

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

MONDAY, 30TH SEPTEMBER, 2024

[CORRECTED COPY]

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MONDAY, 30TH SEPTEMBER, 2024

The Parliament met at 9.34 a.m. pursuant to notice.

MR. SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

Hon. Sitiveni Ligamamada Rabuka, Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Climate Change, Environment, Civil Service, Information, Public Enterprises and Veteran Affairs
Hon. Graham Everett Leung, Attorney-General
Hon. Prof. Biman Chand Prasad, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics
Hon. Manoa Seru Nakausabaria Kamikamica, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-operatives and Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications
Hon. Viliame Rogoibulu Gavoka, Deputy Prime Minister and, Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation
Hon. Ro Filipe Qaraniqio Tuisawau, Minister for Public Works and Meteorological Services and Transport
Hon. Dr. Ratu Atonio Rabici Lalabalavu, Minister for Health and Medical Services
Hon. Charan Jeeth Singh, Minister for Multi-Ethnic Affairs and Sugar Industry
Hon. Filimoni Wainiqolo Rasokisoki Vosarogo, Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources
Hon. Siromi Dokonivalu Turaga, Minister for Justice
Hon. Lynda Diseru Tabuya, Minister for Women, Children and Social Protection
Hon. Aseri Masivou Radrodoro, Minister for Education
Hon. Sakiasi Raisevu Ditoka, Minister for Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management
Hon. Ifereimi Vasu, Minister for iTaukei Affairs and Culture, Heritage and Arts
Hon. Jese Saukuru, Minister for Youth and Sports
Hon. Maciu Katamotu Nalumisa, Minister for Housing and Local Government
Hon. Agni Deo Singh, Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations
Hon. Vatimi Tidara Tuinasakea Kaunitawake Rayalu, Minister for Agriculture and Waterways
Hon. Alitia Vakatai Bavou Cirikiyasawa Bainivalu, Minister for Fisheries and Forestry
Hon. Lenora Salusalu Qereqeretabua, Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs
Hon. Esrom Yosef Immanuel, Assistant Minister for Finance
Hon. Isikeli Tuiwailevu, Assistant Minister for iTaukei Affairs
Hon. Iliesa Sovui Vanawalu, Assistant Minister for Education
Hon. Ratu Rakuita Solesole Sauramaeva Vakalalabure, Assistant Minister for Home Affairs and Immigration
Hon. Sashi Kiran, Assistant Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation
Hon. Jovesa Rokuta Vocea, Assistant Minister for Rural, Maritime Development and Disaster Management
Hon. Tomasi Niuvotu Tunabuna, Assistant Minister for Agriculture and Waterways
Hon. Kalaveti Vodo Ravu
Hon. Inia Batikoto Seruiratu
Hon. Jone Usamate
Hon. Faiyaz Siddiq Koya
Hon. Premila Devi Kumar
Hon. Viliame Naupoto
Hon. Ioane Naivalurua
Hon. Mosese Drecala Bulitavu
Hon. Hem Chand

Hon. Parveen Kumar Bala
Hon. Penioni Koliniwai Ravunawa
Hon. Sachida Nand
Hon. Semi Tuleca Koroilavesau
Hon. Aliko Bia
Hon. Sanjay Salend Kirpal
Hon. V. Nath
Hon. Ratu Josaia Bulavakarua Niudamu
Hon. Ketan Kirit Lal
Hon. Naisa Tatau Tuinaceva
Hon. Viam Pillay
Hon. Shalen Kumar
Hon. Alipate Nagata Tuicolo
Hon. Virendra Lal
Hon. Rinesh Ritesh Sharma
Hon. Taito Rokomatu Matasawalevu
Hon. Joseph Nitya Nand

Absent

Hon. Pio Tikoduadua, Minister for Home Affairs and Immigration
Hon. Sakiusa Tubuna, Assistant Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister

MINUTES

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

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

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE SPEAKER

Welcome

I welcome all honourable Members to today's sitting, those joining us in the gallery and those watching the proceedings on television and the internet. Thank you for your interest in the workings of your Parliament.

Standing Committee on Social Affairs –
Savusavu Town Council 2011 Annual Report

For the information of all honourable Members, I have approved the request from the Standing Committee on Social Affairs to refer the Savusavu Town Council Annual Report for 2011

and 2012, to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence. This is to allow efficiency through the even distribution of the workload.

Parliamentary Remunerations Act 2014

Honourable Members, please, kindly take note that I have received legal advice that by operation of Section 11(1) of the Parliamentary Remunerations Act 2014, the new Determination made by Parliament on 24th May, 2024, which was published in the Gazette on 30th May, 2024, had superseded the 2020 Determination. As a result, the 2020 Determination had been effectively revoked, and the 2024 Determination has established that the current salaries is at 100 percent effective from 1st August, 2024. You are now on 100 percent. You all seem to be looking at the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND CERTAIN DOCUMENTS

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 38, I present to Parliament the Reserve Bank of Fiji - Quarterly Review June 2024

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, please take note that the Reserve Bank of Fiji – Quarterly Review June 2024 is for information only and will not be referred to any Standing Committee.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

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

- (1) Honourable Minister for Fisheries and Forestry;
- (2) Honourable Minister for Education; and
- (3) Honourable Minister for iTaukei Affairs, Culture, Heritage and Arts.

Honourable Members, Ministers may speak up to 20 minutes and after the Minister, we will then invite the honourable Leader of the Opposition or his designate to speak on the statement for no more than five minutes. There will also be the response from the honourable Leader of the Group of 9 –Bloc or his designate and may also speak for five minutes. There will be no other debate.

Status of Timber Treatment in Fiji

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Prime Minister, honourable Ministers and Assistant Ministers, honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Members of Parliament, ladies and gentlemen, *ni sa yadra vinaka*.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to deliver my statement on the status of timber treatment in Fiji. I am delivering this statement because the issue of selling sub-standard treated timber on the domestic market is a cause for concern and has become one of the critical national interest. Last month honourable Premila Kumar raised this issue in the media and so did the Consumer Council of Fiji, raising a crucial question on the role of the Ministry of Forestry in this regard. I must thank the honourable Premila Kumar and the Consumer Council of Fiji for raising this important issue

especially when we are faced with serious challenges relating to the incursion of the Asian subterranean termites.

Mr. Speaker, as you may all know, the main purpose of treating timber with chemicals is to protect the timber from insects and fungal decay making it more durable and being able to last longer in service. Without treatment, many species of timber including pine will not be suitable for use in exposed and ground contact situations.

Mr. Speaker, timber treatment therefore, substantially extends the service life of timber, particularly those with lower natural durability classes including a number of our native timbers and our main plantations species. It must however be noted that the treating of timber with chemicals is not compulsory. This is because some untreated timbers from species such as pine can be used without any problems for some specific end-users especially for non-load bearing and in fully protected situations and out of ground contact. Also, low grade timbers destined for boxing purposes are not normally treated.

Mr. Speaker, at the same time, there are native species, the hardwood of which are naturally durable and do not need to be treated. So, in the market, one has a choice of purchasing either treated or untreated timber depending on one's requirements. It is only when a timber processor elects to undertake timber treatment that the current legislations come into play to ensure that certain quality and safety standards are met.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Forestry currently regulates the operations of all timber treatment plants in the country as required under the Forest Regulations of 1992. As we speak, we have 29 registered timber treatment plants and so far, 14 are licensed to operate this year. These plants are licensed annually and are monitored on a quarterly basis. The monitoring of these plants focuses on operator competency, health and safety control where timber samples are located on a monthly basis for testing, looking at the concentration and penetration of preservative chemicals in the timber to ensure that these are within required standards.

Mr. Speaker, different end-users have different levels of chemicals with assigned buildings including H2 which is used for interior use and is fully protected from the weather and not in ground contact. H3 for exterior use not in ground contact, H4 are posts which have low risk and in ground contact, H5 posts which are high risk and in ground contact, H6 posts and poles which are usually of marine use. All licensed timber treatment plants should have the appropriate branding gears which is low risk and ground contact; H5 posts which are high risk and in ground contact; H6 posts and poles which are usually of marine use. All licensed timber treatment plants should have the appropriate branding gears to enable them to brand their treated timbers, showing the treatment plant ID number, the chemical use and the hazard level to which the timber has been treated. One end of every piece of treated timber should be branded as described.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Forest Regulations 1992 mandates the Ministry of Forestry to licence and monitor the operation of timber treatment plants but does not authorise the Ministry of Forestry to ensure that timber users only buy timbers which are treated according to the legally prescribed standards. We can only advise and offer our assistance in the proper specification of timbers and in the inspections to ensure that the specifications had been followed. The Ministry of Forestry had been working tirelessly over the years carrying out awareness and training with timber retailers and hardware shops and using the radio talkback shows and the *Nai Katalau* television programme to educate and raise awareness to the general public.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, consumers need to know and understand what they are buying for and what they need to ask retailers as well as seek in the specifications, the level of treatment and what hazard

level that timber is suitable for. As this issue of substandard timbers continues to be a challenge, especially in the face of incursion of the Asian subterranean termites, the Ministry is at the moment exploring the possibility of developing a timber marketing regulation to also oversee the operation of timber retailers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is important to note that treating timber with chemicals is not only part of the solution. Proper design of buildings and proper specification of building materials go a long way in ensuring that we are better protected, especially against the termites. I thank you for the opportunity to speak, Mr Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER.- I think the advice is very important, as we are trying to find a way in the timber market for the solution to enable us to get good timber. There is some advice, we from the islands, use coconuts a lot. Coconut is oily and it does not need to be treated. We have a senile tree that is 60 years to 70 years old, that is a good enough timber to take care of your timber needs for a new building. Maybe people are not used to it, but those are some of the sound advice coming from the honourable Minister for Forestry.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for her deliberation this morning and highlighting the facts surrounding timber treatment. I think when we look back in the olden days, timber treatment was not available then. I remember correctly back in my village in Kadavu, the technology and the idea of timber treatment was not readily available during my young days. I remember even in buildings of Fijian *bure*, the villagers used to use the sandalwood tree as their posts. These posts used to be the one that lasts longest, *yasi* and *vesi*, because of their natural strength and hardness in the fibre that is made out of these.

I thank the Honourable Minister for highlighting these facts because there seems to be confusion within our local population on the laws regarding treatment. I know that non-treated timber mostly are rejected by people in the rural areas thinking that the life span of untreated timber is much shorter than the treated one. But her explanation this morning basically means that there are other ways, as you have alluded to, Mr. Speaker, the traditional way of treating timber to make their life span longer. I remember in the rural islands they have been treating pine by soaking them in seawater for a week. The only difficulty in that is when they bring out to construct it is very hard to put nails through it. The timber pine basically hardens, and it is very difficult to use nails. It basically will need holes to be drilled and the use of bolts and nuts.

Again, Mr. Speaker, she highlighted the different and the various types of treatment of timber. I think out of the eight types of treatment the main treatment is to treat against insects and termites. In my trips around Lautoka I found out the attack of termites and the destruction that is caused. I think, honourable Assistant Minister in the Prime Minister's Office and honourable Sashi Kiran have been in charge of a group that actually looked at this.

I was in a wedding in Girit Centre two weekends ago. It is amazing to see these termites when the light goes on 6 o'clock in the evening. They almost clog the lights that are hanging around the Girit Centre where the wedding was held. But, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I noticed that by 9 o'clock all the termites have gone. None to be seen. Now, I would like to ask, honourable Sashi Kiran if she can explain to me the fiasco on this habit of termites that not only in the Western Division but now it has moved to the Northern Division around Labasa. I understand from honourable Assistant Minister Sashi Kiran that they actually go underground. They creep to about 15 metres and then can come up in cane fields and actually eat into standing cane. So, it is a huge problem, but I thank the honourable Minister for highlighting the issue so that we can at least learn and be more informed of the different aspects of treatment of timber and the termites and insects that attack timber.

MR. SPEAKER.- It is very interesting, honourable Member. Maybe honourable Assistant Minister for Women can share what sort of oil she uses. I think that is a kind of repellent to those kind of insects.

I now call upon the honourable Leader of the G-9 Bloc or his designate.

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the G-9 Bloc thank the honourable Minister for the very timely statement and advice on the issue and we have nothing further to add.

TSLS Delegation to Sydney and Canberra

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Deputy Prime Ministers, honourable Cabinet Ministers, honourable Leader of the Opposition and fellow Members of Parliament and all those joining us live through the livestream across the globe and from the comforts of their homes; I thank you for the opportunity to present my Ministerial Statement on the recent Tertiary Scholarship and Loan Service (TSLS) delegation visitation which I led to Sydney and Canberra in Australia and the outcomes achieved.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it would be remiss of me not to mention that this is the first time that the Government, in this case, the Coalition Government has set budgetary allocation to visit sponsored students studying under the TSLS overseas scholarships in Australia and New Zealand and similar visit is done by other governments across the globe who sponsor students at universities overseas.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the purpose of the visit is to check on student wellbeing and welfare and have direct audience with university executives and students in order to work out solutions raised by students, or the respective universities and the visit coincided with strengthening and expanding partnerships with universities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, TSLS was established in 2014, and overseas scholarships started in 2019 under the organisation. There was no visit to the students until 2023. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this year I was fortunate to be part of the TSLS delegation, which included:

- (1) Ro Teimumu Kepa - TSLS Board Chair
- (2) Dr. Hasmukh Lal - Chief Executive Officer
- (3) Staff from TSLS and the Ministry of Education.

The universities visited included the University of New South Wales, Western Sydney, University, The University, Newcastle and the University Canberra.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in addition to the intentions of the travel, the Coalition Government introduced a new scheme on, the current financial year, to have more citizens to access PhD scholarships to boost Fiji's human capital. This is the newly introduced scheme called Cost Sharing Overseas PhD Scholarship. Under this agreement the universities will cover tuition fee while TSLS will pay stipend, airfare and any other cost associated with the study. As such, the taxpayers of Fiji will save around \$300,000 tuition fee for a four-year PhD programme and will have graduates of top quality.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on 3rd July, 2024, the University of Newcastle was the first university to come on board for the cost-sharing overseas PhD initiative. During the visit, I witnessed the signing of the cost-sharing overseas PhD MOU between TSLS and the University of New South Wales and Western Sydney University and I thank these two universities for development perspective towards Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also had the opportunity to visit the world class Brumbies sport facility at the University of Canberra, where TSLS will send prospective students to pursue qualifications in sport science and sports medicine. This is a model where the university has a partnership facility for learning, teaching research and sports excellence with ACT Brumbies.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, during the visit of the four universities, the delegation emphasised to the universities the intentions of the scholarship investment designed in developing human capital, particularly on the introduction of a new overseas scheme called Scholarships for Merit-based Postgraduate Diploma Specialisation, In-service, overseas training and the increased quota in the scholarship for merit-based undergraduate overseas scheme from 40 awards to 80 awards.

The universities were also requested to ensure pastoral care is provided to assist students in adjusting to the fast-paced environment of learning they are in, whereby peer mentoring services to students is emphasised to assist students in coping with their academic requirements.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, during the meeting with the students, they were notified of the TSLS policy changes, such as increasing bond services from 1.5 times to 2.5 times. Increase in termination penalty up to 50 percent for students who default their bond services with special emphasis on scholarship academic obligation since the probation period has decreased from three probations to two probations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, after visiting the sponsored students at the four universities I was overwhelmed with the response that was received from the students. The sponsored students commended the Coalition Government for providing them with the opportunity to undertake programmes at an overseas university. The students also commended the support services provided by the universities and TSLS in achieving their educational goals overseas and assisting them in adapting to the new environment overseas.

And the sponsored student showed commitment towards completing their programmes and returning to serve the country. I assured the students that the Coalition Government will continue to assist and invest in the youths as they are the future of a country and as such it is a responsibility of the sponsored students to serve their scholarship bond.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the student highly acknowledged the visit as it was motivational, and they saw Government's seriousness and commitment to their studies. It cost Government around \$300,000 to fund, one undergraduate student in the Overseas Scholarship Scheme when compared to \$30,000 to \$40,000 at a local university. To have commercial return of service to the country against the investment, the bonding of overseas scholarship is now 2.5 times the duration of the study.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, upon meeting with the sponsored students at the universities, I was alerted on the need to review the Education Curriculum to allow students a smooth transition from secondary school to universities, specifically in the areas and subjects of mathematics, physics, and computer science. It was highlighted in the visit that there is a vast difference between what is learned in Year 13 in Fiji and what is taught in the universities in overseas. These sponsored students were assured that the curriculum innovation and transformation from ECE to senior secondary is one of the priority areas of the Ministry and as such the Ministry is working towards the reviewing of the school curriculum.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, under the Overseas Scholarship Scheme, TSLS funds the programme which are part of the national priority areas but not offered by the local universities. A total of 60 students are currently enrolled in areas such as cyber security, software engineering, veterinary science, data science, actuarial science, forensic science, architectural engineering, chemical engineering,

biomedical engineering, environmental engineering, mechatronics engineering, speech pathology and renewable energy at the New Zealand and Australia based universities. With increasing scholarship quota at the undergraduate level and the introduction of new scholarship schemes, more Fijians will be pursuing quality education in Australia and New Zealand.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji is faced with competing priorities and challenges and for Government to alone invest skilling people, to mitigate gaps in our workforce, is a challenge with other competing national priorities and therefore, during the visit I had the opportunity to lead the delegation to the bilateral meeting with DFAT where the delegation was joined by His Excellency Ajay Bhai Amrit, Fiji's High Commissioner to Australia who coordinated the meeting.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji has lost approximately around 2.5 percent of its population through permanent and circular migration. It is evident that Australia is the one highly preferred destination country. It is noted that the Australian Awards Schemes are also given to our citizens, which we highly acknowledge, but there is no monitoring in place, on how long the graduates effectively serve in Fiji after graduation. As such, our bilateral meeting with DFAT in Canberra discussed ways the students on the Australian Awards can be bonded by the Fiji Government through TSLS. This will ensure that Fiji does not lose Australian Scholarship Awards Graduates, and they serve at least minimum of five years in Fiji and be cleared from the bond services by TSLS.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, amongst other discussions with DFAT, the delegation acknowledged the Australian Government in its budget support to the Fiji Government and made recommendations that the Australian Government considers providing targeted funding for specific job skills, training under the Vuvala Partnership. The proposed budgetary supports towards vocational programmes and degree programmes which are offered by local universities in the areas where Fiji lacks the discipline and skills shortages.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, curriculum innovation and transformation from ECE to senior secondary school is one of the priority areas discussed DFAT. The Ministry is working to develop a concept of curriculum innovation and transformation. We are pleased to inform this august House that DFAT has assured support for Fiji's curriculum review, which will be assisted in parallel with the Australian curriculum review.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as curriculum review is enhanced, it is expected that teachers' skills will need to be upgraded, and this was also discussed with DFAT to set up a teacher upskilling platform on digital training assessments. The Ministry of Education, Mr. Speaker has started dialogue with other bilateral partners on assistance for online learning for both, teachers and students, and DFAT along with the World Bank and ADB, and some other agencies.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it must be celebrated that Fiji on the education front is spending scholarship on its own and through partnerships with the Australian universities for example the PhDs. The intentions whereby TSLS is the driving force along with the Fiji Higher Education Commission and our stakeholder tertiary providers. We wish to inculcate a culture of research-driven policies that encapsulate innovations and entrepreneurship for development resolutions, and in doing so, the Ministry of Education is driving the establishment of a Fiji National Research Council or a proxy to allow researchers to receive grants to conduct research on Government policies and challenges. The proxy can be a model to begin with research grant based at TSLS and then full scoping to establish entity on its own.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, during the visit by the TSLS delegation, we were able to secure the pro-bono service of two distinguished professors who are from Fiji to help in the establishment of a Research Council. They are Professor Dharmendra Sharma from University of Canberra and

Professor Satish Chand from University of New South Wales. We are very grateful to the gentlemen for their support towards the development of Fiji's research capabilities and we will look forward to the support of our other esteemed sons and daughters of Fiji in the area of education research to join us in this noble development intention.

On that note, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am also pleased to report that DFAT has assured the assistance of the Australian Research Council to help in the setting up of Fiji's National Research Council, which had been agreed by law to be set up in 2017 under the National Research Council Act of 2017, which, however, is yet to be implemented.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to conclude the investment that Government is doing in quality education and in research degrees; Fiji will reap benefits in three to four years' time and beyond and we need a strong and bold vision in education to ensure that we build an inclusive nation that empowers our citizens. The Coalition Government's commitment to education, we will definitely make a measure in roads in our development intentions accordingly and we thank all stakeholders for working with us to make these aspirations happen.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just before I take my seat, may I also extend my sincere appreciation to His Excellency the High Commissioner to Australia, Mr. Ajay Amrit Bhai, his hardworking staff and the amazing Fijian diaspora for the warm traditional welcome accorded to us as we visited Canberra. The usual Fijian hospitality and fervour was on display, and I wish to say *vinaka vakalevu na veivakataukeitaki, na loloma kei na veikauwaitaki*. We trust we were able to satisfy those queries especially on the education sector sufficiently.

MR. SPEAKER.- *Vinaka vakalevu* honourable Minister for Education for that very thought-provoking tour that you have undertaken and your discussions with your counterparts in Australia. The Legislature is pushing for some recognition of how best it could endeavour into more research to be undertaken, especially when the honourable Attorney-General has highlighted that there are only six drafters with the Solicitor-General. Most of the time they are tied up, there is delay in the work not only for the Committees, even for private motions from honourable Members. That is still to be seen.

We would like something similar to the Ministry of Health where they do a Public Health Master's and that should encourage and then given a budget allocation. But the concern raised by the Australian Government, I think, needs to be noted very seriously, honourable Members and honourable Ministers. Please, see the concern that is coming from graduates, we do not know where they are, they are provided with some scholarships and then they vanished. In this regard, we are just registering our interest here, honourable Minister for Education, the legislature. We need drafters and we are pushing very hard for an in-service training to be conducted by the various officials here who are highly qualified and stand ready to pursue further education in law.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the honourable Minister for Education for his Ministerial Statement on Tertiary Scholarship and Loan Services and the recent visit by TSLS team to Australia. TSLS gives scholarships to Fiji students to go and study abroad. My questions are:

- (1) Who decides which programmes to be funded? Is it only TSLS making this critical decision or Higher Education Commission Fiji is also involved in this decision-making?
- (2) Does such decision have regard to the new National Development Plan, meaning, professional needs of the country?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the tertiary educational loan scheme was introduced in 2014 by the Bainimarama Government, with the focus on achieving the best educational outcomes for Fiji and ensuring that funding spent on scholarships and loans, which would result in contribution to the Fiji's economy growth, workforce development and livelihood. The TSLS has spent \$1.44 billion from the budget to assist around 70,000 students in last 10 years of operation. The total amount of taxpayers' money spent has indicated huge contribution to Fiji that is prioritised through tertiary education and training programmes. Previously, all students meeting the educational requirements at any tertiary institution, were given loans but that is not the case today. There are many students who have received admission into programmes at universities but are studying privately because they did not qualify for the scholarship or loan. That is around 19,000.

The previous government established a sustainable funding model for tertiary education, creating a revolving fund for future students intending to study in tertiary institutions. Unfortunately, this Government has created an unsustainable financial model, where every year taxpayers fork out around \$150 million for tertiary education. The Government has imposed 50 percent penalties for forfeiting bonds if they wish to seek opportunities offshore. How does this help our graduates or the economy? Remittances sent by unemployed students working abroad can contribute positively to our foreign exchange.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government decision to write off student debts in the last budget has cost over \$600 million directly equating to the current budget deficit. Converting the student loan scheme to a scholarship is not sustainable for a small economy like ours. Even larger economies like Australia, continue to maintain a loan scheme for tertiary education. Mr. Speaker, Sir, \$150 million would have gone towards other important developments. The Government is given budget support by Australia and New Zealand. Students in these countries are on Higher Education Contribution Scheme. We hope that the TSLS team that visited Australia have learnt the sustainable financial model of funding tertiary education which reduces financial burden on taxpayers.

MR. SPEAKER.- I now call on the honourable Leader of the Group of Nine or their designate.

(Chorus of interjections)

You just stand up and continue.

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- I was waiting for the yellow card to come out.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for the very informative statement on their visit. I wish the students who are studying under the Scheme well. I urge them not to waste this wonderful opportunity and finish their studies. We have nothing further to add.

MR. SPEAKER.- I acknowledge the presence, honourable Members, of Ms. Malimali in the Chambers. It is hard to miss her, honourable Members. She has been the centre stage of attraction all these how many weeks. All the best, Ms. Malimali.

National Museum and National Art Gallery

HON. I. VASU.- Mr. Speaker, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Deputy Prime Ministers, honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Members of this august House, ladies and gentlemen who are here in the gallery and those listening from their homes, *ni sa bula vinaka*.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to provide a Ministerial Statement to share with you the progress the Ministry is undertaking in the effort to strengthen a transformed culture sector for Fiji. One such is

the national museum, a statutory body established through the Fiji Museum Act of 1929 to manage, protect and provide our national collection of objects and treasures which relays stories of Fiji's rich culture.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, over and over again we learn from diplomatic and international visitors alike that more than often the best place to learn Fijian history, people's heritage and culture is at the Fiji Museum. Our new National Sustainable Tourism Framework highlights the importance of our cultures, traditions and creative industries in promoting a holistic experience for our tourists. Now this begs the question, are we doing enough to support our national museum, the iconic cultural institution that has been in existence since the 1900s?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, while I acknowledge past governments and their efforts to support the museum progress, it has always been an *ad hoc* and piece meal assistance. In addition, these efforts fall short of addressing the serious neglect that the institution had endured in the past years. However, tangible changes are progressively manifesting in the form of innovative exhibitions and infrastructural expansion at the National Museum.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if Members of this august House and the general public have been to the Fiji Museum in recent days, what you see is the result of hard work put in by staff, management, and its Board of Trustees past and present.

These are the real people that work behind the scenes, to ensure that our people, our international visitors, our senior citizens, our youths and our children get to see the renewed Museum offering an interactive experience that has been stagnant for the last 30 years. Through fundraising efforts of the *Tokani* - friends of the Museum, sponsorships, mini-donor assistance from embassies, cost-cutting measures carried out by the Museum board and management during and post COVID-19 assisted in the expansion you would have seen.

I would like to extend my *vinaka vakalevu* to these individuals and institutions for your kindness and assistance which came in when the Museum most needed a shoulder to lean on. And this new look National Museum, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is not the end to efforts by this Government and the Ministry to ensure that it gets the support it needs to transform itself into a national standard museum.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the old history gallery has been rebranded to focus on our creative communities. Its main objective is to engage visitors to learn and appreciate the artistic and creative excellence of our *iTaukei* communities and other communities who call Fiji home. It looks at techniques and making of cultural treasures such as *masi*, woven fibre materials, pottery including associated rituals, ceremonies and governance. In this new financial year, the Government is providing the Fiji Museum \$970,000 for its Operational Grant and \$700,000 for Capital Upgrade Works.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, while we want such independent statutory institutions to stand on its own, the Government must first take lead in making serious investment so that the Museum can become sustainable in the near future.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the increased funding will complement works that have already progressed at this stage. The installation of solar panels promoting energy efficiency had progressed to phase two which will reduce electricity bill for the Museum and alternate as main source during power outages in Suva. Having a steady supply of water through the installation of water tanks and pumps at the Museum will alleviate issues of unplanned water cuts especially when there is a high visitor entry numbers.

Mapping out a comprehensive and aligned waste and sewerage system in and around the Museum infrastructure is critical and works have also begun. The Museum will also commence with groundwork necessary to build its new state-of-the-art collections storage facility which will cost \$2 million. This will replace the current old building which was built in the 1970s and has not been renovated ever since.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, my sincere gratitude to the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources for facilitating our request in amalgamating the property lease area for the Fiji Museum. Since the building of the current Museum in 1955, the Museum lease space has always been relegated to the existing length and width of the building.

Now this has expanded to include the two former Nawela Hostel Building which housed the Museum administration and staff offices. This lease expansion has allowed the Museum to expand its facilities and ensure safe and security of its premises. The renovation of the Nawela Hostel Building will be completed in this financial year. The office will allow open space working environment for staff and dedicated rooms for specialized units to carry out their work such as the Archaeology Laboratory and the Exhibition Workshop.

The setting up of a robust IT system for the Museum includes fire alarm, protection and CCTV camera system is being planned and will be fully installed before the end of this financial year. This will ensure the security of our national collection and premises from hazardous threats that could lead to loss and ruin of our National Museum.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our National Museum is continuing with an implementation of its in-house activities to ensure that it fulfils its mandate. The development and rolling out of the museum education material is aimed at promoting interactive learning for our young people when they visit the Museum. It is a 360 degrees archaeology project which is an ongoing digital initiative that will ensure that the general public, diaspora Fijians, developers and visitors are able to see heritage sites and monumental features that are located in remote or inaccessible places around Fiji.

The Fiji Museum collections' project funded by the United States Embassy Cultural Preservation Grant has commenced and will soon recruit cultural youth interns to help in the documentation and community engagement aspect.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with the increasing activities and development necessary for the Fiji Museum, it has its fair share of challenges. Management is currently working on recruiting qualified and experienced individuals to fill vacant positions so that our National Museum can deliver its mandate to the Fijian people. The Fiji Museum is also looking at having a sustainable funding source to complement the annual grant given by the Government. This is key to business continuity and independence.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the care needed to protect 10,000 objects, textiles, archaeological materials, natural historic specimens, photographs and documentary heritage need to be amplified if we are serious about safeguarding our cultural heritage.

I ask our fellow Members of this august House and the general public to rally around supporting our National Museum in its effort to create an inclusive space for everyone. Our collection effort will foster the new direction that the Fiji Museum is undertaking with the focus on the celebration of our history, our identity, our heritage and our culture.

MR. SPEAKER- *Vinaka vakalevu*, honourable Minister, for that very important information of the collection of artefacts that belongs to Fiji. Just a word of advice, it will be interesting if you

pay a visit to the University of New South Wales Museum, in the heart of Sydney, as well as the Harvard University in the United States of America and even in Cambridge University. They have a lot of artefacts that are very important to us. It can be part of your collection that you are going to undertake with your budget allocation, but honourable Members that is a genuine concern raised by the honourable Minister.

Honourable Members, it is now 10.30 a.m. I intend to adjourn the House now and we will resume when the bell is sounded.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.31 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.06 a.m.

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you, we will move on and I now call on the honourable Leader of the Opposition or his designate to make their response.

HON. J. NAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the honourable Minister for a very comprehensive statement.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we all know that the vision of the Fiji Museum is to inspire, promote and to respect all cultures in Fiji, with its mission is to become a world-class museum. We understand that this will enhance its reputation by working locally, nationally and internationally to maintain and strengthen its focus on the diverse cultures of Fiji. It will be a place where the tangible and intangible heritage of these cultures is safeguarded and made accessible to communities, community members and researchers. This innovative and imaginative exhibits and programmes will serve local communities and be a significant draw for all visitors and it will also make a difference in people's lives.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are aware that the Fiji Museum is to install and set up displays inside the museum galleries, using objects that are kept in storage, and I understand this is being currently done. The idea is to create a theme based, storyline display with associated captions and short narratives based on archival materials including photographs, illustrations which may tell a story about the object.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we all know that displays are done externally by various institutions and the museum should encourage that any set-ups should be done inside the museum.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, mobile exhibits can be done, and all care must be taken to protect these exhibits. We hope that the Fiji Museum will put all its efforts into the realising that all cultures and ethnic groups have a piece of history. Currently, there are many histories, stories, artifacts, songs, cultures and traditional aspects that are not well documented.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I strongly recommend that the Ministry set-up a taskforce to move around the nation and acquire the artifacts and expressive arts and have it recorded and documented. This may mean that we go beyond our shores and acquire from people of our diaspora who have settled elsewhere. I understand that the Ministry will be venturing into this. Mr. Speaker, Sir, before it is too late and our piece of history will be lost forever, I urge the Ministry to forge ahead with this.

There is also a need for the Government to consider a building and funding a second small museum set-up in Nadi to cater for the tourism industry and get much needed revenue. There are many artefacts, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that are not displayed due to the lack of space in the current museum and these artefacts can be used in the second museum, let us say, supposedly to be built in Nadi and there is a request for that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the museum for their restorative work done so far and hope that people of this nation will use it to their advantage. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity.

MR. SPEAKER.- I now call on the honourable Leader of the G-9 Bloc or their designate.

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for his Statement this morning. The important value, the important aspect of the museum preserving the history of our nation. In addition to the preservation of our cultural and heritage history, Fiji, a small nation has got

a big war history. From 1917 during the Labour Corps days, World War I, World War II, those that went to the Malayan campaign and so far, even now the Peacekeeping era. I am urging perhaps, if those that are looking after the museum, the renovations and the enhancement that is happening now, if we can also look at the idea of having a section or accepted building as a war museum like all the other countries do, to capture that part of Fiji's history in the various campaigns that our ancestors went and participated in bravely, a fair number of them resting in those far away countries, for those that have passed.

I certainly support the work that is being put towards the enhancement of our museum. We hope that Government will continue to support the enlargement of the area and also perhaps think about the idea of preserving our war history and looking a war museum.

MR. SPEAKER.- Your suggestion is a noble one, it would be interesting to see how the former soldiers who were given a spade, a fork and a knife after giving their life for the country. It is sad, but that is reality, and I do not know if they still have those around as if mooted by honourable Naupoto, you need to have a war museum as well, it will be very interesting.

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

Plans to Address Flooding in Rakiraki Town (Question No. 217/2024)

HON. RATU J.B. NIUDAMU asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Housing and Local Government update Parliament on the plans to address flooding in Rakiraki Town?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, flooding in Rakiraki is a persistent problem, primarily caused by its geographical setting and climate. Located in the Naqoro Flat, with a backroad of Nakauvadra Range, Rakiraki is prone to flash floods during periods of heavy rainfall, especially during the wet season and during tropical cyclones. Floodwaters usually affect homes, businesses and agricultural lands causing significant disruptions to livelihoods and the local economy. The low-lying areas of Rakiraki Town and nearby villages are particularly vulnerable to these floods or flooding events.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, 27 floods were recorded from 2018 with an average of four floods expected yearly in Rakiraki. That is really a big number. The Town is usually closed due to floods and the main public roads and businesses normally take two days to three days to clear and clean up. According to a survey conducted by the Rakiraki Town Council in 2022, loss to businesses was approximately \$200,000 to \$300,000. For a small Town, that is a major dent on their livelihood.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is anticipated that after any flood, diseases such as leptospirosis, typhoid and dengue can arise due to contaminated water, poor sanitation and the rapid increase of vectors like mosquitoes. In mitigating these risks, the Council has prepared a Disaster Management Policy that includes the Disaster Management Operation. This is usually activated in November and deactivated in April the following year.

The processes include areas liable to Town operations, such as awareness and visitation by the Health Team to all residences and business houses in Town. The purpose of site visit is to raise awareness on the effects of floods and to remove or reduce mosquito breeding places, proper boiling

of drinking water and proper WASH processes, which is water, sanitation and hygiene. The Disaster Management Operation is a success for Rakiraki Town as there was no record of leptospirosis, typhoid and dengue in the area since 2021.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the most critical strategies to address flooding in Rakiraki is improving the Town's drainage system. Unfortunately, Rakiraki Town Council or the Ministry of Local Government cannot work alone in resolving this matter. This requires effective inter-agency collaboration, as tackling flooding in a small town such as Rakiraki requires appropriate resources. Flooding worsens by the inability of existing drainage infrastructure to cope with the volume of water during heavy rain. The Council has upgraded most of its stormwater drains and even removed big rocks or boulders to divert the flow of water. This provides immediate relief as it directs water away from the Town more efficiently.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the dredging of rivers around Rakiraki is crucial. Over time, the build-up of sediment in rivers reduces their capacity to carry water, increasing the risk of overflow. Dredging involves removing the sediment to deepen the river channels and allowing them to accommodate high water levels during storms with extended periods of rainfall. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Council has submitted a request to the Ministry of Waterways for dredging of Penang River, as well as the Nakauvadra River. The Ministry of Waterways has advised they will move the dredging machines towards Rakiraki once the main rivers are dredged.

It is also important to note, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Waterways has started desilting farm drains near Rakiraki, which will reduce the effect of flooding in the future. We have also received confirmation from the Ministry of Waterways, that they will start desilting works of Penang River by December 2024. Another significant effort made by the Council is the development of early warning systems. This is done in preparation with the Ministry of Meteorological Services and the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO). The Council actively notifies residents living in low lying areas when rivers reach dangerous levels. This allows people to take precautionary measures, such as moving to high grounds or securing their homes, as well as other necessary materials before the floodwaters arrive.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government and local authorities are focussed on resilient infrastructure development. Future construction projects in Rakiraki are being designed with a focus towards flood resilience. This includes elevating buildings, as well as constructing flood areas or land in strategic areas. The structural changes aim to limit the damage caused by floodwaters and allow quick recovery after flood events. Plans are also on the way to retrofit existing infrastructure such as homes and bridges to withstand the impact of floods.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, finally there is an increased focus on community engagement and disaster preparedness. The Council is working closely with the Chamber of Commerce, local communities and ratepayers to improve awareness on flood risks and to develop response plans. Regular trainings and simulations are conducted to help residents better understand evacuation procedures, prepare emergency supplies and protect their assets during floods. Reinforcement culture preparedness and resilience, Rakiraki aims to reduce human economic costs of future flooding events.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, through a combination of infrastructure upgrades, natural resource management, early warning systems and community preparedness, Rakiraki is taking significant steps to address the ongoing challenge of flooding. These efforts, supported by Government and through partnership, aim to minimise damage caused by future floods and help the community recover more quickly when floods reoccur. I thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for allowing me to respond to the question.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for a detailed response. My question is from a Rakiraki resident. His name is Fazeel, and he has stated the things that the honourable Minister has stated, that dredging has not been done in two years. Branches of all sizes are lying there, overgrown grass, no clean-up campaign. The honourable Minister spoken about the efforts to mitigate this. So, I am asking a simple question, by when? Is there a timeline, is it going to be done next week, next month, next year or after the election?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Thank you, honourable Member, for asking a very important question. Mr. Speaker, Sir, not only for Rakiraki, I think for the towns in the Western Division that are prone to flooding. One thing that we have emphasised to the Administrators of the Councils is to start preparing before the wet season or the cyclone season starts. So, what they have done now, they have also got the Council in a small way, they are cleaning and clearing up drains. I have also said in my response, they are also clearing some of the big boulders and rocks that are stuck in some of the major drains to stop the diversion of the flow of water.

I have also mentioned that the desilting by the Ministry of Waterways was going to happen by December 2024. But the Councils, not only in Rakiraki, they have also gone into clearing the drains as well as other areas that affect the flow of water when floods do happen.

HON. S. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, on average of four floods in a year, I think it is too much for a small town like Rakiraki. I know at some stage there has been some talks about the realignment of the river. My question to the honourable Minister is, how far has these talks have progressed?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is also one of the ideas and strategies that came up during one of the consultations that I had with the residents, as well as the people around Rakiraki, the idea of diverting the Nakauvadra River. I think it is a good idea but it needs more detailed planning, even something similar to the works in progress at the Nadi River where the engineers have also come on board to start coming up with more economical and more resilient strategies, instead of river diversion we can put some water retention near to the river source so that when water flows downstream, at least there is a minimal flow of water during a heavy down pour during flooding. So, talks are ongoing, and we are also engaging with other NGOs to help the Ministry come up with a very practical solution.

If you look at dredging, dredging alone is a very expensive exercise. If you do dredge annually, you are going to a dry up our resources. So, we need to come up with a very practical, a long-term solution that can not only addresses the issue of flooding in Rakiraki, but also the other towns around our country.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Honourable Minister, one of the major problems, not only in Rakiraki Town is about the development being conducted within the municipal boundaries. The unfortunate thing is, there is no risk assessment done on pre and during developments and this is one of the major contributing factors. What is the Ministry considering to address this issue?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Thank you honourable Leader of the Opposition for asking that question. I think it is a very important question. Maybe I will just a good example of a project that I have just issued a stop construction order, that is the development done by Grace Road in Yalalevu, Ba. I must thank honourable Bala for flagging that to my notice. These are some of the things in the area of development, some of the very important process like having a good assessment done on EIA report, even during one of the meetings with the Chamber of Commerce in Ba, they also highlighted some of the places in Ba that have been prone to flooding for more than 40 years.

When the Ministry does the assessment on the application for any development, we also take that into consideration - the flow of water, the connectivity of the drains that leads to the major rivers and these are some of the infrastructural challenges that we also take on board especially when the Town and Country Planning and the Council does its assessments. I think it is very important that all these are done and maintained to ensure that any developments done without proper vetting, proper checking of all these infrastructural improvements will lead to more disasters, more problems when we have flooding issues in the future.

HON. RATU J.B. NIUDAMU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the honourable Minister for his response. I will just make a comment before I will come to my question. In terms of river dredging, we have seen past governments doing river dredging, but we have noted that it is not really working in Ra, flood continues. I am asking if the Ministry can consider other options. I am thankful that the torch is going on in diverting the Nakauvadra River to follow the Naqoro River. My question is on the market vendors in terms of flooding, especially when they come from the interior and the coastal areas. Is the Council looking for a solution to solve their problems during the rainy season because what I have heard is just focusing on big businesses?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is one of the challenges faced by the market vendors with water seeping into the market during a heavy rainfall. I am also happy to say that this year, we will be doing some improvements to the adjacent market because there were some engineering shortfalls that we had noticed even before flooding. When there is a heavy downpour, the water seeps down to the ground floor and affects the place where our market vendors are selling at the moment. But in this financial year, honourable Member, we had allocated close to \$300,000 to upgrade the roofing as well as the structure that is going to stop the seeping water flowing down to the level where the market vendors are selling.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, in 2019 a Dutch Disaster Risk Management Report came out and it clearly stated that there is a building in Rakiraki that is actually the cause of the trouble. It also highlighted that dredging is a solution and it suggested that eco-based solutions should be used in the upper catchment area so that siltation is less. How much of that report has been implemented or have you considered eco-based solution as a way of solving the current problem?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think the dredging issue is not only focussed on Rakiraki, we are also taking the lead from the work that is required to upgrade and resolve the issue at the Nadi River. We have also been having consultations amongst the Ministry on the best way forward because even things like dredging, if we do that every year, it is also very costly. We need to come up with ideas where we can actually manage the flow of water downwards to the riverbank or downstream. That has been one of the things that has also been raised by one of the engineers to do some of these strategies near the river source up the catchment area so that we can maintain or reduce the overflow of water downstream.

MR. SPEAKER.- The honourable Member is still not satisfied with that.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Answer the question.

HON. V. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Waterways used to give a small grant to the small municipalities to clear their drains, et cetera and this grant is no longer there. Can the honourable Minister talk to the Ministry of Waterways and have this grant reinstated? I think it will help the small municipalities (they do not have much revenue there) look after the drains.

MR. SPEAKER.- They have reinstated the Drainage Board.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Now the Drainage Board is not responsible for drains.

HON. V. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is within the town boundaries. The Drainage Board looks after the drains outside the town boundaries.

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think some of the basic services that used to be carried out by the Council were removed by the previous administration. This is something that we are trying to bring back.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Very poor.

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- For repairs in the Councils, if there is an issue regarding their drains, they do not go to the Ministry of Waterways or if there is an issue with streetlights, they do not run to the FRA, they report their complaints to the Councils. This is something that we are reviewing right now and hopefully before the end of this month, something should be confirmed on reverting of some of these basic services to the municipalities.

MR. SPEAKER.- Remember, most of these drainage within the municipalities, they still have not been handed over to the Ministry of Waterways. They have only been deemed to have been transferred and come under their responsibility. In that, there is a breakdown in who will be responsible for all these drainage. Once we iron that out, then we fully understand where we should be focussing on and who should be the one doing the focussing.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- I think it should be given back to the Council.

MR. SPEAKER.- Yes, like you have in Lautoka. When there is a deluging and all of a sudden it is flooded, but the Waterways people are not responsible, and the Local Government are not fully responsible as well. In the meantime, that part of the city is flooded, that is near the Coronation Church, down to Morris Hedstrom (MH).

Foreign Workers' Working Conditions in Fiji
(Question No. 218/2024)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity and Workplace Relations Update Parliament on the working conditions of foreign workers in Fiji?

HON. A. D. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for the question. All employment related legislations which include the Employment Relations Act 2007 and Health & Safety at Work Act 1996 apply equally to both foreign and local workers, thereby protecting the rights and welfare of all individuals in the workforce.

My Ministry is tasked to ensure that all employers comply with the minimum standards. Awareness sessions are conducted together with workplace inspections nationwide. Mr. Speaker, Sir, since 2021, the Ministry has received a total of 165 labour complaints from migrant workers. Of these cases, 159 have been resolved while four are still pending with the Employment Relations Tribunal and two are under investigation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, amongst these 165 migrant workers, 46 were employed in the wholesale and retail industry, 121 in building, construction and civil engineering, nine in the informal sector, seven in the manufacturing industry and two in the hotel and catering industry. The Ministry has

recovered a total of \$54,337.34 as arrears of wages for these migrant workers.

To enhance the welfare of migrant workers working and contributing to the Fijian economy, the Coalition Government is currently undertaking a review of legislation. This review includes the extension of coverage of foreign or migrant workers, particularly seafarers, who are not covered under the current legislation. The Government is also reviewing the Immigration Act to strengthen the work permit process and the development of the Fiji National Labour Mobility Policy Framework and Strategy in collaboration with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM).

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Coalition Government through my Ministry is dedicated to ensuring decent, sustainable and fair labour practices promoting a safe, healthy and supportive work environment for everyone which enhances overall productivity and wellbeing.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Honourable Minister, this question relates to exactly what you have just spelt out and also to a statement that you made this morning in the news with respect to the standard of workers that are entering the country. It is relative in terms of the employers being compliant. Are we ensuring that our missions are being used, are we setting in train some kind of standard when we actually bring these workers into our country because we must remember that our workers have set high standards, and this is why they are in high demand in other countries off-shore. Are we actually setting standards and our missions being used to ensure that we get the right people that can cover the standards in Fiji?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, there have been occasions where we have received complaints from employers that the skills level do not match the certificates that have been forwarded to them by the agents before recruitment and these creates a number of problems.

First of all, the employers are very unhappy because the skills that they were expecting are not there, not possessed by the worker and then they redeploy them and when they are redeployed, the workers complain about the reduced wages that they are paid. Some have ended up with the Human Rights Commission that have been referred to us and we are now dealing with the agents to ensure that the certificates that they come with are actually genuine. Some of these labour-sending countries actually have Government agencies that deal with labour mobility from their country, export of labour and we are encouraging employers to deal directly with those agencies.

HON. J.N. NAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, recently it was in the news that some of our workers were mistreated and abused. What sort of support has your Ministry given to those workers, and how will this be addressed?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have just explained that we receive complaints and we attend to them immediately.

Monitoring and Controlling Schools Fundraising
(Question No. 219/2024)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Education inform Parliament on how the Ministry monitors and controls fundraising in schools?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, can I just get a clarification from the honourable Member, is this fundraising related to school or any fundraising?

HON. H. CHAND.- I am talking about fundraising that is done in school?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- For school purposes?

HON. H. CHAND.- Yes, by the schools.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Still not clear, Mr. Speaker, Sir, because as we note that a lot of fundraising have been held in schools. That is why I wanted to ask and clarify whether the fundraisings are for school activities or for the school or any other purpose?

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, my question is about fundraising that is done in school, by the school, for the school.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the simple answer to that as he might be fully aware that the conduct of fundraising by schools, in schools, for the schools are clearly documented in the School Management Handbook regarding the purpose, approval process and post-fundraising activities.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think my question was not answered. The reason why I have raised this question is because it is very important for the Ministry to monitor fundraising, which is done by schools, so that the parents and students are not forced to raise funds, or they are not levied. That is the very reason why I asked that question. My supplementary question is, are there any limitations on the number of fundraising that schools can do in one year?

MR. SPEAKER.- Is that not covered in the Handbook, honourable Member?

HON. H. CHAND.- No.

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- It is there, Sir. He is fully aware, but I will just read it out for the benefit of the honourable Members of this House. Fundraising is only permitted for very special circumstances as per Ministry's regulation, and only one fundraising per school per year is allowed in the school premises.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Honourable Minister, are you aware of any incidents where school fundraising is being done to supplement teachers' wages? Carefully answer that, Sir.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, can I just ask the honourable Member to clarify which particular year is he referring to?

HON. F.S. KOYA.- This year, Sir.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Sir, for the year 2024, 83 schools from the 916 schools - 178 secondary and 738 primary, within the nine education districts, have been granted approval to organise fundraising. The purpose of fundraising is for:

- construction of additional classrooms;
- purchasing of building materials for the construction of quarters;
- building sickbay for the wellbeing of the children, considering, the geographical locations of villages, settlements and workplaces;
- upgrading of school playground;

- collecting funds to construct multipurpose hall at school premises;
- completion of pending school projects;
- raising fund for the ablution block;
- purchasing of additional resources for school libraries and science labs;
- paying for school lunches for students in need and supplement PTFA project-needed funds; and
- upgrading of the schools' equipment, sporting resources and coaches - the supplementary ancillary staff, to name a few.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, I would like to present A case study before I can present question to the honourable Minister. There is a school in Lautoka in the Western Division....

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, this is question time.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Yes, Sir, I will come back to the question.

MR. SPEAKER.- Could you go straight to your question?

HON. K.K. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, my supplementary question to the honourable Minister is, is the Ministry aware that these fundraising activities are placing additional financial and emotional pressure on parents and students, especially in rural and low income communities? What steps will the Ministry take to ensure that no child or parent is put in such a position in future?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, may I enlighten this House, again, on the process of request for fundraising and, hopefully, will be able to answer his question. The request to conduct fundraising is on voluntary basis or scenario, and fundraising must be approved and co-signed by the Head of School and the school manager, and this is directed to the Divisional Education Office, who verifies the requests before sending them to the Ministry of Education Head Office for the approval.

The documentation to request fundraising, Mr. Speaker, should include the objective of the fundraising, the project for which the funds are being raised and the projected amount, and an explanation as to why the Free Education Grant is unable to accommodate the project, the date of the proposed fundraising, the safety and medical provisions on site, the type of fundraising and confirmation that any fundraising will be on a voluntary basis or voluntary contributions.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I hope the honourable Minister is aware and the whole of Fiji is, in fact, aware, that grants have not been given to the schools in a timely manner. Government says, "*paisa nahi hai*", and fundraising has been used now to basically be a form of income for the schools. Students who cannot contribute to the fundraising, there has been cases of teachers neglecting them and they feel left out. My question is, how is the Ministry addressing that?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Sir, I would like to invite the honourable Member, if he is free, to come and visit our office to shed some light. As I have said in the last point that I had raised, the confirmation of any fundraising will be on voluntary basis, so that should answer your question.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, I think the honourable Minister is not aware, but there is a circular given to one of these primary schools and it says, "Each family will be given a \$2 a vote card to raise funds for the school. After completing each card, the family can volunteer for more cards from the office". I can pass this to the honourable Minister, Sir, but maybe he could get his facts correct as well.

MR. SPEAKER.- Perhaps, you may extend your invitation to honourable Lal.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Maybe, we can request the honourable Member to advise us as to who has been texting him about that.

Update on the Northern Development Programme
(Question No. 220/2024)

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

Can the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-operatives, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications update Parliament on the Northern Development Programme and its impact on stimulating economic activities in Vanua Levu?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Northern Development Programme (NDP) is probably one of the most successful programmes that was launched by the previous Government, and we are continuing it. Since its inception, there has been an investment of over \$13 million since 2008, covering 2,755 business ventures across sectors, such as agriculture, fisheries, forestry, tourism and the manufacturing sector.

Of course, it focusses on the North, Sir, but one of the things is that the grant is unique because it actually provides for a 45 percent loan funding on the grant - allows for a loan grant of 45 percent and 10 percent contribution from the applicant. Perhaps, the reason why it is so successful is because similar to the Integrated Human Resource Development Programme (IHRPP) grant, because of the accountability and the contributions made by the recipient, it seems to have gained a lot of attraction.

One of the most influential lending partners has been the Fiji Development Bank (FDB), Sir, and which has allowed contributions to the North over the last three years. In fact, we have invested about \$1.5 million in grants and securing loans of about \$2.4 million. We see the value in supporting MSMEs in the North, and let me just to share some interesting facts, Sir.

Based on recent visitations, there is about 95 percent success rate recorded in the NDP. Our Monitoring and Evaluation tells us that every MSME we support in the Programme creates about three jobs. Essentially, our investment, if you look at it in total since 2008, has created up to 8,200 jobs and contributing to about 39,000 livelihoods. On average, one recipient can earn close to \$13,000, which varies by sector, and we have also noted the shift from informal business ventures to a more formalised compliant entrepreneurial real ventures in agriculture, fisheries, manufacturing and tourism.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just to share one successful story from the grants and this is the case of Ms. Meena Gounder, who started with only 100 layer birds with the assistance of NDP and has now grown her business to be one of the key suppliers of eggs in the North. Of course, her example has broken all gender stereotypes, triumphing the course for women but business in general.

As you can see, Sir, the grant, at this point, I think certainly from the Government side with the renewed resurgence, I think economically in the North, this grant is actually proving more and more popular and more and more sustainable. It is no secret that Damodar investment in the North is close to completion, there is also Parmod Enterprises, Vinod Patel and Namena Plantations, that are investing in the North. In our estimation, there are about eight investments, earning about \$44.5 million that are under construction at the moment in the *Vualiku* and, of course, there is the much anticipated opening of the Ramada Encore by Wyndham, which is significant because it actually

signals the first branded property in the North, which will actually mean, as the honourable Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation knows, when the Sofitel was launched, it created a momentum of branded resorts as a catalyst in those areas, and we are expecting similar momentum in the North, Sir. In fact, there is already one big name sniffing around in Taveuni as we speak.

Of course, the Grand Eastern Hotel too is expanding, which is positive. In the North, at the moment, at concept stage, there is about \$142 million worth of investment that is, sort of, already in the pipeline and this covers real estate, tourism, construction and commercial buildings. So, in a nutshell, the grant, as I have mentioned, has been quite positive in its contributions.

The Ministry continues to exhaust all funding that is allocated to this grant, and we will continue to seek more as we move along. But, overall, Sir, as you can see, not only is the grant popular but from this side of the House, the North is starting to boom, and we will see significant growth in the next three to four years.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, in answer to the North booming, do not forget the West started it all.

Honourable Minister, in light of the fact that the NDP is so successful and, especially, there is a lot that can be done with respect to agriculture, are we doing the handle-hold exercise with respect to exports to the markets that we know we can supply to? I know for a fact that a lot of pathways that were opened with Biosecurity Authority of Fiji (BAF), we still have not utilised. So, are we getting new people to do these things in the North because they seem to be a lot harder working than some of the other ones in the mainland?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as the honourable Member is aware, we do teams that do assist in terms of facilitation of pathways for export, and that still continues. At the moment, there is a bit of a focus on the kava industry for the obvious reasons that I have mentioned in this Parliament. In fact, what I can see is, with a growing economy, there will be demand for more manpower in terms of supporting some of these initiatives and that is something, I guess, we will have to cross at the next Budget. But, yes, the support that we continue to give to kava and other agricultural products continues, and that is also overlaid by business training and other types of training that is required, Sir.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is good to see that the NDP is moving forward. Thank you, honourable Prime Minister and honourable Deputy Prime Minister. Can you clarify how the NDP has addressed infrastructure and logistical issues that could potentially hinder economic activities and also noting the high fares of Fiji Airways?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think honourable Lal makes a very good point. In my view and certainly the view of this side of Parliament, the North is the next economic frontier of Fiji. And you will have seen something that was initiated by the previous government which was the World Bank funding of US\$200 million. What will happen, Sir, is that a lot of that funding will go towards infrastructure and actually assist the concerns of honourable Lal.

The honourable Prime Minister has negotiated with China on some additional roading. At the moment, I am in deep discussion with a certain potential hydro operator, Sir, in Taveuni, to electrify Taveuni fully on hydro and then maybe, look at supplying Vanua Levu. So, these are the type of exciting opportunities, Sir, that exist and if we set the right base, Vanua Levu can be as big as Viti Levu in terms of economy and land size and, obviously, the quality of the food and fish is second to none. To answer honourable Lal's question, yes, the Government is focussing on infrastructure because as we all know, without infrastructure economic development is futile.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Minister, the infrastructure, I think, is a good answer, so thank you. But in terms of making sure that all of the businesses in the North, are they also being assisted in terms of digital enhancement and upgrading so that they can be the next supplier of what we need around the world? I know that necessary digital infrastructure have been set up but are they also getting the training to make sure that they are digitally-savvy?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will put that in the work-in-progress category. Firstly, at the moment, as you may be aware, Telecom Fiji Limited is building fibre from Seaqaqa down to Savusavu and then eventually from Seaqaqa to Nabouwalu so that will open up the ability to communicate in terms of digitally. That is one priority.

There is always challenges with digitisation in the North, so there is still a bit of hand holding at the moment that happens from our Ministry in terms of request, but hopefully over time, once the infrastructure gets built, Starlink is now starting to get available as well Sir. These are tools that might help with the digitisation process.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Honourable Deputy Prime Minister, the two main contributing factors to the success of the Northern Development Programme are training and monitoring and evaluation, because applicants undergo eight days basic training, monitored, and then they do another package, considering the growth to take them to the next level. So, how is this being considered in the Ministry particularly with the other SMEs that you are doing? How effective is your training and monitoring and evaluation so that the success from the Northern Division can also be replicated in other divisions?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- The recent statistics that I have seen shows that the effectiveness is not too bad and by that, I think from recollection the success rate was around 83 to 85 percent in a nationwide polling, but Vanua Levu seems to be high. We have quite an extensive Monitoring and Evaluation team that does work on the ground to monitor closely.

One of the things that we also do, Mr. Speaker, Sir, which I think helps with these projects, is that there is a lot of initial training before even a grant or assistance is brought into play. For example, there is a desire to form a co-operative, there is a series of trainings that happens before, and that is done specifically to ensure that when the grant funding comes, that there is an understanding of what it means. In a broad sense, Sir, the funding is quite effective and we will just continue to monitor it to ensure that we continue to get the best results from the money that is coming from our taxpayers.

Reduction of Soil Erosion and Coral Reef Rehabilitation
(Question No. 221/2024)

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Fisheries and Forestry inform Parliament if the initiative to replant trees on riverbanks to reduce soil erosion and use mangroves aimed at contributing to coral reef rehabilitation, is still being pursued?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- I can confirm that these initiatives are, indeed, still being pursued by the Ministry.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker, Sir. One of the initiatives that we used to carry out is litter collection around urban areas, we use to hold it on Wednesday afternoons at 2 o'clock which used to be physical training also for Ministry of Fisheries

and Forestry. The timing was so that it is conducive for school movement when the children coming on buses returning from schools so that they are aware of the litter problems. I just wanted to ask the honourable Minister if that is something that he plans to do in the future.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, because the Ministry is undertaking a programme to assist in addressing a question that was raised by the honourable Member, we will make time to allow for that initiative to be integrated with the current programme that the Ministry is undertaking now.

Pathways to Pursue Rugby as a Career
(Question No. 222/2024)

HON. J.R. VOCEA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Youth and Sports update Parliament if there are pathways in place for students who wish to pursue rugby as a career after having participated in the Fiji Secondary Schools Rugby Deans Competition?

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, just before I answer that question, allow me to congratulate the Fiji School Boys under 18 that made history in the weekend by defeating the Australian Schoolboys by 26 points to 14. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also wish to thank Professor Broughton, who is in the public gallery with Mr. Rajesh Singh this morning and Rugby League Bid Fiji Pte Ltd for putting together Fiji's bid for the NRL franchise. Last but not the least, I congratulate all our weightlifters who participated in the recent 2024 Commonwealth Championship here at home. They made us all proud and we wish you well in your future endeavours.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, reference to the question raised by the honourable Member, I wish to highlight that there are a few pathways in place that allows or gives opportunities for secondary school players. The most prominent pathway is through the Fijian Drua set up. Due to its elite nature as a franchise team. The pathways into Drua involves the following path: Drua under 16 Academy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this year in August, the Fiji Rugby High Performance Unit established under 16 Boys Academy. There are 30 spots for Drua Under 16 Academy with all players selected from the Dean's competition from all over Fiji through talent identification, talent taking and talent processing. There is also a \$2000 support allowance per annum for each player. In this structure, players will go through a two-year processing phase where the best at the age of 18 years, will then be chosen to be part of the Drua Development Programme with a starting salary of \$10,000 to \$15,000 per annum. Progressing from the Drua Development Programme will be the players selection into the Drua professional contract, starts at a base salary of \$40,000 per annum.

High Performance Unit Academy for men and women. Mr. Speaker, the Fiji Rugby High Performance Unit Academy for men and women players also select players from the provincial competition with ages ranging from 17 years to 23 years. Most of the selections for these cohorts are from the schools throughout the competition using our long-term athlete development plan. Under this plan, there are 60 contracted players for men and 30 contracted sports for women. The players selected from schools under these programmes Under 16 academy and the LTADP have opportunities to progress further into men's Fiji Under 20, Fiji Warriors, Fiji Men's Sevens Team, Fijian Drua and the Flying Fijians.

For women they have the opportunity to progress further to the Fijiana 7s, Fijiana 15s and the Fijiana Drua. This pathway model has been a successful factor in the establishment of the Fijiana Drua Programme in 2021 with 80 percent of players in the initial Drua setup coming through the

pathway.

The Flying Fijians Rugby World Cup Team of 2023 had 60 percent of players that have come through the school's pathway. Overseas Schools Scholarships, Mr. Speaker, the above setup or pathway in the Fiji Rugby System also focusses on lead talents from our domestic schools. It does not restrict or control the best talents in all schools being offered rugby scholarships in New Zealand, Australia and Japan. Some of our best talented players through secondary schools that go across progressed further to universities and to the different franchises of the countries that offer scholarships of this nature.

The same concepts apply for players from schools that offer academy contracts with premier clubs all over the world. The same process for professional franchise applies. Semi-professional pathways, Mr. Speaker, under the semi-professional pathways, school players are offered engagements with clubs, mainly in Australia and New Zealand where they are playing part-time with work.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, the above are the current pathways for secondary school students looking to use rugby as a career opportunity. However, further to the above, a review of the Fiji National Sports Commission is approved by Cabinet earlier this year will be conducted soon. This review will ensure that a clear sports development pathway is established for all sports, not only rugby, in the country and more importantly the establishment of the Fiji Institute of Sports to coordinate such developments.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for his response talking about development in Fiji. One of the key problems is perhaps the governance. Milo Kaji has its own organisation. Fiji Secondary School Rugby Union has its own organisation, and Fiji Rugby Union, there is no connection. This is something that hinders development in the country for rugby. What is the Ministry considering together with the stakeholders in order to sort out this issue?

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Leader of the Opposition for pointing that out, that is something that we have noted and that is why we are doing a review of the Fiji National Sports Commission to try and line-up all the structures that we currently have with rugby being sort of distributed and not focussing as one effort.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I hope that you will accept this question because the honourable Minister talked about Fiji Rugby League and he raised the report.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- New question.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- No, no, he mentioned it in his response so this is why I am asking this question. There are a lot of issues, Sir, concerning Kaiviti Silktails. There is money given by the Australian Government to developing rugby league in Fiji, but it has been alleged that this funding has been abused or misused. What is the Ministry's plans on looking at this so that it can work together with the Fiji Rugby League? So, that it can also develop the sports Fiji?

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Thank you honourable Leader of the Opposition for highlighting that. At the moment the Fiji Government has supported NRL for its bid for the NRL franchise, which I have mentioned in my speech, it has been documented by the Broughton and we are so thankful that they have done that. It will create pathways for our local talents to be showcased overseas in the international arena, something that Fiji will need.

Yes, for your question regarding Kaiviti Silktails, it is something that is beyond our hands. It is something that Mr. Petero Civoniceva approached the NRL, and it has nothing to do with our Government but we are our trying our best to talk to both parties on how they can work together Fiji NRL and Kaiviti Silktails because they are looking after the same course and talents we have locally, and how they can channel that to be showcased at the international level. I thank you for your note on that.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, to be a Member of Parliament, to be behind a uniform or to play, to wear the national jersey, it is a matter of national pride. Mr. Speaker, Sir, currently the youth have reached out to me, youth that play rugby who aspire to play for the Fiji team have spoken about what has been happening with FRU and the honourable Minister for Youth and Sports has not said anything much about it as well.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the youths are discouraged to see what is happening with FRU in terms of the payments and the allegations that have come up. What is the Ministry doing to mitigate this sense of discouragement among the youths in order for them to actually have national pride and play for the country?

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, on 29th June, there was a Special General Meeting. The Fiji Rugby Union has removed the Prime Minister's nominee from the Board of Trustees of Fiji Rugby Union. At the moment, the Government does not have a say in running of the Fiji Rugby Union, but we believe that with the trustees that are in place, a current board of trustees, which was appointed by our government, are doing their work. They are professional people. They will be able to work out something for the future of rugby in Fiji. And on top of that, the AGM is already planned for November, where unions can voice their concerns, members of the Fiji Rugby Union can voice concerns at the Annual General Meeting.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister, I tend to agree with what was raised by the Opposition. There seems to be a disconnect in the role of FRU and the role of the Government, especially your office, honourable Minister. When the honourable Prime Minister, same as the previous Prime Minister stepped in to make statements that are kind of challenging, as well from the Government's perspective, they offered to build someone's house, the Captain of the Sevens Team. It was not really fulfilled by the then honourable Bainimarama, but it was fulfilled by the honourable Prime Minister Rabuka when he offered to pay \$20,000. There is disconnection from your good office, Sir. We are not paying for that! You mentioned here that you are not paying for the \$20,000 that will be given to the Seven-a-Side. Here, there is a bit of disconnection that is causing all these. I will give you the floor to make your reply because rugby is part of us.

You remember the days when we used to play in Lautoka, it is part of us, but when there is an initiative being done or undertaken by the Government and to say we are not going to be paying for that, you are speaking from your own Ministry of Sports, Sir, allocation of funds according to your budget. But this is coming from the honourable Prime Minister when he has mentioned that we will pay \$20,000 per player, that has been done. That is the only concern, I fully agree with the honourable Leader of the Opposition. There is some kind of disconnection, then all of a sudden, we do not know where to pin the thing to FRU or the Government or Ministry?

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Sir, may I clarify the money that was promised to the Fiji Sevens Team has been paid, the \$20,000.

MR. SPEAKER.- That statement was made by the honourable Prime Minister and you refuted it here, saying we are not going to be paying for that. We do not know where the \$20,000 is coming from. I am trying to get back on what I stated earlier on, and the honourable Prime Minister sent me

to present the jerseys to the Seven-a-Side Team in Dubai. That is the disconnection that is being highlighted here, Sir.

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Sir, I take note of the issues raised.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, this is definitely an interesting discussion that we are having. So much of skills are around and we are very proud of our sports, but the only challenge that I see, often the decisions are made by adults – how the sports, which direction it should take?

I think in the review exercise which the honourable Minister just mentioned, it is extremely important that consultations should take place with the players who are already complaining about so many things. That will only entice our young ones to take rugby as a career, because they do see rugby as a career, it can generate a lot of money, but the other side of the coin is, when the career is over, money is over. How are we going to manage the financial aspects? When the going is good, how do they do the investment so that when they are not in rugby, they can still lead a proper life? My question was that - review!

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. J. SAUKURU. – Mr. Speaker, Sir, just responding to honourable Premila Kumar's statement, we are about to call for expression of interest for the setting up of that review team. That is where young people from all walks of life can come in and participate, have a say in how we want to build sports in Fiji.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, in light of the fact that the IRB issues directions with respect to interference with Fiji Rugby Union. What will you be proposing in terms of how to handle the current situation because it will require some kind of government investigation, et cetera into it to see what has actually happened without treading on IRB's toes.

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Sir, just to respond to that question, World Rugby has made it very clear they do not want Government to interfere in Fiji Rugby Union's business. But yes, of course, the Fiji Government has been pouring a lot of funds into rugby house in supporting rugby as our flagship, sort of marketing our small Pacific Island to other parts of the world. They have been doing successfully. Yes, we will talk to them when it is right.

At the moment, the plate is quite hot, because the players are showing and coming out with their frustrations and the trustees are trying to come to terms with that. But we will surely talk to them when the time is right. As I have said, we are really concerned about the position of World Rugby and we would like to be watchful of that situation at the moment, but we will certainly come in when the time is right.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, that calls for a suspension of our proceedings now so that we may have lunch and then we will return when the bell is sounded at 2.30 p.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.32 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.40 p.m.

Maintaining and Repairing the Railway Network System
(Question No. 223/2024)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Multi-Ethnic Affairs and Sugar Industry update Parliament on the progress of maintaining and repairing the railway network system that was damaged and is no longer in use?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, you can hear my voice is not right. So, I do not expect any supplementary questions.

(Laughter)

MR. SPEAKER.- Can you leave that for me to decide?

(Laughter)

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, when I came into the Chamber, someone asked me, “are you sick?” There are two versions of being sick. One is sick then I am a Sikh. I do not know which one to answer? But having my wife as a doctor, she knows that I am very sick, so she gave me this medicine today.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Pillay asked a very pertinent question about the railway system. But before I answer him proper, I will tell you one thing, as I was having lunch at home (I normally have lunch at home)

MR. SPEAKER.- What are you doing?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- I had a nice lamb curry.

(Laughter)

Mr. Speaker is talking about lunch. I had a nice lamb curry cooked by my wife with chutney.

The railway system in this country has been there for 140 years under the CSR government. What happened in 2019, the FijiFirst Government signed an agreement with a company called Farer Group Pte. Limited to run the tramline between Nadi and Vuda and they were leasing the tramline for only \$10,000 a year. Then in 2019, they also re-signed another agreement from Nadi to Cuvu for \$20,000. That system never worked, today, that company Farer has sued FSC for \$31 million and that case is before the Court. Here FSC is struggling to survive, how can this type of agreement be signed under the last government.”

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Very poor!

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Fix it.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Fix it, no! Who will fix it but you have to pay for it.

(Chorus of interjections)

I tell you one thing, this is the biggest litigation in the history of this country.

MR. SPEAKER.- What was the question raised? The railway?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- I am simply saying, Sir, where are we heading now?

(Chorus of interjections)

I will answer, take your time. What has happened?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to address the question raised by honourable Pillay regarding the progress of maintaining and repairing the railway network.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is not the first time he has said that. I can also say to him that he *choro* everything from his family. If he wants to continue that, I can also say that, but I want to say that stop saying all those nonsense.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Sit down!

HON. P.K. BALA.- You are not the Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER.- Carry on, honourable Minister.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- First and foremost, I appreciate that inquiry as it demonstrates the concerns of the sugar industry. However, I must highlight that my time in Government has been significantly shorter than the 16 years of the FijiFirst Government if they had addressed those pressing issues.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me take a moment to consider the current state of the tramline network, a total of 482 kilometres of railway across our mills, only 384 kilometres remain operational. Let me explain the breakdown:

- (a) Lautoka Mill has 225 kilometres, 135 kilometres operational
- (b) Rarawai Mill has 130 kilometres, 125 kilometres operational.
- (c) Labasa Mill has 127 kilometres, 24 kilometres in use.

While these numbers indicate that any pursuit of our rails are functioning, we cannot overlook the fact that the substantial portion remains damaged and non-operational. Additionally, we are challenged by the outdated locomotives which are barely operational, along with the shortage of rail carts, all of which require significant funding to address.

In the good old days, dating back to 20 years to 30 years when you were not born, delivery by rail were over 90 percent and this declined steadily over the intervening years. Even looking at the recent data from nine years, one can see the trend of how fast rail to trucks ratio is changing. In 2015, rail accounted for 21 percent of deliveries while trucks delivered 79 percent of the crops. The ratio has continued to shift dramatically in favour of the trucks with 7 percent of sugarcane being transferred by rail. This decline is not merely a statistic, it represents missed opportunities from the previous regime to bring back the rail system by investing in the rail network. Mr. Speaker, Sir, under this Government, it is investing in railways infrastructure known to be cheaper and more efficient.

(Honourable Opposition Members interject)

HON. C.J. SINGH.- *Suno yaar.*

(Laughter)

HON. C.J. SINGH.- This is the problem when we have juveniles in Parliament.

(Laughter)

In Australia, the cost of transportation, as we speak today, is \$4 per tonne as compared to ours where the cost ranges from \$25 per tonne to \$35 per tonne. This is due to neglect and the bad management decision by FSC in 2000, particularly under the leadership of the former CEO, Mr. Abdul Khan.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Hogwash.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Hogwash, honourable Usamate. You guys were sleeping on the job.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Consultations with farmers was a waste and that they were told to move. Abdul Khan told them to move from railway to trucks. Your boss! Indeed, it is a costly and a bad decision. *Areh*, I am a farmer, I know what is happening.

(Laughter)

The previous Administration has taken the necessary steps when they were in power. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we may not be in a position today where the sugar industry requires a bailout from the Coalition Government. That being the fact and a history now, we have now recognised the urgent need for the restoration of the railway network. We are currently in discussion....

(Hon. R.R. Sharma interjects)

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Listen man! Listen!

We are currently in discussion with a reputable company from India to conduct the feasibility study on the railway system, while we will await a report from the Food Agricultural Organization as well. This is a very crucial step in our commitment to revitalise this essential transport network. However, our Government is very clear, that we will not make a hollow promise. No more hollow promise.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Our mission will be based on the findings of the study, and most importantly, of the needs and the desire of the farmers.

In conclusion, while I appreciate the concerns raised by honourable Pillay, it is essential to reflect on the history of inactions that has been brought here by us and by you people. We are committed to restoring the railway network and supporting our farmers, but this journey requires a thoughtful planning, collaboration, and without being directly impacted. No more supplementary questions, please.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Hear, about the planning.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, my question to the honourable Minister, in talking about hollow promises, the farmers in Daku, Wainikoro and Seaqaqa are still waiting for the promise that you gave them. When will that be fixed?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Leader of the Opposition was the Commissioner Northern too for so many years. What have you done to help the farmers?

HON. K.K. LAL.- Answer the question!

HON. C.J. SINGH.- I am answering. You were there. It has only taken us two years. So, have patience, it will happen.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Rinesh Sharma?

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir...

(Hon. L.D. Tabuya interjects)

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- You are not the Minister.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- No lecture!

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Minister for Sugar is daydreaming with his eyes open in broad daylight. He has promised 1.8 million tonnes of sugar being generated and 2.5 million tonnes for future. The farmers are asking, when will the honourable Minister deliver and fix the network system for the railroads so that they can transport their sugarcane at a cost-effective price? When, is the answer, next week, one month or the next election promise?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, he has the habit of asking the same question for every Minister here. When? For 16 years, you were there, we never question you. We are only here for two years. Hold on, make it happen!

MR. SPEAKER.- I will take that as the last supplementary question.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think because he is sick, his temperature has gone up, Sir.

(Laughter)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- I mean, unwell.

Honourable Minister, I am not sure if we were able to gather the answer that you gave with respect to the repair to the rail network system, but my question is, has there been a proper assessment done in terms of costing? Is that within your budget to be able to do that within this parliamentary term? Most decent Members from that side will ask, apart from others.

I know why, because, yes, the costing needs to be done. We are getting the people from India. They will come and assess the railway system on what is not operating and what is operating. And I tell you one thing, I was told that the railway system, this concrete with gravel, that has to be done and because it has sunk in so many places, that is why the trucks tilt over. So, there is a costing coming up.

Update on the Rural and Outer Island Programme
(Question No. 224/2024)

HON. T.N. TUINABUNA asked the Government, upon notice:

With the revival of the Rural and Outer Island Programme, can the honourable Minister for Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management update Parliament on how the Ministry will implement this Programme to ensure maximum return on this investment?

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Assistant Minister for Agriculture for his question.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, firstly, I would like to congratulate the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics for the launching of the new National Development Plan 2025-2030 of the Coalition Government, which sets the direction and platform for us, as we progress in building our beloved nation.

I believe, Mr. Speaker, Sir, most, if not all of us, in this august House, would have spent time already in perusing the document. I am pleased that a chapter is specifically dedicated for the Rural and Outer Island Development, which stipulates Government's planned strategic focus areas in the coming years.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the question at hand is with regards to one of the many programmes administered by the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management, which is the Rural and Outer Island (ROI) Programme.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we all aware, the Coalition Government decided to revive the ROI Programme through the Ministry from January 2023. This revamped ROI Programme already undertook a thorough consultation with our key stakeholders, including key private sector components of society, during the formulation stage in order to understand the strengths, weaknesses and opportunities that exists in the agriculture, fisheries and forestry value chain system before mapping the pathway for the revamped ROI Programme.

Understanding that value chain system is crucial, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to ensure that the revived ROI Programme is focused, targeted and based on statistical evidence that can holistically address the development issues faced by our rural communities for more than a decade now.

Mr. Speaker, some of the key rural development issues that were identified during its consultation with key stakeholders includes farm access road, market access, communication network, transportation, water supply and the issues of climate change in terms of sea level rise and riverbanks erosion. The above development issues are also common in all *Bose ni Tikina* and *Bose ni Yasana* development forums.

In addition to the above, Mr. Speaker, Sir, high rural poverty rate (36.5 percent), particularly with those associated with our subsistence farmers and rural-urban drift are the two major issues that the Ministry is currently working on closely with our key stakeholders to systematically address these issues through their various development programmes. At the same time, Sir, the Ministry is also mindful of those rural population that are living near the poverty line and are most likely to fall below the poverty line when faced with economic shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, given the increasing demand and broad inter-related issues facing our rural communities, the revamped ROI Programme needs to focus on complementing the Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Fisheries and Forestry programmes, particularly on improving farm access roads, land preparation, market access, value-adding, and network connectivity. The above interventions from the overall objectives of the revamped ROI Programme and to ensure that our ROI budgetary allocation is focussed and addressing the real needs on the ground.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in terms of Rate of Return on ROI investments, one of the expected outcomes of this ROI Programme is on improving productivity and increasing production, mostly targeting our subsistence farmers. This is crucial, given that expected increase in productivity will lead to increase in agricultural production and increase in income which, in turn, contribute towards addressing rural poverty due to the expected increase in the purchasing power of our rural subsistence households. The same principle applies with the Fisheries and Forestry Sector, targeting income generating projects. This ROI Programme also ensures that it contributes towards addressing food security and nutrition, which is a very important component of measuring poverty.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to ensure increased production and contribution from our rural farmers are realised, the Ministry is currently finalising its production and farming plan and will proceed soon with our ROI Community Awareness and Training Programme regarding their monthly targets and expected post-harvest annual returns. Helping our ROI farmers understand the dollar value of their post-harvest annual returns may provide that necessary motivation and drive towards increase in productivity.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, all our ROI communities' production and farming plans will be closely monitored by our Divisional Technical Working Group (TWG), chaired by our Divisional Commissioners. This TWG is expected to closely monitor our ROI communities' production and farming plan and address any technical issues that may arise. An Advisory Committee comprise of key government stakeholders and Permanent Secretaries will also be established to address those value-chain issues that may arise from the TWG discussions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry has noted the importance of the Programme sustainability, thus all our ROI farming communities will be incubated for the next three to five years, to ensure their targets materialised as planned, whilst there is expected results achieved in terms of improved standard of living and reducing poverty.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in order to measure these results, the Ministry will proceed with the profiling of these ROI farming communities in order to have some baseline statistics on their current living standards, income levels, and their goal for the next three to five years. The above baseline data is also crucial for the evaluation of the Programme's effectiveness in the next three to five years. The above are the new initiatives that this revamped ROI Programme introduces to ensure sustainability, scalability, and with the future expectation of being self-sufficient and reduce their over-dependence towards Government assistance.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the 2023-2024 financial year, the ROI Programme, in consultation with the Ministry of Agriculture, has constructed a total of 22 rural farm roads at a cost of \$2 million. This includes the construction of 75.5 kilometres in the Northern Division, 16.9 kilometres in the Western Division, 5.9 kilometres in the Central Division and 5 kilometres in the Eastern Division. These rural farm roads when strategically constructed, does not only give access to farmers, but enables women to reach markets as vendors, children now travelling on proper roads, infrastructure to school, and the elderly are able to reach the nearest postal agency to access their social welfare benefits.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the intention of the Ministry is to ensure that all rural communities are connected to road infrastructure through the strategic construction of rural farm roads. We understand the limited budget constraints of Government and the limited machineries available with the Ministry of Agriculture, to ensure all farmers receive a fair share of infrastructure access.

As the coordination Ministry for rural development, a total of 22 contractors with road infrastructure machineries were approved by the Government Tender Board. Having more contractors accelerate the construction of rural farm roads, this indirectly increases competition for the private sector, strengthening Private Public Partnership and in return, a source of revenue for the Government in terms of generating tax, which is the multiplier effect of the ROI Programme investment in rural farm roads.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, all rural communities have much expectation for the Coalition Government to facilitate improvement in livelihoods. In this context, the ROI Programme, in consultation with the Ministry of Forestry, procured four portable sawmills for each of the four Divisions to facilitate Scheme 3 of our Rural Housing Programme. This is a one-third and two-third contribution between the Government and communities that have available forests as their one-third contribution.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I believe that all in this august Parliament have realised the growing kava or *yaqona*, *dalo*, ginger and turmeric production in our rural economy. As we continue to explore markets globally, the ROI Programme has focussed internally by procuring food processing units to make possible the growth of niche markets through rural processing hubs. This directly connects farmers to locally created markets and generates economic activity widely, and employment creation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are already existing farmers that are driving the agriculture sector in all areas, heavily reliant on manual labour. Our coordination role with the Ministry of Agriculture at the divisional level through established technical working group highlighted earlier, has guided the ROI Programme to procure and supply farming implements, such as ploughs and harrows, to these farmers. One may argue that we are duplicating implementation, however, the objective is to complement and supplement technological and machinery support to farmers wherever possible, to improve agricultural production and its contribution to GDP which was once a driving economic sector of the nation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, rural communities have evolved globally due to the growing rural subsistence sector, and Fiji was once a leading economy in the Pacific region - we have lost the prestige. The ROI Programme and in communities that are beneficiaries of the project, will be formed into cooperatives to drive economic activity. The pilot initiatives are undertaken in Vatulele and two communities in the Bua Province, with technical support from the Ministry of Industry and Trade and Department of Cooperatives. The key objective is to strengthen savings for the members with controlled loan based on clearly defined bylaws.

The Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management is thankful to the increase in the budgetary allocation for the ROI Programme from \$2.5 million in 2023- 2024 financial year to \$3 million in the current financial year. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry is determined to achieve the objectives of the revamped ROI Programme which is an important component of the Coalition's National Development Plan, as well as the Ministry's vision of inclusive development for production in resilience communities.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Honourable Minister, it is good to see the ROI Programme in action. But with respect to the outer islands, one of the most critical components in it would be Government shipping and our shipping that is able to get those new vegetables, et cetera, all the things that our outer islands can do. So, with that particular programme, has there been, or will there be some more

consultations for the transport and Government Shipping Services (GSS), et cetera, with respect to being able to bring those goods into the mainland or for export, et cetera?

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank honourable Koya for the question. At the moment, our focus is on trying to unlock the potential in assisting market access and where we are able to assist with transportation, we will certainly discuss that, in co-operation with the line Ministry which is the Ministry of Transport, so we can consider that. I believe there is a review of GSS which is currently being undertaken at the moment under franchise.

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, a supplementary question. What is the difference between the ROI Programme that the Ministry is currently undertaking, compared to the one that used to be offered by the Ministry of Agriculture?

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the past when the ROI Programme was held by or offered by the Ministry of Agriculture, they focussed mostly on the commercial farmers. But the focus of the ROI Programme now is working with those having traditional ownership of land which is 54 percent of agricultural land, and we are leaving the Ministry of Agriculture to focus on the commercial side, while we work with those who operate other traditional ownership which is 54 percent and which is, at the moment needs to be unlocked in order to have contribution to the GDP as I mentioned.

Written Questions

Progress of Fiji's 5G Readiness (Question No. 225/2024)

HON. P.D. KUMAR asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-operatives, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications provide –

- (a) an update on the current status and progress of Fiji's 5G readiness;
- (b) key initiatives being undertaken to facilitate this transition; and
- (c) timelines for rollout?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, I wish to table my Written Response.

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you.

Recorded HIV Cases from January 2024 to June 2024 (Question No. 226/2024)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services inform Parliament on the following –

- (a) when can Fiji expect the confirmation of tests for the 552 HIV cases recorded from January to June of this year;
- (b) when will the necessary testing kits be expected to arrive in Fiji; and
- (c) what measures are being implemented to ensure the safety and wellbeing of

individuals who have started the anti-retroviral therapy based on these initial test results?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Minister for Health will provide the Written Response later as allowed for under the Standing Orders.

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you.

TSLS Student Data for 2023 to 2024
(Question No. 227/2024)

HON. P.D. KUMAR asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Education provide detailed information on the Tertiary Scholarship and Loans Service (TSLS) for the years 2023 to 2024, specifically—

- (a) a year-wise breakdown of the number of students and the TSLS funds disbursed as loans and scholarships to each Higher Education Institute;
- (b) a year-wise breakdown of the number of students at each Higher Education Institute who did not complete their studies during this period and the total amount of TSLS funds disbursed that could not be effectively utilised due to student withdrawals or failures; and
- (c) the steps the Ministry has taken to address the issue of students not completing their studies under the TSLS programme, and the strategies in place to improve retention and completion rates?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I hereby table my response in accordance with the Standing Order.

REVIEW REPORT - NADI TOWN COUNCIL 2016 ANNUAL REPORT

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

That Parliament debates the Review Report on the Nadi Town Council Annual Report for the year 2016 which was tabled on 4th September, 2024.

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

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to speak on the review report of the Nadi Town Council Annual Report for the year 2016. The Nadi Township was established in 1947. The electoral system was introduced in 1967 by Dr. A.H. Sahu Khan, who was the first elected Chairman of the Nadi Township Board. With the introduction of the Local Government Act in 1972, the Board Chair, the status of the Council was H.M. Lodhia, who became the first Mayor of Nadi Town Council in 1972, and remained Mayor until December 1973.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Nadi Town Council being one of the oldest municipalities, and known for actively contributing to the tourism sector in Fiji. The potential for investment has been optimistic and this foreign investment has led to an increase in development and in population as well. The Nadi Town Council is therefore, embarking on a proposal for an extension of its own boundaries to cater for the increasing population, and to continue with the necessary processes of declaring Nadi as a city.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the year 2016 was the year that affected most people in Fiji, and Nadi was no exception with a widespread diversification and loss of life, all the infrastructure and the environment. The Committee noted concerns raised by the Council in its key findings, particularly, the constant flooding of Nadi Town. As part of the Committee's recommendation, the Committee had highlighted the following:

- (1) The new design of Prince Charles Park to be in line with international standards so that it can attract international events and tournaments;
- (2) The Prince Charles Park to be renamed King Charles Park;
- (3) The Council to work closely with the local Government's Committee and key stakeholders in the process of extension of its own boundaries to be included in the Nadi Municipality for better service delivery;
- (4) The Ministry of Waterways is to reinstate annual grants to maintain an open drain and manhole within the municipalities;
- (5) The Council to continue working closely with the general Government and other donor partners in terms of the Nadi Flood Alleviation Projects;
- (6) The Nadi Town Council is to seriously identify a suitable dumpsite for the ratepayers of Nadi and to save costs in terms of transportation to Lautoka;
- (7) The reintroduction of Challenges Fund to the municipality to assist in the identifying of capital projects, such as a leisure park, multipurpose court and the development of Wailoaloa picnic spot;
- (8) All efforts to be made by the Council to collect outstanding rates in terms of house-to-house visits, face to face meeting with ratepayers, Small Claims Tribunal, and the last resort, to take defaulters to court;
- (9) The Council needs to work closely with all relevant stakeholders to declare Nadi Town a city; and
- (10) The Council to replace all the old lollipop metres in the pay and display parking metres to generate additional revenue for the Council.

Once again, the Committee would like to thank the Ministry of Local Government for their timely submission in response to the Committee's recommendation.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee's recommendation is aimed to enhance the infrastructure, Government and service delivery of Nadi by aligning Prince Charles Park with international standards and renaming it to King Charles Park. The Council can attract global events and elevate the Town's profile.

Collaborating with key stakeholders to extend the Town boundaries and improve service delivery, reinstating the annual grants for drainage maintenance and work on the Nadi Flood Alleviation Project, are crucial steps towards sustainable development. Identifying a suitable dumpsite, introducing the Challenge Fund for capital projects and implementing effective strategies to collect outstanding rates will further strengthen the Town's operation efficiency.

Additionally, declaring the Town as a city and upgrading parking metres will generate additional revenue and improve urban management. The Committee looks forward to the successful implementation of these recommendations which will significantly contribute to the growth and prosperity of Nadi.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion. I have also got a list of speakers that have been sent by the respective Whips. There will be three speakers from the Leader of the Opposition and his designate and there will be none from the G-9 Bloc, and there will be three speakers from the Government as well.

The batting will be led off by honourable Koya, followed by the honourable Minister for Local Government, honourable Hem Chand, honourable Minister for Justice, honourable Joseph Nand and then it will be rounded off by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, I thank the honourable Member and also the Committee for the Report. I think, Sir, Nadi is a very important part of the whole of Fiji's tourism industry. It is a Report that needs to be thoroughly discussed and there are some very pertinent issues that have been raised in the Report which need to be highlighted, and I am hoping that the Ministry of Finance is actually listening so they can assist Nadi Town Council in getting things done.

Mr. Speaker, one of the biggest problems that is actually faced by the Nadi Town Council, it has been an ongoing issue for many, many years and apart from the one that we all know about, which is flooding. It is the one that we forget. Every single town or municipal place in Fiji pretty much has its own place where there is refuse collection and the rubbish, et cetera that gets dumped in proper places, Nadi Town does not. It has not done so for many years, and I see within the Report it says that they are actually actively pursuing them to find a place where they can actually build one.

We must look at this as an opportunity, Mr. Speaker, Sir. It is an opportunity where we can talk about recycling. We talk about proper refuse being looked after and done properly so that we are not actually harming the environment. But this is an issue that has been at the forefront of literally every government since the 1970s and it still has not been resolved with respect to the rubbish that actually comes out of it.

I will give you a case in points and examples of how bad it used to get and I am hoping that it is not the case at the moment. Nadi Town also houses particular villages right next to it. Unfortunately, previously the Councils would never use to pick up rubbish from the villages so it actually used to end up in the river. That kind of stuff should not happen in any city or town that we have. So, I am hoping that these things are actually addressed. It is quite commendable also, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that within the Report, Nadi Town has actually collected 92 percent of its town rates. They only have 8 percent remaining in arrears for that particular year.

Now, it is a growing municipality, Mr. Speaker, Sir. You can see with the development that has occurred from the airport right through to Denarau, and it is a different kettle of fish from any other town or city in Fiji. And I think that needs to be capitalised on, because what happens now, there is a separation. If you look at the road that actually comes from the airport all the way to Denarau, then you go to the left when you come pass McDonalds and come towards town, there is chalk and cheese difference. We have left the other part that leads into town in complete disarray. So, it is things like that, that the Council needs to look at, the Ministry of Finance also needs to look at, FRA needs to look at, to ensure that we do the right thing, as it is the first point of contact, hoping for a million tourists who actually come through Nadi Airport to move to other parts of Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we also look forward to the day that Nadi Town becomes a city, and I am sure that is not far off, but if you want to become a city, the necessary infrastructure needs to be right also. I know there are serious problems with respect to sewerage, with respect to water, I know there are serious problems with respect to flooding etcetera which we are about to go into hurricane season and that is something that needs to be accelerated, so that we can actually deal with this problem. Nadi Town residents are very resilient people but at the end of the day, it is the problem that they face on a yearly scale.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, garbage as I said, is an important issue that they needs to be looked at. Sewerage also, it is a growing city and there are many large companies that are actually housed there

plus we have a whole lot of tourist workers that are housed there. And it is now, as of a couple of weeks ago, we see it as a destination where you are going to have huge concerts etcetera that will happen and we need to have the necessary services available so that, that particular place can be one of the highlights of being in Fiji. The hospital itself also needs to be upgraded. We need to look at Nadi as we do Suva, as we do Lautoka – it is actually a port, but we do not, we seem to be riding rough short of all of this.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Flood Alleviation Project, I know the Japanese Government has been very actively involved in it, I am not sure how far its actually progressed, but I am hoping that it is done at a better speed than it is up until now. With the Fiji Roads Authority, honourable Minister for Public Works and Transport, and I hope you will pay more attention to it also, and one of the most important things for tourism towns is to ensure the cleanliness of the town. I see in today's newspapers, the Nadi Chamber of Commerce President, reporting about Touters, et cetera, who are harassing tourists. All of these things need to be addressed. The re-establishment of the Nadi Tourist Police, I am not sure if that still exists, maybe it was a good thing, it is a good thing, maybe that needs to be looked at and I see that the honourable Minister is not here but that is something that needs to be looked at.

With respect to the re-naming of Prince Charles Park, now its King Charles Park, there is one thing that is forgotten, and I hope I am not wrong, Sir, but I am hoping if I am corrected, this names not forgotten within Prince Charles Park, the actual stadium was named A.D. Patel Stadium. In my travels within and out of Nadi, I have not seen that name, it has actually been removed. It would not be an honourable thing if we removed the name and did not put the name back on to the Stadium because it is for someone who was part of our history and has done a lot for this particular country and that name should remain on that particular stadium. I am hoping that they put it back on but I know it was removed and I see the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance looking at me like that. Please, have a look and check it and I hope that that actually and still remains as A.D. Patel Stadium, as it has been there from many, many years. He is an important part of Fiji's history.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I know there are several weaknesses that are within the Council in terms of rate collections, they are facing delays now and also within the staff, but I think with the upcoming project of elections or local elections, that some of the problems that can be solved after the elections, but that is something that needs to be looked at urgently.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other thing is, we must also turn that city or town into a town that is compliant with all the sustainable development goals, as I have said, it sits at the forefront of our tourism industry which earns us the most amount of dollars. We need to make sure that all councils update their policies and procedures, so we are actually lean and mean at the end of the day but we are clean. Traffic is a huge problem which still has not been resolved. I think also what needs to happen is that in terms of the council and auditing, regular audits and performance evaluations, they really need to happen within Nadi Town Council. I think these are issues that have been raised by the Committee and these are the issues that need to be at the forefront, and I am hoping that the Ministry of Local Government will look at Nadi Town in a different light, because it is one of the first ports that anyone sees when they visit Fiji. It is our tourism town, it is our next best city about to become, we look at Namaka, Sir, it is phenomenally good and all of that area, but it is the town area that needs to be seriously looked at. I support the Report.

MR. SPEAKER.- Before I grant you the time to speak honourable Minister, just let me acknowledge honourable Members, those present in the gallery now. On the right are familiar faces, renowned personalities in our Government - Mr. Parmesh Chand, Mr. Mesake Nawari, Mr. Mark Halabe. I am sorry I have missed out the lady. On the right are our visitors from abroad, even though we do not have the factual details of your presence here ladies and gentlemen, but we do acknowledge

your presence in Parliament.

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the motion before the House. Firstly, I would like to thank the Committee Chairman and its Members for doing a thorough review of the 2016 Nadi Town Council Report. Even though it is an old Report, it is something that we are trying tell the Ministry to make sure that all the financial accounts and reports are forwarded to the Office of the Auditor-General for audit.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the past 25 months has been spent in my Ministry by instilling good governance in all the 13 Councils around our country. The first task that I assigned to the team of new Special Administrators in January this year was to get the Act of the Councils in order and this should be achieved by first bringing all annual reports and accounts in order.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform Parliament that all the 13 Councils have committed to completing the pending financials and have their accounts ready for audit by the end of this year. As of today, approximately 37 accounts have been submitted to the Office of the Auditor-General, whilst 50 financials are being prepared and ready for submission to the Office of the Auditor-General. That is something that I had said earlier, something that is lacking in most of our Municipal Councils, except for one, which is Rakiraki Town Council is the time they are taking to prepare their financial accounts as well as get their accounts audited by the Office of the Auditor-General.

Based on the Report submitted by the Chairman this afternoon, there are about 10 recommendations, and these are very important in terms of development at the Nadi Town Council as well as Nadi Town in addressing some of the very pertinent features of the Council. It is a tourist town, and we want to maintain the standard to ensure that we keep Nadi as one of the tourist centres, as also was a tourist town in our country.

First, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is the design of Prince Charles Park, which the Committee has highlighted the need to re-design the park to ensure that it can attract overseas teams and also up to international standard. I remember a year ago when there was a trial game done by the Super Rugby where the Drua played against the Rebels. It was a good turnout, even though it was a trial game. The Council is working on trying to upgrade, uplift and also design the current Prince Charles Park.

Also alluded to by the Chairman is the need to also change the name to King Charles Park because of the change in the monarchy. That is something that the Council has also written to the British High Commission as far as protocol is concerned, to give them some confirmation on the changing of Prince Charles Park to King Charles Park.

Another very important recommendation is for the Council to work closely with the Local Government Committee and key stakeholders in the process of extension of its town boundary and to be included in the Nadi Municipality for better service delivery. I think that was done in 2018 where the town boundary was extended, and the Council must now focus on providing adequate services to the newly included area.

It is also worth noting, Mr. Speaker, that any further extension to the boundary will be done after the upcoming Local Government Elections. The Ministry is committed to ensuring that future expansions serve the best interest of the Council and its residents in enhancing service delivery and ensuring equitable development across Nadi.

The Council to work closely with the Government as well as donor partners in terms of the Nadi Flood Alleviation Project. I think this is a very important exercise and a very important activity for Nadi. For so many years now, Nadi has been under water due to flooding caused by heavy rain

downpour. There is also a plan in place, in collaboration with JICA on further engineering works that need to be done to alleviate the problems Nadi Town is facing, that is from the effects of flooding and even heavy downpour.

Another issue is the relocation or identification of a suitable rubbish dump. At the moment there is none for the Nadi area. In July this year, Cabinet has reviewed and endorsed a proposal for a new landfill project in the Western Division. Something we need to seriously reconsider right now because there is a need to have a good wasteland system in place to look after the waste that is produced by all those municipalities within the Western Division.

The importance of the re-introduction of the challenge fund, the municipalities to assist with the identification of capital projects such as leisure park, multipurpose court and the development of Wailoaloa picnic spot. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the quality in introducing a challenge fund is one matter that we take very seriously. This fund previously supported the Municipal Councils in delivering capital projects such as leisure parks, multipurpose courts and also some smaller sports like the one at Wailoaloa. While the challenge fund will not create new processes for personal identification, it will centralize funding allocations, providing a streamlined approach to support these initiatives.

The Ministry encourages councils to continue submitting their project proposals for the public sector investment project process to ensure capital needs are met and the requirements, heavy infrastructure as deemed necessary.

Another key area that was also highlighted is the need for the Council to review or to relook at the collection strategy to collect outstanding town rates. Town rates is one of the key drivers. It is one of the very important income drivers for the Council. It is very important that they have practical as well as a good strategy in place to collect more rates from all the outstanding rates.

Various collection methods have been suggested such as house-to-house visits, face-to-face mediums as well as even encouraging wage earners who have fixed employment to do direct deduction so that payments are made weekly to the town council and also to avoid arrears.

Also Mr. Speaker, Sir, those accounts that are hard for the Council to collect or exhausting, they will be exploring legal avenues to try and collect these hardcore arrears. And also, the Ministry has also amended the Local Government Act to help arrears from 11 percent to 5 percent as well as changing the interest methodology from compound interest to simply interest. This is solely to assist ratepayers who are facing financial hardship to pay up their rates at the Council.

The issue of the Council to work closely with all the relevant stakeholders to declare Nadi Town a city, I think we all aspire for that but before Nadi can be declared a city, there are some important elements of development that needs to be complied with. That is something that the Ministry is also exploring with the Council on the way forward for this.

Lastly on the lollipop metres, something that the Council had just changed recently. They also acquired display parking meters. If you have been to Nadi Town recently, you will see some newly installed digital parking metres. This is one of the strategies the council has undertaken to try and improve the income stream of the Council.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is a collaboration of planning and unwavering commitment to the people. Those recommendations highlighted by the Committee highlight some of the critical areas of focus and assure the august House as well as the Ministry of Local Government will continue to work tirelessly to support Nadi Town Council, and all stakeholders involved. Mr. Speaker, I fully support the motion before the House.

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

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

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

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

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

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we still have a few items on Schedule 3 and Motions for Debate to finish of the Order Paper today.

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

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE - REVIEW REPORT ON THE NADI TOWN COUNCIL 2016 ANNUAL REPORT

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute on the motion before the House. I would like to commend the Standing Committee on Social Affairs for a detailed report.

I have noted from the Report that the Committee has come up with key findings and some very good recommendations. I fully support the recommendation of the Committee that Nadi Town Council should identify a suitable dumpsite for the ratepayers of Nadi which will save cost in terms of transportation to Lautoka. Currently, rubbish is transported all the way to Vunato, Lautoka which is very costly; hundreds of tonnes of rubbish are taken to Lautoka from Nadi which means extra cost to ratepayers. I urge the Ministry of Local Government and the newly appointed Special Administrators to put their thoughts together and address the issue at the earliest.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other important area which cannot be overlooked is a recreational area. Recreational area plays a very important role in enhancing the quality of life in an urban environment by providing residents and visitors with spaces for outdoor activities and relaxation. There is need for more recreational areas for the people of Nadi and visitors to Nadi, including the tourists. There are only a few recreational areas in Nadi which was done some years ago and that needs upgrading. The Special Administrators and CEO should come up with innovative ideas and share ideas with the Council and the Ministry of Local Government, upgrade and also come up with more recreational areas in Nadi for the people of Nadi.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, another finding of the Committee is outstanding rates. All efforts should be made by the Council to collect the outstanding rates. The Councils should come up with better

strategies so that a huge number of outstanding rates can be collected and utilised for important developments and maintenance work.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are many important places in Nadi which needs maintenance. I will talk on only one, I have identified one important place which needs maintenance and upgrading and that is Nadi Bus Stand. During my recent visit to Nadi, in fact, when I was coming to Suva yesterday, I went to the Nadi Bus Stand. The reason why I went to the Nadi Bus Stand because some concerned citizens of Nadi raised concern regarding the state of the bus stand. I saw that the Nadi Bus Stand is in a very bad condition. The bus stand is outdated and rusty, ceiling and boards are falling apart. I took photos and will send them to the honourable Minister, benches at the bus stand needs repairing. It is a health hazard; we are putting our students and people at risk.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Very poor.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I urge the honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity and Workplace Relations and the honourable Minister for Local Government to look into this without any delay. We do not want to see people getting injured or losing their lives from the hazard, which I have just highlighted. I am sure the Nadi Town Council Special Administrators and CEO are fully aware of the very bad condition of the Nadi Bus Stand.

I do not know what is stopping the Council from carrying out maintenance work. Is it finance? Priority should be given to this important area and maintenance should be carried out without any delay. Nadi Bus Stand is used by thousands of people daily, which also includes thousands of students, visitors and tourists. At the moment, it is an eyesore. Nadi Town Council is known for actively contributing to the tourism sector in Fiji, but this poor condition of the bus stand reflects badly on Nadi Town Council and also on the Ministry.

MR. SPEAKER.- Do you have an area in mind for this dumpsite in Nadi?

HON. H. CHAND.- I went to the bus stand yesterday, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I have taken some photos which I will be sending.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Dumpsite.

HON. H. CHAND.- Dumpsite, no, I have not. I will leave it to the Administrators and the Ministry of Local Government.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the motion. I do so as a resident of Nadi for eight years, having lived in Waqadra, Bountiful and, of course, CAAF Compound.

One of the issues that I wish to raise, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is the need for acknowledging the landowners. There must be close collaboration with the landowners in terms of policy discussions. It has happened in the past when there are new policies and when there was a meeting held at the town hall, it is the other ratepayers that attend. As for the *iTaukei*, they do not go and attend these kind of forums.

What is important is the *veitalanoa*. Council should go and visit the villagers. We have the *Gone Turaga na Tui Nadi*, *Momo na Tui Nadi*, *Marama na Tui Saunaka*, and likewise the *Tui Nawaka*. Three chiefs and, of course, for the Namaka Area, *na Momo na Tui Sabeto*. There must be acknowledgement and collaboration between the Councils and the *Vanua*. It is very important. We can all go - *talanoa tiko* wherever we go, but it should start from home, and this is something that we have lacked over the years. I hope that under the Coalition Government, with the reform being done,

we see a major improvement in terms of closer collaboration between the *Vanua* and the Local Governments.

The second issue which I acknowledge and has been made by the honourable Minister and also by honourable Koya, is the lack of landfill. It is a pity that we are in this state, but the issue has been recognised. The former Minister sitting there, but it has been recognised. I am sure, Mr. Speaker, Sir, if you approach the landowners, there are potential sites where this can be done. It is just a matter of sitting down to address this issue because Nadi, being a premier town closer to the Airport, it must have an incinerator on its own.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- You need to open your mind and open your eyes as well.

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the 3Rs (Reduce, Reuse and Recycle) Project, I understand that the Japanese Government has funded the 3Rs Project, in partnership with Nadi and Lautoka Town Councils, to reduce waste. There was a team that went to Japan, until now, we are yet to see what has been implemented. They need to pick on these issues, and I guess one of the problems is the constant change of the management. It is noted in the Town Council. So, the question goes back, who appoints them? Why sack them? Why do people have to retire?

There is a tendency of appointing people and sacking them. Obviously, there is no forward plan for that, and that is one of the problems that we saw at the Nadi Town Council.

On the Nadi River Diversion Project, this is a constant issue that I had actually faced. I experienced three major floods in Nadi, Waqadra Area, Vesi Street. Mr. Speaker, Sir, some of the houses were actually up to the roof level. We urge the Town Council and all authorities to address this issue. Also, on the issue of how can they be assisted financially?

In some cases, all household belongings were damaged and some of them just within the poverty line. There should be a policy to assist these people. I speak on behalf of the people who live in Nadi, in Waqadra and the downtown area, most of them are just struggling to live, so this is an important issue.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Do you not know the work of the Local Government?

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- On the issue of drainage which the previous Government did not address it in the last 16 years.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, another issue is the need for cemetery. Enamanu Cemetery is an eyesore. Sometimes, it is opened three or four times. You can even spot who owns these graves. So, the Town Council needs to look for new sites.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if we go overseas to Australia or New Zealand, they have high respect for those who have gone before us.

(Honourable Members interject)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- But this has not changed in the last 16 years. Under the leadership of honourable Nalumisa, this will be done, I can assure you that.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Sixteen years, you cannot compare that to two years, not even two years. Poor execution! That is what I call.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there has been great work on the review of the Local Government Act and, again, I encourage a close collaboration with the *vanua*. Sometimes, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is only the people who are the people whose voices are heard. What about those who cannot be heard? This is the reality in Fiji. *O koya ga e domo levu, e levu na nona i lavo, e rogo. Ia, o ira na ka lalai, e sega soti. Ena sega ni rawa ni vaka tiko 'go na veivakatoroicaketaki e Viti. Meda rokovi ira tiko o ira na i taukei ni qele, meda rogoci ira talega na cava era sotava.* We must listen to them. This Government will listen to them. We promise, we deliver, and that is the change between this Government and the other side.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, an issue that is noted and it is across the board, the poor collection of rates. It has been addressed, and the Government will strive to work with the new Council. We have an upcoming election so people can take ownership of their town, they pay their rates on time, so there will be lots of money for infrastructure.

HON. K.K. LAL.- God is watching, my friend!

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, one thing that touches me when I go to Namaka is the pirate taxis. Why does it thrive these days? Because those who have taxi metres do not operate after 6.00 p.m. So, the question is something that the Council has to deal with. How can this be tailor-made? How can we address this?

A lot of people actually make a living out of this. I know it is unlawful, but then the question again is, what about those who are licensed to operate at a certain time, but they choose and pick and at what time? This is an issue that the Nadi Town Council has to address. It cannot ignore that.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- LTA matter, you should know that!

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Finally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is a need to establish a one-stop business licence shop. There is a need for a centralised one-stop-shop for applying for business licence, to eliminate the inconvenience of residents travelling to Suva, or multiple offices for document verification for approval. There is a discussion within my Ministry in terms of placing one of our officers from the Registrar of Titles, at least, two days in a fortnight, so that it can address the request from landowners in terms trust deeds. So, they do not have to come all the way to Suva. We are also going to place them in other towns. They will come for training to the Registrar of Titles Office so they can do these services.

Before, in the last 16 years, Mr. Speaker, Sir, you come to Suva to do that. If you are living in Koro, you have to come and get your registered birth certificate in Suva. That problem has been resolved. Done! Soon, *qaravi*.

The Ministry of Justice, Mr. Speaker, Sir, does not go out to do awareness. So, basically what I am saying is that the people living in the maritime, are left out. That is the change we promised

this country, led by the honourable Prime Minister, and of course, these are my colleagues. This is the change we promised. We are actually empowering the people.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I fully endorse the motion. I thank the honourable Minister and honourable Vanawalu for their hard work. We hope that there will be some good governance in the near future.

When I look at the statements, Mr. Speaker, Sir, paragraph 5 of the Auditor-General's Report says, "The Council was unable..."; paragraph 6 says, "There was unreconciled..."; paragraph 7(a), "The Council was unable..." So, the question is, who appointed these people? Why was no action taken? But with the Coalition Government, we hope we are going to set new standards. I support the motion, Sir.

HON. J.N. NAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the debate before the House. As we dig into the findings of the Report, it is imperative to acknowledge the weaknesses that have been identified within the Nadi Town Council. The financial health of the Council is a pressing concern, with outstanding rates approximately amounting to \$3.4 million. This figure includes both, the current dues and arrears, with only about \$243,000 collected in the financial year, representing a mere 11 percent of the total owed. Such a situation is untenable and poses a significant barrier to the Council's ability to finance essential services and infrastructure projects that our community desperately needs.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Report highlights the Council's struggle with rate collection, which has led to reliance on legal action to recover outstanding dues. The Committee has rightly recognised that pursuing these matters in court is necessary to deter non-compliance and ensure that all ratepayers contribute their fair share. This approach, Sir, while essential, underscores a deeper issue - the need for a more proactive and engaging strategy to communicate with the constituents about their responsibilities and the importance of timely payments.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in addition to funds and challenges, the Report points to depressing need for improved infrastructure in Nadi Town. Residents have voiced their concerns regarding the poor road conditions which has not been adequately maintained. The Committee has engaged discussions with the Fiji Roads Authority to address these issues, seeking their assistance in upgrading the roads that are vital for the safety and mobility of our community. It is crucial that we continue to advocate for these improvements, as they directly affect the quality of life of our residents.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee has emphasised the importance of partnership in addressing these challenges. Collaboration with organisations such as JICA and the Australian Government are essential for the successful completion of the ongoing projects. The Committee is actively working to finalise these projects.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Nadi Town Council faces significant challenges that require our collective effort and commitment. The weaknesses identified in the Report, particularly regarding financial management and infrastructure, must be addressed with urgency. The solution proposed by the Committee, including legal action for rate collection, improve communication and strategic partnerships are steps in the right direction.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I commend the hard work of the Council and would like to thank the current, CEO, Mr. Muni Gopal Reddy and his team, for working tirelessly to meet the expectations of the ratepayers and other stakeholders.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the outskirts of Nadi Town, there is the Saunaka Land Purchase Co-operative Society Limited, but it still has issues pending with the Nadi Town Council and other stakeholders. This Co-operative was established in 1970 with 15 members, and later with additional members, increased to 30 in the years 2009 to 2010. In 2018, instead of full subdivision, a piecemeal subdivision was carried out and titles were issued under the land depository period. Due to this, Sir, most of the members, stakeholders and beneficiaries refused to pay their town rates. According to the Co-operative, members' multiple emails have been sent to the Nadi Town Council and no response has been received to-date.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, out of 56 acres, 14 acres has been purchased by the members, with the remaining allocated to access roads. Moreover, for some reasons, 18.5 acres of members' land has been misappropriated by the previous Saunaka Land Cooperatives Board, and that has been labelled as balance spent. This issue has been raised with the Nadi Town Council and the Titles Office, but no response has been forthcoming, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I urge the Nadi Town Council to look into the plight of this Saunaka Land Purchase Cooperative Limited so that proper development can take place, and outstanding rates can be recovered by the Council.

I also urge the honourable Minister responsible to conduct an investigation into the affairs of this Saunaka Land Cooperative Limited and its previous Board so that the current members can move on with their allocated lots for the development of the Nadi Town Council and improvement of Nadi as a whole.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I urge all honourable Members of Parliament to support the recommendation put forward in the Report and advocate for necessary actions to implement the solutions. Together, we can build a better future for Nadi Town and its residents.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I intend to adjourn Parliament for afternoon tea. When we return, we shall be inviting the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics to make his contribution as well.

The House adjourned at 4.40 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 4.37 p.m.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank honourable Vanawalu for his motion and also thank all the honourable Members, including the honourable Minister, for his contribution.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will just confine to two issues that were raised by honourable Members, one, of course, is with respect to solid waste management. In the National Development Plan (NDP), one of the sub-chapters 7.4, has been devoted to the solid waste management Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), policies and strategies.

Fiji, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is dealing with a significant solid waste management problem now. Obviously, increased economic activity, changing consumption patterns, even in the rural areas, consumption patterns – products that were not used are now being used and there are different kinds of activities, which generate a lot of solid waste – informal settlements, increasing urbanisation, so at the moment, Mr. Speaker, Sir, only 0.2 percent of the total waste is, kind of, recycled in Fiji.

In the NDP, as part of the KPIs, Mr. Speaker, Sir, right now, solid waste disposal through collection and disposal by Municipal Councils is about 182,000 tonnes nationally. The target in the NDP for the next three years – 2025-2027, needs to take it to 250,000 tonnes, and between 2025-2029 to about 350,000 tonnes.

We are also, Mr. Speaker, Sir, looking at how we can increase recycling plants and the target key indicators. The targets in the plan are one in the Western Division and one in the Northern Division. The Western Division in the next first three years (2025–2027) and landfills again target for one in the Western Division, Northern Division, we have talked about rubbish dump in Nadi. Those are immediate short-term targets, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for solid waste management.

For Nadi, it is a serious concern because the nature of waste has also changed in rural areas, for example the use of diapers. People use it in the rural areas because there is no provision to dispose of them, we are not encouraging disposal methods. They bring it to the urban areas, hoping that the town and city Councils will collect and dispose. It is an ongoing issue for many of the municipal councils.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other issue is the Nadi River Flood Alleviation Project. This project is one of the most critical long-term initiatives underway. This project which aims to reduce the flood risks that have historically impacted Nadi, continuous to be a priority for both the Nadi Town Council as well as the for the Government.

This, Mr. Speaker, Sir, reference was made to the support by international partners such as Japan. As I said, the project is designed to mitigate flood risks that have long threatened that area's infrastructure and economy. So, while significant progress has been made in improving drainage systems and reinforcing riverbanks, additional resources will be required to review those further.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I can inform Parliament that we have received the final Technical Report by the Australian Infrastructure Financing Facility Programme (AIFFP), and I want to thank the Australian and the Japanese Government for working together. There were some concerns about the original design, the way in which the first and second phase was going to be conducted.

The Technical Report that has been submitted by AIFFP addresses that and one of the donor partners has already committed grants. So, this project is going to be a big project and it is going to cost us significant resources. At the moment, within the Ministry of Finance, we are looking at policies and strategies, to ensure that we look for more grant financing for this project because under

climate resilience projects, these types of projects are very, very important.

I am confident now, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that given the completion of the Technical Report and given the support that the Japanese Government is already providing, we should be able to move on this project as soon as possible. Other supportive infrastructure by Government around Nadi, is the dredging works at Denarau in which we had allocated about \$5.5 million in the 2024-2025 Budget. As we know, Denarau is one of the key areas that contributes to the tourism economy. It is part of the Government's broader effort, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to mitigate the cost of flooding and strengthen critical tourism infrastructure. These dredging works will protect Denarau shores, improve drainage and safeguard this infrastructure against rising sea levels and extreme weather conditions, which is quite frequent

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in addition to the Nadi River Flood Alleviation Project, we have also prioritised the allocation of funding to upgrade drainage systems to reduce the impact of the kind of flooding that we would have seen in the past. So, in the 2024-2025 Budget, we have allocated additional resources to the different Ministries - the Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways and Ministry of Sugar and Multi-Ethnic Affairs, because we believe that some of the drainage works that need to be done beyond the town boundary is having an ultimate impact when there is a lot of rain and cyclones.

Because of those works not being carried out beyond the towns and cities, they ultimately end up in those areas, so as part of the overall projects by Government, both in the 2023-2024 Budget, but more significantly in the 2024-2025 Budget, we had provided additional funding for drainage works throughout the country and I think some of the work has already begun. Some were done last year, and we can see the positive impact of that kind of drainage work beyond the town and city boundaries and is having a positive impact on towns and cities as well.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, of course, the other issue that the honourable Minister for Justice raised was that their rate collection was a big problem over the last many years, and we are addressing that now. We are also saying to vendors and those using the services of towns and cities that a certain level of user pay is required because everyone, and those who live in the cities and town boundaries but more importantly those who live outside of these boundaries, use these services on a regular basis, so town and city councils must have adequate resources. Government cannot continue to inject funds to run these town and city councils, and we are hopeful that after the elections, more understanding and campaign amongst the ratepayers where this culture of self-financing and the ability of town and city councils to provide services to the people will be enhanced.

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you very much for a very constructive deliberation from the honourable Members this afternoon and we believe most of the issues raised have been addressed by the honourable Minister.

On that note, Sir, once again, the Committee would like to thank the Ministry of Local Government for their timely submission in response to the Committee's recommendations in this august Parliament.

The Committee looks forward to the successful implementation of these recommendations in which we significantly contribute to the growth and prosperity of Nadi Town Council. On this note Sir, I have no other comments on this Report.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

REVIEW REPORT - RAKIRAKI TOWN COUNCIL 2019 ANNUAL REPORT

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

That Parliament debates the Review Report on the Rakiraki Town Council Annual Report for the year 2019 which was tabled on 4th September, 2024.

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

HON. I. S. VANAWALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Standing Committee on Social Affairs was referred the Rakiraki Town Council Annual Report for the year 2019 on 4th July 2023. Pursuant to Standing Order 38(2), therefore, the Committee was referred to the review of the Annual Reports as pursuant to its mandate, as stipulated in Standing Order 110(1)(c).

Rakiraki Town was legally declared on Thursday, 4th July 2010. The Public Service Commission approved the use of an office space in the Government rented complex at Vaileka House, where official operations commenced on Monday, 6th July 2010.

The Committee, as part of its deliberation, conducted a site visit to the new Rakiraki Market Complex and held a public submission with the CEO and the Administrator. The Council officially raised concerns with regards to extensive flooding that has occurred in Rakiraki over the years. They requested that this be addressed through regular dredging. It was also highlighted that the Council was moving towards digitalisation of their services through initiatives, such as the new website to keep track of applications and the introduction of QR payments via MPaiSA to enhance customer convenience.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, also discussed with enthusiasm was the Council's proposal for a satellite town in Waimicia, Nalawa, Ra, and the proposed extension of its Town boundaries. As part of the Committee's recommendation, the Committee had highlighted the following:

- (1) An urgent need to support the regular dredging of rivers to mitigate flooding in Rakiraki Town.
- (2) The Government to reconsider providing annual grants to small municipalities like Rakiraki to carry out their service delivery within time of request.
- (3) Support the establishment of the proposed state line town in Waimicia, Nalawa, Ra and carrying out all necessary feasibility studies.
- (4) The Ministry of Waterways to reinstate the annual grant to maintain the dangers within the municipalities.
- (5) The retention of the Fiji Sport Council ground for sports and other recreational purposes for the people of Ra.
- (6) To expedite the process of converting the first floor of Rakiraki Market for commercial office space, and SMEs operators to generate additional revenue for the Council.
- (7) The Council to have regular meetings with Fiji Road Authority (FRA) in terms of regular maintenance of road and streetlights.
- (8) The Council to liaise with the Ministry of Tourism and other key stakeholders in promoting tourism in Ra.

Thank you, once again, to the Ministry of Local Government for providing a timely response

to the Committee's recommendations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in this Review Report, the Committee highlighted the various areas that need to be strengthened by the Council, and relevant recommendations were formulated for resolution.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I would like to inform you that I have a list supplied by the honourable Whips. There will be three speakers from each side, who will be speaking for 10 minutes. The batting will be undertaken by:

- (1) Honourable P.K. Bala;
- (2) Honourable Minister for Housing and Local Government;
- (3) Honourable V. Lal;
- (4) Honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Cooperatives, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications;
- (5) Honourable S. Nand; and
- (6) Honourable Minister for Fisheries and Forestry.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to make my brief contribution to the deliberation in this august Parliament on the Review Report of the Rakiraki Town Council 2019 and I would like to thank the Chairman and the Members of the respective Committee.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am deeply concerned by the continuous failures of this Coalition Government to deliver on the most basic needs of our people. Mr. Speaker, Sir, while we continue to face increasing urbanisation and raising cost of living, this Government is content to sit on their hands offering nothing but empty promises and delays.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this neglect is hurting the very people they are supposed to represent. The poor, the working class, the small business owners who are struggling to make ends meet. Mr. Speaker, Sir, let us talk about this Rakiraki Municipal Market.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- What have you built?

(Laughter)

HON. P.K. BALA.- You do not have to pay! What are you talking about? The Prime Minister and your Ministers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I have said, let us talk about Rakiraki Municipal Market. When it was first designed, there was a clear vision and provision for a concrete mezzanine floor so that that can be converted into office spaces for commercial use and for small businesses. So, I would like to ask, because we, the Committee met with the management of Rakiraki Town Council, and they said to us that they have asked for the funds but the funds has not been given. I want to thank him. He is a very honest Minister. He is shaking there, because he knows it! And I want to thank him! As the line Minister he is responsible for responding to me! I do not want to hear from others.

(Laughter)

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this was the vision for a better infrastructure and to help Rakiraki Town Council to generate additional funds. The smaller Councils can say whatever they want to say, but

they are struggling, crippled by the lack of funding. And I was surprised that, unfortunately, he is not here.

The honourable Minister for Finance has just said, that he has provided funds to the respective departments or the Ministry, Ministry for Waterways. So where is the money? Because, when we went there, they basically said there is no more Challenge Fund. So, where is this Challenge Fund that he is talking about? Maybe tomorrow you can answer. But the message that we got from the management of Rakiraki Town Council that, that Challenge Fund had been stopped by the Government. Simple as that! So, the Minister can respond to me.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Very poor.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, another glaring issue is the Government's failure to formalise the FSC ground which includes the golf course and settlement areas which were basically granted to the Council some years back. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this delay is unacceptable to the Rakiraki Town Council and the people of Rakiraki.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I ask Government to direct FSC to immediately formulate the agreement that was reached by the Rakiraki Town Council and the FSC some years back, as I have mentioned. Apart from the Sports Council's facility in Rakiraki, there is no other ground, that is the only one. We were very successful in our negotiations with Fiji Sugar Corporation at that time and they gave that ground, golf course, and there were few tenants residing in that area. I hope the honourable Minister will definitely look into this issue. Someone told me that the honourable Minister for Sugar has stopped it, he should worry about sugar, not the grounds.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government's non funding for our towns and city is worrying and growing challenges in our urban areas. While the people of Fiji tighten their belts and suffer, the Coalition Government is unable to focus on what truly matters, that is, the delivery result for the people. The honourable Minister for Trade, whenever I speak, he always says swimming pool, swimming pool, swimming pool.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- That is where all the money is going.

HON. P.K. BALA.- You better go and swim there, then you will know.

(Laughter)

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fijians were promised before and during Elections for a Municipal Election. The people trusted them at that point in time and voted them that the Municipal Election would be held in the first 100 years or within six months.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, 100 days or within six months, I ask, where is that promise? In fact, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it was a total lie, and it is also against the Electoral Act 116(4)(c). I will put that matter to rest. Maybe the honourable Attorney-General can look into that.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Which one?

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Sacked one.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I call on this Government to immediately provide the necessary funding so that the Rakiraki Town Council can complete these capital projects that I had mentioned.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is time for this Government to start addressing the real issues affecting the lives of the ordinary Fijians. Rakiraki Town Council has identified a dumpsite which will be used by Tavua Town Council as well because the municipal councils have common issues and problems. So, they have identified a dumpsite which will be used by Rakiraki Town Council and Tavua Town Council.

But what they need, Mr. Speaker, Sir, because they do not have funds. They are requesting the Government for funds to carry out the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) and therefore I call on the Ministry of Environment to assist this small Council's request. I believe the Ministry of Environment comes under the honourable Prime Minister's portfolio and I know he will definitely listen to the request of Rakiraki Town Council.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, during our visit, we also went and talked to the market vendors. They do not know the rule and the laws, but they asked us if we can remove the market stall fees and charges to which we said as a Committee, we do not have such powers, it is only the honourable Minister. I said to them what was right that it is the Government's call and the line Minister.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I ask the Government to consider, based on the high cost of living and the long spell of drought that the people of Rakiraki has faced, to remove the market stall fees and charges for a period of time, so that these poor people can be assisted. The people of Fiji are watching and they are tired of waiting, waiting and waiting.

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the motion for debate that is before the House. I will provide my recommendations, as well as my input to the key recommendations as shared by the Chairman of the Committee this afternoon. Before I do that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, please, allow me to respond to some of the comments that were shared in this august House by the former Minister, honourable Bala.

The first is on the Rakiraki Market. I believe, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that he does not read his Budget Book. If he had read the Budget Book properly, he would know that Rakiraki Town Council has been provided a budget of \$342,044 to upgrade the first floor of the Rakiraki Market.

The next comment is on the municipal elections. Mr. Speaker, Sir, he has the audacity to come and ask this august House about when we are going to have the Local Government Election. In the last Sitting, I was waiting for him to ask me that question, but he was not here. I presented my response on when the Elections will be held.

The other comment is on the dumpsite. Mr. Speaker, Sir, he has now been telling this House that they have already identified. No, they have not identified the site, so he is lying in this House. Both Councils are still trying to locate a dumpsite.

HON. P.K. BALA.- The Management is saying here and is written in the Report that they have identified a location. So, who is telling the truth? I do not lie!

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, they are still looking for a dumpsite around Tavua and Rakiraki areas. I was there, they showed me the site, but I still have reservations because some people are still farming around that area. So, that is something that I want to share in this House, they still have not actually confirmed the site because a lot of review is going to be done before we can give confirmation in this august House.

The other comment is on the market stall fees. What we are trying to do now is to move away from that mentality of giving assistance to Councils, like Rakiraki Town Council. That is something

that I have been driving at my Administrators, as well as Executives, and is something that we also want to share with you, the importance of maintaining whatever things that we do, we must make sure that the operations are carried out at a very sustainable way. I think that is something that you need to understand before a Council suggests this type of ideas in this august House.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I must thank the Committee for coming forward with very good recommendations. These are very pertinent and very important for the development of Rakiraki Town and the surrounding areas, as well as to the committers and those who visit Rakiraki Town.

One of the things that has been a recurring issue, Mr. Speaker, is the need to dredge the two Rivers, which is the Penang River and the Nakauvadra River. That is something that I have also shared in this House in the morning, that we are also having consultations and collaboration with the Ministry of Waterways to assist the Council in coming forward with a strategy, not only to address this in a short period of time but, at least, provide a long-term solution on the issue that the people of Rakiraki are facing. The central government to consider providing annual grants to small municipalities like Rakiraki to carry out service delivery. These are some of the things that we are also trying to do now, to bring back some of the services that used to be provided by the Councils, to assist the Councils in providing the services better to the ratepayers and also the people of Rakiraki.

Another very important issue is on the establishment of a growth centre or a satellite town like Waimicia in Nalawa, Ra. I think this is very important because you are not only trying to promote economic activities around that area but also bringing services closer to the people of Nalawa and also districts that are close to Waimicia as it is quite far for those *tikina* in the inland of Ra to come to Rakiraki to do their business as well as shopping. At the moment, the Ministry is also doing a feasibility study on this aspect and hopefully when we next come to Parliament, we will confirm on the progress of the growth centre.

Another issue is on the FSC ground, as alluded to earlier by honourable Bala, something that we are also in consultation with the with the Minister for Sugar on the possibility of the Council to lease the FSC sports ground.

As we speak there is an event happening on the same ground. The honourable Minister for Fisheries and Forestry was there last Saturday to open the Rakiraki Carnival. One of the plans of the Council is to upgrade, given the contract and the lease by FSC to upgrade that place to a good sports ground that will be used, not only by Rakiraki as well as surrounding areas and the people of Ra.

On the upgrade works on the first level of the Rakiraki Market, in my response in the morning, it is not only that, but there is also an issue of water leaking from the roof when there is a heavy downpour going down to the ground floor that affects those market vendors who sell products at the ground floor.

That is part of the project that the Ministry and the Council will be carrying this out in this current financial year with an allocation of close to \$342,000. He also said it correctly, that is also one of the avenues of the Council to create more space for SMEs as well as small businesses be able to operate from. This also adds additional revenue to Rakiraki Town Council.

On the issue of road upgrades at Rakiraki, something that we have also been having consultation with Fiji Roads Authority on the need to have continuous regular upgrades of the road that service town as well as surrounding areas of Rakiraki.

Another issue on the Council, if you go to Rakiraki now, on the coastal side there are more hotels coming up. This is one area that the Council hopes to explore and provide better services

because a lot of tourists are coming and going to those hotels around the coastal areas closer to Rakiraki Town. It is really growing and booming right now, and we also anticipate having more tourists visiting Rakiraki Town.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in conclusion, I must thank the current administrator as well as the administrators for Rakiraki Town Council and the staff who have been working tirelessly in delivering services to the people of Rakiraki.

The Ministry also work hand in hand with the Council as well as the administrators while looking forward to the Local Government Elections to ensure that the Council continues to provide better services to the people of Rakiraki and also to the people that use Rakiraki Town. Mr. Speaker, I support the motion before the House.

HON. V. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to speak on the Review Report of Rakiraki Town Council 2019. Rakiraki is a small town with just over 500 ratepayers and the town is located beside a river and is a flood prone area. On average, Sir, Rakiraki Town gets flooded four times a year and we have heard this from the honourable Minister earlier.

Flooding occurs when there is continuous heavy rain in the Nakauvadra Range and its valley. During any flood, the Fiji Police control the town, and they close the main entrance and their exit to control movement in the town. Public service transport gets affected during flooding and traffic flow only resumes when flood water recedes. Apart from the main town area, other nearby areas like Naqoro Flats, Qalau Road, Waimari Road, FSC Road, Korotale Road and Rewasa Road also gets flooded. Sir, you can see the number of people affected and also there are some schools nearby and when it starts raining in the afternoon, teachers have to release the students early so that they can reach home in time. I have experienced that, that as a student and also as a teacher where students have to be released early because of flooding.

Sir, while talks in regard to the river realignment is ongoing, the Council has proposed to the Ministry of Waterways for regular de-silting and dredging of rivers especially the Nakauvadra and Penang Rivers. However, this is not happening, Sir, as the machines have not reached Rakiraki. The Rakiraki Town Council have requested for this for a number of years, and the Council has been told by the Ministry of Waterways to clean the drains and the chamber. The sad thing is, the Ministry of Waterways has stopped giving grants to smaller municipalities to look after drainage as they used to receive before. Sir, I strongly urge the Ministry of Waterways to reinstate the annual grant to maintain the drainage within the municipalities.

Sir, to increase revenue for the Council, I suggest the Council should expedite the process of converting the first floor of Rakiraki Market into commercial offices. I request the Government to move its other offices in Rakiraki to the market building in order to help the Council increase its revenue so that it is able to better serve the people of Rakiraki. Initially when the market was built, the first floor was kept as accommodation for those women who come from afar to sell their produce at the market. Currently, only two to three women are using the accommodation on a weekly basis, especially on Thursdays and Fridays. Since there is a lot of space available on the first floor, this space can be used to earn some revenue for the Council. This space can be rented out to the Government or other businesses or MSMEs to generate additional revenue for the Council.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the issue of dumpsite, a lot of complaints have been received from nearby residents and the management of the Naria Primary School. This school is sitting just beside the dumpsite and the school faces this problem of flies buzzing in the school buildings and the compound all the time. The school management spends a good amount of money to buy sprays to keep away

the flies. When there is a dump fire, the school buildings get covered with smoke, making it inconvenient for the children and teachers to focus on their work.

The school management and the residents have, on numerous occasions, complained about these issues Health Department and a petition was also signed and sent to the District Officer Ra some years ago, Mr. Speaker, Sir. But nothing was done about it, and instead of relocating the dump, the Tavua Town Council has also started dumping rubbish from Tavua at this site, from last year. I think it is a burden on the taxpayers of Tavua, taking their rubbish all the way to Rakiraki and I am surprised the Minister has just said that the dumpsite has not been identified, but it is clearly written in the Report!

The Report clearly says that a dumpsite has been identified in Rabulu and I urge the authorities to speed up the process and relocate the dump from Naria, so that there is no destruction to the students of Naria school and the residents of the nearby areas can live in a clean environment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with this, I support the motion before the Parliament.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- I rise to speak in support of the motion regarding the Rakiraki Town Council 2019 Report. Mr. Speaker, Sir, just reflecting on the comments by the other side of the Parliament, by the esteemed honourable Members, there you can kind of sense a bit of forgetfulness perhaps, or an inability to remember what they were doing in the last 16 years. If you look at all these issues, if we were in Government for 16 years, we would not have these issues. When you think about it, this is a 2019 Report, so between 2019 and 2022, nothing was done and the honourable Minister has already mentioned that he has started doing all these things within 18 months or maybe 22 months. Well, converting the first floor of the Rakiraki Market Extension, just as an example.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, my purpose today, I think the honourable Minister has covered the Report quite comprehensively. So, I thought I should share some thoughts around a couple of things in. One of them I have mentioned before, and that is of course, another sort of gift from the other side of the Parliament, the untimely nature of the Financial Reports in the Town Councils. We talked about Nadi Town Council Report, and that was in 2016. This report here, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is 2019 and I know for a fact that the honourable Minister is working very hard to try and get everything up to date. That is fundamental, when you want to govern - the timeliness of financial information! That is fundamental, and so you know whilst the reports are noted, I am hopeful that by the time we finish this Term, we will actually get a lot of these Reports up to date. So that, we can move forward on a more timely basis. And everybody knows when we start talking about history, it is pretty much valueless.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other thing I thought to share was, I agree with honourable Bala and also the other honourable Members that have spoken, that Rakiraki has a challenge because it is a small town. Just reading through the statistics, there is only 403 ratepayers in Rakiraki. But the question is, as a Government, are we doing about it? What we are trying to do in this economic diversification exercise is to create more economic activity around the country.

Fiji Water is talking about commercial agriculture, they are based in Ra. The honourable Minister for Agriculture is about to do a research centre in Caboni in Ra, that will significantly activate a lot of economic activity. We are talking at the moment about rehabilitation of cocoa in Ra.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- How will you increase the base?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- That is exactly what I am saying, that will increase the base of the economy. That increases the economic activity in the economy, and the revenue comes in, which they can use in the in Town Council. What the honourable Minister talked about hotels is, there is a hotel at Wananavu being re-built at the moment. On completion, it will be a very highly valued hotel. Again, a lot more activity, a lot more spending in the towns, and a lot more money for the Town Council. So, what this Government is all about, it is not only about lamenting about the number of ratepayers but trying to do something about it.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thought of touching very briefly on another matter. I know I have raised this before, and I hope that at some point, we can just really revisit this issue on the Report. As I said, whilst I do know that legally we are obliged to debate every single report, the value of debating reports that are dated is somewhat in question. But other than that, I congratulate the honourable Minister for starting to action the items. The other thing I thought I would just note very quickly, and I am sharing this with some of the honourable Members on the other side of Parliament in terms of the flooding.

I will tell you about the example from Tailevu at the moment. The honourable Minister for Agriculture and Waterways decided to restart the Drainage Board. Mr, Speaker, Sir, it is a significant change that has happened in Tailevu right now. The effectiveness of the Drainage Board and how it is actually starting to clear the waterways, I get constant compliments now on the clearing of the waterways. I am sure, the honourable Minister has similar plans for Ra. In terms of, again, as a Government that is trying to action items and provide solutions, we are doing a lot on this side of the Parliament. I thought I would just end on that note and support the motion before Parliament.

HON. S. NAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to commend the honourable Committee Members for presenting this report. To start off with, I would like to request the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Cooperatives, Small & Medium Enterprises & Communications, to be slightly original. 16 years, saying it over and over again, is now immune to the ears. Come up with something original! I would say, it is almost two years now, start taking ownership! It is almost two years now! Always giving it away to someone else is not taking ownership. Be original! If you cannot say anything good, I think it is better to keep quiet.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, also just a quick one. He said that the Drainage Board is being started and it will make a lot of difference. I schooled in Rakiraki during the 1990s, the Drainage Board was still there, and flooding still occurred. So just shifting the thing from Waterways to Drainage Board, will not change things. Doing work will change things! You have to get the work done! Name change does not make things happen.

Mr. Speaker, small municipalities, such as Rakiraki Town, play an important role in the overall operation and health of a society or the communities attached to it.

One of the findings in the Report is the occurrence of flooding. A lot has been discussed this morning during the question raise by honourable Niudamu. A lot of discussions has happened in the last number of years, but the problem still persists. Blaming the previous Government and current Government will not get things done. It is time we take ownership. It is time we look at the plight of the people. It is time we put our foot down and make it happen. Let us get the work going. And the issue needs to be holistically looked at, only the Ministry for Housing and Local Government cannot solve the issue. It has to be holistically looked at. The Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Forestry and Ministry of Sugar, all these Ministries need to work together.

We need to find the cause of siltation to address the issue. Why is it happening? Probably the agriculture system is not correct, the cultivation methods are not correct, or the forestry methods are

not correct. That is why the silt is getting into the river. We need to address the holistic thing. Stop the siltation from happening and then dredge the rivers.

Honestly speaking we cannot totally blame the Ministry of Housing. Everyone needs to work together. Every Ministry needs to work together, and it is time that we stop blaming that this side of the Parliament did not do their work or that side of Parliament did not do their work! Get your tools together and start doing the work! Blaming is cheap, doing the work is a hard thing.

The frequent flooding in Rakiraki, the effects of it is not only to the town. The consequence of flooding is beyond the municipal boundaries. It affects the people. When the town has been flooded it affects not only the shop owners it affects the market vendors. It affects the service station operators. It affects people who want to go to the hospital on the other side. We need to start looking after our people. We need to do the work. It is affecting people's lives, and we cannot take it lightly. Every time we raised the issue, oh, these people have not done it for the last 16 years! Fine, they have not done it! But you are not doing anything, so what makes you any different? Get the work done!

Riverbed erosion, I have seen in Rakiraki one of the building's foundation has been washed away. Those things need to be looked at. That is the safety of the people that is in line. Again 16 years, try to be different. Stop blaming! Get the work done! And being a small municipality, it does not mean it can be ignored. And I find this Government is ignoring it and he is talking about all the agriculture projects that is going to be held. We need to get commercial projects happening in Rakiraki so that the economy improves. We need to look commercially! We need to activate Rakiraki!

And the FSC Mill, yes, correctly pointed out! It is a promise by the Government. Put your money where your mouth is, get the mill going. Stop playing with people's emotions! Oh! We will rebuild the mill. If it is not possible stand up and say we cannot do it! However, if it is possible, get the work done! Build the mill! Churn the economy!

Before I sit down, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I urge everyone in this Parliament, stop blaming each other. Get your tools, get the work done! And 16 years, try to be more creative, Minister for Trade, Cooperatives, Small & Medium Enterprises & Communications! It is really sore to the ears – the 16 years.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Firstly, I would like to thank the Chairperson and Members of the Committee for the compilation of the Rakiraki Town Council 2019 Annual Report.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to, particularly, touch on one of the key findings in the recommendations of the Committee, which is the proposal for a satellite town in Waimicia, Nalawa, Ra. As development expands and moves away from the town area, the proposal to have a satellite town in Waimicia is welcomed, especially for most of us whose villages are very far from Rakiraki Town. This is an opportunity for us to have our own little town closer to the districts of Nalawa, Saivou and Nakorotubu.

Currently, there is a service station there, there are a few shops there and also an established Police Post, which makes the area very safe. I think in a few months' time, there will also be a newly constructed supermarket and a shopping mall in that area.

I would like to take this time to thank the Chairman, the Special Administrator and staff of Rakiraki Town Council for having the foresight in identifying Waimicia as a proposed satellite town for Ra. I hope, Mr. Speaker, that once all the feasibility studies have been conducted and the satellite town becomes an established commercial area, the Council will think of renaming Rakiraki Town

Council to Ra Town Council.

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I believe a lot has been said in this august House on this Report. For most of the deliberations, we believe there is work to be done and as we have heard in this Chamber the importance of getting the work done and the implementation of the work by the Council. Hopefully, from the Committee's perspective, the eight recommendations from this Report will be taken into consideration and the Ministry of Local Government, which is the arm of the Government, will actually look at how best the implementation has to go through, the monitoring aspect of it, so that at the end of the day, the holistic debate that we did this afternoon will benefit our nation.

We thank, once again, the Ministry of Local Government for providing a timely response to the Committee's recommendations. On that note, Sir, I do not have any other comments on the motion.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

CONSOLIDATED REVIEW REPORT - CIVIL AVIATION AUTHORITY OF FIJI 2021 AND 2022 ANNUAL REPORTS

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to move:

That Parliament debates the Consolidated Review Report on the Civil Aviation Authority of Fiji 2021 and 2022 Annual Reports which was tabled on 3rd September, 2024.

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

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Civil Authority of Fiji (CAAF) is an independent statutory authority established under the CAAF Act 1979. The main objective of the Act is to establish a CAAF with functions related to civil aviation and matter incidental thereto. It provides for the establishment of a regulatory framework for maintaining, enhancing and promoting the safety and security of civil aviation in Fiji, with particular emphasis on preventing aviation accidents as well as incidents.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in response to the operations learned posed by COVID-19 pandemic, the Civil Aviation Authority of Fiji has implemented several measures to comply with the pandemic related to restriction while ensuring the continuity of its operation.

The former Committee had undertaken a site visit to CAAF office and had public consultation with senior CAAF officials. Furthermore, the Committee noted the concerns raised and identified recommendations to better address its funding. The Committee recommends the establishment of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), Office for the Pacific Small Island Development State in Nadi and for being awarded the ICAO Council President Certificate.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as part of the Committee's recommendation, the Committee has highlighted

the following:

- (1) The Civil Aviation Authority of Fiji to expedite the Civil Aviation Bill to amalgamate the Civil Aviation Act 1976, the Civil Aviation Authority of Fiji Act 1979 and the Civil Aviation Reform 1999.
- (2) The Civil Aviation Authority of Fiji to fulfil the current vacant specialised position at the earliest.
- (3) The Civil Aviation Authority of Fiji to strengthen its skills framework, policies to enable them to recruit suitable, specialised personnel with suitable positions and benefits.
- (4) Government to urgently rectify the three International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Aviation Security International Convention to better address aviation security issues namely:
 - (a) Beijing Convention,
 - (b) Beijing Protocol and the
 - (c) Montreal Convention
- (5) The Civil Aviation Authority of Fiji to set aside emergency funding to cater for the future unexpected pandemic such as COVID-19.
- (6) The timely submission of CAAF's Annual Reports to Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee commends the Civil Aviation Authority of Fiji for the measures implemented during the pandemic and acknowledge the other achievements attained. The Committee anticipates the successful implementation of the recommendations provided in this Report.

MR. SPEAKER.- The floor is now open for debate and I have a list with me. As usual it will alternate between the Opposition and the Government. The batting will be led by;

- (1) Honourable V. Pillay;
- (2) Honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation;
- (3) Honourable F.S. Koya;
- (4) Honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Cooperatives, Small and Medium Enterprises; and
- (5) Honourable J. Usamate.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you for the opportunity to address the Consolidated Review Report of Civil Aviation of Fiji (CAAF) for the years 2021 and 2022. As we dwell into the findings of this Report, it is crucial to emphasise the recommendations made by the Committee. These recommendations are not mere suggestions, they are vital steps towards enhancing the operational effectiveness and strategic direction of our aviation sector. While we acknowledge the hard work of CAAF, we must also be candid about the short comings that remain.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee has rightly highlighted that while CAAF is dedicated to supporting the Sustainable Development Goals, there is an urgent need for more substantial action, initiatives like the use of remotely piloted aircraft systems for medical supply deliveries are commendable. However, they must not be seen as isolated success, but as part of a broader commitment to improving health access and connectivity for all Fijians, particularly in remote areas.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Report underscores CAAF's role in promoting quality education through safe air transportation. This is a crucial area where we must improve, especially regarding increasing female representation in aviation roles. We must take concrete steps to create pathways for women in our aviation sector.

The report also raises concern about the sustainability of our aviation practices. While Airports Fiji Limited has plans for photovoltaic solar initiatives in their master plan recently launched, we must push for further enhancements. I urge them to consider the installation of solar power, pilot activated lights and runway lights are essential for airports and airstrips like Savusavu, Taveuni, Kadavu and Lakeba. These initiatives would not only ensure safe operations, but also increase night-time accessibility significantly benefitting our remote communities. Importantly, while the operations of these airports fall under Airports Fiji Limited, it is through CAAF that approvals and regulations are made. By adopting this enhancement, we can elevate safety standards across our airports and strengthen the overall civil aviation industry in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in terms of the operational challenges, the Report indicates while the Job Evaluation Exercise (JEE) has had some positive outcomes, competitive salaries from airlines continue to be a significant issue for staff retention. We cannot ignore this challenge. The JEE has improved job satisfaction, but unless we address the salary gaps that lure skilled personnel away from CAAF, we will face ongoing staffing shortages that jeopardise our aviation standards.

Moreover, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Report reveals a pressing need to expedite the modernisation of our aviation legislation. The draft Civil Aviation Bill must be prioritised, delays in this area could hinder our compliance with international safety and security standards, putting our aviation sector at risk. We need robust regulations that reflect global best practices and CAAF must lead the charge in this endeavour.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to commend CAAF for the successful outcome of the Universal Security Audit Programme. This reflects positively on our security measures, however, we must not become complacent. The aviation sector face ever evolving threats and ongoing collaboration with relevant agencies is essential to maintain our security post.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we examine the Corporate Plan for 2021 to 2023, it is clear that CAAF aims to be a model aviation regulator. However, we need to ensure that this vision translates into actionable outcomes. The plan emphasises stakeholder engagement and continuous improvement in safety and security, yet these initiatives must be rigorously followed through to ensure tangible results.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also like to reference the Nadi International Airport Master Plan 2024 - 2033 which outlines 18 projects aimed at accommodating future growth. While upgrading facilities is crucial, we must ensure that these plans are integrated with the operational needs highlighted in the Committee's recommendations. For example, the proposed photovoltaic solar initiative and must not only enhance energy efficiency but also align with our commitment to sustainability. With those words, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I fully support the motion.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speak, Sir, thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the Standing Committee on Social Affairs Review of the CAAF 2021 and 2022 Annual Reports.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, CAAF is making significant strides in addressing the Standing Committee's recommendations. Ongoing legislative reviews, recruitment drive efforts, policy updates and international convention ratifications are enhancing Fiji's aviation sector. These measures ensures

that Fiji complies with the International Aviation Standards fostering safety and security within the civil aviation operations.

The key legislative framework guiding CAAF include the Civil Aviation Act 1976, Civil Aviation Authority of Fiji Act 1979, Civil Aviation Security Act 1994 and Civil Aviation Reform Act 1999. These laws empower CAAF as Fiji's aviation safety oversight organisation responsible for fulfilling international aviation obligations, especially in line with ICAO standards. Effective oversight of aviation in Fiji strengthens the nation's ability to maintain and expand its flight information region and international air routes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, currently Fiji boasts an ICAO audit of 76.3 percent, well above the Asia-Pacific region's average of 65.5 percent and the global average of 69.4 percent. So, we are tracking well, Mr. Speaker, Sir. If I can highlight some of the responses to the recommendations tabled by the Parliamentary Standing Committee:

Recommendation 1

The Civil Aviation Authority of Fiji to expedite the Civil Aviation Bill to amalgamate the Civil Aviation Act 1976 and Civil Aviation Authority of Fiji Act 1979 and the Civil Aviation (Reform) 1999.

The response from CAAF is this, Mr. Speaker, the Civil Aviation Bill 2024 Draft Three is currently under review by the Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation. Following this review, the Bill will progress to the Solicitor General's Office for further legal assessment and refinement, and we aim to bring it to Parliament in the first quarter of 2025.

Recommendation 2

Civil Aviation Authority of Fiji to fill the current vacant specialised positions at the earliest.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, CAAF has been actively recruiting to fill vacant positions. Out of the 77 established roles within CAAF's structure, 70 positions have already been successfully filled. The remaining seven are expected to be filled with the next six months. Meanwhile, to ensure uninterrupted service delivery, CAAF has contracted overseas consultants. As I have highlighted in this House many times, finding and keeping these highly specialised people is a continuing challenge in aviation, but we have had some measure of success. As highlighted here in the meantime we use overseas consultants.

Recommendation 3

Civil Aviation Authority of Fiji strengthens its Scarce Skills Framework policies to enable them to recruit suitable specialised personnel with suitable positions and benefits.

The response, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is CAAF is currently working on enhancing its scarce skills framework policies. These updated policies aim to attract and recruit specialised personnel, by offering suitable positions and competitive benefits. Now, this is a tough call, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as you know, as soon as they are qualified and experienced, our neighbours grab them, so it is quite a challenge. The improved process are projected to be implemented by the fourth quarter of 2024. We are investing in continuous training and development and leveraging the Pacific Liaison Office by ICAO to help in growing the capacity HR.

Recommendation 4

Government to urgently ratify the three ICAO Aviation Security International Conventions, to better address regional security issues namely:

- (1) The Beijing Convention;
- (2) Beijing Protocol; and
- (3) Montreal Convention.

In response, CAAF is advancing the necessary processes for the Government's ratification of the three ICAO Aviation Security Conventions. This will enhance Fiji's ability to address aviation security concerns in line with international standards.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in short, CAAF is doing very well and is highly respected in the Asia-Pacific Region. Twice now, Fiji has been asked to Chair or Vice-Chair of some high-profile aviation conferences. As you know, I chaired the one in Dubai on CAAF/3 which is the Civil Aviation Alternative Fuel, and two weeks ago in Delhi, I was Vice-Chair on the Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference. The Chair was Ram Mohan Naidu, the Minister for Civil Aviation in India, I was the Vice-Chair. There is a recognition of Fiji's position in aviation in the Pacific.

We were fortunate that day at the closing, honourable Narendra Modi came to close the Conference. Tourism is flourishing. As highlighted by our honourable Minister for Finance, the forecast of growth had been increased upwards to 43.6 percent, and being driven by tourism. Aviation is very critical to tourism. I assure the House, the Coalition Government is committed to supporting civil aviation by extension, supporting our tourism industry. I support the findings of the Committee.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to thank the Committee with respect to the motion before the House on the Report of the Civil Aviation Authority of Fiji 2021 and 2022. The Civil Aviation Authority is a hugely critical component of our nation's infrastructure. The importance of ensuring that Fiji is actually compliant with international standards, particularly those that have been set by ICAO sits at the forefront. Civil Aviation, we must realise that it is not just the means of transportation, it is actually one of the pillars of our national development. It is a driver of our tourism industry, it is a lifeline for connecting our communities, and also connecting our global communities. The strength of that sector has actually got far reaching implications.

The Report is timely, and I think it is important that there are some sections that have already been dealt with. Honourable Gavoka is correct, Civil Aviation Authority of Fiji has moved on in leaps and bounds and done a fantastic job. I think it is a testament to the actual leadership, and the current CEO also, Mrs. Levestam, who is actually doing a fantastic job with it, Sir.

The recommendations that have been given by the Committee are there to enhance the effectiveness in the strategic direction of CAAF. What we must realise, Sir also, is that with civil aviation, we have to continuously look at our compliance with respect to the standards that have been audited by ICAO.

Critical elements required by ICAO for Aviation Authority is to achieve compliance is what we need to look at. I think that also comes out in the Report. We have had successful audits that have been carried out, as the honourable Minister for Tourism actually spelt out now, we are about 70 percent with a tick off. We must remember that that is great, but the rest of the 30 percent that we have not, we will need to ensure that we do. It is critical because it is significantly to do with security and concerns identified within the aviation industry that need to be looked at and the positive outcome reflects the effectiveness of the Civil Aviation Authority of Fiji (CAAF).

Now, the successful audit also indicates a healthy position with respect to the security posture for Fiji and it enhances our reputation in the aviation industry. That is why we continuously get asked

to chair meetings and honourable Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation is now, I think he has done it twice, one which I attended with him, Mr. Speaker, Sir. So, Fiji has a very, very high place in the space with respect to civil aviation. But we must continue to ensure that we keep that.

Now, to do that also, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are recommendations in the Committee's Report which are quite valid. It is important also that we now have an International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) office, a liaison office based in Nadi which was recently opened, that enhances our Fiji's access to ICAO expertise and it is actually tailored for our regional needs. We also need to ensure that we look at the Joint Entrance Examination (JEE) exercise that has happened, we have an issue with respect to staffing.

As I mentioned earlier on, it's not just one industry. This is another industry where our staff are extremely good. They get headhunted, we lose them, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and that is not good. So, we need to ensure that we are competitive. We need to ensure that we do capacity building, competitive in terms of salaries, et cetera, all that kind of stuff.

Our information and communications technology (ICT) upgrades need to also be at this particular level, because you are talking about civil aviation. But the most critical component now, and something that the Office of the Attorney-General, and I know he very short staffed, but this is something that needs to be looked at, is the legislation. It really needs to be brought up to speed and up-to-date, and I think if it requires us to get assistance even from offshore to ensure that we get our legislation right with all of the Acts that have been spelt out by the honourable Minister, it is important that we do that.

I think there is a Review of the Civil Aviation Bill. I think three different Acts that are actually being looked at. I know CAAF is also working towards rectifying some ICAO Conventions. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think that also needs to be looked at. What it really does it only enhances our aviation security and compliance with international standards.

Now, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am not sure, but correct me if I am wrong Honourable Minister, the implementation of ICAO's Global Air Navigation Plan means that we must invest. We must invest in modernising our Traffic Management Systems, it is critically important that we do so. Otherwise, what it does effectively it then affects our compliance standards, our airspace which we actually do considerably well out of, that also needs to be managed with modern technology. Also, the other thing is we have such great development partners, and these are the areas that we need to look at with respect to us making sure that we never lose that status, that we have around the world. We must ensure the highest level of security, safety and efficiency.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, also, I think we must take our hats off to how CAAF has operated COVID and post-COVID, we have kept ourselves afloat and done a fantastic job, so hats off to all those that are actually part of CAAF. It is imperative that the Government acts urgently to do these things that I have mentioned. There are some gaps in the compliance issues that have been recognised, and the Honourable Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation has recognised those things, and I think it needs to be addressed and I think these increased investments in aviation security and safety. We need to also see if we can allocate more resources to CAAF to ensure that it can actually recruit, train and retain the specialise personnel that the Honourable Minister just spoke about.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I said earlier, our Air Traffic Management and Navigation Systems ensure safe and efficient management of our airspace using the satellite-based systems and our radar coverage that we have. But I cannot say this enough, the regulatory framework and the strengthening of our legislation is required and the amendments that are required with respect to the existing laws

and new legislation has to be done on a very urgent basis. One of the other things that we must realise is that regionally, the region looks up at us and therefore we also have great regional partnerships and we must leverage with ICAO to ensure that these partnership is successful and other aviation bodies.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with all that is in place, and I am actually confident that we can achieve. It will be fantastic to do so, we can achieve ICAO full compliance as the Report has spelt out, what is needed and what is not. There are other issues that needs to be dealt with, and just on a quick note before I finish off. We have a booming voice on the other side who continues to come out and I think something he said about 16 years, I just want to remind him, and I have a list here and I could go on.

The honourable Minister for Trade, Co-operatives, Small and Medium Entrepreneurs and Communications keeps saying, but let me remind you, Sir, that we did the:

- (1) New Ba Hospital;
- (2) Navosa Hospital;
- (3) Navua Hospital;
- (4) Nakasi Health Centre;
- (5) Waimaro Health Centre;
- (6) Rotuma Airport;
- (7) Nausori Airport;
- (8) Rakiraki Market;
- (9) Nausori Market;
- (10) Namaka Market; and
- (11) Vunisea Jetty.

Really, you do not want to hear it, but I am going to say it. We did the:

- (1) Valelevu Court House;
- (2) Valelevu Police Station;
- (3) Nakasi Police Station;
- (4) Nadi Police Station;
- (5) 52 new bridges;
- (6) Laqere Market;
- (7) New Fire Stations at Nabouwalu, Nakasi, Korovou, Taveuni; and
- (8) New pavilion at Albert Park.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we did the:

- (1) New renovated Nadi Airport;
- (2) New Nadarivatu Hydro Electric Dam;
- (3) Somosomo Mini-Hydro Dam;
- (4) New Hibiscus Highway;
- (5) Under sea connection from Ovalau to Motoriki which was done for providing solar electricity;
- (6) Four lanes from Suva to Nausori; and
- (7) Four lanes from Nadi Airport to Denarau to Martintar.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I could go on, so for once honourable Minister, please, let go of the 16 years because I can stand here for half an hour and go on the list of what we did. Thank you very much Mr. Speaker, Sir, I support the Report.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you for the opportunity to talk about civil aviation, between me and the honourable Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation, we share a passion for civil aviation and tourism because we did spend a bit of time working in that industry.

But before I go there, I think the other side of the Parliament is getting too sensitive. The reality, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that whilst they did a lot of good things, and you have heard me acknowledge them here for doing the good things, but there are a lot of things they did not do well too. So, there is no need to be so sensitive, the fact is, there are certain things that were not done well, and we are going to fix them.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just to start off, when honourable Gavoka took over the position of Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation, two of the great things he did immediately. One, for the first time the board of CAAF has now become a very professional board. It was led by, and I would also like to acknowledge the late Mr. Eliki Kaumaitotoya, who was the first Chairman of the Civil Aviation Board, this is upper echelon when it comes to Civil Aviation.

In their Government, the Board was not of high-calibre, and we did that because we knew how serious civil aviation was for Fiji. The second thing we did, and complements to the honourable Minister, we confirmed the acting appointment for the Civil Aviation Authority, Mrs. Theresa Levestam. She was acting whilst she was operating from the other side and the honourable Minister within a few months confirmed her as the first woman CEO of the Civil Aviation Authority of Fiji. Again, someone who is very capable, and so right now, in terms of white board governance, the Civil Aviation stands as a beacon, I think to the Pacific. In terms of the quality of Board, in terms of the quality of CEO and the quality of management.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just coming back to the Report that is before us in terms of the 2021-2022 Annual Reports. Firstly, I acknowledge the work of the Standing Committee in reviewing the Annual Report. Of course, we do have to commend the Board and management of CAAF for their tireless efforts in progressing the civil aviation sector. As directly pointed out over the COVID pandemic period, which was a challenging period for us all and particularly aviation.

The civil aviation sector, Mr. Speaker, Sir does play a critical role in our country which is obvious and the fact that we now have a very high calibre Board and a high calibre CEO talks to how this side of the Parliament views the civil aviation sector and how we will ensure that we continue to support them in the years ahead.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, some of the key highlights in terms of the Report in 2022, they started earning a profit again up to about \$5.9 million. A lot of that came from the departure tax, but again a positive development, which means we have an organization that is self-sustaining, that can actually run on its own two feet and can invest into the regulatory body as appropriate.

Also in 2022, CAAF was awarded the International Aviation Organization Council (IAOC) President Certificate, acknowledging the oversight in terms of safety. There was a successful completion of universal security audit. There were no significant concerns identified, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and something the honourable Minister worked on was the establishment of the International Civil Aviation Organization Pacific Small Developing States Liaison Office which was opened in Nadi quite recently. Again, this strengthens our position in the Pacific and strengthens our Civil Aviation Authority in the years ahead.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, like any other organisation there are some key challenges, there is continued shortages in technical staff, and I certainly agree wholeheartedly with the Committee that CAAF

needs to continue to strengthen its scan-skills framework and recruit suitable personnel as required. Also pleased to see they have recently completed their job evaluation exercise. Of course, this is a step closer towards attracting better skilled personnel on attractive packages. I am told that they are advertising for the relevant expertise that we cannot locate locally.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is also pleasing to note, that CAAF continues to invest in its capacity building and training for its staff and we support that wholeheartedly in terms of its importance to maintain a high level of safety and security in terms of aviation. In fact, prior to 2022, Fiji had only one ICAO certified auditor but now CAAF has four certified officers by ICAO, the international body. Which again, attaches to how this organisation continues to develop and again I would like to congratulate the CEO and her management Board for their contributions today. On that note, I support the motion before the Parliament.

HON. J. USAMATE.– Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you for giving me the time to talk on this particular Report. First of all, I would like to congratulate the Committee for the work that is being done and putting it together on an organisation that has been very critical for Fiji.

The importance of CAAF is something that we know about, the importance of aviation safety in the globalised world that we live in today, aviation is very important. And as the Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation had said during post COVID, tourism was our saving grace and behind that fact, was not only due to that Government but also to the things that we did before they got there.

Over and above that, I noticed, that when the Minister for Tourism had said that CAAF is now well respected globally, that did not happen overnight. To get that kind of respect takes time. So, it is not only this Government, but it is the people that were there before, they put in the processes, they put the systems in place and as a result you get the performance that you, and as I have always said, Mr. Speaker, Sir, you stand on our shoulders, we did the ground work for you, now you have to fly. So, stop complaining, stop talking about 16 years, get on with the job! So, great airports and aviation is absolutely critical.

I would also like to share my comments about Mr. Eliko Kaumaitotoya. He is a person that I have met over time as an aircraft engineer, a quality management person, a person that is very involved in human resources development also at ATS and CAAF. And I think if you look at some of the things that CAAF has been able to do in terms of processes and so forth, I think it links back to the kind of people like Mr. Eliko Kaumaitotoya. People who are well versed with process engineering, with quality management, people who are expertise in this area. I think we have one sitting here, our industrial engineer, Mr. Mark Halabe, who is also a well-known exponent of fixing systems and processes, so they work well. It comes back to this point that I have said often again, fit for purpose, you have the right people in place they will move the bus in the right direction to get the kind of results that you need.

I congratulate CAAF on some of its achievements, this council president certificate, I was reading about it, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it shows that they have been successfully implementing the civil aviation organization regulations which is quite good because it has an impact on the recognition of our own Nadi flight information and also with this certification, it gives us some influence with the ICAO. Also, that we have this office in the pacific for the P-SIDS countries that we have here.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I noticed that they had a very successful safety audit and one of the things that I wanted to say, one of the good things about organisations like this they do not depend on their own audit they go for third party audits, so they do not compare themselves with their own standards but against international standards. If you look at organisations that have done well, this is what they

do, they look at their performance, they benchmark against others and they benchmark against international standards, that is one of the important reasons why CAAF has been able to do well and other organisations in Fiji can learn from this.

In Fiji, over the past few years we have things like ISO 9000, we have things like ISO 22,000 about Food Safety, and so I think this is a general oversight of how we can improve performance, this is something we need to pick up across Government, across our SOE's, across Government departments, how we benchmark ourselves against the best in the world. And as the honourable Minister mentioned, CAAF has now got four ICAO international civil aviation auditors. That is good.

What has happened now for CAAF, for international organisations they will get CAAF to audit, I think that is a process we can also use in Fiji for other sectors. We get organisations in Fiji to audit other sectors at the international standard and that will help us lift the performance that we need in this country. The challenges that have been faced by the organisation, CAAF faces continuous shortage of skilled and technical specialised workers as they seek opportunities abroad. I also, read the verbatim report and I noticed that even though they had job evaluations, the management said they did not really stem the loss of people. So, I am thinking that this is something that we really need to look at in terms of how to make sure we get the right technical, well, specialised skilled people.

I think perhaps it is not something that we can do an organisation by organisation basis, but more on a sector basis. The aviation sector to look at the kinds of needs that we have in place to be able to continue to provide people with specialised skills. One of the things when you have skilled workers like this, you cannot learn it in an institution. There is part of it that is learned in an institution, the other part is to learn with people in an organisation or know how to do it. If you do not have that, then you are not going to get the development, the kind of people that you need. So, the shortages need to be filled, I think there is an issue here for the appropriateness of our training and development methodologies, not only within that particular sector, but across Government in the Higher Education Commission of Fiji, et cetera, to see how all of these things gel together. Perhaps the Government will need to look at how we incentivise people that can go into these particular fields, not just at an organisational level but also sectoral.

There is a mention there about strengthening the skills framework to be able to recruit personnel with positions and benefits. I think one of the things that we have talked about in Parliament for some time, we also need to look at how we can attract people from other countries to come here. We need to have some sort of incentivization scheme because it will take a long time to be able to develop internally the kind of people that we need. So, hopefully the Ministry of Education and Higher Education Commission will start looking at that, how do we do that incentivisation so we can get people to fill up the skill gaps that we need across the country.

I also congratulate CAAF, one of the things that we have in any country, when you start looking at your policies and laws, you tend to do it in a sort of a hotchpotch basis; you do something here and you fix it and over time you see you have all these little bits of legislation. I am glad to see that now CAAF is trying put all these into one legislation. This was something that was done in the Ministry of Employment a few years ago. We aligned about five, six, seven different laws to become one Bill and it becomes coherent, and it is in line with what is happening in international practice. One of the challenges I noticed in CAAF, when they started changing their Bills, by the time it went to the Solicitor-General's Office and came back, ICAO had already changed some extra provisions. So, they were always one step behind. I think in all of these things in making sure that our Bills are up to-date, we have to also look at the Solicitor-General. We have seven drafters there, how can we

fix that problem so that as entities begin to change their Bills, they are not delayed by the problems that exist in the lack of drafters within the Solicitor-General's Office.

All of these, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is part of the process of making sure that we can continue to improve. Mr. Speaker, Sir, finally I would like to thank the Committee and congratulate CAAF for the excellent work that they have done over the years, what they have been able to achieve so far, it has been long way from 1976, from the time that they started and we hope that they continue to do well because they are absolutely critical for this country, not only for tourism but also for the country as a whole. I wish the organisation well and I endorse the recommendations of this Report.

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, there has been a lot of deliberation on this issue in this august House and also on civil aviation for the implementation of our recommendations in moving forward. Sir, the Committee wishes to thank CAAF for anticipating and the successful implementation of the recommendations provided at an early stage which they are currently working on. On that note, Sir, I have no other comments on this motion.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

REVIEW REPORT - FIJI AIRPORTS 2021 ANNUAL REPORT

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

That Parliament debates the Review Report of the Fiji Airports 2021 Annual Report which was tabled on 3rd September, 2024.

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

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji Airports is a fully owned Government Commercial Company that was established on 12th April, 1999. Fiji Airports has an obligation to deliver the 10 percent return on shareholders fund to Government. The company has a dual reporting system where it reports to the Minister for Public Enterprises for its commercial performance and to the Minister for Civil Aviation on policies relating to the aviation industry.

Fiji Airports has the ability to rebound from the setback of successive lockdown during the second wave of pandemic in Fiji which demonstrates the organisation's resilience in the face of extreme challenges ahead. Fiji Airports might have to complete major runway maintenance works in half the usual time due to the longer working windows caused by the absence of international and domestic flights.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee was informed of the extension of the Nausori Airport Runway. The \$60 million project will allow the opportunity for increased flights, on both domestic and international routes.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee commends Fiji Airports on its commitment to the SDG on the Great Airport Initiative attaining Level 3 Airport Carbon Accreditation in having their solar farms and the introduction of their electronic vehicles.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as part of the Committee's recommendation, the Committee had highlighted the following:

- (1) Fiji Airports to continue to improve their flights to achieve their strategic objectives and maintain business continuity;
- (2) That whilst Fiji Airports is reviewing its Master Plan 2018 – 2043, proper feasibility studies for Nadi and Nausori Airports land sites is to be carried out;
- (3) The Fiji Airports to consider increasing its contingency/reserve fund to meet future challenges;
- (4) The Fiji Airports to work in collaboration with the relevant agencies to produce a cyber-security framework as required by ICAO;
- (5) That Fiji Airports maintain and improve the standards that is required for the next level of accreditation for the Great Airport Initiative;
- (6) That further consultation be done between Fiji Airports and Fiji Airways for Nausori Airport to be used for more international flights;
- (7) That Fiji Airports explore avenues to make the non-profitable airports more commercially viable.

The Committee commends the support of Fiji Airports for its commitment to the Sustainable Development Goal (SDGs) and anticipate positive outcomes in the forthcoming reports.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee acknowledges the significant record and achievement of Fiji Airports and the challenges posed by the pandemic. The recommendations provide the aim to further enhance the strategic objectives, operational resilience and sustainability of Fiji Airports. By continuing to improve business continuity plans conducting through feasibility studies and creating contingency fund, developing a robust cyber-security framework, at the same time maintain high standards for green initiatives.

Fiji Airports can ensure its readiness in future challenges. Additionally, fostering collaboration with relevant agencies and exploring financial viability for non-profitable airport will contribute to the overall growth and success of the organisation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee looks forward to seeing these recommendations implemented and the positive impact that they will have on Fiji Airports' operation and the broader aviation sector.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion. I also have a list before me now and the order is as follows:

- (1) Honourable F.S. Koya;
- (2) Honourable Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Climate Change, Environment, Civil Service, Information, Public Enterprises and Veteran Affairs;
- (3) Honourable V. Pillay;
- (4) Honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation; and
- (5) Honourable K.K. Lal.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will actually be quite brief. I want to thank the Committee also for the Report, this Report comes out of 2021. This would be a Report coming out of, just on the back of COVID. So, there are a lot of things that may have hindered Fiji Airports' progress in that particular period prior to 2021. I understand also that Fiji Airports always had a master plan and this was a plan that went from 2018 to 2043, but the pandemic had hindered a lot of

things that Fiji Airports needed to do. So, I think there is a revised plan that is actually being done or already done.

One of the good things that the Report spelt out, and it shows us the power of having a good organisation, or an institution, is that Fiji Airports actually maintained a contingency fund in that particular time of around \$85 million. This was kept in order to address unexpected events, and that included pandemic. So, it is a testament to all these institutions that survived right throughout. There were certain projects that were held back. I think the Nausori Airport Runway also. The upgrade of that was approximately \$60 million project actually was going to face financial losses due to Fiji Airways halting all its international flights in and around 2022. The decision to cease the operation was based on commercial viability concerns.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is great to see that Fiji Airports is actually compliant and committed to Sustainable Development Goals, and actively tracks its progress in those particular areas. We have an academy that provides air traffic control training. Again, this is another place where we need to make sure that we keep them in Fiji rather than losing them to other countries round the region and the world. I see they also are a big champion in terms of climate change, accreditation, and decarbonisation issues that surround all of that. Fiji Airways is an active component in all of that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, they operate 15 airports, which is no small feat. Their significant focus is on safety, maintenance, data capture, et cetera. I also understand that they have now gone into Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology with respect to improving its monitoring and efficiency. There always is a need for us to balance our technological advancements with needs of similar island states in the region.

I think the recommendations came out, and it said that they would have to consider future developments with the integration of our local capabilities with international standards. I also understand that the Nadi Airport masterplan is under review with respect to future development and tourism-based things. All of these things can only bode well for an institution that actually hands over a considerable amount of money to the State. I think on average they have given back about \$20 million in terms of profit to the Government.

The Airport itself has implemented strict protocols with respect to COVID whilst it was on and I think they continued to monitor all of those things. One of the other things also is that there is an energy conservation exercise that the Airports Fiji Limited actually went through. They reduced their bills to quite a considerable less amount that they would have to fork out on a monthly basis. We understand now that Fiji Airways is able to operate its 737 out of Nausori Airport which means better service capabilities.

Mr. Speaker, I think one of the most important things is the green initiative that was undertaken with plans for a different level of accreditation by 2024. I think the necessary upgrades that actually need to happen at Fiji Airports Limited is being looked at which is an important issue. The employment contract issue, I think also was changed. The airport has modernised its plans with respect to the arrivals, et cetera. Arrivals area and the overall passenger experience is actually being looked at and with the numbers being bended about by the honourable Minister for Tourism of a million people, we need to ensure that our airport is one of the best in the region, if not in the entire Southern hemisphere.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our Traffic Management Systems had actually been looked at, the upgrade of all of that, I think one of the other important things is just as the stuff that we talk about with CAAF, Fiji Airports are actually leads ICAO meetings in terms of its commitment, et cetera. So you

can see that Fiji is in a different space when it comes in. We looked at it very differently and we are held in very high regard with respect to even Fiji Airports Limited, not just CAAF.

From an energy perspective, as I said earlier on, we are using less power, using more renewable energy, et cetera, and I think it is important that we continue on that same vein.

Mr. Speaker, we must also look at how we can it more profitable. I think there are other issues that some other speakers will talk about, but we must always continuously look at how Fiji Airports Limited can actually be more and more profitable wherein their handing out bigger checks to the Government. With those few words, I support the motion before Parliament.

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to support motion before the House as the Minister for Public Enterprises. I acknowledge the presence in the gallery of Mr. Mark Halabe, a member of the Board of Fiji Airports and the CEO of Fiji Airports, Mr. Mesake Nawari. I thank the Permanent Secretary for allowing them to come, in fact telling them that we are going to be debating this Report from the Standing Committee on Social Affairs.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Koya has mentioned most of the things that I have prepared. But I will not, unlike him in his previous contribution, say I did this, I did that, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the company came into being in 1999 when I was Prime Minister, but it was not something I did. We were moving along with the rest of the world, we were going into corporatisation and then privatisation of various government departments. We were very glad and very proud that what we had formed then, it now becomes a very, very important entity in the corporate world in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Report highlights that there was a slight loss because of COVID but the entity made a big comeback with a \$49 million profit. I must congratulate them, and I request Mr. Halabe and Mr. Nawari convey our appreciation to the board, the management and the workers in Fiji Airports. We have heard, as the honourable Koya had mentioned, they have had a corporate plan and they are well on their way into complying with the various things that they have put into that plan.

Mr. Speaker, I will now like to go straight into the recommendations.

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that Fiji Airports continue to improve their plans to achieve strategic objectives and maintain business continuity.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Master Plan and the carrying out of the plan, the various things they are doing are in line with the recommendations and in fact they have already been adopting the recommendations.

In January 2024 (this year), they embarked on the 10-Year Strategic Plan Initiative and the plan is expected to be finalised the month beginning tomorrow. So, they are really moving as they have said in their report to do.

Recommendation 2

That Fiji Airport is reviewing its master plan with proper feasibility studies for Nadi and Nausori Airport landsite to be carried out. It is noted that the plan to initiate feasibility studies for the land sites for Nadi and Nausori are already in process, in fact Fiji Airports is currently progressing with engaging a consultant for the development of the Nadi and Nausori landsite masterplan.

Recommendation 3

To consider increasing its contingency; reserve funds to meet future challenges. The Fiji Airport is currently hazardous of \$85 million as contingency as recommended. In fact, they had already been on to that recommendation before the report of May.

Recommendation 4

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Airports Fiji to work in collaboration with the relevant agencies to produce a cybersecurity framework as required by ICAO. I am glad to say that honourable Deputy Prime Minister in his capacity as Minister is responsible for that area, has been working very closely with Fiji Airports to upgrade our capabilities in policing, cybercrime interference with our operations.

Recommendation 5

Fiji Airports maintained and improved the standard that is required for the next level of accreditation for the Green Airport Initiative. The recommendation is noted, the airport had level three Carbon Accreditation by Airport Councils International (ACI) and they are continuing on that programme and hope to achieve Level four, Optimisation Airport Carbon Accreditation as well.

Recommendation 6

The Committee further recommends that further consultation be done between Fiji Airport and Fiji Airways for Nausori Airport to be used for more international flights. The Committee recommendation is noted. Fiji Airport has already put in the infrastructure at the Nausori Airport to support international movement out of Nausori. They are also aware that it is a commercial decision for Fiji Airways regarding any future plans for flying international flights from Nausori.

The last recommendation Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that Fiji Airport explore avenues to make non-profitable airport more commercially viable. The Committee's recommendation is noted, and Fiji Airports is going to be engaging a consultant this month to develop a comprehensive landside masterplan as I mention for Nausori Airport.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I as the honourable Minister responsible for Public Enterprises, I am very proud of what Fiji Airport is doing. In closing, I would like to congratulate Fiji Airport for their vision and leadership in establishing and improving its services and revamping its airport to world class facilities.

This has been a source of pride for our nation and a clear indication of the potential that lies within our people. I urge all of us to continue to work together to build a brighter future for Fiji, where opportunities are abundant, and our people can thrive in a rapidly changing world. The Government is to continue to pursue partnerships and collaborate with international and development partners to improve Fiji's aviation sector and to further strengthen Fiji's position as the Pacific's regional aviation hub. I am sure my honourable Deputy Prime Minister and colleague will agree with that and one of his missions is very, very, much committed to that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to concludes, again, I thank the Standing Committee, the Chairman and all those involved. I thank the Board, Management and staff of Fiji Airport.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to discuss the Standing Committee on Social Affairs presentation on the Fiji Airport 2021 Annual Report. This report provides a comprehensive overview of the operations and performance of Fiji Airports, particularly in the context of the challenges faced during the pandemic. However, as we reflect on the past, it is crucial to identify the weaknesses in our current strategies and to look forward to the newly launched Masterplan for 2024 - 2033.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the significant weaknesses highlighted in the 2021 Annual Report is the impact of COVID-19 on passenger traffic and revenue. The pandemic has exposed vulnerabilities in our airport operations, leading to a sharp decline in the international travel. This decline not only affected our financial performance, but also highlighted the need for a more resilient operational framework. To address this, we must prioritise development of contingency plans that can be activated during future crisis, ensuring that our airports remain operational and capable of meeting the needs of travellers and cargo transporters alike.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we transition to the new Masterplan, it was lost in June 2024, we must acknowledge the ambitious projects outlined within it. The plan includes 18 projects aimed at upgrading existing facilities and infrastructure, such as new gates, a domestic terminal, and improved firefighting services. While these developments are commendable, we must ensure that they are implemented efficiently and within the proposed timelines. Delays in project execution could hinder our ability to accommodate future growth in passenger and cargo traffic, which is essential for our goal of becoming the regional leading aviation hub.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, another area of concern is the implementation of the Fleet Replacement Plan which includes the delivery of electric vehicles to Nadi Airport. While this initiative is a step towards sustainability, we must ensure that the transition to electric vehicles is supported by the adequate charging infrastructure and maintenance facilities. Without these essential components, the effectiveness of the Fleet Replacement Plan may be compromised. Therefore, I urge management to prioritise the establishment of a robust support system for these electric vehicles to maximise their potential benefits.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Masterplan also emphasises the need for improve communication, navigation and surveillance systems. While these upgrades are vital for enhancing operational efficiency and safety, we must also consider the training and development of our personnel to effectively utilise these new technologies. The establishment of Fiji Airports Aviation Training Academy is a positive step in this direction, but we must ensure that this is adequately funded and equipped to provide comprehensive training programmes for our staff.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we look at the ambitious projects outlined in the Masterplan, such as the construction of a transit hotel and a commercial retail building, we must also be mindful of the environmental impact of these developments. The inclusion of the Photovoltaic Solar Farm is a commendable initiative, but we must ensure that all new projects adhere to sustainable practices. This includes conducting thorough environmental assessment and engaging with the local communities to address any concerns they may have regarding the impact of these developments on the environment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in conclusion, while the Fiji Airports 2021 Annual Report provides valuable insights in their operations, it is essential that we learn from the weaknesses identified and embrace the opportunities presented by the new Masterplan. By addressing the challenges of the past and implementing the propose with diligence and foresight, we can position Fiji Airports for a successful and sustainable future. Let us work together to ensure that our airports not only meet the demands of today but are also prepared for the challenges of tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I fully support the motion.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, on the Review of Fiji Airports 2021 Annual Reports.

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge the work done by the Steering Committee in reviewing the Annual Report. As kindly being appreciated Mr. Speaker, Sir, 2021 was a very difficult year for Fiji Airports and indeed Fiji. I commend the Board, the management and staff of Fiji Airports for their dedication and resilience in 2021, despite the risks of COVID-19, Fiji Airports staff worked tirelessly with Ministry of Health and Medical Services, Fiji Airways, Airport Stakeholders and the Tourism Industry to facilitate repatriation flights, medical evacuations, essential cargo including supplies such as Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs) and vaccines.

We all remember these days Mr. Speaker, Sir, the whole world was closing down and we were proud of our aviation people, Fiji Airports and Fiji Airways. During the year, Fiji was working behind the scenes with Fiji Airways, other airlines, airport partners, essential service providers, and ground operators, dealing with international borders whilst most parts of the world was crippled with the pandemic. There is always this belief by the other side of the Parliament that they are the ones who discovered Airports Fiji and Fiji Airways and all that. No, no, they have been doing very well all these years, before their sorry law came into picture.

(Honourable Opposition Members interject)

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Microwave, it is microwave.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, if I could highlight some of the stuff, reopening the international borders in 2021, Fiji Airways reopened its borders at the Nadi International Airport to travel partners from Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Japan, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Spain, Switzerland, UAE, United Kingdom, USA, and most of the Pacific Islands. This was more than after 600 days of lockdown and made possible with the decisive decision and extensive planning, people were re-employed and our people returned home and reunited with their loved ones.

This shows the significance role of Fiji Airports played in the aviation sector and Fiji's economy. I think the honourable Prime Minister just said, during his administration, Fiji Airports was created, so can we not lose sight of that please. That is how it was created. You were fortunate there was this very vibrant organisation that was there during COVID-19.

It was not the work of FijiFirst Government, please, and then the reaccreditation of the Airports Council International (ACI), so Fiji's now international airport was accredited in both 2020 and 2021 under ACI Health Accreditation Programme for providing safe airport experience for travellers. This meant that Nadi International Airport is the first airport in the Pacific region to receive this accreditation is a test of Fiji Airport's commitment to service delivery.

I am highlighting this, because it gives us the confidence, as I am the Minister for Tourism. It gives me confidence of the potential for tourism going forward, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I am like the strength of the organisation here! The upgrading of the Air Traffic Management System, commissioning of the new Aurora Air Traffic Management (ATM), honourable Koya was referring to this based in Nadi. The new system integrates, oceanic approach and tower control capabilities and includes a new traffic control simulator to train air traffic controllers in an Automatic Dependence Surveillance Broadcast (ADS-B). Today, Fiji uses the latest ADS-B technology in the domestic airspace and is the first in the world to transition from procedural cost control to surveillance control without radar experience. This is truly phenomenal and a game changer for Fiji.

Fiji Airports attained level three airport carbon accreditation and remains the only airport in the Pacific to have attained this certification. The EFL bills were reduced by 70 percent with the Committee noting that Fiji Airports used to pay \$0.5 million monthly on electricity bills and has been reduced to approximately \$150,000 a month. Fiji Airports remain committed to managing

environmental impacts, even during the difficult times. Of course, the upgrade to the extension of Nausori International Airport is a \$60 million project, ensuring that improvements in safety, and all-weather operations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as highlighted by the honourable Prime Minister, like any business that suffered during the pandemic, Fiji Airports was not spared. Fiji Airports key indicators fell, that is, passenger movements declined by 80 percent and aircraft movement declined by 31 percent. The decline in these two factors resulted in the decline in the total revenue by \$24 million with a net loss of \$4.3 million in 2021.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Coalition Government has a vision to make Fiji a thriving international gateway, not just for tourists coming in, but for investors and businessmen and women. We want to be an entry point to the region, to the Pacific Islands and a transit point for Australian, New Zealand and the US travellers. In this regard, the partnership with our national airline, Fiji Airways is important, as they carry 70 percent of our visitors and passengers. We want more international flights. In order to make this happen, we need to continuously invest in our airports, both above the average and below, where non-glamorous work takes place.

Fiji Airport, Mr. Speaker, Sir, will continue keeping its finances and revenue in check in order to invest back in the core functions and infrastructure. The Fiji Government will provide support in this endeavour. In closing, I once again thank Fiji Airports management and staff for their continued hard work and dedication. I support the Report of this Committee.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise today to voice my deep concern regarding the operational decision of Fiji Airports and the impacts on the people in the Northern Division and other airports. It is commendable that Parliamentary Standing Committee has recommended that Fiji Airports explore avenues to make non-profitable airports more commercially viable. However, I question the approach being taken and its implication on the livelihoods of our people.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the most pressing issues is the steep car park charges imposed under the park and fly option. These additional costs has affected those travelling to our Northern Division and the surrounding islands, especially our families who already face high airfare costs by Fiji Airways or Fiji Link. For many Fijians, these charges make travelling not just inconvenient but unaffordable. I ask the Government and the Fiji Airports, where is the consideration for our ordinary Fijians? The people who are the backbone of our economy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the excessive car park charges are not just a financial burden, but a testament to the disconnect between the management decision and the lived realities of our people. For Fijians, from Vanua Levu and our outer islands, every dollar counts. These charges, instead of making travel smoother, have created yet another hurdle for our people. I urge the Government to revisit these charges and find a solution that works for our people and not against them.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I must also highlight the state of our airports in the Northern Division, specifically Labasa, Savusavu and not forgetting our Garden Island of Fiji, Taveuni. Since, the new Government came into power we have yet to see any intangible improvement in the maintenance of infrastructure of these critical facilities. How can you talk about regional development, particularly the Northern Development Programme and the Look North Policy if we continue to ignore the very infrastructure that connects our people and our tourism sector in the Northern Division?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we speak so often about the Northern Development Programme, the Look North Policy, yet where is the action? Where is the commitment to upgrade and maintain the very airports that serve as lifelines for our poor people in the Northern Division. If we are serious, Mr.

Speaker, Sir, about promoting the development of Vanua Levu and our surrounding islands, then we must prioritise making these airports operationally efficient while maintained an accessible.

But I thank my kai Savusavu and the *Turaga na* Prime Minister for pushing for the National Development Plan (NDP) which will benefit our people of Vanua Levu and the surrounding islands. But honourable Prime Minister, tai Savusavu, all I ask you, and the people ask you and they demand, if you push harder so that we can achieve this before the new Government comes in 2026.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our words must be followed by action. We cannot be repeating the same rhetoric of development for the Northern Division without actually implementing the necessary changes. The people of Labasa, Savusavu and the surrounding communities deserve better. They deserve airports that reflect the same standards as those in Suva and Nadi. They deserve fair and reasonable carpark charges that do not add to their financial woes. And they deserve a government that listens and acts in their best interests.

At the same time, I urge the Government to revisit the Airport Plan for Nasarawaqa in Seaqqa. It is time to change the narrative that they promised, Mr. Speaker, Sir. It is time to show their real commitment to the Northern Development Programme, not just words but in action that transforms the region and uplifts our people.

MR. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs to speak in reply.

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I believe a lot has been done in deliberation of this Fiji Airports Report. There is a lot of constructive and destructive issues we hear this afternoon, and we leave the onus on the Government to actually implement the positive aspect path of Fiji Airports. On that note, Sir, we thank the Fiji Airport Board, CEO and the team for the well-articulated reports that was presented to the Committee.

On that note, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is no further comment on this motion.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, that brings us to the end of the sitting today. I thank you all for your contributions. Parliament is now adjourned until tomorrow at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 7.04 p.m.

Reply to Written Question No. 225/2024 tabled by the honourable Minister for Agriculture and Waterways (Ref. Page 1943)



**MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE AND WATERWAYS
(Hon. V.T.T.K. Rayalu)**

Reply to Question No. 225/2024 is as follows:

Advancements in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) have been foundational to the world's Digital Economy. One of the most significant advancements in the ICT space that has connected millions globally is mobile communication. Mobile communication has undergone several generational shifts, starting with 1G for voice calls, 2G for voice and SMS, 3G for voice, SMS and basic mobile data, and 4G, which brought high-speed internet and video streaming. Now, we are amid the next revolution: 5G.

The newest generation of mobile cellular technology, 5G, promises unprecedented opportunities. It offers ultra-low latency, ultra-fast internet speeds, and the potential to connect millions of Internet of Things (IoT) devices, among other innovations. The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) contextualises this in numbers to Mobile Broadband Data rates of up to 10Gbits per second, latency as low as 1ms and a connection density of 1 million devices per square kilometre.

Since Commercial deployment, 5G has reached 40 percent of the world population and is in its early stages of deployment across the Pacific Island Countries (PICs). High-speed broadband services like 5G are critical for enhancing digital connectivity and empowering citizens to fully participate in the global digital economy.

The successful rollout of any advanced technology at the national level requires careful analysis of needs, scope and resourcing. This applies to 5G as well. 5G has been rolled out in many developed countries globally and we have seen some great examples of how technology can be leveraged to improve the productivity, access and quality of life of citizens. However, at the same time we have also witnessed poorly managed rollouts which has widened the digital divide.

Key Initiatives:

Fiji boasts one of the strongest telecommunications infrastructures in the Pacific, a position strengthened by the recent introduction of Starlink and the anticipated arrival of Google's Tabua and Bulikula subsea cables.

A number of activities have been undertaken by the Department of Communications (Department) under the Ministry of Trade, Co-operatives, MSMEs and Communications (Ministry) for the introduction of 5G in Fiji, including the development of a 5G roadmap and the requisite governance, legal and regulatory framework – including commercial spectrum licensing framework. This is part of a concerted effort by government, regulator and service providers to properly deploy 5G technology.

There has also been significant interest expressed from Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) to launch 5G in Fiji.

After executive and technical discussions between the Ministry, Regulator and the MNOs, the Ministry issued 5G testing licences, allowing operators to test 5G equipment. This ensured MNOs could conduct relevant testing and planning for an eventual 5G rollout.

The Department, with the support of the USAID Digital Connectivity and Cybersecurity Partnership (DCCP) is developing a 5G readiness and spectrum assessment. A draft assessment report has been provided and is currently being finalised in collaboration with the Department.

Whilst the assessment has been in progress, the Department has been in close collaboration with the ITU – the United Nations specialised agency for information and communication technologies and which sets the global 5G standards. The ITU has been providing guidance through its extensive knowledge in telecommunications. Additionally, through Fiji’s active membership in the Asia Pacific Telecommunity (APT), the Department recently attended a comprehensive 5G implementation training programme hosted by the Malaysian Government and the Malaysian Communications and Media Commission. This training has enabled the Department to build its capacity and better understand the opportunities for Fiji in implementing 5G, which extends beyond internet speed or gaming to various verticals. These verticals include sectors such as healthcare, education, agriculture, manufacturing and many more. 5G also enables Fixed Wireless Access (FWA) services, providing high-speed fixed-broadband to households and businesses, in areas without traditional fibre infrastructure as access to Fixed-Broadband for people in SIDS is half when compared to the rest of the world. These verticals together with the widespread availability of reliable internet connectivity will drive innovations and efficiencies, transforming MSMEs, Industries and boosting the Fijian Economy.

Timeline:

While the demand for cutting-edge technology is significant, the Government is taking a pragmatic approach to ensure the maximum positive impact on the people and the economy. Following the recommendations in the draft assessment report, the Department is working on a few key activities before 5G can be made publicly available. These include the formulation of a 5G Spectrum Plan and a Spectrum Valuation and Pricing Model. These activities will be carried out with the assistance of international partners to ensure that 5G is licensed for rollout with the best possible outcome for Fiji.

The final assessment report is expected to be completed this year, with the recommended activities set to follow. The Ministry aims to complete the necessary preparatory work and successfully launch 5G no later than the end of the first quarter of 2025.

ANNEXURE II

Reply to Written Question No. 227/2024 tabled by the honourable Minister for Education (Ref. Page 1944)



MINISTER FOR EDUCATION
(Hon. A.M. Radrodro)

Reply to Question No. 227/2024 is as follows:

- (a) Tertiary Scholarships and Loans Service (TSLS) administers government scholarships, grants and study loans. TSLS has continuously been working on strengthening the policies to ensure transparent and efficient management of taxpayer funds for scholarships and study loans.

In 2023, there were 13,860 students funded by TSLS under scholarships and study loan schemes at various Tertiary Education Institutes while in 2024, there are 15,666 students currently being funded by TSLS.

The breakdown of students funded under scholarships and study loans at various Tertiary Education Institutes are:

Tertiary Education Institutes	Number of Students	
	2023	2024
Fiji National University	7,826	8,333
University of the South Pacific	4,662	4,280
University of Fiji	848	902
Sangam Institute of Technology	299	319
Fulton Adventist University College	102	142
Corpus Christi Teachers College	70	100
Advance Aviation Training (PTE) Limited	-	7
Pacific Flying School	-	13
Centre for Applied Technology Development	19	123
Keshals Business Education Institute	-	32
Montfort Boys Town	2	13
Navuso Agricultural Technical Institute	-	10
Pacific Polytechnic	-	1,192
Pivot Point	-	57
Service Pro	-	10
SPA Academy Fiji	-	14
Vishan Infotech	-	56
Overseas Universities	32	63
Total	13,860	15,666

TSLS has disbursed tuition payment to various Tertiary Education Institutes as follows:

- (i) 2022-2023 Financial Year - \$56,875,980

(ii) 2023-2024 Financial Year - \$62,414,805

The breakdown of funds disbursed to Tertiary Education Institutes are:

Tertiary Education Institute	Disbursement	
	2022-2023 (\$)	2023-2024 (\$)
University of the South Pacific	15,537,414	13,143,401
Fiji National University	30,565,249	30,758,717
University of Fiji	5,729,074	6,695,178
Sangam Institute of Nursing	1,905,438	1,933,200
Fulton College	661,136	485,128
Advance Aviation Training (PTE) Limited		350,000
Centre for Applied Technology Development	54,500	473,700
Corpus Christi Teachers College	492,700	420,200
Keshals Business Education Institute		53,400
Montfort Boys Town		16,835
Navuso Agricultural Technical Institute		6,080
Pacific Flying School		608,189
Pacific Polytechnics	16,000	3,926,699
Pivot Point Fiji Institute		656,952
Service Pro International Tourism & Hospitality Institute		45,500
SPA Academy Fiji		70,000
Overseas	1,914,469	2,771,626
Total Disbursement	56,875,980	62,414,805

The above do not include the allowance disbursed directly to students.

- (b) Students who were awarded scholarships and study loans in 2023 and 2024 are still in their active bond term as they are first and second-year students respectively.

From 2014 to-date there are 21,685 students who have either absconded, are inactive or are yet to graduate and their bond term has expired and equates to around \$160 million of investment.

Breakdown by institution cannot be released as it will cause reputational damage to the Tertiary Education Institutions.

Trend recorded is that students who had very low marks and were provided with a study loan to do degree programmes prior to 2021, attracted high attrition rates from technical colleges, adding to the high non-completion of programmes of study.

- (c) TSLs has various strategies in place to address the issue of non-completion. TSLs provides:
- (i) Learning Enrichment Services to all our sponsored students to assist in their academic pursuit to improve retention and completion rates.
 - (ii) Students with scaffolding support to enrich their learning journeys.
 - (iii) Weekly Learning Enrichment Sessions. These sessions are provided to students at flexible hours which includes essential topics such as time management, preparing for

exams, managing the coursework, allowance management and the importance of mental health amongst others.

- (iv) An At-Risk Student Intervention strategy, that has been put in place through the recent amendment to TSLs Act during the 2024-2025 budget. As per amendment to TSLs Act, it is mandatory for Tertiary Education Institutions to provide reports on “at-risk” students. This is to ensure that Tertiary Education Institutions have learning support and remedial programmes to improve retention and completion rates. Tertiary Education Institutions are required to identify and provide reports to TSLs on all students who are at-risk of failing their courses by mid-term. TSLs has strengthened its policies by implementing intervention strategies for students who are at-risk failing and necessary assistance is provided to the students to avoid the risk of failure as a proactive measure. This is the initiative of the Coalition Government.
- (v) Confidential Personal Counselling. TSLs provides a safe space and conducive environment for all students who may be in need of confidential one-to-one counselling. Students who are facing any issues that is affecting them academically can reach out to TSLs and the necessary counselling services are available to assist them.
- (vi) On Campus Visits to meet students and create awareness of the support available to students.
- (vii) Online Flexible Interactive Sessions where students can join in and talk about issues that may be affecting them, and at the same time begin conversations on the best solutions to face the challenges ahead. Students can join these sessions from the comfort of their homes, or schools as online sessions are a lot more convenient. Session times are early mornings while they commute to school, or in the afternoons and evenings when the students are done with their classes.
- (viii) Work Skill Development and Industry Mentoring to sponsored students where TSLs connects students to professionals from the industries such as Accounting, Engineering and Teacher Education. This allows students to hear from the industry professionals on what to expect from the profession they have chosen post-graduation.
- (ix) Support Sessions for Suspended Students to maintain effective communication with all suspended students throughout the term of their suspension, providing guidance and ways on how best to improve academically and get supported on how to re-enter the Tertiary Education Institutions.
- (x) Learning Enrichment for Overseas Students who are studying abroad.
- (xi) Post-Graduation Care and Employer Connect Services. Through this, TSLs provides assistance and guidance to its sponsored students post-graduation. The TSLs Post-Graduation care services equip graduates on the basics while searching for employment such as resume writing and preparing for interviews.
- (xii) Employer Connect Portal (ECP). This is an in-house developed portal that connects new graduates with potential employers. Employers can sign up for the portal and post their vacancies, and the same will be visible to all graduates that have signed up. Graduates can upload their resumes and interest towards positions and employers carryout shortlisting on the same portal.

The Coalition Government will work with TSLs on further strengthening the policies to ensure high completion rate and ensure transparent and accountable management of government funding and there is maximum return from taxpayer investment in higher education.