

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

MONDAY, 20TH MARCH, 2017

[CORRECTED COPY]

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MONDAY, 20TH MARCH, 2017

The Parliament met at 9.31 a.m., pursuant to adjournment.

HONOURABLE SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

Hon. Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama, Prime Minister and Minister for iTaukei Affairs,
Sugar Industry and Foreign Affairs
Hon. Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum, Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Public
Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications
Hon. Faiyaz Siddiq Koya, Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism and Lands and Mineral
Resources
Hon. Parveen Bala Kumar, Minister for Local Government, Housing and Environment,
Infrastructure and Transport
Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy, Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts
Hon. Commander Semi Tuleca Koroilavesau, Minister for Fisheries
Hon. Osea Naiqamu, Minister for Forests
Hon. Lt. Col. Inia Batikoto Seruiratu, Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime
Development and National Disaster Management
Hon. Jone Usamate, Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations
Hon. Lt. Col. Laisenia Bale Tuitubou, Minister for Youth and Sports
Hon. Rosy Sofia Akbar, Minister for Health and Medical Services
Hon. Alexander David O'Connor, Assistant Minister for Health and Medical Services
Hon. Lorna Eden, Assistant Minister for Local Government, Housing and Environment
Hon. Commander Joeli Ratulevu Cawaki, Assistant Minister for Rural and
Maritime Development and National Disaster Management
Hon. Veena Kumar Bhatnagar, Assistant Minister for Women, Children and Poverty
Alleviation
Hon. Vijay Nath, Assistant Minister for Infrastructure and Transport
Hon. Ilesia Delana, Assistant Minister for Youth and Sports
Hon. Viam Pillay, Assistant Minister for Agriculture
Hon. Mohammed Mursalinul Abe Dean
Hon. Jiosefa Dulakiverata
Hon. Viliame Rogoibulu Gavoka
Hon. Semesa Druavesi Karavaki
Hon. Ro Teimumu Vuikaba Kepa
Hon. Ratu Kiniviliame Kiliraki
Hon. Jilila Nalibu Kumar
Hon. Dr. Brij Lal
Hon. Alvik Avhikrit Maharaj
Hon. Ratu Suliano Matanitobua
Hon. Alivereti Nabulivou
Hon. Ruveni Nadabe Nadalo
Hon. Ratu Sela Vuinakasa Nanovo
Hon. Niko Nawaikula
Hon. Mataiasi Akoula Niumataiwalu
Hon. Howard Robin Thomas Politini
Hon. Prof. Biman Chand Prasad
Hon. Parmod Chand

Hon. Aseri Masivou Radrodro
 Hon. Salote Vuibureta Radrodro
 Hon. Lt. Col. Netani Rika
 Hon. Balmindar Singh
 Hon. Prem Singh
 Hon. Anare Tuidraki Vadei
 Hon. Samuela Bainikalou Vunivalu
 Hon. Mikaele Rokosova Leawere
 Hon. Mosese Drecala Bulitavu

Absent

Hon. Ratu Inoke Kubuabola, Minister for Defence and National Security
 Hon. Mereseini Rakuita Vuniwaqa, Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation
 Hon. Ashneel Sudhakar

ADMINISTRATION OF OATH/AFFIRMATION OF ALLEGIANCE

The following Member subscribed to the Administration of Oath or Affirmation of Allegiance and took his seat in the Chamber:

Honourable Parmod Chand.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CHAIR

Maiden Speech – Honourable Parmod Chand

HON. SPEAKER.- Congratulations to the Honourable Member and welcome to Parliament. I also take this opportunity to welcome his family members, who are observing from the gallery this morning; welcome to Parliament.

I now invite the Honourable Parmod Chand to deliver his Maiden Speech.

HON. P. CHAND.- Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I rise before you today as a proud resident and Member of Parliament from the Friendly North to represent the people of Fiji.

It is an absolute honour and privilege indeed to be here in this capacity and let me start by thanking God Almighty because of whom we are here today. With Him on our side, we can do the impossible and I thank God for His presence here today.

At the outset, Madam Speaker, I thank the National Federation Party for having confidence in me to serve as a Member of Parliament for the remainder of the term of this Parliament. I realise my current parliamentary term will be short with the General Elections scheduled for next year.

However, Madam Speaker, I will certainly try to do justice to my role as a Member of Parliament in accordance with the normal parliamentary norms and rules of this august Chamber, as well as in conformity to the principles and policies of our party that has been in existence for the last 54 years.

I also wish to put on record my thanks and appreciation for the work done by our former President of this Parliament, Roko Tupou Draunidalo. She discharged her parliamentary duties fearlessly and

effectively until her suspension, considered to be harsh and unreasonable by even the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. P. CHAND.- Madam Speaker, I aim to live up to the trust the electorate has placed in me, and to the high standards set by my predecessors. They have been members who served Fiji with great distinction and admiration. Their service to this nation will indeed be big shoes to fill but I am optimistic of the fact that where there is a will, there is always a way to move forward together, as a nation, not divided but united for the common good of our beloved Fiji.

Our national anthem has these words and I quote, “As we stand united under noble banner blue” Therefore, Madam Speaker, I am certain with the grace of God, the support of my fellow parliamentarians and blessings from loved ones, this will undoubtedly be an exciting and rewarding journey.

Albert Einstein said, “The value of a man should be seen in what he gives and not in what he is able to receive.” Now let me add my own words to it. The value of a man should be seen in what he does and not only what he says.

Madam Speaker, with an opportunity to serve and make a difference in the lives of people, I find these values highly relevant. My passion to serve this country will be an important factor in the success of my journey as a Member of Parliament in this august House.

Madam Speaker, indeed I have followed in the footsteps of my late father, Mr. Vishnu Prasad, a former school teacher and an entrepreneur of a successful bus business, who then sought to become a politician. As a businessman and a cane grower myself, Madam Speaker, I have adopted my father’s principles in trying to be of help to the disadvantaged people in his life. My Dad’s message to me has always been “you cannot change the world but you can certainly make a difference in someone’s life”, and that is what I wish to do.

With this dream soundly embedded in my mind, and values enshrined in my upbringing, I am ready to be an integral part of a vision, a vision of dynamic Fiji, where everyone has a chance to make a choice, have a choice and enjoy this choice, where no one is left behind and where there is true compassion, where a mentality of one team, one dream prevails and where not as individuals but collectively, we become ultimate champions.

Madam Speaker, our fathers and forefathers have left a legacy of mutual trust, cooperation, compassion and a multitude of nation-building techniques. So, let us use this as a foundation to build on.

My passion for a visionary Fiji is to develop a visionary strategic plan, Vision 2030, as very articulately stated by our Honourable Leader three years ago. We should be inclusive in our approach as we develop this plan. We should consider to invite wide-ranging community outputs, including international assistance if need be, establish a timeframe, as we forge ahead with this visionary plan.

Madam Speaker, an integral part of the vision would be to develop an achievable goal - a goal that will define Fiji, a goal that will represent Fiji, and a goal that will be embraced and enjoyed by Fiji. Above all, a goal that will be the face of Fiji.

Madam Speaker, we are a great and blessed nation. Our tropical climate, rivers, deltas, valleys and fertile land are our great assets. Our greatest strength are the people of our multicultural, multiethnic and multi-religious nation. We need to harness our resources effectively and fully utilize these strengths.

We need to focus and entrust our valued resources in this endeavour and, Madam Speaker, we need to strive and I believe as we strive together, the sky is the limit.

Madam Speaker, sustainability and maintenance of family values are great virtues of our diverse cultures and traditions. It is the wish of all parents and guardians to successfully nurture their children and settle them well in their lives. It is therefore, extremely important that all our people are empowered so that they have an opportunity to attain knowledge, fortitude and strength to establish a successful livelihood for them and their families.

As leaders and legislators, we should always aspire to facilitate an environment in order for our people to achieve this because this is what national interest is about.

What I stand for and my passion can be defined as follows:

- Freedom of speech and the media, vibrant democracy and respect for human rights;
- Economic growth driven by manufacturing and promotion of small businesses;
- Revival of the sugar industry;
- Roads and infrastructure development;
- Electricity grid extension to rural and cane belt areas;
- More sealed roads;
- More cross-country roads to open up land and reduce travelling time;
- Clean and continuous water supply; and
- Decent employment opportunities.

Our vision for Fiji will revolve around these key attributes.

Madam Speaker, I will focus on some of the objectives that I just alluded to, including their importance to Vanua Levu.

Freedom of speech: The right to free speech is one of the most basic yet precious right of any person. Freedom of speech is important for a vibrant democracy, as it enables a free flow of information and ideas from the public in making informed decisions. By giving people the opportunity to express themselves and speak their minds without fear of retaliation can provide valuable feedbacks that can be articulated and used concurrently in improving our young people and improving policies and procedures. I believe in encouraging our young people to voice their opinion, as our young people's voices is as important as ours and a cry for the betterment of our people and our nation.

Madam Speaker, on economic growth, there is an inevitable outward migration of people from Vanua Levu to Suva, other parts of Fiji and even overseas for better opportunities. Everyone looks for greener pastures and unfortunately the North is deprived of economic growth due to the exodus of its skilled and talented people. The Northern Division is rich in its resources, which needs to be positively utilised and can contribute to the economy as a whole. With Government's intervention and support, these resources can be used effectively and utilised to reduce the migration of people from the North.

Madam Speaker, furthermore, if we are able to retain our people in Vanua Levu, it would be a great asset to the existing businesses. In addition, the development of a fully-fledged university campus by both FNU and USP in the North will also be a contributing factor to retaining our young people, whose knowledge and skills can be further developed, to enable them to be entrepreneurs, starting their own businesses and contributing to the overall economic growth of the North.

Revival of the Sugar Industry: Madam Speaker, with agriculture, in particular the sugar industry being the main backbone of Fiji's economy for over a century, the revival of the sugar industry in the

North will bring about a positive economic growth. Through proper funding and recovery programmes, the sugar industry in the North can be revitalized to provide more employment opportunities. It is important to note that not all school leavers end up in higher education institutions, or get absorbed directly into the workforce. Some of these school leavers end up in the cane fields as a source of income to accommodate their daily needs. A healthy and vibrant industry is paramount not only for Vanua Levu but Fiji as a whole.

Roads and Infrastructure development: Madam Speaker, to ensure social well-being and population cohesiveness and the well-functioning of economic activities in a country, an adequate and efficient transport network is vital. It is also the right of the citizens to expect this from their government. An adequate and efficient transport network will greatly enhance the economy in the North. I understand the difficulties faced by decision-makers in their endeavour to facilitate a well-coordinated transport network in Fiji.

However, I believe that focus on Vanua Levu in terms of infrastructure development should be aimed at ultimately bringing economic parity between the two major islands of Fiji. I acknowledge Government's efforts in the tarsealing of Dreketi to Nabouwalu Road. The economy of the Bua province is showing signs of improvement due to the upgrade of this road.

Madam Speaker, the Government should also look into tarsealing the Nabouwalu to Naibalebale Road and the road between Nacavanadi to Coqeloa. This will open up the economies of this region and give serious incentive to hoteliers, given the serene and scenic nature of these areas. Moreover, having more cross-country roads will open up land and reduce travelling for commuters.

Electricity grid extension to rural and cane belt areas: Madam Speaker, with an increase in electricity supply to the greater population in the North, more economic activities will be generated. There will also be an increase in investment opportunities and improvement to overall productivity in the North. Additionally, communication will be improved, urban migration will be reduced, and people will have better opportunities to study from their own setting. How children in Fiji are nurtured and educated is a strong determinant of Fiji striving to become a knowledge-based society.

Madam Speaker, this can only be achieved if the people in Fiji are given unrestricted access to all forms of education based on quality, fairness and equality and this is achievable with a good electricity access and supply and improved communication network and facility to the people in Vanua Levu.

Water Supply: Madam Speaker, clean drinking water is the most vital basic human resource for all communities in Fiji. Having proper water supply is the most powerful preventative measure to reducing infectious disease. According to the World Health Organisation, each day about 3,900 children die world over from dirty water or poor hygiene alone, as stipulated in the International Decade for Action 2005-2015. Proper water supply to all the communities in Vanua Levu will reduce medication and treatment cost caused by the lack of unhygienic water supply. Consequently, the economy will also benefit from investors.

Employment: Madam Speaker, in my vision for Vanua Levu, it is my desire to see improvement in infrastructure in the North, particularly our roads. It goes without saying how vital roads are to the economy in the North. Employers and employees are well aware that without good roads, the adverse effect it has on businesses and livelihoods of people is overwhelming.

Better access to electricity and water, revival of the sugar industry, are all important factors that contribute to economic growth in the North. With improvements on these fundamental issues that I have highlighted, it should provide an incentive not only for people to remain in Vanua Levu, but also for

investors to create opportunities for the people. Ultimately, the unemployment rate will surely decrease; there will be a more even distribution of wealth for Fiji as a whole.

Madam Speaker, we should endeavour to be successful, and this is aptly captured by Ralph Waldo Emerson, when he defines success, and I quote:

“To laugh often and much; To win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children; To earn the appreciation of honest critics and endure the betrayal of false friends; To appreciate beauty; to find the best in others; To leave the world a bit better; whether by a healthy child; a garden patch, or a redeemed social condition; To know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived. This is to have succeeded.”

Madam Speaker, to conclude, let us aspire and achieve the above objectives that will make the North the Paradise it was meant to be, thus fulfilling the slogan, “Fiji the way the world should be”.

I look forward to working with each one of you and assure you of my unconditional and unwavering support towards a visionary Fiji.

God Bless the Friendly North and God Bless Fiji.

(Acclamation)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Member.

MINUTES

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Madam Speaker, I beg to move:

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Friday, 10th February, 2017, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

HON. LT. COL. N. RIKA.- Madam Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome

HON. SPEAKER.- I wish to warmly welcome Members of the public joining us in the gallery and those watching proceedings on television and the internet, and also listening to the radio. I wish to also specially welcome our friends from the United States, members of the LDS church, who are here with us this morning. Thank you for taking interest in your Parliament.

Fee-to-Air Channel – Parliament Broadcasts

For the information of Honourable Members, I have been informed that Parliament, in collaboration with the Department of Communication, has secured a free-to-air channel on *Walesi TV*

and this is on Channel 6. This will allow the broadcasting of the Parliamentary sittings from the beginning right through to the adjournment on each sitting day. This will continue for the entire week's sitting.

Sign Language – Parliament sittings

In the February sitting of Parliament, I had informed Honourable Members that in this week's sitting of Parliament, we will have officers who are proficient in sign language to provide simultaneous interpretation to the viewers. Whilst I was hoping this would begin this week, due to technical complications, it seems we will not be able to implement this until confirmed for a later date.

Allocation of Annual Reports and Petitions to Standing Committees

Moving on with the Business of the House following my meeting with the Chairs and Deputy Chairs of the Standing Committees, I am taking into consideration the workload of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights and therefore, I am allowing the following:

1. The Fiji Police Force Annual Report - 2013; the Fiji Police Force Annual Report – 2015; and the petition on the Review and Redress of the 2015 Police Back Pay, to be referred to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence;
2. the Petition on the Severity of Punishment by LTA to be referred to the Standing Committee on Social Affairs; and
3. the Petition on the Conditions of Work at Grand Pacific Hotel to be referred to the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs.

HON. SPEAKER.- The Honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa, the Leader of the Opposition, you now have the floor.

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

Efficiency of Fiji Roads Authority (FRA) (Question No. 55/2017)

HON. RO T.V. KEPA asked the Government, upon notice:

In view of the Prime Minister's concerns about the efficiency of the FRA, what remedial measures does the Honourable Minister for Local Government, Housing, Environment, Infrastructure and Transport have to make FRA more effective?

HON. P.B. KUMAR (Minister of Local Government, Housing, Environment, Infrastructure and Transport).- Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I also thank the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Madam Speaker, after the departure of the MWH late last year, the FRA Board, in consultation with the management and the stakeholders, has now a well-established system for policy planning, monitoring and reporting.

Madam Speaker, fundamental cultural and transformational changes within an organisation does not happen overnight, FRA is only five years old. I am aware that there are some challenges within FRA and the board has and will address these issues. The changes put in place by the board and management will not truly take full effect for another two to three years. The Government will continue to monitor

and recommend changes and improvements, where necessary. In the interim, Madam Speaker, the Ministry will also assist FRA, to deliver on this mandate to the people of Fiji. This, Madam Speaker, is the process of continuous improvement.

Madam Speaker, there have been some immediate actions taken to make FRA more effective:

- 1) Divisional offices for FRA have been set up with more staff;
- 2) Specialised machineries have been brought in by the contractors;
- 3) Intake of technical staff;
- 4) Much better coordination with other Government departments, municipal councils, stakeholders and the private sector after signing the Code of Practice for utility operators. This Code of Practice is designed to improve coordination between agencies, in order to eliminate duplication, service conflicts and delivery of service; and
- 5) There is also an MOU in place with the Ministry of Provincial Development for a three year programme, for the construction of rural roads, crossings and jetties.

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister has raised his concern in some areas, and I can assure this august House that those bad situations will be fixed. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Minister for his explanation, but as far as the travelling public is concerned, the FRA allocation for 2017 is \$527.2 million and that is a lot of money - more than what has been allocated to the Ministries of Education and Health and many other ministries. There are so many complaints, Madam Speaker, in our daily newspapers, in the news and on television, on urban and rural roads.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- My question is, what is the FRA doing, through the Minister, in terms of road drainage because I think that is a problem that needs to be looked at and which is a major contributor to the flooding of roads?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister.

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. This issue was brought up in the last sitting and I hope the Honourable Leader of Opposition was present then, whereby I made a commitment that FRA will carry out the drainage programme, and if you go around now, you will see the drainage work is in place. So, I really do not know what drainage the Honourable Leader of Opposition is talking about.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Nanovo.

HON. RATU S.V. NANOVO.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the Honourable Minister for the reply given. For your information, I just came back from Kadavu last week and there was not much drainage done on the roads in Kadavu. My question is, can the Honourable Minister advise this

august House whether the officers currently managing the FRA are qualified enough in that field, in order to manage the operation of FRA successfully?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Not relevant to the

HON. RATU S.V. NANOVO.- No, that is part, that should be

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I would like to remind Honourable Members that on question time, one minute is given to the person asking the question. Thank you. Honourable Minister.

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker, I think the Honourable Member was not listening. When I was giving my response I said, "Intake of technical staff". So, those are in place and they are responsible for taking care of FRA. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Nawaikula.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- The roads in Labasa, some of the areas that the Honourable Prime Minister had highlighted and the Honourable Minister said "it will be fixed", that is no comfort. It will be fixed, but when? There was no comfort at all to the road users in Labasa even the FijiFirst supporters there. Can you give us a timeline?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- You want them to vote for you?

HON. GOVT MEMBER.- New question?

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, it was really an honour for me to accompany the Honourable Prime Minister to the North. I would like to invite the Honourable Nawaikula to accompany us in the next trip because I tell you....

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Let me tell you, Honourable Member, that people residing in that area were so happy about the roads, water supply and electricity and let me say this, he is talking about from 2014, and it is a matter of two to three years. What about those people who have been staying there for 70 or 80 years? No roads! No electricity!

(Acclamation)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, a Point of Order.

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of Order.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Can he give us a timeline? That is all. When, one month, two months?

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- The issue does not qualify under the Point of Order process. On a Point of Order, the ruling should be made from the Honourable Speaker and should be directed at the Speaker.

Would you like to continue with your reply Honourable Minister?

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Let me address his Point of Order, I do not see any point in that order.

(Laughter)

So, let me continue with my response, Madam Speaker, that the people from the North are very happy, they do not have to worry about what he is saying, but let me say that the roads have been done and will be done by this Government. Thank you.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you for supporting my Ruling. I now give the floor to the Honourable Professor Biman Prasad.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I noticed that the question was on the efficiency of the FRA and the Honourable Minister obviously did not talk much about it.

My question to him is, whether the FRA has looked at the cost and benefit of hiring overseas contractors as opposed to promoting local contractors, and looking at the efficiency between the two and the employment of people locally?

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister.

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- In my response, Madam Speaker, I have said so many immediate actions that we are taking. Can you hear me? This is the problem with you...

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- I have said to involve more local contractors. I have said so many immediate actions that we are taking

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- It is here. So what are you talking about?

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- What do you mean that it is not an evidence?

(Honourable Member interjects)

Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister. I now give the floor to the Honourable Bulitavu.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Madam Speaker, given that FRA has wasted taxpayers' money in consultation fees and expatriates hired from overseas, this money could have been diverted to the Ministry of Health for building better hospitals.

Madam Speaker, PWD was given \$60 million. The FRA is being given \$600 million a year but what have they done?

Madam Speaker, my question to the Honourable Minister is, can the Honourable Minister consider removing FRA and getting an organisation like PWD and to be more corporatised, can that be done? That will be more effective.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. The issue here is not to remove FRA. The issue here is to strengthen, and this is what I have highlighted.

A few weeks ago, I was in Nasekula Village in Labasa and the road in that village has not been upgraded so many years back, and Honourable Bulitavu has been to that village so many times, Madam Speaker. During my visit, I had assured the Nasekula villagers that their roads would be upgraded and in just after a few days, the road was upgraded. So let us not talk about removing FRA, let us talk about how we can strengthen and work together to see that things are done. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Lastly, I invite the Honourable Aseri Radrodro to have the floor.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Madam Speaker, I take note of the remedial measures mentioned by the Honourable Minister but I fail to hear the Honourable Minister saying anything about changing the CEO, FRA and his board. I just want to ask a question to the Honourable Minister, is that an option, given the Honourable Prime Minister's recent comment in Navua?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker, I did say that I am not here to defend the issues or the allegations that have been raised earlier on, but I am here to see, as the Minister responsible to implement.

In my response, I had said that the Honourable Prime Minister has raised concern in certain areas, and that needs to be fixed. The issue does not arise to change the CEO or the board. That issue does not arise. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister.

(Laughter)

I now give the floor to the Honourable Ratu Kiniviliame Kiliraki to ask his question.

Progress of the 80-Bed Nausori Hospital
(Question No. 56/2017)

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services inform this House as to the progress of the construction of the 80 bed hospital at Nausori?

This was budgeted for \$2 million in 2016.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services.

HON. R.S. AKBAR (Minister for Health and Medical Services).- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to thank the Honourable Member for the question.

Madam Speaker, the new Nausori Hospital was initially proposed and designed to provide 55 beds based on the 2005 Estimates of likely patient numbers. It was to be constructed on a site at Vunivivi Hill in Nausori. The site was allocated to the Ministry of Health many years ago under Town Planning. Hence, the Ministry had limited choice but to make an attempt to design the hospital, based on the current health care standards.

Honourable Members and Madam Speaker will be aware of the significant growth in population of Nausori that has hovered in and around over the past years. This area has also seen increased levels of economic activity and will benefit further from plans to expand and upgrade the Nausori Airport.

Madam Speaker, in order to meet the health care needs of their growing population and the thriving local economy, it was decided that a larger 80-bed hospital would be needed, and planning went ahead on that basis. That planning process, however, determined that the original site could not accommodate a larger hospital designed to provide the required 80 beds.

Madam Speaker, while the Government is still working towards developing the new Nausori Hospital, those currently living in Nausori and nearby areas are already able to access health care services at several locations; namely:

- Nausori Health Centre which has four beds, one emergency bed, provides general outpatient, emergency special outpatient, dental and pharmaceutical services;
- Nausori Maternity has 12 inpatient beds, one first stage labour bed prior to delivery and two delivery beds capacity;
- Wainibokasi Hospital provides general outpatient services, emergency services and has 12 adult inpatient beds and a Children's Ward; and
- Mokani Health Centre also provides similar services.

Madam Speaker, I am also pleased to inform the House that construction of the new Nakasi Health Centre which will also complement the services of Nausori Health Centre is well underway, and that facility is expected to be commissioned by the end of 2017.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Dulakiverata.

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Minister for the explanation. The Nausori Health Centre caters for the population of Tailevu, Naitasiri, Rewa and the

most populous Suva-Nausori corridor and is very ill-equipped, so the need for a new hospital is very urgent. Can you give a timeline as to when this hospital will be built?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Madam Speaker, I cannot give an exact timeline but the Government is very much committed to developing the new Nausori Hospital in the near future and, of course, we expect to see it progressing soon.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Salote Radrodro.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- I thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you Madam Minister for that explanation. Having looked through all those institutions that were supposed to be under construction work in 2016 under the Budget Supplementary Address and which has not been reflected in the 2016-2017 Budget Address, can the Honourable Minister explain what kind of feasibility study has been done to all those institutions that have been listed to be constructed under the Budget Address and have not been implemented? For example, the Nausori Hospital, in having said that, the reason is the site. Should that had not been dealt with first before you actually list the construction of those medical health facilities in the Budget Supplement or in the Budget?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Madam Speaker, I think that is a totally new question but just to shed a few light on what Honourable Radrodro has said. Through the engagement of a lead Consultant and Health Planner and working with the Construction and Implementation Unit in the Ministry of Economy, various value engineering options and calculations have taken place. In the case of Nausori Hospital, the design reached up to permit stage whereby the estimated cost plan started to unfold at a very unfavourable end, and the associated infrastructure upgrading required to make the proposed designed hospital to be fully functional contributed to even higher costs. Hence, as a Government, we decided to relook at the design and a more suitable site for the future.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now invite the Honourable Leawere to have the floor.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Honourable Speaker, I would like to thank the Honourable Minister for her response. The question I would like to ask the Honourable Minister; are there plans to also improve other nursing stations by having a doctor and, at least, four beds, for example, Galoa Nursing Station has 3,000 patients and they have been looked after by one nurse and as well as Korovisilou Nursing Station? I would just like to ask the Honourable Minister for an assurance; are these included in the plans as well in terms of having a doctor in nursing stations, please?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. There is a question of relevance here. We are really focusing on the Nausori Hospital and not the other Health Centres. Therefore, I am ruling that question out, and I now give the floor to the Honourable Bulitavu to ask his question.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Madam Speaker, we have heard the Honourable Minister today that the site is not enough. Is there any plan on the new site that will accommodate it because this particular programme was in the 2016 Budget, nothing has started, so what can be done now or what assurance can the Honourable Minister give?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Bilitavu for that question. Yes, we are currently looking at alternative sites but at the moment, we have not fixed up a particular site for that.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Honourable Nawaikula.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- The Honourable Minister cannot give us a timeline, she still needs to do the assessment. Then why did you put it in the Budget?

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Why did you put it in the budget, why?

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Madam Speaker, a simple answer to that is, we are building for the future, not logged into plans an outdated models of patient-care but taking medical care progressively towards the future needs and standardised health care that the country needs.

HON. SPEAKER.- Lastly, Honourable Kiliraki

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- Madam Speaker, I believe the Outpatients Department at Nausori Hospital numbers about 500 patients every day from morning until 10 o'clock at night. They are being sheltered in a makeshifts shelter with only the roof exposed to the environment. Can the Honourable Minister be able to do something about it so that the patients are protected?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Member for the question. I am sure all the Honourable Members of the House have driven past Nausori for the last 20, 30 years or many more years and that facility has existed the way it was initially constructed.

Madam Speaker, when I visited Nausori Hospital first upon taking this portfolio, that was a priority and I can inform in this august House that works have started as of today, to improve the waiting area for the Outpatients Department and I have been given four to six weeks for the completion of the waiting area for the General Outpatients Department.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Honourable Salote Radrodoro to ask her question.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- I thank you Madam Speaker.

Payment of Royalties to Bua Pine Landowners
(Question No. 57/2017)

HON. S.V. RADRODRO asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Forests outline the royalties paid to the Pine landowners in Bua?

HON. O. NAIQAMU (Minister for Forests).- Madam Speaker, I rise to answer the question raised by the Honourable Member on the royalties paid to the pine landowners in Bua.

Fiji Pine Limited paid what is called a stumpage, not royalties, to pine landowners within their plantation lease in Viti Levu and Vanua Levu. Stumpage is paid at 12 percent of the net revenue after

the deduction of logging, cartage and roading costs. This is a direct monthly payment to landowning units through iTLTB, based on the stumpage applicable to all logs extracted in a particular month from respective forest areas.

Madam Speaker, for Bua pine landowners, Fiji Pine Limited paid \$303,486 in 2013; \$572,893 in 2014; \$525,092.37 in 2015; and \$202,541 from January to October 2016. Stumpage payments are also made to all other Fiji Pine stations wherever pine logging takes place, including Lololo, Nadi, Nabou, Ra and Macuata forests. Overall Fiji Pine Limited paid a total stumpages of \$670,133 in 2013; \$1,153,083 in 2014; \$908,303 in 2015; and \$524,868 in 2016.

Madam Speaker, in addition to stumpage, pine industry provides the following returns to the landowners:

- Lease rental of \$13 per hectare, before it was \$2.50, so thanks to the Bainimarama-led Government.
- Three percent forest-based levy which is paid to the forest-based companies to venture into business activities within the pine industry, whereby increasing landowners' participation and returns.
- 2.5 percent forest trust levy, which is paid to the forest-based trust for community development projects.
- Lease security bonus payment, which is a bonus payment based on the company's financial performance.

Since its inception in 2014, Fiji Pine Limited has paid out a total of \$3,171,995.35 as lease security bonus payment to its landowners. *Vinaka*, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Bulitavu, your supplementary question?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Thank you. Madam Speaker, from the response given by the Minister in regards to the trust which is given of 2.5 percent and 3 percent for the companies, are there any plans to increase and review this? Will forest landowner- based companies be allowed to participate in logging and they own a licence? In Bua, there is a company called Premier, that was given a licence. How can the locals venture into that kind of business also, can we increase that?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister?

HON. O. NAIQAMU.- Madam Speaker, before increasing, I would like to mention for the information of this House that this is the first ever that the Government has committed such a structure whereby the resource owners never experienced this before, especially for the pine landowners throughout Fiji. Their population is more than 30,000 from all the 14 provinces and are being included in all those payments. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Nawaikula, a supplementary question?

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- What matters is the equity that the resource owners hold in Fiji Pine Limited. How much of the Company do they own?

HON. O. NAIQAMU.- Madam Speaker, it is a new question altogether.

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Salote Radrodro.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- I thank you, Madam Speaker, and I thank the Honourable Minister for his explanation. My question is, for the different pine products like pine posts, pine logs, pine chips and Bua has a pine chips industry site there. What are the different rates paid to those different products and is the Bua one just focussing on the pine chips or they are also producing pine logs, timber, posts and other products?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. O. NAIQAMU.- Madam Speaker, that is a new question.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. There being no other question, I now give the floor to the Honourable Prem Singh to ask his question.

Compensation – Family of the late Ashneel Singh
(Question No. 58/2017)

HON. P. SINGH asked the Government, upon notice:

Would the Honourable Prime Minister and Minister for iTaukei Affairs, Sugar Industry and Foreign Affairs inform the Parliament whether any steps have been taken by Government to ensure the family of the late Ashneel Singh, killed in a road accident in October 2015 by a vehicle driven by a South African Diplomat have been compensated by the South African Government?

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA (Prime Minister and Minister for *iTaukei* Affairs, Sugar Industry and Foreign Affairs).- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Member for the question.

Madam Speaker, what happened to Mr. Singh in October 2015 was a tragedy, and again I extend my most sincere condolences to the Singh family. But it is important to note, Madam Speaker that Mr. Theodorus Mostert, the South African Diplomat involved in the accident passed away in South Africa shortly after leaving Fiji. I hope Honourable Prem Singh knows of his passing.

While Mr. Mostert was in Fiji, he, like every diplomat serving here in our islands, was protected by the Diplomatic Immunity. Fiji, along with nearly every country in the world, is party to the Vienna Convention which protects all diplomats, including those Fijians serving in our Missions abroad from civil and administrative jurisdiction. These are the rules every nation must play by in the engagement with the world. His Diplomatic Immunity prevented any investigation of the incident from moving forward as the South African Government has not waived his Diplomatic Immunity. As a result, the facts of the case remain unclear.

While we would have hoped the South African Government would have waived immunity and allowed for a thorough investigation, that has not happened and as a result, there can be no legal action taken by Fiji. This incident has been upsetting for me as Prime Minister, Madam Speaker, and I can only imagine the pain that Mr. Singh's death has caused to his loved ones but in this moment of grave tragedy, we must try and take away what lessons we can and we must always remain alert on the road.

We must always be proactive about our own safety. We can only speculate on the specific of this tragedy but in the situation, wearing a seatbelt can mean a difference between life and death. So I would end with a plea to every Fijian and everyone in Fiji to always buckle up. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Prem Singh.

HON. P. SINGH.- Madam Speaker, a supplementary question. Is it right for the insurance company, that is Tower Insurance, to deny the family of Ashneel Singh third party payment on the basis that the late Mr. Singh was killed in an accident by someone with Diplomatic Immunity? The third party cover was with Tower Insurance for the late Mr. Singh's vehicle.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Prime Minister.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Madam Speaker, I think he has gone off the track. There is no third party insurance claim. It is a head-on collision and it is quite fairly different.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. There being no other question, I now give the floor to the Honourable Mataiasi Niumataiwalu to ask his question.

Preparatory Meeting - United Nations Ocean Conference
(Question No. 59/2017)

HON. M.A. NIUMATAIWALU asked the Government, upon notice:

Heads of States for Pacific Countries have been meeting in Suva for the Pacific Regional Preparatory Meeting for the United Nations Oceans Conference to be held in New York in June this year. Can the Honourable Prime Minister and Minister for iTaukei Affairs, Sugar Industry and Foreign Affairs explain what will Fiji push for at this global stage and how will we benefit from such engagements?

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA (Prime Minister and Minister for iTaukei Affairs, Sugar Industry and Foreign Affairs).- Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I thank the Honourable Member for the question.

As you all know, there are a few countries more dependent on the health and vitality of our ocean and marine resources than Fiji. We cannot afford to take a back seat in the global campaign to reverse the stress that pollution, overfishing and ever-increasing marine traffic has had on our marine ecosystems; ecosystems that Fijians rely on to keep their families fed and to generate income to support themselves and their communities.

For some citizens of more developed countries, effects of this crisis, Madam Speaker, affecting our oceans and seas may seem distant but we Fijians live with those consequences every day. Every Fijian understands the need for urgent action to protect our oceans and rally behind the global community to reverse the steady degradation of our marine resources. Our fishermen know that fish stocks are depleting as they too often return from spots often teeming with fish empty handed.

Our coastal communities see the destructive impact that bleaching is having on our coral reefs, a phenomena that intensified to unprecedented levels last year and I, as a former Naval Commander, have witnessed first-hand how year after year plastic has accumulated in our seas and how our oceans have been steadily degraded by selfish and unscrupulous interests that rob our people of our precious ocean resources.

The threat is growing and it is the Small Island Developing States that are suffering the most dearly, that is why Fiji is co-hosting with Sweden the first-ever United Nations Conference on Oceans this June. Our leadership and perspective are vital to protect the interests of every Fijian, every Pacific Islander and every person on earth as healthy oceans and seas are the lifeblood of the planet we all inhabit. This Conference sees the launching point of the global effort to reclaim what we have lost to the unchecked destructive behaviour that has devastated our oceans and seas.

In summary, Madam Speaker, we are pushing for a comprehensive review of the current state of our oceans. We want the full, unfiltered truth revealed to the community of nations and the top technical agencies, and the world's foremost scientists would be in attendance to detail the scope of the damage our oceans have sustained and once equipped with that knowledge, we can begin acknowledging the role each nation must play in confronting this crisis. We can form invaluable partnerships necessary to honour national pledges in line with the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14 that calls for the conservation and sustainable use of our ocean resources. #

Fiji and our partners in the Pacific have a clear vision, shared purpose and high expectations for the Conference this June.

At our Preparatory Meeting last week, we developed 10 strategic benchmarks to be advanced in New York to secure sustainable future for Pacific Small Island Development States. We must:

1. Formulate a Joint Declaration by Pacific Island Countries and Territories to work towards stronger and more efficient ocean governance.
2. Implement actions for a cleaner Pacific at all levels and call for global actions to reduce plastics and all forms of pollution by 2025.
3. As part of our commitment to a cleaner Pacific, we are also calling on those responsible to do what is necessary to address nuclear and other contaminants, shipwrecks and other World War II relics in our oceans.
4. Put in place a global operational observing system for preventing ocean acidification and improving ocean health.
5. Explore the feasibility of mechanisms for blue carbon and other potential benefits that can be derived from healthy oceans.
6. Mobilize new resources and align and target existing resources to deliver integrated ocean management commitments.
7. Support holding Triennial UN Ocean Summit supported by regional and sub-regional ocean summits until 2030.
8. Call on partners to assist us to invest in data and information systems to monitor ocean health.
9. Formalise maritime boundary and secure rights over resources.
10. Reaffirm the nexus between climate change and ocean, and emphasise for every opportunity, the need for all countries to meet their obligations, under the Paris Agreement.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Ratu Kiliraki, you have the floor.

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. To be able to present a comprehensive scenario on the world stage, the Honourable Prime Minister mentioned about the shipwrecks that are polluting the oceans and as you know, Madam Speaker, there are a number of wrecks around Fiji Waters. In Vatoa, as you know, it dates back to the 1800s. What can the Government do to be able to get rid of these wrecks before presenting such issues on the world stage?

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Madam Speaker, the shipwreck in Vatoa is not the only shipwreck in Fiji, there are a whole lot of other shipwrecks in Fiji but Vatoa has been there for ages and years long before we talked about this. As you would have heard, we talked about many other shipwrecks and we will try our best in trying to come up with an answer.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to the Honourable Gavoka.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Our best wishes go with the Prime Minister for the Conference in New York, playing at a global stage, but can I ask the Prime Minister to just stay close to home, there is an article here that says “Papua New Guinea is halting trade with Fiji”. It is no longer being handled by the Minister. Can he, at his level, try and resolve this issue, Madam Speaker? It is very dear to us, it is only across the ocean that PNG is determined to hold off trading with Fiji. Can the Honourable Prime Minister attend to that, please?

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Madam Speaker, I think this is another Member of Parliament that has gone off the rock in his tracks, he does not know what he is talking about because this has nothing to do with the question that he was initially asked.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- It is very important here.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Nawaikula.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, could the Honourable Prime Minister advise us on what aspects he will be pushing for in relation to the protection of our reefs and its environment?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Prime Minister.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Madam Speaker, I just read out 10 pointers that we will be taking out to the United Nations from 5th to 9th June, 2017. I wish the Honourable Member of Parliament would sit there and listen.

HON. SPEAKER.- There being no other question, I now give the floor to the Honourable Alvick Maharaj to ask his question.

Rural Electrification – 2016-2017 Achievements
(Question No. 60/2017)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Madam Speaker, I would like to withdraw the question.

HON. SPEAKER.- The question is withdrawn.

(Question No. 60/2017 withdrawn)

Worker's Compensation Act
(Question No. 61/2017)

HON. B. SINGH asked the Government, upon notice:

The Workmen's Compensation Act was recently amended by Parliament to improve administrative aspects of the Act and promote workers' rights. Can the Honourable Minister explain how these amendments will assist the Ministry in ensuring that workers who are injured or die due to the nature of their work are efficiently and adequately assisted?

HON. J. USAMATE (Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations).- Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you Honourable Member for the question.

In the last session of Parliament, we did pass the amendments to the Workmen's Compensation Act and those amendments basically have three ways in which they improve the way in which we try to make sure that the compensation that goes to the dependants or family members of the workers who have been injured or who have been killed in the workplace, the speed with which this is done.

The first thing that those amendments have done, it has made it mandatory that the assessments are done only by those who have been trained in how to use the code. So around the world, there are special codes that have been developed on how you assess occupational injuries and occupational deaths. To-date in Fiji, we have trained more than 200 doctors in these codes and how to apply them, so the impact of that is, there will be consistency in assessments.

In the past, we have had assessments being done by those who have been trained in the code and those who have not. So often, when you have that situation, people come up with different percentages in terms of the injuries that have been incurred but now it is required that only those doctors that have been trained do the assessments. There will be consistency in the way that injuries have been assessed and that will allow us to make sure that there is more speed in the process.

I think the second thing or the second impact of that amendment has been, in the past, people had to start the process of reporting or applying for Workmen's Compensation to just 12 months. Now that is being extended to three years, so there is more time in which cases can be called so these issues can be addressed.

I think the last major issue, one of the issues is Workmen's Compensation is when there is a case that is called in a company, there are at times delays in getting information from the company or from the employer to allow us to process the case. Now with this amendment, the work of the labour officers who represent the workers are given the power to be able to demand further information and demand for the documents to allow them to process the case. So in this way, we hope to be able to provide better support for the workers and their family members who are claiming for compensation.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Vunivalu, you have the floor.

HON. S.B. VUNIVALU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker, supplementary question. Can the Honourable Minister advise this Honourable House on the total number of Workmen's Compensation cases that are outstanding and what measures have the Ministry undertaken to ensure efficient disposal of these cases?

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Workmen's Compensation Act basically requires an employer to report if an injury has taken place. That is the legal responsibility under the law. If you have an employee in your workplace, something happens to him, he gets injured, it is the

requirement of the law that the employer has to report that, has to take the step of initiating the process. Once these cases have been reported to the Ministry, then we have staff who will go and investigate to determine what has been the cause of the injury or death and then these investigation reports are given to the medical assessors that I was talking about earlier on to do the assessments.

Once these medical reports are received, claims are then calculated based on the percentage of the injury and these are then forwarded to the employers to effect payment. As at February, 2017, my Ministry has a total of around 2,146 cases pending. This comprises of 319 death cases and 1,827 injury cases. What we are trying to do about these cases since 2016, there have been an additional 20 Assistant Labour Officers who have been recruited and undergone training on the processes and we hope that with more staff available they will be able to progress these cases.

There is also a regular review of the processes that are used within the Ministry, within the Occupational Health and Workmen's Compensation. The processes are certified to ISO9000 Certification, which is mandatory, so this allows and forces us to continually look at improving the processes that we use.

The third thing that is being focussed heavily on is working in partnership with others, such as working in partnership with services within the Ministry to publish names in print media, through *Talkback Shows* and also constant discussions with employers all around the country.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Mikaele Leawere.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Minister for his comments especially on more speed in terms of determining the assessment to be carried out by assessors and also as he mentioned about outstanding cases that the Ministry has carried out to determine those who are to be compensated or the number of injury cases, Madam Speaker, as mentioned by the Honourable Minister, Mr. Viliame Naduivalu made his claims regarding his injury in 2016 and so far, he has not received any feedback or any word from the Ministry of Labour.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Madam Speaker, I would not have the ability right now to refer to any specific case. If there is an individual specific case, that can be referred to me and then raised with my officers.

However, in the case of a worker's compensation, if someone gets injured today, it takes up to 12 months or 18 months to be able to assess the impact of that injury on the limb or body. One cannot do it immediately. It requires up to 12 to 18 months, after the date of the injury before you can assess or if it is an injury to the limb, what percentage of the usefulness of that limb has been reduced; that can only be done after 12 to 18 months. So that is one of the major causes of the delay, the fact that you have to wait.

The other causes of delay have been answered by some of the measures that have put in place by the amendment that I have talked about which is to make sure that all the doctors making the assessments have gone through the training so that they are seen using the same pair of glasses when they look at the injuries.

The other one of course is looking at the processes themselves and constantly trying to fine tune the process and working in partnership with employers, giving new powers to labour officers to demand information; all of these should help speed up the process of dealing with these cases.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Politini.

HON. H.R.T. POLITINI.- Madam Speaker, just a supplementary question to the Honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations. Can he provide to this Honourable House the measures taken by the Ministry to ensure that occupational diseases in Fiji that are recognized under the Workmen's Compensation Act are the same as the Internationally Recognized Occupational Disease?

HON. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Honourable Minister

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. The workplace can be an area in which people can get sick, people injured and pass away. So the International Labour Organization produces a list of the occupational diseases. With this list, countries are expected to have their own national list. We in Fiji have a list of occupational diseases that exist as part of our legislation. The Ministry has just now undertaken a review of that list of occupational diseases, as this review is in line with the ILO list of occupational diseases; the revised version of 2010. The idea is to make sure that the list we use in Fiji is compatible with the one that is used internationally.

The new list includes a range of Internationally Recognized Occupational Diseases; diseases that arise out of the fact of occupational itself. This includes illnesses caused by chemical, physical & biological agents, respiratory and skin diseases, Musculoskeletal Diseases and occupational cancers. Interesting also, now the ILO list is talking about mental and behavioural disorders and these have been included in their list. So that list has now been updated and it will be published once it is being passed by the Ministry. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to the Honourable Jilila Kumar.

Technical Colleges in Fiji – Update on Enrolment
(Question No. 62/2017)

HON. J.N. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker, please allow me to seek your indulgence before I ask this question.

I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank the Government of Fiji, especially the FijiFirst Government and particularly the Honourable Prime Minister, for the opening of the new synthetic track at Churchill Park. On behalf of the people of the West, I would like to thank the Honourable Prime Minister for his thoughtful idea in remembering the students of the West. Thank you so much, Sir.

Madam Speaker, my question is:

Can the Honourable Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts provide an update on the enrolment at various campuses of Technical College in Fiji?

HON. DR. M. REDDY (Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts).- Madam Speaker, I rise to respond to the question asked by the Honourable Member and would like to thank the Honourable Member for asking that question.

Madam Speaker, Target 4.3 of SDG Goal 4 seeks to ensure that by 2030, all people have equal access to affordable, quality technical and vocational education. Similarly, Target 4.4 calls for a substantial increase in the number of youths and adults who have technical and vocational skills and similarly, Target 4.5 of SDG 4 seeks to ensure that by 2030, all gender disparities are removed to have equal access to vocational training for the vulnerable.

Madam Speaker, the Sustainable Development Goals are the benchmark of educational development globally. We are aligning our resources in achieving these targets and technical education progress is at the forefront of this movement.

Madam Speaker, as alluded to earlier on in my previous Ministerial Statement, we have now 13 Campuses of the Technical College of Fiji throughout Fiji. These campuses are located not only in the heart of the cities but also in the urban areas and fits fairly on our Honourable Prime Minister's and Government's vision to take education closer to the people. The latest addition to this is the Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara Campus in Lakeba which has also been very popular with the students there.

Madam Speaker, to give the numbers, they are as follows:

1. Nabua Sanatan Campus, we have 206 students enrolled;
2. Suva Hospitality and Textiles Training Campus at Robertson Road, we have 213 students enrolled;
3. Anjuman Hidayat-ul-Islam, Nausori Campus, we have 328 students enrolled for the full time courses;
4. Nadroga/Navosa Provincial Campus in Sigatoka, we have got 416 students enrolled;
5. TISI Sangam Sadhu Kuppuswamy Campus in Rakiraki, we have 209 students enrolled;
6. Tagitagi Campus in Tavua we have 150 students enrolled;
7. Ratu Epeli Ravoka Campus in Bua, we have got 106 students enrolled;
8. Wainikoro Campus; we have 51 students enrolled;
9. C.P. Singh Campus in Navua, we have 104 students enrolled;
10. Vanua Levu Arya Campus in Labasa; we have 312 students enrolled;
11. Dr Shaukat Ali Sahib Campus in Nadi; we have 455 students enrolled;
12. Lautoka Sanatan Campus, we have 168 students; and
13. Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara Campus (a new campus), we have 77 students enrolled.

Madam Speaker, a total of 2,795 students enrolled for full time Level 2 programme at the 13 Campuses throughout Fiji.

Madam Speaker, if you look at the numbers, the largest campus is the Nadi Campus – Dr. Shaukat Ali Sahib Campus, followed by the Nadroga/Navosa Provincial Campus and the Nausori Campus is the third largest campus. This is in line with our quest to ensure that we also fulfil the skills gap in the labour market. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I give the floor to Honourable Mohammed Dean.

HON. M.M.A. DEAN.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Just a supplementary question on enrolment numbers. Can the Honourable Minister please provide data on how does the enrolment number this year compare with the number last year at the Technical Colleges in Fiji? Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, I want to thank Honourable Dean for asking the question. Overall, in 2016, we had four full time programmes, 2,134 students enrolled at the 12 Campuses because we did not have the Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara Campus last year. This year, we have got 2,795; an increase by approximately 600 students.

Madam Speaker, campus-wise, last year, the Nabua Campus had 217, and this year it had 206, Suva Hospitality & Textile Training, last year we had 191, this year we have got 213, at the Nausori Campus, last year we had 222 but this year we have 328 an increase by 100, Sigatoka Campus - 275 last year, this year it nearly doubled - 416. We have offered a new programme there - Electric Fitter Mechanic which was demanded by the industry.

So, Sigatoka again 235, this year 416; Rakiraki Campus 124 last year and this year 209 (nearly doubled); Tavua, last year 68, this year, 150 (more than doubled); Bua, 69 last year, 106 this year; Wainikoro, 73 last year, 51 this year (slight decrease); Navua,, 67 last year, increased to 104 this year; Labasa, 333 last year, slight decrease this year to 312; Nadi, 311 last year, this year 455 (substantial increase); Lautoka, 81 last year this year 168 (nearly doubled) and Lakeba, this year is 77.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I give the floor to the Honourable Dulakivereta.

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the Honourable Minister for his answer. My question is: do the Technical Colleges have a full complement of machines and equipment to enable students to undertake their practical lessons? Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, thank you for asking this question Honourable Member, that is important to ensure that the graduates are of high quality because Madam Speaker the difference between this programme

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, this programme that we offer out of the Technical College Campuses are competency-based. Probably, they are not aware of what competency-based programmes mean. There is no final exam component. Students are actually tested, examined by assessors externally, appointed assessors by the Higher Education Commission on the ability to perform that particular task; the key portfolio.

Madam Speaker, to do so, it is a three-trimester programme. Trimester 1 is spent at the workshops and Trimester 2, they are attached to an industry. If I am an Electrical Fitter Mechanic student, I will be attached to an electrical company; if it is a Carpentry and Joinery, I will be attached to a carpentry and joinery company. The entire Trimester 2 is spent on the industry; attachment is actually on the field (hands-on training) and Trimester 3, they come back.

So, Madam Speaker, to answer your question, to ensure that they have got hands-on training in that particular technical aspect, there are up-to-date workshops which is again constantly upgraded with new machines and secondly the plight to the industry. So, yes, we have workshops and machines to support the competency aspect. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I give the floor to the Honourable Mikaele Leawere.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. The way Technical Colleges are being opened around the country, very soon we will have one at the Offshore Park; it is just a waste of taxpayers' money from the outset. I would just like to ask the Honourable Minister, Madam Speaker, what guarantee does the Ministry have to absorb these graduates into the workforce immediately after graduating, which is a stark contrast from those who come out of Montfort Boys Town.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister.

(Inaudible interjections)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- I wonder whether he has got his question correctly, he is talking about the ability of graduates out of Technical Colleges getting into labour market immediately. Madam Speaker, no one can guarantee immediately, next day after graduation, today they will get into the labour market, but what is important is that we prepare them well so that they have the ability to do the work that they acclaim at level 2 of competency under the qualifications framework which unfortunately I do not think they have any understanding of.

What is important is to ensure that the workshops are up-to-date, secondly the industrial placement is monitored and the student gets the experience up to level 3 competency and the huge demand for certain areas, that is why you see numbers are very high. For example, the Robertson Road Campus where we teach textiles and hospitality, there is a huge demand there. With this year, we started three campuses, we started the electrical course, a massive demand for that. So, yes, we are looking at the labour market, we are identifying the gaps there, we are preparing the students and encouraging them to take on those particular qualifications which is also tuned to the labour market as well as meet their aptitudes. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I give the floor to Honourable Bulitavu.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have been to some Technical Colleges in Labasa and also in Wainikoro and there are problems like hostel accommodation. They come daily by bus, which is a waste of taxpayers' money and also there are old machines there which are not relevant to this age of technology. There are even some assessors who are not qualified and cannot make proper assessments to students and probably there are clashes in the courses. Once you finish from technical school, you come up to FNU, you have to repeat the same unit. Will the Honourable Minister review these technical colleges?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, there were three questions in one question. One was about transportation, second was on boarding facilities and the third one was the review of the programmes.

On the first one, Madam Speaker, yes, the students travelling to Savusavu, we do not have a campus there and we are providing transportation to the students so that they can come and undertake

those training. We are looking at establishing a campus in Savusavu in April, Madam Speaker, after the two new ones in Nukuloa and Tailevu North and we will look at Cakaudrove as well.

On the issue of boarding, Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister has funded a new boarding facility at Bua Campus so that should probably be ready by end of this year. Madam Speaker, boarding facilities, the other campuses, Madam Speaker, we have made a submission in the upcoming budget to construct boarding facilities/dormitories in, at least, five of the campuses throughout Fiji. So, that will solve the issues of boarding and an issue of getting students from islands to the interior to stay there and access the technical education.

On the issue of review, yes, Madam Speaker, normally once in three years, we subject all our programmes to external review and the programmes at technical colleges are no exception. Thank you

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I give the floor to the Honourable Alvick Maharaj.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, based on Target 4.5 of SDG Goal 4 seeks to ensure opportunity for females as well. Can the Honourable Minister provide data on the females enrolled at the campuses of Technical Colleges?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, I want to thank the Honourable Member for raising the gender dimension of the enrolment throughout our various campuses. In 2016, as alluded to earlier on, 2,631 students were enrolled; of this 63 percent were males and 37 percent were females. That is a substantial percentage and we are looking at raising this further to 50 percent or so but we have started with a right platform - 37 percent last year and this year, we have 34 percent female students taking up programmes in Technical Colleges.

But again, when you see it campus-wise or programme-wise, you will find that in certain programmes, you have more females enrolling and less males. For example, textiles and hospitality programmes. However, there are other programmes where females are enrolled. So to answer his question, we have got about 33 percent in our marketing, we are targeting and emphasising that that the females as well can become electricians or mechanics or carpenters, joiners, et cetera, and it is based on that marketing, we were able to get about 37 percent last year and 34 percent this year. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Nawaikula.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, I do not think that the Honourable Minister is listening to the people, he is not even listening to his own teachers because they are all complaining.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- If you look at it, you are filling all these Technical Colleges with students, but are they all working? I will ask him the question by his own teachers - no facilities, no staff to complement it, how will you address that?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- How will you address it?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- I am totally taken aback by the Honourable Member saying “no staff to teach the technical college”.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- No staff!

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- This is ridiculous, Madam Speaker, totally ridiculous. You go to every campus, they are full with teachers.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- This is coming from your own teachers.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- What own teachers?

(Laughter)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- You are just saying there is no staff, then his saying “your own teachers are saying that there is no staff”. I am lost for words, Madam Speaker.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Gavoka.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. The concern with the Technical Colleges is that, they are too theoretical, there is very little hands-on, very little experience to the extent that they carry very little weight with the employers.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Can I ask the Honourable Minister, in the localities where they are located, do they interface with the local companies to take them on? Is there any incentive for companies to take on these workers, to help them get the experience that they need, to add value to the paper that they get from training in colleges?

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, I would urge the Honourable Member to go out and visit the technical college there and talk to the head of the campus. He will tell you that from last year, there were about 50 students enrolled in the Hospitality Programme. After trimester one, as I said, second trimester, they have to go the industries, so they were in the hotel. None of them wanted to come back, Madam Speaker, the hotels offered them jobs, right on the spot, even before they finished.

Madam Speaker, it is a competency-based programme, it is not a theoretical in class exam question. Unfortunately, they do not get it, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Members, this is to inform the House that the secretariat had received written responses to Question Numbers 30/2017 and 31/2017 from the Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism, Lands and Mineral Resources, and these have been forwarded to the respective Members who had asked the questions.

Question Number 30/2017 was in relation to the formula calculation for fair share of royalty paid to landowners for the last four years, as referred to in Section 30(1) of the Constitution; and Question

Number 31/2017 was in relation to the formula with which compensation is calculated for those in the Yatu Malolo.

Also, for the information for Honourable Members, all written responses are made available on the Parliament website after tabling.

Honourable Members, Question time is now over and we will adjourn the sitting for refreshment and will resume at 11.30 a.m. Thank you, Honourable Members.

The Parliament adjourned at 11.02 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.30 a.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Members. We will resume from where we left off.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

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

1. Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts; and
2. Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development and National Disaster Management.

Each Minister may speak up to 20 minutes. After each Minister, I will then invite the Leader of the Opposition, or her designate, to speak on the statement for no more than 5 minutes. There will also be a response from the Leader of the NFP, or his designate, to also speak for 5 minutes. There will be no debate.

I now call on the Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts to deliver his statement.

Policies and Programmes to Improve Health and Wellbeing of School Children in Fiji

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Leader of NFP and Honourable Members of Parliament; today, I will enlighten the House on the policies, practices and programmes that the Ministry of Education has implemented to improve the health and wellbeing of children in our schools in Fiji.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts has been given the responsibility of ensuring that the wellbeing and safety of our children in our school system - 15,577 in the Early Childhood Education (ECE) programme; 143,414 in primary schools; and 66,512 in secondary schools - since 2015, and we have tried our best to ensure that students under our care are given the safest and healthiest choices in schools.

Madam Speaker, one of the vital components to progress and growth of any nation is the health and welfare of its citizens. When we have healthy people, the productivity and output of the nation prospers. Under the Education 2030 Declaration, the Sustainable Development Goal 4 of the 17 Goals which proposes to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”, in the framework for action commits to promote adequate health and nutrition of all children. It denotes that the first few years of life, the most significant in terms of brain and physical development must be built on the very basis of healthy living.

Madam Speaker, the school environment plays an important role in reducing health hazards through practicing right norms and educating on the basics of what is right and wrong. This in effect develops a ‘culture of prevention and preparedness’ which is later filtered down to the family and community at large. What the child learns and practices in the school is instilled permanently in the child as good habits and traits.

Madam Speaker, when we ventured into improving the Education Sector in Fiji, we took a holistic overview of the system and ensured that while we break through stagnant processes, biased practices and long overdue goals. We also guarantee that our children are confirmed the highest levels of safety and well-being. We have injected greater emphasis on good health and physical wellbeing of the child.

Madam Speaker, we are looking at each and every policy with in-depth evaluation and ensuring that once implemented, they target long-term positive inputs.

Madam Speaker, the grave concern triggering from bad food and lifestyle choices has been literally affecting every aspect of our society. The instance of non-communicable diseases have never been higher. Madam Speaker, our Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services quoted in the *Fiji Times*, dated 28th January, 2017 noted that “the latest diabetes victim was a twelve year old girl. Our children are falling victims to lifestyle diseases and this rate is more serious, severe and constantly increasing now.”

Madam Speaker, this House will be astonished with the high rate of diabetes, obesity, malnutrition and non-communicable diseases amongst our school children. A study conducted in Fiji recently by Wate, for a sample of 6,871 children aged between 13 and 18 years from 18 secondary schools on the main island of Viti Levu, shows that 24 per cent of adolescents were overweight and obese. Twenty percent, nearly one quarter, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, in our schools, we have found out that many of our children are addicted to junk food. They rely on soft drinks and extra salty, sugary and oily food for their lunch and refreshments. In some cases, students resort to junk food during their breaks at school. We have also found out that there are many children who give away or put aside their food parcels from home and instead consume junk food and soft drinks purchased from school canteen. We have found out from parents that sometimes their children insist on not taking their lunch from home, but force for more pocket money, which they can use to buy snacks. In addition, we have seen that the instance of children being obese and sickly in schools is increasing with many contracting serious sicknesses early. In the immediate term, Madam Speaker, this affects attendance and performance of our students.

Madam Speaker, in some cases, school canteens over the years, while supplying to the food and refreshment demand for the students, have shifted away from its fundamental role to becoming an extremely profit-oriented business. We have found out that, in some cases, the foods sold in canteens are the food, which are unhealthy and which in the unhealthy food chart are listed right on top. There are also food hawkers selling unhealthy food near the school compound, Madam Speaker, and attracting children to them.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts has spearheaded a campaign to ensure that all schools are ‘health promoting schools’. In 2016, in partnership with the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services and the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, we implemented the Fiji School Health Policy in schools and this year we have implemented a Policy on Food and School Canteen. These policies are aimed at institutionalizing wellbeing, health and wellness of our children in schools.

Madam Speaker, on 23rd September, last year, we signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Ministry of Health and Medical Services and launched the Fiji School Health Policy in schools. This partnership strengthens both Ministries to engage in coordinated approach for consistent promotion of school health and wellness programmes.

Madam Speaker, through this policy, we are trying to nurture partnership with all relevant stakeholders, inclusive of parents and guardians, students, owners of private schools, school heads and teachers, school canteen operators, and other authorities and organizations to see that our efforts in promoting healthy living in schools is not undermined.

Madam Speaker, implemented in Term 1 this year, the Food and School Canteen Policy mandates all school canteens to sell only healthy food and beverage items, and promote healthy food environment

in the school. This policy intends to support the principles taught in various year levels, which aim to promote healthy eating practices, healthy living, well-being and the safety of all students in schools.

Madam Speaker, a school is an ideal place to promote healthy eating, consumption of affordable local produce and nurturing of positive health amongst its students because children are very receptive at this age to any new information, Madam Speaker. They are learning sponges. The school canteen is an integral part of the learning environment and therefore, needs to operate in a manner that supports the health messages of the curriculum. Beyond the school environment, a school canteen influences and reflects a child's food and beverage choices and those of the broader community as well. Good nutrition is fundamental to children's development, concentration and learning, health and prevention of lifestyle diseases and future productivity.

Madam Speaker, it is envisaged that with this Policy, it would be possible for school canteen operators to adhere to the mandatory procedures, which is being aligned to meet the legal responsibility under the 2013 Constitution, to ensure that every child has a right to basic nutrition. An efficient and effective canteen at the school promotes opportunities to reinforce healthy eating practices and provides a convenient venue for food items and beverages to be purchased by children and staff during recess and lunch.

The Policy also creates awareness on the responsibilities of the school head, as well as the canteen operator on the minimum standards required under law to ensure the child's right to basic nutrition is not compromised in the name of business and to get all stakeholders to have mutual understanding on the main role of a school canteen.

Madam Speaker, the policy adds value to the teaching of healthy living and health curriculum by ensuring that the school head, teachers and school managements practice what they preach and make strong attempts to foster and instil healthy habits in students.

Madam Speaker, the policy on food and school canteen also seeks to re-identify the roles that the canteen committee, the head of school and canteen operator have to play, to ensure that the instructions given in the policy are not compromised. For example, some of the duties that canteen operators have to see to are: safe food handling practices; health and hygiene requirements of food handlers; and advisory or warning statements next to, or in connection with food containing allergens.

Madam Speaker, we have supplied a list of items which are prohibited to be sold in the canteens. Some foods and beverages under this category include deep-fried foods like *bhajia* and *bara*, *gulgula*, chocolate-coated and ice-creams, ice blocks, sun pops, sweets (lollies, chocolates, jelly beans), uncooked noodles, sugar-sweetened drinks that include fruit-flavoured drinks, sports drink, and all fizzy drinks. Some health promoting foods as listed in this policy include: boiled or baked root crops; cereals, such as wholemeal bread; stir-fried or boiled vegetables; fresh salads; fruits in season; milk; water and sugar free drinks. Madam Speaker, this policy is in full effect in all schools now and we are now rigidly following up on our monitoring and evaluation phase, jointly with the Ministry of Health and Medical Services.

Madam Speaker, our Government has ensured that every Year 1 student receives 250 ml of free milk and Weet-Bix a day. Around 20,441 Year 1 students have benefitted from this initiative in 2016. This initiative has been very successful so far, with requests from various stakeholders to increase this initiative to other levels, as well.

Number of Year 1 Students by Districts, is as follows:

Education District	Year 1 Enrolment No.
Ba-Tavua	1,438
Cakaudrove	1,390
Eastern	1,207
Lautoka-Yasawa	3,815
Macuata-Bua	1,965
Nadroga-Navosa	1,461
Nausori	3,235
Ra	820
Suva	5,110
Total	20, 441

Madam Speaker, the main purpose of our policy is to provide clear and transparent guidelines on the distribution and usage of milk being supplied to primary schools for the benefit of our children. The policy will guide the reader in understanding the importance of milk to a student.

Madam Speaker, our Ministry has also implemented a WASH initiative in schools and at this juncture, I wish to take this opportunity to thank our partners, WHO, UNICEF and DFAT for their generous assistance in ensuring that the WASH initiative implemented in schools is a success. The WASH programme refers to Water, Sanitation and Hygiene in schools.

I also wish to acknowledge the efforts of the Project Heaven in adopting our schools for the WASH initiative. This initiative is reinforced under the Convention on the Rights of a Child whereby “All children have the right to clean water and basic sanitation” and the 2013 Constitution makes it a legal right of every person to have access to clean and adequate water.

Madam Speaker, all our Fijian schools have available access to facilities such as toilets, hand washing stations, and sanitary disposal bins. However, some of our students either do not see the importance or still lack the necessary knowledge, practice and behaviour to properly utilise the existing WASH infrastructure in schools. By the WASH initiative, we emphasize the importance of cleanliness and hygiene practices for our children’s health and well-being, as well as students learn how to use these facilities and keep themselves clean and learn hygienic practices.

Madam Speaker, hygiene and sanitation challenges have caused many children in developing countries, like Fiji to fall ill from infection with intestinal parasites, abdominal pain, and diarrhoea. This situation also leads to anaemia, stunted growth, and higher incidence of absenteeism, which consequently impede a child’s learning and ability to stay in school. Madam Speaker, it also diverts parents’ time and resources away from productive work towards caring and looking after the child. The WASH programme in schools supports the global efforts, where all children go to schools that provide a safe, healthy and comfortable environment, where children grow, learn and thrive.

Madam Speaker, this is another initiative of the Bainimarama-led FijiFirst Government to equate future Fiji by educating our child on importance of sanitation and hygiene.

Madam Speaker, to support this initiative in resource-poor schools, we have adopted other support initiatives of resource backing. We have begun to prepare for the adverse effects that our schools will face from climate change and at this juncture, I take the opportunity to thank our Honourable Prime Minister for bringing this crucial issue of climate change and approaching hazards to the forefront.

Madam Speaker, we are putting in more and more water tanks in schools. This is to ensure that schools have access to a proper and clean water storage system. So far, in 2015 and 2016, our Ministry

has provided schools with 254 water tanks; 145 in 2015 and 109 in 2016. From this, we have distributed 203 water tanks, having a 5200 litre capacity and 51 water tanks, holding 10,000 litre capacity to schools.

Madam Speaker, let me now enlighten the House on what steps the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts have taken to promote good mental health of our students.

Madam Speaker, as you are well aware, our children are our greatest asset and when we lose a child, the loss is not only felt by the immediate family members but the entire nation. When a person takes his or her life, questions arise as to what has forced the person to take such a destructive step. The serious concern that young people were taking their own lives and that past situations were boosting the increase and severity of suicide cases called for efficient suicide elimination tactics to be put in place. As such, we initiated the National Anti-Suicide Discourse and Awareness, which took place on 18th September 2015 and the Suicide Prevention Day in schools is commemorated on the 9th and 10th September in all schools.

All schools were encouraged to come up with proactive measures in addressing issues and problems relating to the theme. School activities included promotion of understanding of the problems leading to suicide, highlighting the prevention of suicide through poetry, songs, art and drawing. Guest speakers and members from the religious organizations were called to speak to children on the options and support mechanisms that exist for children in our community. As part of our awareness campaign against suicide, the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts developed brochures on suicide prevention, which was sent out to all schools and also to community at large.

Madam Speaker, I am happy to inform this House that we were able to reduce suicide amongst our children in schools to negligible numbers last year. At this juncture, I call upon our parents to continue to provide unconditional love and support to their children as there is no substitute to parental love. This is the only way our children can be assured that we are there for them at all times and we want them to do well.

Madam Speaker, the key component of advocating against issues affecting children is to promote rights of children and human rights in schools. We have administered new and revised Child Protection and Behavioural Management Policy, which I will elaborate more in another sitting of Parliament.

Madam Speaker, with the collaboration and support from the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, we ensured that the child helpline number 325 is known and accessible to all school students and also teachers who are in need. This was launched by Honourable Minister Akbar when she was in that Ministry, Madam Speaker. Once again, Madam Speaker, the child helpline number 1325 is known and accessible to all school students and teachers who are in need. We have made counselling services available to all students in schools. We are providing free basic counselling training to teachers so that the teachers know what to do in cases where students need help.

We have four divisional counsellors and three fully-trained counsellors in NSAAC, who are providing counselling sessions to students, teachers and parents and we are looking at extending the number of counsellors throughout Fiji.

Madam Speaker, due to the increased number of students affected by *TC Winston*, we also allowed free access to our partner agencies, to ensure counselling services to the students and teachers. We are also having discussions with the Fiji Human Rights Commission to develop supporting resource materials, to back our teachers covering this topic of human rights in our school system.

Madam Speaker, albeit all difficulties, we have a highly robust curriculum, which is geared towards delivering one of the best products for future Fiji.

Madam Speaker, one area that has been neglected and downplayed for years is the physical education. Unfortunately, physical education had been narrowly seen as physical sports only in our school system, which excluded a lot of students from participating in it. We are now taking a number of measures to deal with this issue. Over the past two years, the number of specialized physical education teachers in secondary schools, as well as in primary schools, have increased and this area is given equal importance.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts in its continued pursuit to deliver excellence in schools have implemented Yoga Programmes in all schools around the country, though not compulsory. This step has been primarily taken in consideration of the benefits of yoga to physical and mental health and for personal peace and harmony. The holistic benefit of yoga embodies unity of the mind, body and the thoughts and actions of the individual. The International Day for Yoga was launched last year and it was celebrated in all schools, and this year we are looking at a bigger celebration.

Madam Speaker, we have launched the first ever Fitness Manual for primary and secondary schools, in partnership with FNU, as part of the physical education programme. The Fitness Manual was prepared by Mr. Alifereti Cawanibuka, a very well-known sports personality and an academic. The Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts is looking forward to taking the lead role in formulating the first ever national policy for Quality Physical Education, in partnership with UNESCO, Madam Speaker. The physical education curriculum is now for the first time ever been consulted with major sporting bodies, rugby union, universities and other stakeholders. Sporting bodies are now working in consultation with the Ministry of Education on the inclusion of their subject matter into the curriculum and filling in practical gaps that exist.

Madam Speaker, our children are under enormous pressure from challenges and issues that they are subjected to now which did not exist during our time when we were in school. We need to mobilise school stakeholders to support our children. The Ministry is just one stakeholder. I wish to assure all parents that our Ministry is doing all it can to deal with contemporary challenges faced by our children and at the same time urge all of you to partner with us in this quest.

Madam Speaker, we are building a healthy, vibrant community of learners, who are prepared for future national and global demands. Their health is a core component of this and this is where we are investing. We look forward to support from all stakeholders in this journey of securing and educating our children for future Fiji. Thank you. *Vinaka*.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Leader of the Opposition, or her designate to speak in response.

HON. M.R. LEAWARE.- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Minister for Education for his ministerial statement and do agree with the idea of instituting programmes and processes through the health and wellbeing of our children in schools, and we favourably believe that this is very essential.

Madam Speaker, well-being is essential towards effective learning and preparation for successful independent learning for our young people. The Honourable Minister has just mentioned about the school canteen policy, which was formulated in 2005, and later was reviewed through partnership with the Ministry of Health in 2013 and 2016 as nothing new in this new initiative that has been raised in this House by the Honourable Minister.

While the Honourable Minister is introducing this programme, but schools are promoting the fizzy drinks, which contradicts to what is being planned like the Coke Cola Games, the Deans and the

Twisties Games as well. These food can cause NCDs and yet the Honourable Minister is coming up with a lot of programmes in terms of this wellbeing and these programme policies to improve the health and wellbeing of our students. This is in contrast to what is happening on the ground and the reality of what he is saying in this House would be better, Madam Speaker, if this programme, if the fizzy drinks are being replaced by Island Chilled Water, which is much better.

During one of our constituency visits last year, Madam Speaker, we visited schools in the Eastern Division and we met with some of our school teachers. Those of whom we met informed us that programmes such as the Free Milk Programme and Free Weet-Bix has had detrimental effects on our students. Some Class 1 students, when it comes to having these, they run away to the toilet because some of them have been seen to be vomiting after consuming this milk and a teacher even advised that for the past three months, some of his students ran away for the fact that the milk and the Weet-Bix are being distributed in the morning. This is very sad, Madam Speaker.

We also need to consider, Madam Speaker, the cost implications in executing these policies and we would like to recommend to Government if this could be built into the school curriculum, instead of being a stand-alone item, especially on the promotion of health in schools, as it will cultivate the knowledge and skills that need to be positive, especially on the mental aspect, emotion, social and physical wellbeing in school. So, the Free Milk Programme must be reviewed to determine these impacts on the students, as I have mentioned earlier and perhaps substitute this, instead of, as I have mentioned, with fruits as well for free, and of course this will assist our local farmers economically.

Madam Speaker, secondly students are being immunised or going to be immunised, especially for female students for the prevention of Cancer using the Human *Papillomavirus* Vaccination (HPV) and after immunisation, some of these students are sick. The question that I would like to pose to the Honourable Minister is, who is liable in terms of what will happen? Why is it also that the students of Jasper Williams are not being allowed to train, to camp in the morning? Is it because the Honourable Minister has said that is not so? So, that is also promoting healthy lifestyle, especially in terms of what he has just mentioned in this House. Thank you Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Leader of the National Federation Party, or his designate to speak in response.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the Honourable Minister for his statement. I think he has quite rightly covered a number of issues and I really have no objection to the overall objective that he has outlined, in terms of ensuring that our children have good habits inculcated from within the school, and obviously he has talked about sanitation and cleanliness, I think that is a very important issue. In fact, Madam Speaker, might I add that really, that should be the number one priority of the Minister because I have seen many schools and I have heard many complaints from students, from parents and especially for our female students that proper sanitation and the facilities for cleanliness are available. So, I am glad that the Minister pointed that out and I hope that, that would become a single most important priority in terms of making sure that our children actually get the best of it.

Very specifically, Madam Speaker, on the Food Policy, I think the Honourable Minister is right that the school is a very captive environment, that is, where teachers can inculcate in the students various habits, such as health habits, food habits, like cleanliness and sanitation habits. They are very very important. I remember when we were in Class 1, we had to make sure that our fingernails were clean, we had to carry handkerchiefs and basic cleanliness were always something that the schools actually did.

So, it is really something that we need to upgrade, but just coming back, Madam Speaker, on the food policy, majority of the meals that the kids have are actually not in the school. On average, they

would have five meals in the school lunch, but kids also need snacks and other things. I was just reading the list of approved food items and the lists of prohibited food items but I was not sure, but maybe Parliament should look at the list of approved food items and beverages and we should practice it here. Otherwise, we may not be able to eat fish and chips when we go for tea break or lunch.

On the prohibited food items, to me, Madam Speaker, it is really not some of those food items per se that causes obesity, although a small percentage maybe indulging in some of those items. So, I think general education to school canteen operators through a policy to encourage them to have more healthy food, is welcomed. It is not something that is really an issue but school canteens are also run by private operators.

I think most of them have contracts, they pay licence but the bigger issue that I want to raise and perhaps, Government needs to understand this and work this out is that, a lot of the unhealthy habits are the result of other things. For example, kids at home, parents at home, their affordability, are they able to buy fruits, what are the basic food items, et cetera?

Things that we may not consider basic needs are actually basic needs. For example, those who want to eat butter, margarine and jam, these are available in the supermarkets. So, we really need to look at those food safety legislation and standards and also look at all those specific food items that we need to bring their prices down, so that not only will they learn good habits in school but when they get home the parents cannot afford it. So, I think that is a broader question.

If you do not align those things with this policy in the school, you are not going to get the results. I mean, this is why I always say, Madam Speaker, that policies are good but policies must always be reviewed and reviewed, and improved, and we need to look at their effectiveness. That is what I want to urge the Honourable Minister, to look at this policy again because once the kids get out of the school, they may find beyond 10 metres another canteen and buy the junk food. So, it may not necessarily work, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, I now call on the Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development and National Disaster Management to deliver his statement.

Progress of the Potato Research and Development Programme

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker, for this opportunity to address this august House by way of a Ministerial Statement on the progress of Potato Research and Development that is being undertaken in the Ministry of Agriculture.

You would recall, Madam Speaker, that in 2014, in one of the Honourable Leader of the National Federation Party's contributions in the debate, he made particular reference to what the Ministry is doing about potato development in Fiji and given the progress made this far, this is the opportune time to give an update to this august House because I know for a fact that most of the Honourable Members are farmers as well, and with the communities that we serve, this information is important for the people in their respective communities.

Madam Speaker, once again, we are all aware of the big plans that the Government has, particularly for the Ministry of Agriculture. In 2014, as I have stated so many times before in this august House, we launched the 2020 Agriculture Sector Policy Agenda, focussing on the modernisation of the agriculture sector. For us to be competitive and for us to be delivering well within the dynamics of the current environment, we need to modernise Fiji's agriculture sector. And, of course, we cannot deny the fact that there are huge potentials in the agriculture sector, but there needs to be a concerted effort and particularly, all the stakeholders to work together, not only focusing on production as I have always stated

so many times, Madam Speaker, but looking at the whole value chain which is very, very critical for agricultural production.

Madam Speaker, again, food security is always important and given the recent developments, particularly in the work undertaken by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), it is not only on food security but, of course, every responsible government is required to provide food to the people and not only food, Madam Speaker, but the shift today is on nutrition as well. It is about food and nutrition security. We need to be giving our people not only food but, of course, the best quality food. The Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services has always talked about NCDs and how it has affected us in so many ways, and this is why nutrition security is important for us.

Within this programme, Madam Speaker, there are two main areas, one is about improving our export levels and for this, we have talked about kava which is one of the main crops that contribute significantly to the non-sugar subsector of agriculture in terms of its contribution to GDP, but we also have taro and other rootcrops, vegetables and tropical fruits. I will not go into the details of this, Madam Speaker.

Likewise for import substitution, we all know, Madam Speaker and Honourable Members of this august House that we import quite a few commodities which can be grown and, of course, be sufficient enough for our domestic needs and hopefully over time, we can also export these to other countries, particularly within our neighbouring small island Pacific States. One of this, Madam Speaker, is on potato where I will focus on in my Ministerial Statement this morning, Madam Speaker.

In terms of our Import Substitution Programme, in our last February session, Madam Speaker, I talked about rice production and it has improved a lot. My two colleagues from Vanua Levu, particularly from Wainidevo and Honourable Chand as well, know about the progress in Vanua Levu - in Muanidevo, Korokadi, Lekutu and maybe, if the Honourable Bulitavu can go and convince the people in Nabua, Cakaudrove, if they can go seriously into more rice production as well. But rice import bills are high, almost \$50 million every year and we have reduced this, but now we want to focus on potato which is also one of the rootcrops that is costing us significantly.

If we look at potato import bills, Madam Speaker, and why this is so important for Fiji. In 2012, we imported about 22,442 tonnes with the value of about \$22.3 million; in 2013, 22,885 tonnes, a value of \$22.2 million; in 2014, about 21,972 tonnes with a value of \$30.9 million; and in 2015, about 20,317 tonnes with a value of about \$27.3 million.

Why I am making this statement here today, Madam Speaker, is because we have not got rid of the bill, but the indications on the work undertaken is very, very encouraging and positive. Hopefully, in the next couple of years, we will gradually be slicing this importation bill, probably by 5 percent and then 10 percent, until we get rid of the total import bill, as I have just stated.

Potato is not new to Fiji. According to our information, Madam Speaker, potato has been in Fiji since the 1860s but unfortunately, there was no serious commitment undertaken for us to produce our own potatoes but when we look at other tropical countries like Mauritius and Brazil, they produce their own potato. For a long time we have had this thought that it is only in the temperate countries that they produce good potatoes but research has brought online very good varieties and, of course, our connection to these institutes and, of course, our own resolve and commitment we have managed to get into some of the varieties which I will speak on and this has started to show positive results, Madam Speaker.

As I have said, it was introduced in the 1860s, there were potato developments and research programmes from the 1980s, but come 1993, there was a complete stop. And for those who were

involved, it was just mainly for their food security, whatever little that they can grab either from the leftover materials but this is the history of potatoes in Fiji.

One of the biggest problems that we faced during yesteryears, Madam Speaker, which I will add more to it in my Ministerial Statement today is storage. We can produce potatoes during the main season but to store seeds for the next season, and that was our biggest problem. And as a result, we continue to import seed materials.

Since 2010, Madam Speaker, under the Government's Strategic Development Plan, this has been brought forward again as a key commodity in which the non-sugar agriculture subsector needs to focus on and it was included in the PSIP in 2010 and, of course, again in the Food Security Programme.

Since 2010, Madam Speaker, we have undertaken some serious work on the research component and, of course, the trials in as far as potato development is concerned.

The work undertaken, Madam Speaker, firstly, if I may categorise it into two main categories; one was the work undertaken by the Research Division and the work undertaken by the Extension Division. We were aggressive, knowing that there will be prices to pay as well but the results have proved positive, Madam Speaker, and basically the primary objective was for Government to fully fund the local seed multiplication.

We cannot continue to rely on imported seeds. That was one of the main key consideration when we started with the 2010 programmes. We cannot afford to continue to rely on New Zealand and we cannot continue to rely on Australia to provide us with imported seeds for planting material, Madam Speaker. We knew that we are to fund the development programme, through Extension and, of course, through our Research Division, and to fully develop the potentials of the best potato growing areas in Fiji.

Surprisingly, Madam Speaker, for Fiji, although it does very, very well in areas like Nadi, in Sigatoka particularly close to the river banks and of course in Ba as well but with this Red Pontiac variety specifically, it does well in almost all the areas in which we used for trials. It did well in Koro, it did well in Ovalau, in Wainibuka in Tailevu even in Kadavu, Madam Speaker. It has shown very positive results, therefore, the challenge for us now is whatever seeds that have been produced locally, how can we keep those seeds awaiting for the next season?

Let me talk about the potato varieties that I have already mentioned, Madam Speaker, that we used to import the potato seeds from Australia and New Zealand. Part of the work undertaken by the Research was the potato varietal evaluation. Apart from the fungal testing as well because of wilt, this is common particularly in potatoes. The fungal testing was very, very critical and of course the potato varietal evaluation and thirdly, was on the potato fertiliser trial. Those were the three major works undertaken – fungicide, fertiliser and the varietal.

On the varietal, Madam Speaker, from New Zealand when we started, we tried to import three main varieties – the Red Rascal, the Ilam Hardy and the Ivory Crisp. From Australia, we had about five - Red Pontiac, Atlantic, Golden Delight, Sebago and SPTR01. I will not go into details, Madam Speaker, but as we progress over the years from 2010 we have found out that under Fiji's conditions Red Pontiac does very, very well and it can be sustainable in the long term for Fiji, and that is where the focus is.

I have mentioned, Madam Speaker, about the three main areas on fungicide trial, particularly we were just focusing on the three main fungicides available in Fiji - Kocide, Ridomil and Mancozeb. We did the planting material before planting and, of course, the results have been recorded. I will not go into the details.

Of course on fertiliser, we trialled NPK, Mineral Blend, the NPK Teitei blend and Super Phosphate. On NPK, we had two mixtures 13-13-21 and the 16-16-16. Of course, the new rate of potash, again I will not go into details. Different areas, different soil conditions so it requires a different mixture in the elements of the fertiliser and, of course, we have the results as well.

Madam Speaker, I wish to focus again, as I have stated, on the variety that is doing extremely well in Fiji now, the Red Pontiac. Of course, it has been found to perform well in various locations in Fiji, including Nadarivatu, Sigatoka Valley, part of Ra, Kadavu and recently in Dawasamu, Tailevu. . It does very well in Kadavu and I have got here the report about the Southern Kadavu is where it has really performed well, Honourable Members.

Again, with the Red Pontiac, now that we have made some successes that gradually we will achieve a 5 percent and a 15 percent targeted reduction in import volume, say from 2018 and 2020.

Madam Speaker, I have talked about potato storage. To determine Fiji's capability of storing potato seeds after harvest, the Research Division carried out storage experiments to find out the duration a potato seed can be stored in diffuse house or thatched bure and cool houses. We trialled the three basic means; one was the cold storage, the other one was the mobile cold storage, these are trucks that we have, and of course, the detached house. This is the thatched bure. We did this in Naga up in Nadarivatu and, of course, it produced very good results as well. So areas where the temperature is quite cool, it does very well in terms of its performance.

From observations, Madam Speaker, unbruised harvesters tubers can be stored for seven months, both in cold storage and diffuse houses. Seeds are expected to shrink and lose about 2 percent of its original weight. Selected seeds should be treated with fungicide before storage. If the tubers are bruised, bacteria and fungus affect the tubers and the incidents of rot will increase. However, rot development will be slow in cold temperatures as compared to diffuse houses.

We have also taught farmers on this basic husbandry practices, Madam Speaker, of the long term intention that this can be outsourced to farmers so that over time, instead of all seed production being undertaken by the Ministry of Agriculture, we will issue out contracts to farmers so that they can produce for the Ministry and for other farmers as well.

Ideal material: We also trialled material, Madam Speaker, this include putting it in sacks or plastic or wooden crates, so the storage materials included jute bags, crates and wooden boxes which were tested in the last season. Potato seeds perform better in wooden boxes, Madam Speaker, and of course, we are using it in all coolers around Fiji in order to increase production.

Volume and Output Level to Reduce Imports: Madam Speaker, because we have found out that we can store potato from the planting season to the next season, we are now aiming for two seasons actually for Fiji but the main season is usually from March to June. Of course, we want to also make a serious effort in introducing another season from August to October, so with more seeds and more crops available, we should be able to create that impact, particularly on our import bill and an increase in the area planted is expected. As I have said, it does well in most parts of Fiji which will be used by selected farmers for potato seeds.

Potato Seed Production and Planting: Madam Speaker, research teams try to build seed stock whereby the volume of import seeds gradually decrease until we are self-sufficient with seed material. We have approximately 14.5 tonnes of local seeds, selected potato tubers from Farmers Field which were purchased from the month of August and September 2016, harvested and kept in full storage. These seeds will be planted in the 2017 main planting season which begins in March, so Madam Speaker and Honourable Members of the House, if you go to these areas that I have mentioned, farmers will already

be busy with the main season crop. We used to import about 40 tonnes and hopefully over time as I have stated, we will decrease those imported seeds in terms of quantity, and we will use more of our local seeds.

This planting season, Madam Speaker, will mark the first time ever for Fiji to plant locally produced seeds of this magnitude and this will be concentrated in the Nadroga and Navosa Provinces, and monitoring will be carried out by both the Research and Extension Divisions.

When we are setting up the proposed standard potato seed production system in Fiji, Madam Speaker, selected seed farmers and stakeholders will be supplied with F2 and F3 generation seeds. They become Ministry of Agriculture's hands for multiplying two-type seed material and sell them back to the Ministry of Agriculture for cold storage and distribution because of the limited number of cold storage facilities and it is mainly within the Ministry of Agriculture now. But I have always talked about developing the whole agriculture value chain because agricultural products are perishable. It loses its quality, it loses its value and over time we will need more cold storage systems in Fiji, particularly in these production areas so that it becomes easy in terms of logistics and providing technical support.

Madam Speaker, lastly on tissue culture, we are thankful to our Ambassador in Brazil. We managed to also get 42 tissue culture varieties from the Tissue Culture Laboratory, International Potato Centre in Peru. So as we speak, Madam Speaker, 28 of these have been taken out of the laboratory. It is undergoing what we call the 'hardening process' in Sigatoka. Apart from the Red Pontiac, we will focus on these varieties as well and over time, we will select the best ones that suit Fiji's conditions, Madam Speaker, and particularly we look forward to the days where we will do commercial cultivation.

To conclude, Madam Speaker, it is envisaged that the local potato seeds planted in the upcoming season will be productive to give a good harvest for the farmers and quality seeds for the Ministry of Agriculture. The result of the next harvest is very important as it will show the capabilities we have to produce our very own potato seed.

For the 2017 season, we hope that we will reduce imports from Australia and focus more on our local varieties and huge opportunities for our local farmers to involve in potato farming as an alternative crop, to help them in their socio-economic issues, Madam Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Leader of the Opposition, or her designate, to speak in response.

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- Madam Speaker, in reply to the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, firstly, it is always a long-term intention of every government to be self-sufficient, to save import bills. In this case, as the focus is on potato, we would like to raise another concern which is on the dairy industry where we import large quantities of milk, butter, cheese, fun flavour, to name a few of the products which have very high importation bills.

While focussing on potato, we ask, why not focus on dairy which has been here for years? Potato was introduced in the 1860s so it is 156 odd years and now, we have gone back to potato which is an introduced species.

As for the pricing, there is no mention of the pricing in order to convince the farmers at the end of the chain that they must have a very equitable price so that they can be able to make a decision whether to plant *dalo*, ginger or other crops that they are well-established with, so to introduce a new crop altogether is a question of long term sustainability and their faith in the new introduced product.

However, Madam Speaker, I would like to make a general comment in terms of import substitution. As researched, import substitution policies can also have a negative effect on the nation's economy. A nation that becomes self-sufficient, bridges corruption and in activities such as smuggling, this policy can backfire on a nation. The nation that does not import will have high cost fraudulent products due to lack of competition and might also have a product that is inferior due to outdated technology. When a nation determines that import substitution and its policy backfires, they continue protecting the domestic industry with high import tariffs.

On the implementation, Madam Speaker, I would like to raise a few points in terms of the capability of the Government, especially in the budget distribution to be able for the Ministry to fulfil its quarterly task. As I have highlighted previously, budgeting for the implementation of such programmes will have an impact of the overall output of a programme. Budgetary allocation must be timely in order for the farmers to have sufficient time for land preparation which has been lacking, especially for ginger, *dalo* and other products to be able to have timely technical support.

Currently, it is experienced that the availability of qualified staff, their mobility and transportation to be able to address these issues on the ground when the farmers need them. So those are the points I would like to raise for this new product that is being introduced, to be able to convince the farmers that everything is in place for them to go into this new industry and most importantly what is the price that is offered to the farmers to be able to convince them to change their farming products.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now call upon the Honourable Leader of the NFP or his designate to have the floor.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the Honourable Minister for his update on the plans to increase the production of locally-grown potatoes. I think Honourable Ratu Kiliraki made some general observations and they are very sensible ones. Pertinent points with respect to any attempt by Government to promote the policy of import substitution.

Import substitution policies, Madam Speaker, are important, they can be used initially to improve the capacity of the producers in terms of deficiency, in terms of a period through which they can learn. In other words, if you are introducing potato farming again and I know we have identified a new variety, if I understand correctly, Honourable Minister, the initial variety was found to be totally unsuitable for Fiji's micro-climate. Potatoes grow in certain parts within the same area, but would not grow in other parts. So I think the important thing would be to identify those micro-climate throughout the country to be able to understand where a particular variety of potato would grow.

The other point, Madam Speaker, with respect to identifying new crops such as potato, and I think it is a useful experiment. I do not object to the idea that we should try and grow more potatoes but I think we also need to be aware of the pitfalls of doing that.

The critical point about import substitution, the Minister mentioned rice; rice makes a lot of sense, we have tried, it worked, we had about 66 percent of self-sufficiency in about 1989 and then some of the support was withdrawn, the research and extension and training was withdrawn, so the production declined drastically. I am pleased now that we are going back and rice production has increased and local rice is in demand.

With respect to potato, I mean I talked to a potato farmer and I was keen to understand what was happening and he was telling me, Madam Speaker, that initially they produced quite a bit and he tried to sell those potatoes locally. He said that after a while people switched back to imported potatoes because

they did not like the taste. So I think, a lot of research would also have to go into the actual consumption of the potatoes that we produce because if the consumption does not increase, if people do not like the taste of the new variety of potato, then the farmers would get into it, obviously we will not be able to sustain that and that is why some of the farmers, the initial group, Honourable Minister will recall, they lost interest in potato farming because there was no market and they were only doing it because the Government provided the support.

Now import substitution policies, Madam Speaker, that is a pitfall that Honourable Kiliraki talked about. Initially when you provide the support, you provide the seeds, you provide the grant, land preparation, people will try that but as soon as you remove that, that is the end of the story. So the idea is that while we are giving that support, we need to ensure that proper research, proper extension, training and the overall consumption framework is provided for those who want to produce.

The final point I want to make, Madam Speaker, with respect to import substitution policies and this is probably what the Honourable Minister and the Government ought to consider and the Honourable Ratu Kiliraki made that point is whether we putting enough money in the non-sugar crop sectors that we are exporting. So import substitution policy is not always helpful as you said quite rightly, if we are not exporting as well.

Perhaps, we need to balance and do a thorough cost benefit analysis of putting more money into exportable crops, such as *kava*, *dalo*, ginger or we spend money on import substitution crop which we may not know exactly how it is going to turn out. That said, I take the point that we need to keep trying new products but we must not lose sight of those exportable ones that are very very important because they earn foreign exchange which will offset whatever we import as well.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Members that brings to the end all items in today's Order Paper. I thank you for your participation.

Parliament is adjourned until tomorrow morning at 9.30.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.36 p.m.