener. Those who underestimate the significance of culture to confront the serious issues like drugs, often overlook the powerful influence it has on community resilience and individual behaviour. While inspired by the two festivals, Fiji is already on the course to further integrate cultural heritage into the National Development Strategy. Community empowerment and *iTaukei* villages would be impacted the most.

This year, for the first time, we have been resourced with Cultural Officers for the Provinces, as has been addressed by the honourable Assistant Minister. It is part of the implementation of the National Cultural Policy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, filling the vacant traditional title is just the beginning, not an end. Our strategy must include all pillars of the *Vanua* for long term success.

Ignorance has long undermined the *Vanua*, which now seeks proper recognition. From the Ministerial Statement by the honourable Minister for Youth and Sports yesterday, we have witnessed the successful of the support of the *Vanua* to the Government, and we will continue to seek the *Vanua*'s support to the Government and also to religious organisations.

We will also see that the *Vanua* takes education seriously, as that will be the way forward for our community. Strengthening the three pillars of the *Vanua* is essential, otherwise, our efforts will merely be seen as well-intended but insufficient. *Vinaka vakalevu, Turaga Sipika.*

MR. SPEAKER.- *Vinaka vakalevu*, honourable Minister.

COMMUNICATION FROM THE SPEAKER

Back to Office Reports

MR. SPEAKER.- Before we adjourn, honourable Members, for your information, the following are Back to Office Reports - Reports that, kind of, described the tours that we (Fiji Parliament) undertook to attend regional meetings. I usually lead the delegation and then there is one or two from the Opposition and Government side who travels with us. When a group makes a tour, it is proper that they compile a report when they come back and this report is highlighted in the House.

There are two Back to Office Reports - the first one is on our Official Visit to the Parliament of Victoria and the second is on the Indonesia-Pacific Parliamentary Partnership (IPPP) Meeting which was held in Jakarta, Indonesia. That meeting was an interesting one whereby we encountered a kind of preparation that was completely different because we were hoping, through Fiji's support and how we were able to kind of describe it, the inroads that they have made into West Papua, so there was a kind of a bilateral arrangement between the MSG comprising of Fiji, Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands together with them, but the theme of the meeting was IPPP in the Pacific. So, we told the Madam Speaker, "This is good, but this is only to do with MSG. The rest of the Pacific that you want is there, down on the ground floor."

These are some of the things that we learn as we go to these kind of meetings because of the heavy investment they have undertaken in the resource rich country of West Papua. I told them that before coming to this meeting, we had a huge protest outside our Parliament. It was to do with West Papua and there are other countries from the Pacific, like New Caledonia - the Kanaks, who are seeking their independence and these have been long outstanding issues. That is why we have seen it fit to have these Reports be made available in the Library for reference. So, when you go there to do your research, these Reports will be available to you.

ADJOURNMENT

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

That Parliament adjourns until Monday, 2nd September, 2024, at 9.30 a.m.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, that concludes the end of our sitting for this week. I must thank each and every one of you for the robust debate and the contributions throughout the week. Your being able to sit for long hours and bear with the exchanges that is happening in the House, we thank you for that ability to sit and listen. It is all of our work in this august House which is to sit and listen, whether you do not like what you hear, or you like what you want to hear, or what you hear, that is all part of the work in this Chamber. We just have to sit and listen.

I now declare Parliament adjourned until Monday, 2nd September, 2024, at 9.30 a.m. Parliament is adjourned.

The Parliament adjourned at 2.13 p.m.

ANNEXURE I

Reply to Written Question No. 159/2024 tabled by the honourable Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport (Ref. Pages: 1647-1648)



**MINISTER FOR PUBLIC WORKS, METEOROLOGICAL SERVICES
 AND TRANSPORT
 (Hon. Ro F.Q. Tuisawau)**

Response to Question No. 159/2024 is as follows:

The Marine Safety Authority of Fiji (MSAF) received a Capital Budget of \$2,118,149 for the Financial Year 2024-2025. The various projects included in the MSAF Capital Budget are as follows:

	Projects	Budget	Anticipated Completion Date	Benefits & Beneficiary
1	<p>Light beacons – roll over project 2023/2024:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natovi • Ovalau - inter island shipping routes. <p>Lighthouses - roll over project 2023-2024:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Makogai Island Lighthouse. • Beqa Island - Nawamati Point Lighthouse. 	\$20,000,000	May 2025	<p>Benefits</p> <p>The construction of 21 new lightbeacons to be located at East of Cokota Reef, Ramsey Reef, Green Reef, SW of Clifton Reef, NW Ovalau, off Natovi Jetty, Cokota Reef, Qomalailai Reef, Cakau Davui and unnamed dangerous reefs in the approaches to Nabouwalu wharf is an on-going project. We received 1,000,000 in the 2023-2024 financial year and funds this financial year will see the completion of this project.</p> <p>Makogai Island Lighthouse - Construction of new to lighthouse to replace the structure which was destroyed by TC Winston in February 2016.</p> <p>Beqa Island – Nawamati Point Lighthouse – Rehabilitation of existing concrete foundation which is deteriorating due to marine environmental conditions. The light beacons and lighthouses serve as navigation aids for ships and boats and offer stability and direction. They will be beneficial to mariners who use these routes at sea.</p> <p>Beneficiaries:</p> <p>Maritime Traffic for shipping routes between Natovi, Nabouwalu, Ovalau and Lomaiviti waters. Also, for shipping routes passing Beqa Island.</p>
2	<p>CCTV for the following stations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natovi and Nabouwalu. • Outer stations. 	\$40,000	March 2025	<p>Benefits</p> <p>CCTV at the Natovi and Nabouwalu Jetties will enhance surveillance especially as we move towards the management of all jetties. The implementation of CCTV systems across all outer offices at MSAF will enhance security and the protection of assets and employees CCTV coverage provide real-time monitoring enabling prompt response to security incidents and potential threats. It acts as a deterrent to unauthorized activities, safeguarding valuable</p>

	Projects	Budget	Anticipated Completion Date	Benefits & Beneficiary
				assets and resources Beneficiaries: Shipping, stakeholders, MSAF Employees, MSAF and Boarder Security Agencies.
3	Firewall High availability for MSAF HQ	\$30,000	January 2025	Benefits: The high availability of the firewall at MSAF's HQ office is a critical role in ensuring uninterrupted network security and data protection. This configuration provides redundancy, minimizing the risk of downtime and enhancing the resilience of MSAF's digital infrastructure. The criticality of this setup is evident in its ability to maintain continuous and secure access to critical applications, prevent unauthorized access, and mitigate potential cyber threats. The firewall's high availability is essential for sustaining operational continuity, safeguarding sensitive information, and fortifying the overall cybersecurity posture of MSAF. Beneficiaries: Shipping stakeholders, MSAF Employees, MSAF
4	Replacement of MSAF 1 Outboard motor in Lautoka	\$33,949	September 2024	Benefits: We have an outboard engine which was bought in 2000 and it has done its part and is due for replacement. Since it is more than 20 years old, we find it difficult to get spare parts and therefore it is more feasible to just replace them. This outboard engine is for Lautoka Oil Spill response boat, which needs to be a reliable and efficient engine to be on standby 24/7. Beneficiaries: MSAF and Boarder Security Agencies.
5	Database (DR) Server	\$15,000	July 2025	Benefits: The DR server provides a robust backup system, allowing swift recovery in the face of unexpected events, minimizing downtime and preventing data loss. Simultaneously, the DR firewall acts as a frontline defense, securing MSAF's digital assets from unauthorized access and cyberattacks during the recovery phases. Beneficiaries MSAF
	Total	\$2.118.149		

ANNEXURE II

Reply to Written Question No. 160/2024 tabled by the honourable Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport (Ref. Pages: 1649)



**MINISTER FOR PUBLIC WORKS, METEOROLOGICAL SERVICES
AND TRANSPORT
(Hon. Ro F.Q. Tuisawau)**

Response to Question No. 160/2024 is as follows:

Fiji has a total of 69 lighthouses located across its various islands and coastal regions, serving as critical aids for maritime navigation and safety. Out of these, 51 lighthouses which equates to 73 percent, are currently operational.

There are 18 non-operational lighthouses, representing 17 percent of the total lighthouses. Most of these lighthouses were damaged by Tropical Cyclone Winston in 2016, which was one of the most powerful cyclones to ever hit Fiji, causing widespread devastation. The force of the cyclone resulted in significant structural damage to many of these vital navigational aids, rendering them inoperative and highlighting the urgent need for repair and restoration.

Out of the 18 non-operational lighthouses, the Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji (MSAF) successfully repaired and brought back into operation three lighthouses in the last financial year (2023/2024). These lighthouses are:

- (1) Lautoka Harbour - Pinder Reef Light;
- (2) Beqa Island - South West Reef Light; and
- (3) Suva Harbour - North East End Light.

MSAF has a comprehensive plan to commit, through its budgetary allocations, to repair and make operational a total of three lighthouses per year over the next five years, from 2024 to 2029. The three lighthouses scheduled for the 2024/2025 financial year are:

- (1) Beqa Island - Nawamati Point Light;
- (2) Makogai Island Light; and
- (3) Lau Group - Vatoa Island Light.

Additionally, in the 2024/2025 financial year, Government has allocated budget to MSAF, through its Aids to Navigation Capital Allocation, to construct 21 Light Beacons from Natovi to Ovalau and Natovi to Nabouwalu, which are among the most congested and frequently used navigational passages in Fiji, operating 24/7.

Beyond lighthouses, the Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji (MSAF) also maintains various other Aids to Navigation (ATONS) structures to ensure safe maritime travel. These include Light Beacons, Leading Beacons, and Navigation Buoys. Currently, there are a total of 14 Light Beacons, of which 13 are operational and one is non-operational.

Additionally, there are 4 Leading Beacons, with 3 being operational and one non-operational. Furthermore, there are 13 Navigation Buoys, with 10 operational and 3 non-operational. These ATONS structures are crucial for guiding vessels safely through Fiji's waters, and MSAF is committed to their ongoing maintenance and repair to uphold maritime safety standards.

