

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

THURSDAY, 17TH JULY, 2025

[CORRECTED COPY]

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THURSDAY, 17TH JULY, 2025

The Parliament met at 9.36 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

MR. SPEAKER. took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

The honourable Members were present except honourable P.D. Kumar, honourable S. Kumar and honourable N.T. Tuinaceva.

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Wednesday, 16th July 2025, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE SPEAKER

Welcome

I welcome all honourable Members to today's sitting. I also welcome those joining us in the gallery and those watching the live proceedings on television and the internet. Thank you for taking an interest in the National Budget proceedings which is still underway.

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON THE 2025-2026 APPROPRIATION BILL 2025

In Committee:

Head 34 – Ministry of Trade, Co-operatives, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications

MR. CHAIRMAN.- I will explain why we have preferred Head 34 this morning. Take time to prepare yourselves. The honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister responsible for Head 34 has got ministerial meetings with regional ministers in the cause of this morning, and that is why Head 34 is before you this morning. I will allow time for you to re-adjust if you want to.

Programme 2. Activity 1: Economic Unit

SEG 6

HON. I. B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, a question on Grant to Professional Bodies (\$1,174,000). Can the honourable Minister explain if these are local professional bodies, or does it also include professional bodies from abroad?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Chairman, the Grants to Professional Bodies is not a new item. It has been there for the last couple of years. Basically, it represents about four professional bodies, and I will just list them out. Business Assistance Fiji, this is the body that looks after SMEs and micro small medium enterprises. They do things such as assistance for preparation of accounts, marketing strategies, et cetera. It is actually gaining a lot of popularity and is quite effective. They have also been responsible for the first ever MSME conference in the country, and that is being used as a very good way of harnessing the industry, the MSME and co-operative industries. The second one is Textile, Clothing and Footwear Council. Maybe I will just put the allocations in there as well. It is about \$489,000 for Business Assistance Fiji, \$97,000 for Textile, Clothing and Footwear Council. This is a Council that promotes Fiji in terms of textiles; doing a bit of work with them because we need to ensure that this industry continues in Fiji. The balance of the funding is actually to Outsource Fiji and it is basically for the ongoing operational expenditure, plus, there is a lot of work going into marketing. We now have about 8,000 employees in this sector and \$300,000 in foreign exchange. So, the money is being well spent.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, then it is also an allocation for Business Process Outsourcing that is not part of it because you have mentioned that the rest or the balance goes to Outsource Fiji. That is a separate allocation for Business Process Outsourcing?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- It is a separate allocation, with an operational component and a marketing component. We separate them just to make sure there is transparency in the allocation.

Programme 2, Activity 2: Trade Unit

SEG 6

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman, a clarification on New Films Tax Rebate. Is this for the film only or documentary is also included in this?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Chairman, there are two components to this tax rebate. The first component is the ongoing new rebates. The budget for that is \$10.3 million and basically it is for any upcoming film series in the current year. At the moment we have got *Survivor 48*, *Stranded Honeymoon* and *Love Island Games* Season 1. Those are the types of projects that are around. The second component is the outstanding film rebate. If you recall, we inherited a liability of about \$200 million from the previous government to do with excessive rebate levels. We were paying 75 percent rebates. It is now down to 20 percent so that is the other component honourable Bala. As I have mentioned in my budget speech, we are not paying this year. The plan is to try and clear it from this year's under provisions.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman, my clarification was, if someone wants to do a one-hour documentary, is that included in this?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Normally offshore.

SEG 7

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- I have a question to the honourable Minister, through you Mr. Chairman on SEG 7 on the implementation of the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework Agreement. A lot of effort has been put into this and with the change in leadership in the United States we would be interested to hear about this.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework was an agreement that was initiated under the previous United States Government. We had concluded three out of the four pillars that were in that agreement. So, there is work being carried out on the three pillars

particularly the labour pillar seems to be getting a lot of activity. Currently, Australia has some funding available to do implementation work and we are working with them on moving forward with the implementation of the labour side of the agreement. With the good governance pillar, which covers fraud et cetera, there is also some work being done on that. Clearly, because of the posture of the current regime, we were hoping to get the trade pillar completed, but that is not in play at the moment.

Programme 3, Activity 1: Trade Measurements and Standards

SEG 9

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- My Chairman, I just wanted clarification from the honourable Minister on these last two items, if he can elaborate on the need for the Purchases - Electric Forklift and the Gantry Master Meter.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA- Mr. Chairman, the two items in the allocation are an Electric Forklift which is about \$70,000 and the balance is a Gantry Master Metre. The Forklift is quite necessary because there are a lot of heavy weights in the measurement area, and we need to move items around. These are about one tonne or more, so it is not advisable to be them carrying around. In terms of the Gantry Master Meter, it is the acquisition of better equipment. We had an old Master Metre and we are replacing it, because it enhances the accuracy of the work are trying to do. To bring into context, Mr. Chairman, honourable Members you will remember in the last two years, we had spent almost \$3 million progressively on equipment, so we are trying to reinvest in all the measuring equipment so that we get better levels of accuracy from our measurements area.

Programme 4, Activity 1: General Administration

SEG 6

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Honourable Minister, in light of the fact that there is a lack of explanation in the budget book with respect to the grant in the sum of \$10 million to Yasawa Tourism Market Co-operative Limited, one singular co-operative. Before I ask any further questions, could we just have an explanation as to why, especially in light of the fact that any tourism marketing with respect to Fiji is done by Tourism Fiji. This is one quarter of the budget of Tourism Fiji in terms of marketing..

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Can I just clarify honourable Koya, you have proposed an amendment

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Yes, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- And you are explaining that amendment now?

HON. F.S. KOYA.- No, Sir. I am asking a question first and it may be that after the honourable Minister's explanation then just to be prepared.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Chairman, basically the Yasawa Marketing Co-operative actually consists of the hotel owners and backpackers out of the Yasawa Group. There used to be 32 members, and they are down to about 12 currently.

History has shown that rightly or wrongly they have been basically have had a very hard time with cyclones, et cetera and they really did not receive much in terms of assistance from government at that time and then during COVID. This is an attempt to reinvigorate the Yasawa backpacker market, particularly the indigenous operators because basically as I said, there used to be 32 there that decimated

down to about 12 at the moment. We feel like with this money we can actually assist rebuild. The properties are very good. They just need a bit of assistance around some of their debt structures, those kinds of things. So, this is a grant to help assist those members of the co-operative. There are about 12 of them.

Mr. Chairman, obviously the spillover will be more employment, more economic activity in the Yasawas. The backpacker market in the Yasawas used to be very big. We believe the honourable Prime Minister also has some allocations for small business. So, this is all part of an attempt to really reinvigorate the Yasawa backpackers and then keep going.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- So, is this to help them in marketing or is this to prop them up because they are indebted?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- It is basically a grant to prop them up and help with some of their recapitalising and debt restructuring as well.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Seruiratu, do you wish to intervene.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, that was the question that I intended to ask whether it is on debt servicing or marketing?

HON. F.S. KOYA.- I know there may be few questions on this because why is it that it is not being done individually to the actual institutions like the backpackers; it is part of a co-operative. So, the measures that are being put in place to ensure that this is done and this is a marketing co-operative. I ask this because I do not think there has ever been a case where such a large amount has actually been given to one single co-operative. I understand the tourism issue, I understand the backpacker issue, but why as part of a co-operative is it being given because it will open up a huge area where anyone in government will have to with the precedence being set.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Ultimately, we could have called this just as Yasawa Restructure Package. It is really not so much about the co-operative but about funding the 12 entities that need to be assisted in our view. They had formed a collective as co-operative just to keep them in a group together, so that they can work together. They do things, for example, such as they have their own vessel, and that vessel carries everyone in that 12-member co-operative. It used to be very successful before, and we are trying to help them rebuild. That is the whole idea. If we can recapture the momentum; there is enough evidence that there is now a resurgence after COVID-19 in the backpacker market. We feel that this money was spent well.

There is a committee that includes the Deputy Prime Ministers which is going to scrutinise this assistance. It is not going to be just, "here is a cheque, go and enjoy yourself." It is actually going to be well-structured so that we ensure that we get value for money in terms of the assistance.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- If I can add to it. That area of tourism was badly affected, not only through cyclone, but also during COVID, and it is an important area. This is also an attempt to rehabilitate those businesses so that, as the DPM said, it is not something that is just going to be handed over, which will include, elements of debt that they owe, like we provided millions of dollars support to businesses during COVID. Some have paid back, some have not and some have been written off. These businesses fall in a similar category. It is important for us to provide that support and help them. But as the DPM said, we will look at all those individual businesses collectively as part of the co-operative and what they are doing before the decision to disburse the funds will be made. So, it will be carefully considered as part of a package, and it may not necessarily be all that \$10 million.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, I wanted further clarification. At this rate, you will be granting approximately just below \$1 million per resort in the Yasawas. The honourable Minister has stated that there is a tendency that they would like to reinvent transporting their guests from Nadi to the various resorts. I am just worried that in this respect, if you combine sales and marketing, and then interfering into their operations, which should be really accessed through financial institutions like the Fiji Development Bank (FDB) to assist them.

I know the background on these fiascos, Mr. Chairman. Fijian Holdings, who own South Sea Cruises had basically become a monopoly in distributing tourists around the resorts in Yasawa. I am worried that if we give assistance directly to the resorts for operational purposes, then we are interfering with the normal financial responsibility for our indigenous population to be able to support and run their own resorts. I just wanted to highlight that because the danger of interfering into the normal financial operation of a resort for *iTaukei* could be interpreted in different ways and we know how it is. So, I hope that this allocation is basically to market the products and not assist in the daily operations of the various resorts.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- I think that is a statement, not a question. Honourable Kamikamica?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Chairman, this allocation has gone through quite a rigorous process, and as honourable Deputy Prime Minister said, “you have my assurance that this is not a handout.” This is a genuine attempt to help businesses that were once really very successful, and through no fault of their own there were a lot of other factors that have happened when they started, and very little assistance given. We are trying to assist them now. For context, Mr. Chairman, this is something I shared on our side of the House. We wrote off \$200 million to sugar in this House without bating an eyelid. Here we are talking about genuinely trying to help indigenous operators that were once world acclaimed, and honourable Koroilavesau will know a lot of them. He actually had a big hand in the creation of one of these operators, and that is really what this assistance is all about. Be assured that it is not just a handout; it will be very clearly managed, and obviously all the DPMs are involved, with the blessing of the honourable Prime Minister. You have our assurance.

We are trying to rehabilitate an industry that was very very successful in the past. To give you some context, \$200 million write-off for sugar, no one said anything. This is only \$10 million. I think on the back of this, we can create more backpacker opportunities in the Yasawas, which is an exceptional tourism destination anyway, as we all know.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Chairman, honourable Minister, does this, or will this not fall outside the ambit of the aims and objectives of this particular co-operative, or has that been cleared?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Chairman, as far as I am concerned, I have got clearance from Cabinet, and that is where the clearance comes from. We are very acutely aware of being responsible in terms of the disbursement. As I said I assure this House that will make sure that this is done properly and all the due diligence that needs to occur will occur.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, with the explanation given by the two honourable Deputy Prime Ministers, we fully understand the intent behind this. I think the issue that we would also like to raise, and perhaps for the future as well – we are answerable to taxpayers. I hope that we are not setting a precedence in which it becomes a norm in the future. We know that this is a business issue; commercial decisions that they take, and they have lending agencies and whatever as a normal business. For us to divert taxpayers' money into this; this is why these questions are coming from. Are we going to salvage every business? We know that we want to bring up the *iTaukei*, but that responsibility we equally carry and being answerable to the taxpayers. That is the main gist behind the line of questions that are coming from this end, honourable Deputy Prime Ministers.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Chairman, we all know about the Yasawa backpackers. We can relate to how it started and as indicated by honourable Kamikamica, we started with 32 operators in there. Over the years, some have fallen by the wayside, and natural disasters and COVID-19 have compounded the problems. However, when we started negotiating with them – because it has taken quite a while to talk to them – we noticed a greater sense of discipline within their operations in the Yasawas. A huge part of the approval that we have given in Cabinet is due to the due diligence that went into this. We are very confident that this will revive those operators and encourage others to grow, to bring back the Yasawas into what it used to be – 32 operations sometime back. It is not only the backpackers now, some five-star and six-star properties are also in the books, and some will be announced soon. We are talking about a region of Fiji that needs to thrive and was in danger of losing out in a big way, hence the decision by Government to step in and help them.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Chairman, I do understand the vulnerability of that particular area very well. This is why the questions. But in light of the fact that honourable Deputy Prime Ministers both have proffered explanations with respect to making sure that the checks and balances are in place because is a substantial sum of money and it is taxpayers' money.

As the honourable Leader of the Opposition has pointed out, that we are answerable, and it sets a dangerous precedent. So long as we make sure that we put all the necessary checks and balances in place, I will withdraw my two motions.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The proposed amendment from honourable Koya has now been withdrawn.

SEG 10

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Chairman, may I request the honourable Minister for Trade to elaborate on the same - Co-operative Development Grant.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Chairman, what basically this side of the House is trying to do is reinvigorate the co-operative movement in Fiji. We have found to our dismay, since we came into Government, every single large economy in the world has found success on the back of the co-operative movement. I will give you some examples. Kiwifruit in New Zealand which is operated by Zespri, a co-operative. In India, Amul out of Gujarat is the largest single exporter of dairy milk in India. It has about US\$5 billion revenue now.

They say the co-operative movement is a great way of building business and ensuring that it trickles down right to the rural economy. One of the gaps in our strategies over the last few years, is not creating structures to allow the economic benefit to flow downwards into the economy. That is why Mr Chairman, we created a \$400,000 grant last year for co-operatives. It has now increased to \$600,000. The \$400,000 will be pretty much fully utilised. About 17 co-operatives will be getting allocations from this grant. Not only just shops, but agricultural co-operatives and all those kinds of good co-operatives. So, the \$600,000 is quite welcomed; it is a 50 percent increase, which probably underpins the importance of this area. That is really the background behind the allocations.

It is a similar structure to the Integrated Human Resource Development Programme (IHRDP) grant, one third, two thirds, so it is not a handout grant. It is quite popular like the IHRDP, which the honourable Koya knows is very popular. This one is starting to gain a lot of momentum as well. Hopefully we can get \$1 million next year, but we will see how that goes. But we are seeing a major uptake in co-operatives.

HON. V. NATH.- Honourable Minister, how many co-operatives fall under this \$600,000 and I will have another supplementary question?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- I do not have the....

MR. CHAIRMAN.- You have a question and you said you will follow it with a supplementary. So why not ask it at the same time?

HON. V. NATH.- Mr Chairman, thank you for giving me the opportunity.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Chairman, it is a procedural matter. It is the Committee of Supply, I think the honourable Members cannot use this as a parliamentary debate or whatever. If you have a very clear question on an item, whether you want to ask why is it an increase or decrease? That is the clarification that we are looking at in the Committee of Supply. If you want to increase or decrease or change you move a motion. You cannot just say – can you explain this? Why are you doing this? That is a debate that we had in the Budget Debate, picking up questions or parliamentary questions. You can ask a parliamentary question in the next session. That is fine.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Nath, can you repeat your question to the honourable Minister?

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Chairman, I asked the honourable Minister to explain how many co-operatives fall under this \$600,000? The honourable Prasad may know when he was on this side and he is on record in the *Hansard Report*. Similar questions were asked when we were on the other side. So, there is an increase in co-operatives because when I was a student 20 years ago, I have seen co-operatives as failure. Then when we started, it was doing very well. My question is simple - how many co-operatives fall under this?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- There are two separate questions there. One is the number of co-operatives in Fiji. I think it is over 1,000-plus and growing. I think the full register is about two-and-a-half. But we are trying to reinvigorate those results. So, if you like, you can say there are at least 1,500 or maybe 1,800 active co-operatives. This grant is just for those who apply. So, for example in the \$400,000 allocation, there are about 17 successful applicants. In the \$600,000 there is already a big queue of those wanting to come; co-operatives for sugar cane farmers wanting tractors and harvesters.

Mr. Chairman, there was a question about productivity in terms of agriculture. Between ourselves, rural development and the Ministry of Agriculture we have been pushing hard on mechanisation to mechanise production and we are starting to see production increase overall. So, a lot of these funding goes into productive agriculture which is something we want to see a lot of. I take the point by the honourable Member about failures in co-operatives. Our explanation to people who have concerns is, it is nothing to do with the co-operative structure. It is more to do with the governance of those structures. So, the individuals who are managing it. So, what we are trying to do now is train our co-operatives, put them through proper training so that they understand how important recordkeeping is, to have proper meetings, to have proper guidelines in terms of purchases, payments, et cetera, so that way you can actually start building viable businesses.

I do not have to tell you. I get excited about Zespri and Amul and there is Fonterra too in New Zealand. That is another big co-operative. These are successful models which have built themselves around discipline and good governance. The potential for Fiji is massive in this area and yes, there has been failures, but show me a country where businesses have never failed. The allocation is welcomed, Mr. Chairman, this will go in no time.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Nath, you asking questions. Now it is time for question and answer, directly the answer is given.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Chairman, I now understand it is not earmarked, it is in a pool. Can I request the honourable Minister, like giving these machines, probably where it is needed. Like in terms of, there are four divisions, which division is getting the most?

Mr. Chairman, in terms of economic return, which section gives the most economically? I have seen this, and I must declare that I am member of a co-operative and honourable Tubuna gave me a tractor. They are following the legacy of FijiFirst. That is good work. In some places I have seen that the machines given are not functioning. What I am requesting, honourable Minister is to give it to the areas where the economic return is the most.

Programme 5 Activity 1: General Administration

SEG 6

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, I beg to differ with honourable Professor Prasad, initially I wanted to say that if we need a clarification on the figure, then we basically just ask for simple clarity on that.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- No, I am saying that you used to do this when you were in the Opposition. So, let us be clear on that.

On SEG 6, I wanted to ask the honourable Minister if he can just clarify this Trade Enhancement Programme of \$1 million.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr Chairman, it is quite targeted to micro businesses. These are all the young entrepreneurs and women entrepreneurs who are dabbling in small businesses or micro businesses. This can include juice operators at the markets. It is really like a funding that is used to help with the micro enterprises, in the hope that with some seed capital, they can perhaps scale up to a bit more business. So, it is about \$1,000 per person and it is actually quite popular as well.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, just a follow-up question because I have gone through even Head 50. There is an allocation of \$1 million there as well for Small Business Schemes. So, what is the difference between the two? How will that be allocated? Is it just parked there as reserves for other purposes? There is so much money parked in Head 50 which are also in the respective Ministries.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- When we get to Head 50.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We will defer your question to Head 50.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Yes, Sir. Thank you.

SEG 10

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Chairman, I just wanted clarification from the honourable Minister on the Northern Development Programme (\$800,000); if he can elaborate on that and who is entitled to that?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Chairman, this is a programme that has been in place for quite some time. I think it was initiated back in the SVT days – *Look North* and it has been quite popular over the years. It is targeted at micro, small, and medium enterprises solely for the North. The structure is a bit different. It is 45 percent funded by the Government, 45 percent is funded through Fiji

Development Bank (FDB) (some funding institution), 10 percent is the contribution of the individual. The contribution is a bit lower, but it is quite popular. We are now seeing, like for example, in Lekutu, an Indian couple with a retail shop and it now has got solar power and solar fridges. They earn good money at that shop. Honourable Ravunawa will know about Lekutu. It is a very popular programme.

We will continue to push and encourage those who can do it. It particularly works when people are already in some sort of business in the North. We have fishermen who come in to get these loans. You can get an outboard motor, you can get a fiberglass boat, plus you can get diving and fishing equipment. It is a very popular fund.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Chairman, I just need clarification. The amount that was allocated last year for the Northern Development Programme –was that fully utilised?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- I think almost utilised. I think it was a very high percentage, about 90 percent. It is normally quite utilized. What happens if it is not fully utilised for whatever reason, we channel it into any of the other grant programmes. We try to ensure that nothing is unspent.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, I also have similar question to the previous one on Head 50, SEG 6 - Miscellaneous. There is also some money there on Northern Development Projects. I will just raise the question later.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- I have an amendment proposed by honourable Koya with respect of SEG 10.

That Head 34 be increased by \$10 million in Programme 5, Activity 1, SEG 10 – National Export Strategies.

Is there a seconder to the motion?

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Sir, if I may, I had withdrawn both my motions because they were interconnected. I was taking from and putting it into another, so that was withdrawn earlier.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you honourable Koya for that clarification.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- I do have a question on SEG 10, Mr. Chairman. Honourable Minister SEG 10, with respect to the National Export Strategies, I know you have answered the take-up on the fact that NDP has been roughly 90 percent. But in light of the fact that we are crying out for a lot of diversifications within the National Export Strategies, is the answer the same, that there was a big take-up and have we changed the rules? I know you will say that is enough to cover it, in fact, if we want to do more diversifications these are the questions. I am not just asking it now; it is actually from exporters who are asking. Is that the case at the moment – that there will be more of an uptake because of the diversification that actually happened and have the rules changed somewhat so it is easier to get to?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Chairman, probably the way I will answer honourable Koya's question is that just last year we received about 10 applications over a million dollars. So clearly there is a big demand for this area. Nama Fiji was a beneficiary of this. There is another lady that does goat milk soap and she is starting to ramp up cosmetics. We have used the fund as honourable Koya is aware, to sort of turn cottage industries into larger opportunities. So that is kind of happening quite well. In Rabi at the moment there is *yaqona* business that has reached out. We have tried to help as well. The short answer is, if we were given more we could probably use more.

Again, as honourable Koya understands, we try and use the allocations that are given. We also are mindful that overall in terms of the MSME sector there is about \$160 million this year in terms of allocation across the government. We will just use this money, and if funding is clearly required, we will step up and try and get more. One of the things, Mr. Chairman, is great about this one is there are no contributions. It is a straight out grant for export. In other words, you already have an existing business, you have an ability to export, we come in either to establish your infrastructure or create more momentum in terms of what you need, in terms of starting the exports.

Recently, we funded a young man who is starting an export business, and it was done through this. I have to say since coming into office, it seems to have garnered a lot more interest over the last two years.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Chairman, I take it, honourable Minister, that there is also an encouragement from the staff at the Ministry for the businesses to take up loans, rather than keep coming back to it on their own strength. Is that the case?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- I mean, obviously, it just depends on the type of business and the type of opportunity. But certainly, we are predisposed to help any potential exporter initiative, particularly like at the moment, recently we did one in Lovoni, Ovalau. This is a young man who set up in the middle of Lovoni. He has got about 100 farmers which he is buying from. They are called Heritage Kava. If you *Google* him, he is processing his *kava* in Lovoni, Ovalau, using solar-powered systems which came through NAS (National Authentication System Pass. And he is exporting it on Amazon. So, that is the power of this kind of grant, and we feel that he can possibly scale it up to include the whole of Ovalau and keep going. It is quite an exciting way of building capacity and capability.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, I know that honourable Members want to have morning tea. To the honourable Minister, you talked about scaling up. One of the issues for those that want to scale up, expand is the policy. I was in Lovoni, Ovalau too. He does want to expand, “Oh, I have been assisted already, and I cannot be assisted again.” Can we change that? Can we change that and do something about it?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- We probably will take that on board, and I do understand the issue there. Sometimes, Mr. Chairman, we do have businesses that we assist a little bit, they start getting very successful and need a bit more. But we cannot because we have already allocated a small amount.

In retrospect maybe we should give them a bigger amount, but that is where we probably need to tweak policy a little bit. The other part to your issue around funding and assistance, we are working on the regulations to do the Access to Business Funding Bill, a new Act. When that comes through that should actually provide a bit of access to a lot of entrepreneurs. It will open up the ability to get funding from offshore directly in terms of investment. Hopefully that will help as well.

Programme 6, Activity 1: Digital Government Transformation Office

SEG 7

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Chairman, just a clarification, there has been a significant decrease in SEG 7 especially with the Ease of Doing Business (\$4,292,800). Can the honourable Minister for Trade elaborate where we are with this particular programme and how long are we going to fork out money for this programme to be up and running?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Chairman, there are actually three funding streams in that SEG. The one that has been there for the longest is the Ease of Doing Business. The honourable Members

will recall, I have been talking about the Start a Business system, and currently the building permit system. That was the first phase of the of the Ease of Doing Business exercise and that is coming to an end this year.

This is the last part of that to spend. Hopefully we will complete that at the end of this year. Because we now have a digital strategy, we will go back and look at all the Government systems and see what to automate first. That is why there is a bit of a slowdown this year, and obviously from experience, it takes a bit of gestation to settle in a new system. The Start a Business – which we did last year – is still being tidied up. The building permit approvals – which is the current system – will finish off around December this year, and then we will bed that in and then start looking at what we need to do in terms of other areas.

Programme 6 Activity 2: Department of Communications

SEG 7

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, sorry for being fast-forward. I just wanted to ask the honourable Minister on Feasibility Study - Shore Based Facilities (\$281,250). I wanted to ask because it says “shore based”. Are there sea-based facilities available?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Thank you for the question. Mr Chairman the honourable Member is correct. This is just a provision to look at how we are going to deploy the full coverage in maritime. At the moment Fiji is in breach of its International Maritime Organisation (IMO) obligations in terms of being able to get in touch of all vessels when you in your economic zone. At the moment we are not able to do that. This funding is obviously to see what the best fit is. As honourable Koroilavesau will appreciate, this will enhance safety of travel when you are in the Fiji economic zone.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Parliament will now proceed to vote on Head 34 – Ministry of Trade, Co-operatives, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications.

Question put.

Head 34 agreed to.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, we will now suspend proceedings for a break. Parliament will resume in half an hour.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.42 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.25 a.m.

Head 7 – Ministry of Employment, Productivity and Workplace Relations

Programme 1, Activity 1: General Administration

SEG 3

HON. J.N. NAND.- Mr. Chairman, there has been an increase of \$110,000. Previously, it was \$80,000 and Telecommunications has increased to \$10,000 that is \$90,000. Just need clarification from the honourable Minister on the increase.

HON. A. D. SINGH.- Mr. Chairman, the Telecommunications budget has been reduced because the Ministry staff mostly use emails, apps such as *Viber* to communicate.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr Chairman, so there is actually a reduction because of the reduction in VAT. So, you will see, Mr. Chairman, in all of the allocations, there is reduction and that is the reduction in VAT.

HON. J.N. NAND.- There has been an increase. Last budget year was \$80,000 and this year is \$90,000, an increase of \$10,000.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- And that is explained by honourable Singh right?

HON. A. D. SINGH.- Mr. Chairman, there are mobile phones and Wi-Fi – there is an increase in number use because we are also using digitalisation. We are using apps as well for staff who go to do inspections, et cetera.

SEG 5

HON. J. NAND.- Mr. Chairman, on Office Books, Periodicals and Publications, previously it was \$50,000 and the budget has \$67,500. So, there is an increase of \$17,000 roughly. Can the honourable Minister explain this value when we are moving to e-copy?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr Chairman, daily newspapers, virtual platforms, printing Ministry's banners, posters and all strategic documents. That is the expense and that is why it has gone up because we are also doing a lot of posters and publicity on OHS and standards matters.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- On SEG 5 can the honourable Minister clarify the Digitisation and Implementation of Quality Management System. Is this system already in place, or are you going to work on this system for implementation?

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Point of Order, Mr. Chairman. According to Standing Order 100, all the objections, all the questions need to either increase, decrease or delete the allocations on the budget, but what the Members of the Opposition are saying – just clarifications –which I consider are lazy questions. According to the Standing Orders, they need to do some homework either to do an increase or decrease or delete the allocations in the budget, rather than coming and sitting here and dragging the issue, asking a lazy question of clarification. There is no clarification on the Standing Order.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- My reading honourable Member on that one is specifically on amendments. If there are amendments to be done, then it is only in specific areas – increase or decrease, but they are permitted to ask questions on matters that are relevant as far as that item is concerned.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Chairman, just clarification on the actual allocation.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- So I am just seeking a clarification. Is the Digitisation Implementation of Quality Management System, whether the system has been implemented because it is only \$225,000, Because such systems do not come this cheap. So is this going to be a continuous funding for couple of more years or this is it?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- We have completed the implementation of the paperless inspection systems and the Ministry's performance dashboard reporting. We have started developing the local employment registration portal and this is work in progress and we should complete during the year.

SEG 6

HON. J.N. NAND.- Mr. Chairman, Fiji Trades Union Congress (\$97,826). I would like to know on what basis it was given.

HON. A.D. SINGH.- There is a \$97,826 grant to the FTUC for the first time. Mr. Chairman, when I spoke in Parliament in response to the budget, I did mention that during the last 14 years, the trade union movement had been totally decimated from 35 percent it had gone to 9 percent because of draconian laws. So, we are now assisting them to organise themselves; to educate themselves and also the new labour laws will be coming into effect as soon as they have gone through Parliament. They need to do professional development and training for the workers, so that they understand the labour laws as trade unions, so that they are clear on how and what they need to pursue, rather than coming up with some claims that may not be legitimate and unnecessarily wasting our time. That is the whole purpose of it.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, in relation to the Vatukoula Gold Mine Strike Settlement costs. Last year, the figure was also paid out of around \$6 million, this year has gone to \$5.68 million. Is this something that will be happening every year; where in one year we do \$3.6 million and the next year will be \$5.68 million.

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Please allow me to explain Mr. Chairman, Sir. We assured them that they would be paid in two tranches, \$10,000 and then \$15,000 this year. Last year, we actually settled with 179 workers who are alive and 19 beneficiaries. The rest of them will have to wait until they are able to get their probates done. We will wait until their probates are done and this payment will be going to the same people and others who are cleared by the courts in terms of the probate.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- honourable Chand the question is for SEG 6.

HON. H. CHAND.- Yes, my question is on SEG 6 about the allocation for the Fiji Trades Union Congress.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- The question has already been asked.

HON. H. CHAND.- I am asking a question. So, my question is to the honourable Minister. There is \$97, 826 allocated to the Fiji Trades Union Congress. How many unions are affiliated to the Fiji Trades

Union Congress and how many are not? The reason I asked is because from my understanding, there are certain trade unions that are not affiliated to the Fiji Trade Unions Congress and they will not benefit.

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, the honourable Member can ask that question at the next session of Parliament.

Programme 1, Activity 2 – Labour Standard Services

SEG 5

HON. J.N. NAND.- Mr. Chairman, SEG 5 on Expenses of Trade Disputes has increased by \$1,000. So the reason for the increase?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Chairman, can the honourable Member repeat the question please?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Minister, I speak louder than the honourable Member. SEG 5 under Expenses of Trade Disputes of \$9,000. Do you want clarification?

HON. J.N. NAND.- Yes.

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Chairman, this increase in allocation is to cater for meetings with trade unions and administration of trade union cases.

Programme 1, Activity 3 – Occupational Health and Safety Services

SEG 6

HON. J.N. NAND.- Mr. Chairman, under Workers Compensation that has increased by \$1 million. The reason for the increase?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Chairman, workplace and school injury-based cases is 0.4 percent out of the 1 percent FNU levy.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, can the honourable Minister repeat the statement that he just made, as it may be related to the question I would like to ask?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Can you repeat your question?

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Can you please repeat the statement that you just made, as it might be related to the question that I wish to ask?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Chairman, the \$6 million has gone to \$7 million? That is the question? Well, it is 0.4 percent of the 1 percent of FNU levy that is allocated for injury-related compensations that are paid to dependents of those in fatality cases and for any injuries.

HON. ST. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, that would answer the question that I was going to ask.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Just a clarification on this \$7 million. Now, that it is budgeted in our budget estimate, what about 1 percent that is distributed through the Accident Compensation Commission Fiji (ACCF)? Does that money come to the Ministry as well, or that is a separate allocation?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- The 0.4 percent of the 1 percent will come to the Ministry.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- So, that is not part of this \$7 million, or is it part of the \$7 million as well?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- It is part of the \$7 million.

Programme 1, Activity 4: National Employment Centre.

SEG 5

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, Foreign Employment Mobility Services (\$337,500).

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Chairman, this unit oversees the placement of work attaches and payment of attachment allowances under the National Employment Centre Act 2000. The attachment allowance will meet the weekly allowance of 100 work attachés at a weekly allowance of \$150. That is 50 percent we pay of the \$150, co-shared with the employer for three to six months. A total of 1,000 clients to undergo Life Skill Training at \$4 an hour and that is through NTPC, and 60 clients earmarked for training at TPAF's Employment Skills Training. We participated at the Fiji Showcase and conduct our job fairs. We conduct awareness and employer visitations.

HON. J. USAMATE.- So, is this just replacing the NEC allowance that was in last year's budget?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- That is part of the allowance.

HON. J. USAMATE.- It is the same thing but different name?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Yes.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, is in terms of the Pacific Labour Scheme, the increase in this budget by \$162,000. If there is some clarification on that in SEG 5.

HON. A.D. SINGH.- The Pacific Labour Scheme, this budget allocation is for salary and operational cost of the three country liaison offices based in Australia that we have appointed to look after the Fijian workers. I have alluded to this in the past. The liaison offices will be responsible for pastoral care and welfare support of our Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) workers on the ground promoting the approved employers in Australia.

Programme 1, Activity 5 – Mediation Services

SEG 5

HON. J.N. NAND.- Mr. Chairman, Singapore Mediation Centre \$73, 370. I want to get the clarification on that.

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Chairman, this allocation is for training of our accredited mediators and aspiring mediators with the Singapore Mediation Centre. There is a membership fee as well to attend the Mediation Association Annual General Meeting and conferences for the chief mediator.

Programme 1, Activity 6: Productivity Services

SEG 5

HON. J. USAMATE.- This is not in relation specifically to SEG 5, but something that was in last year's budget, which was the Asian Productivity Organisation (APO) training allowances. It used to be in SEG 7, but this year it is not there. Since Fiji is a member of the APO, and the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry has recently been the chair of APO, I am just wondering, whether these APO training allowances have been completely taken out, because they are not appearing in this year's budget?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- That will be sourced from within, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Parliament will now vote on Head 7 – Ministry of Employment, Productivity and Workplace Relations.

Question put.

Head 7 agreed to.

Head 8 – Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Programme 1, Activity 1: General Administration.

SEG 5

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, I see an allocation of \$189,800 for UN Peacekeeping Force. I seek clarification on this, Mr. Chairman.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Chairman, the UN Peacekeeping Force \$189,000 is no change from the last allocation. The budget of \$200,000 is to cater for Fiji Government contributions to UN Peacekeeping Force, which of course, as we all know, we have a big history that Fiji has for many years. It has been the top of the list, biggest supplier per capita to the peacekeepers, the United Nations Peacekeeping Force.

SEG 6

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Chairman, a clarity from the Minister on the Pacific Islands Development Forum – Operating Grant (\$1,173,913). It is a regional institution, it still actually reports to this particular Ministry as announced lately, or is it an independent institution, but just given a grant for them to operate independently?

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- This budget, the PIDF grant is actually a decrease by \$26,000. This revised budget is now, as you can see, \$1.17 million, and this is actually sufficient. The PIDF is Fiji's visible footprint to the global community. So, it does come under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and it is representative of the whole of the Pacific, but based here in Suva, as you know.

Mr. Chairman, PIDF validates Fiji's hub role in the Pacific and Fiji's relations with the smaller Pacific Smaller Island Developing States (SIDS), provided that all sincere development partners, irrespective of their length and depth of association with individual Pacific Island SIDS in whatever capacity, acknowledge their role as partners by aligning to the ownership of P-SIDS in their development goals. So, the P-SIDS receives funding from other governments as well, but is based here in Fiji and are staffed by Fijians.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Regarded as a regional institution, not a department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs?

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- It is a unit of the Department of Foreign Affairs.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- So if other governments are funding an organisation, how can it be part of a Ministry? That is just a clarity that we are trying to seek. It is a regional institution whereby other governments also fund a regional institution and then how can it be a unit of a particular Ministry of one of the governments who are funding that particular institution?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- If I can explain that. You know the history of PIDF, you know that very well. It was setup as a regional institution, it no longer is, but there are still institutional donors that are supporting it and they are supporting it as part of the Fiji Government and that is not unusual. There are various programmes in government ministries and departments that are supported by donor funds agencies.

SEG 10

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, I just wanted a clarification on Aid-in-Kind. This amount of \$1,605,355, is this aid targeted to a specific programme within the Ministry or is it just given and then the Ministry then allocates it?

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Honourable Professor Biman Prasad, can you answer that, please?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Do you wish for him to answer?

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- I will defer to the honourable Minister for Finance.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- The allocation?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The Aid-in-Kind, the very last Item.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Honourable Minister for Finance, my question is on Aid-in-Kind. There is an allocation of \$1.6 million and I just wanted to know the clarity between the amount that is given. Is it targeted to a specific programme within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or is the amount just given to Foreign Affairs? Then it decides where to allocate it to.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Yes, your question is correct, honourable Koroilavesau. It is a new expenditure allocation. After the repatriation due to COVID-19, the Volunteer Programme was resumed in Fiji from May 2022. With two-year and short-term period, volunteers are expected to be dispatched in a wide variety of fields per year, so that is already a contribution. So, it is a volunteer.

Programme 2, Activity 1: Overseas Missions

SEG 7

HON. K.K. LAL.- Mr. Chairman, can the honourable Minister responsible give clarification on Special Administrator.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- First item on SEG 7.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- The Special Administrator is the Military Police Advisor (MPA) at the Prune in New York. This increase by 12.5 percent from last budget, but it is also to include

the VAT component of 12.5 percent into the initial budget of \$ 480,000. The sum is VIP and is to cater for all the operational costs for the military police advisor for the Fiji Mission in the United Nations based at our Fiji Mission in New York.

Operational costs include the personal emoluments, FNPF contribution, the post allowance, rent, medical costs for family, education costs for any dependents, and any other running operation expenses. I am very happy to also add, honourable Ketan Lal, Colonel Siliva Vananalagi is the first woman ever to hold this prestigious position, and she joined Fiji's Permanent Representative at the United Nations (PRUN) in December 2023.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- I have an amendment motion by honourable Ketan Lal, that is, the re-establishment of Israel Embassy be left out of Head 8 in respect of Programme 2, Activity 1 SEG 7.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Is there any seconder?

HON. S.S. KIRPAL.- Mr. Chairman, I second the motion.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Mr. Chairman, I believe, the establishment of the Israel Mission will be a big expense for our country because right now the....

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Point of Order. Mr. Chairman, I think this motion is out of order because this is a Cabinet and a Government decision. Honourable Ketan Lal can come here and say, "I want this removed, I want this decreased or increased," but he needs to understand that this is a decision of the Government and the Cabinet.

(Honourable Ketan Lal interjects)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Yes, I know, but you are not changing the decision of the Cabinet. The Committee of Supply is about removal of expenditure or increase or decrease. What is the motion?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Yes. I think that would be in accordance with the Standing Order 102(c) – it says that it will allow an item or sub-item be left out of the Head. It is right.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Mr. Chairman, just to let the honourable Minister for Finance know as well, this is Parliament, and this book is here in front of us. We can do as per the Standing Orders. The current state of the Middle East is very unpredictable. Building or establishing an embassy will be very costly for us. What if there is another rocket launched at Israel? What if our staff who are stationed there, we have to get them back and send another Fiji Airways to get them back? It is going to be very costly, and I believe that this is not the right time to establish an embassy there. That is basically my motion.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The floor is open for discussion, for debate.

HON. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Chairman, I want to reply to the issues raised by my honourable friend, on his reasoning why we should remove this allocation. Honourable Ketan Lal understands that we have to establish diplomatic relationships with people that we like or do not like. It is just a matter of the state; we need to talk to people.

Secondly, Fiji has a very pertinent interest in the Middle East. There are not very many embassies around there. Yes, we have the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Mr. Koya who is there at the moment, and of course the one that is going to be established in Israel. It is very important for Fijian interests also in the Middle East. It is not only about relocating to Jerusalem or so, but this is important to Fiji and to our soldiers who are there also.

I have just come back from there and we really have no one except for Fijians who are in Jerusalem and in Tel Aviv who help us. Or Fijians with the United Nations to try and get things sorted out for Fijians who are on study. In particular, there are a lot of youth who go to study agriculture in Israel, and doctors as well. There are many good reasons why we should have an embassy. Therefore, I think, I stick on this side of the House to say that it is actually quite well that we should have an embassy in Israel. We do not have one. I do not agree with the motion by the honourable Lal.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Chairman, mine is just a correction, honourable Minister, honourable Koya is sitting here, that is Ambassador Koya.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- There has been no intervention. I will give the right of reply back to the motion mover.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Thank you Mr. Chairman and I acknowledge the sentiments from honourable Defence Minister as well. As he stated we already have an embassy around the Middle East which is in UAE and already looking after the whole region. I think establishing and putting our other staff at risk in Israel will be something more costly for us. I understand we have students and other soldiers who are there, but Mr. Chairman, I stick with my motion to leave this out, and maybe the Government can bring it back after the situation in Middle East is better.

HON. PROF. B. C. PRASAD.- A clarification Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- I will allow your clarification.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- The cost will be paid by us, but will be reimbursed by Israel as well. It is not going to cost us as much as.

Question on amendment put.

Motion lost.

SEG 8

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, on the upgrade and enhancement of building overseas, there was an allocation of around \$1 million last year. And I have also taken note of nine, which is the purchase of a new house in Wellington. So if the honourable Minister can just clarify on which missions have utilised last year's fund? I'm aware of the situation in Brussels, United Kingdom and Canberra. So if we can just have some explanation from the honourable Minister about the utilisation of last year's fund and of course, for this year as well?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- The 2024-2025 Budget sum of \$951,000 was released for which \$763,000 has been used for the following;

- London, \$620,000 for urgent repair and refurbishment works to the Fiji House, Fiji High Commission of which \$612,000 has been fully utilised.
- Installation of change three security systems in PNG, again \$36,000 has been utilised.
- Canberra, Fiji High Commission, \$115,000 was released for the refurbishment and renovation works at the Chancery, the residence of Fiji High Commission in Canberra of which funds have been fully utilized.

That is the breakdown for last year. So, this year's funding is really for the maintenance of the Chancery in the Fiji High Commission in London which is really in a bad shape. It has not been renovated for many, many years.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, if I may just suggest to Government to seriously look at the Brussel's property as well because it has been vacant for quite a while and it keeps deteriorating. I hope with the work done in Australia, because I know when the High Commissioner took office he was renting, he has moved back because it costs extra money to the taxpayers of Fiji.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- The honourable Leader of the Opposition is correct. In fact, there was a very, very serious neglect of all our properties for many years. I will give you an example, New Zealand High Commissioner's residence was a good property, completely falling apart. There was no renovation and essentially it was condemned. So, we had to sell that, and buy a new one. Same with others, so this is part of an attempt to actually fix all this.

SEG 9

HON. K.K. LAL.- Mr. Chairman, my question to respective honourable Minister with the purchase of the Fiji House in Wellington, New Zealand. Will this include increase of staff as well for the New Zealand Embassy? Because during my previous visit, I understand there is some shortage of staff and the High Commissioner did a good job there visiting our diaspora, but I understand he needs more manpower as well. Is there possibility that these purchase will also entail an increase in staff as well?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Chairman, the allocation is very clear. It says purchase of Fiji House Wellington, New Zealand.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Capital expenditure.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, just a clarity. There is an allocation of \$2.6 million for the property at Wellington. The simple question I want to ask, has the property been identified for that cost or is this an allocation to buy the property?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- The Cabinet decided to approve the sale of the existing property and to buy this new property for New Zealand \$1.675 million and that is the allocation.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- In respect of this Segment I have an amendment motion from honourable Ketan Lal and the motion reads that Head 8 be increased by \$1 million in Programme 2 Activity 1 SEG 9 which we are on now that is for the purchase of Fiji House. I am presuming that, that amount is to be increased by \$1 million, that is my reading of the motion. I will ask honourable Ketan Lal to elaborate.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Mr. Chairman, again, the upgrade and enhancement of overseas buildings, overseas missions the New Zealand mission I understand is a heritage building as well. Therefore, it is going to be costly to upgrade it. However, I am just increasing it to assist the upgrade of the initial mission.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Is there a seconder to the motion?

HON. S.S. KIRPAL.- I second the motion.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- He does not even know what he is seconding.

(Laughter)

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The motion is on the floor, are there any interventions?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Chairman, can I just get a clarification on the actual motion? Is it for the increase for the purchase of Fiji House - Wellington, New Zealand?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- That is correct. According to this motion, it is SEG 9 which specifically refers to the purchase of a Fiji House and to be increased by \$1 million.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- It is actually a silly motion. I have just explained that we sold the property. The Cabinet made the decision. This is the purchase price. This is the allocation. Why would you want additional allocation? He wants Government to give a gift to the guy we are buying the property from? Is that the level of understanding for the honourable Member?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Maybe honourable Ketan Lal, did you agree? You heard what was explained in respect of SEG 9? Is this allocation specifically done for a purpose of purchase of a house?

HON. K.K. LAL.- Mr. Chairman, I withdraw the motion.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Parliament will now vote on Head 8 – Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Question put.

Head 8 agreed to.

Head 9 – Independent Bodies

Programme 1, Activity 1 – General Administration

SEG 6

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, the Parliament the budget has been reduced by a \$1 million, which is quite a lot. Could I just have a clarification, I am getting a bit worried about that reduction of money coming to Parliament, if we could have some explanation on it.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- The net decrease is due to the following. Obviously there is an increase in some of the areas like wages, purchase, special expenditure.

Decrease due to:

- established staff, \$799,000 due to the reduction in the personal emoluments for the Members of Parliament, given the appointment of the three Ministers and three Assistant Ministers, whose corresponding FNPF increase, et cetera;
- an increase of leave allowance for the honourable Speaker and the Leader of the Opposition;
- inclusion of the health and life insurance benefits;
- operating grants and transfer, given the deregistration of the FijiFirst party, they are not eligible for the \$325,000 grant for political parties; and
- capital purchase due to the completion of the 2024-2025 ICT project, so that is the reduction.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, will we continue to discuss this Head or is it over?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The motion is specifically on Parliament.

HON. J. USAMATE.- I wanted to ask another question on the Judiciary.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We will move to Judiciary after we have dealt with honourable Ketan Lal's motion.

The motion is that Programme 1-1(6) Parliament (\$17,320.33) be increased by \$3 million.

HON. S.S. KIRPAL.- Mr. Chairman, I second the motion.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Mr. Chairman, I am requesting an increase in budget due to the fact that the Chambers upstairs in our Committee Rooms need an upgrade. Also, Mr. Chairman, the transportation for Members of Parliament, therefore we need more vehicles for Parliament. At the same time, we need a budget allocation for staff and Members of Parliament's training, induction programmes, and so forth.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Chairman, the motion is already moved and seconded. In previous years, Head 9 – Independent Bodies, is normally not debated because they are considered as Independent Bodies. For this motion, for us to talk about the legislature's allocation, it is not allowed, but given that you have opened up Head 9 for us to talk about, and even after this, we will jump to Judiciary, probably there needs to be a clarification on whether we can debate on Independent Bodies or not, considering their allocations, because they are Independent Bodies. That was the practice in the past.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Bunitavu, are you asking a clarification from the Chairman? As the Chairman is concerned, Parliament can discuss anything. Nothing is sacrosanct. As long as it does not get into the heart of the issue, right? We are discussing votes to each of these Heads. Are there any further comments before this matter is put to vote?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Chairman, just to help the honourable Member, as I explained, the decrease, some of it was capital expenditure, which has been completed, deregistration of the FijiFirst party, \$325,000. The elements of the budget. This budget for Parliament is very well discussed with the Secretary-General, with the Office of the Speaker. Parliament has no questions, the Office of the Speaker and the Secretary-General's Office is satisfied with the budget. So, I do not see any issues with that.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Chairman, just a clarification from the honourable Minister for Finance. He said, that now that the party is de-registered, the \$325,000 is gone. If Members of Parliament do formulate a new party, will they be given the \$325,000?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Own expenses.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Chairman, I reserve my right to answer that question.

(Laughter)

Let us try venture out of giving another lecture about registration and formation of parties.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, issues that have been articulated by the honourable Deputy Prime Minister, we are aware that there are plans to extend the services of Parliament in terms of offices, staff and so forth. I know the budgetary constraints, but we do not have any idea when the judiciary has to move out and so forth. Is there a planned phase for getting this done? Even the staff themselves, their aisles are quite cramped. For Government to be able to fund that approach, moving the judiciary that side, and having more space here for Parliament. Is there a plan for that?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Chairman, that is a policy that the Government will consider. I think the ill-conceived decision to move Parliament here from the big parliamentary complex that was built many years ago is an issue that Government, Parliament and everyone will have to discuss. I will leave it there.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Ketan Lal, I give you the floor to close this discussion one way or the other?

HON. K.K. LAL.- Mr. Chairman, we may proceed. All good from my end, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Your amendment, are you withdrawing it or are you proceeding?

HON. K.K. LAL.- Proceeding, Mr. Chairman.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Chairman, let me also say that since this Government came into power, we have in fact increased the budget. The previous parliamentary budgets was to the tune of about \$8 million. In fact, it is a huge increase in the last two and a half years for Parliament. We are very pleased with the allocation in terms of not only improving the infrastructure of Parliament.

We are also pleased that the honourable Members, especially honourable Opposition Members' support the provision in terms of salary, allowances, activities, and supporting the honourable Leader of the Opposition's Office as an important office. All that has been affected into a very appropriate budget for Parliament. I wanted to make that point that we have had a very well-resourced Parliament for the last two and a half years.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Mr. Chairman, no comments, we can proceed.

Question on amendment put.

Motion lost.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Parliament will now vote on Head 9 – Independent Bodies.

Question put.

Head 9 agreed to.

Head 10 – Ministry of Environment and Climate Change

Programme 1, Activity 1 - General Administration

SEG 5:

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Chairman, can the honourable Minister for Environment and Climate Change explain about the Implementation and Enforcement of Environment Management Act (\$33,750)? What is this money is going to be utilised for?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Chairman, this allocation is a movement from Programme 1, Activity 3 to Programme 1, Activity 1. The allocation is directly tied to critical functions of the Director of Environment and the Permanent Secretary under the Environment Management Act. This adjustment ensures that the resources are appropriately aligned with the key responsibilities, which include issuing a

Prohibition Notice (PN), conducting compliance inspection, and managing appeal related to environment enforcement.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Chairman, for the same Implementation and Enforcement of the Environment Management Act, I would like to ask the Minister for Environment and Climate Change, looking at the scale of crisis, the number of companies before court or who are not following the environmental laws, is \$33,750 enough allocation for this looking at the complex of the issue at hand and the amount.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Chairman, absolutely, the amount is enough.

SEG 9

HON. I. B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, on the Purchase of Trashboom Equipment, forgive me honorable Minister if I am confused. Is this for trash? I am more concerned with the oil spill. Is there a different equipment that is used for oil spill? I just need clarification from the honourable Minister, Mr. Chairman.

HON. M. D. BULITAVU.- We have the same equipment too in terms of oil spill that is used to trap the oil in the spillage area. But this allocation is for Trashboom. It will be for three new ones in three key spots areas between Suva, Nausori and also in Nadi. We have 1 already in the Nabukalou Creek and since its installation in February 2025, we have managed to trap about 612 kilogrammes of plastics, debris and solid wastes which has been collected by the relevant company.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Sir, it has been clarified by the honorable Minister. Same question.

HON. R. R. SHARMA.- Mr. Chairman, it has been clarified by the honourable Minister.

Programme 1, Activity 2 – Environmental Management

SEG 1

HON. R. R. SHARMA.- Mr. Chairman, looking at the crisis at hand, the number of companies violating Environmental Laws, the question to the honourable Minister is again, Laws need to be amended but we need the capacity to action it. So, could he clarify that the amount allocated and in terms of staffing, is it enough to deal with the problem at hand?

HON. M. D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Chairman, the increase allocation for Personal Emoluments in SEG 1 that is asked for, is to support the recruitment of 3 new Senior Environment Officers. They re-conduct of environmental audits, site inspections and post approval monitoring for EIA approvals. This officers are critical, to ensure that developers comply with EIA and Wastes Disposal conditions.

Programme 1, Activity 3 – Waste Management and Pollution Control Services

SEG 4

HON. R. R. SHARMA.- For SEG 4, looking at the implementation of the Litter Act, \$48,930 has been allocated. Mr. Chairman, I would like to ask the honourable Minister, that the review of the fines issued needs to be looked at. I think that is of national interest. It is part of the National Development Plan (NDP) and Anti-Litter campaign. But could he clarify that if this amount is sufficient enough that has been allocated in this Budget.

HON. M. D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Chairman, the amount is sufficient and the Act will also be under review and welcome the honourable Member if he wants to give his opinion, once the review consultations is conducted, he is most welcome to come and attend.

Programme 1, Activity 5 – Resource Management and Partnership

SEG 5

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, just looking at some of these amounts that are budgeted here are fairly small on some of these Conventions, Biological Diversity \$1,000 and others. Are these just for memberships or what are these funds for? On the various Conventions that we have here - Convention on Biological Diversity (\$1,495), CITES (\$460), are these just membership fees or what is the money for?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Yes, these are our obligations to the Conventions. They include fees and also the other meetings that will take place in regards to these conventions.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, SEG 5 - Natural Resource Owners Committee, can the honourable Minister clarify that?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- That is on the National Resource Owners Committee (NROC). That is a partnership between the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change and the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs where we have in all the 14 provincial offices, *Mata ni Yau Bula* they are resource owners represented. They are our ears and eyes on the ground in terms of any environment or climate change issues. And every year we have the annual meeting with this *Mata ni Yaubula* conducted in conjunction with the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, where we come and hear out issues in regards to what is happening in the different provinces and from that we go up to a National Environment Council where they also voice the issues on the ground and that is for conducting that annual meeting.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, I see a significant increase of about \$70,000 plus from \$20,000 that was allocated last year to around \$97,000 this year. So, what changes have been made that necessitated this huge increase?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- It is not easy to get all the reps from the 14 provincial councils around Fiji and to conduct a full three day workshop it comes around \$40,000 and the last one we had the last two months we had only for one day. It was not enough, so that is why we asked for increase in budget for this one to cater for a workshop that will be done in the next financial year, which will be a two or three day workshop which will include their stay in Suva and also some allowances.

Programme 1, Activity 6 – Divisional Support Programmes (North and West)

SEG 1

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Chairman, looking at the allocation and looking at the activities it is under North and West, it is a wide coverage and capacity is needed. But in my opinion, the allocation is quite less if the Ministry is looking at dealing with issues and the backlogs that are there. There are all types of backlogs. Can the honourable Minister clarify this?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- SEG 1 - Personal Emoluments.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Chairman, the allocation is sufficient and that is also an increase in our capacity in the new recruitment that we will be undertaking and that is all factored in Personal Emoluments.

Programme 1, Activity 7 – Project Management and Services

SEG 6:

HON. J. USAMATE.- This subsidy for Naboro Landfill, is this an annual amount that we will pay year in, year out, or is this sort of an abnormal amount of \$978,000?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Chairman, the subsidy has been extended for a further three years from 1st August 2024 and this will be up till 31st of July of 2027. To assist the municipal councils and the two Local Rural Authorities in the Central division for the safe disposal and management of waste at the Naboro Landfill.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Follow-up question, honourable Usamate?

HON. J. USAMATE.- Sir, forgive my ignorance, but was there an original agreement for a subsidy up to a particular point in time at which the subsidy would stop? And if such, what was the basis for the extension? Just for my understanding.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Chairman, honourable Usamate this is really the subsidised gate fee for five town and city councils and one rural local authority. So, they actually collect the rubbish and then dispose the waste at the Naboro Landfill.

Programme 2, Activity 1 – Policy and Administration

SEG 7:

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, I would like to request clarification from the honourable Minister on the implementation of the Climate Change Act and particularly, the programmes that it will cover.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- *Vinaka!* Mr. Chairman,, the budget support on the implementation of the Climate Change Act remains in the next financial year. Last year, the funds were utilised for preparatory works required for the relevant parts of the Climate Change Act 2021 that was ready for enactment. This was implemented in April 2025 whereby 13 of the 17 parts of the Act were handed into force. In the next financial year, the Ministry will focus on implementation of relevant parts of the Act that entered into force as well as the remaining work or the other four parts that have yet to be enacted. To commence with the implementation and enforcement of the Act, appropriate guidelines, regulation strategies and indicators are required to be developed within the first year of its commencement.

This budget will be utilised as follows:

- (1) As per Section 10 of the Act, the Minister must establish Establishment and Performance Indicators to report on and review the implementation of the Act. \$140, 000 will be taken from that allocation;
- (2) Furthermore, \$60,000 has been allocated for capacity building for inspectors as per Section 14 of the Act;
- (3) Moreover, we intend to develop guidelines of how Ministerial and state entities take into account the consideration of Climate Change as an integral part of the decision making progress -for this, \$100,000 was allocated;

- (4) Additionally, the department is required to develop regulation for the sale of bulk fuel. Any person who imports bulk fuel into Fiji for distributing or selling, should provide information on binary basis to the Permanent Secretary responsible for transport. For the development of these regulations, \$60,000 has been allocated;
- (5) We also aim to develop a National Climate Change Communications Strategy which is a legislative requirement. Under the Act this must be prepared at the early stage to guide any Climate Change communication, education, advocacy and awareness on highly technical matters. For this, \$80,000 has been allocated;
- (6) Lastly, we have allocated \$122,000 for initiating the ground work of the development of a Registry regulation for carbon trading. This includes developing the scope and objective for legal and regulatory framework for the Fiji's Registry to record and track carbon trading transactions in a transparent manner for Fijian people participating in the trade.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We have a motion for an amendment from the Leader of Opposition and that is an addition to the proposed segment. A new segment to be SEG 8 and I will read the motion, that Head10 be increased by \$4 million in Programme 2, Activity 1 and the proposed new SEG 8 which will read Relocation of Communities. I will accept that as an amendment to the Activity 1 on Policy and Administration under that Head amendment. I know honourable Prasad was going to raise a point on that issue, were you?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I was, but I will take your advice on that.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The motion is before the Committees. Can we have a seconder?

HON. J. USAMATE.- I second the motion.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, we all talk about our vulnerability and I know that the honourable Deputy Prime Minister just addressed the Pacific Security this year and he was speaking along these lines. I raised this during my Budget response. We are a former COP President.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, you will recall that in IPU particularly, the role of Parliament is becoming very, very critical now in terms of, not only the provision of legislations but one of the key expectations out of all Parliaments now is the implementation by providing the proper resources to the Conventions and issues that we have ratified, so to speak. No one in here will deny how vulnerable we are and the devastating effects that climate change has caused on our communities. We have 40- plus. I have seen the response by the honourable Minister the other day that there are some more verifications that are going on in the work of the Relocation Task Force Committee. Although I have named it under relocation but if we have such a funding available to the Climate Change Unit, probably it will not just focus on adaptation. Relocation is an adaptation measure but the mitigation measures as well.

What is important, Mr. Chairman and Members of the House is while we are awaiting funding from other sources, I acknowledge the efforts made by the Ministry of Works, they are getting some adaptation funding but I think that has already been committed as well. The Government has to be seen to be leading and pouring. I like the theme of the budget, honourable Deputy Prime Minister, "*Security, Stability and Prosperity*".

We need to get our people out of the poverty cycle. From past experiences, Mr. Chairman, Sir, when their houses are damaged, when they are under threat because of the conditions that they live in, perhaps this is the biggest assistance that we can provide to our people so that they can focus on other things and move forward. If the honourable Minister may ask, where will you get the money from? As I have said, I have looked at Head 50 SEG 5, we are providing \$42 million for vehicles only - leasing, insurance and so forth. There are many other avenues and opportunities where we can just get slices from just Head 50 alone to fund this.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The floor is open for any comments.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Chairman, the idea is welcomed but there is a proper channel also where we have our Adaptation Trust Fund. The funds are normally channelled through that and we are in contact with the Ministry of Finance most of the time and also the mechanism that is involved, that is, funds that are released to our executing agents, especially for relocation is done by the Ministry of Rural Development. Just last three weeks we had given them \$3.5 million for the second phase for Nabavatu, Dreketi in Macuata.

For coastal erosion and other adaptation measures that the honourable Leader of the Opposition has talked about, when we come to the Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways in Programme 4, you will see that Waterways is divided into drainage, irrigation and also coastal erosion. That allocation is there and we are also in the talks with the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change and Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways on how we can work together in terms of the coastal erosion protection projects. But other help is there through Head 50 and we will be in contact with the Ministry of Finance who has assured us on this funding and the various projects that will come up. But the list will be with the Acting Minister for Agriculture and Waterways on the various projects and communities that have requested.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, I thank the honourable Minister for explaining the work that has been undertaken broadly by Government to address this issue of the need for relocation. As the honourable Leader of the Opposition has pointed out, a lot of people that are challenged by these issues of the need for relocation, when you talk about stability and security, this is the issue that permeates their minds every day in terms of how they are going to survive and move on in life. I can understand that there are always limitations to the money that is available at any one time to be able to do everything that you have. There is always an issue of competing priorities.

As we discussed yesterday, when we talk about the heritage issues at Levuka, the longer that we delay, we can see the impact that it has. One of the issues that we talked about Levuka, is because the delay in maintaining those structures, people are leaving. I think this is the challenge for us also. Over the past few years, this corridor has become inundated with people for various reasons - coming to Suva for education, coming to Suva to get a job, some of them now beginning to leave also for these particular issues.

I understand the challenges, but I think it is very important for us to see how we can address this much better for the people who are out there. I have been to a lot of villages lately, some of these villages that I have been to, relocation is not really the issue, maybe some terms of things into prior protection. I will just name a few - Narikoso has not moved very fast, it has gone stalemate. Dravuvalu Village, the village that I was brought up in, sea is getting in. Naivaka, my family's home is under the sea in terms of my family there. In Galoa in Bua and Nabasovi in Koro. I think the idea for relocation, but also to mitigate until that relocation can take place. This is one avenue that it can be done. There are other avenues, the avenue that honourable Bulitavu, but we need these funds because these are things that are impacting on people's lives today. I support that motion, Sir.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Chairman, I thank the honourable Leader of the Opposition. Three points I want to make and maybe the honourable Leader of the Opposition can decide what he wants to do with the motion after that. I agree fully, this whole issue about adaptation and addressing the vulnerabilities of people immediately and we are saying this in international forums as the honourable Minister pointed out.

Number one point, we have a number of allocations right through Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Public Works, Ministry of Maritime and Rural Development, Ministry of Waterways, Ministry of Sugar and a number of programmes right throughout these ministries is to deal with immediate livelihood-threatening climatic events that are taking place - saltwater intrusion, construction of small seawalls that will prevent intrusion into the villages and the crops. So all that funding, not amount that will cater for all the areas that we need, but I think the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change already has a list. For example, we have 700 sites or villages identified that need attention in terms of seawalls and drainage. Attempts have already been made and it is there.

The scale and the speed at which we can get more funding is what we are putting out to the funding sources globally, whether it is Global Climate Fund, through the Loss and Damage Fund, or the Adaptation Fund. These are, as you know, honourable Leader of the Opposition available. My gut feeling is that there is an element of urgency amongst the larger countries and those who are responsible for doing that, but as I said, that is something that we are pushing. Instead of creating another SEG here, and I do take your point, perhaps in the next budget, we could collapse everything and say, “this is purely addressing adaptation, mitigation issues. We could put all that under one Ministry, but gain, putting it under one Ministry can create, complications because the capacity is provided in different ministries. That is what we are trying to do.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- I will give the floor now to honourable Seruiratu for his reply.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, I do take note of the response from the Government side. This will not change the situation on the ground, particularly with coastal communities. They are different from the two relocations that are on the implementation phase right now. Nabavatu was because of the cracks, not landslide, that led to the Nabavatu relocation because of the Geotech recommendation. Cogea funded now by the Germans, because of the experience they went through after *Tropical Cyclone Yasa*. It is an experience in itself of what these villagers go through. I came into Vunidogoloa on a king tide, and experienced firsthand what the people are going through. This is why I am asking for this allocation. We can wait, but let us put ourselves into the situation that these people go through.

When I came into Vunidogoloa, Mr. Chairman, a few years back, that was led to the first relocation, and that led to the relocation guideline that was launched in Katowice in 2018 during COP23, I suppose. They were not moving because the seawater has come right into the village greens. They were just sitting inside their house and watched the water come under their homes. This is the experience that some of these villagers are going through. I hope that we can get some funding. This is a people-first budget, and we need to take this on seriously. I take note of what Government has stated, Mr. Chairman, but I still insist that we vote on this, given its importance and urgency.

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Mr. Chairman, just a comment to add some light to the discussions that are happening regarding relocation.

Mr. Chairman, for the information of this honourable House, the Fiji Taskforce on Relocation and Displacement has just met today, and one of the agenda items, a list of communities to be further assessed for relocation, and the update from the Manager Relocation Unit is that 43 communities have officially been endorsed today by the Task Force on Relocation for assessments to determine the need for relocation or *insitu* adaptation. That is just adding some light to the discussion.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- That appears to be the latest update, honourable mover of the amendment. Just take it on board but we will proceed with the voting on the amendment.

Question on amendment put.

Motion lost.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Parliament will now vote on Head 10 – Ministry of Environment and Climate Change.

Question put.

Head 10 agreed to.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- At this juncture, honourable Members, I think it is time for us to suspend the proceedings for lunch. Parliament will resume in one-and-a-half hour.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.56 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.36 p.m.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Can I just remind honourable Members that this is a Committee stage and you need not stand when the Chair comes in.

Before we move to the next Head, I would ask for a favour all of the honourable Ministers, that is, if you will allow the Head 12 to come now in view of, the honourable Minister for Immigration is not feeling very well, and we would like him to go home and rest as fast as he can. Please, if you will bear with me and I request that we go to Head 12. I do not hear any objection, thank you.

Head 12 – Ministry of Immigration

Programme 1, Activity 1: General Administration

SEG 8

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, can we have some clarification on the Upgrade and Enhancement – Suva and Nadi Safe Houses (\$202,500)?

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- Mr. Chairman, last year we were given \$250,000 for the upgrade. Most of it was used in the Suva Safe House at Nukulau Road, for those of you in the Veiuto area. We went back to have a look - \$240,000 is almost the money to build a new house and this renovating Government quarters. We were not satisfied, so that is why the Suva Safe House is still there. We are talking with Permanent Secretaries for the Ministry of Works and the Ministry of Immigration to try and get that contract, whoever was building that house, maybe redone to redo that. It is really not worth \$249,000, I think, what was used. The \$202,000 is for the Nadi Safe House, so hopefully we can complete it now. I cannot remember the street or where it is, but \$202,000 is for Nadi. Suva is still in there because we are not happy with the way they did the last one.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, perhaps just the follow up question from the same item. I know the honourable Minister, have asked on a few occasions about the detention facility, so in the meantime, in the absence of purpose-built detention facility, are these safe houses are serving the purposes? I just wanted clarification.

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- Eventually it will, but safe houses are more for migrants, asylum seekers, people that are abused that you want to keep. For now, those that we hold in custody, for example, for deportation, if it is well enough, yes. we will use it, but otherwise we will just defer to the prison. I mean that facility, forgotten the word, sorry. Otherwise, this will serve them when it is fully done.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Parliament will now vote on Head 12 – Ministry of Immigration.

Question put

Head 12 agreed to

Head 11 - Ministry of Information

Programme 1, Activity 1: General Administration

SEG 5

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, I just like to get some understanding on this Public Awareness for Media Relations and exactly what this entails. Is this primarily just for Government or is it across the board? It is \$225,000 in SEG 5-Public Awareness-Media Relations.

HON. A. BIA.- Mr. Chairman, just in terms of the allocation to the Public Awareness and Media Relations, this allocations caters for the PR consultants and the PR expenses as well. In case if we do need experts on issues relating to matters of national concern, and we do need assistance from the PR consultant, this budget is allocated for them.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, following up question. Does that also include speech writing?

HON. A. BIA.- Mr. Chairman, not exactly speech writing. We also have experts locally, they do speech writing for us, but in case if there is an issue that we do need expert in, then we will source funds in order to assist.

SEG 6

HON. V. LAL.- Mr. Chairman, I can see that the PSB grant is now extended to other service providers. I would like clarity on this. How? What? What is the monitoring process here? We just give the grant. Do we monitor how it has been used?

HON. A. BIA.- Mr. Chairman, even before the grant is given out, tender is conducted and through the tender these various media companies, televisions and broadcasting companies they write proposals as to how they will utilize the grant that is given to them. After the grant is given, then quarterly, they will provide a report as to how they have utilized the grant.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Is it like a tender where they competitively tender on different programmes and who gets to do it? Is it like a tender?

HON. A. BIA.- The tender and the funds allocated to each media company is dependent upon the proposal they provide during the tender.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Just a clarification. Again, Fiji Broadcasting Commission (FBC) appeared before Public Accounts Committee and the suggestion by CEO was that this grant should be considered as fees. So, are we still going to consider this as a grant to FBC or fees to the service that is provided by FBC?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Just for clarification, the FBC gets allocated at the Public Service Broadcast's grant. So, that is extended. In addition to that, this is Public Service Broadcast to other media organisations and it is part of an effort to create some level playing field because a lot of the other media also do a lot of Public Service Broadcasts. When you have emergencies, they continue to do that. So, it is getting different platforms to advocate on Government initiatives, campaign, whether it is NCDs, HIV, and drugs, so there is a much broader distribution of the campaign rather than just a Government station.

Programme 2, Activity 1: General Administration

SEG 9

HON. V. LAL.- In SEG 9, I can see here when we got back to SEG 4 as well I can see there is IT Infrastructure \$123, 750. In SEG 9 we also have \$263,964. Can you provide some clarity on the two?

HON. A. BIA.- Mr. Chairman, this allocation in SEG 9 compared to what the honourable have raised this is to cater for the upgrade of the National Archives Server plus the IT Specialists to store more digital records.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, that completes the activity under Head 11 – Ministry of Information.

Question put.

Head 11 agreed to.

Head 13 - Independent Commissions

Programme 1, Activity 1 : General Administration

SEG 6

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, the Online Safety Commission last year had a budget of around \$473,000, this year has gone up to \$1.5 million. Can you just have some clarification on what the huge increase is for?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- A good question honourable Usamate. Increases are due to the following. We are giving six new positions:

- team leader cyber and cyber specialist;
- prosecutor;
- communications advisor;
- graphics;
- online content specialist; and
- receptionist.

The idea, given the concerns that people have and the effectiveness of Online Safety Commission. When it was set up, it was basically in name. There was hardly any activity. People knew it was there, but it was not doing anything. So, we are trying to strengthen this and honourable Deputy Prime Minister Kamikamica, if he was here, he would tell you that the Online Safety Commission receives complaints from any individual and there are a lot of complaints to online safety commission.

Essentially, they did not have the resources, they did not have the people. It was the office, there was a commissioner, nothing was being done. So, this is an attempt to really give it some purpose and we agree that the idea of setting up Online Safety Commission was a good idea. But if you do not resource them, if you do not give them any teeth, then they are useless. That is the objective of the increase funding.

HON. J. USAMATE.- I thank the Government for doing that. As you know, there has been a lot of comments about whether or not Online Safety Commission has been able to do its job. Hopefully with this, we will be able to address it.

The other issue that I want to talk about is the Accountability and Transparency Commission. Currently, the three Bills that are going on through Parliament are likely to be passed towards the end of this year. One of them will be the Accountability and Transparency Commission. This figure of \$20,000 to make that Commission actually work might be a little bit less than what is needed. Would there be other sources of funding to help address that establishment of that Commission?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- As you know, this provision in the Constitution was there for eight years. It is now 10 years and it was never set up. You are right, once it is approved and comes into effect, then appropriate funding would be provided.

Just on the Online Safety Commission, honourable Usamate, there was no commissioner. The absence of commissioner was never appointed for a long time, there was no commissioner, and so nothing happened there.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Parliament will now vote on Head 13 – Independent Commissions.

Question put.

Head 13 agreed to.

Head 14 – Fiji Corrections Service

Programme 1, Activity 2 – Penal Institutions

SEG 7

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, can we just have some elaboration on the Yellow Ribbon Project? It is a project that has been in time for some while. I do not know how effective it has been, but just on this particular funding, if there be some elaboration on it.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Chairman, I think it is plain clear that the Yellow Ribbon is effective. It sends a clear message out there in the community. I think from time to time in the newspapers, in the social media, there are always positive stories of people whose lives have been dramatically changed, positively changed, as a result of some indiscretions with the law. In fact, this Saturday, it is a Yellow Ribbon Walk, where the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance will be the Chief Guest. It is a nationwide programme, all I ask is the full support of this House in terms of this project.

Programme 1, Activity 3: Enterprise

SEG 5

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, I just wanted to ask the honourable Minister on headings in SEG 5 which cover all materials for these programme under SEG 5 and SEG 6. It says materials for the different projects that has been carried out at Corrections. Do we have any monitoring on the income that is generated for the sale of these projects.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Most certainly. I do not have the figures. You may ask that in the next parliamentary session and we will provide the update.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Honourable Koroilavesau, before we used to have these trading accounts. We no longer have that because there are a lot of issues. Income is part of Government revenue now.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Please forgive me for my ignorance. I have seen Devo Heights both in SEGs 5 and 6. I am not familiar about Devo Heights. What is this, honourable Minister?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Devo Heights, they are both at SEGs 5 and 6.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Chairman, catering in rations available during the upskilling of FCS female inmates. Trainings are conducted daily, where they do the theoretical exercise, practical cooking, and to gauge the knowledge taught and assistance in catering during official functions for FCS. Specifically, to answer your question, that is what it is for.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Is that in Korovou?

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- That is where prison is.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- The female inmates.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- It is Devo or De vo?

Parliament will now vote on Head 14 – Fiji Corrections Service.

Question put.

Head 14 agreed to.

Head 15 – Ministry of Justice

Programme 1, Activity 1: General Administration

SEG 6

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, this is an increase in the allocation, Justice of Peace Allowance from \$30,000 to \$1,000,000. Justice of Peace, SEG 6, Yes? Can we have an explanation of that?

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Chairman, we are thankful to the Ministry of Finance. For the first time ever, JPs will be paid an allowance. They provide a very valuable service. What we have also seen in the period of the Coalition Government is the increase of appointment of JPs in the rural and the maritime areas. It is quite a challenge for those out in the maritime and rural to get this very important service. Also, part of it is the awareness training, and of course the expenses that comes with training.

The Justice of Peace programme is under gender-responsive budgeting. The current representation of JPs as of March 2025; males – 74 percent and females – 16 percent, a total of JPs today is 673 throughout the country. A re-assessment of the current budget has been made with an initiative to achieve the objective to promote meaningful gender equality within the justice system.

The budget is also to facilitate training workshops, seminars, purchase of JP stamps, logbooks, booklets. Females -109 out of the 673 services provided by JP. Witnessing and signing of important documents such as affidavit services and the likes. As I said, these are very important and critical services.

The appointment of an individual Justice of Peace carries with it a profound trust in the honesty, diligence and caution in performing their duties. I hope that, yes, \$100 allowance per month.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Can I have a follow-up question? Yes, I understand in the previous budget it was \$30,000.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- That was only....

HON. J. USAMATE.- Can I complete my question? In the previous budget it was \$30,000. I assume during that time, allowances were not being paid?

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Correct!

HON. J. USAMATE.- Now you are introducing allowances.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Correct!

HON. J. USAMATE.- Is that the major cause of the increase in this budget?

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Most certainly!

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- I think that is an issue to be thought about, because normally Justice of Peace do it out of the goodness of their heart. Now that you are paying allowances, I am not too sure. I have a bit of an issue with that, but I just raised that particular point. The answer to my initial question is, the jump is because you are paying allowances.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- No.

HON. J. USAMATE.- So what is it?

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- The jump came in as an initiative, understanding the need in the community. It was a consideration made by the honourable Minister for Finance, but time has also changed, honourable Usamate. Nothing is free now days.

HON. J. USAMATE.- I am trying to understand...

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Chairman, just to add what the honourable Minister for Justice said. You are right, the \$30,000 was just for training. In this Budget, we have decided that all JPs will get a hundred-dollar payment allowance. The jump from \$30,000 to \$1 million is to cater for the allowance. That is in support of what the honourable Minister for Justice said, that these people do a lot of work, and they spend a lot of time. There is a lot of need for JPs to do these things for the community. It is an incentive for those who are working, plus better service for our people.

HON. J. USAMATE.- That is what he had to say, instead of all this hullabaloo!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Honourable Usamate, that is not a very complimentary comment to the honourable Minister for Justice. He wanted to explain the reason behind the increase in allowance and the services, so I think you should appreciate that! Sorry!

Programme 1, Activity 1: Justice of Peace Allowance

SEG 6

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Chairman, just a clarification. I can see that there is a \$1 million allowance for Justice of Peace (JP), my question is, what about the Commissioner for Oaths?

HON. S. D. TURAGA.- Commissioner of Oaths are administered by the Judiciary. This is under the Ministry of Justice. I hope you understand.

HON. I. B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, of course we do acknowledge the \$1 million allocation and I am sure that Government already has the list of current JPs. My question to the current honourable Minister is, is there flexibility in this \$1 million allocation to cater for additional JPs, particularly in areas where there are none and if we can make submissions?

I just use one example; there were some issues concerning the Polytech in Nawaca, Bua. Came to our office, I visited the Polytech in Nawaca, and there were too many issues:

- (1) Joint card for FNPF and FRCS; and
- (2) Absence of JPs within the area.

So, if we do make submissions the honourable Minister, is there a flexibility in this allocation, just to cater for the additional needs?

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Chairman, if I may respond. Just to get to a better perspective, there is a \$100 allowance; the JP allowance is \$807,000. The total that was granted was \$979,000. I as of last week, put a stop to further JPs because of that, but I have also recognised the need in some areas, they may need a JP. Yes, approval will be made on that basis, but not as the rate that we were been granting.

HON. P. K. BALA.- We have just heard from the honourable Minister of Finance that his JPs will be paid \$100 each. Am I right?

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Yes.

HON. P.K. BALA.- How are you going to justify if a JP does 10 certification...

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. P.K. BALA.- It is not about *areh*!

(Laughter)

Listen! And another one does 200 certifications. So everyone gets equal \$100 each?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Let me answer that. Let me just say that, I think it is actually quite hilarious for honourable Bala, I mean he should appreciate that this the first time that the JPs are being given the \$100 flat allowance. Some do more than the others. A JP in Suva would obviously do more than a JP in Ba or Vatusui somewhere. So, we have not discriminated, based on how many forms they sign. All we are saying that, this is a token of appreciation, of the community work that they do on a regular basis and \$100 allowance. Allowance means not pay honourable Bala!

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Turaga, do you wish to add?

HON. S. D. TURAGA.- Yes. I think they have to acknowledge that out of the goodness of their heart, they want to serve the nation. I think we have to recognise them.

HON. A. A. MAHARAJ.- While this allocation is welcomed, just a small...

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- What?

HON. A. A. MAHARAJ.- ...suggestion, the issue is, though we have a lot of JPs around, people do not know where these JPs are located. Can we actually have some kind of online publications of names

and their addresses because sometimes, like for example, I stay in Vatuwaqa, I do not know if there is any JP present in Vatuwaqa or not. It is not publicised. So if this can be publicised...

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Make a suggestion!

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- No, no! It is just an example. I am not saying they are not, but I might not be aware and likewise at other places as well. So, if we are able to publish the names with their addresses, the general public will be able to know that there is a JP available whom they can actually go and attend to.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Point is taken.

Programme 1, Activity 1: General Administration

SEG 7

HON. J. USAMATE.- Just a request.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. J. USAMATE.- I think that cheering squad here is getting a bit too noisy. My question to the honourable Minister, Mr. Chairman, is on the implementation of administration of justice, which appears to me to be a new, I do not see it from last year's budget. Can we have an explanation of it from the honourable Minister?

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- I am sure you are aware of the Child Justice Act 2014 and the Diversion Programme? That is basically, yes, and it involves some multi-agencies.

SEG 7

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Chairman, SEG 7, honourable Minister, my question is relative to the digitisation programme. In the actual note before it, it refers to it going towards phase one of the Registrar of Titles digitisation initiative, along with the upgrades and the other three registries. As part of the digitisation initiative, will this digitisation mean that the public will have access to their details? For example, at the Registrar of Titles once it is completely digitised? I have a reason to ask that, because I may want to ask for government service.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- It is a phase digitalisation. The funds allocated is for the first phase. The study was done by ADB. We hope to reduce it from the five years to a lesser period so that we can see how it turns out, but basically to improve services and connectivity with its service providers, especially the customers outside the Registrar of Titles office.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Koya you wish to follow up on?

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Yes, Mr. Chairman, just to clarify, I mean, for example, when settlements are being done by law firms and they cannot access their details, will that mean that you will be able to do settlements online once it is completed?

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- I suppose so, because it is quite a very comprehensive programme.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Chairman, if I can just add to help honourable Koya, as you know, this thing has been talked about for years, even in the last Parliament we talked about it. There are

a lot of records which are not digitised, so if there is a transfer of title, they have to go and manually look at where the file is. So, this will be part of an effort to digitise, preserve, conserve and those that are not digitised will be available.

So that is the intention that all these documents would be available digitally and it will be easier and quicker for the office to actually provide and deal with the transfers. And let me just say, that some of you would be aware, you would be aware! Your previous government hired a Singaporean company and that was a complete disaster. It failed! Nothing happened! So, we are kind of starting to do this again and that is where the allocation is.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Yes, I think there is still a lot of complaints, honourable Deputy Prime Minister.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Yes, we know.

HON. J. USAMATE.- My question is, hold your horse! My question is, this digitisation, does it also include the digitisation of all the titles?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Yes, that is what I am saying. The Singaporean company that was hired by the previous government was a complete disaster. There was a lot of ways nothing happened. So, I am just saying that this is now, a start again to do that.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Parliament will now vote on Head 15 – Ministry of Justice.

Question put.

Head 15 agreed to.

Head 16 – Ministry of Policing

Programme 1, Activity 1 – General Administration

SEG 1

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, I know that it is a new Ministry allocated \$1.1 million on personal emoluments, SEG 1 and of course wages at \$108,000, SEG 2. I just wanted to know from the honourable Minister, in terms of the staffing at this stage for the new Ministry and the future plans. Also, if I may, honourable Minister, are there some that are probably on attachment or posted to the Ministry but are still funded by their previous agencies? I just wanted to seek clarification on those areas.

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Chairman, this allocated sum is to cater for the 25 new positions at the newly established Ministry of Policing. The 25 posts has two divisions, one is Corporate and the other is Strategic Policy. It is to enable the Ministry to function and operate like a Ministry.

If I may just use an example, we have a Director of Corporate Services and a Director of Policy. A point of interest is in the Policy part of it, where we have a Manager of Narcotics, Manager of Cybersecurity, and a Manager of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation. On the other side, on the Corporate Services are the normal posts. Part of your question, honourable Leader of Opposition, is really what the future holds. This is really to establish the Ministry.

The Narcotics part of it will develop, at this point it is supported by the Fiji Police in terms of its manpower and other specialist roles. Because of competing issues and priorities, we will have to start with this, in our agreement with the Ministry or the Minister of Finance.

Programme 1, Activity 1 – General Administration

SEG 7

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, I was going to ask about the Narcotics Bureau but I hear that they have a Manager Narcotics. Under this particular SEG, there is Narcotics Operations, and this is under Special Expenditures, so I will just request that the honourable Minister explain that a bit.

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Chairman, as I said earlier, under the approved strategy by Government on the Counter Narcotics Strategy for 2023-2028, will take five years to fully establish this Narcotic Bureau. The priority at this point in time, the responsibility of the Narcotics operations comes under the Ministry, and the manpower for that comes under the police. That is the arrangement that we have and plus there are other key agencies, which we have yet to receive their contribution.

The Narcotic operations, at this point in time, the focus is on information gathering, networking and establishing the operations of the unit itself. It is not a fully-fledged unit at this point, but we rely and depend a lot on the support from the Fiji Police Force and the Commissioner.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, I thank the honourable Minister for his clarification on the Narcotics Unit and of course its future as well. He probably is the best person because it was his baby from the very beginning and we hope that in due time the decisions will be made to have it as an independent unit as were the initial considerations. My question, honourable Minister through you Mr. Chairman, is on the Police Act Review. Are we going to get outside assistance as well like previously from UNDP and New Zealand?

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Chairman, the process has already started. The timeline that we should be able to have the Bill by August or September at the latest this year. We have a wide consultation not only nationally but beyond that. We are online on time with the timeline that we have prepared and we should have the first Bill by September before the end of this year.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, I just wanted to maybe just make a comment, still on SEG 7 Police Act Review and the Human Trafficking work as well because these were the key issues raised in the US Report on the anti-trafficking. There were comments made if this can be expedited because it has implications. I acknowledge Government for taking this initiative and I hope that it will be given the due attention and resources so that we can address some of the issues that are connected to this. I just wanted to acknowledge the Government, Sir.

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Chairman, if I may make a comment on that. It is really not the Ministry of Policing by itself. We work in close consultation or coordination with the honourable Minister for Defence and as many other NGOs and key agencies. I intend to make sure that we change the status as is already alluded to by the honourable Leader of the Opposition.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Just on the Police Act Review (\$56,250), is this the end of a process or the beginning of a process for the review?

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- It is really the beginning of the process.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We will now vote on Head 16 – Ministry of Policing.

Question put.

Head 16 agreed to.

Head 17 - Ministry of Civil Service and Public Enterprises

Programme 1, Activity 1: General Administration

SEG 6

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, I noticed that for the Fiji Learning Institute of Public Service that it commenced from last year with its establishment of \$300,000 and this particular figure of \$1 million. Last year was the establishment, can we just have some explanation of that \$1 million, what it will encompass.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Chairman, on behalf of the honourable Prime Minister, FLIPS has been established to provide learning programme that is designed to boost capabilities in the Civil Service. The aim is not just skill improvement but also to align the Civil Service with the contemporary advancement. So, essentially, staffing under the Ministry of Civil Service will be transferred to the new institute and funds for the of FLIPS, which the breakdown includes the personal emolument of \$659,000 there and other incidentals, so that is the allocation.

SEG 7

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, last year, for the Engagement of Local Tradesmen/Women, there was a slightly bigger fee. I know that this is one of the things that, if I am not mistaken, is when they want to retain old-aged people who have trade skills, this money is used to fund them. But there is a decline in that figure for this year. Can we just have an explanation of why the decline and if my understanding of what this money is for is correct?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- So, really the decrease is aligned to the expenditure trend. We looked at what was used in the current financial year, and also part of the component is the VAT reduction and those who have completed the work; that is the reduction.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, I wish to ask a question on Aid-in-Kind on the DRR Programme and Clean City Programme (JICA) with an (\$458,673). I just wanted to seek clarification on how is Government planning to utilise this particularly on the issue of the Clean City Programme. Very recently we have a lot of issues about dengue throughout the regions in Fiji. We used to have this intensive campaign on dengue and typhoid. Is part of this is going to be used for that purpose as well?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- The answer is yes.

Programme 2, Activity 1: General Administration

SEG 5

HON. J. USAMATE.- Can we just have some explanation for the rent for UN agencies (\$4,384,220)? What is the Government doing about the housing of the UN agencies in the future, if possible?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Essentially a slight decrease due to the VAT reduction, but as honourable Usamate knows very well, we pay our obligation to the UN. I know the previous government was having discussions on building a UN house, et cetera. That is still under discussion. When we are ready, we will let you know.

SEG 8

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, just on the Upgrade and Enhancement – Quarters (\$3,375,000). I just wanted to raise a question on it because later on we will discuss Head 18 as well. I see allocations as well given to the Ministry, which I will ask later. I just wanted to know on this upgrade of quarters that will be undertaken by the Ministry of Public Service.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- As the honourable Leader of the Opposition knows, this is one of the most difficult problems that we. Government quarters throughout the country were in a dilapidated state. So, the sum of \$3.4 million allocated to cater for the renovation and maintenance of Government quarters and public buildings in this budget is a very good start. In the last financial year, \$2.7 million and almost all of it has been utilised as of the middle of this month.

Programme 3, Activity 1 : General AdministrationSEG 7

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, on SEG 7 – Monitoring - Public Enterprises (\$22,500). If I can just have an explanation, it looks a bit small to me. Maybe just explain what that \$22,000 figure covers?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- One of the things that we have not had for a long time, and again, which should have been done, is the valuation of state-owned enterprises. Unless you do a proper valuation, and if you are thinking of divestment, then that is something that you have to do properly. This allocation is really to pay for the valuation of state-owned enterprises that have been identified or that have been suggested for divestment. So this allocation will go towards that.

HON. J. USAMATE.- In relation to that, as you say, you want to build up the balance sheets of these organisations, so you might want to sell them off. Is there a fund then to also help them to develop that or to get to that more favourable balance sheet?

You are monitoring them to a level where you might be able to hive them off? Is that what you mean?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Those are part of the things that will come up, with a proper valuation.

HON. J. USAMTE.- Alright, I will leave it there.

SEG 10

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, on SEG 10 the last item is Ship Building Revival Project (\$4,891,305). Does this figure represent the cost of the whole project, or just the initial work in the shipbuilding revival project? It just seems to me that it is quite small.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- It is the initial works. As the honourable Prime Minister has articulated this on many occasions, this is a start-up company, the Oceania Shipbuilding and Engineering Limited (OSEL). The short answer to your question, honourable Koroilavesau, is that this is an initial start-up.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, if I may ask then, I know after signing the enhanced *Vuvale* Partnership with Australia, the honourable Prime Minister did state in this Parliament that Australia is going to help us. Is that still on, honourable Prime Minister, and when are we expecting that to happen?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Yes, we have actually built donor funding in that, and that is the discussion that is going on, and Australia is very keen.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Parliament will now vote on Head 17 – Ministry of Civil Service and Public Enterprises.

Question put.

Head 17 agreed to.

Head 18 – Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management

Programme 1, Activity 1: General Administration

SEG 5

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Chairman, National Training Productivity Centre Levy (\$73,125). Can I ask, the honourable Minister for Rural and Maritime development to elaborate on that?

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Mr. Chairman, that is the 1 percent levy paid to FNU. The decrease in the expenditure is aligned to the 12.5 percent reduction in VAT.

SEG 6

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Chairman, the District Advisory Councillors Allowance (\$767,960). I can see that there is a slight change. Would the honourable Minister be able to tell us how many councillors are there? Is there an increase or decrease?

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- There is no change. There are 302 District Advisory Council (DAC) personnel, which consists of 14 DAC chairpersons and 288 members.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Chairman, I have seen there is a slight change in the figures, though it is very small. Would the honourable Minister be able to tell the reason for that? If you see the 2023-2024 Financial Year and compare with the current, you will find there is a slight change.

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Mr. Chairman, there is no change.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Chairman, if you look at the item in the last budget, I can see that the amount was \$767,040 and here it appears to be \$767,960, so there is a slight change. That is taxpayers money.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Let the honourable Minister answer this slight variation.

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- If there is any slight variation, we will get the answer to the honourable Member.

SEG 8

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, first of all, I would like to thank the Government for the money set aside for Vunisea Government Quarters but my question is on the Construction of Evacuation Centres (\$1,125,000). Request if the honourable Minister can tell us which evacuation centres this will be if possible? Construction – Evacuation Centres is \$1.1 million.

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- This is aimed to enhance community resilience. To date that there are a total of 94 new evacuation centres have been identified to be constructed.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Which particular evacuation centres are these?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- SEG 8 - Evacuation centres \$1.125000.

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- I will do the details, carry on DPM and I will do the details later.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- This is the 2025-2026 work programme. This is actually phased out over a number of years. To date, a total of 94 new evacuation centres have been identified to be newly constructed. 26 Central, 24 Eastern, 30 Western, 14 Northern and eight evacuation centres to be completed, 2 per divisions and 21 evacuation centres to be retrofitted, four for the Central Division, one in the Eastern Division, two in the Western Division and 14 Northern Division. So that is the allocation for this year.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Perhaps the honourable Minister can give us the list and the sum in the future.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- He can provide the list to you later.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- I am assuming honourable Minister, that you will provide the list of the information.

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Yes, I have the same numbers that the honourable DPM had already given, but I will give the list later.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, still on evacuation centres. I just wanted to clarify with the honourable Minister, if Narikoso in Ra and Matalula in Tailevu will be included in the list of new evacuation centres. Why I am asking is, because there was an allocation given by IOM and two are already in progress, Rokovuaka and Maumi, but these two seems to be have been left out from the initial four that was agreed upon and signed with IOM. That is funded by KOICA, it seems it has been deleted from the list. I just want to seek clarification on those two communities, Narikoso and Matalula.

HON. S.R. DITOKA.-Yes, Mr. Chairman, it is a decision that has been difficult to come by and it is from the IOM because they are other ones who are managing the projects. I think there was some disagreement at the *vanua* level at Matalula as to where to build it. So, this disagreement caused the delay and IOM decided to move on. I had in fact given my commitment to Matalula, that it would be constructed there, but later on, the IOM people changed that and moved on. They could not wait around because the funding requirements needed to be met. I have spoken to IOM and we will see if there are any other thing that we can do to get that fixed later on.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman, SEG 8, Construction of Specialised Cabling Suspension Bridge. If the honourable Minister can highlight on this because I can see it in Toge in Ba is also included in those three bridges. What type of bridge will this be?

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- These are cable foot crossings. They were damaged due to extreme weather conditions and due to the increase in frequency of cyclones that you experience. This will improve accessibility, safety, and community resilience, provide safe and reliable access across rivers and creeks especially during wet season when water levels rise. There are cable bridges. So, those are the three communities that were earmarked for those projects.

HON. P.K. BALA.- So, it is not a bridge, it is a walkway.

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Yes, it is a bridge, it is a cable bridge.

HON. P.K. BALA.- It is a bridge walkway.

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- No vehicles.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Bridge with no vehicles.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- It is not as big as the San Francisco Bay Bridge or something like that.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Yes, Mr. Chairman, back to what I raised when we were discussing Head 13, it is just the allocation given to the Ministry about the upgrade and enhancement of quarters. The question that I have, honourable Minister, is this allocation for institutional quarters or it covers all the other Government quarters within the division as well, because I know few years back when Mr. Parmesh Chand was still chair of the Public Service Commission (PSC), we were members of the housing committee from the divisions. There was a decision that we go away with institutional quarters and all quarters are Government quarters. Just a clarification on how this funding is going to be utilized because PSC has already have a quarters allocation and of course, Ministry of Rural Development.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- It is general question and budgets are given to different Ministries to actually do the upgrade but the idea of institutional oversight that is under the Ministry of Civil Service, the accommodation and so we have centralized that now.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- I understand, honourable Deputy Prime Minister, because in the divisions we have the Divisional Housing Committee which is chaired by the Commissioners. This is why I am asking so whether this allocation given to the Commissioner is for all the Government Departments within Vaturekuka, Vatunibale, Bua or just institutional quarters for the Ministry of Rural Development?

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Just for Vunisea there is nine existing quarters at the Government Station in Kadavu. They were awarded to two contractors divided in three clusters, based on building locations of the station just to ease project management and to give the approved contractor realistic timelines of 14 weeks to complete the works.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- You have answered my question, honourable Minister. So, it covers all quarters for all the Government Departments that are in Vunisea.

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- I believe that we cover some, not all.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- I understand.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- There is a motion by the honourable Vijay Nath. The motion is as follows; that Head 18 be decreased by \$61,050 in Programme 1- Activity 1- SEG 8 with respect to upgrade and enhancement quarters in Vunisea.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- He wants a reduction?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- And I thought it was already been explained, correct?

HON. V. NATH.- May I, Mr. Chairman?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Yes.

Programme 2, Activity 1: Commissioner Central

SEG 4:

HON. V. NATH.- That is coming in Programme 2, Activity 1, Mr. Chairman, SEG 4, Repair and Maintenance of Burial Grounds. I would propose the change here. \$5,625, which I believe should increase. In order to increase, there should be a reduction somewhere, so the one which you have read is a reduction I am requesting. It is an ongoing project, in fact. We can deduct from there and add over here, which need more.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- I am not quite with you at the moment. Maybe it is linked to Programme 2. Are you saying?

HON. V. NATH.- What I am asking, Mr. Chairman, that we take out \$61,850 from the Vunisea Government Station Project and add it to Repair and Maintenance of the Burial Grounds in all four divisions.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The Upgraded Enhancement of the Quarters Vunisea Government Station, which stands \$1,687,500, and you wish \$61,050 to be taken away from that amount and to be moved to Programme 2?

HON. V. NATH.- That is right, Sir.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Just to help, I think, Mr. Chairman, honourable Vijay Nath is totally confused. He knows that burial ground budget is also under Corrections and Multi-Ethnic. We have talked about the Vunisea quarters in this Parliament. I was there when I went Kadavu, I saw the state. On what basis he wants to reduce \$67,000, I cannot get it. It is just all confused.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Chairman, may I reply to honourable Finance Minister? I feel the honourable Minister is confused. My request is very simple. I am not asking for the whole chunk of money. I am just asking \$61,000 from that Vunisea project to be given to four divisions and is for repair and maintenance of burial grounds. These burial grounds hold more than memories, Mr. Chairman. It holds life of those who saved our own.

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Mr. Chairman, Point of Order.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Point of Order, honourable Kuridrani.

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Standing 100(4) – Debate on an amendment is confined to the Head, subhead or item to which the amendment refers.

You are referring to Programme 1, but you want to take it to Programme 2. You cannot do that.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- That is what I am saying, he is totally confused.

HON. V. NATH.- You are even more confused.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- I think honourable Kuridrani has a point. That you are borrowing from one Head or Activity to another. I think you cannot cross the boundaries in that respect.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Sir, it was the same issue that honourable Kuridrani has raised, that you cannot do that, and this has been said to by honourable Members of the Opposition, to voice it that he cannot do that.

HON. J. USAMATE.- I think all of this has stemmed from the notion that when you make your request for amendment to increase something or to decrease something, you have to specify where the money should come from. That is not required. All we do here is to say this should be increased or decreased. So what the honourable Member is trying to do, he is trying to go to the next step. His ultimate motion will be on the burial grounds. He is going to move the motion that we increase the burial grounds. It is not necessary for him to say where the money should come from, but he wanted to do that because that is what people have been saying. He is not confused. He knows what he wants to do, but he is trying to go to the next step.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- He is confused.

HON. J. USAMATE.- That is all this is. We do not need all the kind of explanation.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- I think everyone is correct, right?

(Laughter)

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Everyone is correct. Let me explain. You are correct, honourable Usamate, that he can do this motion as it is without saying the second part of it, which is correct as far as the others are concerned. You cannot transform Activity 1 to Activity 2. So, everyone is correct in that regard.

Now, we go back to the motion. Honourable Koya, do you wish to add to the confusion?

HON. F.S. KOYA.- No, I wish to make it easy for everyone. Sir, we all might have jumped the gun because I think his main motion is with respect to the graveyards, which is the next SEG. Because it was called earlier, it is now created the confusion, Sir. Again, everyone is correct. You take something from somewhere and you put it somewhere else. I think it was just called a little earlier, that is why it is all confused now. I think he wants to wait until the graveyard portion comes up.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Until he reaches the graveyard.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Let me put it to honourable Nath. Do you wish to withdraw this motion to await the next Activity?

MR. V. NATH.- Yes, Mr. Chairman, I do.

Programme 1, Activity 1: General Administration

SEG 9:

HON. J. USAMATE.- Just to explain what the Operational Mobility Vessel is.

HON. S.R. DITOKA.-The intention is to procure work boats for the disaster response to provide mobility in inaccessible areas, enabling transport of emergency personnel. Evacuation of affected populations and delivery of essential supplies. The aim is to ensure rapid deployment, effective operation in disaster response, enhance emergency response capabilities by enabling the transport of personnel, equipment and relief supplies and facilitating access to affected areas that are otherwise difficult to reach during disasters. Funding is provided based on quotations received. The boat will act as our roving emergency boat, targeting rural and maritime natural hazards and future events response.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, on the same issue. We need to economise because I see that Japan is also providing an Aid-in-Kind for a vessel. We will come to that when we come to the Ministry of Works allocation. There is a vessel provided by the Government of Japan to respond to disasters. So maybe an option to redeploy this fund somewhere else. I just want to make that point.

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Sir, that one is a much bigger ship. This one is a small one. Different purposes.

Programme 2, Activity 1: Commissioner Central

SEG 4:

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Chairman, I believe the question was earlier called, but it is interconnected now since we have declined the first one. The second one. I am requesting for repair and maintenance of burial grounds. Currently it is \$5,625. What I request is a change, an increase, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- In that regard, honourable Nath has moved an amending motion and that particular Head 18 – Burial Grounds be increased by \$14,375, that is in Programme 2, Activity 1, SEG 4. As I have said, with respect to Repair and Maintenance of Burial Grounds. Are there any seconder?

HON. J.N. NAND.- Mr. Chairman, I second the motion.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Nath, do you wish to elaborate on your motion?

HON. V. NATH.- Yes, Mr. Chairman, as mentioned earlier, what I request is, the amount currently given here, \$5,625 for Central Division, you will find similar is given to the Eastern, Western and Northern Divisions, which will go later. This amount is not sufficient.

If you look at Nausori/Central Division itself, we have Korovou, Raralevu, Muaniweni cemeteries. The honourable Minister for Finance is confused because Prison is looking after Nasinu and Suva. He must have himself visited Suva, and part of Suva is dedicated to *Sanatan*. If you look at the condition there, it is pathetic, Mr. Chairman.

It is a very peaceful place. You will often see some hooligans drinking there. Of course, a number of times the committee – apart from Raralevu Committee – have done excellent and marvellous work, we praise their work, and we have made a cremation centre there. But, when it comes to maintenance, they have to run around and look for money. A number of times they have requested people to assist them.

This is a very important place, Mr. Chairman, because here lies the echo of our love that time cannot erase. You all visit cemeteries, the burial grounds, and this amount had been there for a long time. I am requesting it to be probably increased to \$20,000 in all Divisions. This is where I initiated that we

get the money from the earlier request, but I withdraw that case. Now we are on this one here, so I request the honourable Minister for Rural and Maritime Development to please give a suggestion.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The motion is open to the floor for any intervention.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Chairman, I think honourable Vijay Nath really has a problem. He was not listening and I repeated twice. I said there are two other allocations. This is for four specific locations.

The Ministry of Multi-ethnic Affairs has allocated about \$2million for community projects, for community cemeteries and other ground components there. On top of that, the Ministry of Multi-ethnic Affairs has funding in the last budget and this budget as well for crematoriums.

Those rural cemeteries where they will not be able to build crematoriums, can access the funding support from the Ministry of Multi-ethnic Affairs. That is what I was saying to you earlier, honourable Nath.

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- This is only for three burial grounds in Korovou and Serua areas. We found that throughout the years this has been sufficient to take care of the work that needs to be done.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Chairman, the honourable Minister for Finance just mentioned that the money \$5,625 is sufficient, which I hope is true, because I know Muaniweni Cemetery got burnt down, maybe nine months ago and nothing has been done. Also, honourable Minister for Finance has mentioned that money is sitting somewhere. Based on those, I hope I put the request on record and therefore I withdraw my statement.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you honourable Nath, the motion is withdrawn.

Programme 2, Activity 4: Commissioner Eastern

SEG 4:

HON. V. NATH.- Could I request the honourable Minister to elaborate on this \$16,875 Community Capacity Building, Mr. Chairman?

HON. S. R. DITOKA.- The purpose of the allocation is to cater for training and awareness in government services and programmes in rural communities and other related capacity building related programmes implemented by the Ministry. It is on-going.

Programme 3, Activity 1: Rural Livelihood, Water, Sanitation and Community Access

SEG 8:

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, on the Community Access Roads, Footpaths and Footbridges - just like to know, whether this is specifically only for rural areas or whether it will cover also areas on the outskirts of places in Suva, places like Rokara Road at the bottom there where they have a creek, they want a Footbridge and also places like Savutalele or is it specifically for places away from the urban areas?

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Well, this is the dilemma we are caught in with the definition of what is rural. So what we have done is, we try to work as much as possible with communities who come to us, where we can help with their funds available, their savings, that is where we do lend a hand. But otherwise, it is strictly for the rural areas.

HON. J. USAMATE.- To stop people like from Rokara, Savutalele, all these people around these areas needs this sort of assistance. They can still apply through the DOs?

HON. S. R. DITOKA.- That would be the place to go.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- I am sorry, honourable Koroilavesau. Did I miss you on the other SEG? SEG 8?

HON. S. T. KOROILAVESAU.- Yes SEG 8. I wanted to ask the honourable Minister, on the allocation of Footbridges for \$2,250,000. Does that amount is allocated already to special projects or are you still considering for applications to be included in the Footbridges Projects? Why I am saying this honourable Minister, I must declare our interest, that in my village which crosses over to our school, that is about 6 villages, they actually go across by fibre glass punt. I am just asking if there is a possibility of seeing you later just to seek clarification, if this could be considered in this programme.

HON. S. R. DITOKA.- Certainly, it can be included in our programme but I am not sure on whether it could fit into this Financial Year, but certainly, we will have a look at that proposed project with PA Kadavu.

SEG 10:

HON. A. A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Chairman, can the honourable Minister elaborate on this to Grant to Self-Help Projects?

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- The programme is aimed to empower local communities by enabling them to take the lead in identifying and implementing projects that directly address the unique development needs. Funding provided for the Self-Help programme is shared amongst the four Divisional Commissioners. Government meets two-thirds of the total projects, while the applicant contributes one-third.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- So this is basically community projects? So, for example, if someone wants to open a canteen and those kinds of things as well?

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- There is a mix. There could be a community or there could be individuals as well, or groups or co-operatives, so it is not just strictly.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Chairman, could the honourable Minister update on the target for the financial year on this seafaring entrepreneur assistance subsidy? What target do you want to achieve, honourable Minister?

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- That is seafarers? The funding is allocated to subsidise the purchase of fully equipped and operational fibreglass boats for Fijian's living in the most isolated coastal areas of Viti Levu, Vanua Levu and the maritime islands. As it reached there, it is the seafarers entrepreneurship assistance or sea subsidy. It furthers our longstanding commitment to the self-starting culture in our maritime communities.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, the grant for the self-help projects. So, these projects, I assume that have already been identified now, but I would like to know if these communities here around Suva, they are not in the rural areas but on freehold land in swamp areas. There is a place called Waikerekere here, the Solomon Islanders, Samoan, Tongans would those people be able to apply for those sorts of grants?

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- I think, we let our District Office (DO) Suva talk to them to see what possibilities are or the Ministry of Multi-Ethnic Affairs may be the more suitable ministry they can apply to.

Programme 3, Activity 2: Rural and Outer Island Development

SEG 10

HON. J. USAMATE.- On the rural and outer island programme, if the honourable Minister explain what is going to be the coverage under this budget for this programme?

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Funding is allocated, Mr. Chairman, for economic development in the rural and maritime areas. The programme aims to enhance the livelihoods and increase market access opportunities and services in the rural and outer through the resource based sectors including agriculture, fisheries and for entry and improve telecommunications in blackspot areas.

Programme 5, Activity 1: Policy and Administration

SEG 10:

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, request the honourable Minister if he is able to provide the areas in which the assistance will be provided in this financial year. If he does not have the list, I could request him to send it later, but I would like to know, for the Rural Housing Assistance Scheme.

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- What was the question again, honourable Usamate?

HON. J. USAMATE.- The list of people that will be assisted.

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Yes, I think that would probably be a Parliament question. I can give you the schemes that we have and where we provide the assistance to but the list of people that have already applied for, that is still being processed.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- That concludes Head 18. Parliament will now vote on Head 18 - Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management be approved.

Question put.

Head 18 agreed to.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, Parliament will suspend its proceedings for a break. Parliament will resume in half an hour.

The Parliament adjourned at 4:15pm

The Parliament resumed at 4.52 pm.

Head 19 – Republic of Fiji Military Forces

Programme 1, Activity 1 – Project and AdministrationSEG 7:

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- To the honourable Minister, on the Review of the Military Act. I know that a lot has been done previously, but can the honourable Minister give a definite answer as to when they expect this to be completed and of course tabled to Parliament, if necessary.

HON. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Chairman, respectfully noted by the honourable Leader of Opposition, the RFMF Act has been reviewed and approved by Cabinet. It is now with the Office of the Solicitor General to complete the work that needs to be done before it is returned for enactment.

SEG 8:

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, just a simple question to the honourable Minister. There is an item - New Joint Logistics Command Warehouse. I just wanted to ask where will this be built?

HON. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Chairman. This allocation is rightfully noted by the honourable Member, is the new RFMF warehouse for Humanitarian Aid and Disaster Relief (HADR) to centralise and monitor the inflow. At the moment the RFMF is renting outside. As we now know, they are centralising the supplies and stores of the RFMF. We have engaged a lead consultant to have a look at it, which is Herman Construction for the project and the project planning and designs are currently currently in progress. One of this warehouse is already in Nabuni, but they are going to also relocate the second one. So, let me come back to that. I know this allocation has already been done, but we got to make the determination where that it is going to be built..

HON. PROF. B.C.PRASAD.- In army land in Bayview Heights, That is where it is going to be.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, the FOB North.

HON. P. TIKODUADUA.- This is the one for the Navy, Malau.

Programme 1, Activity 3 - 3 FIRSEG 5:

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, just to the honourable Minister. There is an item on SEG5 Rapid Response Infantry Combat Group. Where is this established? If it now exists, if it is not, where will they be stationed?

HON. P. TIKODUADUA.- This is already an existing unit. They are at QEB. It has been there for actually quite a while now.

Programme 1, Activity 5 - Naval DivisionSEG 4:

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, I am looking at the repair and maintenance of vessels. I had put a suggestion to increase the amount that has been allocated for repair and maintenance of vessels.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- You are moving a motion, honourable Koroilavesau that Head 19 to be increased by \$662,500 in Programme 1 Activity 5 SEG 4, the maintenance of vessels. That is the motion submitted by honourable Koroilavesau. Is there a seconder?

HON. J. USAMATE.- I second the motion, Mr. Chairman.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, I just feel that with the limited number of vessels that the navy has now, it is imperative that they are maintained to be able to operate and cover the operational area within the Economic Exclusive Zone, let alone the islands within Fiji. The responsibility given to the navy is quite wide and it catch thugs from fishing vessels, patrols and to search and rescue. I have witnessed a vessel that has been lying in Stanley Browne Base for over a year now, *Kacau*. It has not been able to operate. With my understanding, I think the main engines have not been repaired. Let the vessel operate again and carry out the obligation and the responsibilities that have been given to the naval division. I just feel that with the limited vessels, maintaining them will lengthen the time they spend out see at sea. That will be an advantage to the naval division. Unless if there were more vessels, then you have a sort of a reserve that is able to be deployed for the responsibilities that is given to them.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The floor is now open for any comments.

HON. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Chairman, if I may. For two budget years, we have consistently granted the same amount. We had an issue with '*Kacau*', but that is about to finish now. They had bought the new engines. Just by way of background, as you know the '*Kacau*' came from a Chinese donation, but it is taking forever for the Chinese to sign an MOU on its repairs. The Government has come along to repair it and it is almost ready to go back in the water. In terms of the Pacific Patrol Boat (PPB) and the new Guardian Class, the support arrangements under DCP for what used to be the under the Pacific Patrol Boat programme, there never used to be a maintenance and a supply chain provided by Australia to look after the boats. Now with a Guardian Class they have experts including funds and now they are establishing this maintenance places/workshops here in Fiji for the benefit not only for Fiji, but also in the Pacific. That is going to be based here in Fiji in the not-so-distant future. Those really will help the Navy.

HON. V. LAL.- Mr. Chairman, on the same SEG, I can see there is a purchase of software Starlink \$122,390. I am asking, Sir...

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Virendra Lal, we are talking on the motion. Are we still on the motion? Any comments on the motion.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, thank you for assurance by the honourable Minister. That will allow the vessel that is operated by the Republic of Fiji Navy carry out its responsibilities. I would like to withdraw my motion.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Koroilavesau has withdrawn his motion. Honourable Lal, do you still wish to speak on SEG 4?

HON. V. LAL.- SEG 5, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We will come to that in a minute.

SEG 5:

HON. V. LAL.- Sir, I would like to know, are you purchasing the whole Starlink software? Or is it just buying the devices on the last item on SEG 5 – Purchase – Software (Starlink) (\$123,390).

HON. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Chairman, there is an allocation of \$123,390. The \$109,680 is to cater for the purchase of Starlink. Starlink would enhance the data communication between Navy patrol boats and deploy personnel on the ground in remote areas, wide redundancy connectivity for the Maritime Essential Services Centre (MESCC). Of course, I am not going to describe the background behind Starlink, but it is a one-off purchase.

HON. F.S KOYA.- Mr. Chairman, honourable Minister, because it is a purchase of software from Starlink, before this was actually done, and because it is our military, were there security checks, et cetera, that are required to be done with respect to software that is operating within the realms of our military?

HON. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Chairman, Starlink is an unclassified source of communication, which everyone gets to use. This is procured locally, where everyone is purchasing it. So, it is just really to help communication within the ships themselves, and also with the new Maritime Essentials Service Centre, and also out in the remote, when the boats go out at sea.

Programme 1, Activity 5: Naval Division

SEG 7:

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, honourable Minister, significant increase in the Maritime Surveillance Centre Operations, from \$50,000 to \$1.6 million. Could you kindly explain the reason behind the significant increase?

HON. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Chairman, this allocation will cater for the operations of the Maritime Surveillance Centre, the new office, as you know, was commissioned by the honourable Leader of the Opposition back in 2017. This is an upgrade from the Search and Rescue Information System (SRIS) to now a Vessel Monitoring System (VMS), Automated Information System (AIS), Flight Radar Monitoring System (FRMS), Disaster Monitoring System (DMS), and Search and Rescue Management Planning System. These are all included in this particular procurement.

This has significantly improved the planning and monitoring of natural disasters, search and rescue operation, illegal fishing, border security threats, and transnational crime. Funds will be used for the payment of software licenses as I have already described for the different areas.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, just a follow-up question. This has been relocated to MESCC in Lami or still in Stanley Brown base?

HON. P. TIKODUADUA.- No, no. It is now in Lami.

Programme 1, Activity 5: Naval Division

Aid-in-Kind

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, last year, it was Procurement of Patrol Boats (Japan). This year is Official Security Assistance for Fiji Navy. Is it still the same thing?

HON. P. TIKODUADUA.- Sorry, say that again, honourable Leader of the Opposition.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Last year, it was under Aid-in- Kind - Procurement of Patrol Boats. I know that there were plans for smaller, the Rigid Inflatable Boats (RIBs). If you can just clarify this, because in this year's assistance, it is Official Security Assistance for Fiji Navy, again from Japan.

HON. P. TIKODUADUA.- Yes, that is correct. Those procurement of those RIBs and other small patrol boats for the Navy, those are still coming through as Aid by the Japanese. We have also funding allocated for that to be able to get the boats across here to Fiji. But those boats are still there. We have not received them yet, but we will receive them in time.

Programme 2, Activity 1: Command Joint Task Force

SEG 9:

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- On Contingent Owned Equipment (\$1,125,000). Honourable Minister, I see a huge reduction. It was \$5 million last year. Can you just briefly explain the reason behind the huge reduction in COEs?

HON. P. TIKODUADUA.- This particular allocation essentially is for the third phase of the COE procurement. Fiji currently receives reimbursement only for four operational items right now deployed intermission area out of the 31 items. We are trying very hard, and we are on our way to wholly supply for our contingent so that we get the reimbursement for it under the UN Reimbursement Guideline.

This programme supports Fiji's efforts to maximise the financial return on the military strategic assets deployed in the mission area. This particular procurement, \$1.1 million, is assigned to procure the new contingent on equipment for the Bushmasters, personal protective equipment, weapons and ammo, and some other Military vehicle. I think I will leave it there unless if you want some other clarification, honourable Leader of the Opposition.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Parliament will now vote on Head 19 – Republic of Fiji Military Forces.

Question put.

Head 19 agreed to.

Head 20 – Fiji Police Force

Programme 1, Activity 1: Police Head Quarters

SEG 7:

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, I would like to seek clarification from the honourable Minister, on the heading of Women in Policing with the amount of \$56,250. I just wanted to know why are women being given a separate head in this SEG 7 is it different from the allocation that is given to men?

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Chair, this particular funding is really for the advocacy of women in Police and for the additional information for the Members of the House. At this point in time, the women account for 26 percent of the total Fiji Police Force of 4840. In addition to that, out of the 25 police officers that are serving abroad on UN missions, 11 of the 25 are women. This particular funding is to promote the advocacy not only at the national level, and they are also involved at the regional level. Right now, Fiji sits as the Chair of the regional body that looks after for the advocacy of women in policing.

SEG 8:

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, just a question to the honourable Minister on the upgrade and enhancement of operational building. Almost the same allocation last year, but is this for Suva areas only or outside Suva as well? Obviously you are well aware of Labasa particularly I am just interested in where this allocation will be directed.

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Chairman, for this SEG along there was a reduction of 75,000. It is to continue with the ongoing upgrading and the maintenance of police post stations and quarters all over Fiji, specifically, we have plans to build from this funding here 3 community posts in Daria in Vanua Levu, Vuna in the southern part of Taveuni and Kavala is identified as major supply points for drugs.

And you will note later in one of the activities, there is also funding over \$1,000,000 that is for minor works that is intended to supplement these two. Right now, we have ongoing work in Nalawa and also in the Northern Eastern Division for some of these works.

SEG 8:

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Chairman, just a question on that because we went through the Fiji Police Annual Report, there was a need for a police post in Kavala, Kadavu and Beqa. Is this allocation part of that or it will be considered later?

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Chairman, I just mentioned that Kavala is also included in this. There are other competing issues and a priority in our plans for community engagement are really community posts the honourable Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance, is fully aware of our plans for the building of community posts.

SEG 9:

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Chairman, just a clarification for the honourable Minister for the CCTV cameras. There is a \$450,000, is this just within the Force or would this be at certain hotspots that you feel like crime rates are high. Just clarify on this please...

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Our strategic plans, if we have that capability within the next few years and the ability to have the eyes in all over Fiji including strategic posts like the bridges et cetera but the priorities right now is really to include the hotspots areas.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chair, I was going to ask the same question on CCTV too.

Programme 1 Activity 3 - National Intelligence Bureau

SEG 7:

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, just a short clarification from the honourable Minister on the SEG 7, Intelligence Bureau Agents Allowance. Does this refer to the allowance for the duties that they perform or any special equipment that they need to carry with them in the performance of their duties?

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Would you repeat that question again, if I may?

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Intelligence Bureau Agents Allowance. I just wanted to have a clarity, is this allowance to be added up above their normal Police salary if they become agents or is it special equipment that they need to carry with them in the performance of their duties? Mr. Chairman, this is to do with agents that are employed out there.

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, this is to do with agents that are employed out there.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Not Police?

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- No, they have got a separate allocation altogether. This for agent that provide information and so forth.

Programme 1, Activity 6: Western Division

SEG 5:

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Search and Rescue Services, honourable Minister, you have it for the North. We are going to cover the Northern after this and Western but none in the Southern and Eastern Divisions. If you can just explain, why?

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Chairman, the Divisions that are here close to Central Division are supported from here. They have some minor capabilities but basically, they are supported from the capabilities that is here in the Southern Division and also with the Central Waterpol Policing and they can move with these capabilities around.

Like the other divisions like in Northern Divisions they have capability but limited. I have seen the plans that are in place that there is a need to improve and expand our ability to operate effectively in the maritime zones.

Programme 1 Activity 9: Support Services

SEG 5:

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Can the honourable Minister, just clarify on the number of containers he wishes to buy and where is going to be stored for the exhibitions?

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Chairman, this is the first time that we are given containers. These containers are to support the increasing number of our exhibits especially drugs. These are temporary measures. There is a long-term plan in place by the Commissioner to have what we call exhibit warehouses to acquire a piece of real estate and build big warehouses that we can secure all these exhibits. So, these are temporary arrangements. The containers, I do not know the numbers, but I can tell the honourable Member later but it is a first-time approval to the need at this point in time is to really secure some of these exhibits as evidence is important before they are further destroyed.

Programme 1, Activity 10: Central Police District

SEG 1:

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, I just wanted to ask the honourable Minister on the various activities that we have gone through. Under SEG 1, it consists of the personal emoluments for divisions, and I found that there seems to be different amounts that are catered for in the divisions. I just wanted clarity because I see that you have Nasinu Mobile Force, and then you have Central Division. Can you just explain how you quantify it?

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Activity 1 is really where the central headquarters of all our funding are placed. The other, from 1 to 10 are those what we call, those units from the north, east and the central, and they vary in sizes. Therefore, you will note in some of the funding that is allocated vary significantly in many, many ways, because of the number of sizes, the activities - so it is planned according to that. If the divisions is a huge one, you will expect a larger portioning of their budgeting and that includes what you have just mentioned, honourable Member.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, can I just ask him a follow-up question? So that means in the Western Division, the funding for emoluments will cover a wider area?

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Yes, it is one of the biggest divisions.

SEG 4:

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Chairman, Fuel and Oil - Vehicle (\$90,000). In my speech in response to the Budget, I did mention, especially in Koronivia, was a red zone and turned to green - excellent work done by the police officers.

I mentioned a number of times, they do not have motor vehicles and borrow it from others, at times from Baulevu Police Post. Can I request the honourable Minister if a vehicle can be allocated for Koronivia, because we still want to see that this area becomes a green zone. There is a bypass road now being done from there to Naulu; that will be another problem.

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- That is noted honourable, but the question you had raised is to do with fuel and oil. This fuel and oil is to do with the central police district here in Suva, and the Eastern Division, we can consider that separately when we talk about the Eastern Division.

Programme 2, Activity 1 – Overseas Peacekeeping Operations

SEG 1:

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, on SEG 1, if the honourable Minister can just again clarify on the number of personnel of Fiji Police Force who are on deployment. If I may also raise this question, honourable Minister, about our standby arrangement. Is the Fiji Police Force part of our BIT component under the standby arrangement and what sort of arrangements do you have in place in terms of preparations for any emergency call up?

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Chairman, the deployment at this point in time has been reduced. Today we have 22 deployed in United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) in Sudan and three deployed in United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) also in Africa. So out of that 25, as I said earlier, 11 are women on the operational theatre.

On the second part of your question, honourable Leader of the Opposition, standby arrangements. I can give you a more detailed brief on that later, but I know when I was the Commissioner, we used to have that. I will have to get the detailed brief to you later, if that is acceptable to you.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, a general question to the honourable Minister, I may have missed it, but, there are plans to decentralise and upgrade as well. Accommodation is a big issue in rural areas. I will use Tukavesi, for example, honourable Minister, I know you are well aware of this. What is the plan and what sort of allocation are we looking at in terms of supporting, particularly those outside the town areas?

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Chairman, maybe I could give those briefs in my Ministerial Statement later on in one of the Parliamentary sittings.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The Parliament will now vote on Head 20 – Fiji Police Force.

Question put

Head 20 agreed to.

Head 21 – Ministry of Education

Programme 1, Activity 1: General Administration

SEG 6:

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Chairman, this is in regards to the allocation of \$0.5 million to School Management Association. Can the honourable Minister tell us how this money will be utilised and the accountability mechanisms that will be put in place to ensure that \$0.5 million is utilised effectively for the stated purpose?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Chairman, this is a first allocation for this year; the first allocation that has been provided in the budget - \$500,000 and it will be treated just like every other grant. They will be needed to provide and sign the agreement before funds are disbursed.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Hem Chand, you have a follow-up question?

HON. H. CHAND.- No, Sir, but I have another question on SEG 6. This is in regards to the School Scouts Programme. Last year, the School Scouts Programme was allocated with \$98,000, but this year I cannot see anything for the School Scouts Programme. Can the honourable Minister provide clarification on this?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Yes, it will be sourced from within.

HON. H. CHAND.- So, there will be money to the Scouts Association.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Yes.

SEG 7:

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Chairman, there is an allocation of \$1.125 million for Research Council. Can the honourable Minister elaborate on the establishment and the purpose of this Research Council? I think this is something new.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Chairman, I will probably discuss the purpose Research Council once it has been endorsed by Cabinet. But, the allocation is there for the setup of the Council, in terms of membership, the Council members who will be able to operate the National Research Council.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Chairman, just to add, he obviously was not in the last Parliament. Those who were there would recall that this National Research Council Act was passed by the FijiFirst Government, but the Council was never set up. There was no allocation for any funding. I remember that we supported, there was a bipartisan support for it. At least we are now giving it an effect.

Programme 1, Activity 2 - Library ServicesSEG 5:

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, I just wanted to ask the honourable Minister on Special School Library Scheme (\$56,250). Can he explain where this allocation will be forwarded to? It is the first time. Does he have a list of special schools that will be given this allocation or is it for all schools?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Yes, Mr. Chairman, there is a list of special schools, around 13 at the time being.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- For all special schools?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Special schools. So, this allocation is to purchase special resources such as the big books, charts, tables, furniture and other special items for setting up school libraries in those special schools.

Programme 1, Activity 3 - Information Communication and TechnologySEG 7:

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Chairman, there is an allocation of \$45,000 for Fiji Education Management Information System (FEMIS). Can the honourable Minister elaborate on this allocation for FEMIS?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Chairman, the allocation is for the training, conducted by the IT Department in the Ministry in the Northern and Western Divisions. With this budget, the training will also be extended to other divisions and districts under the Education Ministry. The Eastern Division and some of the districts in the Central Division.

Programme 2, Activity 2 - Non-Government Primary SchoolsSEG 6:

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Chairman, I can see that there is a decrease of \$0.75 million in the Free Education – Non-Government Primary Schools (\$33,750,000). Can the Honourable Minister inform us if there is any change in the free education grant formula for primary schools?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Chairman, there is no change. The allocation is based on criteria that needs to be met by the respective schools on the provision of financial statements, the AGM minutes, and that is what they are required to do before the dissemination of grants. So, there is no change.

Programme 2, Activity 3 – Special EducationSEG 6:

HON. P. K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman, I raised this last year and I think the honourable Minister for Finance has also visited this school – Ba Special School which was destroyed by fire and there is a grant around \$1 million. I just want to know whether the grant also includes to rebuild the Ba Special School.

HON. A. M. RADRODRO.- This is part of the normal grant. This is specifically directed to Special Schools, so, in addition to the Free Education Grant.

HON. P. K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman, I am also talking about the Special School, so I am just asking whether the construction to rebuild that Ba Special School – is that grant also included in this or no?

HON. A. M. RADRODRO.- They have to meet certain criteria, if they satisfy the certain criteria within the Ministry of Education policies, then they can give answer to the question, Mr. Chairman.

SEG 7:

HON. S. T. KOROILAVESAU.- Just a simple question to the honourable Minister on item - Verifications for Students with Disability, who will do this verifications?

HON. A. M. RADRODRO.- The Verifications for Students with Disability in schools are usually conducted by the Ministry of Education officials, especially those that are in-charge of ECE and SIE.

Programme 2, Activity 4 – Early Childhood Care and Education

SEG 7:

HON. S. T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, just an explanation from the Minister of Education on the last item on the list. This is new. Can he just briefly explain the Early Intervention and Detection Training?

HON. A. M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Chairman, this is a new allocation to cater for the training of teachers at the ECE level on how to utilise the reviewed Disability Guides and tool kits provided to schools. Training on the early detection and intervention at ECE level on collaboration with the disability service providers – like Project Heaven, Pacific Autism Centre and National Council for Persons with Disabilities (NCPD). This will be rolled out in 2025 academic year.

Programme 3, Activity 3 – Non-Government Secondary Schools

SEG 6:

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Chairman, SEG 6. In the last Budget, there was an allocation of \$2 million for Location Allowance, but 2025-2026 Budget, I cannot see any allocation for the Location Allowance. Can the honourable Minister provide an explanation on that?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Prasad, may be you can help.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Location Allowance is there. An allocation of 2.2 million. Programme 3-3 (1) Location Allowance.

HON. H. CHAND.- I cannot see anything on the Location Allowance, honourable Professor Prasad.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- If you look at Programme 3, Activity 3 - Non-Government Secondary Schools under SEG 1 you have Personal Emoluments, FNPF, Location Allowance, Relieving Staff, before SEG 2.

HON. H. CHAND.- That is, last year honourable Prasad.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Estimate 2025-2026 \$2.2 million

HON. H. CHAND.- No.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- What we have honourable Minister is that SEG 6 has only two lines:

- (1) Free education – Non-Government Secondary Schools: Years 9-13;
- (2) Per Capita Grant – Boarding Schools.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- That is all part of Programme 1, Activity 1, it is still part of the \$15 million.

HON. H. CHAND.- I am talking about the Location Allowance. So where is it?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- It part of Programme 1, Activity 1, SEG 1.

HON. H. CHAND.- Which SEG?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- SEG 1.

HON. H. CHAND.- No, but it is not mentioned. That is why I am raising this because....

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- If you had raised it from that time, we would have explained it to you.

HON. H. CHAND.- No, you are not answering the question. I think he is not answering, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- My understanding from the honourable Minister, it is in another, we have already passed it. Correct?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- It is part of the....

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- No, Mr. Chairman. If I may help. In this year's Budget Estimates under SEG 1 it is not broken down into the components. So that \$165 million has that Location Allowance in it. Because in last year's Estimates, when you have Personal Emoluments, then you have FNPF, you have Location Allowance, you have Relieving Staff et cetera. This year it is just the figures.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Chairman, the reason why I asked, was because last year it was specific. \$2 million Location Allowance, that is why I raised this.

Programme 5, Activity 1 – General Administration

SEG 5:

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, under SEG 5 you have an amount of the Development of the National Qualifications Framework of \$13,000. There was a figure of \$10,000 last year. Now I am aware that the National Qualifications Framework is housed in the Higher Education Commission and that it was first developed maybe 10-12 years ago, so I am not too sure what this amount is, given that the qualification framework is already in existence and it is supposed to be housed in the Higher

Education Commission. Whether this is just money for updating it or what is this money? Because it is \$10,000 per year.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.-Mr. Chairman, with consultation with the Higher Education Commission for certain programmes that are offered at the Ministry of Education. Level 1, 2, 3 certificate programmes to be developed with the Ministry of Education. National Certificate in hospitality, in fashion, manufacturing, design in fabrication and welding, automotive and mechanic, joinery and interior finishes plumbing, sheet metal, electrical fitter, national certificate in baking and pastry and the list goes on. I think there are about 13 certification programme that will be given at the Ministry of Education facilities.

HON. J. USAMATE.- You are submitting the Ministry of Education programmes for approval by the High Education Commission?

HON. H. CHAND.- I have a question on SEG 5 that is on development of national TVET policy. Last year, \$50,000 was allocated for the Development of National TVET policy and this year, \$56,250 has been allocated. My question to the honourable Minister is what is the progress on the development of the policy?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- The first stage of the development of the policy is completed, now we are left with public consultation and the validation process, as you might be aware, and also the submission to Cabinet for approval of the policy.

SEG 6:

HON. I. B. SERUIRATU.- I just wanted a clarification from the honourable Minister. You still have this vocational grant, could you please explain.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- This vocational grant is paid to schools, to all the students who undertake vocational training at \$110 per student per annum and for this allocation, 25 new vocational centres will join the existing number of centres and there is expected to be an additional 1,000 students. We will try and arrange this with the number that will be available in schools.

HON.J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, may I ask a question in relation to that?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Let me go to honourable Alvick Maharaj first.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- I wanted to seek the same clarification about vocational grants which has been answered.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Okay, now, honourable Usamate.

HON. J. USAMATE.- One of the issues that we have is the products coming out of these institutes do not meet the requirements. So, I am glad that Ministry is saying that you now want to do higher education assessed programmes. So, when you give a vocational grant to a school, is it a requirement that they run programmes that articulate into higher level qualifications? In other words, they are part of the National Qualifications Framework or do they do their own programmes?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- It is part of the assessment that is done by our technical vocational education training department for every school. Right now, there are basically three courses offered in majority of the schools:

- (1) Carpentry and joinery;
- (2) Automotive; and
- (3) Hospitality.

According to the needs of the area and the request made by the school with the agreement with the team from TVET.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Does the vocational programmes lead into recognition for a national qualification? Is there a pathway?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Yes, most of the trainees go to do attachments in the workplaces. They are not allowed by the employers to return to school because of the quality and skills they bring to the workplace for training purposes.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Will the little bit of training that they have done, does it cross credit towards a national qualification?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Yes, they need to complete the programmes and that it is what we are discussing with the employers through the Fiji Employers Federation to allow these students to come back to school to complete their courses and cross credit.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Okay.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you honourable Minister for the answers you have given. You have talked about the validation which is very important in terms of the completion of the training management cycle. Who does this training validation? Is it officials of the Ministry or do you bring in experts from outside with the relevant technical areas, so to speak, to do this training validation? I think this is something that was not given that level of seriousness previously, because the workplace needs to give feedback to the training providers as to the level of competency, so that we might have to relook at the training syllabus, or whatever is lacking in the skills. So, who does the validation honourable Minister?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Chairman, can the honourable Leader of Opposition ask that question at the next session of Parliament because I need to get back and find out whether it is done in-house or externally.

HON. V. LAL.- Mr. Chairman, we are in week nine of Term two and so far, Term two grant for secondary schools has not been released. Can the honourable Minister please explain.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- You could have asked honourable Hem Chand. It is usually 50 percent given and after the Budget is passed, the other 50 percent is given. It completes the year.

Programme 8 Activity 1 - General Administration

SEG 6:

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Chair, I can see one very important teacher training institution missing from the list and this particular teacher training institution was allocated \$140,800 in the last financial year. Can the honourable Minister provide an explanation why Corpus Christi College is not on the list?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Yes, that question has been raised to us already and according to the Higher Education Commission, despite all the reminders for submission it was not done, but that does

not mean that they will not be able to. So we will have to work out how to do that now and come back but according to the Higher Education Commission Director, despite reminders they did not make any submission. We recognize that it is an institution which trains some primary school teachers. They should be able to get some funding. The Ministry of Education from within its budget should be able to cater for that \$140,000.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Chair, I think this particular institution should be assisted.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- I have a motion from honourable Alvick Maharaj. The motion is:

That Pacific Polytech be left out of Head 21 in respect of Programme 8, Activity 1, SEG 6. Is there a seconder?

HON. V. NATH.- I second, Sir.

HON. A.A.MAHARAJ.- Mr. Chairman, there is couple of things that I need to discuss with regards to this particular funding. I received an email. I think it was very childish of the Chairman of this particular institute to email to us questioning how we actually scrutinize this particular funding. All the Ministries and agencies they get funding; it is not an issue. That is why we have Parliament.

We have Parliament to scrutinise, whether it should be given more, less or whatever. An outsider who is being funded writing to us and telling us there is a breach in the privilege does not seem right. And then we are being warned that this kind of mistake should not be repeated in future. I think this is very childish coming from a chairperson who is being funded by Government. I did not respond to the email of Mr. Chand but I thought to bring it up in this particular forum because that is why we have Parliament to scrutinise any kind of funding that is given, whether it be good or bad, the budget is going to be passed and definitely the funding is going to go for whatever the Government intends to do with a particular institute. So, I think it is very unappropriated for him sending us email and it would be much more appropriate if he sends his Annual Report and Audited Report for us to have a better knowledge about what is happening in Polytech.

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Mr. Chairman, the honourable Member, he is out of context. According to the 104, section 4, we need to speak on the Head that is currently on the plate table. He is getting something outside from what is here, and he cannot do that.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- He is speaking on the motion and the motion is that this particular institution.

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Yes, I understand Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The allocation should be deleted. That is still, in my view, still allowable because the motion is right in respect of SEG 6.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Chairman, I believe the honourable Member needs a good orientation after coming back to Parliament, but nevertheless, this kind of thing should not be tolerated by Parliament, I believe. I have actually stated this, even it went to the extent that it is not a private institute. I only understand there are two kinds of institutes, public and private. If you are publicly listed, you are public or owned by the Government or you are private, as far as that is concerned. As I have stated earlier, I believe this money could be better utilised with all other institutes that are actually mentioned in the SEG.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The floor is open for discussion or any intervention.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- I note the honourable Member's motion to have the Pacific Polytechnic Ltd funding removed completely. I just wish to share some experiences about how Pacific Polytech has assisted many youth in the Suva and Nausori corridor, especially young people including those under 18 who have dropped out of school. They really have nowhere else to go. I am talking about even 15, 16 year-olds who, as a result of Polytech and nowhere else, even Nabua Secondary School - *Matua* programme is full, they are able to undertake courses where they can bridge, so that they can then get into Level 3 and Level 4 certification. There is nowhere else that they can go to and they are all *iTaukei* students.

Majority of them are young men in Nabua and Nasinu area. They have also been left out of any development programmes in the Suva and Nausori corridor. I am talking over 40 young people so I think honourable Maharaj if you can reconsider, if you are thinking of our current young people especially this generation, who a lot of them if they fall on the wayside, they do not really have much else to do, they roam around and they have nowhere else to go. Some of the courses that were undertaken throughout the settlements are short courses like aged care, but there are only one or two courses. They do not give them any certification. So, they have experience and they assist with their families but Pacific Polytech has come to the rescue and on top of that, they have also given them scholarships so that they are actually undertaking their schooling on scholarships.

I ask the honourable Member to reconsider because this is a very useful initiative, no matter what the politics is, or whatever the chair has sent to you members, we cannot let our young people suffer as a result of this. I fully support the funding to Pacific Polytechnic Limited and especially when they are accessible in the urban centres. This has been life-changing for them. They have gone on to secure jobs, but just for us to really have a good think about what the Pacific Polytech is doing and their reach as well as their purpose.

Regardless of what we think of those that are in charge, they are really reaching out to the communities and even now they want to come out to the rural areas. They want to come out to maritime including Kadavu, so that they can also undertake courses there for young who have dropped out of school or are unemployed.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Are there any further contribution, honourable Professor Prasad?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Chairman, I do not know what communication the honourable Maharaj has received, but that is not an issue. I just wanted to correct him and put this on record. The funding for higher education institutes, it is not a question of whether they are registered as a private company. University of Fiji, for example, because when it was set up, it was set up by a limited liability company. The University of Fiji is still registered. There are other institutes that are owned by different entities. For example, you could say the same thing for the Sangam Institute for Nursing. You might say that is a private institution set up, run by a cultural organisation. You could look at Monfort Vocational Technical Education, Centre for Appropriate Technology Development (CATD) Nadave or any other technical institute. The process of higher education funding at the moment is through the Fiji Higher Education Commission. They approve courses, they approve qualifications, they register provisionally and permanently institutes, and they make submissions.

We look at it at the Ministry of Finance as any other budget submission. Not everything everyone that wants gets it. I think it is important when we bring some of these issues to Parliament, that we are actually aware of whether we are articulating factually what is on the ground and what are the effects. I just wanted to clarify that.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, just speak very briefly to this particular motion. I think one of the things that I agree with over the past few years has been the push to award more funding to

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET). We all know the vast majority of the fund that is given to support students in this country goes for training for people with degrees. But the real need, as people have always said, is people who can do the job. So, moving more funds to that area is good. That is a good thing. We need to make sure that it moves to areas where they address that issue. And still right now, if you look at the way the funding is happening in terms of tertiary high education, it is still going to people who know things. Less is going to people who do things.

One of the good models that we have in Pacific Polytech it delivers micro qualifications. These are small qualifications. If you add them up, then they become a more formal part of a larger substantive qualification. But always built into those qualifications is a part that is built at the institute and the other part that you should see on the job. What a person can do in institute, they cannot deliver on the job. This is always the difficulty, and that is why these things are important.

You need to make sure the validation of training, what that person delivers is meeting the need on the workplace. That is what validation that the honourable Leader of the Opposition was talking about. I think whatever the higher education does, it needs to make sure that the outputs are meeting the requirements. I am not too sure that this is happening or how well it is happening. I know a lot of the people at Pacific Polytech, very good people I work with personally in my life. But there are a lot of misgivings about making sure, for instance, the sudden jump from \$5 million to \$7 million, and then the drop by \$1 million for Fiji National University (FNU), which also does these TVET programmes. These sorts of things are a bit worrying for us. I believe that we need to throw more money at TVET. But do it in such a manner you put it in institutions that deliver the target, which requires good validation. As the honourable Minister has pointed out, people get the training, then they cannot do the attachment. If you cannot do the attachment, your competencies on the job cannot be ticked off. There is something lacking.

Mr. Chairman, perhaps we also should look at how can we assist employers to take them for that attachment, so that on the job, competencies can be checked and ticked off. They can also be checked and ticked off if the person checking himself can do the job. But those are some of the things I want to bring to this, because this is very important. It is a crisis we are facing in this country. A lot of money is being thrown. I have always said, we have the infrastructure, and we have the Higher Education Commission to do this, but we need to ensure it is channelled in the right place to address the skill shortages that we have.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Chairman, we have listened to the honourable Usamate. He agrees now that Polytech has a purpose. It will reduce unemployment and poverty. I urge my good friend, honourable Alvick Maharaj, to withdraw his motion, given it addresses youths and unemployed. I know he will withdraw that.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, I wanted to make a very short contribution towards the discussion that is being held. The question that has been raised by honourable Maharaj, is basically the accountability and transparency of the funds being moved out of Government as a grant to Pacific Polytech. I suggest that Pacific Polytech be encouraged because they have gone through three cycles of \$1 million, \$5 million, and \$7 million. They would be encouraged to give a return on the investment that has been given by Government for the provision of the training that they are getting right now. That is my view. If that is done, then all this suspicion and to-and-fro discussions will be covered under that. They need to be transparent and accountable, provide the account to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and let them scrutinise it.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Chairman, I thank all the honourable Members contributed to this particular motion. The main reason and gist was to explain to the institution what is accountability and transparency. It was well discussed in this motion. We need to scrutinise it. Not any particular institution can be given funding without any scrutiny. That is why we actually have Parliament.

Whatever points and discussions that came from honourable Lynda Tabuya and honourable Minister for Finance, honourable Usamate and other honourable Members, were very good suggestions. On that note, I do acknowledge that there are students with Pacific Polytech and they need to continue with their education in order to have a brighter future. With that note, I withdraw the motion.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, last year we had the \$5 million payback for USP, and this year there is none. That means there is going to be no more USP backdated payments. Just a clarification on that?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Chairman, the honourable Minister for Education and I were at the USP Council meeting. There is an issue about the amount and VAT that USP owed to Government. There is a discussion on the actual amount that is left in arrears. We had paid two instalments of the arrears already. Right now, we seem to think that the VAT amount that USP owes would balance off the arrears that is left. That is why it is not included in this one.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The Parliament will now vote on Head 21 – Ministry of Education.

Question put.

Head 21 agreed to.

Head 22 – Ministry of Health and Medical Services

SEG 3:

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Chairman, requesting if the honourable Minister can elaborate further on what is this Overseas Medical and Consultancy Services?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Chairman, Overseas Medical and Consultancy Services caters for patients overseas treatment that are not available in Fiji, particularly for cancer, some cardiac kidney diseases and other similar musculoskeletal neurological disorders.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Chairman, just a clarification, does this only cover treatment in India or also covers treatment in New Zealand and Australia as well? Do patients going to Australia and New Zealand get any kind of subsidy?

HON. DR. RATU A.N. LALABALAVU.- Yes, it is more of an assistant from government through the Ministry of Health in assisting patients who need further tertiary care overseas. It can be any overseas destination. Nevertheless, if they require the assistance, they just need to write to the Ministry of Health and Medical Services through our overseas medical referral team.

SEG 5:

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Chairman, I have several points of clarifications, if I can just state all in one and the honourable Minister can respond to them all. E-Transaction Cost – what is that? Outsourcing of Emergency Clinical Health Services – what is the doctor's specialisation and Health Emergency and Response. Can the honourable Minister elaborate on these four points?

HON. DR. RATU A.N. LALABALAVU.- Firstly, on allocation of E-Transaction Cost, this will mainly be used for the payment of transaction fees for the use of various EFTPOS machines M-PAiSA and MyCash. As you are aware that the Ministry of Health also does transaction in terms of receipts and

approvals for certain licences. The Doctor specialisation is to cater for more medical officer training that occur during the financial year, this funding also caters for payments of doctors who are actively studying for Postgraduate qualifications. The clinical service governance, the fund is directed to the sole purpose of blood service operation in Fiji and funds are used for operational activities such as the salary of the 10 project offices, and training, World Blood Donor Day, minor renovations, vehicle maintenance, et cetera.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- The other one was outsourcing of emergency clinical health services. Is this outsourced to private hospitals or GPs as well?

HON. DR RATU A.N. LALABALAVU.- It is mainly the emergency outsourcing of various radiological and laboratory capabilities. It is only in the scenario where the equipment is not functioning within the public hospitals that these allocation to kick-in to assist.

SEG 6:

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, on Kidney Dialysis, I know that this is an issue that used to be discussed a lot in this Parliament previously. It is just the allocation of that amount to the various kidney dialysis centres.

HON. DR. RATU A.N. LALABALAVU.- You request the facilities?

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- That \$4 million allocation is going to be utilised particularly with the various centres that are assisted through this funding.

HON. DR RATU A.N. LALABALAVU.- So allocation is used to as subsidies, the cost of kidney dialysis to ease the cost of treatment of patients and their families. Subsidy will be offered at \$180 per patient with household incomes of over \$30,000. Facilities are Fiji National Kidney Centre (government operated), the Northern Dialysis Centre, Kidney Foundation of Fiji, Kidney Hub, Ba Dialysis Centre and the Pacific Kidney Centre.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Chairman, grants to NGOs - which NGOs are these?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- The allocation goes to NGOs to cater for any service that the Ministry may require during the financial year. The NGOs are selected through an Expression of Interest process based on the Ministry priority needs. So, allocation is there and the EOI will be put out and NGOs can apply accordingly.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- On this one, for example, if a particular hospital has an NGO and they are doing some free surgeries for our citizens, can they actually apply for assistance through this programme?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Yes.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Because there are some hospitals that that carry out free surgeries as their corporate social responsibility.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Sorr, honourable Minister, I will go back to kidney dialysis, probably I missed it. With the centres, is there any facility doing this in Vanua Levu? No one from Vanua Levu is asking so I think I will ask.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- I think the Northern Dialysis Centre.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, for the Sai Prema Foundation Fiji, I noticed that you have an operating grant of \$3.9 million, but I also know that the staff from the Ministry are also working there. Is that included here, the cost of the Ministry staff who are working there or the Ministry pays for them?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- The Ministry engages with Sai Prema Foundation Fiji through an MOU whereby certain cadres within the Ministry are seconded to Sai Prema Foundation Fiji only on certain occasions when there is a visiting team. Nevertheless Sai Prema Foundation Fiji has its own staff and they are paid for by the Sai Prema organisation. Through the arrangement between the Ministry, an MOU usually second a staff over to learn and also build capacity in terms of the area of cardiothoracic surgery in children.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman, my sincere apologies. I just want to go back.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- No, we cannot go back.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Just one sentence, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- No, I am sorry, honourable Bala.

HON. P.K. BALA.- The price has gone up that is why I wanted to bring it up.

Programme 1 Activity 1 – General Administration

SEG 8:

HON. V. LAL.- Upgrade and Enhancement - Sub-Divisional Hospitals, Health Centres and Nursing Stations. Has the Ministry identified the health centres and the sub-divisional hospitals or I should simply say, is Valelevu Health Centre part of this?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Can you repeat the question, please?

HON. V. LAL.- Is Valelevu Health Centre part of this allocation (\$1.4 million) for refurbishment?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Chairman, for Valelevu Health Centre part of the refurbishment programme is an ongoing. It was done for this financial year. Since it is a big facility, the work was done in phases and for this year as well, yes, we will include some leftover works to be done at Valelevu Health Centre. It is a big facility with big work needed to be done in that facility.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Sir, on the same SEG 8, we see Demolition and Construction of Dreketi Health Centre (\$371,250). Then we see Construction of Tokaimalo Health Centre (Phase 1) at around \$278,000. If Phase 1 is just costing that much for a particular health centre, is \$371,000 sufficient enough for Dreketi Health Centre to be demolished and reconstructed?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Yes.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Or it will carry on in the next financial year as well?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- It is a phased work - part of it for this financial year. This is the work that has to be done. It is probably four or five phases.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Sir, when the health centre is going to be renovated or made into a new health centre, they will renovate existing quarters so that there is a transition. Some of the cost is involved in that as well and then the second phase would complete the health centre.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, nothing against the people in the area, I note that in the area we have Seaqaqa, Nakadrudru and now Dreketi. What will be added to Dreketi so that it can be seen as providing a better service and options for the people? I hope I am correct, this is Dreketi opposite the road to Nabiti and Nasigasiga and not Nakadrudru.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- No.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Chairman if I may, I would just like to request the Minister if he can give an undertaking in Phase 2 or Phase 3, if we can do a mortuary in Dreketi. It has been an issue because they have to travel all the way to Savusavu or Labasa and it is a big province as well. If you are able to give an undertaking, I will not move an amendment. Otherwise, I will have to move an amendment to slot in mortuary with the health centre and the quarters.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Just read the Budget book properly. There are a number of mortuaries including Dreketi included in the budget this year.

Aid-in-Kind:

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, on the subject of mortuary, I can see that there is a heading here, Procurement of Medical Container. Does this actually include portable mortuary in containers? I have heard about it, that Government is looking at having portable mortuary within the outer stations so that they can allocate containers for bodies to be kept overnight before burial.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- The allocations for mortuaries right now is prioritised in areas where they are on the grid. We have a constant power supply to be able to power the mortuary itself. But nevertheless, we are also looking into areas outside of it, such as the refurbishment in Kadavu, whereby there has always been an issue in terms of mortuary. So we are looking at a sort of model for solar, diesel or generator.

Programme 2, Activity 2 - Wellness

SEG 5:

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Chairman, with regards to Non-Communicable Diseases Prevention and Control, we see only \$393,750 given for this particular programme. Anywhere we go, even as Members of Parliament, we preach that prevention is better than cure. Looking at the NCD rate and the total budget for the Ministry of Health which accumulates close to around \$465 million, I think it is not proportionate as to how much we are spending in trying to promote the prevention of the disease. We spending more on curative. Does the honourable Minister feel that this amount is sufficient, being a doctor himself?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Chairman, in this allocation on Non-Communicable Diseases Prevention and Control, it is mainly for the programmes. Other than that, in terms of the implementation of certain interventions, whether by primary, secondary, or tertiary level, that is done at the clinical setting. This is mainly for the programme to screen NCD status, support NCD intervention, Special Out-Patients Department (SOPD) clinics at the Diabetic hub. It is mainly to be used for the wellness in terms of the programme that they will carry out to complement the work that is done at the hospital setting.

Programme 2, Activity 3 - Health Protection

SEG 5:

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Chairman, just a clarification on the Quarantine, Burial, and Cremation (Pesticides). I think this was introduced during COVID-19. Do we still carry on with this or it is just a budget kept aside for such an event?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Chairman, this allocation is used for implementation of the Quarantine Act and Port Health and International Health Regulations. It is used to control public health emergencies of international concern. Funding will support Quarantine Officers training in the Central, Western, and Northern Divisions, the burial and cremation site visits, quarantine, printing of supplementary cards, supply of PPEs for quarantine staff, information, education, communication materials for the Border Health Protection Unit, novel disease testing and sampling, and purchasing of test kits with its reagents.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Chairman, requesting the honourable Minister if he could elaborate on Leptospirosis, Typhoid, Dengue and Diarrhoea (LTDD) Control Programme (\$56,250). I am raising this because this led to a few deaths in Ba even after the flooding, rise in dengue as well.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Chairman, this allocation caters for the detection, screening, awareness and control of leptospirosis and dengue. These are normal programmes. In any case where there is an emergency or outbreak, that is where we will touch on the fund; we have already passed that fund - emergency part. These are during normal times but other than during emergency or outbreak, this fund is not touched. The officers and Health Inspectors usually touch the fund from the health emergency.

Programme 3, Activity 1 - CWM HospitalSEG 1:

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Chairman, this would be the general question that will apply to other activities as well. The Personal Emoluments, does this cover overtime for our doctors, nurses and paramedics? Is it incorporated in personal emoluments? It is not given as a breakdown, so I am trying to get clarity on that.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Yes.

Programme 3, Activity 2 - Lautoka HospitalSEG 1:

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Chairman, another clarity with regards to Lautoka Hospital. Now that it is managed by Aspen, why are we still giving close to around \$8.9 million to Lautoka Hospital? Was it not supposed to be covered by Aspen? On one side we are saying that we are paying them too much, and the other side we are again giving them around \$9 million a year. These personal emoluments, whom are we paying actually if everything has been taken care of by Aspen?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Chairman, for Lautoka Hospital, we still look after the dental hospital, so all those staffs are still within the Ministry of Health.

Programme 3, Activity 3 - Labasa HospitalSEG 1:

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Chairman, SEG 1 is Personal Emoluments (\$20,617,519). My question is on location allowance, if there is any for nurses and doctors, and if it is included in that?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Yes, it is included.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Chairman, all is now collapsed within the personal emoluments, so that is for all ministries.

SEG 5:

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Chairman just a clarity on Minor Improvements – Building (\$337,500), with regards to the building at Labasa Hospital, and this will also apply to other health centres in the Northern Division. One thing we have seen is basically the waiting area. The building is small and they keep expanding GOPD, SOPD and the waiting area gets congested.

In this improvement, are we trying to better the sitting facility and the waiting area as well? If you go to Nasea Health Centre, people actually have to wait outside in the corridor and sometimes we have to put tents for them to rest.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Chairman, I am sure it will be included because as it is, generally the increase will support the next 10 minor work projects. I can ask around to see if that is included, but I am sure it will be included.

SEG 7:

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, a simple question to the honourable Minister. In every Activity, I can see outreach programmes that has been allocated. Can you just explain what that entails?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Chairman, the outreach programme is combining public health work with hospital services. You can see it is within most of the core centres because in keeping up with universal health coverage, we are ensuring that we take the work out to the community.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- The staff in the hospital go out to the public as an outreach exercise?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Yes.

HON. I. B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, this is just a general question since we are on Labasa Hospital. Honourable Minister, one of the issues that was raised to me when I met your team in Vanua Levu, was the issue about operating theatres. I have forgotten the other major issue but I will submit to you, the specific report. But one is the operating theatre. What is the plan now for Labasa Hospital in terms of improving that particular service? It is just a general question on Labasa Hospital.

HON. DR. RATU A. R. LALABALAVU.- For Labasa Hospital, currently as it is, the Ministry is together working with the Ministry of Works in trying to improve on the electrical capacity within the Labasa Hospital. We have to do an overhaul of the electrical capacity within the Labasa Hospital. Once that is done, then – we had allocated funds for this Financial Year for improvement of certain wards and including the theatres. But, because there was a stoppage, due to the electrical works that need to be done first, that is prioritised now. Once all that is done, we can move onto the renovation of the various wards including the theatres.

Programme 3, Activity 4 - Tamavua Twomey Hospital

SEG 7:

HON. A. A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Chairman, just a clarification from the honourable Minister, Twomey Hospital – also carries out skin clinic and leprosy, this are centralised clinics, only available at Twomey Hospital but for the outreach, there is no funding for the doctors to go out with regards to the advocacy of leprosy or carrying out skin clinic in other centres throughout Fiji. Because we have few private doctors who are specialised in dermatology as well.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Allocation?

HON. A. A. MAHARAJ.- No, no. There is outreach but they are specific for other things, but specifically for skin clinic and leprosy is not there. So just wondering if this can be incorporated if you can actually source out some funds because other places we have lot of skin patients, suffering from dermatological conditions and they need skin specialists as well.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- We have noted that and just to reassure that it is included in the Outreach Programme.

HON. A. A. MAHARAJ.- Just another general question to honourable Minister for Health on clarity. Do we actually have some kind of funding for Biomedical Technicians and Maintenance of appliances because there is a lot of equipment which are basically standing still and not in operations, so is there any kind of funding to have a holistic approach to fix all these machines, that are standing still in hospitals and health centres?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- We have allocations for Biomedical Engineers at the FPBS and also at the main hospitals. But we have moved further than that to put them in Divisional, and very soon we will start putting them in certain Sub-Divisional where it is usually very busy and with lots of equipment they use. So that is the plan.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Medical equipment for urban and subdivisional hospitals in this budget, \$11 million last year, \$10 million this year.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- That is appreciated, but the problem we have actually faced being staff of CWM as well. Procurement of this equipment is not an issue but maintenance is always, because we do not have biomedical technicians to look after.

Programme 5, Activity 1 – Drugs and Medical Equipment

SEG 5:

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, I just wanted to ask the honourable Minister if he can just elaborate on vaccine on the amount of \$4.880 million. I just find that there is no other allocation in other areas within his Ministry of Health that has that allocation. Vaccines, \$4.880 million.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- That FPBS allocation is usually the procurement and store of the vaccines before it is being used.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- So these vaccines will be all for all the hospitals in Fiji?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- All the hospitals in Fiji.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. chairman, SEG 5 on Biomedical Equipment. My question is for Nadi Hospital, there is allocation of \$1.6 million. Is Nadi hospital included in that as far as the biomedical equipment is concerned?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Yes.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Chairman, there is a major decrease from \$78 million down to around \$61 million in terms of purchase of goods and services, which includes consumables and medicines and I believe dressings as well. And we know that it is very hard for us to operate hospitals if we do not have medicine and consumables. For the recent number of years, one of the consistent issues that we have been facing is the shortage of supplies. So with the reduction close to around \$20 to \$21 million. How does the honourable Minister plan to equip the hospitals and health centres with medicine and consumables so that treatment is not affected?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- I believe that was addressed by the honourable Assistant Ministers' address. Most of it is to do with the VAT component.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Chairman, \$21 million would not be the VAT component. It is quite massive, because we had a presentation by FPBS and they were looking at somewhere close to around \$95 million. That is understood, but at the moment what was given to them last year compared to what is given to them this year.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- So, medicine was non VAT, every year we had a lot of VAT savings. So, in this budget, we have cut VAT out and that is the reduction. But in actual terms, in terms of the assessment and the volume, there is no reduction in the budget for consumables or medicine at all.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- Mr. Chairman, to help with answering the question by the honourable Alvick Maharaj, there is another \$10 million brought to the Ministry of Health headquarters. It used to be with FPBS. It is now being brought back to headquarters to do with HIV and AIDS stand-alone unit that has been established recently.

MR. CHAIRMAN. - Parliament will now vote on Head 22 – Ministry of Health and Medical Services.

Question put

Head 22 agreed to.

Head 23 – Ministry of Housing

Programme 1, Activity 1 – General Administration

SEG 7:

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman, there is a new allocation - Review of Policies (\$22,500) is this within the Ministry or is it external?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Chairman, the review policies with an allocation of \$22,500 is to assist the Ministry in reviewing some of them. Currently, the Informal Settlement Act, as well as the lot allocation policies and some other policies that we are proposing to review in the coming financial year.

Programme 2, Activity 1 – Housing and Community Development

SEG 6:

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Chairman, could I request the honourable Minister to please explain the housing assistance given to fire victims? How many households have we assisted?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Okay, the question is on the number of households that were assisted by this particular scheme. For the current financial year, the Ministry received a total of 34 applicants and there are six applicants that are still pending. The Ministry is still currently processing those six applications.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Chairman, may I?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Yes, honourable Nath.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Chairman, I propose an increase...

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Are you speaking to your motion, have I received it?

HON. V. NATH.- No, if you allow.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Right. I have your motion that:

Head 23-2-1(6) be increased by \$2,755,435 in of which we are in, with respect to housing assistance to fire victims. That is the motion you are wishing to discuss? Is there any seconder?

HON. F.S. KOYA.- I second it.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Chairman, I move to increase the increase the budget allocation for housing assistance fire victims. This is a pressing humanitarian crisis that demands our immediate and robust attention. Last year, approximately 195 homes were destroyed, unfortunately three in my village and while travelling home last night, I saw a house that caught fire in seven miles. Mr. Chairman, what we are doing at this particular point in time, is giving them \$1,000 and another \$5,000 I believe, which is a very small amount.

What I am proposing to the Government is, at least when houses are burnt, Mr. Chairman, we lose everything, a person runs out of the house only wearing the clothes they have on them because I witnessed three fires. It was very disheartening, Sir. We only gave \$5,000. Why my figure is there because we designed a Category 5 wooden building which approximately costing \$60,000. At least basic household income, items probably another \$10,000 comes to \$70,000. What I am proposing at least 30 percent or one-third from the Government will help the people.

Just on Saturday, honourable Agni Deo Singh and myself were chief guest at one fire victims fundraising. Probably he will vouch for my motion. We both were there. We differently gave something from our pocket. There is a lot of fundraising being done like this. It was always been my plea because honestly speaking at this point in time, I personally organised with my friend Mr. Rampati from Koronivia we have organised about 300 fundraising either it was for the house fire or for medical treatment. If you go and visit them you will definitely cry because they just come out empty-handed. So, I am requesting and this the gist of my motion.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Are there any further contributions to the motion? No, then I give you back your right of reply.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Chairman, no further comments. I thought my good friend, honourable Singh will contribute because he was the guest of honour on Saturday night, I will leave it here and I will request the Government of the day to please address the issue.

Question on amendment put.

Motion lost.

SEG 8:

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman, in the last budget there was an allocation of around \$13 million for the informal settlement and in this year's budget is around \$14 million. So, what I need to know from the honourable Minister, is this the continuation of those subdivision or it is a new allocation for a new subdivision.

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Chairman, an allocation that is given to the Ministry of Housing for the upgrading of formal settlements and to cover the ongoing capital projects. There are six at the moment, one in Sakoca in Nasinu, Tavela in Nadi, Tore in Lautoka, Field 4 in Lautoka, Valewaquyaya in Ba, Vunika in Labasa, as well as new projects for the new financial year. These to start off the projects and preliminary works. These are the various sites, Delaisaweni and Lovu in Lautoka as well as Caubati in Nasinu that covers both ongoing as well as the new four projects for the new financial year.

HON. P.K. BALA.- There are some areas where the development lease has expired, and I was trying to find out that allocation to renew those development leases. Unfortunately, I mean, I cannot see here, but if Minister can explain.

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Chairman, part of the allocation also covers the ground rental for those development leases, which comes to around \$66,561.42. These are:

- Central Division -4 settlements
- Western Division - 3 settlements
- Northern Division- 1 settlement

SEG 10:

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, I just wanted to ask the Minister the last item on this Habitat for Humanity Grant - Greenfield Pilot Project (\$978,261). Can you just inform us where this project is? It is a new project as far as I am concerned.

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Chairman, this is to assist in the relocation of those settlers living in the informal settlements that have been served with eviction notices, such as those living in the Nabua Muslim League Settlement, Kilikali in Nadera, as well as Veidogo and Naidiri. The proposal by the Ministry is to acquire greenfield, to assist the Ministry in relocating or resettling those that have been served with eviction notices.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- So greenfield has not been identified. It is just a name.

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- We have identified two at the moment, and we are still currently negotiating with the TLTB, before we can actually go in and acquire the partials of land through the Lands Department or the Ministry of Lands.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, I want to ask about the Veikoba Project. We allocated \$1,467,391 million this year. Last year \$2 million was allocated to construct a bridge. Has the bridge been constructed? Now we are moving to the housing component. What is the progress, honourable Minister?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- On the Veikoba Bridge construction, this is for the Veikoba project. The Ministry will pay Housing Authority \$717,000 by the end of this month. This year, the Ministry will also do consulting design works for the Veikoba sewers, water, as well as wastewater package treatment plant for the Koroisalusalu project in Tavua.

HON. V. LAL.- Mr. Chairman. I wanted to ask exactly the same thing, but since he has answered, is there any time frame to finish this programme, Minister?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Yes for Veikoba, they have already advertised the tender for the contractor to come and do the development. Currently they are evaluating the tenders, so that kicks in this year and it will take another two years to complete the project.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Parliament will now vote on Head 23 – Ministry of Housing.

Question put.

Head 23 agreed to.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, at this point, we shall suspend the proceedings for dinner. Parliament will resume in an hours' time.

The Parliament adjourned at 7.06 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 8.11 p.m.

Head 24 – Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection

Programme 1, Activity 1: General Administration

SEG 6:

HON. V. LAL.- Mr. Chairman, the Grant to Voluntary Organisations. Can the honourable Minister name the voluntary organisations here, please?

HON. S. KIRAN.- Mr. Chairman, this Grant to Voluntary Organisations covers the children. For example, the Dilkusha Home, Veilomani Home, Salvation Army, St. Christopher's Home, St. Vincent de Paul and there will be a few new additions this year.

SEG 7:

HON. V. LAL.- Mr. Chairman, SEG 7, I can see there is a huge reduction of \$438,000. Can the honourable Minister explain the reduction, please?

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- What is the total now?

HON. V. LAL.- From \$438,000, it is \$45,000 now.

HON. S. KIRAN.- What are you talking about?

HON. V. LAL.- The total allocation for SEG 7 is \$45, 000. Mr. Chairman, in the previous Budget it was \$483,000. There is reduction of \$438, 000, Sir. I am asking the honourable Minister, why is there a huge deduction in this.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- The allocation, Mr. Chairman, has moved from Programme 1, Activity 2 - Poverty Monitoring Unit. But that is the reason why the reduction.

SEG 8:

HON. V. LAL.- Mr. Chairman, SEG 8 – the Construction of New Lautoka Aged Care Facility. In the last budget, there was some allocation for this. I would like to know what is the progress of the construction of the Lautoka Aged Care Facility.

HON. S. KIRAN.- Mr. Chairman, the reason we were not able to move with it because we could not relocate the residents. Now, we have renovated a building with Ba Provincial Holdings and this month, we are moving the senior citizens to that new place. So, that is why. Now we will be able to scope for the aged care facilities in the new budget.

Programme 2, Activity 1: Department of Children

SEG 7:

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Virendra Lal, you be on alert when we go through this, so you do not take us back.

HON. V. LAL.- We are still on SEG 7 and I am asking SEG 7.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- You are on SEG 7, you have the floor.

HON. V. LAL.- In SEG 7, there is a new allocation. Last year there was no allocation for that. This year there is an allocation for \$303,080. Why is there a new allocation? Is it something new which has come up?

HON. S. KIRAN.- You are talking about the total? We have a couple of new projects. He is quoting the total. One is a grant to well-being service, well-being centre for the street dwellers, and there is another grant for drug rehabilitation centre for the street kids.

Programme 3, Activity 1: General Administration

SEG 6:

HON. V. LAL.- Mr. Chairman, in SEG6, we grant to NGOs. Can the honourable Minister name which NGOs are involved in here?

HON. S. KIRAN.- This is a voluntary organisation to women. It is normally a call for proposal.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Parliament will now vote on Head 24 – Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection.

Question put.

Head 24 agreed to.

Head 25 – Ministry of Youths and Sports

Programme 1, Activity 3: Research, Policy, Information and Planning

SEG 5:

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman, Social Media Management (\$50,625), within or external? If external who is this company managing?

(Laughter)

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Mr. Chairman, this allocation supports the implementation of the Ministries digital strategy through a range of services across multiple social media platforms. The key activities include:

- (a) Managing the Ministry's social media accounts and engaging audiences with compelling content that aligned to the Ministry's objectives. This includes daily updates on platforms such as *Facebook*, *Twitter* and *Instagram*.
- (b) Monitoring the ministry social media presence to assess public sentiment and evaluate the effectiveness of online engagements;
- (c) Preparing reports for the Ministry's management and board as needed to support informed decision making related to Youth and Sports development;
- (d) Auditing, the Ministry's social media assets to assess performance and visibility with the aim of enhancing stakeholder engagement; and

- (e) Developing standard operating procedures for handling complaints and facilitating customer engagements through Ministries social media platforms.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Very good!

Programme 2, Activity 1 – General Administration

SEG 6:

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Chairman, honourable Minister, Short-Term Expert in the sum of \$195,652, with SEG 6. Can you just elaborate on that one? Who is it? What is it for?

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Overseas Sporting Tours?

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Short-Term Expert. \$195,652, right in the middle of SEG 6.

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Mr. Chairman, the funding will assist the Fiji National Sports Commission to cater for the engagement of local and international experts to assist in the development of minor sports in the country. Funding will be utilising training and development of local athletes and SP representatives and sports administrators to provide best sports administration and compliance to the international requirements by its National Sporting Organisations (NSO).

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Chairman, hosting of international tournaments \$3.9 million set aside, my question is any particular international sports tournament that Fiji will be hosting in the next financial year?

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Mr. Chair, the National Sports Commission has been allocated funding to support the participation of national teams for international tournaments such as:

- (1) Australian Football League;
- (2) Fiji Athletics;
- (3) Basketball,;
- (4) Cycling;
- (5) Football Association;
- (6) Netball;
- (7) Rugby;
- (8) Rugby League;
- (9) Rugby Union;
- (10) Squash;
- (11) Tennis; and
- (12) Yachting.

For the question, the budget allocated will support 16 sports events with 29 types of sports, but the reduction in the total amount is result of VAT that is applicable in the new financial year. The updated VAT has been calculated solely on the principal amount, however, Fiji National Sports Commission (FNCS) grants submitted for 2025-2026:

- (1) Netball - \$141,000,984;
- (2) Rugby - \$903,600;
- (3) Football - \$216,000;
- (4) Swimming - \$386,640;
- (5) Archery - \$76,486;

- (6) Athletics - \$14,400;
- (7) Squash - \$7,200;
- (8) FASANOC - \$1,547,281; and
- (9) Tennis - \$31,600.

HON. V. LAL.- Mr. Chairman, he did not answer the question which I asked. This was regarding hosting of international tournaments.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- SEG 6 – Overseas Sporting Tours.

HON. J.SAUKURU.- These are for hosting of international tournament. The allocation for its sporting bodies.

SEG 8:

HON. P.K. BALA.- Last one, Mr. Chairman, Upgrade of Sports Ground \$1,467,391. When and where?

(Laughter)

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Increase is for the upgrading of 21 sports grounds in various divisions. You want the list?

- (1) William Cross College;
- (2) Vuisiga;
- (3) Waima, Naitasiri;
- (4) Naqeleqai Village;
- (5) Naitasiri Secondary School;
- (6) Navuso District School;
- (7) Rewasau Village;
- (8) Nabobuco;
- (9) Naitasiri Rugby Union;
- (10) Kabariki, Kadavu;
- (11) Kavala, Kadavu;
- (12) Nadarivatu High School;
- (13) Koro High School;
- (14) Nakorotubu Secondary School;
- (15) Wainibu Youth Club, Saqani;
- (16) Ratu Emeri Catholic School;
- (17) Nadavaci Village;
- (18) Kubulau Rugby;
- (19) Solevu Parish;
- (20) Dreketi Secondary School;
- (21) Korovou Primary School;
- (22) Kumi Village; and
- (23) Nameka Village.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman, just a supplementary, for all those grounds that you have mentioned you will be able to carry out the upgrading for this \$1.4 million?

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Yes.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Oh good! Thank you.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Chairman. Construction of hard courts, can the honourable Minister elaborate on that, please?

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Funding for construction of hard courts will be utilised for the construction of 3 multipurpose courts:

- (1) Ahau in Rotuma;
- (2) Holy Cross Secondary School in Taveuni; and
- (3) Yadrana, Lakeba in Lau.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Chairman, the grounds which was done in this financial year and the last year are all contractors been paid?

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Can you give me that supplementary question in the next sitting.

HON. V. NATH.- In this financial year 2023-2024 and the previous years all the constructions been done and all contractors been paid?

HON. J. SAUKURU.- You may ask me that question, honourable Member in the next Parliament Sitting.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Parliament will now vote on Head No. 25 – Ministry for Youth and Sports.

Question put.

Head 25 agreed to.

Head 30 – Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways

Programme 1, Activity 1 - General Administration

SEG 6:

HON. J. NAND.- This is relation to Tutu Training Centre, the operation grant is \$782,600. Previously it was \$900,000. So, there is a reduction of about \$9,600. Just a clarification for the Minister, why this reduction?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Chairman, the justification for the decrease in budgetary allocation is mainly due to the fact that the majority of the construction work for the dormitory in Tutu was finished in this financial year, resulting in minimal funding needed for the completion of the project.

Programme 1, Activity 4 – Information Services

SEG 7:

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, I would like to ask the honourable Minister, just to explain to us the e-Agriculture Station. What is an e-Agriculture Station?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Chairman, the establishment of an e-Agriculture Station is a new activity for the Ministry. It is intended to be established in three locations, so the station will be fully equipped with technological hubs featuring internet, smart TVs, laptops, Starlink, allowing access to our data platforms such as the data hub, market access data, and market pricing, amongst others.

Additionally, Mr. Chairman, these stations are designed for use by farmers, women and children from the nearby areas during specific hours, enabling them to access farmer data related to market access and prices, and their email and other agricultural assistance information that is provided by the Ministry.

So, this initiative is connected to the gender and youth in agriculture policy, aimed at enhancing access to information and innovation for women and youth.

HON. J. USAMATE.- This question....

MR. CHAIRMAN.- One moment. Honourable Nand?

HON J.N. NAND.- That was the same question I wanted to ask.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, I thank the honourable Minister. I think that is a very great initiative. Can you just tell us where the three centres will be? The location of those three centres.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Honourable Member, the three stations is proposed to be stationed, one in the Central Division, one in the Western Division, and another in the Northern Division.

Programme 2, Activity 2 – Extension

SEG 6:

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, on SEG 6 - Fertiliser and Weedicide Subsidy (Dalo, Ginger, Cassava, Vegetables) - \$1 million allocated. Perhaps this is just a request to the Minister of Finance for next year. There is a huge difference between the allocation given to non-sugar agriculture and the sugar farmers. Nothing against the sugar farmers, but, you know, non-sugar agriculture is really picking up. In terms of reducing their costs so that we can also improve quality of the products and so forth, we really need a big boost in these allocations because for sugar, for example, we have about \$15 million alone on Fertiliser, and Weedicides is about \$978,000. So, it is just a suggestion for next year because we also need to pay equal attention to non-sugar agriculture.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Chairman, it is very interesting that the honourable Leader of the Opposition is actually talking about, even I agree with him. I remember when we were in Opposition, for eight years we talked about non-sugar support and this Government is the first one that in the last two budgets, we provided subsidies.

But I agree with you, that there is scope to increase that in the next budget. But apart from that, if you look at the allocation for Ministry of Agriculture, as was highlighted earlier. In the last two budgets, including this one, and if you look at these three budgets, there has been a significant increase in the budget for Ministry of Agriculture, especially for non-sugar crop sectors, price support, drainage, farm mechanisation, seed, research, extension training. So, you are right, honourable Leader of the Opposition, we have actually made a big push to enhance non-sugar agriculture sector, but I take your point on the subsidies.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Minister for Agriculture, do you wish to add any comments on that?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- No, Mr. Chairman, but I have noted the honourable Member's suggestion.

Programme 2, Activity 2 – Extension Continued

SEG 8:

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Chairman, this is in relation to Farm Access Roads. Previously, I think there were \$2 million allocated, and there is a huge reduction of \$533,000. So, any explanation on that?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Chairman, the difference in the budgetary allocation, there was a decrease in that allocation. The activities on the construction of farm roads, and the decrease was mainly because farm roads is also covered by the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development, which we will work together to ensure that all farm access roads are accommodated by both ministries.

Programme 4, Activity 1 - Irrigation, Drainage and Flood Protection

SEG 8:

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman, last year, the \$5.5 million was allocated for dredging works. This year, dredging for major rivers is \$7.3 million. Before I go on to the \$7.3 million allocation, I would like to know whether that \$5.5 million for the last year, was it fully utilised? Or is it a continuation?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Chairman, this budgetary allocation saw an increase of \$1.8 million, and the increase is mainly due to the complexity of the work in Denarau River, which will be progressed in the next financial year. That is why the increase in that allocation.

HON. J.N. NAND.- Mr. Chairman, Acquisition - Dreketi Irrigation Pond (\$1,125,000). Can the honourable Minister elaborate on this?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Chairman, the acquisition from Dreketi Irrigation Pond is a new activity for the Ministry. The budgetary allocation will enhance water availability for agricultural production in the Dreketi area, which is a key farming region in the Northern Division. The project will also address seasonal water shortages and improve climate resilience for local farmers, targeting 1,076 farmers in Dreketi.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman, so if this is the continuation of last year's budget, where is the dredging for Ba River allocated? Where is it factored? That announcement was made by the honourable Minister for Finance.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Chairman, \$5 million was used for Ba River, \$7.3 million this year is for Denarau River.

HON. P.K. BALA.- *Are yaar!* Last year, it is here, \$5.5 million was allocated for dredging works in Denarau. This year, dredging major rivers, which is allocated \$7.3 million and the honourable Minister responsible said that it is a continuation of that. I am asking where is that Ba River dredging programme factored? That is all.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Carefully, honourable Bala, I said it was titled Denarau River, but \$5 million was actually used for Ba River. This year's allocation of \$7.3 million is for Denarau River.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Chairman, with regards to the honourable Member's question on the dredging of Ba River, in the current financial year 2024-2025, the utilisation rate for the allocation that was for Ba dredging is 98.2 percent and the work is almost 100 percent completed.

Programme 5, Activity 1- Agriculture Land Use

SEG 5:

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Chairman, having gone through all of that, I have not seen one place where our organic farming or organic labelling, et cetera, has actually been a part of it, except for Sustainable Land Management Programme at \$924,000. Does that have our organic farming component in it? It is Sustainable Land Management Programme, and I had spoken to the former Minister regarding that.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- We will get the honourable Assistant Minister to answer.

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Mr. Chairman, organic farming is part of the activities of both crop research and crop extension, which had already been covered. It is factored into the individual programmes that they have.

SEG 8:

HON. J.N. NAND.- Mr. Chairman, Programme 5, Activity 1 – SEG (8) in relation to Civil Works - Ovalau Agro-voltaic Project, I think it's a new allocation altogether. The honorable Minister to please explain on this.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Civil Works - Ovalau Agro-voltaic Project is a new Activity.. And the Ministry will provide support for the first r Green Climate Fund and Cooker Projects with Civil Works with \$1.5 million and due to the terrain, Civil Works is needed to realize the success of this Project. The Project intends to maximise productivity per unit of land where crops and energy are harvested together on the same land area.

The energy produced is enough to reduce Ovalau diesel consumption by 50 percent, reducing Fiji's carbon footprint. A Research Station will be built on this site which will be the first in the Pacific. Employment will also be created for locals in Bureta and across the island's 27 communities.

HON. I. B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, I probably need to help the honorable Minister on this one. This is not a new project. But the initial site is not favourable. So, now, they are re-locating it up the hill because the area is too wet. So, it's an old project, but you need this Civil Works to change the site, from where it is next to the airport. They have already identified the new site, just on the other side of the road. So it's an old project, but we need to relocate because the previous site was not favourable. I was just there 2 weeks ago.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Your comments are noted honorable Member.

HON. S. T. KOROILAVESAU.- Maybe it is new for the Ministry of Agriculture because Fiji Development Bank was the lead agency that was carrying out this exercise with an international aid programme. Or, it would be new to Ministry of Agriculture because initially spearheaded by Fiji Development Bank.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We will now proceed to vote on Head 30 – Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways.

Question put.

Head 30 agreed to.

Head 31 – Ministry of Fisheries

Programme 1, Activity 1 – General Administration

Aid-In-Kind

HON. S. T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, I just wanted to ask the honourable Minister, on the Research vessel, that has been earmarked with a \$10.6 million by Japan. Is this going to replace the *Bainitakali* or supplement that vessel's role.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Chairman, this Research vessel that is kindly donated by the Government of Japan. Currently the *Bainitakali* is not with the Ministry, it is with the Government Shipping Services, so this vessel is like a new vessel for the Ministry of Fisheries.

Programme 1, Activity 2 – Economic Planning and Statistical Services

SEG 5:

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Just a question to honourable Minister on SEG 5. This electronic monitoring system is it supplementing the existing system now or is it totally a new system altogether replacing it?

HON. A.V.B. C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Chairman, this is the same system that was piloted with the Ministry back in 2016.

Programme 1, Activity 5 – Extension and Advisory Services

SEG 8:

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Just on Matakunea Fisheries Station allocated (\$56,250). I just wanted to know where is Matakunea?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Chairman, Matakunea is located in Navatu, Cakaudrove. If you would recall, last year it was proposed in the budget that a fisheries ice plant was to be established at Natewa so that was not made possible because Natewa does not rely on fisheries for its livelihood. It was moved to the proposed new site, Matakunea.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, just to clarify regarding Koro Fisheries and Cawaro — the amount allocated seem quite big compared to Matakunea with \$56,000. Does the funding for Koro and Cawaro include both the fisheries station and the ice plant, while Matakunea is just for the station? Can the Honourable Minister confirm this?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Chairman, the \$56,250 that is allocated for Matakunea is for preparatory works, which will include securing the land owners consent, the land acquisition, survey undertaken by the Lands Department, survey of water source by Water Authority of Fiji, and the consultation fees. So it will have a fisheries station and also the ice plant.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Later?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Yes, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The Parliament will now vote on Head 31 – Ministry of Fisheries.

Question put

Head 31 agreed to.

Head 32 – Ministry of Forestry

Programme 1, Activity 1 – General Administration

SEG 5:

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, just a question to the honourable Minister. The International Bamboo and Rattan Organisation, I wonder honourable Minister if it is worth keeping to this organisation because we have not made any effort in the area of bamboo which the Fiji Government had initially entered into or hoping.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Koroilavesau, I have lost you here. Where are you? Are you on the same page as we are?

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- I could be either a tubelight or fast forward.

(Laughter)

I am sorry, I am on Programme 2, Activity 1

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Right! Well, hold your horse, hold your horse!

(Laughter)

HON. KOROILAVESAU.- Yes, finally Parliament has caught up with me!

(Laughter)

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Just that question again on the International Bamboo and Rattan Organisation. We became a member of this, some seven or eight years ago, but we have never made an effort to cultivate bamboo on the basis of commercial use. I am just wondering if there is any value for us if we continue to be a member of this?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Bainivalu?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Chairman, I would like to inform honourable Koroilavesau that as we speak, the Ministry is currently finalising its policy on non-wood products which includes bamboo. So that is something that the Ministry is currently working on. I think over the years, the Ministry had concentrated mainly on the two plantation species and have kind of neglected the other non- forest products. We are trying to develop these no-forest products because it is readily available and would become useful for our communities and our villages.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Just a follow on question to the honourable Minister. When you talk about non-wood products, particularly from bamboo, are we just looking at the local bamboo species or is there going to be a new species altogether when we want to run this as a commercial product?

HON. A.V.B.C BAINIVALU.- We are trying to develop the local species that we have and at the same time, we have some new species that are still at research stages with the Research Division in Colo-i-suva.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you.

Programme 2, Activity 4 - Silviculture Research, Resource Assessment and Development

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, I just have a general question on Activity 4

MR. CHAIRMAN.- SEG 8?

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Probably yes. It is rather a general question. Tissue Culture Laboratory for research like Indonesia and Malaysia. We have talked about bamboo. Tissue Culture Technology really helped in the development of these new species. Is there any consideration for the Ministry to have a Tissue Culture Laboratory or are we going to make use of the Tissue Culture Laboratories that are already in existence. Agriculture has good one because technology is the way to go, honourable Minister.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Chairman, that is something that the Ministry is considering to set up in the near future.

HON. J. USAMATE.- On the SEG 8 - Research and Development of Wood and Non-Species, along the lines of this tissue culture one of the things that we notice with a lot of the forest sawmills they are running out of timber. And the ones like Zinfra, they are looking to plant timber but they think the ones that you cannot use take too long to mature. They are looking at things that they can harvest in eight or 10 years.

So, I am just wondering if there is any research on that. I think they are looking at things like, is it eucalyptus or something like? They grow it in those small test tubes so, that it will be a 95 percent success rate. Is the Ministry also doing something like that for species that will be harvestable in a shorter period of time?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Chairman, the Ministry is currently researching on new species of trees that can be planted and be harvested for 10 to 15 years. There are some that are currently being tested but we are yet to prove that it can grow on our soil type that we have here in Fiji.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Honourable Minister, talking about new species, there is a new species planted in Verata and the company has gone bankrupt but it is still there now, Silver Quandong. Can the Ministry staff come and have a look because we were told that it just takes 15 years. It is over 15 years now. Silver Guandong is there in Verata.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Chairman, will take note of your request and we will have our officers come to Verata tomorrow or Monday next week.

Programme 2, Activity 7 - Monitoring Control and Surveillance (Harvesting and Logging)

SEG 10:

HON. J. USAMATE.- The commercial maritime pine subsidy this is a capital grant. So where is this? Are these paid to what? Are they co-operatives who plant the pine in the maritime areas?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Chairman, the commercial maritime subsidy is used to subsidise the barge costs from the maritime islands to Drasa Sawmill. Currently, the Ministry with Fiji Pine Limited they harvesting pine in Kadavu. So, that is where the Maritime Pine Scheme is harvesting at the moment in Moana, Kadavu and it will also explore the other districts of Soladamu, Moani, Nasegai, Ono and Yawe. So, the subsidies mainly to subsidise the barge cost from the various villages to the Sawmill in Drasa.

HON. J. USAMATE.- And Lakeba?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- After we finish from Kadavu and we will move to Lakeba.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, I was going to ask too, after Kadavu where to? Like Cicia and the others, Moturiki.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Initially in this financial year the pine harvesting for the maritime was supposed to take place in Lakeba, but because we were told to wait, we had to move to Kadavu.

SEG 10:

HON. J. USAMATE.- The Maritime Pine Development has doubled this year. This doubling, is it a new plantation on new islands or what is the cause of the doubling? From \$750,000 to \$1.5 million?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The last item on SEG 10, of Activity 7.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Chairman, this allocation will be used to develop the pine woodlot owners, to develop communities through rehabilitation works, which is the ripping and the treating of timber for building and maintenance of homes. The project will continue to provide support in the form of housing rehabilitation and construction of new homes in maritime islands, particularly in Kadavu and islands in the Lomaiviti and Lau province.

Programme 2, Activity 8 – Forest Parks, Recreation and Nature Reserves

SEG 7:

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, on Community Incentive Programme (\$315,000). Can you just clarify, please?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Chairman, this is the Job for Nature Community Incentive Programme. It is a new allocation and it is to cater for the last phase of the Job for Nature Initiative, which is the incentive payment to communities for planting trees in degraded areas. It was previously with the Ministry of Finance and it will moved to the Ministry of Forestry in the new financial year.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Parliament will now vote for Head No. 32 – Ministry of Forestry.

Question put.

Head 32 agreed to.

Head 33 – Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources

Programme 2, Activity 1 – Geological and Mineral Investigation

SEG 7

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, can you just explain the SATREPS on Disaster Risk Reduction, what is covered there?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Programme 2, Activity 1 – SEG 7.

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Geological mapping?

HON. J. USAMATE.- SATREPS on Disaster Risk Reduction.

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Chairman, that is to cater for the development and the update of eruption scenarios and hazard maps throughout our geological surveys being conducted comprehensively through our Fiji Islands topography in our volcanic areas in Fiji.

Programme 2, Activity 1 - Geological and Mineral InvestigationSEG 8

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, on Groundwater Assistance Programme - Large Islands and Small Islands. Honourable Minister, the allocation is appreciated but one of the issues that most communities are facing is the quality of the submerged pumps. I just wanted to bring that to the attention of the Ministry and probably something that the Ministry can look into when it comes to underwater ground assistance.

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Sure, Mr. Chairman, over the last 12 months we have continued to upgrade the quality of the underground pumps. Our staff have gone to the more advanced technology. I think there is a couple that have been installed, pumps in Bua that we are yet to commission. I have personally visited them and they are performing tremendously well. So the signs of the technology have advanced and we are purchasing those ones.

Programme 2, Activity 2 – Oil and Mines Acts AdministrationSEG 7

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, SEG 7 – Review of the Mining Law, is that the continuation of the Mining Act or is it some other legislation?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Chairman, the Review of the Mining Law is at its 11th draft as of last month. So, it had been commissioned by Cabinet during the FijiFirst Government for review. So, it is at this stage now where I think it could come back into the purview of Cabinet to have a look before it then goes to the subcommittee of Cabinet on legislation and then thereafter, perhaps for a much larger public consultation.

Programme 3, Activity 1 – State Land AdministrationSEG 5

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, this is in relation to this particular activity, there was money that was set aside last year for Schedule A - Rentals. Is that now mooted and done? There is no more

rentals being collected from Schedule A – Land, suppose that has not been transferred yet? Is that why it is not budgeted? It has disappeared from this activity?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- For which item?

Programme 3, Activity 4 – State Land Planning and Development

SEG 8:

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, the Development of State Land, I think it has gone up substantially. Am I correct? Can you just explain what the coverage is for this year's item?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- \$112,500? We had a development in Nadi and there was a variation and additional requirement for the construction of retaining walls, so that it can facilitate the transmitter roads. That requires the additional amount that we had asked for in our finance.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- For the development of the state land, I think that is what you were referring to honourable Usamate. That is Caubati and Wainibuku subdivision.

HON. J. USAMATE.- It is not the one in Volivoli?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Chairman, is that for the development or the maintenance of the existing subdivision?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Development.

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- That is for Caubati and Wainibuku subdivision.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Okay.

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- They have existed for years, but they have not been formalised. People who have lands in those areas continue to have those lands on Notice of Agreements. It needs to be formalised into proper leases.

Programme 3, Activity 5 - Land Use Division

SEG 6:

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, Land Bank Investment (\$24,800). Has it gone down by \$219,000 am I correct?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Yes.

HON. J. USAMATE.- The reason for its decline, dropping of the budget?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- There has been the absence of interest. Over the last 12 months there have been a couple of withdrawals from the land bank initiatives, so it has resulted in the decrease in the funding.

Programme 3, Activity 9 - Survey Division

SEG 8

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Honourable Minister, with respect to SEG 8 and the Geodatic Datum (\$182,000) – upgrade and the enhancement. Have we now got on to a stage where we have upgraded so that it is aligned with Google's Geodatic Datum?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Honourable Koya, through you Mr. Chairman, these stations will continue to require updating. We are not there yet. Right now, we are trying to bring the accuracy to where we are, I think it is plus or minus 20 metres. The constant upgrading is to bring that 20 metres down to the exact millimetre. Over the years, I would not think that this amount of money that we are requiring this year, is to get us to that position. Over the years, there is always going to be a need for updating until we get there.

MR. CHAIRMAN. – Honourable Usamate, you wish to contribute?

HON. J. USAMATE.- It is basically on the same things.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, again on mahogany Plantation survey, \$840,000. Can you clarify what is being undertaken by the ministry and that by iTaukei Affairs because I know that Fiji Hardwood has their own surveyors as well. Can you just please explain this in more detail?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Sure, honourable Leader of the Opposition. We have divided the workload so that it is able to be done quickly and the division of labour is that the ITLFC surveyors are going to focus and do Vanua Levu plantations. The Ministry of Land surveyors are going to do all the plantations in Viti Levu. Understanding that all these plantations are mature, and quite possibly some of them have over matured, the quicker we get these leases done or these boundaries defined leases can be issued, the sooner we can harvest. So, the division of labour is Ministry of Lands Viti Levu, iTLFC Vanua Levu.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Just a follow on question. Thank you honourable Minister, it is much clearer now. Does this survey also include the over-planting issue. This is the very contentious issue when it comes to mahogany.

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Yes, absolutely. I mean that is part of the job and it is also part of the challenge that our surveyors face on a daily basis. I said last year that some of them get chased with horrible instruments because they come there and they want to get the areas defined, landowners issues also exist. So we do as much as we can to try and get these things organised so that leases can be done, over planting can be identified and they can work with the landowners and see how best they can resolve it.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Parliament will now vote on Head 33 – Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources.

Question put.

Head 33 agreed to.

Head 35 - Ministry of Multi Ethnic Affairs and Sugar Industry

Programme 1, Activity 1 – Sugar Unit

SEG 6

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Chairman, on SEG 6 for Fertiliser Subsidy compared to last year, I see there is a decrease of \$434,800 and the honourable Minister has been saying that he is doing a lot of work

to increase the production and when new cane is planted, farmers will need fertiliser. Can you explain why?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- There is no increase no decrease, VAT reduction

HON. V. PILLAY.- For only \$434,800 is VAT reduction?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Chairman, there are two issues on that. One is that we are controlling the farmers who are not using the fertiliser but selling it away at \$20 a bag. So, we are controlling that. I will tell you one thing, let us control it. We do not want wastage in this Government.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Chairman, a supplementary question. As honourable Minister said he is controlling. As a canefarmer I know whenever we plant sugarcane, we need fertiliser. There is a lot of investment by the Ministry of Sugar in regards to the farm development programme and sugar planting programme. So, when new farmers are planting cane definitely they will need fertiliser and we see there is a decrease compared to what was given last year. That is what I am asking. You need to have adequate funding or subsidy.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Honourable Viam Pillay do you know the word control? We are controlling the cost of running the sugar industry.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Any farmer who needs subsidy this budget will be enough and it is always been adequate.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Chairman, I was just raising because there was \$20 million given last year and there is a reduction to \$19, 565,434.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- That should be sufficient. As the honourable Minister was saying that we put in some control, cut out the abuse and those who genuinely need it will get it.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Genuine farmer will be given. There is no doubt.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, Farm Incentive Program \$978,000, can the honourable Minister clarify what this allocation is for?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Farm Incentive Programme, Sir, firstly if the farmer increases his tonnage to say if he has been growing 500 tonnes and he then gives 750 tonnes. So for the 250 tonnes more he gives another \$5 extra.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Per tonne?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Yes, Sir.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Chairman, Cane Cartage Penang to Rarawai the allocated fund is \$4,852,500 and there is a reduction of \$108,580 compared to what was given last year. It simply means the production in the Rakiraki area is decreasing and that is why the allocation has not been given. Can the Honourable Minister explain?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Chairman, while these estimates are given to us by FSC. FSC gives us a tonnage for the area, but however my information from FSC now is that the tonnage is increasing in every area. Should there be an increase in tonnage, we will of course divert and give them additional funding for the transportation of cane into Lautoka or Rarawai Mill.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Honourable Minister, the grant to community-based organizations, you already have a list of specific organizations that is assigned to?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Last year's budget, yes, we actually invited expression of interest from all the communities and there was an independent committee in my Ministry that had vetted and they were very transparent, so similarly in this Budget we will use the same criteria.

SEG 8

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Chairman, the Construction of Shradh Ghat (\$450,000) . Initially, this was my baby, but this \$450,000 which Shradh Ghat are you going to fix?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Yes, there are initially two plan - Shradh Ghat in Labasa in Lautoka, but we have got an extra location. Should there be another requirements around, the money is there to develop more.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Chairman, my next question – is the Upgrade and Enhancement – Tuatua Crematorium/Driveway (\$563,000). I understand in last financial year, which is 2024-2025, I can be corrected on that. The money was allocated for two gas crematorium, has that been done?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Chairman, we are planning to put four machines one in Lovu, one in Varoka, Ba, one in Nadi and one in Labasa. Then we are getting another two one for Savusavu, and one for Sigatoka.

These machines are coming in. Unfortunately the suppliers of our machines as they promised then, did not deliver the machines on time. However, before the end of this financial year. All will be done before the end of our term.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Parliament will now vote for Head 35 – Ministry of Multi-Ethnic Affairs and Sugar Industry

Question put.

Head 35 agreed to.

Head 37 – Ministry of Local Government

Programme 2, Activity 1 – General Administration

SEG 5

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman, just last one. The Municipalities Master Plan – Singapore Cooperation Enterprises (\$1,957,000). In the last budget they were allocated \$2.2 million, again this year \$1.9 million. I just want to know progress, whether they are based here or whether there is any work in progress or not.

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- In my budget response, I stated that the Cabinet has endorsed the subcommittee to look after the second phase of the Master Plan. There is a task force that has been formed, chaired by me as well as relevant ministries, in doing the next phase, which is the detailed planning of the Master Plan. So that is the next phase that we are working on right now.

SEG 8

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, can I just ask the honourable Minister, at SEG 8 - it says 'New Town Development'. Can he just clarify which town is this?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA,- Mr. Chairman, the New Town Development that the Ministry has undertaken includes Nabouwalu. The civil work for phase 1 is going to start from this budget allocation, as well as Keiyasi. The third one is at Seaqaqa which will also be starting in this new financial year.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Parliament will now vote on Head 37 – Ministry of Local Government.

Question put.

Head 37 agreed to.

Head 38 – Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Parliament will now vote on Head 38 - Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation.

Question put.

Head 38 agreed to.

Head 40 – Ministry of Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport

Programme 1, Activity 1: General Administration

Aid-in-Kind

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, just a question to the honourable Minister. I am glad to see that the work on the Tamavua-i-Wai Bridge is about to start. Just a question, when is it estimated to be completed?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Chairman, we are estimating that to be finalised towards the end of 2026, at the earliest, but probably later in 2027, in the first quarter.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, just wanted to ask the honourable Minister on the Capacity Improvement on Non-Revenue Water Reduction in Nadi/Lautoka Region. Can he just explain that, does this mean that this water system does not join into the main reticulation system?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU- It is a \$1.3 million project for non-revenue water reduction in Nadi/Lautoka. It is a technical cooperation initiative between JICA and the Government of Fiji. The objective is to reduce non-revenue water, as you understand, in leaks in water pipes, illegal connections, and meet inaccuracies. That basically is the objective of that.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, I just wanted to clarify that. By the word "non-revenue" I would have thought that it is outside the main line where you have metered water.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- No, it is leakage in the main lines.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, both in terms of direct payment and Aid-in-Kind, urban water supply and wastewater management are covered. I want to raise a question about Levuka. Levuka has water problems too, and it was raised by the Special Administrator. I wanted to ask the honourable Minister, what is the plan for Levuka in the short to medium term?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Chairman, Levuka had actually been included in the last financial year, but we had issues with the landowners. That is again currently being addressed. We are looking at progressing that in this financial year. I recall that is part of the Water Authority project to be progressed.

Programme 2, Activity 2 - Reporting and Facilities

SEG 8

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Sorry, Mr. Chairman, Construction of Meteorological and Disaster Awareness Regional Centre (\$1,125,000).

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Chairman, this is a construction of the Pacific Meteorological Regional Centre, so the agreement has already been signed and the design et cetera is now underway. We are looking at the project beginning towards the end of this year.

Programme 3, Activity 1 - General Administration

SEG 8

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, I wanted to ask the honourable Minister on the Feasibility Study, the Yasawa Island Airport Facility (\$250,000). I was talking with the honourable Deputy Minister for Tourism. Is this the same discussion that he had briefed me on this evening, that they are looking at an airport near Tevi Village in Yasawa?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Yes.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- You are correct, it is a feasibility study for a new airport facility. Once we have the feasibility study, then we can take the next step.

HON. J. USAMATE.- SEG 8, I have two questions. The first one is in regard to Upgrading and Enhancement of Government Quarters (\$5,961,183). When you are looking at the rural, we also saw some funds there for Government quarters, so we are finding them again here. I think this relates back to what honourable Leader of the Opposition was asking. This relates back to PSC, and I think whether it is the institutional quarters or whether they are being treated as one. Is this one talking about all Government quarters or the ones in relation to the Ministry?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I think what we have tried to do is, as I said earlier, we have tried to put it in different Ministries where there are capacity and obviously as much as PWD would like to do all of them, they probably will not have the capacity right now to do everything. So there are different Ministries, so some may actually go and get outside contractors as well to get this fixed. So that is why the allocations are available in different Ministries.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- You wish to add honourable Tuisawau?

HON. RO F. Q. TUISAWAU.- So, just to add to that, we are coordinating closely with the various Ministries, for example Health, Rural Development, so that in that coordination we

cover everything. Some are covered by the other Ministries, but public works also in coordination, works with the others to ensure that everything.

So by the end of this financial year, we want to ensure that all these government buildings or public buildings are upgraded, including the accommodation, which has been lagging in the last two years.

HON. J. USAMATE.- I will just add a comment to that, if you allow, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Yes.

HON. J. USAMATE.- I think one of the issues, I talked to the asset lady at the Ministry of Health, Mrs. Guan. They use some of their own stuff to do the upgrading, and two weeks later in Vanua Balavu, the guys from Public Works came and they had to re-do it. So, this issue of different bodies doing their own work without, I do not know what happened. Maybe you need Department of Building & Governments Architect's (DBGGA) or somebody to oversight, because two weeks later, this group came in and had to re-do it again. So, I can see the rationale for putting things, but that quality assurance mechanism, no clock off works type thing, I think that is something that needs to be strengthened.

HON. RO. F.Q. TUISAWAU.- So, I suppose that is one of the issues faced when we are bringing back PWD. So, a lot of the maintenance is still with the Ministries and we are working on consolidating that. But eventually, we want all of that to come under Government Properties Management Section, so it is all coordinated, modernised and we have digitalised the records and all that. So that in those records, it would indicate the maintenance programme, time of building has to be upgraded or whatever needs to be changed.

So that is part of the long term plan. But like I said, at the moment, it is part of an evolving reform in a structured manner. But definitely, there will be, you know, control and there will be no duplication. And as you mentioned, DBGGA in terms of the monitoring, that is something we are working closely with other Ministries to ensure that it is there when they engage the private contractors in terms of quality.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Last one on SEG 8, Mr. Chairman. On the Upgrade and Enhancement of Rural Roads. So, this is upgrading and enhancement and not new rural roads – but my question honourable Minister - would we be able to get a list of these roads at some later date, if it is available? At one time, we used to publish this together with the budget. Is this limited just to rural roads and not on the roads on the periphery of urban areas? Especially in Vakavanua settlements that we have around Suva.

HON. RO. F. Q. TUISAWAU.-That is in SEG 7? Upgrade and Enhancement of Rural Roads will also include the new roads. So we have a list under the Divisional Engineer, for example, Nakida, Sawani, Kula, Nasoqo and also Divisional Engineer North and West, so it is divided under those. We can provide that later if you need it.

Programme 3, Activity 3 – Electrical Services

SEG 8

HON. J. USAMATE.- So, SEG 8, I assume this is the reconnection of the solar back to the generators for Lakaru. Will that all be completed in this financial year?

HON. RO. F. Q. TUISAWAU.- Honourable Member, what SEG is that?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Yes, you correctly state it is part of the Lakaro project. Which we have earlier this year signed an agreement with UAE and also New Zealand MFAT to upgrade that. We have already signed the contract in September, the mobilisation with the contractors will happen. I think we should not start from Lakeba, we should start from Rotuma and then Kadavu.

The work will involve rectification of underground falls and also the overhead mains and one of the main developments there is the installation of the latest batteries, which had been developed through research at UAE in terms of Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) but it will be upgraded and part of the current power station. So, hybrid, we are looking at 24 supply of power. So, Lakeba, Kadavu then Rotuma.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, I acknowledge government for the allocation of the procurement of generators, but just to wear the climate change hat. It would be good for government to lead by example. You want to come away from dirty fuel, so if we can consider going green clean in our own stations.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- As I have mentioned, this is definitely we will be looking at hybrid. A mix of both, so that they complement but of course working to try to phase out the diesel.

Programme 4, Activity 1 – Policy and Administration

SEG 8

HON. J. USAMATE.- I am glad to see that the work will continue on the Muana. I was just wondering has any thought been given to Kadavu Koro?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Sorry, what is that? Kadavu Koro?

HON. J. USAMATE.- It is not here, but I am just asking or maybe I will ask you later.

SEG 9

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Chairman, can I ask the honourable Minister to elaborate on the purchase of that Hoist Truck?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- The current hoist truck was purchased in 2019. Since it was purchased it has developed technical and mechanical problems and could not undertake its intended purpose. It has been mobile since 2023 and we need this replacement for the department. We have been hiring from private companies, so it is really necessary for our energy team.

SEG 10

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, for the solar home system, I noticed that there has been a significant drop in the budget by about 30 percent. Just an explanation for the drop in the budget. The Solar Home System Programme by \$2 million?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- The reduction is a result of the re-scoping of the whole...

HON. J. USAMATE.- What does that mean?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- That means that when they did the re-scoping, the cost came down to \$2 million.

HON J. USAMATE.- For the same number of homes to be solarised. Why?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Sorry?

HON. J. USAMATE.- For the same number of homes to be solarised?

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

HON. J. USAMATE.- So, the number of homes that you solarised in last year's budget for \$3 million, you will be able to do in this new budget for \$2 million, is that what you are saying?

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

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Some of the payment is a roll over from that \$3 million.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Oh okay. It is different from his explanation.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- In addition to his explanation.

HON. J. USAMATE.- *Areh!*

(Laughter)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- It is a combination of that!

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Yes, combination of that!

(Laughter)

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, the House Wiring for Completed Grid Extension Projects. Again, this is appreciated, but honourable Minister, please be aware if this project could be monitored. Your Permanent Secretary already knows, I gave him a call a few weeks back. I went to the interior of Ra. There is a disconnection somewhere, whether it is the contractors or EFL, but it is so slow.

There is a lot of running around by the communities because they do not get definite answers from those concerned. I know that in the last Ra Provincial Council Meeting, the Chairman of the Ra Provincial Council chased EFL out of the meeting and then they go and discuss later because he was very disappointed with the explanation he was getting and the work that is happening in the communities. Honourable Minister, can this be monitored very closely please?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Yes, as honourable Usamate knows, the funds are through the Ministry but the implementation is done by EFL. So, the grid extension is not funded because approximately \$12 million is sitting with EFL or approximately 64 skins and 1,750 customers are supposed to benefit. Some of the challenges include the lack of contractors or the limited number of contractors, issues with supply chain of materials, even hose, wires, cross – sun, transformers and conductors, and the last one is the skilled manpower or human resource issues that EFL sector continues to face with high turnover. Yes, we acknowledge the honourable Leader of the Opposition.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Chairman, I was just about to ask the Minister as to why there is no allocation for the grid extension but he has explained. What I would like to request, if he can provide us with a list of all the places where that \$12 million is going to be utilised for the grid extension at a later stage, not now.

Programme 5, Activity 1 – Policy and Administration

SEG 8

HON. J. USAMATE.- I just have one question. I am very appreciative of this project at Navunimono and Ucunivanua. I am just wondering about the other villages in Verata?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- honourable Minister?

HON. RO. F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Yes, so *Navunimono* and *Ucunivanua* have had a long standing issue regarding water and we are very pleased that we have progress. As part of our responsibility, this project is funded by the French Government with Fiji. Under the Fund for Studies and Aid for Private Sector (FSAP), at a total cost of \$886,000 and it will be utilised to upgrade and rehabilitate the existing water supply in Navunimono and Verata and we will also include the package plant, the same as I suppose as the one which is in Nabouwalu. Mr. Chair, for Verata in general we are assessing the pipeline from Raralevu and also from Namau. The technical assessment at the moment. So that is also a priority.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Even the size in Nabouwalu that should handle the whole of Verata such a big plant.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- No, no, this is a smaller capacity but it is sort of a pilot project with the French which can be also be utilised for similar communities around Fiji.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- I am sorry, Sir, just on this rural water, I think honourable Minister one of the main request from the rural communities is particularly those that were done previously is just Ecological Purification System (EPS). They have water sources but they just need a bit of additional which is I think minimal just for EPS.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Yes, we do acknowledge that. In the Water Authority Programme there is a list of rural projects to be covered including the EPS. I can give you the details of that under the WAF Programme.

Programme 7, Activity 1 - Government Shipping Services

SEG 1

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Chairman, a very concern topic, which I want to ask. In that transport sector just a small one we have not seen any Road Safety Education and Awareness Programme. Is it embedded somewhere? The reason being, Mr. Chair, to date we have 29 fatalities on our Fiji Road compared to 26 last year. The Road Safety Curriculum in School and Road Safety Education and Awareness Programme I cannot find it there. If it is there, please let us know.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Nath, you cannot find it here maybe it is not supposed to be here, right?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Chairman, it is in the LTA budget. The details of the LTA budget, I have separately, and I can provide that, but they have the road safety elements there. As you will see, they have been working with FRU and they have been going out to community events, at the rugby match on Saturday which you did not attend, you did not even cheer for Fiji, the LTA was there liaising with the public.

HON. V. NATH.- It is not something funny. It is something serious.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- At the moment we are working on bringing back the Road Safety Council. I think you were the Assistant Minister for Transport at that time when you took it away. So we are reversing what you reversed.

HON. V. NATH.- I would request probably the whole listed will be printed and be given to me.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- I will check whether that is legally required. If not, you can go through the standing committees.

SEG 7

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, I just wanted to ask the honourable Minister for SEG 7 – Consultant and Review of Vessel Design – Phase 1 (\$200,000). Where is the consultant coming from - local or overseas?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- We really need the replacement of Government Shipping Services (GSS) vessels. If you travel on them, this is part of that work in terms of the design consultancy. This consultancy will be advertised locally and if we cannot find a suitable local consultant, we will liaise with our development partners to assist us in funding. It is a design finalisation of the vessel, engaging the naval architect, consultation with the contractor company, site visitation, review, finalisation, and completion of general arrangements regarding the vessel. So, phase 2 is the completion. We are looking at approximately \$12 million and delivery and commissioning \$111,000.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Parliament will now vote on Head No. 40 – Ministry of Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport.

Question put.

Head 40 agreed to.

Head 50 – Miscellaneous Services

SEG 5

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, Explanation on number 12 – Provision of banking services for non-economic rural areas.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Chairman, the banking services in rural areas. It has always been there. This is to cater for the subsidy to bank - BSP for the provision of rural banking services. BSP, in partnership with Post Fiji Limited, ensures that people in rural communities actually have access to banking services, and the Government pays a subsidy of \$3.52 on every transaction that is processed by BSP via post offices and postal agencies, including electronic withdrawals and deposits. On average, about \$200,000 transactions are processed, including about 99 percent of electronic transactions and 1 percent manual transactions.

SEG 7

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Chairman, Public Private Partnership (PPP) for Health. This is only for Aspen Lautoka and Ba or it also covers for the PPP Programme with the GPs?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Chairman, the increases is to meet the shortfall due to the increase in ongoing operational maintenance costed both Ba and Lautoka Hospitals.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Chairman, the PPP Programme with the normal GPs, dentists and laboratory is also covered in this?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Essentially, this is for the Health Care (Fiji) PPP for Ba and Lautoka Hospitals.

SEG 8

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, Item 2 – Nadi River Flood Alleviation Project and allocation of \$7.8 million. If the honourable Minister for Finance can just elaborate further on this allocation.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Honourable Leader of the Opposition as you know, this thing has been talked about for eight years. In fact, this whole project has been installed for eight years. It is only this Government that is now rapidly progressing the implementation of this whole project with our development partners JICA and the Australian Infrastructure Financing Facility for the Pacific (AIFFP). This Nadi Flood Alleviation Project has actually undergone extensive planning and conceptual design over the years. On 17th December, 2024 the Cabinet endorsed the recommendations of the alternative options assessment report for the project. Component B of a phase implementation approach to manage budgetary purchase and allow for the integration of structural and non-structural measures with the total cost anticipated to be about \$302 million based on the previous studies.

The project is expected to be packaged in three stages, to consider JICA's long-term perspective ten years of river widening and dredging works as part of stage three. The stage one of works will focus on the construction of Nadi Town dike and the diversion channel. While stage two will focus on the Nawaka dike and channel works. So both JICA and AIFFP continue to undertake discussions on co-optimisation of structural interventions. Before tabling the most viable approach for Government to consider. The total project cost is estimated at \$400 million. In the next financial year, the first part of the project will be the construction of the airport barrier protection and that will commence in the next financial year.

In addition to that, the detailed design and implementation works will also commence and the Ministry is also setting a Pre-Project Monitoring Unit with the recruitment of a main Manager Project and a Senior Project for this officer. That is where we are and it was good that both the JICA and Australia have come together with a new design, with a new approach and the phase implementation of the project.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, just a follow-on question. We are familiar with where it was before the Coalition Government came in. I know that the design and whatever has already been done by JICA. So this \$7 million, you talked about phase one. Is it going to be used for the construction work on the phase one, or is it for the continuation of technical assessments? The next question that I would raise with the honourable Minister is, why it was stalled, the issue about, what component will be aid and what component will be in the form of a loan? Remember when the honourable Prime Minister came back from PALM meeting, this was one of the supplementary questions that I raised with the honourable Prime Minister, because that was the issue that stalled this project. What component will be aid and what component will be in the form of a loan? If the honourable Minister can explain that, please.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- The Prime Minister did say, in answer to your question, all of JICA funding is actually grants, and JICA grant will be the one that will be utilised first. Dikes are also all grants from JICA, and the diversion channel would be the AIFFP loan. It will be a combination of grant and concessional loan.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Parliament will now vote on Head 50 – Miscellaneous Services.

Question put.

Head 50 agreed to.

Honourable Members, please take note that Heads 51 and 52 are standing appropriations or below the line appropriations. Head 51 lists all the pensions that are payable. These are a charge on the Government finances. Head 52 are the charges on account of public debt. These numerous pages list all the information on interest and loans. Neither Head is voted upon because they must be paid and are therefore already catered for.

Honourable Members, that brings us to the end of the Estimates. We shall now proceed to considering the schedules and the process of the 2025-2026 Appropriation Bill 2025 (Bill No. 10 of 2025), as required by the Standing Order 101. I advise honourable Members that as we have not amended the Estimates, Standing Order 101 prevents any amendments be moved and made at this stage. Standing Order 101(3) also prevents any debate on these questions.

Schedule 1

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Schedule 1 agreed to.

Schedule 2

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Schedule agreed to.

Clause 1

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clause 1 stands part of the Bill

Clause 2

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Clause 2 agreed to.

Clause 2 stands part of the Bill

Clause 3

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Clause 3 agreed to.

Clause 3 stands part of the Bill.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, that brings us to the end of the Committee of Supply and we have now concluded voting on Heads 1 to 50, as well as the Schedules and Clauses of the 2025-2026 Appropriation Bill 2025 (Bill No. 10 of 2025) and at this juncture, I will now resume the Speaker's Chair.

The House resumed:

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the Committee of Supply has agreed to the 2025-2026 Appropriation Bill 2025 without amendments.

In that respect, I now call upon the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics the Honourable Professor Biman Prasad to move the Third Reading of the Appropriation Bill.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move:

That the 2025-2026 Appropriation Bill 2025 (Bill No. 10 of 2025) be read a third time and be passed.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Votes cast:

Ayes	-	36
Noes	-	12

Motion agreed to.

[A Bill for an Act to appropriate a sum of Four Billion, Two Hundred Fifty-Three Million, Thirty Thousand, Five Hundred and Sixty Two Dollars for the ordinary services of Government for the year ending 31st July, 2026 (Bill No. 10 of 2025) enacted by the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji. (Act No. of 2025)]

(Acclamation)

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Parliament has officially passed the 2025-2026 National Budget. As I previously highlighted this week's long deliberation stands as a cornerstone of our constitutional duty ensuring transparency accountability and sound national planning.

I extend my sincere appreciation to all the honourable Members for your thoughtful engagement throughout the important process. Your contribution has been invaluable.

Let me also offer my warm congratulations to the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics the honourable Professor Biman Prasad for the successful adoption of the Budget.

Honourable Members, that brings us to the end of the sitting today. I wish you a restful night and Parliament will now adjourn until tomorrow at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.27 p.m.