

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

WEDNESDAY, 13TH FEBRUARY, 2019

[CORRECTED COPY]

WEDNESDAY, 13TH FEBRUARY, 2019

The Parliament met at 9.32 a.m., pursuant to notice.

HONOURABLE SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Honourable Members were present.

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Tuesday, 12th February, 2019, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Honourable Speaker, I second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote on the motion.

The Question is:

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Tuesday, 12th February, 2019 as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of “Noes”)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, as no Member opposes, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I welcome all Honourable Members to today’s sitting of Parliament. I also welcome members of the public joining us in the gallery and those watching proceedings on the television and internet, and listening to the radio.

On a welcoming note as well, I would like to acknowledge and welcome Mr. Sione Vikilani, Deputy Clerk; and Ms. Feaofaki Fetokai from the Parliament of Tonga, who are with us for a short attachment.

(Applause)

I welcome them most sincerely and trust that you will have an enjoyable time during your stay in Fiji.

Reports tabled before Dissolution of Parliament

Honourable Members, during the Business Committee meeting yesterday, it was unanimously agreed that Reports tabled in the last term of Parliament and referred to the Standing Committees before the dissolution of Parliament be reinstated in the respective Standing Committees. This will allow the Committees to scrutinise the pending Reports and table their findings in Parliament at a later date.

Honourable Members, I hold a strong view that all Annual Reports laid on the Table inside this Chamber are important documents and should be considered seriously by the Committees that they have been referred to.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND CERTAIN DOCUMENTS

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now call upon the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications to table his Report. You have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in accordance with Standing Order 38, I would like to present the Fiji Broadcasting Corporation - Annual Report 2017.

HON. SPEAKER.- Please, hand the report to the Secretary-General.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, under Standing Order 38(2), I refer the Fiji Broadcasting Corporation - Annual Report 2017 to the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs.

Thank you, Honourable Members, we will now proceed to the next item on the Order Paper.

PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence – Review Report of the Fiji Police Force Annual Report - August 2016 to July 2017

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence to present his Committee's Report.

HON. A.D. O'CONNOR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to present the Review Report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence on the Fiji Police Force Annual Report - August 2016 to July 2017.

The Standing Committee is established under Section 109(2)(e) of the Standing Orders of the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji.

The purpose of the review was to scrutinise the Fiji Police Force Annual Report - August 2016 to July 2017, specifically on the Department's operations and administration.

The Committee, after reviewing the Report, identified issues which were raised then but are persistent in the Fiji Police Force today. Many of these issues were witnessed by the Committee during their site visit on Monday, 4th February, 2019:

1. The security of the current Fiji Police Force Headquarters is a concern and the Committee believes that it is time for the Force to be relocated to a more secure environment.
2. The Committee would like to see a technology-enhanced and professional Police Force. The Committee believes that professionalism is key to service excellence and to building the Police service of the future.
3. The Committee is of the view that Police personnel welfare needs significant improvement. Emoluments and allowance should be paid where due.
4. The Committee recognises that the Fiji Police Force, amongst the many organisations in Fiji, has taken the lead in addressing SDG 5 (Gender Equality) at 20 percent of the Force. The Committee also commends the achievements of women police officers, who have taken leadership roles in Fiji and abroad.
5. The Committee is appreciative of the Fiji Police Force recognising the significant impact of drug-related issues in our society. The Committee recognises that in its reforms, the Fiji Police Force has established a Narcotics Directorate with full capability.

The Committee notes that the Fiji Police Force is undergoing reforms and restructure whilst continuing its core functions of maintaining law and order, forging and strengthening local and international partnerships to combat and prevent transnational crime.

The Fiji Police Force had worked diligently to achieve its eight Key Performance Indicators under challenging circumstances. The Committee recognises that these have been imposed on the Force under the Strategic Framework for Change Coordinating Office (SFCCO) and do not quite adequately measure the performance of the Force.

The Committee understands that the Force will now be guided by the proposed National Security Strategy (NSS) and the Police White Paper which are now before Government.

The public perception of the Force is derived mostly from the actions and inactions of police officers in dealing with public complaints. At present, the Force is unfairly perceived to be unresponsive. The Committee is of the view that this could be corrected in two ways:

1. Through an effective communication strategy; and
2. Robust leadership and better management of resources.

The Committee commends the good work of the organisation and its achievements in its fiscal Year 2016 to 2017 as captured in the Annual Report. While applauding the achievements of the Police Department, the Committee had identified some opportunities for improvements. These are outlined in the Report.

I take this opportunity to thank the Commissioner of Police, including all staff and their families for a job well done and their dedication to securing the nation for all Fijians and visitors to our shores.

I take this opportunity to also thank the Honourable Members of my Committee for compiling this bipartisan Report.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, I submit this Report to Parliament. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I thank the Chairperson and I ask him to, please, hand the Report to the Secretary-General.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. A.D. O'CONNOR.- Mr. Speaker Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move a motion without notice that a debate on the content of the Report is initiated at a future sitting date.

HON. DR. S.R. GOVIND.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote.

The Question is:

That a debate on the content of the Report is initiated at a future sitting. Does any Member oppose?

(Chorus of "Noes")

As no Member opposes, Honourable Members, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- We move onto the next agenda item on the Order Paper.

A POINT OF ORDER

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, a Point of Order.

HON. SPEAKER.- You have the floor on a Point of Order.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- A Point of Order, Sir, on Standing Order 81. I would like to raise a point on a comment made by the Honourable Qionibaravi yesterday that when she was in the Administration, the poundage was reduced to 10 percent. In fact, it was reduced in 2009. I want to correct her and ask her to make a correction on that.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister, the point is taken. Honourable Qionibaravi?

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. May I just inform the House of the statement that I had responded to yesterday.

The Honourable Attorney-General had said, "A few years ago, when the landowners used to get the lease monies collected by iTLTB, iTLTB used to take out 25 percent as administration cost" Honourable Speaker, "a few years ago" means just a few years ago, not as far as 2009.

Anyway, I said that when I left the Administration it was at 10 percent. I also further said that previous governments, 10 years to 15 years ago had started to reduce the poundage. It was not only under the FijiFirst Government, that is what I had said too.

There was plan to continue to have it reduced right down to zero percent. My understanding was that, it was reduced to 10 percent and there was plan to reduce it right down to zero percent. A few years ago probably, to me, means 2012. It is 2019 now, surely 10 years is not a few years ago. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Attorney-General, you have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, unfortunately Honourable Qionibaravi has fallen into the same trap as the rest of her colleagues because when they quote something, they do not read the entire sentence and so she just stopped at 25 percent.

What I actually said in the next sentence is also very relevant, and I quote from Page 416 of the *Uncorrected Daily Hansard* of Tuesday, 12th February, 2019:

“A few years ago, when the landowners used to get the lease monies collected”

I did not say “just”, I said “A few years ago” which can mean 10 years, 15 years or five years, can mean five years. I said, and I quote:

“A few years ago, when the landowners used to get the lease monies collected by iTLTB, iTLTB used to take out 25 percent as administration cost from the landowners’ leases. Today, only 10 percent is taken out.”

What the Honourable Minister for Fisheries pointed out is that, in 2009, the poundage taken out by iTLTB had dropped from 15 percent to 12.5 percent, and then in 2013, it dropped from 12.5 percent to 10 percent. You most certainly were not around in 2013, you were not around.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- A point of Order, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, you have floor.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Sir, the Point of Order on Standing Orders 81, raised by the Honourable Minister for Fisheries is irrelevant, and if you look at that, Sir, he was not even the speaker of that particular question that was put, and also it had to be done immediately after that, so yesterday, so you should rule, Sir, that it is irrelevant and that Point of Order is out of order, and we seek a ruling from you, Sir. We cannot allow the Honourable Attorney-General to have a “second bite at the cherry” by coming through this way.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Those are the requirements of Standing Orders 81, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I remember distinctly the figures that were quoted yesterday, and they are the figures that had been presented this morning, they are very clear to me. I really do not know how come there is so much cross-section in the simple figures - from 25 percent to 10 percent, to 12.5 percent. They are there, recorded in Hansard and recorded in the Committee Reports, and we are harping on this and wasting time.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Yes, Honourable Member.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Because if not, this will go down like a fish market.

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, I have not finished. You know the procedure, when the Speaker is addressing the House you should wait, Honourable Member. I will give you ample time to make your point when you need to make it, you know that, as well as I do. Now having said that, Honourable Member, you have the floor.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Honourable Koroilavesau was totally out of order. Standing Order 81 says, only if she misquoted you then you are entitled to stand up to correct. For example, like what Honourable Seruiratu said yesterday, he misquoted me so I corrected it, so that was totally out of order. You should read Standing Order 81 correctly, that is my point. Otherwise, we will dwell now like in a fish market, this is not a fish market, please.

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- I hope the point is taken by everyone and we will move on.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CHAIR

Urgent Oral Question – Declaration on a State of Disaster

Honourable Members, for the information of the House, I have received an Urgent Oral Question from the Honourable Viliame Gavoka, pursuant to Standing Order 43.

The call for the Declaration on a State of Disaster is made by law under the Natural Disaster Management Act 1998, which comes under the jurisdiction of its Minister. Honourable Members, only Cabinet has the power to make such a declaration.

Given that it is not within Parliament's powers to interfere with what is already prescribed in law, I, therefore, rule that the Urgent Oral Question is out of order.

Thank you, Honourable Members.

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

Doctor to Patient Ratio
(Question No. 19/2019)

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA asked the Government, upon notice:

Would the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services inform Parliament what is the doctor to patient ratio in public hospitals in the country in light of his public statement published on 20th January, 2019 that there are enough doctors in the country?

HON DR. I. WAQAINABETE (Minister for Health and Medical Services).- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, and thank you, Honourable Member, for that wonderful question. I would like to say “*Malo pito*” and “Good morning” to our colleagues from Tonga.

Honourable Speaker, in 2014, the Government had 431 doctors. Now, there are 804 doctors, a significant increase of 373. This indicates that the number of doctors recruited, Honourable Speaker, has almost doubled in the last five years. Majority of these doctors are our children, local graduates from the two universities. There are now more students still studying medicine and will continue to study medicine which consequently increases the Ministry of Civil Service’s intakes of our local interns who will then, after their probationary period, and as they pass become doctors.

Our current establishment, Honourable Speaker, shows that we have a total number of field positions at 804. The total number of positions is 916, with a total number of vacancies at 159. We have, as we speak, internal promotions that will be effected this month. That will also affect numbers and these are up to 40 which are the senior medical officers, principal medical officers, chief medical officers and two consultant positions.

We have also made recruitment from overseas and outside the Civil Service. When I say “outside the Civil Service”, these are doctors working in the private sector or possibly from the university, coming back in to supplement our numbers given the working conditions that have improved dramatically, which I will talk about a little bit later, and these are:

1. Medical Officers	: 19
2. Senior Medical Officers	: 7
3. Principal Medical Officers	: 3
4. Chief Medical Officers	: 3
Total	: 32

Honourable Speaker, the increase in doctors is largely due to an improved recruitment process under the FijiFirst Government and also recently under the Open Merit Recruitment Selection (OMRS) Guideline, implemented since 2016. The improved working conditions and the use of modern and far-reaching advertising and advocacy platforms have also helped us in our recruitment process. Most of these recruitments were undertaken over the last four years but significantly also over the last two years.

Honourable Speaker, when we talk about the number of doctors, it is important to understand that we are talking about the number of doctors that we train, the number of doctors that remain within the system and also more importantly, what is the attrition rate?

Honourable Speaker, there was a very significant attrition of doctors from the Civil Service for a very long time and to discuss the number of doctors, one must understand the background and the efforts of this Government to retain doctors.

Honourable Speaker, the late Dr. Salimoni Tuqa prepared a Cabinet Paper in 2000. I am not sure whether it was presented or not but I was privy to see that Paper which showed that 70 percent of all doctors in the Civil Service from 1987 to 1999 left the Civil Service with the majority

going abroad. And when I say “majority going abroad”, it brings to mind a statement once made by the former Deputy Prime Minister of Cook Islands, the late Sir Terepai Maoate in which he said that we, in the Pacific, should push for a brain rotation rather than a brain drain, which means if people leave the Service, as long as they leave but will remain within the country or remain within the Pacific. These doctors never stayed in the Pacific, they left for greener pastures elsewhere into the modern countries that we talk of.

These sentiments were echoed in some other studies and the attrition rate continued to the early part of 2000. I will give you some examples, Honourable Speaker:

1. My graduating class of 1996 of 14, last year, one was employed back into the Service, now has only two; from the 14, only two remained in the Service. The class the following year (1997) has only two left in the Civil Service. The class of 1998, I believe I have checked around, unless there is one left, there is none left in the Service - none.
2. Whole classes of doctors graduating within 10 to 20 years were leaving in droves for overseas predominantly then also into the private practice locally.
3. We have estimated that more than 100 specialists of Fijian origin in Australasia alone, could be here supporting the work that we do.
4. Ms. Kimberly Oman, in her Thesis at James Cook University (and I am not sure whether it was her Masters or PhD thesis) published in 2007 looking at the reasons of why doctors and specialists migrate which are similar to the following four reasons that the late Doctor Tuqa talked about in his Paper:
 - Political Instability;
 - Lack of Recognition (obviously the appropriate working conditions);
 - Lack of Career Pathways; and
 - Lack of Transparency and Promotion.

Honourable Speaker, the Bainimarama-led Government slowly begun to implement changes, not only to increase doctors’ positions, but to retain doctors.

Since 2006, small increases in establishments were done, especially at the top, in diverging the pyramidal shape of the establishment and the recognition of our young growing cohort of specialists, and I am proud to say that I was one of them.

Honourable Speaker, the regularisation was also done to recognise those Acting for more than one or two years and these were some of our young doctors doing very similar tasks with appropriate qualifications being awarded on the spot of their position, and some of them actually got promoted two or three times above the levels that they were on because they had the apparent qualification and were Acting for a very long time.

Honourable Speaker, the most significant change came in the 2017–2018 Budget Announcement. The doctors’ salaries increased from 57 to 84 percent and was weighted according to the clinical demand of their own core commitment.

Honourable Speaker, I was invited to listen as President of the Fiji Medical Association in the tearoom and I was hopefully wishing that day that something would happen, and when the Minister for Economy called in, tears were shed all over the more than 100 facilities in Fiji that night that doctors were manning and at their homes for those resting.

In addition, Honourable Speaker, this FijiFirst Government also increased significantly the salaries again with the Open Merit Recruitment System (OMRS) and through this initiative allowed our young learned doctors to compete for positions that in the old system would be out of their reach. This also meant another increase in salaries with some doctors, Honourable Speaker, in total having nearly 100 percent increase in salary within a year. This is the only Government that takes care and protects its doctors and walks the talk.

Honourable Speaker, the World Health Organisation minimum standard is one doctor to 1,000 of the population (1:1,000) and I am pleased to inform this august House, that with the establishment of more than 800 of filled positions, not including those that have not been filled, we have crossed that threshold. What this Government, through the Ministry of Civil Service and the Ministry of Health, has begun to implement is the right amount of hours acceptable and safe for both the doctors and members of the community.

Honourable Speaker, not long ago, at the turn of the century, we would work 36 hours straight without rest. My children and many doctors' children's aversion to medicine is because of these long hours at work and exhausted mums and dads, who could not contribute to their upbringing.

Honourable Speaker, we worked in sleep-deprived stupor and personally on many occasions, I would ask my wife in the morning literally, "My dear, what day is it?"

Honourable Speaker, the implementation recently of work corrected hours at the fact that we have a surge in the acute clinical ward in all our facilities, may seem to suggest we do not have enough doctors. This policy of work corrected hours has been implemented as of recent, as a result of a joint review that considered the doctor:patient ratio and determined that doctors working hours could now be changed because we have the numbers.

Yesterday, in the evening, when we left here, there were seven doctors at the Valelevu Health Centre and still a hundred patients to be seen, and they were working hard to see that all patients were going to be seen before they left for home.

Honourable Speaker, the recent surge seems to be acute viral illness and this is also tipping off the chronic cases, such as asthma and those with NCDs. These illnesses, Honourable Speaker, has also been reported elsewhere and we ask all Fijians to utilise our facilities as much as possible during off-peak hours when we have large numbers of doctors available. I ask this noble House that we be proactive and ask all Fijians to be wary of their health, be precautionary, eat healthy, exercise and rest well.

Honourable Speaker, the Ministry of Civil Service conducted bulk recruitment processes that utilise local advertising and international publication through a profession social networking site. This has attracted senior and experienced doctors from as far away as Scandinavia and she is working here today, to apply for roles that we have been unable to fill previously and because of our working conditions and the salaries are competitive, we are able to attract them.

Also a classmate of mine, who has been able to come back from overseas is now the Sub-Divisional Medical Officer in Vunidawa, sharing his overwhelming experience from his exposures in Africa with overseas agencies and championing our fight against typhoid in Naitasiri.

Honourable Speaker, I am proud to say that I have heard that as of recent a gentleman from Nabuobuco in Naitasiri, trained in New Zealand and graduated with a Fellowship in Surgery, has accepted the role of Consultant in Surgery (the position I formerly held), at the Colonial War

Memorial (CWM) Hospital as the salary is competitive and it allows him to come back and serve Fijians and look after his aging mother.

Honourable Speaker, we also have a growing number of former Fiji citizens, who are specialists overseas, returning and offering their expertise. This is unprecedented.

There are ongoing discussions with both, the Ministry of Health, Medical Services and the Ministry of Civil Service and the Universities on how we can better address the recruitment process moving forward. This, Honourable Speaker, Sir, will also ensure the introduction of measures that will not only give new graduates an opportunity to showcase themselves, but also providing an opportunity for registration purposes to the new doctors, the interns. This platform will subsequently improve the Ministry of Civil Service, the safety net to select its best candidates at the end of each phase.

Honourable Speaker, as I finish, I bring us back to Kimberly Omans and Dr. Tuqa's findings of why doctors leave:

- Political instability (we are now stable);
- Lack of recognition (they are now recognised and paid well);
- Lack of career pathways (they have many); and
- Lack of transparency in promotions (we now have Open Merit Recruitment).

These are all being met by the FijiFirst Government, resulting in our significant numbers of doctors.

Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker, and thank you for that question.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Minister for Health.

Honourable Salote Radrodro, you have the floor.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, and I thank the Honourable Minister for that explanation. But I am sure those who are listening to the radio, those watching TV and even those who may be sitting at the gallery, must be shaking their heads in disagreement. As he rightfully said, in Valelevu Health Centre it is congested, people go away without being seen by a doctor, and that is a clear reflection of the doctor:patient ratio, it is lacking.

Honourable Speaker, the Honourable Minister mentioned the high number of vacancies that still exist and from 2017 to now, it still remains above 100 vacancies. The FijiFirst Government
....

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, what is your question?

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- My question is; the Honourable Minister highlighted the high attrition rates of doctors and that high attrition rate, he mentioned that they have improved salary and conditions. But Honourable Speaker, what are the other challenges, for example, the quality of the medical facilities. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker. I thank Honourable Radrodro for that question. The high attrition rate was before, now the attrition rate is less than 10 percent, and the reasons are specified in the paper that I have just presented.

Also as I was saying, Honourable Radrodro and Honourable Speaker, Sir, there has been surge recently because of the acute viral illness and this surge is putting pressure on our system. You may also remember that I have just discussed that we want to work the doctors correctly to their amount of hours.

Therefore, because we are working and correcting their hours, so with the surge, we are beginning to see what seems to be a shortage of doctors. These are roles and responsibilities to ensure that we have safe doctors providing a safe service, and the numbers are now right to be able to do it. The days of working 36 hours straight without rest; that is unforgiveable, and if anyone in this House used to say that that should continue, that is wrong.

By Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) regulations, that is unacceptable, and I am pleading with us today and with the public today to bear with us as we continue to work, to ensure that not only they are seen but also the doctors work in a safe environment.

Last year, we had two suicides committed by two young doctors. One of them in one of the densely populated areas - Makoi and the reason is very simple, because of the challenges that they face. Because of that, we have reacted by ensuring that we work them correctly and I find it here this morning appalling to hear that we are only talking about the challenges that the public faces, but we must remember that there are opportunities for off-peak hours to be seen.

Honourable Speaker, we have areas, for example, where doctors are there in the morning and yet, not enough of our people are able to come. Also, I have just been reminded that very soon, we have got to start utilising private General Practitioners (GPs).

Honourable Speaker, yes, we make significant progress in those areas. Thank you very much.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Professor Biman Prasad, you have the floor.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I thank the Honourable Minister for his very comprehensive answer. He pointed out that the shortage right now is about 159 doctors.

Honourable Speaker, I remember in 2017, we changed the Medical and Dental Practitioners Act to allow more recruitment of doctors from outside. My question to the Honourable Minister is; how successful have we been in the recruitment of overseas doctors, and what is the timeline in which he feels that we may be able to recruit more doctors and reduce the shortage of 159 that exists at the moment?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Member. Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Thank you, I have the numbers here with me, Sir. These are the recruitments from overseas and outside the Civil Service to be effected in February 2019, as follows:

- Medical Officers : 19

- Senior Medical Officers : 7
- Principal Medical Officers : 3
- Chief Medical Officers : 3
- Consultants : 2 (one of them is from Scandinavia)

So we have made significant progress in that regard. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. I give the floor to the Honourable Dr. Ratu Atonio Lalabalavu, you have the floor.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Honourable Speaker, I would like to ask a supplementary question to the Honourable Minister for Health: I agree with him on the numbers he has given with regards to the number of doctors in the country but the question is, in terms of the World Health Organisation (WHO) ratio of 1:1,000, and the number of doctors in the country, are they being adequately distributed throughout the country?

The reason why I ask this is because some of the hospitals, even with bigger population are understaffed. Most of the time, they bring out doctors working in Health Centres to come and work in the Subdivisional Hospitals. What are the alternatives available by the Government to address this issue?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Member. Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Thank you very much. I thank the Honourable Member for that question.

As I have said, the WHO population:doctor ratio is 1:1,000. We have now crossed that threshold. We also have to remember that these are the densely populated areas that we try and roster the doctors, for example, the Lami to Nausori corridor, Nadi to Ba areas.

By doing that, as of recent, we have been talking about also ensuring that doctors work on corrected hours. As you know, doctors also go on leave, we have a rising cohort and I admire female doctors, whom and as you know take maternity leave, so these are the things that have to be factored in.

We utilise mechanisms such as bringing doctors from areas where there are more doctors to fill in those positions on a temporary position. We also had the opportunity within the Lami to Nausori corridor and Nadi to Ba to utilise local positions for private practitioners to come and support our doctors in the Health Centres.

As alluded to in the discussions of last year's budget, we are also now looking at utilising the GPs on a roll out basis. So, those are the mechanisms that are going to be used robustly to be able to meet the challenges of doctor:patient ratio. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Anare Jale, you have the floor.

HON. A. JALE.- The retention of locally trained doctors is very important because we have spent a lot of money in their training. I think it is important that we try to do as much as we can in terms of conditions of employment to retain our locally trained doctors. I think the quality of our

doctors as opposed to doctors who have been brought from outside is quite different from my experience.

My question is; what is the distribution or composition of local doctors to expatriate doctors in our medical service at the moment?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Member. Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- At the moment, with the numbers that I have with me, Honourable Speaker, it is above 50 or less. So, out of the 800 doctors (50/800), the ratio could be 16 percent, that is one overseas doctor to 16 local doctors.

In that regard, as you know, Honourable Speaker and Honourable Members, a significant opportunity is now available for Postgraduate training for our doctors and this is supported by Government. The Postgraduate training is for the four-year Masters Programme at the Fiji National University (FNU).

Yes, we are bringing out our own local specialists who have a local field to the patients that we look after and we hope that this will be able to supplement the need in the high consultants and specialists areas. Thank you, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister. Honourable Lynda Tabuya, you have the floor.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir, and thank you, Honourable Minister.

You stated about the issue of brain rotation and that your Government is the only Government that is trying to address stopping GPs or doctors from public hospitals going to private practice or leaving the country. In your budget address, you were to implement the GP Incentivisation Scheme from the 1st January, 2019 which, by the way, is still to be implemented and the Head of the GP Association has not heard from you

The GP Incentivisation Scheme will see doctors going into private practice in areas that you said do not provide medical service. My question is, does this Scheme not directly contradict what you are trying to address which is, that doctors in public hospitals not to go into private practice or to retain them so that they can serve our people in the public hospitals? Does the Incentivisation Scheme not directly oppose this because it will see our doctors from public hospitals going to private practice to take advantage of that Scheme?

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, this is for your supplementary question. It is not for a statement. So, could you ask your question directly?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Honourable Speaker, the idea of the GP Programme roll out is so that our people have a dedicated GP that can follow them up, that can look after them; that

is the whole idea. Unfortunately, we have in this country our people who are not able to identify a particular doctor that looks after them on a regular basis. So, the whole name of the GP roll out is to provide them that safety net of a doctor that they can choose to look after them, hold their records, being able to see them as a baby, all the way up to being an adult. This is something, Honourable Speaker, that happens in the western world.

In New Zealand and Australia, you have a private doctor that looks after you. Even I as a doctor had to choose a private doctor to look after me. That is the whole aim of the GP roll out.

It is actually adding more value to the service already being provided and by doing that, we ensure that the whole population are able to identify a GP that can look after them and their families. That is the whole aim of the GP roll out.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Hear, hear!

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Niko Nawakula.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Honourable Speaker, let me say this comes as a serious concern that two young doctors committed suicide, and the Honourable Minister had perhaps correctly pointed to work environment, this should be avoided. Could the Honourable Minister explain to the House what measures has he put in place or thinking to put in place to avoid this?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Member.

HON. DR. I. WAQINABETE.- Thank you. The challenges that doctors face in the coalface is real, and most times they are unappreciated. Often, Honourable Speaker, you can increase the numbers of doctors at the coalface, or sometimes our people are unappreciative of the work being done.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- There are also challenges that they may face internally and this may attribute to the stress that they face. What we can do is influence and change the things that we can as a Government, and that is why we have gone into this right-sizing or right-working the doctors, no more 36 hours without rest, like we had to do before. That has been changing slowly over the last few years to now a stage where we can do it effectively right throughout the country.

Secondly, we have encouraged the doctors to develop the Mentoring Programme and we have asked the Medical Association to that effect to support that course. Also the Ministry of Civil Service which looks after doctors try to keep in touch with them on a regular basis, apart from that, that we utilised within the Ministry of Health. These are mechanisms that we have in place to support our doctors. There are multiple factors but we can change the things that we can. Thank you, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. Honourable Selai Adimaitoga, you have the floor.

HON. S. ADIMAITOGA.- Thank you, Sir. First of all, I would like to congratulate you for being elected as Speaker and may God bless you.

To the Minister concerned, is there any realisation for the need of specialised services and what is Ministry of Health (MOH) doing in regards to doctors?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister, you may have the floor.

HON. DR. I. WAQINABETE.- Thank you for that question, Honourable Member.

Honourable Speaker, as I have alluded to a little bit in my answer to the question posed earlier by one of my Honourable colleagues, we have a Post Graduate Training Programme that has been running ever since 1997 within the Fiji National University (FNU).

With Government's support, this has now increased the number of programmes but also increased the number of doctors that can be trained. So we are training Surgeons, Anaesthetists, Obstetricians, Gynaecologists, Paediatricians, Pathologists and Ophthalmologists as of recent.

These are four-year training programmes and after the training programmes then we also support the need that we have and also their desire for some speciality training, and this is with attachments overseas, in Australia, New Zealand and elsewhere that might be helpful. By doing this, we begin to build a cohort of local specialists. The number of young doctors coming through the Post Graduate Programme continues to increase every year. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. Honourable Tikoduadua, you have the floor.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. First of all, I would like to appreciate the effort that our Honourable Minister is doing with regards to improving the conditions through our doctors. I say this because my wife is a nurse and I am a cancer and cardiac patient as well, so I rely very much on doctors for my life.

It pains me a lot of the time when we do not pay our doctors enough, or we do not appreciate the kind of work that they are doing. They are actually struggling in their work and they deserve recognition. I am a bit surprised at the outflow of our doctors from here going in to greener pastures. I just want to know, Honourable Speaker, whether pay and emoluments for doctors has got to do with this because I believe that we are not paying our doctors enough. My question to the Honourable Minister is, what is Government paying as a starting salary for new graduates? Is that within a salary structure that is sustainable enough to keep them here within the immediate future, whether we are paying our doctors enough actually? Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Member. Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Thank you very much for that question. Before the pay was not enough, now the pay, in my opinion, I could be wrong, is enough; that is my opinion. The starting salary for doctors now is \$45,000. So we are able to recruit, we are able to retain. Our highest paid doctors now are paid about \$140,000 a year.

So, yes, we are able to keep our doctors. Before when I started, my starting salary was \$17,000, the starting salary now is \$45,000. If I could turn time forward, so that I could start now, it would have been quite nice. But anyway, thank you very much. *Vinaka vakalevu.*

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. I think we have dealt with this question sufficiently and we will move on.

Honourable Members, I have been advised that Question 20/2019 to be asked by the lone ranger, the Honourable Vijendra Prakash, has been withdrawn.

(Question No. 20/2019 withdrawn)

Honourable Members, on that note, we will now take a break for morning tea and when we resume, we will start off with the next question, asked by the Honourable Leader of the Opposition. We adjourn for morning tea.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.29 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.00 a.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will continue with the questions for today.

I have the pleasure to give the floor, for the third question to be asked by the Leader of the Opposition to ask Question 21/2019. You have the floor, Sir.

Selling of Government entities
(Question No. 21/2019)

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications explain to Parliament why Government is continuing to sell Government entities such as the Government Printing Services?

HON A. SAYED-KHAIYUM (Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Mr. Speaker, I am glad the Honourable Leader of the Opposition has asked this question.

When asked the question it seems to be very negatively premised but it was under his Government, when he was Prime Minister, where three significant sale of Government assets took place and some were rather done abysmally, but let me just highlight what has actually happened with Government Printery.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Bainimarama-led Government and subsequently the FijiFirst Government, has put in place an economic plan which, in fact, is elucidated further in our 5-Year and 20-year Development Plans, which actually recognises the fact that in order to grow the economy and sustain jobs, we need to make strategic decisions, and part of that is to encompass and involve the private sector, not in a dogmatic fashion, but where it is strategically important to do so and where in fact it will benefit the Fijian economy; the Government Printing Services is one of them.

Of course, prior to that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have divested our shares partially in Fiji Ports Corporation Ltd. We have also, through Fiji Ports Corporation Ltd., divested certain shares in Fiji Ports Terminal Ltd. and, of course, we are currently working on the divestment of certain shares, with Government still holding 51 percent in Energy Fiji Ltd (EFL); these are strategic organisations.

In respect of the Government Printery, it has been sold to a company called Serendib. Serendib, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is in fact an investment company: 75 percent-owned by Fijian Holdings Ltd (FHL); and 25 percent, by Aitken Spence from Sri Lanka which has a Fortune 200 Companies listed on the stock exchange there, outside the U.S.A. Fijian Holdings Limited, Mr. Speaker, Sir, with the numerous positive changes that have actually taken place in the Fijian Holdings Limited, today their share price strength for the last two years compared to say, June 2016. Today, stands at \$12 as opposed to \$4 and if you split, the share-splitting is from 85 cents, it has gone up to actually \$1.20. So, FHL truly is, in fact, a blue chip company and it has numerous investments.

The reason why the Government wanted to venture into Government Printery is because, now with modern technology being introduced, we need to move very significantly into the printing area.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. MEMBER.- Hear, hear, to past Governments.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I do not know what it has got to do with past Governments. But, for example, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are certain printing jobs in the tourism sector that nobody in Fiji has the technology to carry out that high level of printing: the pixels, the resolutions, nobody in Fiji can do that so they go offshore.

We see a significant opportunity for Fijian businesses in this area and, of course, with FHL being a blue chip company, it has many subsidiaries of its own, it has many requirements of printing of its own, this is now what you call value-adding to their company.

They have partnered with Serendib and Serendib, of course, is Aitken Spence Company, again it is a listed company, they are also under the printing business. Part of the requirement of the sale was that whichever company bought Government Printery from the Fijian Government, had to actually invest in technology to upgrade the printing technology in Fiji itself. So part of the condition of the sale is that Serendib has to, in fact, invest \$5 million over the next five years.

The actual business was sold for \$6 million. It is not a large amount but it is the correct amount. The asset on which the actual building sits on, we have not sold the asset. In fact, it is Government-owned land and as I would elucidate further, what we have done with FPCL, we are not actually selling real estate so the lease is held by the Fijian Government through an entity (which we have highlighted in this Parliament before), Assets Fiji Ltd (AFL), that has the holding of all the assets where we divest and then Assets Fiji Ltd has actually leased the land to Serendib. So, we are not giving away to real estate, we are simply leasing the land and, of course, as any good business would have, if they are buying it for the right reasons, they are not necessarily interested in the ownership of the land but what they are interested in is the bottom line.

So, part of the deal is that, Government will, of course, ensure that they invest the \$5 million. None of the staff actually had to lose their jobs. There were 48 staff, Government Printery & Stationery Department (GPSD) staff have continued their employment. They were given the opportunity to accept employment with Serendib and all of them have and none of the staff actually have been laid off. What this will mean is that formerly Government Printery and Serendib will now actually position themselves for many jobs, not just within Fiji but outside Fiji as well.

As we highlighted a couple of days ago, Fiji has a good brand, whenever you mention Fiji, it actually conjures up very positive images. I will give you a very classic example: In New Zealand, we have numerous companies that actually print, for example, millions of books, exercise books. They are now going offshore to countries like China and various other countries in the South East Asian Region because the pricing actually does not fit with the price of actually producing the cost of that exercise book that they want to sell it at, so Fiji has the opportunity to step into that market. If you had, for example, Embossed Printing, if you have high raised printing which a very few people do in Fiji and most of them cannot do, that is another market that this Fijian company now can step into.

As part of also assisting this company with on-going business, Government has assigned a one-year Service Agreement that they will continue to provide that service at rates that we have agreed with to do your Government Gazette Printing, the Parliamentary Papers, they will continue to do that, so already the company has an established customer.

This actually will mean the share price of Fijian Holdings Limited and the beneficiaries, of course, are the Provincial Councils, et cetera. They will have an increase in their share price, so it

is a very strategic decision that has been made and, Honourable Speaker, I think, however it would be amiss of me not to contextualise this. The contextualisation is this: if we compare this (and perhaps this is where the Leader of Opposition is perhaps giving this a negative connotation) because the National Bank of Fiji, for example, when it collapsed, and Government actually had to fund it to the tune of \$220 million. They decided to sell 51 per cent of the National Bank of Fiji, which was our only bank to then CMLA (Colonial Mutual Life Assurance Society) 51 per cent and they sold it for only \$9 million (actually, to be exact \$9.8 million), so here was our National Bank being sold actually for the wrong reasons.

And I remember as the in-house counsel for Colonial Fiji Life Limited, the balance of the 49 percent was sold by the Qarase Government for \$28 million in 2005. I remember we had signed the agreement in the Prime Minister's Office, so because the asset is not doing well, the rationale for selling Government assets should not be, that you are actually quickly trying you raise money and that was precisely what happened in ATH (Amalgamated Telecom Holdings Limited) under the SVT Government when they created the ATH and brought in what we used to have - the Telecom Fiji.

They brought the Post and Wireless Company (PNT, as it was called). They actually got FNFP to buy, through various shenanigans, the shares in ATH at three times the value of the share, and then overnight, the share price dropped. What does this mean? It meant that the members of FNPF, the value of their funds dropped three times of that investment that was made and, of course, that particular year, the Honourable Leader of Opposition, the Honourable Prime Minister would know, they actually had a surplus in their budget. We only had three surpluses in our history and again that was done for the wrong reason.

The third example I want to use to contextualise it again, of course, is what we used to call the "Government Shipyard". The Government Shipyard, Honourable Speaker, was as was the talk then, sold to a New Zealand \$2 Company. Fiji had a very good shipbuilding capacity and many of the people in this room would actually know that, Honourable O'Connor knows about this – very good shipbuilding capacity, that they sold it to a New Zealand \$2 Company in the 1990s.

By 1996, it was evident the entity was not doing well, in fact, that company came to the Government of the day at that time saying "We want to borrow money, can you guarantee our loans?" You do not sell Government assets to a private entity for them to come back and ask you to guarantee their loans. You are supposed to sell it to a company that can stand on its own feet, and this is precisely the reason, whilst we have you know raised this issue (Honourable Prasad has talked about this), we have, for example, in various budgets said we would divest certain shares in EFL (Energy Fiji Limited), it has taken a longer period of time and we do not mind that because we want to get the right partners.

Already in the EFL, for example, we have given away 5 percent of the shares of EFL to ordinary Fijians. They have now become shareholders of EFL. It is a great buy-in, it is a great divestment of shares. The Fijian Government has stated unequivocally on a number of occasions that 50 percent of those shares will remain with the Fijian Government because it is the energy sector and it is the only supplier of electricity in Fiji where they own the generation, the distribution and the retailer and, of course, there was another failure when they tried to reform with FEA, but I do not want to go into that.

Getting back into the Shipyard, then the company actually went into, within a short period of time, receivership. The irony then was, the Government then went back and bought it, the Government sold it, went back to save whatever it was in the Shipyard. So divestment of shares

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- A Point of Order, Honourable Speaker. The Point of Order is on the Standing Order 45 again on Relevance. The question was about the Government Printery and not every other business or whatever he is alleging about the time when the Honourable Leader of the Opposition was in Government. If the Honourable Minister could limit his answer to the question which is about the Government Printery which the Honourable Leader of the Opposition has specifically asked and it is not sinister, it is a question of clarification, and we ask the Honourable Attorney-General to, please, answer the question directly; thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, the Honourable Minister is answering the question and he is relating to other things that relate to the question as well. But he is answering the question that is asked here about the Government Printing, I cannot see any problem with that.

Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I agree with the Honourable Tabuya that it is not a sinister question, but I am saying that the question is premised on a negative basis - Can the Honourable Minister explain to Parliament why the Government is continuing to sell Government entities?

What I am trying to explain, through the examples of ATH, NBF and the Government Shipyard, is that perhaps the Honourable Leader of the Opposition's thinking is based on negativity because of the experience he went through for the divestment of shares. So divestment of shares is not necessarily a negative thing. We have, for example, when we divested the shares in Fiji Ports Corporation Limited (I have some statistics here), Mr. Speaker, Sir. We actually sold, as I said, that we actually partially sold it to the Aitken Spence, and today the Fiji Ports Corporation Limited, FNPF is actually a shareholder of 39 percent, the Aitken Spence owns 20 percent and our Fijian Government owns the balance.

So what has actually happened since they have come in, we now have dividends, even though we no longer own 100 percent of the shares, our dividend share has increased because the Port is now being run efficiently. There is proper management because these people have got the skilsets, so strategically we saw Fiji Ports Corporation Limited requiring a strategic partner, Fiji needs to continue to reassert itself as the hub of the Pacific. And one of the ways you can do that is that you become a strong port nation, and strong port nation is not done only by talking about it but about efficiencies.

Since the divestment, cargo-handling has improved by 60 percent. Previously, the average port stay of a vessel was 36 hours, but now the average turnaround time of a vessel is less than 20 hours.

When Aitken Spence took over the management of Fiji Ports Corporation Limited, the average berthing for vessel was recorded as six hours. Today, the same has been reduced to one hour or less (from 6 hours to 1 hour). As a result to these efficiencies, the shippers and consignors used to charge an additional of US\$125 per 20-foot container because there was so much wastage, they are burning fuel, that is gone. What does it mean? It means that the cost of bringing a container into Fiji and out of Fiji is reduced. What does it mean? That is passed down to our consumers. What does it mean? It is passed up to our exporters, so we become attractive. We want to create this into a transshipment hub.

And again we are now, through this company, trying to rebuild our Slipway, our Shipyard. Of course, it will take some time because of the debacle of the past. What I want to assure the

Honourable Leader of the Opposition is that, divestments of shares in various entities or sale of assets are not necessarily negative things if done properly, if strategically done.

There are certain assets you do not actually want anyone to look into them at all, Government will need to own them. There are certain assets that you can actually divest partially. There are certain assets, for example, that you can completely sell off, depending on what sort of conditions you put, one of the companies, of course, is Food Processors Limited.

If you actually look at Food Processors Limited, the machinery there is very archaic. Now we are looking for strategic partners. We have the Agricultural Marketing Authority (AMA), we have certain foods that are canned by Food Processors Limited, what are we going to do for the *duruka* farmers?

Are we going to bring in better efficiency in the machinery so we get better canning? Those types of things are what we will look at, and we will bring in, of course, the experts to help us. And there is of course, a question later on by one of the Honourable Members from the Opposition in respect of the concession that has been given for Lautoka and Ba Hospitals and I could elucidate further as to what are the strategic motivations to that. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Attorney-General. Honourable Leader of the Opposition, you have the floor.

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker Sir, may I ask a supplementary question; I totally agree with all the facts pointed out by the Honourable Attorney-General. At our time, Mr Speaker Sir, you will recall the whole world was going through corporatisation and privatisation as part of enhancing the economies of struggling and growing economies.

But the strategic exact question, Honourable Speaker, Sir, is, will we still have a government printer who is responsible to the Government and the people of Fiji for the printing and any mistakes that might come up in the printing of examination papers, the laws of Fiji, the ballot papers, gazettes, et cetera. Do we still have a government printer, a statutory person or office in our law?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Leader of the Opposition. Honourable Attorney-General, you have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You do not actually need to own the entity, what you need is a printing agency that can provide you the service. That is why we already have a Service Agreement with Serendib. So Serendib these Gazettes, these Bills that have been printed have been printed by Serendib. Have you noticed any change? The numbers in the Gazettes are all the same, they are service providers.

When we upgraded the ballot papers, for example, Government Printery did not have the technology to have the current ballot papers, it has been outsourced. I think the name of the company is called "Star Printery" because they have the technology to print that kind or type of paper, have that relevant watermarks that cannot be seen so no one can then go and photocopy papers as was done previously, and we have seen that happened.

The question that should be asked is; can the same level of service required by Government be provided by Serendib or not? And Serendib will continue to provide that service and it will not, in any way, affect the services that Government requires.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Attorney-General. Honourable Lynda Tabuya, you have floor.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir, thank you, Honourable Attorney-General, for your presentation. You mentioned about outsourcing and the need for a positive image for Fiji in terms of tourism printing. I just would like you to clarify if this is the same company that printed the literal translation of the word “Vale ni lotu” to “toilet,” that was on the side for a bit and was taken out. Thank you. Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Member. Honourable Attorney-General, you have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- The Honourable Member would know that the translation that was incorrect was actually on the website. The mistake that was made was by the staff of Tourism Fiji, who were subsequently fired, that is the issue, it is completely unrelated to this.

This is a new company, 75 percent-owned by Fijian Holdings and 25 percent-owned by Aitken Spence. I cannot see the correlation nor the logic, let us not sensationalise it.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Attorney-General. Honourable Leawere, you have the floor.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. Can I ask the Honourable Minister and Attorney-General on the process that was used in the sale? He mentioned that \$6 million was the market price for the sale and the process there, Honourable Speaker, can he enlighten the House on the sale?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Attorney-General, you have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- The process was that a tender was called, people applied. In the meantime, the Ministry responsible also got the valuations of the machinery, valuation of the property and taking that into account, and the tenders were called, so in fact, it took over eighteen months to two years to actually complete this deal. I remember the Honourable Viliame Gavoka at one point in time saying, “Why do some of these divestments not actually go to companies like Fijian Holdings?”

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Check the *Daily Hansard*, he said that, it is actually happening there.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- In fact, the Honourable Gavoka, unknown to him, when we were negotiating, Fijian Holdings was already there but we were not going to tell him that because there are commercial confidentiality rules which they do not understand.

When you have companies that are actually putting in a tender, we have what we call the signed Non-Disclosure Agreements (NDAs), so then they go and do their own due diligence. Then

they put in their bids then they may upgrade their value on what they want to bid for. So, all due processes were followed.

All the Financial Management Act processes were followed and we went through a transparent process, we had discussions with the people who bid in and then, of course, the final successful candidate was chosen.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Attorney-General. Honourable Pio Tikoduadua, you have the floor.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I thank the Honourable Minister for the answers to the questions that he has already delivered.

Honourable Speaker, I agree that it is strategic sometimes for Government to sell public assets for good reasons but I have just been listening to the exchanges in the House this morning and my concern is not so much about Government Printing, which is the subject of the question this morning, but more on Fiji Forest Industries (FFI) in Labasa and Tropik Woods Industries Limited.

Because recently on Friday 15th, it was advertised that FFI has been put out for tender and FFI as we know has produced for Fiji some excellent plyboard in the past which I do not think is probably not producing that much this time and more plywood has now been bought from China. But it is interesting to note as well that by the same token, Tropik Woods Industries Limited has been buying timber from Vanua Levu to be taken across to Lautoka and the two companies are actually being chaired by the same person. So, I am just wondering whether there are any sinister reasons here to be able to downplay FFI in the interest of Tropik Woods Industries Limited. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Member. Honourable Member, it looks as if you have gone to the market to ask this question. It has taken so long.

Honourable Members, when you ask a supplementary question, do not make a statement. Just ask the supplementary question so that we can get on with the work that is being done.

Honourable Attorney-General, you have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker Sir. The Honourable Tikoduadua knows this because he has been a Permanent Secretary of the Public Enterprises in his previous life and he knows that FFI is not under Public Enterprises listed companies. It is a subsidiary of Tropik Woods Industries Limited. And if you want to know the history of how FFI was bought then, I can show you what happened with FFI; how certain fly-by-night people came along and they sold it at an inflated price and then took off, and Tropik Woods was left with something that they should not have bought in the first place because it was not making money.

But to answer his question specifically, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is not a Government-listed company and it is a subsidiary of Tropik Woods. Please, do not impute sinister reasons just because you have one person there, that has always been the case. You should look at what the Fiji Pine and Tropik Woods are doing now.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa.

HON. RO T.V. KEP A.- A supplementary question to the Honourable Attorney-General; he mentioned that they have retained their staff in the Government Printery. My question to the

Honourable Minister is; what training programme have they in place to upgrade their skills so that they are on par with international requirements and especially, for the printing that is taking place, not locally but overseas, whether they have the skills to be able to provide for that?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Member.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am glad the Honourable Kepa has asked this question.

As highlighted that one of the requirements placed by Government on Serendib is that they need to bring in new technology. Currently, if you look at the technologies being used by Government Printery, it is actually rather archaic. Even things like binding of books, there are certain things that other printeries can do in Fiji, they cannot do. They do not have the machinery to do that, so they have been doing a lot of things as has been done for decades on end.

Now, given that one of the requirements is for them to invest new technology, obviously the new owners will have to invest in their human capital, which is essentially training their staff to be able to use the new machinery. So tomorrow if I am running a shoe making factory and I am going to get a new machine, I will need to ensure that staff are trained to be able to use the machine. It is logical and of course that they will have to do that.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I think we have exhausted this Question and I will move on to the next Question for today.

I now give the floor to the Honourable Sanjay Kirpal for his question.

Agriculture Research
(Question No. 22/2019)

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

Agriculture research is vital to our agricultural development. Can the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment inform Parliament how many new crop varieties have been released by the Ministry's Research Division and how will that benefit farmers?

HON. DR. M. REDDY (Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment).- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I want to thank Honourable Kirpal for asking this question.

Honourable Speaker, research is very important for progress and development. No society, no region, no country can advance without undertaking research. Research to interrogate the existing body of knowledge whether it is relevant or not, or research to expand the existing body of knowledge.

Normally, Honourable Speaker, you will see that those countries who have invested a lot of money in research, we can see how they have grown and developed. So progress depends on continuously undertaking research so that you can do things better, do things efficiently and bringing in new technologies.

Honourable Speaker, with regards to crop, getting new varieties of crops takes approximately six years to eight years. A lot of research and a lot of work goes into that. It has its own special characteristics.

Whenever we would want to come up with new varieties, there are several reasons or several attributes that we want to include in the new variety of a particular crop. For example, we would want that particular variety of crop to be tolerant or resistant to drought or changing climate conditions. We want that particular crop variety to be high-yielding. We would want that particular crop variety to be resistant to pests and diseases. So it is for this reason that we need to continuously examine the performance of existing varieties of crops and see if there is any deficiency, we do research to come up with a variety to deal with the deficiency, or see whether we can raise the benchmark of performance of that variety further.

In 1976, Honourable Speaker, a new *Boldgrain* variety of rice was released. One of the major achievements in the development of this variety was that it was a shorter term variety, 120 days to 130 days it would mature and if you plant that particular variety, you can have three crops per year. It was better responsive to application of fertiliser, it was a high-yielding variety, Honourable Speaker. In a typical Research Station condition, we could get about, 4 tonnes to 6 tonnes per acre and in a farm condition about 3 tonnes to 4 tonnes per acre. This particular rice variety is suitable for both wet land and as well as dry land cultivation.

In 1982, another rice variety was released called *Maleka*. Again, this was a much shorter term variety, early maturing in 90 days to 100 days which means in three months you could have three to four crops per year, but really ideally you could have three crops giving a break between harvesting and planting. It was released targeting dry land, upland rice, rain fed rice, it was not suitable for wet land. So this particular variety, the major achievement was that, it was a short term maturing crop and it was targeted for upland rain fed condition rather than wet land.

In 1986, Honourable Speaker, again a new variety of rice was released, *Deepak*. This time around it was meant for wet land condition. So again it was early maturing, 110 days to 120 days, it was high-yielding, 3 tonnes to 5 tonnes per acre, the grains were longer, clear and well-received.

In 1987, another rice variety was released, *Totoka* variety. It was again suitable for dry land and quite high-yielding, 4 tonnes to 6 tonnes per acre, early maturing and again it was a three-month variety. So, Honourable Speaker, quite a bit of work was done on rice and then there was another variety released in 1990.

In 1990, *Niuniu* was targeted for wet land cultivation. It was quite high-yielding, 4 tonnes to 6 tonnes per acre and again it was a three-month crop. So a lot of effort was made to release short term varieties, varieties which were more susceptible to our condition and were targeting farmers who were not in irrigated areas.

In 1992, a taro variety, *Samoa Hybrid*, was released. It had good eating quality, early maturing and high-yielding variety, up to 25 tonnes per hectare.

In 1995, Honourable Speaker, two taro varieties were released, *Maleka Dina* and *Vula Ono*. The *Maleka Dina* was yellow colour, quite widely-recognised and liked by consumers, it had a good eating quality. Then the *Vula Ono* was developed which was tolerant to drought and also had yellow flesh.

In 1999, the taro *Wararasa* variety was released which had a lot of suckers so it was good for farmers who would want to get suckers for planting material. It adapts to a variety of soil condition and it had good eating quality.

In 2002, a pigeon pea variety *Bharpur*, that was released, given the importance of pulses in our diets and household consumption basket. It was suitable for dry land cultivation, also a dwarf variety, so easy to harvest.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- A Point of Order, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, you are taking the floor on a Point of Order.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- A Point of Order. Honourable Speaker, on Standing Order 45(4) that the reply must be relevant, concise and confined to the subject matter. I think it is a very specific question, Sir. The issue there, how many new crops, varieties, so the word “new” is the catch word there and also how will it benefit farmers? The years that he has said are not new, those were previous governments that brought all those crops, and we thank them.

Also, most of the answers that he is giving, Honourable Speaker, Sir, have been already revealed to this House by his predecessor. So, if the Honourable Minister can stick to the question, and you should also rule that out of order or remind the Honourable Minister to be concise and precise.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, I take your Point of Order, but, the question is, can the Minister inform Parliament how many new crop varieties have been released? And he has just been talking about the number of new crops, I cannot see where, if there is a deviation.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- You have the floor, Honourable Minister.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Honourable Speaker, a lawyer cannot understand and interpret a question, that is the quality of lawyers we have on the other side.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- No, Honourable Minister. I am just surprised that there have been so many new crops. I have never heard of that before, so I am listening to what you are saying. Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Honourable Speaker, after 2002, after the release of the *Pigeon Pea* new variety, in 2004 a chili variety was released called *Birds Eye*. Again the primary reason to develop this variety was, at that particular time, there were a lot of issues with fruit flies. Fruit flies had become a major issue. So this variety was developed which was resistant to fruit flies.

Honourable Speaker, after that in 2006 as I said, continuously we must undertake research. For example, if you look at mobile phones, *Motorola* came, then *Alcatel* came, then *Blackberry* came and people thought it was the end of it, and you can see where we are now. Again a new rice variety was released called *Star*. *Star* took a lot of attention because it was resistant to pest and diseases, drought-tolerant, it was very high-yielding, much higher-yielding than the others, 5 tonnes

to 8 tonnes per acre, early maturing again and suitable for both dry land and wetlands. So it had three components in it; No. 1, it was suitable for both conditions; No. 2, it was high-yielding; and No. 3, it was a three-month variety (90-110 days).

So, *Star* is still around, it is still grown well and liked by farmers.

In 2006, a new variety of capsicum was developed. Honourable Speaker, what I am saying is that, look at the ability of our research staff and research stations to do this kind of research and come up with new varieties. So, *Blue Star*, a variety of capsicum was released. Again the idea was to come up with a high-yielding variety under our climatic condition and it had the capacity of yielding up to 18 tonnes per hectare of capsicum.

Also in the same year, a new cowpea variety, *Tara*, was released. The primary objective was to have this variety resistant to pests and diseases. So it was a variety which was dealing with that particular issue of pests and diseases at that particular time.

Then in 2014, a new variety of mungbean was released, *Samraat*, and as you know again mungbean and pigeon pea, these are very important components of pulse seeds which are part of our diet. A lot of households now are consuming pulses and I will be talking about some of our strategies in the Ministerial Statement about increasing pulse production. In 2014, the *Samraat* variety of mungbean was released which was a very high-yielding variety.

In 2015, the *Melrose* variety of tomato was released. It was developed because at that particular point in time, we had this leaf curl disease, so the primary reason was to develop a variety which would be resistant to this particular disease. So this *Melrose* variety was developed which was also quite high-yielding, 20 tonnes per hectare.

In 2016, one year later, another variety, *Rio Gold* variety of tomato was released which was to deal with the *Tobacco Mosaic Virus* that was quite widespread at that particular point in time. Then in 2017, a new *Green Pearl* variety of guava was released and this particular guava is fruiting throughout the year. So, Honourable Speaker, that was in 2017.

In 2018, we had three major varieties released. One for dalo, *Tarova Loa* and *Tarova Vula* which were resistant to taro leaf blight. Then we had a *Golden Brown* sweet potato variety released last year which was drought-tolerant and also resistant to scab and weevil pests. Lastly, *Golden Bell* variety of capsicum was released which was further development of the previous variety that was released earlier on.

Honourable Speaker, these were some of the developments within the research of crops side that led to new varieties to deal with contemporary issues faced by farmers at that particular point in time. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. Honourable Biman Prasad, you have the floor.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I will not go to the fish market to ask this question but I just have to say that research, extension and training are very important for agriculture development. Once in the '70s and '80s, Fiji was considered to be one of the best places for research, extension and training in support of agriculture in the whole of the Pacific.

Just listening to the Honourable Minister, and thank you for giving the detailed outline of the new crops that were developed, can he tell the House, what is the assessment of the research, extension and training capacity right now within the Ministry of Agriculture because I think over the years, it had declined. It shows from the statistics that he provided that the number of new varieties that have come into being, has been very small over the years. I think it would be very important to hear from him what it is right now and what you intend to do about it?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Honourable Speaker, a relevant and good question. We need to resource our research stations. In terms of human resource, our supply is that we have got some very, very good qualified staff. We have got Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) level staff in our research stations. The Director Research holds a PhD, so my feeling is that, probably after health and medical science, this is one of those ministries which has got very well-qualified staff, a large number of Masters' holders and Bachelor Degrees. So in terms of human resource, I think the research stations are doing well.

I had a discussion with the Minister for Lands. We are now doing an assessment of the land that we need probably in the Western, Central and Northern Divisions for the development of more research work as well as to get seedlings and seeds for distribution to farmers for some of the new projects that we have just got approved by the Cabinet, so that is on the agenda. I had one preliminary meeting with the Research staff and I had a quick meeting with the Plant Protection (Pathology) and Plant Protection (Entomology) staff and they said that we will have a detailed meeting on research that we need to do that side to support the crop production side and the agronomy side, and we will be developing an agenda for that to roll out a lot of research work in that area. So, I think we are at the right juncture now to put our research strategy properly and implement it. So, Honourable Speaker, a lot of work will be done this year to set the framework. I think that is something that I had informed Cabinet that this year we will be spending a lot of time to set the framework.

I must say that all the staff in the Ministry of Agriculture are well-tuned and have a common vision in terms of where we want to take agriculture. So research is high on our agenda, human resource is quite good except in the livestock side, we do not have a breeder. So, we have identified that we do not have a livestock breeder and we are talking with some donor countries to see how they could assist us in getting a livestock breeder, so we have identified the deficiencies and we are looking at how we will get that framework and the resource set up this year to launch it.

Again, research output is something that you will see in 1 year 6 months or 1 year, 2 years, Honourable Speaker, it will take time. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. Honourable Niko Nawaikula, you have the floor.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Honourable Speaker, I wish to ask my supplementary question on rice.

From 1976 to 2004 - 10 new varieties, and with all that, we would expect this House to be filled with rice. Fiji will be exporting even overseas but it is not happening that way, rice production is going down.

I looked at the Annual Report for the Ministry last year, and the only reason why it has stabilised is because of Grace Road. So there is no correlation at all, some of these are drought-

resistant, fire-resistant, water-resistant, but there is no correlation to production. With all this, can you explain the reason why rice production is going down?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, but before I start, I just want to correct the Honourable Nawaikula, I never said “fire-resistant variety of rice”

(Laughter)

Honourable Speaker, I agree with part of his comment that the overall rice production has declined in the country. You would see that over the last four decades, some of the areas where we had a lot of irrigation support have really closed down, those areas include Navua and Nausori. A couple of reasons or contributing factors for that: one of course is that he himself is responsible and contributed to the non-renewable of leases.

(Laughter)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I was not responsible for the non-renewal of leases. Please, withdraw that, you are misinforming the House.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister, he has asked the question and I will give you the floor.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Just answer the question: Why is rice production going down - eleven varieties.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Honourable Speaker, to grow an agricultural crop you need land. If land leases are not renewed, you cannot have farmers farming in a particular place, so non-renewal of leases has been a major contributing factor; some of these areas are closer to urban areas.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- ... So obviously, over time, these places have been converted from agricultural to non-agricultural land, and you can see that that has happened. Those agricultural lands are closer to urban areas, so that has been a contributing factor.

Also, Honourable Speaker, over time, what had happened is that, with open importation of rice, some of these rice farmers saw that the imported rice had kind of kept them check on the price of local rice. You can see that the rice that comes out of Labasa, it lands here in the supermarket, selling at about FJ\$17 to FJ\$18 for a 10 kilogramme bag, while we land rice all the way from Vietnam, exchanging so many hands, we sell it here for about FJ\$11 per 10 kilogram bag.

Honourable Speaker, what had happened is that, over the last 30 years, we have seen part-time farmers in the rice industry, part-time farmers doing leisure farming, et cetera, and this has

resulted in productivity going down. Consumers are sovereign, consumer sovereignty is over producer sovereignty so you really cannot protect producers at the expense of 100 percent consumers. So because of low productivity amongst the rice farming sector, also there are other sectors as well to some extent, those farmers thought that their rice price was not very high because this imported rice was keeping a trend.

So at the moment we have a group of Chinese experts from China working in Dreketi to see how we can raise farm productivity that could contribute to better yield and better farm income rather than artificially creating temporary markets through subsistence grant and giving these farmers some leverage. So at the same time in my Ministerial Statement I will be talking about a new programme that we have approved where we will put in young farmers who will produce and supply as a result of demand from the market. So that is the way to go in the long run to push production and streamline our agricultural sector, Mr. Speaker, thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Members, I think we have covered this question sufficiently and we will move on. I have the pleasure to give the floor for the 5th Oral Question for today to the Honourable Mikaele Leawere to ask Question No. 23/2019. You have the floor.

Training of Local Participants - Film-Making and Movie Production
(Question No. 23/2019)

HON. M.R. LEAWARE asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications inform Parliament if there are plans by Government to train our local participants to take part in the actual make-up of a movie to be professionals in story-writing, dialogue, cameramen and stage setup?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM (Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I thank the Honourable Member for this question.

I actually refer the Honourable Member to the Income Tax (Film-making and Audio-visual Incentives) Regulations 2016. What this regulation does is, as you know that Fiji has a very attractive rebate for film production in Fiji, so essentially we give a 47 percent rebate. Now what it says, and I refer to regulation 68, it says that in order for Film Fiji (which is the statutory body that governs filmmaking in Fiji) to issue a certificate for a film, because they actually have to approve all productions that come to Fiji, they need to check on numerous things, including what is the script (which is what you refer to as story-writing or dialogue). They have to agree to the script because, for example, we do not want someone to come here and say “Sex in the islands”, you know what I mean. You need to control the script, what they will use, who will they use in the production, so they issue a certificate.

One of the considerations before Film Fiji can actually issue a film certificate, and I refer you to regulation 70(k), it says:

“The film production company demonstrates to the satisfaction of the Minister that it:

- 1) will engage services of Fijian citizens in movie productions; and
- 2) will utilise technicians, students and technical aid facilities at the filmmaking school in the Fiji National University or any other specified local institutions.”

So when a production house, for example, comes in, they have to lay out all these things. They of course will need to say “We are going to shoot, for example, this particular documentary or what you call “live television” and say the survivors series which is well-known. These are the villagers that will be engaged, this is what we will do, where will we buy our food from and who will we use. So before all that is done and before they actually commence that, there is obviously lots of other things that they need to comply with, they will then give the certificate.

Once the film is actually made then they can apply for the actual tax rebate so they have to show all they spent in Fiji, Fiji Revenue & Customs Services has to vet it, they audit it and then based on the production cost in Fiji, then they actually give the rebate. In order for the rebate to be given, again it says:

“The film production company demonstrates to the satisfaction of the Minister (responsible for Film Fiji) that it:

- 1) will engage services of Fijian citizens in movie production; and
- 2) will utilise technicians, students and technical aid facilities at the filmmaking school in the Fiji National University or any other specified local institutions.”

So you need to fulfil all those requirements. Of course, the company has to also go through what we call “an audio visual agent”. Now we have what we call “certified audio visual agent”. If, for example, assuming that you are a foreign company and you want to come and shoot a movie in Fiji, in order for you to actually go about and do all these engagements and even hire lawyers, accountants, et cetera, you have to go through an audio visual agent. You cannot just pick up someone in the street and say, “Please, help me.” They have to be certified because we want credible people. Anyone can become an agent, you simply have to apply for it and the Ministry then actually certifies you to be an audio visual agent.

So to answer your question, that is the answer, please, check the regulations. It does say that you need to engage with the Fijian staff. Of course, if you brought for example a script from Hollywood, there is a couple of big productions that were made in Fiji. They already write the script back in USA, they are not going to get a local to write the script. But, of course, they can use people, for example, for make-up, they can use people on the stage.

In fact, I have got some statistics here, in some of the recent productions:

1. The Survivor, USA: alone it employed 350 local Fijians in 2018;
2. The Survivor, France: employed approximately 150 Fijians in the same year.

A current feature film that has been shot in Fiji, the name of which we cannot reveal until the movie is made, as you know, is employing approximately 100 Fijians. So you see there is a number of things that are taking place. Now, what we have seen, which is a good trend, because a number of productions have been coming to Fiji, some of the locals have actually now become a bit of an expert in those areas.

So in one of the productions, one local crew actually went to the level of Assistant Director. So you see, if I, for example, get into the movie industry as a Fijian, and if I go into four or five productions, I developed a particular knowledge-base, so anyone can come in to shoot the next movie will say, “Hey, go to him because he knows the stuff”. That is what is actually happening, and just for your information, what is spent on the locals is directly injected into the Fijian economy:

2016 - \$43 million;
2017 - \$94 million; and
2018 - \$97 million.

That is how much money is spent in film production, directly pumped into the Fijian economy.

So for example, there has been a number of examples, and I will give you an example, Survivor France injected \$8 million in the local economy in the Yasawas. This included the employment of local women who supplied food to local men and women who were employed as production crew. The production also constructed a proper road through the island connecting a number of the villages. They also hired boats and vehicles from the local villagers on the island for their production.

The production also paid \$1.8 million to the local villages, what we call a “location fee”. So, this is the type of work that is going on and we are actually developing a cadre of Fijian crew members, because now the word gets around fairly quickly so they say, “Hey, go to Fiji, xyz is very good in camera, xyz is very good in carpentry and doing sets”, that is the current situation. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General. I give the floor to the Honourable Member for a supplementary question.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. A supplementary question: given the fact that there are a lot of interest, especially in the film industry in Fiji, for example, in 2003, there was the *Anaconda* which was shot in Pacific Harbour, Navua and also Mango Bay Resort on the Reality TV shows. All these generated a lot of interest in the community, especially in bringing in revenue to the government. Are there any plans to establish a local studio to cater for all these, like the Yaqara?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Member. Honourable Attorney-General, you have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Government is not going to be in the business of setting up a studio itself. If you may recall, Honourable Member, a few years ago, we actually zero-rated duty on any equipment that is going to be used for film production purposes. So, we try to encourage the private sector to get into that space.

Yes, one of the problems we have is many production houses when they come to Fiji, we do not actually have professional cameras available. We do not have large warehouses where they do a lot of film shoots inside, where they have what we call ‘green rooms’. We do not actually have, for example, cameras that can go on tracks, you know when movies are shot, when they actually move on the rails, et cetera. We want to get the private sector involved in that.

Now when they go to New Zealand, they simply bring the actors, the right people around them, the directors, et cetera, they jump on the plane, they go to New Zealand, all their equipment is there.

In Fiji, one of the challenges we have is, they have to bring most of the equipment with them. That, of course, can be in fact you know have a deleterious impact on a company’s ability or commitment to come and shoot in Fiji. We accept that, so we are trying to build that kind of

capacity and in fact, we are talking to some local companies who may actually be interested in doing so.

So we believe with the investment of approximately about \$4 million to \$5 million, we can have good editing machines, good cameras, that will make us even more attractive for shoots.

Remember one thing, a lot of the companies that are coming into Fiji are simply shooting advertisements. There was a Canadian company that actually came down to Fiji, just to shoot a one-minute advertisement and they spent, I think, three weeks to do that one-week advertisement.

So, my apologies, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I was looking at the Honourable Member, he is just so captivating, I need to look at him.

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- I do not blame you, I quite agree.

(Laughter)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are trying to get more private sector investment in that space. Again, these sort of shot shoots sometimes give you a high yield than perhaps, some of the longer shoots. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I think, Honourable Members, we will move on.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Just one last question.

HON. SPEAKER.- You can ask a supplementary question on the next question.

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will move on to the sixth Oral Question for today. I give the floor to the Honourable Dr. Salik Govind to ask his question. Honourable Member, you have the floor.

Number of Seasonal Workers – RSE and SWP
(Question No. 24/2019)

HON. DR. S.R. GOVIND asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations, Youth and Sports please update Parliament on the number of seasonal workers currently deployed to date under the New Zealand Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) Work Scheme and the Australian Seasonal Workers Programme (SWP)?

HON. P.K. BALA (Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations, Youth and Sports).- Honourable Speaker, I would also like to thank the Honourable Member as well for his question.

Honourable Speaker, just in terms of background in regards to these two programmes, the history of both [the New Zealand Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) and the Australian

Seasonal Workers Programme (SWP)] began when both Governments signed the MOU with the FijiFirst Government.

Honourable Speaker, the first batch of Fijians was deployed to New Zealand in February 2015 and to Australia in April 2015. For New Zealand, Honourable Speaker, the Programmes have seen an increase in the number of Fijians deployed for seasonal work and likewise, an increase in the number of employers. To date, 946 Fijians have worked under these Programmes.

Honourable Speaker, the breakdown for the New Zealand Programme are as follows: in 2015 when this Programme started, a total of 46 Fijians went; in 2016, 228 workers went; 2017 – 284; and in 2018, 386.

As of 31st January, 2019, Honourable Speaker, only two have gone but interview is going on right now as I speak in Levuka.

Honourable Speaker, the SWP for Australia, the Programme has seen an increase in the number Fijians deployed for seasonal work and likewise, an increase in the number of employers.

Honourable Speaker, to date, 748 Fijians have worked under this Programme and the breakdown are as follows; in 2015 - 137 workers went; 2016 - 85; 2017 - 214; 2018 - 297; and as of 31st January, 2019, 15.

Honourable Speaker, recently the Prime Minister of Australia came to Fiji and he made a few announcements, and one of which is Fiji's entry into the Pacific Labour Scheme (PLS). Honourable Speaker, the PLS promotes economic development and deepens friendship between Australia and Pacific Island countries. It allows Fijian citizens to apply for low and semi-skilled temporary employment in Australia.

Honourable Speaker, before I take my seat, some success and remarkable stories shared were, that these workers' savings was invested in the *yaqona* farming, home extension, setting up of canteen businesses, contribution to village developments, village halls, just to name a few. Honourable Speaker, I thank you for this opportunity.

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

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, just a supplementary question; I understand that the amount of remittances from overseas is one of the biggest income for the Government. I wonder if the Government has any investment initiative programme for our people who are playing overseas and are bringing in money to establish themselves after their sporting career?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I have just mentioned about this Scheme, the overall framework within these Programmes for Australia and New Zealand. This contract for the workers is for a period of six months for New Zealand and for Australia - seven months and they are very well paid.

At this point in time, what the Honourable Member has asked is not in our plan right now but I can assure you that this business, they must understand one thing that it is the employer's choice. The number of workers they want, they decide, they dictate. We do not decide who is to

go. All the interviews and everything is controlled by them so it is basically an employer's choice. We, as a country and our Fijians should be happy that, at least, we have opened up this Scheme.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Professor Biman Prasad, you have the floor.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I remember in 2017, the then Minister for Employment revealed to Parliament that there was a ban on four villages in terms of recruitment of some of the workers because some workers from those villages and settlements did not follow the regulations while they were in Australia and New Zealand.

I am just wondering whether that ban is still in place and whether that ban might be discriminatory, in the sense that you do not penalise the whole village or settlement just because someone misbehaved in Australia and New Zealand.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. There is no ban right now. What has happened after that, we have included the village elders to monitor the selection process, and now they will be answerable and responsible if such things happen. So from that point in time, that problem has not occurred so everything is well.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. Honourable Salote Radrodro, you have the floor.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, and I thank the Honourable Minister for his explanation.

We know this Programme started off with the former Ministers, Honourable Koroilavesau and Honourable Usamate, and now when we are into a new term, can the Honourable Minister explain if they will pursue to take this to a higher level in regards to including trade in the construction industry, and also in other professions or trades where women could come in, for example, in nursing or caregiving for nurses or caregivers; and if the Ministry will be taking up those issues, Honourable Speaker?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Member. Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I never ever said that I started this Project. I never said that I started this Programme. In fact I thank and acknowledge my Ministers.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Answer the question.

HON. P.K. BALA.- I am answering it because you are the one picking all these small things.

Honourable Speaker, as I have mentioned earlier on, there was a visit by the Australian Prime Minister and he has made that announcement and the announcement was on the Pacific Labour Scheme and that Programme that the Honourable Member is talking about, will be included in this Programme. Thank you.

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

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. My question to the Honourable Minister, in terms of the welfare of our citizens under this Scheme:

- how are they kept there with their employers;
- how safe are they;
- their salaries;
- what other issues that have come up in terms of their security?

And given that there are many incidents we hear in terms of their safety and also some of the ill-treatment that happened to them, have you gone into signing an agreement in terms of a government to government agreement regarding the welfare of those who were sent through this Scheme to New Zealand and Australia?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Member. Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, and I thank the Honourable Member as well. Before these workers are selected, there is a process whereby they have to go through the medical and fitness to qualify into this pool. So in terms of whether they are medically fit or no, that is the time they are tested.

In terms of safety, as I have mentioned, that there is an MOU in place and here the agreement has been signed between government to government, but the Programme is dictated by the employer for both countries. They take full responsibility of the workers while they are in Australia and New Zealand, so they are taken care off. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I give the floor to the Honourable Ro Filipe Tuisawau. You have the floor.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Honourable Speaker, my question has been asked by Honourable Bulitavu. So I am passing my question to the next

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. But, had you informed me, I would have done so myself. Honourable Simione Rasova, you have the floor.

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. I take it that the Farm Scheme in Australia and New Zealand, there is the Suva-Nausori corridor. I think Honourable Tabuya and Honourable Salote Radrodro, there are a number of people, especially youths along the Suva-Nausori corridor, there are probably 10,000 people, but I take it that your requirement on the labour scheme is for villagers.

Referring to criminal activities, sporting activities, et cetera, because once when Honourable Usamate was there, I thought I should give the people of Raiwaqa and Raiwai an opportunity to go to New Zealand or Australia in this Scheme, but then they said, "No, this Scheme is only for villagers". But in your position now, since you used to be an Urban Minister in this urban corridor, can the urban people do that, Sir?

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, did you ask a question?

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- Yes, I asked if he can highlight to us, if there is an opportunity for the youths of the Suva-Nausori corridor where we have about 10,000 people, be given the opportunity?

HON. SPEAKER.- It is such a roundabout question. Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. There are some changes coming in and the change will be, now we will also take all those who are registered under National Employment Center (NEC). So that will be an opportunity where the peri-urban and urban youths can come in under this programme. So we want all those who are registered with NEC, they will be taken into account as well, so it is coming.

Honourable Speaker, quickly on the wage rate that these workers get, for New Zealand, it is around \$NZ16.50; and for Australia, it is \$AUD23.60 per hour. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua, you have the floor.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I just wanted to ask a question of the Minister, if there is a realistic indication to people who want to go and work in Australia and New Zealand about how hard the physical labour is, because it is all fine to tell us how much it costs an hour, but in a lot of these farms, you are paid by the basket that you gather for, and a lot of our people go over there with no idea of how hard the work is physically and they are finding that while the promises are very high, what they actually earn and get to send home is a totally different story. Thank you, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. I will give the floor to the Honourable Minister.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I really do not know where she is getting all this information from.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. P.K. BALA.- Honestly.

All these workers are told the scope of works, the type of works that they will be involved in during the interview. So the choice is for the workers, and honestly, I just do not know where the Honourable Member is getting all these from. There is no truth in it. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Leawere, you have the floor.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. Just a question to the Honourable Minister, we are talking about the \$NZ16.00 per hour so in a five-day period, it will be \$640.

If you look at the five-month tenure in New Zealand, it will come to about \$14,000 and the take-home or what they take back is about \$NZ5,000 plus which is very minimal in terms of the hard work that they do. I am requesting the Honourable Minister for his response whether there are

any plans for the Government to pay the cost of going to New Zealand or Australia and back, instead of them bearing that cost, especially from the worker's side. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. As I have said earlier on that all these workers are taken care of by the employer. They should appreciate that at least this Scheme has opened up for all those Fijians who were not employed, at least they are getting some cents and dollars now.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. P.K. BALA.- The problem with these people has been around for the last four years and now a few months, but they cannot digest the success rate that we are making.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. P.K. BALA.- That is the issue, that is the problem.

(Acclamation)

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. P.K. BALA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I think we have dealt with this question sufficiently and the hour has moved on. I intend to adjourn for lunch, unless there is any violent objection. There being none, the first question to be asked would be by the Honourable Dr. Ratu Atonio Lalabalavu after the lunch adjournment. Honourable Members, we adjourn for lunch.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.27 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.30 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, please, be seated.

Agreement with Aspen Medical Limited
(Question No. 25/2019)

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. First of all, I congratulate you on your being elected as Speaker for this Parliamentary term and wish you all the best.

Can the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications explain whether there was proper consultation before the signing of an Agreement with Aspen Medical Limited?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM (Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Yes, there were proper consultations.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Biman Prasad.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I guess the Honourable Attorney-General probably can guess what I am going to ask him. I have always had doubts about Public Private Partnership (PPP) but my question to the learned Attorney-General is, the FNPF has 80 percent stake in the new company and we believe that around \$140 million capital from the FNPF would be the outlay.

The question really is (and I had raised this before, and he knows that), can the Attorney-General assure the House that with that kind of outlay from the FNPF and the bill itself saying that there would be some payment that patients will have to make apart from the normal thing that they will not pay, which they are getting in public hospitals, that in future the cost to the ordinary patients are not going to be escalated? Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Member. Honourable Attorney-General, you have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I cannot guess what Honourable Professor Biman Prasad has in his head, so I do not know what he is going to ask me beforehand.

There are two limbs to this question. The first one is about the investment to be made by FNPF; and the second one is about the charges for patients who visit Lautoka and Ba Hospitals.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the concession actually has not been signed by Aspen Medical Limited. The concession has actually been signed between Healthcare Fiji Private Limited which is actually 80 percent-owned by Fiji National Provident Fund, and 20 percent by Aspen Medical Limited.

Aspen Medical Limited, Mr. Speaker, Sir, will be the medical provider for those two particular hospitals, so they also have a management agreement with Healthcare Fiji Private Limited but they are also a shareholder of Healthcare Fiji Private Limited. We have repeatedly said, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in Parliament that the current services that the hospitals of Lautoka and Ba offer and the current rates or fees charged, if any (wherever those fees are charged), will remain the same, it will not change. We cannot get any more unequivocal than that.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister. Honourable Niko Nawaikula.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Honourable Speaker, the Honourable Minister's answer, "Yes, consultation was made" it is too brief. We asked this question because the public out there want to know. Could you clarify what type of consultation that was done, who did you consult, what were their views that were brought into the consultations?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, the question is clear: "Can the Honourable Minister explain whether there was proper consultations before the signing of an Agreement with Aspen Medical Limited?" That was asked by the Honourable Member and it was answered, and the Honourable Member was satisfied with it, he had an opportunity to ask another question about that, he did not. But you have the opportunity and I am giving you the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Stop whingeing!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Can you clarify what kind of consultations were made? Who were they made with and what were the views obtained?

HON. SPEAKER.- That is a supplementary question?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Yes, a supplementary question.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- No, what consultation?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Attorney-General, you have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Mr. Speaker, Sir, Honourable Nawaikula perhaps need to then manage the questions within the Party before they come to the Business Committee. It goes to show the inaptitude in the manner in which you asked the question.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- The question could have been worded better.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the signing of the concession agreement between the Fijian Government and the Healthcare Fiji Private Limited, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we went, of course, through a tender process and this was prior to that Government did a number of assessments in respect of what could be provided by way of improving the health care facilities in Fiji.

It was also, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the idea came into being when we had discussions with our Australian counterparts when Prime Minister Modi came to Fiji, and in fact he said, as you know that the Indian Medical Services offered both by the public health system and the private system is well renowned now and many of our Fijian patients actually go to India now, some perhaps in this room including, I understand, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition has had his knees fixed up in India. So people go for open heart surgeries, whatever the case may be.

The reality is, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that we would rather have those types of procedures available in Fiji because, not only for the convenience of our own citizens, but also in respect of foreign outflow because many of these members when they actually go, for example, to get a procedure done, many of them withdraw funds from the FNPF, a lot of people withdraw funds from the FNPF for medical purposes.

Then money goes out of the country, in other words, our foreign reserves go down. If those procedures are going to be carried out in Fiji, that money will not be taken out of Fiji. So our foreign reserves actually stay buoyant.

That is also a strategic decision that Government made. In respect of the feedback that we also received, Fiji, in a way, at the moment, is also a regional hub, and the hub status is not only about an airline or about the port, it is, of course, the University is here. Currently, many patients from other Pacific island countries come to Fiji because the level of services available in those countries are not as good as they would expect.

So, a case in point, when we first had our Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) machine installed in Fiji under the Bainimarama Government, many Pacific islanders actually used to come to Fiji to use the MRI machine and paid the full services. We have, of course, the airline connectivity so it is easier for them to come to Fiji, but this is one of the strategic reasons as to why Lautoka Hospital and Ba, of course, is a feeder to Lautoka Hospital but Lautoka was chosen specifically because it is close to Nadi International Airport. Also, Lautoka had an infrastructure and a lot of land around it where further buildings could be developed.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we, of course, had numerous industry discussions. We then reached out to International Finance Corporation (IFC) which is actually a sector arm of the World Bank. The IFC has done similar such projects on concessions in numerous countries, including Brazil, Mexico, Romania, Nigeria, Moldova, even in India itself they have actually done it for some of the state governments, and have extensive knowledge and indeed experience. So they have got a number of doctors on the panel who are actually geared to administer hospitals and we put various feelers to them. Then, of course, locally, we talked to the Fiji National University and FNPF and various other organisations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, then we actually issued an Expression of Interest for the projects on the 17th of March and six expressions of interest were received from the following hospital operators:

1. Apollo Hospital, India;
2. Aspen Medical, Australia;
3. Karidi Health, Australia;
4. Consortium of Fortress Hospital with Medi Scan (a New Zealand Company);
5. Johnstaff Hospital, Australia;
6. MIOT Hospital (which is now operating, what used to be called the Suva Private Hospital).

Then after the Expression of Interest, we called out what we call a “Request for Tender (RFT)” and again, Mr. Speaker Sir, various documentations have to be developed. We offered documents, of course, things like the concession agreements, et cetera.

Following the RFT, because we want to get the best hospitals, a team went to India and met up with another nine hospital operators that were also interested in this particular Expression of Interest. We held a roadshow, again we had:

- 1) All India Institutes of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), India

- 2) Apollo Hospitals, India
- 3) Almatas Hospitals
- 4) Asian Hospitals
- 5) AusHealth Group (Some people came from outside India)
- 6) Innco Hospital Inc.
- 7) KIMS (Kerala Institute of Medical Sciences) Hospitals
- 8) Primus Hospital
- 9) VAMED - An Integrated Health Care Provider

Then we also had an on-site visit, so that they could come to Lautoka, come to Ba to look at the setup, look at the hospital, meet the staff, talk to the staff, whatever the case may be. Of course, they all signed the Non-Disclosure Agreements (NDAs) as discussed earlier on this morning.

Following that, Mr. Speaker Sir, then the project was then assessed or the tenders were then put in place. It was assessed by IFC with the panel of people and then the concession was given to Healthcare Fiji Private Limited because by this stage, FNPF says, "Look, we are interested; we are a major player."

Honourable Prasad raised about the investment to be made by FNPF. Of course, FNPF is going to lend money to Healthcare Fiji Private Limited, they are not going to give their money for free. They will make money on that because they will gain interest from that. So they will lend to Healthcare Fiji Private Limited.

There are various requirements for that. One of the aspects that he mentioned was about the bill. We have certain conditions for the tender, so whoever came in or comes in has to provide 24/7 open heart surgery facilities available. At the moment, God forbid, if anyone of us has a heart attack, there is not a single Fijian doctor (if the Honourable Minister for Health can clarify this), that can carry out open heart surgery in Fiji now, as we speak. That is why we have visiting teams.

The Honourable Minister for Health will also tell you that it takes a number of years to become an open heart surgeon. One of the conditions is that, whoever won the tender had to provide that - Radiation Therapy, Oncology, Chemotherapy for cancer patients, all of these need to be provided, the whole list of conditions, including constructing a 305-bed hospital next to the current site, within thirty-six months of the signing of the agreement, which was signed in January of this year, 2019.

Also, within six months of the signing of the agreement, they need to start operating the Lautoka and Ba Hospitals. We also have certain conditions: they need to provide, for example, training of medical and nursing students from FNU, of course, and the University of Fiji which is down in Saweni, Vuda. A number of other conditions were put in place.

We also had consultations with the staff before the tenders were called, so we went and met, including the current Acting Permanent Secretary for Health. We went and met the doctors and nurses in Lautoka and also in Ba and explained to them what was happening. The staff have been given a choice, once the new operator comes in within six months of January of this year, the staff have an option. This concession here will actually advertise for positions. The current staff there have the option, they can apply for jobs with them and get a job and be hired by them or should they wish not to join them, their jobs are secured, they will be posted to other public health systems and operations throughout Fiji. So, no one actually loses their job as a medical professional.

Again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this was explained and we have also given statements and in Parliament also about this particular process. Honourable Dr. Atonio Lalabalavu was not in the last Parliament but if he checks the *Daily Hansard*, he will see all the reports where we have stated the objectives of what we are going to do. So, we have, of course, had numerous discussions.

The other important thing, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that, this is the first time such a concession on a hospital actually has been given in Fiji, and we are aware of that.

A number of people in the Ministry of Economy, a number of people in the Ministry of Health are not used to such an arrangement. So, we have asked the Australian Government to help us with International Finance Corporation (IFC), to have IFC staff based in Fiji for the next two years to essentially hold our hands in managing this relationship, because they have done it before.

I have to also thank and acknowledge the Australian Government's DFAT (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade) because all of these and using IFC cost money. They actually contributed over US\$500,000 in payment of the fees.

The Australian Government, when the Australian Prime Minister was here, we have had discussions also through the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Honourable Prime Minister for them to continue that relationship so we build capacity in the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Economy and various other arms of Governments. So, after two years, we have the full capacity to manage this relationship well. This is a new thing that we are doing.

The analysis, of course, was done quite thoroughly and we have had numerous case studies from throughout the world. There is a Concession Agreement, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and it is for 23 years. In that 23 years, of course, certain conditions need to be met.

Under the Concession Agreement, we have the option to renew the Concession Agreement for another 20 years. The Fiji National Provident Fund (FNPF), of course, through its board, has done its assessments. They know that there is money to be made in it, they know that they will provide their members with good opportunities to have those particular procedures done and carried out in Fiji, provide convenience, so if, for example, your loved one actually has to have open heart surgery, you do not wait here in Suva, Nadi, Lautoka or Labasa waiting to know what is happening to them in India. They are just around the corner in our own country and they can go there. Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is actually what is happening and, in fact, we look forward to this taking place.

I want to also highlight, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that this provision of medical services in Fiji will open up enormous opportunities. The Honourable Salote Radrodoro, when asking her question to the Honourable Minister Bala, one of the words she did not get to is about age-care.

The Japanese and the Australian market, the population demographics, a lot of older people. In fact, from some of the information received, over one-third of the Japanese budget goes towards Age Care because they have a huge proportion of the population who are over the age of 60 or 70. If you go to supermarkets, you will see 75 and 85 year olds packing your groceries.

I remember a few years ago, we had a number of Japanese companies that were keen to set up retirement villages in Fiji. What actually stopped them was the inability of the Fijian economy to have a hospital that can provide full tertiary care facilities. With Aspen Medical Limited coming in, we will be able to do that. So, the Minister for Industry, Trade and Tourism and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, one of the things that they will be doing, of course, is encouraging the Japanese companies to come to Fiji and set up these Age Care facilities.

We all know some of us have relatives and other people that actually work as Age Care givers in San Francisco, West Coast of North America. Some of their supporters live there, they know that.

A lot of them are there legally, a lot of them are there illegally because there is a huge demand for that. We are also talking with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, with the Australians, we have reached out to them to say, "Let's develop some courses through the Fiji National University (FNU) so these people, in particular – women, can actually get certification so they become certified age caregivers, and not only in terms of going and working in Australia but also to get the Australians to come and set up retirement villages here. We have fantastic weather, fantastic people and now, of course, we have fantastic hospital services." So, it adds another dimension to our economic sector, so that is entirely the ball game, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General for that.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I thank the Honourable Attorney-General for that enlightenment on this topic. I am just wondering, we heard in the morning the staffing needs that we have here in our public hospitals, and according to the Honourable Attorney-General, the new hospital is going to be offering very specialised kind of treatment which calls for our specialised staffing - nurses, doctors, radiologists, x-ray technicians, et cetera. What guarantee and, of course, if the term and conditions are going to be better, our staff will be tempted or will go there, so what plans or what do we have in place to guarantee that our services in the public hospitals will not be affected?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Member. Honourable Attorney-General, you have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I think the Honourable Member perhaps misunderstands. By having this on a concession basis, what we call the Public Private Partnership (PPP), the hospital will still operate as it does today in terms of any Fijian can walk into the hospital and get the current services that they currently are getting. However, now they will be able to get more services, more procedures available, so it is not like that they are going away somewhere else.

Of course, when they advertise for positions, there are many procedures currently that are not available in Fiji therefore you do not have the specialists. So, they will have to bring them from overseas and it is also an opportunity for our people to get exposure, and that is part and parcel of the concession agreement too, to train our people. So, for example, if tomorrow or in a few years' time, they will have to start doing open heart surgeries, so there could be doctors that could be taken under the mentorship of these specialists. They will now be based at Lautoka Hospital to carry out the procedures, so they will learn very quickly because as the good doctor will tell you, the Minister for Health who is a surgeon too, "practice makes perfect". You need more and more continuing exposure.

One of the other things that we have also said to them that when they build this 305-beds facility, they will need to put in new operating theatres. We have said to them that the operating theatres need to be learning operating theatres. In other words, the doctors who are operating here you have a gallery around as you have in many other international hospitals. So the students are actually watching as to what is happening. So, that is the kind of international standards we are bringing in. It is actually fantastic for our staff to get that level of exposure. But there is no doubt that you will need specialists to be brought in.

It just reminds me of the question that Honourable Professor Prasad asked about the rate of recruitment of overseas specialists to come to Fiji. I tell you, we actually went to India, we are competing with the British. They are coming up and soaking up doctors and nurses from India and I mentioned to one of the doctors and said, "We need some specialists in our three major hospitals: Labasa, Lautoka and Suva. What were the questions I was asked: "Is there an international school in Labasa for my children; what is the night life like; is there a theatre in Labasa?"

Doctors are not clambering over each other to come to Fiji. We have to realise there is actually a world shortage of doctors. When the population of the world increases, we need more doctors. Some countries cannot produce them fast enough, therefore, it is a difficult task but by getting a PPP and getting our doctors exposed to that, we will actually be building local capacity.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Attorney-General.

Honourable Members, I think we have covered this question sufficiently and we will move on to the next Question. The eighth Oral Question for today, I will give the floor to the Honourable Rohit Sharma to ask his question.

Importance of regional policing
(Question No. 26/2019)

HON. R.R. SHARMA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Defence, National Security and Foreign Affairs explain in Parliament the importance of regional policing?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU (Minister for Defence, National Security and Foreign Affairs).- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. I wish to acknowledge the Honourable Member for the question.

Very briefly, on regional policing, this is a creation of our leaders at the regional and sub-regional level. We have a two-pronged approach to this; one is at the forum level and I will speak more on that and, of course, at the MSG level as well. It is very, very critical for us, given our geographical layout and, of course, the challenges that we face as well.

This is about strengthening good governance in the Island States and, of course, creating a conducive environment as well for development which we need so badly in order to provide the necessary services to our people.

As we are all aware, Honourable Speaker, Sir, the Pacific is an extremely large area with Australia as a continent and, of course, with two larger Islands, namely; Papua New Guinea and New Zealand, and we have the small Island States and these nations and inhabitants are vulnerable with porous borders which are easily accessible for exploitation and, of course, the many illegal activities that can come because of that.

The Pacific is also mainly used, Honourable Speaker, Sir, as a transit point, again, due to the porous border that I have referred to. We have incidences to show the vulnerability in this area. The leaders, through the regional police arrangements, have come up with areas in which this can be strengthened and, of course, made more effective and efficient as well.

I have referred to the two-pronged approach, Honourable Speaker, Sir. At the forum level, we have the Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police Conference, which is held annually. Prior to having

this Conference, we also have what is called, the Sub-regional Womens' Advisory Network because a lot of women are joining the Police Force. Of course, we also have a Policy Advisory Group and these are the two bodies that usually convene before the Pacific Islands Civil Police Conference, to provide the feedback and also the necessary advice prior to the Commissioners having their Conference.

We have the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG), the MSG member countries and, of course, they also have their annual meetings. We have a retired Fijian Officer, who has joined the Secretariat in Vanuatu, to provide additional role as an adviser, and we also have attachments to the Secretariat in Vanuatu, particularly on policing and national security role.

We also have in Samoa, Honourable Speaker, Sir, what we call the Pacific Transnational Crime Coordinating Centre. But this is not only police but more on the border agencies. We have Fisheries, Immigration, Customs and, of course, the Police, so this is based in Samoa.

Lastly, Honourable Speaker, Sir, we also had the Regional Assistance Mission in the Solomon Islands (RAMSI). I know that the Fiji Police were deployed twice to the Solomon Islands, one prior to 2003 and again, during the RAMSI days. So these are some of the arrangements in place, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

The Fiji Police, may I also mention, is actively involved in providing capacity development for some of our regional partners, particularly Vanuatu, Nauru and Tuvalu. The end of this month, we will have the Commissioner of Police from Tuvalu invited by the Commissioner of Police in Fiji, under this arrangement to be the Chief Guest for their passing out parade for the current recruits, because we also have six Tuvalu police officers who are in the current batch who are about to graduate.

The importance of having this regional policing arrangement, Honourable Speaker, Sir, again, as I have said, it is about strengthening good governance, it is about creating that environment for investment and development. The sharing of information and intelligence is very, very critical, given the vulnerability that I have mentioned earlier.

The sharing of resources, some of our smaller island countries do not have the capability neither the capacity: they lack the resources and this is why this partnership is so important. We maximise our output, at the same time we minimise the costs involved through the sharing of resources.

Training is a critical component, Honourable Speaker, Sir, and I have stated that we conduct training for most of the small Island States, particularly Nauru and Tuvalu, and every now and then we also have trainings conducted here.

I forgot to mention, Honourable Speaker, Sir, that we also have the Regional Police Academy which currently is co-located with our Fiji Police Academy here in Nasova. Of course, Government is trying to secure land and I did mention about Blackrock in yesterday's question, Honourable Speaker, that is also under consideration that probably it can also be used as the Regional Police Academy.

Enhancing regional security is very, very critical for us, Honourable Speaker. Of course, strengthening our transnational crime linkages and most importantly, I have talked about training. The Honourable Attorney-General has talked about Fiji as a regional hub and we have the UN Resident Coordinator here in Fiji and most of the UN agencies are based here. Most of the training undertaken by UN and other international law enforcement agencies are held in Fiji because of that

very reason and, of course, the facility that we have in the Fiji Police Academy where the Regional Police Academy is co-located.

That very briefly, Honourable Speaker, Sir, is the regional policing arrangement and some of the benefits that we get out of it. Thank you, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. I now give the floor to the Honourable Ro Filipe Tuisawau.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Just a few observations, Honourable Minister, and you mentioned Blackrock. In international relations, we see the current strategy by the US - US's Pivot into Asia, basically to contain China. Then we have the Australian-Pacific Realignment, again, supporting the US to contain China, but yesterday, you explained the China Belt and Road Initiative supported by Fiji, so it is quite confusing to us as to which part or who is Fiji with because this is a clash of superpowers. So where is Fiji in terms of this?

The other part mentioned is the Pacific Regional Police Academy. This was approved by MSG and my understanding is that, Indonesia is in line for funding this.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member ...

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- So when we look at the issues of West Papua

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, just ask your question.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- The question is, where does Fiji stand in terms of the China Belt and Road Initiative as opposed to the US Pivot into Asia and Australian realignment in the Pacific, Indonesia funding the Regional Police Academy and Indonesia's position in the MSG; and Fiji's position in terms of human rights abuses happening in West Papua?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, those are four questions in all. You are entitled to one supplementary question.

Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, let me just say that Fiji is a sovereign State and we are in total control of our destiny. Let me also say that the strategic environment continues to evolve and when the strategic environment changes, that dictates the change that we have to apply within.

I have stated this Honourable Speaker, Sir, Fiji must live in the world as it is, not how Fiji prefers it to be because you have no influence over the strategic environment but you have to adjust to the strategic environment and that is where our foreign policy is premised.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Hear, hear!

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister. Honourable Niko Nawaikula?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Can the Honourable Minister explain as to the impact of this regional policing on the fight against drugs because on this side of the House, you cannot do anything? It is proliferating between regions. Drug trafficking is increasing, and increasing.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister, Sir, you have the floor.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, it is very effective. Look at the number of arrests that have been made. Fiji and the region are transit points, and we are managing effectively and we are doing well, Honourable Speaker, Sir. So that shows the effectiveness of this arrangement within the region.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. Honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa, you have the floor.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. The question to the Honourable Minister is that, in the Review Report of the Fiji Police Force Annual Report – August 2016 to July 2017, there was one recommendation from the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence; that they have noted a disparity in the data collection by the Police and what is actually happening on the ground. Another recommendation is on the complexity of terrorism and transnational issues.

In terms of the two-pronged approach that you have mentioned, Honourable Minister, what is the Ministry doing to bridge the gap in providing the relevant, adequate and proper training for proper regional policing? Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. For the Fiji Police, Government has endorsed the Strategic Development Plan which will be conducted in phases. The Fiji Police Force is well in advance in their planning and the Strategic Plan that is already with the Ministry and already with Government, including the Ministry of Economy which Government will finance in stages over a few years, takes us right to 2050, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

We are now looking at the priority for the first five years and the bulk of that is the capability development and institutional strengthening, including the regularisation of the Special Constabularies to become Regular Police Officers. I probably later on will give more details on that particular issue concerning Fiji.

But again, on Regional Police Training, Honourable Speaker, Sir, I admit the fact that when we have arrangements as such, we also have our own challenges and one of the big challenges that we have is when member countries do not provide their financial obligations on time and this is a major constraint for us and it demands that the management re-look at their priorities. But despite those, Honourable Speaker, Sir, I can say that we are thankful again to our partners, particularly the United Nations and other law enforcement agencies who come into our assistance in providing the necessary funding to keep the training as an ongoing activity and, of course, it is not only training but the capability development as well. So, we are thankful to our partners for that, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister.

That brings an end to the Oral Questions. We now move on to the first written question and I call on the Honourable Viliame Gavoka to ask his written question, Question No. 27/2019. Honourable Member, you have the floor

Written Questions

Assessment of the Infrastructure (Question No. 27/2019)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA asked the Government, upon notice:

Denarau Island is the hub of tourism in Fiji and continues to grow at a pace that may be placing huge strain on the infrastructure on the island. Can the Honourable Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism, Local Government, Housing and Community Development indicate to Parliament if an assessment of the infrastructure has been carried out to ensure that it is not under strain and is coping well?

HON. P.D. KUMAR (Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism, Local Government, Housing and Community Development).- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I will provide my written response at a later date in accordance with Standing Order 45(3).

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister. We move on to the second written question for today and I call on the Honourable Inosi Kuridrani to ask his written question, Question 28/2019.

Agriculture Sector – Decline of GDP contribution (Question No. 28/2019)

HON. I. KURIDRANI asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment inform Parliament why the agriculture sector's contribution to GDP continues to decline from 16 percent in 1995 to 6 percent in 2016?

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. I now call on the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment, you have the floor.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will table my response at a later sitting date as permitted under Standing Order 45(3).

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister. Honourable Members, the question time is now over and we will proceed with Ministerial Statements.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

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

1. Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment;
2. Honourable Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation;

3. Honourable Minister for Forests; and
4. Honourable Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Disaster Management and Meteorological Services.

Honourable Members, each Minister may speak for up to 20 minutes. After each Minister, I will then invite the Leader of the Opposition or his designate to speak on the Statement for no more than five minutes.

There will also be a response from the Leader of the National Federation Party or his designate to also speak for five minutes. There will be no other debate.

I now call on the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment to deliver his Statement. You have the floor, Minister.

Strategies for Agricultural Growth

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- The Honourable Speaker, Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Leader of the Opposition and Honourable Members of the House. Thank you very much for giving me this opportunity to present this statement on Strategies for Agricultural Growth.

Honourable Speaker, there have been many Governments and many Ministers for Agriculture in the past. The Ministry has continued to run under this Government and Ministers. My leadership will not be an exception.

Honourable Speaker, however what needs to be seen is how we are addressing some of the key strategic objectives of the Government and Ministry in relation to agriculture. These include, and not limited to:

- contributing to improved livelihoods of those who are directly dependent on agriculture;
- contributing to our people's nutritional requirements;
- providing positive returns to the owners of the agricultural resources;
- contributing to Government revenue rates via agricultural activities and sales;
- contributing agricultural surplus to the non-agricultural sector for its expansion and growth;
- savings in loss of foreign reserve via a substitution of imported production by raising it locally;
- growing stock of foreign reserves by exporting agricultural products;
- contributing to the livelihood of all those who are indirectly employed in the agriculture or agricultural industries or are working for industries servicing the agricultural sector; and
- contributing to a balanced environment and ecosystem for the sustained benefit of current and future generations while mitigating any negative effects of climate change.

Honourable Speaker, a vibrant, effective Agriculture Ministry and Agricultural Sector is measured by looking at how it is contributing to all these multiple objectives.

Honourable Speaker, noting the above, the multiplier effect of agriculture's growth is enormous and a distinctive feature of agricultural investment is that it reaches out to the most remotest household, the most vulnerable and those with minimal skills and education.

As I alluded to earlier yesterday, Honourable Speaker, any investment on agriculture must always be seen very positively because it deals with those who may be forgotten by mainstream orthodox development paradigms or other standard development strategies which tend to be concentrating in the urban and peri-urban area and all those kinds of investment which generates

employment which requires skills and education. So, any investment in agriculture reaches out to those who are in the remotest areas, in the periphery, near the coastal areas, in the interior, the maritime division, those who are vulnerable and those who have got very minimal or no skilsets education.

Honourable Speaker, having outlined the above, I wish to provide a framework to explain agriculture and how it effectively contributes to all of the above stated objectives. Honourable Speaker, I wish to begin the presentation by acknowledging and recognising the hard work and sacrifices of our farmers who have toiled the land to contribute to contemporary Fiji where it is now. In the past, the agriculture sector would agree that we were at the back of labour intensive, semi subsistence as well as some commercial farmers.

Farming systems have changed substantially since then. Farm size holdings have changed and so has agriculture's relative importance to the economy. For example, in 1995 agriculture contributed to the overall GDP by 15.6 percent.

In 2016, agriculture's contribution to the overall output GDP is around 7.4 percent. Some on the Opposition bench, for example, in the written question today are asking, "What is wrong; what are we doing?"

Honourable Speaker, the statistics show that agriculture's importance to the economy has declined relative to the other sectors and that is the normal trend. You will see that in any developing country because initially the other non-agricultural sectors; industrial, commercial and service would be non-existent.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Five, six decades ago, there was hardly anyone around. Over time, with the surplus created by the agricultural sector

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Understand, please, your colleague asked the question.

The surplus over the last four decades created in the agricultural sector has contributed to the development of the industrial, the manufacturing, commercial and now the service sectors. The service sector was hardly there four decades, six decades ago, now you can see the service sector, tourism sector so, obviously

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Please, listen.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Your colleague has asked a question. So, obviously, Honourable Speaker, you will see that relative to the other sectors, agriculture's contribution will decline. What is important to know is whether agriculture is stagnant, declining or increasing and yesterday, I am proud to say that agricultural output is increasing.

(Applause)

Honourable Speaker, the next four years will be a very exciting period for the agriculture sector in Fiji, one which will go down in the history books as a turning point of Fiji's agricultural sector.

Honourable Speaker, for so long, we were silently supporting the ideology that supply will create its own demands, so we were producing, supporting so that supply will create demand. So, we were incentivising these farmers and giving them grants and subsidies and they continued to produce and supply. We had distorted the factor markets

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- We had distorted the factor markets via subsidies and grants. We had created temporary factor markets, we were riding on the back of small holder semi-subsistence farmers.

Honourable Speaker, we, at the Ministry now wish to move away from this ideology that supply will create demand to the ideology that demand will induce and create supply. So, we strengthened the demand side, we strengthened the exporters, we strengthened the buyers, we strengthened the market players and they will induce farmers to produce and supply.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- So, Honourable Speaker, we will strengthen the demand side, organise the middlemen, collectors, exporters, buyers, structure and support them and they will send signals to the farmers to produce and supply more and more.

Honourable Speaker, we will remove the dilemma as to who will buy their products? How will they get their products to the market? We will strengthen, incentivise, resource and motivate the demand side. We will partner with the exporters and we will make Fiji a major exporter of fresh produce, Honourable Speaker.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Honourable Speaker, profiling our agriculture sector, we have the following:

1. Crop agriculture:
 - (a) Fresh Produce;
 - (b) Rice;
 - (c) Root crops;
 - (d) Pulses;
 - (e) Yaqona;
 - (f) Coconut;
 - (g) Fruit Tree Orchards.
2. Livestock Sector:

- (a) Cattle (Beef and dairy);
 - (b) Goats;
 - (c) Sheep;
 - (d) Pigs;
 - (e) Poultry; and
 - (f) Epiculture
3. Plant Protection, Veterinary and Regulatory Services; and
 4. Irrigation and Water Provision.

Today, I am going to shed light on the first three, and the fourth one I will present it in another statement from the Waterways side.

Honourable Speaker, we are now working on developing strategies to raise the benchmark for achievement on each of these sub-sectors.

Honourable Speaker, on the crop side, we are doing the following:

- Continuing research on releasing high yielding varieties. We also have to do these over time. A particular variety builds susceptibility to pests and diseases and thus its need to be replaced;
- Organising land to raise seeds and seedlings which will be distributed to farmers for them to expand their production and on this, I have held discussions with the Minister for Lands to see what land they have and what is our requirement and we will be making a submission to them so that we could first get a chance to get land for the Agriculture Ministry and then any shortfall, we will look at iTLTB as well.
- About to launch a new program to expand pulse seed production given its importance to household nutrition. It is now increasingly consumed by households and a major source of protein. Annually, we are importing close to four tons of pulse seeds. We will also now launch a new program to entice farmers to increase pulse seed production.

Honourable Speaker, pulses are also a climate-resilient crop, given their ability to tolerate drought and fix atmospheric nitrogen in the soil.

So, overall, Honourable Speaker, we will also be contributing when we are supporting pulse seed production towards improving the soil nutrition.

Honourable Speaker, we will also spearhead a new project of establishing fruit tree orchards, starting with guava, dragon fruit, banana, mango, avocado and breadfruit. Farmers will be assisted to start off the orchards.

Honourable Speaker, what you see in other fruits is widely-grown only during the season.

Honourable Speaker, we are about to launch our Young Incubator Farmer Scheme where young farmers within the age of 20 to 30 who have land, will be fully supported in the first year and pegged to a buyer/exporter who will then derive production by giving market signals.

Honourable Speaker, farmers' trust accounts will be established from farm proceeds which will be used to pick up farm costs for the next season thus ensuring sustainability of this Scheme.

Honourable Speaker, whilst the number of aging farmers in our rural communities continue to increase, Government is concerned about the low number of youths involved in agriculture production.

Honourable Speaker, you would have read the 2015/16 Ministry of Agriculture's Farming Household Baseline Survey which demonstrated that 22 percent of our farmers were recorded within the age bracket of 19 to 30 years - 35 percent are above the age of 50.

Honourable Speaker, you will see that we will need to bring in young farmers in the agriculture sector if we want to sustain the agriculture sector.

Honourable Speaker, the commercialization and modernisation of agriculture should encourage youths and young people to see agriculture as a business rather than something which is relegated to the periphery.

Honourable Speaker, the MOA will continue to provide the required leverage to farmers via the various Farm Support Programs so that, not only the existing farmers are given space to grow further, but we will also attract new young farmers.

Honourable Speaker, we will be developing a strategy paper for each crop and finalising the value chain leading up to the market.

Often, Honourable Speaker, we tend to concentrate on the early components of the value chain on the production side but we tend to forget that we need to ensure that the farmers have full knowledge and understanding of the entire value chain, right from the farm to the market.

Honourable Speaker, we will further provide scientific, technical and professional support services for agriculture development and promote sustainable land-use practices with major emphasis on land conservation and land degradation.

Honourable Speaker, food and nutrition security of the nation is very important. Given the above Programmes, it is important that we assess the effectiveness of these Programmes.

To develop the agriculture sector further, there is a need to assess our current actions, priority and plans against economic principles, guiding agriculture production, agribusiness and agricultural international trade.

Honourable Speaker, we need to make our agriculture sector demand-driven extension services, demand-driven production. It is very important that we concentrate on diversifying agriculture to also scale up successful commodities. Scaling-up in the agricultural sector essentially means expanding, replicating, adapting and sustaining commodities that have proven its market status, its resilience to climate change for greater and sustained impact.

Honourable Speaker, we are now looking in detail on how we can expand our livestock sector. In doing so, we wish to eradicate our livestock sector of diseases, in particular. We have recruited, first-time ever, after a long time, three full-time fully-qualified veterinarians and have strategies in place to eradicate TB and Brucellosis. We are working very closely with Bio-Security Authority of Fiji to ensure we do not introduce any new pests and diseases in Fiji.

Honourable Speaker, we are slowly releasing high-yielding breeds to replace existing ones. We have just released a new high-yielding sheep breed across between the Fiji Fantastic and the

Australian Dorper breed. This has several good traits such as high body weight, high weight at birth, lower mortality rate, to name a few.

Honourable Speaker, we have distributed these new breeds to close to 300 farmers in the Western Division and about 400 farmers in the Northern Division. There are more demand for this new breed and we will stock-up. It will take time and early next year, we will do another round of distribution of the breeder to the farmers. In the meantime, Honourable Speaker, we are loaning out the breeder based on finding out when the cycles are for mating.

Honourable Speaker, we are developing a new breed of cattle which will give us much superior beef cattle in terms of carcass weight as well as dairy cattle which will give us three times more daily milk per cow than what we are getting at the moment. Due to disease risks, live animal imports are temporarily stopped or halted and we have brought in embryos in straws for the new breed and inseminating in cows so that we can have this new breed here without taking the risk of getting live animals and, therefore, importing the diseases.

Once we are able to have an adequate number, then we will loan the breeder bulls out to the cattle farmers. It will take a little bit of time, Honourable Speaker, probably by the end of next year. We are working very closely with the Fiji Co-operative Dairy Company Limited (FCDCL) to expand dairy production in the Western Division.

Again the production and supply of the milk would be demand-driven. Honourable Speaker, we will do everything possible to give positive signals to farmers to get into dairy farming rather than driving this production of milk and supply via subsidies and grants.

We are now in discussion with the FCDCL for them to install more chillers at close proximity of dairy farmers and create demands. Once we have chillers installed in Nadi and Sigatoka, we are looking at installing one somewhere in Tuva. This will then raise demand and give a signal to the farmers to get more dairy cows and start getting in to dairy farming.

So this is what I mean exactly when I say that we will get the market to provide the signal to the farmer to get into that particular enterprise with the stock or livestock. So farmers will respond to these demand signals and raise their production and expand. We will be very careful in not disturbing the production and supply side by giving subsidies and grants, thus distorting the factor markets and then it becomes critically difficult to get out of it.

Honourable Speaker, this is a very exciting time for the dairy industry because we are looking at expanding in the Western Division. Honourable Speaker, if you look at the milk per cow in the Western Division and the Central Division, you will see that they are substantially different. In the Central Division, the same breed of cow, the milk per cow per day is about 7 litres and in the Western Division it is about 12 litres to 13 litres. The interesting thing is, we are trying to get the details on what is the contributing factor, same pasture, same breed of cow.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order! Order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- You are behaving like a breeder bull here.

(Laughter)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Honourable Speaker, good news for our dairy farmers: last week, the Fiji Dairy Limited raised the farm gate price for milk by 13 cents. This is what I mean, Honourable Speaker, when I say that demand will induce the farmers to produce more and expand.

Honourable Speaker, we will be releasing in October and November a new breed of cow. Honourable Speaker, we are doing a similar kind of research in the poultry and pig sector and we are looking at producing new breeds of poultry and pig for farmers.

Honourable Speaker, we will soon be launching our new pasture improvement plan which has just been approved by Cabinet, and we are quite excited about solving the issue of pasture during drought for our livestock farmers.

In my Waterways Paper that I will give later this week probably or in the next sitting, we will provide a solution of how we are going to deal with water shortage amongst the livestock areas in the drought-stricken areas.

Honourable Speaker, there is a lot to say but I want to end here, and I want to state that a lot of good work has been done by the Ministry of Agriculture, and we will continue to raise the benchmark. It is quite an exciting period ahead for Agriculture. Thank you, *vinaka, dhanyavaad*.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister.

Honourable Members, before we continue with this motion, for the purposes of complying with Standing Orders with respect to sitting times, I will allow a suspension motion to be moved.

I now call upon the Leader of the Government in Parliament to move his motion.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

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

That under Standing Order 6:

That so much of Standing Order 23(1) is suspended so as to allow the House to sit beyond 4.30 p.m. today, to complete all items as listed in today's Order Paper.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Honourable Speaker, I second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now call upon the Leader of the Government in Parliament to speak on his motion. You have the floor, Honourable Minister.

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, we only have three Ministerial Statements left, and we would kindly ask Parliament if we can complete that before we adjourn for tomorrow. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister. Honourable Members, the floor is open for anyone wishing to speak on this motion.

There does not seem to be anyone wanting to speak to this motion. There will be no need for the right of reply. Honourable Members, the Parliament will now vote.

The question is:

That under Standing Order 6:

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

Does any Honourable Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of "Noes")

HON. SPEAKER.- As no Honourable Member opposes the motion, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

On that note, Honourable Members, I will suspend proceedings so that we could have afternoon tea, and then after afternoon tea, we will take the two speakers: first from the Leader of the Opposition's designate and then from the National Federation Party's designate.

Thank you, Honourable Members, we adjourn.

The Parliament adjourned at 3.39 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 4.15. p.m.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, before we continue with the Ministerial Statements, I just want to announce that two Ministerial Statements have been withdrawn and they are from the Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation; and Minister for Forests.

Having said that, I now give the floor to the Honourable Inosi Kuridrani.

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to respond to the Ministerial Statement made by the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment and thank him for the information he has provided to the House.

Mr. Speaker, keeping up with the five minutes allowed for our responses, let me begin by reminding this House that Fiji has a land area of 18,222 square kilometres, of which only one-third of the land is available for farming. That arable land area is further reduced by the fact that there are tenants who have taken up arable land and are not cultivating it. There are arable land put in use for other purposes, other than agriculture. Then you have arable lands which are turning brown and barren due to damaged soil structure from environmental exploitation and degradation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Minister for Agriculture has dwelt at some length and talked about the strategies of Fiji's agricultural diversification in par with the intent of achieving a green growth economy. That, on the paper, looks noble but allow me to question the success rate of such initiative in the last decade. If that is to be used as a yardstick, then I am afraid we are seeking to ride a dead horse. What should those guiding ideals and principles be? Let me answer that to some extent.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, firstly, we will need to grow enough for our local consumption and set a trend for eating fresh, seeking to curb and control the rising cases of NCDs.

Secondly, we need to draw and implement strategies for agricultural development and marketing. It makes our agro-based economy more competitive than what it is today, if we are to retain and recruit more farmers.

Thirdly, to learn from the failures of the past and put in place the safeguards, not to repeat that.

The SDL Government, Mr. Speaker, Sir, like the Alliance and the SVT Governments, paid heed and sought to address Fiji's agricultural issues and potentials in these three contexts, and the results are there to see what our agriculture growth was in that era as opposed to now, where we witness mass exodus of farmers from the rural to urban areas as proven by the statistics from the last Census Report.

Yet, we are told that the previous Governments did nothing and this Government is doing everything. That is far from the truth. I welcome and challenge the Honourable Prime Minister and the Government to put up with this truth.

One of those noble initiatives of the past Governments was the food basket concept which the then Ministry of Labour and Industrial Relations was sensitising with the Ministry of Agriculture at the time of the last *coup*, and the successive Military and FijiFirst Governments

thought it fit to continue with the food basket concept, you would have eliminated malnutrition, arrested NCDs and got more of our people interested and engaged in agriculture.

Fiji's agricultural priority, Mr. Speaker, should be guided by home-grown policies and programmes, aligning them to international standards as opposed to what we see. We now see foreign ideas imposed upon us eliminating traditional methods of agriculture, putting our land, farms, crops, livestock to the risk of oblivion in terms of economic and natural value.

The other issue that I wish to touch upon, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is the strategies pronounced by the Honourable Minister for Agriculture in this House today with regards to pasture improvement which we welcome, expressing the hope that it would see the light of the day beginning from the necessary gathering and demonstration by the stakeholders.

Fiji's agriculture sector, Mr. Speaker, Sir, produces approximately 320 million tonnes of commodities, not including sugar. We import crops and livestock of more than \$600 million per year as opposed to approximately \$200 million of agricultural exports. Today, agriculture provides only 8 percent of our GDP and you add to that 5 percent component of the GDP by the sugar, it adds up to 13 percent.

However, we have to be mindful of the fact that we need food to eat and we need to be mindful about the number of people who are engaged and make a living from our agriculture industry. That being so, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we cannot and should not, in any way, undermine the issues and potential pertaining to agriculture development and marketing in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with those few words, I join Honourable Members of the House to wish the Honourable Minister and his staff all the best in regards to this implementation of the initiatives with the necessary adjustments and improvements that we have suggested. Thank you, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. I now give the floor to the Honourable Pio Tikoduadua, you have the floor.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. Honourable Speaker, I rise to respond to the statement by the Honourable Minister.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Minister never ceases to amaze me with his story-telling. He appears to be the only Honourable Member of this august House to tell a better story than me.

I also thank the Honourable Minister for his rather unusual textbook-like and theoretical overview of the role of agriculture. What we have heard today is like saying we will be self-sufficient in agriculture but, Mr. Speaker, nothing can be further from the truth.

In September 2017, my good friend the then Minister for Agriculture told the media that Fiji, on an average, imported \$788 million frozen fruits and vegetables annually for the last five years. I am sure this trend has continued last year, Mr. Speaker.

The Honourable Minister then said this was a big concern and we heard nothing today that can, sort of, dampen this trend. Mr. Speaker, because the current Honourable Minister seems clueless, I believe, on how to revitalise the industry which is one of his portfolios.

The supplement to the 2018-2019 Budget does not make good reading and it is not our figures, it is the statistics of the Government of the day.

Mr. Speaker, this morning you said you were amazed after hearing of the so many new crops that were rice varieties, introduced over the last four decades. You will surely know that we had thriving schemes in Lakena, Dreketi and these have gone. There were rice mills in every cane districts, even in the dry places, like Ba and Tavua. Now, even their relics cannot be found. We are now relying on imported rice, Mr. Speaker.

We have heard also that new varieties of tomatoes, capsicums, dalo, bean were being released. We have heard of new sheep and goat varieties being released. But research in the Extension Services have declined, Mr. Speaker, so one needs only to go to the farmers to learn of their frustrations.

Mr. Speaker, a once thriving dairy industry is now struggling. The Government's actions in the last 12 years is like one milking a barren cow in the hope that it becomes productive. All it has been doing is increasing the profitability of one company, Mr. Speaker, at the expense of the poor dairy farmers, who only have a 20 percent stake in that particular company.

After many years, the prices of raw milk paid to farmers has increased to 97 cents, Mr. Speaker. The company imports milk powder and produces constituted milk, 80 percent of milk produced by the company is reconstituted. Almost 100 percent of butter is imported. It is only salted and packaged, sold for almost \$10 for a 500 grams packet, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this is the state of our dairy industry. There is no doubt I would say that under the Bainimarama-led Government and the FijiFirst Government, our agriculture sector has taken nosedive. The Government has recommended:

1. To regard the agriculture sector as important, not only for sustaining livelihoods in the rural sector, but also for the overall growth and poverty alleviation strategy and to sustain livelihood for many.
2. Define a very clear agricultural policy linked to our export markets so that our farmers can increase production and increase income through export and agriculture development. Only then, Mr. Speaker, can any Government initiative produce the desired results.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member for his contribution to the Statement. I now call on the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Disaster Management and Meteorological Services, the Honourable Jone Usamate, to deliver his Statement.

Water Developments and Plans for Central and Western Divisions

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker Sir, for giving me the opportunity to make this presentation. My address this afternoon on the Ministerial Statement is just to highlight some of the major developments on the water system and also distribution relating to the provision of water through the work of the Water Authority of Fiji (WAF) for the Central and Western Divisions.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the WAF is responsible for the provision of efficient and effective water and waste water services in an environmentally sound and sustainable manner. Like all the entities under the overall Government umbrella, in its operations, WAF is guided and led by Government's goals under the 5-Year and 20-Year National Development Plans (NDP).

Yesterday, there were some comments, I think they might have been made by the Honourable Nawaikula, casting aspersions on the Honourable Prime Minister's Presidency of COP 23 and asking as to what are we doing here in Fiji about climate change here at home?

I want to let the House know that all issues relating to all the SDGs, including climate change are incorporated into our NDPs. So as we address the issues in our NDPs, we are addressing those very same issues. That is what the Honourable Prime Minister has made sure that we do, that we address it by addressing these things in our National Development Plans.

So, yes, the Honourable Prime Minister has been championing the issues of climate change globally. He has ensured that the world is much more aware of the issues that we, the small nations face in relation to climate change and he has walked the talk, he has made sure that we address the same at home.

The goals that I would like to talk about in terms of water, are for two things; basically for the provision of safe and clean water in adequate quantities and to make sure that we have accessible and adequate sanitation for all Fijians. Goal 6 of the SDG set by the United Nations is about ensuring availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.

The World Bank estimates that achieving this target will cost approximately US\$114 billion a year, between now and 2030. Currently in Fiji, accessibility of our population to proper water supply is as follows:

- For urban areas, it is currently 84 percent; 84 percent of our population is accessible to good water and just a few years ago in 2016, the percentage was 70 percent. So, it has risen from 70 percent to 84 percent in the space of a few years.
- For the rural areas in 2016, we had 70 percent of our rural population having access to good water systems. Now it has gone up to 75 percent. Our target is to have 100 percent access to clean and safe water in the urban areas by 2021. As I said, we are now at 84 percent so that is quite a substantive target that we have set ourselves.
- For the rural and maritime areas, we want to achieve 100 percent access by the year 2031.

As I mentioned before, currently it is at 75 percent. The WAF is the agency that we will count on to achieve this lofty and ambitious but nevertheless very important targets. But we know that investment in water and sanitation is investment in health and it is also investment in overall cost-savings to Government.

According to the World Health Organisation, for every \$1 that we spend in safe drinking water and sanitation, the WHO estimates that the return is \$3 to \$34 in the form of reduced health care cost for individuals and societies around the world where basically about 2.5 billion still lack access to basic water and sanitation services.

What this means is that for every new pipeline installed or old pipeline replaced or new waste water system installed, there is an overall economic return to this country. These investments trigger new business developments, people build new homes and ultimately targets to improve the living standards of all Fijians as a whole. Clean accessible water for all is an essential part of life, however there are, of course, challenges that we face in terms of access to fresh water.

In addition, due to bad economics of poor infrastructure, thousands of people, including children, die every day from diseases associated with inadequate water supply, sanitation hygiene not necessarily in Fiji but around the world. Water scarcity faces a challenge, poor water quality, inadequate sanitation; all of these things negatively impact food security, livelihood choices and educational opportunities for poor families across the world. Currently, more than 2 billion people are living with the risk of reduced access to fresh water resources by 2050. Drought also affects some of the world's poorest countries worsening hunger and malnutrition.

In Fiji, we know that our drought periods are also becoming prolonged and the impact of climate change is becoming a reality and this is affecting the water levels in our catchment areas. Honourable Speaker, WAF is responsible for providing access to quality drinking water and waste water services to over 151,000 residential and non-residential metered customers residing largely in urban areas.

WAF's current water and waste water network constitutes more than 4,792 kilometres of pipes. The Authority is responsible for setting up water supplies systems in rural schemes reaching over 300,000 people nation-wide. The WAF supplies approximately 127,927 mega litres or million litres of treated water annually to homes and businesses nation-wide.

Maintaining this state asset is a challenge given that most of these pipes are old and inadequately sized. Continuous maintenance of these assets is not economically viable compared to the capital cost of replacement. To address this, WAF has been allocated a total budget of \$51.7 million or approximately 21 percent of its total budget towards the Water Distribution System Project. This will include upgrading works to improve the level of service to consumers in terms of reliability, quality and quantity. The water demand in the Central and Western Divisions where rapid development is expected is rapidly increasing and the expansion of water supply facilities is an important and urgent issue to assess this development.

From the budget that I have mentioned, \$8.8 million is earmarked for water supply, hydraulic pipeline improvement programmes in the Central Division and also in the Western Division. This programme is to replace and increase the capacity of old, under-sized and faulty water pipes. This will also cater for the increase in demand from the growing population.

Based on a recent 2017 population and Housing Census by the Bureau of Statistics, the province of Ba, which includes Nadi, Lautoka, Ba and Tavua has had a significant increase in the proportion of its urban population by 14.6 percent. By the same token in the Central Division, Naitasiri, the population increased by 10.1 percent; Rewa, 5.3 percent; and Tailevu, 14 percent. So, these population increases indicate the demand for water supply in these regions.

These projects are scheduled to be completed between April and July of this year benefitting around 11,500 people in both the Central and Western Divisions.

The hydraulic pipeline improvement works will be ongoing work for the WAF in the next three to five years. This annual programme will ensure that Fijians living in these areas receive consistent and reliable supply of clean and safe drinking water.

Case Study is the Arolevu Water Project outside Nadi whereby a 75 year old lady, Mrs Vidhya Wati, a mother of six used to walk to fetch water for 30 minutes daily with a 20-litre gallon on her head. This was a daily struggle over the last 10 years but now she enjoys water supply in the comfort of her home, and we hope that can be a story for as many people as possible in Fiji.

Honourable Speaker, the Vaturu Dam, the main water source of the Nadi and Lautoka area, was built in 1982. Over the years there has been rapid growth in economic development and the rural urban drift in the Nadi to Lautoka corridor and consequently the demand for water supply has significantly increased.

The planned Vaturu shut down works in Nadi last weekend was a result of a major leakage on a high pressure pipeline supplying raw water from Vaturu Dam to the Nagado Water Treatment Plant. The repair works were completed in 12 hours and normal water supply was restored within 24 hours.

In preparation for this shutdown, WAF Customer Service Teams carried out an awareness campaign prior to the shutdown. This was carried out with businesses and residential customers to ensure that people prepared themselves accordingly.

WAF has been working very hard to make people aware of any likely water problems that will arise through advertisements and even text messages. We all need to pay attention to such advice.

During this shutdown, residential and business customers from Lautoka and Nadi rural areas were supplied with water through 17 water carting trucks; 50 water tanks with storage capacity between 5,000 litres to 10,000 litres were stationed at strategic locations, hospitals, schools, businesses, hotels and public places were prioritised during this period; 14,000 people were affected but this repair work will ensure consistent and reliable water supply to all our customers.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in light of the above, WAF has completed four Water Master Plans for the four major systems; Suva/Nausori, Nadi/Lautoka, Sigatoka and Labasa. These Master Plans run up to the Year 2033 and Government will need a total of \$1.39 billion to fully upgrade and rehabilitate water and waste water infrastructure. So, Government, through WAF, is currently working on other Master Plans for other water and waste water systems to be completed this year.

Before I take my seat, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would just like to address two issues that were brought up in the House and I think this is an opportunity to address them.

The first was the issue that was addressed by the Honourable Anare Jale in relation to the removal of shipwrecks in Ono. I just like to inform the House that the Maritime Transport Act of 2013 authorises the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji (MSAF) or an authorised person to try to address the issues of shipwrecks on reefs, et cetera.

MSAF has the authority where they will then work with the ship-owner. There needs to be a formal notification made to MSAF so that they can do this. If the ship-owner cannot remove the wreck or the ship-owner cannot be found, CEO MSAF will take possession and raise and remove or destroy the hazard. MSAF can also sell the wreck in order to recover the expenses in removing the same. If the money earned from the sale is not enough to pay the whole expenses incurred to remove the wreck, then the balance can be recovered from the owner or master or person who is in command of the hazard.

The other issue that I would like to address very quickly is the issue that was raised by the Honourable Professor Biman Prasad. He talked about the solar farm in Qeleloa and asked the question whether it was being developed?

I would like to inform the House that the Qeleloa five megawatts solar project is progressive. The project is a joint venture between Electricity Fiji Limited (EFL) and Sunergise and their joint venture company, Viti Renewables Limited (VRL), is developing this five megawatts solar power plant at Qeleloa in Nadi.

The subleasing of the land is underway and the project is now in progress. The total cost of the project will be around \$12 million of which about 80 percent is funded through debt, and 20 percent equity, and as I mentioned the project is well underway. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I thank the Honourable Minister for his Statement. I now have pleasure of giving the floor to the Honourable Aseri Radrodro. You have the floor, Honourable Member.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to give the SODELPA Opposition response in accordance with Standing Order 40(4). First of all, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am confused with these Ministerial Statements because I think it is part of the level nine meeting on low-hanging fruit, what the Honourable Minister has elaborated today, especially the concerns on the water developments around the Central and Western Divisions.

I was looking forward to issues covering the whole of Fiji to cover also the Northern and Eastern Divisions, Mr. Speaker, Sir. It is an embarrassment to continue to hold these discussions on water development. These are the same issues that have been brought into this House by the former Honourable Minister for Infrastructure, and I think he should ask for direction from his former Minister because in the last four years, I have stood in this august House to ask and question Government on the operations of Water Authority of Fiji (WAF) and the use of taxpayers fund, as well as the loans received for water development from foreign entities and donors.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Ask your candidate.

HON. A.M. RADRODDRO.- The challenges of water disruptions, low quality water, (not low-hanging fruits) continue to plague the nation, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Whilst we can blame the growing population and increasing demand, I will continue to question the monitoring of expenditure and operations of WAF, especially the high level of outsourcing of most of WAF's functions.

An increased budget from WAF from \$306.9 million to \$349 million in 2019 has been passed. This side of the House continues to wonder where all these funds are being swallowed because we really have not seen any major improvements in water supply and piped water provisions.

Listen to this, Honourable Minister, workers at Kinoya Sewerage Plant continue to raise their concerns on their request to be supplied with protective clothing and equipment to allow them to carry out their duties diligently in accordance with OHS standards. All that clouds my memory, Mr. Speaker, because I am sure the same is that for many in this country the incidents of abuse of funds like the \$33 million digger scam that occurred in WAF last year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reality is WAF has become so much more expensive than the Department of Water, and it has also worsened in its function, it leaves us wondering ...

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- ... whether they are synchronising their work against the various developments that are occurring around the nation. Informal settlements, for example, are mushrooming and these need to be coordinated properly. The recent typhoid outbreak in Namosi and Naitasiri, Mr. Speaker, Sir, brings to light the struggles of our rural people to access clean drinking water. Just last week, I have been informed that there was water disruptions at CWM Hospital, especially in the Children's Ward, Mr. Speaker. For one whole day, nothing was prepared by WAF.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if Government has spent \$45 million over the last four years on the International Golf Tournament in Natadola, that we know settlements between Natadola, Momi and Yako Village are still being denied proper water supplies. We need to stop hoodwinking our people, Mr. Speaker.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Shame on you.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- I have constantly said in the last four years, majority of our people in rural areas rely on boreholes and village water dams. I am optimistic that the new line Minister will make sure WAF looks at the monitoring of these water sources whilst people await piped water to reach them.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in Taveuni I am told that sea water is pumped from the sea and converted into fresh water and this is supplied to the two villages of Vuna, Korovou and Vuna, Kanacea. Whilst it may be useful for washing, bathing and for toilet use, is it fit for drinking?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, recently, WAF has conducted disconnections in the areas mentioned. The people are questioning whether the payment of their bills are justified, especially when water disruptions continued for two consecutive days and is giving them much grief.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, just a reminder to the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure, that whilst these plan developments are good, we hope that they will be handled diligently to avoid problems as have been noted in Draubuta Village in Navosa, where I sincerely hope, Government can declare an issue as state of disaster and ensure that they are provided with emergency supplies and relief. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

Honourable Members, I thank the Honourable Member for his contribution to this debate. I now have the pleasure of giving the floor to the Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua who will speak on behalf of the National Federation Party. You have the floor, Madam.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I thank the Honourable Minister for his statement.

Honourable Speaker, public documents tell us that in 2016, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) approved a facility of \$153 million to further improve water supply and sanitation in greater Suva.

The project supported by \$71 million from the European Investment Bank (EIB) and a grant of \$31 million from the Green Climate Fund (GCF) will double sewerage treatment capacity and deliver over 20 percent more water everyday.

Honourable Speaker, it is now 2019. The question of whether this lofty premise of doubling our sewerage treatment and delivery of 20 percent more water everyday, is perhaps best answered by taxpayers who are listening in to our Parliamentary debates right now, and we are quite sure that the people in Navaca and Navakawau in Taveuni will most likely fall outside this net.

In light of those funds to the tune of \$153 million given in 2016, Honourable Speaker, and in respect of the 2017 Audit Report on the Infrastructure Sector tabled just on Monday, which I am sure the Public Accounts Committee will be carefully looking at, there is a major obligation on the Honourable Minister, as laid out on page 25 of the said Report to ensure that his Ministry's oversight capabilities on these kinds of projects are upskilled with urgency, the technical expertise and resources for proper site visits to independently review the projects of the Water Authority of Fiji, because we would hate to have similar audit queries to be raised again, despite all the lovely highfalutin words.

Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I thank the Honourable Member for her statement. Honourable Members, I have been informed that there are no Bills for consideration.

I see the look of glee on all Honourable Members' faces, but I just want to remind Honourable Members before we adjourn that tomorrow morning, at morning tea adjournment, there will be a photograph of the current Parliament on the front steps. I am giving you notice now, so those of you who need to have a makeover ...

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- ... may do so before tomorrow. I have been told that I have got to do something with my eyebrows.

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- But, I have got more hair on my eyebrows than on the top of my head.

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- So I do not intend to do anything about that.

Honourable Members, we will now adjourn to 9.30 tomorrow morning.

The Parliament adjourned at 4.49 p.m.