

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

FRIDAY, 17TH MAY, 2019

[CORRECTED COPY]

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FRIDAY, 17TH MAY, 2019

The Parliament met at 9.37 a.m., pursuant to notice.

HONOURABLE SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Honourable Members were present, except the Honourable Assistant Minister for Health and Medical Services.

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Thursday, 16th May, 2019, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I beg to 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 Thursday, 16th May, 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 the last sitting day for this week. I also welcome guests joining us in the gallery and those watching the proceedings on television and on the internet and listening to the radio.

Birthday Wishes - Honourable Alipate Nagata

Honourable Members, at this juncture, I extend to the Honourable Alipate Nagata our well wishes for a happy birthday, and many happy returns of the day.

(Acclamation)

Delay in Distribution - Daily Hansard

Honourable Members, for the information of all, you now have copies of the *Daily Hansard* Report for the sitting on Wednesday, 15th May, 2019. The *Daily Hansard* for Thursday 16th May, 2019 will be distributed upon completion at a later time.

Written Responses to Questions

I would like to inform the Honourable Members that the Secretariat has received responses to Written Questions – Question No. 94/2019 asked by the Honourable Ro Filipe Tuisawau and Question No. 105/2019 asked by the Honourable Ratu Suliano Matanitobua. These will be conveyed to the Honourable Members accordingly, and will also be uploaded on the Parliament website. At this juncture, I thank the Honourable Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism, Local Government, Housing and Community Development for the responses. Thank you, Honourable Members.

Ruling on End of Week Statement

Honourable Members, a ruling on the End of the Week Statement by the Honourable Lynda Tabuya. I refer to the proposed End of the Week Statement by the Honourable Lynda Tabuya in relation to the Air Terminal Services Board, which is listed as the second End of the Week Statement on today's Order Paper.

The End of the Week Statement contravenes Standing Orders 61, which states, and I quote:

“When speaking, a Member must not refer to any matter in relation to which a judicial decision is pending”.

Given that the matter of the Air Terminal Services Board is currently a matter before the courts, it is not appropriate for the proposed statement to be discussed in Parliament. Honourable Members, I am fully aware that the statement in question was approved by the Business Committee, however, I am invoking my powers on the Standing Orders 18, 20 and 124(5), and therefore rule that the End of the Week Statement by the Honourable Lynda Tabuya, will be removed from today's Order Paper.

At this juncture, I remind all Honourable Members that my Ruling is final and there would be no debate or clarification on my Ruling.

Matter of Privilege Pursuant to Standing Order 134

Honourable Members, on Wednesday, 15th May, 2019, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition reported a matter of privilege to me pursuant to Standing Orders 134.

The Honourable Leader of the Opposition alleged that the Honourable Attorney-General misled and brought dishonour and disrepute to this august House, on Monday, 1st April, 2019 and Monday, 13th May, 2019 while responding to a question and a supplementary question respectively, which were both asked by the Honourable Leader of the Opposition regarding the Waiver of Tender Processes.

In the letter, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition quoted from Page 749 of the *Daily Hansard* of 1st April, 2019 and alleged that the Honourable Attorney-General had commented as follows, and I quote: “I cannot waive procurement regulations. The regulations allow me to waive certain processes.”

The Honourable Leader of the Opposition also quoted from Page 1279 of the Uncorrected Copy of the *Daily Hansard* of 13th May, 2019, and alleged that the Honourable Attorney-General commented as follows:

“Mr. Speaker, Sir, the waivers are actually given in exceptional circumstances and the regulation clearly sets that out or there is only one supplier, the general principle of it.”

Honourable Members, the Leader of the Opposition alleged that these statements were blatant lies and that the Honourable Attorney-General misled Parliament and demeaned and brought disrepute to Parliament. The Honourable Leader of the Opposition also urged that the Privileges Committee be convened immediately to make a final determination.

SPEAKER'S RULING

Matter of Privilege

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I will now give my ruling on this matter of privilege raised by the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

It is pertinent to highlight that deliberately misleading Parliament is a serious matter, and maybe viewed as contempt of Parliament. There are 3 elements which must be established in order to show that a Member deliberately misled Parliament:

- Firstly, the statement must, in fact, have been misleading;
- Secondly, the Member must have known at the time the statement was made, it was incorrect.
- Thirdly, in making the statement, the Member must have intended to mislead Parliament.

Honourable Members, it is clear to me that neither of the statements quoted by the Honourable Leader of the Opposition are false or misleading. There is no law in this or any known jurisdiction which allows a Minister to waive subsidiary laws. That is clearly what the Honourable Attorney-General is alluding to when he said on 1st April, 2019, that he could not waive regulations. He then proceeded to add or qualify by clearly stating that he was, in fact, empowered to waive certain processes.

The documents provided by the Honourable Leader of Opposition has purported evidence that the statements made were false are in fact a waiver of the tender process. That is clearly what the Honourable Attorney-General meant when he said he was allowed to waive certain processes which he is empowered under the law to do.

In relation to the statement made on 13th May, 2019, I note that such statement was made immediately after the Honourable Attorney-General quoted the necessary provisions in relation to the waiver of tender under the Procurement Regulations 2010. The exceptional circumstances he is quite obviously referring to are the circumstances he had listed which did in fact contain a requirement for a single or sole supplier under Regulation 48(1).

His statement is also clearly neither false nor misleading and is in fact what the law provides, therefore insofar as the latter is concerned, it is my ruling that there is no *prima facie* evidence that the Honourable Attorney-General deliberately misled Parliament or that he brought dishonour or disrepute to this august House. Therefore I find that there is no breach of privilege. Accordingly, I will not be referring this matter to the Privileges Committee and there will be no further discussions on this matter. I thank Honourable Members.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now call upon the Honourable Pio Tikoduadua to move his motion.

ESTABLISHMENT OF A BIPARTISAN SELECT COMMITTEE ON SUGAR

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Honourable Speaker, I move:

That this Parliament agrees to establish a bipartisan select committee on sugar to collectively find solutions to revive the sugar industry, to ensure it remains a vibrant industry economically benefitting all stakeholders.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Honourable Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now invite the Honourable Pio Tikoduadua to speak to the motion. There is a better looking Pio Tikoduadua on the other side.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- I thank you, Honourable Speaker, for confirming something I have known all along.

Honourable Speaker, this motion is an impassion plea to once again make our sugar industry the sweet industry response.

Tuesday, 14th May marked the 140th Anniversary of the arrival of the first indentured labourers or also known as *Girmitiyas* to Fiji on board the *Leonidas*. The *Girmitiya*, Honourable Speaker, were brought to Fiji by the then colonial administration to work on the sugar plantations. They did exactly that.

From 1879, the *Girmitiya* and their descendants turned the industry into the economic mainstay of Fiji for more than a century. Until the turn of the 21st Century when Fiji Water overtook it as the number one export commodity. The sugar industry has survived many natural disasters, catastrophic cyclones, hurricanes, severe droughts, devastating flooding and four military *coups*.

Honourable Speaker, the challenges it has been facing for the last two decades, particularly over the last 12 years is proving to be insurmountable at least in the manner that the challenges and the obstacles are being tackled with little or no success. Honourable Speaker, the last 10 years since the *coup* of 5th December, 2006, there had been a tumultuous time for cane growers and their families. Statistics prove beyond any doubt whatsoever that the Military Government, the FijiFirst Government since September, 2014, both of these are being led by the same leader had failed miserably to revive the sugar industry, Honourable Speaker.

This is not this Government's lack of trying, Honourable Speaker, indeed the current Government is providing many incentives to our cane growers and financial help in the form of loans and guarantees to keep the technically insolvent Fiji Sugar Corporation afloat. It is second only to what the National Federation Party was offering cane growers in terms of financial assistance, but we also offered more than financial help.

Even the Honourable Prime Minister has time and time again stated that 200,000 people are directly and indirectly dependent on the industry for their livelihood, Honourable Speaker, and this is more than 20 percent of our population. So, naturally, this Government thinks it has done everything it can to keep Fiji's oldest surviving and perhaps, most important industry in terms of having a direct impact on the largest segment of our population going with the hope that it will one day turn into that vibrant industry once again.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I am not playing the blame game. This motion is about an honest and an impassioned plea to put all our collective will together. Honourable Speaker, we all want the same things, a healthy and vibrant sugar industry. Mr. Speaker, there is a saying, "Money can't love" and tragically, Mr. Speaker, money and the nature in which it is used now cannot rescue the sugar industry and revitalise it. Mr. Speaker, statistics do not lie. To prove what I am saying, the official statistics for the last 13 years paint a sorry picture. Sugar cane production, sugar production and the number of active growers have been declining steadily. Again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, why? Despite millions of dollars being pumped into the industry, nothing seems to be working.

Honourable Speaker, I have the full statistics for the last 13 years, 2016 to 2018. It does not make happy reading, so I will not read out statistics for every year. The best one that I should use is the 2006 statistics; before the *coup*. In 2006, the industry had 18,636 active cane growers. They produced 3.226 million tonnes of sugar cane from which 310,140 tonnes of sugar was produced at a TCT of 10:4.

In 2018 or the last season, the industry had 12,000 active growers. They produced 1.696 million tonnes of cane from which 160,204, sugar was produced at a TCTS of 10:59. Therefore, Honourable Speaker, what has happened in the last 13 years?

The number of active growers declined by more than 6,600. Sugarcane production held by 1.595 million tonnes. Sugar production has fallen by 149,936 tonnes. Honourable Speaker, as we can see, production kept declining and so did the number of active cane growers. There was no lease renewal issue after the military *coup* or was it?

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Ask Honourable Nawaikula.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- There was no issue with financial help for growers because they received a lot from the Government, so what happened Honourable Speaker?

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, during the term of Parliament from October 2014 to July 2018 and until Parliament was dissolved in 1st October, 2018 for the conduct of the General Elections, the National Federation Party made several attempts, both in and outside of Parliament either be to convince Government to adopt bipartisanship to collectively tackle the challenges facing the sugar industry and particularly for the cane growers.

We were ostracised and like the cane growers kicked from pillar to post but we relentlessly stuck to our role, not for political survival but for the survival and eventual vibrancy of an industry that is far too important for our nation to play around with.

We were accused of politicising the industry by Government, but little did Government realise that they are politicians themselves. Land lease non-renewals were for blamed. Of course, Honourable Prime Minister, you can do something about it.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Of course, Honourable Prime Minister, you can do something about it because you are the Government.

We were accused of politicising the industry by Government, little did Government realise that they are politicians themselves and they need to know that.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Hear, hear!

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Land lease non-renewals were blamed. A particular, Honourable colleague on the Opposition benches was basically blamed for playing the leading hand in non-renewal of leases.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Absolutely!

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- But, Honourable Speaker, statistics rule otherwise. No politics ...

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Oh, he keeps saying that, Honourable Speaker, legacy issues, legacy issues; better take some blame for something.

No politics, no supposed-land lease renewal problems. Complete Government control of growers affairs through dissolution of the industry, complete control of FSC by virtue of its marketing of sugar, millions of dollars in planting grants to growers, multi-million dollars' worth of loans and guarantees to FSC and FSC Strategic Plan urging Government to write-off \$173 million in loans, attempts to change the Sugar Industry Act and the Master Award provisions, top up of cane prices for growers, a National Development Plan full of erroneous sugar industry protections including producing a tonne of sugar only using 5.47 tonnes of cane, that is unheard of in the world, Honourable Speaker are just examples of what the Government has done, but Honourable Speaker all to no avail.

Now, what has been happening? I am pleased to say this, Government has adopted a wild bull in a China shop approach and we all know what a wild bull would do in a shop full of China ware; it will smash everything, Honourable Speaker. This is what the industry's statistics portray, even the TCTS which was improving markedly, has risen to 10:59. We are told due to inefficiency in the Rarawai Mill. Penang Mill is no more and cane from Ra is being taken to Rarawai and even Lautoka; this is only adding to Government's expenses, Honourable Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I will give an example of how well bipartisanship works when the industry was facing a crisis. In 1998, Fiji faced probably its worst drought in recent memory. Cane production fell by 50 percent from 4 million to 2 million tonnes. While some politicians were talking about a cash grant, the NFP did not want growers to be treated as chattels and again kicked from pillar to post.

So the NFP and the Opposition Leader, Jai Ram Reddy and the then Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka who is now the Leader of the Opposition negotiated a crop rehabilitation package. Between both the leaders Honourable Speaker, endorsed by the Parliamentary Select Committee on Sugar and the House of Representative during an emergency session in July 1998. It was a package involving loans and mostly grants. The loan was later paid by Government, similar to what the current Government is doing, but, even less than what is being allocated annually. Honourable Speaker, the results were astonishing. In a year of the following season in 1999, cane production doubled to 4 million tonnes ...

HON. MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- ... so much so that 170,000 tonnes was left unharvested in the fields that the then Sugar Minister and Prime Minister refused to authorise compensation for.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Honourable Speaker, this is what cooperation and bipartisanship can do.

Honourable Speaker, the Secretary-General of the United Nations spoke to us yesterday and told the world about the *talanoa* session that came from Fiji that is now changing the world.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Well exactly, Honourable Speaker, they can *talanoa* to the world, but, they cannot *talanoa* to Fiji's people.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- No wonder it is all declining.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- But, Honourable Speaker, this is what corporation and this is what bipartisanship can do.

Mr. Speaker, once again I make this impassion plea, let us form a Special Committee as allowed under Section 129 of our Standing Orders.

The motion says a bipartisan select Committee, this is so that we can all collectively find solutions in an environment conducive to discussing issues of national importance. Honourable Speaker, together we shall prevail and I commend the motion to the House. I thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. The floor is now open for debate on the motion, and at the end of the debate, I will call for a right of reply. I give the floor to the Honourable Prime Minister, you have the floor, Sir.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I am sorry Honourable Speaker, I could not wait to stand up because I think this motion is a waste of resources and a waste of time.

Honourable Pio Tikoduadua talked about the demise of the Penang Mill, any Class 5 student who witnessed *TC Winston* would tell us that. Just this morning Honourable Speaker, in one of the media, it talked about the combination of good support from Government, better technical support by our field teams and the extended support from all the industry stakeholders is starting to show a positive outcomes. So we really do not need this bipartisan approach. NFP who wants to tell the world that the sugar industry is failing when in fact NFP is failing.

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

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- As I said, Honourable Speaker, I rise to speak against the motion moved by Honourable Tikoduadua for the simple reason that it is unnecessary and would duplicate work and processes that are already well established.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Hear, hear!

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- We all know that the sugar industry is vital to Fiji, more than 200,000 people, Honourable Speaker, roughly a quarter of our population depend on it. The industry is well-established and served by 7 major institutions:

1. Fiji Sugar Corporation (FSC);
2. Sugar Cane Growers Council (SCGC);
3. Sugar Research Institute of Fiji (SRIF);
4. Sugar Cane Growers Fund (SCGF);
5. Sugar Industry Tribunal (SIT);
6. South Pacific Fertilisers (SPF); and the
7. Ministry of Sugar Industry.

These institutions, Honourable Speaker, has specific laws to play in overseeing and supporting the sugar industry in all its activities and in all phases of sugar production and marketing. These institutions have been implementing internal reforms to streamline their operations with the goal of improving the service they provide to the cane farmers.

Leadership, Honourable Speaker, is an important part of this process, and so a number of new members with exceptional capabilities have recently been appointed to the FSC, the SCGF and the SRIF Boards.

Honourable Speaker, these institutions also have a role in developing policies and strategies with the aim of helping cane growers increase their productivity. That increased productivity will come from reducing growers' production cost and increasing cane production. The Ministry of Sugar Industry has worked with these institutions to carry out regular consultations, meeting and discussions with the cane growers, lorry associations and other stakeholders to listen to their views and experiences and take actions on issues that affect them and the industry as a whole.

A number of new policies have already been developed following the consultations with growers. This led to the significant increase in budget for the sugar industry; from \$26 million in 2016/2017 to \$60 million in 2017/2018. This increase, Honourable Speaker, allowed us to implement new policies and programmes, including the New Farmers' Assistance Programme:

- cane planting grant;
- fertilizers and weedicide subsidies;
- upgrading of cane access roads; and
- farm mechanisation.

Honourable Speaker, interest in cane farming is growing, cane farming is growing. In 2018 and 2019, we have helped more than 100 new farmers acquire land to establish cane farming under the New Farmers Programme. The industry is also promoting commercial cane farming, especially through the landowners who have larger parcels of arable land.

In 2018, the FSC established four new joint ventures with landowners and bought more than 110 hectares of new land under cane cultivation. This is in addition to the 5,260 hectares of cane planted in

2018 with the goal of producing larger and more vigorous cane farms throughout Fiji. The SRIF has set up a drip irrigation trial in Drasa, that will be replicated in other mill areas by 2020.

Farmers have also increased the application of fertiliser inputs by 36 percent, thanks to the increase in that subsidy and have improved weed management with the introduction of weedicide subsidies.

Honourable Speaker, in less than two years, a total of 33 operatives have received grant assistance to procure mechanical harvesters and 19 cooperatives have received similar assistance to procure tractors and implements. The FSC has procured 30 tractors with implements to promote farm mechanisation and more than 430 farmers have received small grants to purchase farm implements, fencing materials and water pumps.

Honourable Speaker, efficient mechanisation and transportation are critical to agriculture and in particular to the sugar industry. To bring efficiency to the transportation system, the industry is currently conducting gang rationalisation to organise both the manual and mechanical harvesting.

Our rail network needs upgrading and my Government have sought assistance from the Government of India to carry out preliminary studies. The railway experts are now in the process of conducting a detailed study to make recommendations to the rehabilitation of the rail networks, as a number of mechanical harvesters have significantly increased from 20 in 2016 to 59 in 2018.

There is a high demand for cage bins to transport billet cane. The FSC has already tested 20 cage bins to transport billet cane that trialled yielded good results. And so an additional 40 cage bins will be trialled in the 2019 season in other areas before more bins are introduced. Currently, approximately 30 percent of cane is mechanically harvested, mainly on flat land area. The industry aims to increase the total mechanically-harvested cane to more than 50 percent by 2020 and the industry is actively seeking appropriate mechanical harvesters for the hilly areas.

A mechanical harvester with potential to harvest on hilly areas has been identified from overseas and will be trialled in the 2019 season. To further promote efficiency in the transportation system, the FSC is also conducting a feasibility study to trial the trans-loading centres in one of the areas far from the mills. This will be replicated in other areas once its economic viability is known.

Honourable Speaker, the industry is now developing the National Sugar Industry Policy, which will set strategies and provide actions to be undertaken to create an increasingly economically viable, sustainable sugar industry. The processes for the National Sugar Industry Policy began with the development of draft policy framework and was approved by Cabinet this year.

Honourable Speaker, extensive consultation with stakeholders were undertaken between November, 2018 and February 2019. That, involved request for written submissions and face-to-face consultations with cane growers in all 38 sectors. During the consultations, all stakeholders provided suggestions and views on ways to improve the sugar sector. The Ministry of Sugar Industry is extremely grateful to all stakeholders, especially the growers for providing excellent suggestions on ways to move the industry forward.

Honourable Speaker, given that the number of initiatives that have already been undertaken, in addition to the National Sugar Industry Policy that has already been developed to provide a long term vision for the industry, there is absolutely no need to establish a bipartisan select committee on sugar to find solutions to revive the sugar industry. This Government is committed to making Fiji's sugar industry more efficient, not bogging it down with more bureaucracy.

I, therefore, do not support the motion. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

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

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I will not be long because there is a lot of people who want to speak. But, the Honourable Prime Minister talked about many initiatives. We heard that yesterday, we heard that last year, we heard that the previous year. It is just like what they say about the climate, you look outside. When it is raining, it is raining. The road, as you look outside, what is out there: potholes.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- The Fiji Sugar Corporation, just look at the output, 4 million tonnes to 1.3. So, what are all these initiatives doing? Nothing. It is sad that they cannot admit that they have killed this very important institution. It is like you have a dead body inside the house and they are crying. They are poking it on this side and this side, but it is dead. What you should do - call the Honourable Minister for Health, bring his stethoscope, put it in and check. He will tell you that it has been dead for a long time, take it and bury it. But they are still trying to poke this, poke on this side. What is wrong with you people? Seven initiatives, Honourable Prime Minister said, seven new policies to increase the budget. What for? We look at the outcome. New programmes, just like the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, 16 new species of rice; and the Honourable Minister for Forests, so many new species but no outcome, Sir.

(Laughter)

Outcome, outcome, outcome - what do we see? It is a reflection on lack of leadership. If you have this institution in the last 13 years and, we, the taxpayers have given to you, no we gave it to you as a gift - \$400 million. What have you done? Admit it - you have done nothing, we have the solution this side. You cannot do it, you should go out, that is the problem, leadership cannot resolve things.

The Honourable Prime Minister said, "New policies". For what? To increase the budget, for what? We want to look at the production. New programmes, cane planting grant, new cane access roads, output, output, output. What is the production? Going down. Four new joint ventures with the landowners, what does that achieve? In less than two years, more grant.

HON. MEMBER.- It is improving.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- What have you achieved?

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- It is improving, go back and check

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- We gave you 13 years, what have you done in 13 years? We gave you \$400 million, what have you done? Tell us, I am listening.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- We have done so much

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- What, what is it?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, do not carry

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Honourable Speaker, they want to talk to me, I talk to them.

(Laughter)

I can sit down now and you tell us are you improving or what?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, do not talk to the Honourable Member on the opposite side directly, come through the Speaker. I would like to hear what you have got to say as well. Now, you have the floor.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- But they are farming.

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

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- You can talk

HON. S. ADIMAITOGA.- You want me to talk.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- You have a Point of Order.

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

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I thought, Honourable Speaker, that she has a Point of Order.

HON. SPEAKER.- You have the floor.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- But the Point of Order is that, you did nothing, you achieved nothing, you should be out. We gave you 13 years to correct the problem and you are a politician. We do not need the Government, we do not have the money. Honourable Speaker, they refer all time to 1987. How many years ago was that? 1987, 2007, 2017 – 32 years.

For something that happened 32 years ago, and they have 13 years with all the money in this country, \$400 million given by us and the donors to just one thing - just improve that production, up. That is all that we are asking - \$4 million, 32 years ago, you would have been dead by then.

Because you are talking about the land, let us talk about the security of tenure. We understand very well what happens for 10-year leases, after that 30 year leases with provision, and the biggest problem for the farmers was security of tenure and our forefathers found a solution - the Agricultural Landowner and Tenant Act. That allowed for the production to increase and you are in the Government.

What solution have you done to address the security of the tenure, that you will need for the farmers to be happy, to feel secure in what they are doing and what did they do? They went to the landowners, the owners of the land the people that matter, not the Government.

What does the Government own? Nothing, but it destroyed that. You terminated the Great Council of Chiefs, you nationalised Native Land Trust Board, it is all under your control now. So, you have it all, it is like a big pot and you are looking at it, how do I do with this? And it is true.

The Honourable Pio Tikoduadua said that they are like a bull inside a China shop, they make a decision and shake like this (indicating), all the ones on this side fall down, then another decision shake like that (indicating), all the ones that side fall down, and those decisions cost \$400 million.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, I would like to see that move put into music.

(Laughter)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- And, it costs a lot of money. We have had enough.

HON. S. ADIMAITOGA.- A Point of Order. Honourable Speaker, can I add to that because he is talking about the cane production. He has been misleading us, Sir.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Honourable Speaker, can I please ask, “who is your Whip?” Whip, can you teach her the procedure and the process? You do not just stand up like that if you want to sing or to say something.

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order! You have the floor.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Yes, I have the floor. Remember that, if you want to stand up again, you can stand up.

(Laughter)

I am just asking the Whip on that side to teach the Honourable Member the procedures of what we do inside this House, Sir. We do not just stand up, if we are to sing, no. There are rules that we have to follow, and I was talking about the bull and that is what you are.

(Laughter)

The bull inside the China warehouse; shake like this or you are going to fall down.

(Laughter)

Then another problem, five initiatives, seven shake like this, all seven fall down. And that shaking has cost us \$400 million in the last 13 years and that is the amount we have given to them to make their decision. I think the problem with you is that you only have one mind, Honourable Attorney-General; he should share. If you listen to the other ideas, maybe they would have achieved something.

If you want to *talanoa*, come *talanoa* with us here.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Do not go and *talanoa* outside or to the UN. Come *talanoa* with us, we are here.

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER. – Order, order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- We are here to help you. We have found that in the last 13 years, you have achieved nothing, you have done nothing. They say, “This, this, this”; take a drive around and you will see all the leases there, all grown up because you do not listen to the farmers.

You go, sit down, drink grog and listen and then maybe you will might find something. Only one, not even two people, not even the Honourable Prime Minister, only the Honourable Attorney-General is making the decision and doing the thinking for all of you.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- No, I am serious . That is the picture, looking at it from this side of the House.

HON. SPEAKER.- I am going to limit the debate on this motion because, as you know, we have limited time today. I will give the floor to two speakers. I will give the floor to the Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

Yes, you are the Minister I am looking at. You are the only good looking one sitting there.

(Laughter)

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir, because the Honourable Member who raised the motion did talk a lot about statistics. But, let me just in my very short term contribute to the motion, just highlight a few things that contributed to the decline in statistics. One is land. Land is obvious; the non-renewal of land leases and that is what led this Government to establish CBUL in 2008 so that we can entice the landowners to renew leases.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, you do not plant cane in the water, you do not plant cane in the sea, you plant cane on land.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- And for you to produce, you must first have land. When land was not renewed, you cannot plant cane.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- So it was the non-renewal of land leases and everyone in this country knew that leases were not renewed when it was approaching 1997.

That brings me to my next point Honourable Speaker, Sir, when you are running a business, you need to re-invest in the business. I talked about agriculture the other day. For you to grow your business, you need to reinvest. Five years from the expiry of lease, Honourable Speaker, Sir, farmers are not putting money into it because they were not sure about their future.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Absolutely.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, although the figures look good in 18,000 farmers in 2006 and approximately \$3.2 million whatever but little did they know that farmers

were no longer reinvesting because they were not sure whether their leases were going to be renewed or not.

It did not just happen overnight. As we were approaching 1997, Honourable Speaker, Sir, I was part of the CBUL when it was established, these are facts. I am a sugar cane farmer myself, Honourable Speaker, Sir. I deal with the farmers.

I have got my farm in Natua Sector, go and see that Honourable Speaker, Sir, to the Honourable Members. So, non-renewal of leases, second was the lack of investment and third, farmers were neglected.

I say this again, Honourable Speaker, Sir, farmers were neglected. When we toured the sugar cane belt, particularly, I will talk about Seaqaqa. Farmers are people. They have feelings. They have needs. They have emotions. They have families. Most of the farmers in Seaqaqa, Honourable Speaker, Sir, left simply because women are not willing to come and marry them. These are the youths because they do not have electricity, because the roads are bad, because they do not have schools.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Alright, what have you done?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Yes, we have brought electricity to that area, Honourable Speaker, Sir. We have improved the roads. We are dealing with people because back then they were only interested in the farmers when it was cane crushing season. So, the cane was more important than the people.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- It's their politics.

HON. LT. COL. I. B. SERUIRATU.- So, they were interested in taking cane but these farmers are vegetable farmers, they are livestock farmers, they are sugarcane farmers and they contribute a lot to the economy. That was one of the biggest injustice that we can say by previous governments because they neglected the farmers. So, farmers cannot marry.

Honourable Speaker, the owner of Raiwaqa Transport is one good example. His first marriage did not work out. The lady, when she knew that he was a cane cutter from that area, she declined to marry him because he was from that area, because she knew that there was no electricity, no water and there was poor road conditions. We are dealing with people. We need to look after them first. It is about the goose and the egg. If you want them to produce then you have to look after them. So, that is the other thing, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

Let me talk about the farmers, the processes. We need to address these processes. Honourable Speaker, Sir, if you want are a new cane farmer (you do not qualify for anything), you have to struggle and this is why most of iTaukei farmers who wanted to take over the lease later realised that as new farmers, they did not have capital and this was one of the main contributing factors for new cane farmers.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, and this is why Government has come up with these initiatives that will see results as we progress. Rome was not built in one day, Honourable Speaker, Sir. We are progressing. Let me just quote the figures now. In Labasa when I was there as Commissioner Northern in 2008, we were hitting around 400,000 tonnes crushed canes. Now it is 672,000 tonnes; that is statistics. That is reality. We are increasing gradually but it will happen. Let us deal with the people first, as I have said in this House. Was it politicised? Yes, it was politicised. We are Government, we do not have a National Farmer's Union, we do not have a Fiji Cane Growers Association but kill the spider!

All along, Honourable Speaker, we have been dusting cobwebs, pleasing everyone. I have sad it in this House, if we want to progress, if we want the sugar industry to grow and continue to be sustainable in the long term, let us get rid of the cobweb by killing the spider.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- That is what this Government is doing, Honourable Speaker, Sir. Thank you.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

I thank the Honourable Minister for his Statement. Honourable Minister, I am very familiar with the Tailevu and the Verata areas, and I have not noticed any cane farms there. Where is this cane farm you are talking about?

(Laughter).

HON. SPEAKER.- I give the floor to the Honourable Prof. Biman Prasad. This is the last speaker for this item.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I do whole heartedly support the motion by my colleague, Honourable Pio Tikoduadua. Many of us would also recall, Honourable Speaker, the Honourable Prem Singh moved a similar motion on 10th February, 2017 in the last term of Parliament and that again was shot down by the current Government.

I also recall the passionate Honourable Minister Seruiratu, described the motion and NFP as spider's web in through the sugar industry. Five months before that, on 30th September, 2016, the Honourable Prime Minister had described my knowledge of the sugar industry as being so little that it could fit his pocket. We were even described by the Honourable Prime Minister in one of the international sugar conferences as a conga line of politicians and naysayers. Maybe, the Honourable Prime Minister's speech writers, Qorvis MSL Group forgot that the Honourable Prime Minister himself is a politician. All of you are politicians, you play politics too.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- I do not.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- You do. Let us be honest.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Honourable Speaker, we are all politicians. Let me also say that I find this Government, especially on the sugar industry, like other issues, it is the Government which is actually locked itself in a room with many mirrors, and they do not know which reflection is the genuine one and which is not.

The statistics on the sugar industry is quite glaring. The other day, I also described a disease and I think it is the characteristics of this Government, it is called cognitive dissonance, where this Government believes they have a view that they are doing all right for the sugar industry. They are doing these bits and pieces and that what is going to rescue the sugar industry and then they have that view or

hold that view very strongly. But the reality, Honourable Speaker, is something else. And when you get into that mode and when you hear something which is the reality, you actually get quite upset about it. So do not get upset.

The sugar industry has a problem and my colleague, I think in his Right of Reply, will talk about what are some of the problems right now. We have had many farmers calling us over the last two to three weeks, identifying the issues that are there, and I am sure my Honourable colleague will talk about them.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have heard this thing about land leases. Yes, I agree that we had issues of land lease all throughout the history of sugar industry. But we have had leaders who were able to negotiate, we have had leaders who did the *talanoa*, who actually resolved the issues. Yes, Mr. Speaker, Sir, leases were always a problem, but this Government has been in power for the last 13 years and the Honourable Prime Minister is the Chairman of the iTLTB.

I tell you, Honourable Speaker, that I have heard, in fact, the Permanent Secretary for Sugar, I am told is working very hard. In fact, in Nawaicoba, there has been a lot of issues about land lease renewals and there are several leases which have not been renewed which are being pushed by farmers to have them renewed, and those have not been renewed and I am saying

(Honourable Government Member interject)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I agree that Honourable Niko Nawaikula might have been responsible, you can say that.

(Laughter)

You can agree that in the 1970s or in the 1980s we had led but the buck now stops with the Honourable Prime Minister because he has been the Chairman of the iTLTB over the last 13 years. This is what I am saying that the leases are still not being renewed, Honourable Prime Minister, you find that out. I think it is absolutely vital that we do not stoke up the past, yes, we know the past, we all know about it.

(Honourable Government Members interject)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I was at the forefront of writing about land lease problems in this country.

(Honourable Government Members interject)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- If you go and look at the articles that I wrote, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and suggested some solutions. In fact, I have talked about the concept of the master lease, it was going to be accepted by the last Government. In fact, they had already started the process, so what we are saying is, I am standing here, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and offering a very genuine hand to the Government...

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- It is not about politics, it is about your knowledge of the industry, it is about the ability to get people together.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- They are not together.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- They might have voted for you because they are together with you on the sugar industry.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- They know the problems.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Old *talanoa*.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, ...

HON. SPEAKER.- You have the floor.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Let us not stoke the negative past.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Let us have this Select Committee, and I am happy to be on that Committee, I am happy to praise the Government after that. I am happy to give all the credit to the Government of that Committee.

(Laughter)

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I can tell you what this Government has been doing, and this is why this debate is very important, Mr. Speaker, Sir, very important because I tell you the benefit of this debate ...

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- ... is this, while they oppose everything we say but then after a period of time, they go quietly and actually try and do some of those things so we still get the benefit.

I will give you an example, when I suggested in 2016, I had actually moved a motion during the Budget Debate. I said “We should get a minimum granted price of \$90 then now it is up to \$85”, but soon after that, they actually went and got the fertilisers subsidy, the weedicide subsidy then as the Honourable Prime Ministers said, “We want to reduce the cost”, meaning they actually listened to us and got something done for the farmers to increase the production.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- So, Honourable Speaker, even if they do not support this Motion, there will be some external benefits coming out of this. But I do want to urge the Honourable Prime Minister, there is no harm, you are not going to lose anything. In fact, you are going to gain by forming this Select Committee, getting a group of Members of Parliament to steer the industry in the right direction

and, we, on this side of the House are happy to be part of that and support the Government's initiative to promote the Sugar Industry because it is very important, Honourable Speaker.

Already there are signs of declining the economy in the sugar areas. That is the reality, they do not want to believe that but the reality is that, if you put money into the sugar industry, not giving the money to people through cards which ends up in the pockets of these big businesses which they did to get votes in the last Elections. That is not the best way to do that, the best way is to put the money into the sugar industry. The multiplier effect of the sugar industry will generate the economic activity in all the sectors of the economy, and it will help us, help this country to address the declining economic activities in the rural areas, especially in the sugar belt, Honourable Speaker, thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member.

You have the floor for your Right of Reply, Honourable Tikoduadua.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- I thank you, Honourable Speaker. Honourable Speaker, I would like to reinforce that the offer is on the table and it is up to the Government to pick it up. But, Honourable Speaker, I would have thought that there would have been some decent contributions from the other side, but, unfortunately all I heard was three words, Honourable Speaker, 'Excuses, excuses, excuses', 13 years of excuses.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- If they listened a little bit, I am sure, in terms of this motion, I do not think, Honourable Speaker, we will be here debating this issue again next year, because by then I am sure there will be enough solutions to our sugarcane industry, then we do not have to play politics over it again.

But, in my initial speech, I made references to declining statistics. I was not going to raise it, but I thought given all the walls that are coming up from the other end in trying to exclude the spirit of *Talanoa* in this House, let me give you a short *Talanoa* of statistics - 13 years. I am talking about the number of active growers again.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Oh, no, listen, you might learn something.

The statistics are (2006-2018): 2006 - \$18,636; 2018 - \$12,000; Total cane crushed, \$3.226 - 2006; 2018 - \$1.6 million; Total sugar production - \$310,140; 2018 - \$160,204.

The facts do not lie, like Maikeli Radua says, "If we want to say something about the weather, just look outside." This is the outside, I am telling you, Honourable Speaker, and this is the issue why we thought we would bring this motion before the House, so that it can treat a sickness that they have no solution to.

I urge Government today to take some responsibility in terms of what is coming across. I mean, my good colleague said that in the last 13 years to be dusting cobwebs. And I assure him, if you keep dusting cobwebs, it will take 26 years to get up to the level of productivity under the current innovations that they have. We have one solution, and it is before the House today, Honourable Speaker. Only Government needs to take the time to listen and accept it, and the solution is right here - a select committee of the House, a bipartisan approach that will give our farmers, the sugar industry and the Fijian people the best solution there is to sugar and make it sweet again. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote.

The Question is:

That Parliament agrees to establish a bipartisan select committee on sugar to collectively find solutions to revive the sugar industry to ensure it remains a vibrant industry economically, benefiting all stakeholders.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of “Ayes” and “Noes”)

There being opposition, the Parliament will now vote.

Votes cast:

Ayes	-	23
Noes	-	26
Not Voted	-	2

The motion is therefore defeated.

Honourable Members, we will move on. I hope the Honourable Members are not having problems with their telephones. We will move on to the next item.

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

Government Assistance for Farms (Question No. 129/2019)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment explain how the Ministry has assisted in the bovine TB-Infected Farms in rehabilitation?

HON. DR. M. REDDY (Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment).- Honourable Speaker, I want to thank the Honourable Member for asking this question primarily because of the importance of the dairy industry as well the beef cattle industry for Fiji's economy.

Honourable Speaker, earlier this week I did speak on this topic of TB and brucellosis and I did mention about how important the dairy industry is to Fiji and the Fijian economy whereby we import nearly 85 percent of dairy products and there is a huge room to increase production in Fiji, in both beef meat as well as cattle for supply of dairy products. There is massive demand for beef within Fiji as well as in other countries and now we have just got to know that there is a breakout of a major disease amongst pigs in China, and therefore there will be a shift in demand for beef production in China as well. If that market opens up, there will be a massive demand for beef products, not only in Fiji but outside as well.

We need to prepare ourselves to respond to demand within Fiji as well as demand for dairy and beef products from outside Fiji as well, and hence this programme that the Ministry started five years ago in terms of eradicating our cattle industry from these two diseases; TB and brucellosis which is also zoonotic, meaning the potential of humans getting infected primarily through consumption of infected meat as well as consumption of raw milk.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, we have got five programmes that we have mounted to eradicate these farms with cattle infected with TB and brucellosis. I did allude to last time that it took Australia 40 years and millions of dollars to eradicate their cattle industry from TB and brucellosis and saying that, it is not something that we can do immediately within a year or so.

At the moment, we are going around testing the farms and by law, we have the right to enter any farm, test the animal and then remove that animal. Of course, last year, Honourable Members would note that we brought in an amendment to the legislation to change the compensation rate to the farmers. At the moment, as alluded to earlier this week, we have got a compensation rate of a \$4 per kg carcass that we pay to farmers whereby we pick-up all the cost of transporting the particular animal to the abattoir. The abattoir picks up the cost of slaughtering and we pay the farmer directly (immediately on the spot) that particular amount based on the weight of the carcass.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have got five programmes. The Livestock Rehabilitation Programme and linked to that Livestock Rehabilitation Programme, we also have establishment of TB and brucellosis free farms. So, once we are able to identify a particular farm which is totally free of brucellosis then we kind of hive off that particular farm, ensure that the fences improve, provide support to improve the fence of the farm so that we do not have animals from the farm going out and coming back in, getting infected and then coming back in as well as preventing any infected animal outside getting into the farm.

We also have the Dairy Industry Support Programme, once we have established TB and brucellosis free farms, we can then assist the farmer to expand the number of livestock in that particular farm.

We also have the Dairy Development Programme and the B-Tech (Biotechnology) Programme. A total of \$14million was spent in that particular programme over the last six years.

So these five programmes are the Improved Feed and Calf-Rearing Programme where we provide calf milk replacer and feed subsidy to the farmers so that they can improve the quality of their young calf which will later on contribute to improve productivity in terms of milk production. We have got the TB reactor programme which is going around now.

We have increased, we now have four fully qualified vets and then we have got a number of para-vets throughout Fiji. We are looking at recruiting more vets once FNU first lot, I believe probably next year, the first lot of graduates will be coming out and we will be employing a number of graduates out of that first lot that comes out. So at the moment, we are now expanding to testing for potential reactors outside Viti Levu and Vanua Levu. There is a team out in Vanua Levu as well and those animals which will be found to react positively to TB and brucellosis, they will be immediately culled out and taken to abattoir and the farmer will be compensated.

We also have, as I alluded to earlier on disease free farms which were established in different areas and these farms will also become a source of animals for other farms who could buy from this farm. This farm will be certified, animals will be certified and then the other farms where these animals will go, we will try to fence off that particular farm, secure that farm and then later we will label that farm and that farm can source animal from this TB and brucellosis-free farm.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, I think I had alluded to earlier in this sitting about our Breed Improvement Programme both through artificial insemination as well as embryo transfer. And I did allude to that while there is a ban by Biosecurity Authority of Fiji for good reasons of importing live animals from New Zealand and Australia due to the discovery of a new strain of disease there which we do not have in Fiji at the moment. We cannot import live animals so we want to get new breeds, high-yielding ones and I did mention last year that we are looking at importing senepol breed of cattle which has two to three times high yield as well as milk production.

At the moment we have in the Western Division about seven to eight litres per day and in Central Division, we have about four litres per day, milk per animal. We are looking at about 20 litres to 25 litres per day which is what the potential is for the improved breed that we have got through embryo transfer. We did the embryo transfer for 144 cows with the success rate of 52 percent. So we have about 72 calves now, this improved breed will take time. The embryo transfer process gets an animal in production in about three to four years' time. It is a full proof process and it is 100 percent sure that there will be no transfer or transmission of disease because we are getting already fertilized egg in embryo form and then inseminating in our cows here who get impregnated with the rate of about 52 percent and then the cows give birth. So, we have got about 72 calves now.

We will be revealing a major plan in terms of revitalising a scheme which was dead some time back, a very famous scheme but we will announce later on. We are now at the moment rehabilitating that particular scheme right in the interior of Sigatoka, but we will give more details later on and that will be the place where we will hived out to keep these animals. This will be a breeding station and from there we will take it out to other places.

Sir, we have also a scheme to restock those cleaned up and hived out farms. So, Honourable Speaker, we also have spent about \$3.7 million over the last 6 years to support dairy development to the existing dairy farms and we have contributed toward farm advisory and training programmes. Honourable Speaker Sir, a total of 270 farmers have been assisted over the last 6 years with respect to the various programmes I have outlined. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Nawaikula.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- If it takes Australia 14 years ...

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- 40 years.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- ... 40 years for the industry to recover, how many years do you expect that for Fiji, for its industry to recover?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Honourable Speaker, it looks the Honourable Member is not listening carefully. First he said 14 years, I said 40 years.

Secondly, he said "industry to recover." I did not say industry to recover, I said 40 years to eradicate TB and brucellosis. So, now from that your question would be. How long will it take us to rehabilitate the industry? It is a simultaneous process. As I had explained, it is not that we are trying to totally clean up and then we will start rehabilitation, rehabilitation is happening simultaneously. While we are cleaning up a particular area, we are securing that particular farm, then we are labelling that particular farm and then assisting that particular farm to become a supplier for breeder bulls as well as breeding cattle. So, it is happening simultaneously. We are looking at probably getting the numbers back in another six or seven years' time, back to where we were in terms of number of cattle and then in 15 years' time, we are looking at a major increase in milk supply as well as our beef meat supply.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you Honourable Minister. Honourable Kuridrani you have the floor.

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Mr. Speaker Sir, a supplementary question. I thank the Honourable Minister for Agriculture for his answers to the questions. My question Mr. Speaker is, when can the Honourable Minister confirm to this House the time in which we can completely eradicate this disease because according to the data from MPI, since 2010 there were only 17 heads of cattle that were infected with TB but in 2014, there were 721 cattle? So, to me that seems to be nothing going on to stop these diseases.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member you have asked your question. Honourable Minister you have the floor.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Honourable Speaker Sir, just now I outlined the activities that we are undertaking to deal with this particular problem and then the Honourable Member is saying that there is nothing going on. I just cannot reconcile those two arguments that he is putting forward but having said that, we just cannot give a figure in terms of the number of years that will take us to eradicate because we have not tested the entire stock of animals in Fiji. There are animals also in the interior as well so you cannot...

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- No, we are testing.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Honourable Speaker Sir, at a particular point in time we did not even have a single veterinary officer, now we have got four veterinary officers on our payroll.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- *Areh*, there were not vets in Fiji.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- So, Honourable Speaker, Sir, the answer to his question is that, at the moment we are undertaking, testing of all the animals, once this is complete, , once we have a full picture of the level of infection then we can give an approximate timeline in terms of totally eradicating TB and brucellosis in Fiji. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. We will move onto the next question. I give the floor to the Honourable Viliame Gavoka to ask Question 130/2019. You have the floor, Sir.

Status of Nabou Green Energy Limited
(Question No. 130/2019)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Disaster Management and Meteorological Services inform Parliament on the current status of the Nabou Green Energy Limited?

HON. J. USAMATE (Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Disaster Management and Meteorological Services).-Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I would like to thank the Honourable Member for his question. It is an interesting question because Nabou Green Energy Limited is actually a limited liability company, it is not actually part of Government, but it is a limited liability company that is an independent power producer that actually has an agreement to sell power to Energy Fiji Limited.

Currently, it was in operation, it started providing electricity to the EFL grid in July 2017 until late last year. So as of now, this company is currently not providing electricity to EFL as per the initial agreement that they had and they were supposed to have supplied around 15 million units of electricity, but until the time they stopped, they had provided around 16 million units of electricity. There are some penalty clauses from EFL's side but I am not too sure if that has been imposed. But that is the current status, currently it is not operating in terms of providing power to EFL.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Supplementary question, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- You have the floor.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Honourable Speaker, in its initial set-out, Tropic Woods was given shareholding in this company to the tune of 25 per cent which we believe they have returned to the company. It was given to them for free. Can we be given the reason why Tropic Woods who returned 25 per cent shares in a \$100 million company for free? Given to them for free, why would they return it, Honourable Speaker?

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

HON. J. USAMATE.- Can I just clarify, I did not get that issue about return? To return what?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.-Honourable Speaker, it was reported in the media that Tropic Woods no longer holds that 25 percent share in the company. Can they explain what they did with it?

HON. J. USAMATE.- It was a commercial decision on their part and they gave it up.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Sanjay Kirpal, you have the floor.

HON. S.S KIRPAL.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. My supplementary question to the Honourable Minister; is there any timeline given on when the company is expected to commence operations again? Thank you.

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

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I thank the Honourable Member for his question. As I mentioned, it is a private company so we cannot really say what is actually going to happen within the workings of that company. But the news that I have been provided for that they may well be in operation again within two months or so. I cannot vouch for that because as I said, they are a private company.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Ro Filipe Tuisawau, you have the floor.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Just another supplementary question. Thank you to the Honourable Minister for the explanation. The Economic Affairs Committee actually visited the plant and one of the main issues was the supply of biomass which is wood.

HON. MEMBER.- Question?

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Coming to it. My question is related to the supply of wood, the Honourable Minister of Forests and the Honourable Minister for iTaukei Affairs, because the solution could be for these two to work together and work with the Provincial Councils temporarily until they get their supply going again.

My question to the two Ministers if they could facilitate that, work with the Provincial Councils in Nadroga, Ba and the surrounding areas to facilitate the supply of biomass and yes, if they have plans to do that to facilitate the supply of wood chips for the fuel?

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

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the targets that we have in Fiji is that by 2036, all of our energy is renewable energy, so the development of this organisation was a good one because it is biomass, they are producing electricity out of timber, et cetera. Also, planting so that you have a total zero emission, the amount of carbon that they put in the atmosphere, they plant enough trees to suck it back down, so that is a great sort of development, but it is an independent power producer when they set up the shareholding, they did it to make sure that they are adequate in looking at their source of fuel. Government will always be there to try to help out and make that happen. We would like to see more renewable energy come on board, and some are coming up for the solar - 5 megawatts that we have down in Qeleloa, this one was supposed to be a 12 megawatt plant, we welcome that.

But Government is always there to try to assist but remember, it is an independent power producer, it is a private company. We are there but they are a private company. As much as possible, we will try to assist them where we can, thank you.

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

HON. A.T. NAGATA.- A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker, Sir: Who are all the foreign and local stakeholders to this company?

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

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- It is a private company, they do not know.

HON. J. USAMATE.- It is easily available. For the shareholding of this company, there were three Korean entities.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Do not simplify.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Three Korean entities: GIMCO, GS Power, Mirae Asset (of Daewoo Securities) and as mentioned, it was Tropik Wood Industries Limited that has given up its shareholding.

HON. SPEAKER.- We will move on, and I give the floor to the 5th Oral Question for today for Honourable Aseri Radrodoro to ask Question No. 132/2019.

Poor Road Conditions
(Question No. 132/2019)

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

Given the current poor road conditions, damages to bridges, flooding and landslides happening around Fiji during recent heavy rain spells, can the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Disaster Management and Meteorological Services advise Parliament whether Government will consider reviewing the current outsourcing arrangement undertaken by the Fiji Roads Authority?

HON. SPEAKER.- I give the floor to the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Disaster Management and Meteorological Services.

HON. J. USAMATE (Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Disaster Management and Meteorological Services).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I would like to thank the Honourable Member for his question. This is a bit of a funny question. I was thinking about it this morning as I was coming in. There is a ridiculous assertion. There is a ridiculous supposition in this question.

If you look at the question, it is suggesting that all of these problems that we have, poor road conditions, damages to drain, damages to bridges, flooding and landslide - all of these are happening in Fiji because we outsourced. That is a ridiculous assertion, all these problems did not happen because we outsourced, problems happened because of something else, obviously if you take away the outsourcing, does that mean all these problems will disappear?

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

HON. J. USAMATE.- That is why I say that it is a ridiculous assertion, it is a ridiculous supposition but despite that

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Point of Order. Standing Order 45, when answering questions, they should address the substance of the question but he is explaining the question. He should answer the question.

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

HON. J. USAMATE.- I think the people of Fiji have the right to know if questions are ridiculous, that is what I was going to say but in a nutshell, knowing that the status of the roads, the landslides, it is not because of the fact that we are outsourced or did not outsource, no, we do not have any plans to stop the outsource.

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

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. The quick question to the Honourable Minister, it is about value for money. This Government has a very poor track record on value for money on

HON. J. USAMATE.- Where is that proof?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Is your Ministry going to undertake an analysis of the value that we are getting from spending these large amounts of money on infrastructure? Has there been any analysis done?

I do not think the Public Accounts Committee has looked at that concept, but I think it is the responsibility of the Honourable Minister, and I am asking the Honourable Minister whether he has plans to do that.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Such an analysis, Mr. Speaker, is done every year when we do a budget, we ask ourselves, “How did they use the money last year; did we get the kind of outcomes that we need?” We consider all of that to take that into account. I expect also as a Minister that that is the kind of analysis that the Board of Directors does, because they are there for good governance. So the Board of Directors should be doing that analysis and I as the Minister want to make sure that they do that.

Every year they ask for money in the budget process, all of that needs to be taken into account. The amount of money that we give, are we getting adequate amount of outcomes that reflects the amount of money that is there. So, this is an annual exercise that is done all the time. Government’s interest it to make sure that every dollar that we invest into an infrastructure, produces the right sort of outcomes.

HON. MEMBER.- Very glib.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Very glib? This is what I am saying, this is what we do every year because we are a Government that makes sure that we do the right thing for the people of this country.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Nawaikula.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Honourable Speaker, the question is saying that those that you are outsourcing to, are not doing their work. Do you see the need to change that?

HON. SPEAKER.- Ask your question.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Change that, that is what he implies. Those that you are outsourcing to, are not doing their jobs because of the potholes. So do you see the need to change them?

HON. J. USAMATE.- Once again, there is another ridiculous assertion there. The question was very basically trying to say that the cause of your potholes is the outsourcing, what a ridiculous assertion. But I would like to say that the FRA has done and has been doing a lot of things. They have contracts now to replace the 17 most critically deteriorated bridges in Fiji, that is currently underway and they will be replaced within the next 18 months. We are now using in-house teams where FRA is working on the design of the next 12 seriously deteriorated bridges. This is in accordance with the kind of things that the Honourable Tikoduadua was talking about.

It is not practical for us to work on more than 15 to 20 bridge replacements at any one time because this will overload the bridge resources that we have in Fiji. With regards to landslides, the current view is that these should be proactively managed and only when there is clear evidence of signs of an imminent slip, or otherwise they would be managed reactively.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Will you change that?

HON. J. USAMATE.- No, because we believe that we need to manage them, we need to make sure the Quality Assurance Management Systems are in place to deliver the right kind of outcome. FRA is now finalising due diligence in conjunction with ADB and the World Bank will be reconstructing the worst sections of Kings Road, for a total length of 55 kilometres between Ba and Korovou. This work will also include reconstruction of roads, footpaths and drainage through the many villages on the route. This work will start in December 2019 and will run for 15 months.

There are several roads within the greater Suva area that were severely damaged in the recent storm. Many of these sections have now been severely degraded, that they are no longer manageable using isolated pothole repairs. The FRA has, this week, finalised the arrangements to bring a second contractor to assist the Central Division Maintenance contractor in carrying out carriage way repairs. This

initiative is not the result of any inability from the contractor, it is simply that the scale of the task is beyond what a single contractor can deliver in a timely manner.

Over the past 18 months, FRA has received over 100 kilometres of our arterial road network and is finalising a readiness to deliver a further 125 kilometres over the next 18 months. Government's position on improving roads is expected to boost Fiji's socio-economic sectors. Government has signalled its commitment to reform. This has been backed up by political commitment, with unprecedented levels of investments to deliver significant improvements and that will continue to be our focus. There are some problems with the roading infrastructure, our focus is to make sure that we will be able to repair them to an extent that they will last longer to provide service to the people of this country.

HON. SPEAKER.- We will move on. The sixth Oral Question for today is by the Honourable Vijendra Prakash. You have the floor, Sir.

Rice Production in the Northern Division
(Question No. 133/2019)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment provide an update on the progress of the maintenance of Irrigation Schemes in the Northern Division in support of local rice production?

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

Honourable Speaker, there is a plethora of research that demonstrates that the irrigated agriculture provides substantial difference in terms of yield relative to non-irrigated agriculture. The Honourable Prime Minister, just this morning, mentioned about the Sugar Industry Research Station testing or finding out irrigated sugarcane farms vis-à-vis non-irrigated and how difference in yield would be made through putting in sugar for farms under irrigation.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, unfortunately, we lost the irrigation scheme in Navua and Nausori which were well established sometime back and we have lost that particular capital infrastructure there but we now still have Irrigation Schemes in the Northern Division, particularly in Dreketi, Nasarowaqa, Korokadi, Droca, Naruwai, and these are basically demarcated to grow wetland rice.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, we regularly maintain this particular Irrigation Scheme and I think I alluded to sometime back that we would want to make it very clear to the farmers that these Irrigation Schemes are dedicated for rice plantations and therefore there will not be any other agricultural activity happening there because we are making massive investment in terms of maintaining this Irrigation Scheme. I saw some time back that these farmers downloaded or acquired fencing material to raise goat and sheep, et cetera, but that area is demarcated for rice farming and they cannot do that as per the Irrigation Act, they cannot do any other activity either than plant wetland rice.

Honourable Speaker, as I said, we are investing and maintaining those schemes and we want to ensure that we fully utilise that investment that we are making to produce rice. At the moment, we are only able to supply about 15 percent of the total rice requirement in Fiji for importing the rest of the rice to most people in Vietnam and other parts of the Asian countries.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, we have to maintain on a regular basis these Irrigation Schemes. It is very expensive to maintain these schemes because they have got all the capital infrastructure which can get eroded, degenerated overtime. The last time when we gave a contract in 2018, we gave a contract worth \$987,246 to a particular contractor to do various physical work over the period of 300 days. I want to inform the House today that the work was completed in April this year to our satisfaction in all this to bring this particular Irrigation Scheme and the infrastructure to a standard where it fully discharges its objective as per our expectation. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Jale Sigarara, you have the floor.

HON. J. SIGARARA.- A supplementary question to the Honourable Minister. Can the Honourable Minister provide details on what were the works done at the schemes?

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

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, while I thank the Honourable Members for asking the question, I will provide the details of the work involved in de-silting of drains at:

- Baleyaga;
- Dreketi;
- Nasarawaqa;
- Dreketi Stage 2 and Stage 3;
- Tausa;
- Matasawalevu;
- Vatubogi;
- Dreketi Stage 3; and
- Lekutu (Approximately 130 kilometres).

We did de-silting at Dreketi Irrigation Scheme and the Malomalau Creek - six kilometres. We did excavation of new drains at:

- Nasarawaqa;
- Dreketi Stage 2;
- Baleyaga;
- Dreketi Stage 1 and Stage 3;
- Vatubogi;
- Tiliva;
- Soti 2
- Naqaraniqoli;
- Matasawalevu; and
- Tausa.

Approximately 13 kilometre. We did the excavation and disposal of silk material for Boroboro, Dreketi Stage 1 and Stage 2, Nasama, Korokadi areas - approximately 2 kilometres. We also undertook provision of access road in this Irrigation Scheme at:

- Boroboro;
- Dreketi Stage2;
- Korokadi; and
- Droca.

There was approximately levelling of both 45,000 cubic meter of soil and graveling 1,200 cubic metres. We did a construction of 12 canal check gate structures at:

- Dreketi;
- Soti;
- Matasawalevu;
- Korokadi; and
- Droca.

We did boulder protection of the weir at Naibulu. This weir got damaged and there was a real danger of losing that particular weir and then the water going down to the storage area in Nadevu. So we did that work and fixed the weir. I personally inspected that work. We did the upgrade of 20 sluice gates and structure of Dreketi, Boroboro and Nasarawaqa Scheme. We did the construction of two canals structure at Dreketi, we did clearing of a number of grown trees at Dreketi, Korokadi, Nasarawaqa and Boroboro.

We did rehabilitation of existing irrigation and drainage structures in Bakali, Korokadi and Soti. We did quite a bit upgrade of outfall structure and maintenance of floodgates doors at the Dreketi, Korokadi and Droca Scheme. We did rehabilitation of the gate and structure at Dreketi, rehabilitation of six irrigation and drainage structures in Nacula, Droca, main gate and Korokadi Schemes, we did strong pitching as well as soil filling. I thank you Honourable Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. We will move on to the next question. Honourable Joseph Nand to ask Question 131/2019. You have the floor.

Renovation and Maintenance Work at Nadi Hospital
(Question No. 131/2019)

HON. J.N. NAND asked the Government upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services provide an update on the renovation and maintenance work carried out so far at the Nadi Hospital?

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE (Minister for Health and Medical Services).- Thank you very much Honourable Speaker, Sir, for the opportunity to answer the question. And also thank you to the Honourable Member for the question.

Nadi Subdivisional Hospital is an important hospital to the Government of Fiji and to the people of Fiji. It has 75 beds and looks after 300 patients that come every day to utilise this facility and the coverage that it does which includes its Health Centres and Nursing Stations cover the 96,000 of our Fijians along the greater Nadi area. The refurbishment works at Nadi Subdivisional Hospital started on 21st May, 2018 by a contractor called, "Cope Construction Limited", as per usual a Government Tender Board approved project.

And in accordance with the contract, the contractor has completed the Maternity Building, the Main General Outpatient's Department, Women's Ward, Children's Ward and Paying Wards including the walkways. In other words, that is about 90 percent of the work that has already been done and 10 percent is still left to be finished and we believe this would be done by August. There was a slight delay in the project as expected, because as you know, Honourable Speaker, the hospitals cannot be closed for repairs, refurbishments and renovations. So they work hand in hand with the doctors and the nurses in making sure that they are using available spaces, but, also ensuring that the services were not compromised to the people of Fiji. There were instances where the contractor had to work between

10.00 p.m. and 5.00 a.m. to ensure that in the morning, we were able to utilise that space to continue to provide the work that we needed to do.

The refurbished facility is not only nice and pleasant to see, but, it is also very comfortable with places that have been air-conditioned, to the comfort of all Fijians who utilise that facility. We expect the entire renovation and maintenance cost to be in the tune of \$3.5 million and the contractor, however, will remain visible at the site till the end of the year to ensure that the project is completed well, and if there are any contract defects liability during this period, they will deal with it accordingly.

I also would like to thank the whole Nadi community for the patience during this period and some of them have actually been writing through to us and saying that they are now enjoying the new facility and also the comfort and the ambience which the Facility gives.

I would like to finish, Honourable Speaker, on the question but just on a separate note by informing this august House that on Saturday last week the Fiji Emergency Medical Assistance Team (FEMAT), we became the 15th nation in the world to be emergency medical team-certified by the World Health Organisation (WHO), so thank you very much, Honourable Speaker, for that question and I hope that the answer will suffice.

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

HON. P.W. VOSANIBOLA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. I rise to ask a supplementary question to the Minister for Health. As we approach the final month of 2018 to 2019 Financial Year, my question: what other health facilities the hospitals in Fiji have undergone through renovation and maintenance works?

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

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Thank you very much, Honourable Member, for that question. It is a bit of a blindside but anyway, of the top of my mind, I have just seen pictures come through this morning from the Nabouwalu Hospital. It is nearing completion, and we have also had repairs all around the Western Divisions so Nanukuloa Health Centre, Nasau is actually beginning repairs very soon. Come around to Tavua, it is going through and probably finishing in the next two months the major repairs that are happening in Tavua Hospital. We have been doing some repair works in Lautoka Hospital, as you are aware that the new Emergency Department is now open and is probably one of the best Emergency Departments in Fiji and also in the Pacific, outside of Australia and New Zealand.

We have also made sure that we have done the work that are needed to be done. After the fire, we now have two vibrant theatres that are working. There was also work that has been done in Sigatoka which is nearing completion. As you might be aware, we also have the Vatumali Hospital in Keiyasi which is due to be opened at the beginning of next year. Also the new Maternity Wing at the CWM Hospital is a new project. We have budgeted quite a fair bit of money towards maintenance and repairs and those are ongoing projects that we will continue to do. They have been budgeted from this year's financial budget, within the budget, and they will continue on until next year. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, we will move on. I will give the floor for the next question to be asked.

Shortage of Counsellors in Schools
(Question No. 134/2019)

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

Can the Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts explain to Parliament the reasons for the shortage of professional counsellors in schools?

HON. R.S. AKBAR (Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The Honourable Prime Minister and the Honourable Members of Parliament, I thank the Honourable Member for this question. It is a very important question, Mr. Speaker, Sir, of course, there is a shortage and we recognise that. There is a shortage of qualified counsellors and, of course, this is due to the part of our Higher Education institutions not providing qualifications in counselling. We have also noted a lack of interest in our students to become counsellors.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is a specialist area and if we do not have fully qualified counsellors, we may end up doing more damage than good. The Fiji National University offers a Post Graduate Diploma in Mental Health and Post Graduate Certificate in Mental Health Nursing which are more aligned to the medical profession.

Obviously, neither of these qualifications support our needs in school. The Fiji National University, however, offers some units in counselling in the Bachelor of Education qualification.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the University of Fiji does not offer any counselling qualification. The University of the South Pacific, through its Pacific TAFE offers Certificate IV in Counselling. In 2018, 26 trainees graduated as they do one or two courses per semester. In 2019, we had 95 trainees which are registered as Counsellors which is indeed good news.

The Australia Pacific Training Coalition (APTC) offers a Diploma in Counselling which is on the Australian standard. In 2018, 18 Fijians qualified with the Diploma in Counselling, with another 20 enrolled for this year.

The Ministry has also enrolled this year, 34 teachers and officials to do Diploma in Counselling, short courses to help address the shortage in schools in the short term. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry is competing with Higher Education institutions and NGOs to employ a small number of qualified counsellors which currently exist.

The Ministry of Health and Medical Services as well as the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation both outsource counselling to NGOs. Of course, we will need to work with the Minister of Health and Medical Services and the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation to consider the need and establish a professional council for counsellors as health professionals, and to maintain standards of delivery of safeguarding professional ethics.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the Ministry, we have 41 officials who have some kind of qualifications in counselling. Clearly, this is insufficient to cater for nearly 240,000 students spread across the country. However, we do note that the schooling system seemed to be responsible for solving all societies' challenge and I continue to say that parents and guardians have a key role to play in the children's lives, education and discipline. We, at the Ministry will continue to support them in this endeavour.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Substance Abuse Advisory Council had three counsellors in 2018. They trained 137 teachers in basic counselling skills last year and we have two counsellors working for the Ministry in the Western and Eastern Divisions. A question that may arise, what is the Ministry doing to address this shortage? We are addressing these shortages in three ways. The first one, with the support from the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), we are in the process of appointing service-providers to meet our counselling needs, of course, on a short-term basis.

With the support from APTC and funding from DFAT, we have offered the opportunity to 34 teachers and officers to upgrade their qualifications in counselling. We have developed the job description for counsellors and we will advertise them as soon as we finalise the assessment of how many counsellors we can appoint to meet full needs on a district basis or cluster basis.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we will continue to encourage our officers to undertake further trainings, either to get or to upgrade their counselling qualification through in-service trainings and, of course, through the Civil Service Scholarship system and by offering Toppers Scholarships in this area, and I thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. Honourable Salote Radrodro.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, and I thank the Honourable Minister for all those promises which we hope will be achieved in regards to the training of the teachers which is going to take time. The question is: what is the immediate solution in regards to increasing the budget and work with NGOs like Empower Pacific to be able to provide the counsellors to meet the urgent need that the schools are faced with right now. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

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

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, sometimes I am amazed if whether Members are listening to the questions they ask and the answers given. I have just mentioned three ways in which we are addressing this shortage. Yes, with the support from Australian DFAT, we are in the process of appointing service providers to meet our counselling needs on a short term basis, and I have just mentioned that we will be working with the Ministry of Health and Medical Services and the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation because they are outsourcing counselling services, as mentioned by Honourable Member, the Empower Pacific and the other service providers. So that is what is going to happen and the Honourable Member did mention these things as promises, no, it is already happening.

We are training our teachers, we are upgrading, yes. The statistics that I have provided, Mr. Speaker, Sir, clearly indicate that these are not promises, these are actions that the Ministry has taken. This is already happening. Thank you.

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

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I thank the Honourable Minister for her response. Just a simple question to her and the question is: are these positions going to be established in terms of the counsellor positions in schools and appropriately remunerated?

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

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- We want an answer, you are not the Minister of Education.

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and thank you, Honourable Leawere, for the question. Of course, these positions would be established and remunerated as with other positions that exist within the Ministry. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister. We will move on to the next question. I give the floor to the Honourable Sanjay Kirpal to ask Question No. 135/2019. You have the floor.

School Employment Exposure Programme (SEEP)
(Question No. 135/2019)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity, Industrial Relations, Youth and Sports explain to Parliament what the School Employment Exposure Programme (SEEP) is about?

HON. P. K. BALA (Minister for Employment, Productivity, Industrial Relations, Youth and Sports).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to answer the question raised by the Honourable Sanjay Kirpal.

Mr. Speaker Sir, this Programme, the journey began in November last year and to date, Sir, 248 students took advantage of this Programme.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the School Employment Exposure Programme (SEEP) is a two weeks workplace attachment for our students with the aim of giving them experience in work readiness and help students nurture their skills needed in any work environment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is highlighted in the National Employment Policy Priority 1, which is to create more opportunities for young people aged 15 years to 24 years to follow clear pathways from education to employment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Programme also provide students with an insight into the real world of work and gain firsthand experience on work readiness.

Mr. Speaker Sir, we have partners to run this Programme and I would also like to acknowledge the Fiji Higher Education Commission, the Ministry of Education, the Fiji Commerce and Employers Federation, training providers and industry partners.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the students who took part in these two programmes one in the Central Division and the other one in the Western Division, they were also given allowance. The reason why I am highlighting this is because I know the Opposition will jump on that, whether the students or youth were given allowance or no, so I thought that I will inform the House as well that all students who took part in this Programme were given their allowances. Thank you, Mr. Speaker Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. We will move on and I give the floor for the last question for the day to the Honourable Adi Litia Qionibaravi to ask Question No. 128/2019. You have the floor Madam.

Tabua returned by the NZ Government
(Question No. 128/2019)

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI asked the Government, upon notice:

Would the Honourable Prime Minister and Minister for iTaukei Affairs and Sugar Industry inform Parliament of the current status of the *tabua* or whales tooth recently handed over from the New Zealand Government?

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA (Prime Minister and Minister for iTaukei Affairs and Sugar Industry).- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I was a bit worried when she was not here this morning. I

thought she had gone to our office and iTLTB and opened the cupboard looking for these *tabua* but I thank her for being here. The *tabua* are safe and they are all in our office at the iTLTB.

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- Honourable Speaker, a supplementary question to the Honourable Prime Minister. Why are these *tabua* not being returned to those from whom they were confiscated from?

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- I apologise, I did not get your question. What was the question?

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- Honourable Speaker, the supplementary question is, why are those *tabua* not being returned to those from whom they were confiscated from?

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Honourable Speaker, if they were confiscated, that means they were illegally taken out so they do not need to be returned to the owners. Thank you.

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

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Could the Honourable Prime Minister consider setting up positions, like Provincial Councils where people can go to, to get *tabua* instead of going to the pawn shop?

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Who is going to the pawn shop?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I go to the pawn shop.

(Laughter)

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

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- I see you go to the pawn shop. If you respect the Great Council of Chiefs you would not have to do that.

But, Honourable Speaker, there is an establishment of a *Tabua* Shop within the iTaukei Affairs and this is simply a mechanism to ensure that there are sufficient *tabua* in circulation to meet our cultural needs.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, we will move on.

I will give the floor to the first written question for today. I give the floor to the Honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu to ask Written Question No. 136/2019. You have the floor, Sir.

Written Questions

Update on Number of Native Leases Issued by iTLTB (Question No. 136/2019)

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Prime Minister explain to Parliament the number of native leases which had been issued by the iTLTB since 2010?

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA (Prime Minister and the Minister for iTaukei Affairs and Sugar Industry).- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I will table my response at a later sitting day as permitted under Standing Order 45(3). Thank you, Sir.

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

I now give the floor for the second Written Question and I ask Honourable Inosi Kuridrani to ask Written Question No. 137/2019. You have the floor, Sir.

Achievements – Grant for Cane Development
(Question No. 137/2019)

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

Can the Honourable Prime Minister inform Parliament what are some of the significant achievements made with the injection of the \$8.4 million grant for cane development since 2014?

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA (Prime Minister and the Minister for iTaukei Affairs and Sugar Industry).- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. Again, Honourable Speaker, I will table my response at a later sitting day as permitted under Standing Orders 45(3).

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Members that is the end of Questions for today.

Honourable Members, I would like to acknowledge the presence in the gallery of the former Minister for Foreign Affairs, Ratu Inoke Kubuabola, as well as the former Senator Adi Litia Cakobau, who is looking resplendent in black over there. And no comments from those Honourable Members from Burebasaga.

(Laughter)

END OF WEEK STATEMENTS

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will move on to the End of Week Statements. For the information of the House, the Member may speak for up to 10 minutes, with a 10-minute response by the Minister or Ministers responsible for the subject matter of the Members speeches. No seconder is required and there will be no other debate. We will follow this process for all the statements for today.

I call on the Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua to deliver the first End of the Week Statement. You have the floor, Madam.

MSAF Stringent Surveillance on the Safety of Inter-Island Shipping

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I begin with this proverb; For Want of A Nail.

For want of a nail the shoe was lost.
For want of a shoe the horse was lost.
For want of a horse the rider was lost.
For want of a rider the message was lost.
For want of a message the battle was lost.
For want of a battle the kingdom was lost.

And all for the want of a horseshoe nail.

For 'Want of a Nail' is a proverb from centuries ago, reminding us that seemingly unimportant acts or omissions can have grave and unforeseen circumstances.

Sir, my End of the Week Statement serves to highlight the state of Fiji's shipping services and the credibility of the Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji (MSAF), in maintaining the highest safety standards in light of maritime accidents and disasters which have occurred recently around the world, including in Tonga and Kiribati, resulting in huge loss of life.

I spoke about maritime transport in my Maiden Speech, Sir, and this is an issue which has been brought up repeatedly in this new term of Parliament, including earlier this week when a question was posed to the Honourable Minister responsible for transportation, and I have read the *Hansard*.

I am speaking today as an islander, Sir, one who normally travels on inter-island ferries to get her home in Kadavu several times a year, and who will continue to use her voice in this House to draw attention to this issue in the hope that changes will be effected to make inter-island shipping safer.

Sir, according to the Worldwide Ferry Safety Association, the number of people who have died in ferry accidents around the world since 2000 is nearly 21,000 people.

Disasters in recent years include:

- 21st March, 2019 in Iraq; over 100 people, mostly women and children on their way to celebrate the Kurdish New Year drowned when the overloaded ferry they were on sank in the Tigris.
- In September 2018, in Tanzania; a Tanzanian ferry believed to be carrying over 260 passengers capsized in Lake Victoria, 224 people died. The ferry had an official capacity of 100.
- In January 2018, Kiribati; an overloaded ferry sank while travelling to Betio. There were 88 souls on board, of whom only seven survived.
- In April 2014, South Korea; the *Sewol* sank off the South-Western Island of Jindo on 16th April, killing 304 people, almost all were school children on a trip.
- And closer to home who can ever forget the *Princess Ashika* tragedy?
- In 2009, the Tongan Government-owned operator, the Shipping Corporation of Polynesia (SCP), bought the vessel from a Fijian company. The Vessel began sailing in Tonga on 7th July, 2009. Less than one month later the *Princess Ashika* sank, 74 lives were lost and only two bodies were ever recovered.

Six days after the tragedy, the Minister for Transportation resigned. A royal commission of inquiry into the sinking, found the ferry was declared unseaworthy in 1985 and was never supposed to sail in deep water.

In 2011, two years after the tragedy, the *Princess Ashika's* captain and first mate, the shipping company's Managing Director and the Acting Director of the Tongan Marine and Ports Department, were all found guilty of the manslaughter of the only Tongan national whose body was recovered.

The inquiry concluded the disaster was a result of systematic and individual failures. The tragedy is that, they were all easily preventable and the deaths were completely senseless.

Now, let us look at ourselves, Sir. According to the MSAF's website, the prime objective of MSAF is to ensure that highest safety standards are met, MSAF products and services are provided in an efficient manner, meeting both, the regulatory requirements and the needs of their customers.

With this in mind, Sir, and as someone who comes from the maritime zone, I have a few questions and comments.

First of all, the age of ships. Could the age limit of the vessels being brought in to operate in the islands be re-looked at? At the moment, an issue is the type, age and condition of the vessels that are being brought in. Many are old and their hull plating is worn and thin. One small grounding or collision could rip open these hulls.

Are they fit for purpose? The type of vessels brought in should also suit our sea conditions. You cannot bring in a ferry that used to operate on a lake or calm harbour to operate in the Koro Sea or Kadavu passage.

The overloading of ships is another issue, Sir. On 20th December, 1987 at 6.30 in the morning, the passenger ferry *MV Dona Paz* left the Philippine port of Tacloban city for the city of Manila, a journey of some 28 hours. At 10.30 p.m., the passenger ferry collided with a motor tanker, the *MT Vector*. The passenger ferry's manifest listed 1,493 passengers and a 53 crew, but survivor accounts say that the Vessel was carrying more than 4,000 passengers. The Vessel was seriously overcrowded, with at least 2,000 passengers not listed on the manifest. With an estimated death toll of 4,386 people and only 24 survivors, it remains the deadliest peacetime maritime disaster in history.

Sir, I, and I am sure, many of us on both sides of the House, have travelled on inter-island vessels here in Fiji. I have been on journeys, Sir, where there are passengers on almost every inch of floor space (I mean, on floor space not meant for passengers), including the lobby, right in front of the doors to the toilets, along the passages and even on the floor of the dining room, where you risk stepping on passengers as you make your way from one part of the ship to another. If these are not examples of overcrowding, Sir, I do not know what is. How does this happen if Marine Checkers are doing their jobs?

Yes, many captains will tell you that there are hundreds of passengers at the jetty a few days from Christmas, during the holidays and other peak travelling periods, clamouring to be allowed on board, and there have been angry and ugly scenes at many a jetty.

Mr. Speaker, I also would ask about manifests. When one gets on an aeroplane to fly from Nausori to Lakeba in your case, Sir, or in order to travel between any domestic airport in Fiji for that matter, there is a boarding pass, there is a passenger manifest and a list of the passengers' names on board the flight. The same is true for international flights. In an emergency, that manifest is vital for the information of families, search and rescue, and insurance companies, to name a few.

Why should this be any different for inter-island ferry passengers travelling between Narain Jetty and Rotuma, or Kadavu, Nabouwalu to Natovi, Ono- i- Lau to Suva and Suva to Lomaiviti? The lives of these passengers on the inter-island ferries are no less valuable than the lives of those who travel on planes.

Who allows the ships to sail? Honourable Speaker, on Good Friday, more than 30 relatives of mine were on their way to my village when an accident occurred on the ferry they were on board. We are all so grateful that nothing much worse happened.

I have had conversations with some of these relatives of mine and members of the industry since the incident. Now, I understand that MSAF surveys vessels when they come onto the slipway and before they go back into the water. And only MSAF can authorise the vessels to be put back into the water and to depart from a port to go on a journey.

Marine Checkers have a vital and potentially lifesaving job, allowing or denying vessels clearances to depart a port. Allowing a vessel to depart whilst overloaded, or in any way in breach of rules and laws that govern MSAF and its Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), should be treated harshly by the law, Sir.

Having said all that, the inter-island ferry service is vital. The owners/ operators of Fiji's ferry services are supplying an essential service. The financial burden on them is huge; they have ships to pay off and maintain, licenses, crew, fuel and other overheads to pay for.

In developed countries, if ferry operators hiked the fares, cut corners with safety standards, lower their customer service and treat their passengers badly, a reality of business is that, passengers would just vote for their feet and go elsewhere. In Fiji, this is not the case. The majority of the passengers are poor or low to middle income earners, who because of lack of choice or lack of the financial means to afford the better way to travel, put up with it.

Yes, we complain at *tikina* and *yasana* meetings. Many post photos of the realities on board vessels in the hope someone will help them. Some even succeed in getting petitions into the right hands, but most continue to put up with it. This should not be so.

Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to mention that in March this year, in Manila, a team from Interferry was there, in the first stage to study significant safety improvements in the Philippines' ferry operations. And I know that Fiji is not a member of Interferry; no company, no individual from Fiji is, but if someone from MSAF would like to attend, I am sure they would love to attend the conference in London in October.

To conclude, Honourable Speaker, I hope the number of fatalities I read out today, sacred us. I hope the questions I have asked, made us think. I might be a lone voice in the wilderness today, going on and on about inter-island ferry safety. The thing about being the lone voice in the wilderness, however, is you might get ridiculed, but the lone voice warns of a danger that most people do not pay any attention to until it is too late, and all for the want of a horseshoe nail. Thank you, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. I give the floor to the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Disaster Management, Meteorological Services, Honourable Jone Usamate. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank Honourable Qereqeretabua for the issue that she has raised on maritime safety- the state of shipping services and credibility of MSAF. Taking us back to how she started off, the issue about the nail and all that, if you do not have a horse, how can you have the rider? Think about that.

Honourable Speaker, the issue of maritime safety is something that is dear to all of us. It is certainly dear to this Government, to an extent where we have set up a regulatory body that has to look after this. We used to have the Marine Department, we set up the MSAF, basically to look at this issue. Also interesting to note, they have implemented a lot of things that we need to do, to make sure that we can maintain the safety of people.

As I was listening to the issue that was raised by Honourable Qereqeretabua, it struck me that not one of the examples that she raised was something from Fiji. It is all about Tonga, the Philippines and all about those things.

(Honourable Opposition Members interject)

HON. J. USAMATE.- Yes, get my point.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. J. USAMATE.- But is that not a good thing that we cannot point to some examples from Fiji? Is that not a good positive point? It is showing that something is actually working. It is perhaps, not working as well as it should, there is always room for improvement, but not one single example was from Fiji. Manilla, Tonga and other places but not Fiji, so that perhaps give us an indication that there are some things going well. There are something that are happening positively and we have a good base upon which to continue to build.

This Government treats all the maritime islands and the quality of shipping that goes to the maritime islands as of the utmost importance. Within MSAF there is a whole lot of things that have been put in place to try to make sure that that happens.

Under MSAF, they have included a lot of regulations - the Safety of Life Regulations, the Maritime (Coasting-trade) Regulations, Maritime Marine Pollution Prevention, the Emergency Procedures, Safety of Navigation, Safety Construction and Stability, Safety of Crew and Passengers, all of these regulations and requirements have been put in place, we have had to make sure that people are kept safe and sound.

As I mentioned also when I was talking about in an answer to the question earlier this week, that this year we will be implementing the Safe Ship Management System. The current system is that, after six months your ship gets inspected visually and after one year, the ship goes on the dry dock and gets a full inspection. But in between these periods of the six months and the 12 months, the Safe Ship Management System will make sure that the ship itself, the Master of the ship and the people on the ship have certain responsibilities to make sure the ship is working safety within the period under which they are under survey. That will help to prevent maritime accidents and also protect the marine environment. So that is something that is going to be strengthened from July of this year. That is something that I had already mentioned.

Under the MSAF jurisdiction, there is a whole range of International Maritime Organisation (IMO) Regulations that we need to live up to, and that has been implemented in Fiji. We have the Act, we have the Regulation, we have the Safety of Life at Sea, and other regulations that I have been talking about.

Also, I would like to point out the fact that FijiFirst, when we went into the Election, we had the FijiFirst Manifesto. This is what is governing and what we doing in the Government. Under this Manifesto (I urge you to read it because you will learn a lot from it), on Page 31 it says that one of the things that we intend to do is to regulate the shipping industry with the view to protect the travelling public rights, fares, cancellations and schedules.

One of the changes that we are bringing in this year, currently when someone gets on a ship and, for example, the ship decides not to sail at the time it is supposed to sail, there is no obligation given to the ship provider to do something about the passenger. The new changes that we are bringing in, that if the ship is not going on time there will be some responsibility for the provider of the transport to do something about that passenger. So these are new changes. In fact, there were people calling me about

this last night and that is basically what we have been doing, in order to achieve the requirements that we have for the Manifesto that we have. We will continue to try to enforce the standards through the systems that we already have in place.

Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua mentioned about excessive overcrowding, yes, that is something that we are trying to enforce very strongly. And I am always getting it especially around the Christmas time, people are calling me, "They are stopping us from getting on board the boat." And I think we will continue to do that, if need be, we need to control the number of people that are on the boats that are going, especially during the festive season.

One of the things that we will be doing this year, that we have realised that for the franchise, a lot of these trips going to the inter-island ports is because they come under the Franchise Scheme. Currently under Franchise Scheme, the shipping companies are only given a one-year contract. When you are given a one year contract, it does not give you much incentive to go out and get a better quality ship.

So the changes that we are putting in this year, if you are going to get a Franchise contract, we are going to make it a longer contract, maybe 10 years or 15 years contract under a, sought of, better incentives, maybe when the company gets that contract they might feel confident enough to go and get a better ship. So we will try to put in systems to encourage these shipping companies to bring in better ships, because the travelling public of Fiji deserve better ships than retrofitted old fishing vessels, which is currently what we have.

But, if you try to get rid of all these vessels right now, what happens? There might be no transportation, so we need to, sort of, balance it, we need to be a bit sensible about how we try to manage this. The current ships, we try to make sure that they meet the standards that we have.

In the process, we are putting in place standards, putting in place incentive systems and changing our processes so that the shipping companies can bring in younger vessels and much more well quality vessels where people can travel in much more comfort.

I go to the islands a lot. I can remember when I took my children to their mother's village for the first time, I had to hold one up all night, out on the deck with an umbrella holding on to an eight old child at that time. We are moving towards the time where that would change, that we no longer will have incidents where people have to do that.

There was an issue raised about the passenger manifest. The passenger manifest are actually used. When vessels travel, there is a list that is provided and the passenger list is actually issued to enforcement officers prior to departure and arrival. So this is something that they do check, so there is a passenger manifest for the aircraft that flies, they also have that for the boats that are travelling all around Fiji.

One of the other things that we are doing very strongly in Fiji is in terms of looking at the quality of the staffing that we have in MSAF, to make sure that they can carry out their roles and they need to be competent. One of the moves that is now in MSAF is relooking at the structure, relooking at the quality of people that they bring in and the incentives schemes so that they can attract better quality people so they can carry out their work much better. There is a whole lot of investment in terms of upgrading the staff and in terms of their training.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. J. USAMATE.- I do not know what the Honourable Member is talking about. If you want to know the proof of the pudding, it is always in outcomes. You analyse anything in the world, there will always be your variations, but you look at the overall trends.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. J. USAMATE.- Has there been more accidents or less accidents? Every single example that is being quoted in this House has not been a Fiji example.

We are working very hard to see over time that there will be no Fiji examples. And we can ensure the Honourable Qereqeretabua, I am also a Kadavuan and I was raised as a Kadavuan. I want to make sure that all my relatives in Dravuwalu, Naceva in Kadavu, when they travel, whether they get off at Kavala or at Vunisea or if they have taken the boat that comes around Naceva, even Nakasaleka, Honourable Tabuya, we want to make sure that they travel better. I am not too sure about Ono, we will try to make sure that good boats are there.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the safety of people traveling on the ships is something that is critical and Government holds it at something that is very dear. We have an organisation that supposed to make sure that there is safety. The FijiFirst Government, under our Manifesto we are putting in place, processes, procedures and policies to try to make sure that the traveling public will be kept safe. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister.

Honourable Members, we will move on to the second End of the Week Statement. I call on the Honourable Alvick Maharaj to deliver his Statement. You have the floor, Sir.

Food Security and Nutritional Improvements Amongst Urban Household

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Honourable Speaker, more than 50 percent of the world population or around 3.9 billion people, now live in cities and large towns classified as urban and is expected to rise to 66 percent by 2050. It can be noted that Fiji is experiencing a strong rural to urban drift also.

The Fiji Bureau of Statistics 2017 Population and House Census noted that the proportion of Fiji's population living in urban areas was:

- 37.2 percent in 1976;
- 38.7 percent in 1986;
- 46.4 percent in 1996;
- 50.7 percent in 2007; and
- 55.9 percent in 2017.

Thus, increasing the food production and improving distribution to respond to population growth urbanisation and a change in consumption pattern will require an incorporated approach to everything; several challenges simultaneously along with the entire food chain.

Honourable Speaker, such an integrated approach to food security and environmental sustainability should also be taken into consideration, the nexus of food, water, energy, environment and climate while reorienting food production, distribution and consumption. The tandem in the dynamics of food system are changing. An ever-increasing number of rural and urban producers and consumers mean that achieving food security and nutrition for all may require new policy thinking.

Honourable Speaker, food security not only carry significant benefits for human health but also serve as a basis to achieve sustainable economic growth. For this reason, it is essential that we understand that the food security strategy needs to be seen as more than a single sector issue. It requires the combination of coordinated action in various sectors. We are talking about action in finance, agriculture, health and nutrition, infrastructure and other sectors.

Without stable and long lasting food security, there will be a continued negative effect on human capital, and this will raise Government financial cost with a negative consequence on the Government's public spending. This will also lead to stagnated economic growth in the long term. Thus, food security is central to both short and long term economic growth and it needs to be a central path in larger cross-sectoral strategy at national, regional and global level.

Honourable Speaker, unhealthy diet, malnutrition and NCDs are closely linked. Our focus on efficiency has seen an increase in the availability of inexpensive high calorie food, often from staple cereal crops which has reduced hunger for many. Increased prevalence of obesity, increased consumption of poor quality diet, a perceived undernutrition are contributing to this epidemic. Today's food system are local and do not deliver nutritious, safe, affordable and sustainable diet, worse they undermine nutrition in several ways, particularly for vulnerable and marginalised population.

Honourable Speaker, Fiji's growing epidemic on Non-Communicable Diseases poses a huge risk and cause burden to the country's economy and to the population.

NCDs have now replaced Communicable Diseases as the leading causes of both, mortality and morbidity. There have been little changes in life expectancies in countries for over two decades in large part due to the escalating growth in premature mortality from NCDs.

Honourable Speaker, NCDs globally kill 41 million people each year, equivalent to 71 percent of all deaths globally. Each year, globally 15 million people die from an NCD between the age of 30 and 69 years. Cardiovascular disease accounts for most global NCD-related death or 17.9 million people annually, followed by cancer - 9 million; respiratory disease – 3.9 million; and diabetes – 1.6 million. These four group of diseases account for over 80 percent of all premature NCD deaths.

Tobacco use, physical activity, harmful use of alcohol and unhealthy diet all increase the risk of dying from NCDs. Detection, screening and treatment of NCDs, as well as qualitative care are key components of response to NCDs.

Honourable Speaker, recent headlines on diabetes rates in Fiji highlights the importance of the whole community taking action in protecting their health from NCDs, such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease, which primarily takes the form of heart attacks and strokes.

In 2000, male made up the highest number of NCD-related deaths at 2,168, rising to 2,986 in 2016, followed by females, of which the number of NCD-related deaths rose from 1,537 to 2,351 for the same period.

Honourable Speaker, majority of males are dying from heart disease, chronic lower respiratory disease, hypertension and renal disease, mainly associated with excessive use of alcohol or caffeine, drugs, smoking, stress and physical inactivity. Similarly, majority of female NCD mortalities are due to cancer and diabetes which are also associated with smoking tobacco, unhealthy diet, physical inactivity and obesity.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Honourable Speaker, the impact of NCDs is particularly significant for individuals who, as a result, may suffer socio-economic disadvantage and poverty. Globally, the poorest people experience the highest risk of developing chronic disease and are the least able to cope, with resulting financial consequences.

At the household level, good health and good health system helps individuals maximise their human potential, avoid financial distress and impoverishment and break the inter-generational cycle of ill-health, impaired productivity and poverty.

(Inaudible interjection)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Prevention is critical for decreasing NCDs, death rates and the risk of developing NCDs can be lowered by Fijians, making healthy choice for themselves and their families.

Finally, Honourable Speaker, nutrition outcomes are largely determined, not only by food production and accessibility, but also by food quality and diversity. A considerable potential for increasing the nutritional status of people and efficiency of the whole food chain lies in encouraging changes in diet and consumption patterns, as well as designing pro-nutrition policies.

Government should recognise that healthy, well-nourished people are both, the outcome of a successful social and economic development and constitute essential input into the development process.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member.

I give the floor to the Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Point of Order, Sir. Are we not supposed to reply to an End of Week Statement?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, it can be done. You know the procedure. It has been done before.

You have the floor.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- No, it is the first time!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I want to thank the Honourable Member for

HON. SPEAKER.- I hope you stick to the point.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- ... his statement.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the statement made by Honourable Maharaj deals with health and nutrition of our population, particularly the urban population.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, if you would have listened to the statements made by the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services, you would have noted that one dimension of the health and

nutritional status of Fiji's population depends, to a large extent, on how the agriculture sector will support that particular vision of the Ministry of Health and Medical Services.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, I will today talk about the initiatives that we are undertaking to support one of the missions of the Ministry of Health and Medical Services in terms of ensuring that our population, particularly in the urban areas, are healthy and are able to get nutritionally-balanced diet.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Agriculture has taken a holistic, integrated and innovative approach towards addressing the nation's food and nutritional security. The effort of our Ministry is to make sure that every Fijian household has access to locally grown, safe and nutritive produce in the kitchen.

Our Ministry has a number of programmes that targets promotion of locally-grown fruits and vegetables. We also have programmes that target promotion of local fruits and vegetables that would substitute some of our imported fruits and vegetables, many of which have much higher nutritive value.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, for example guava, mandarin, to name a few, recently our Ministry has launched some very innovative programmes to make sure that our Fiji citizens continue to have sustainable source of healthy fruits and vegetables. Our Fruit Tree Orchard Programme intends to establish large fruit tree orchards that will make sure that we have a consistent supply of local fruits in our urban areas.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, previously the supply was inconsistent as most of the fruits were collected from the wild during the season. We were importing a lot of fruits from neighbouring countries.

Honourable Speaker Sir, with regards to our Fruit Tree Orchard Programme, we will establish 20 orchard farms this year and up to 40 each over the next three-year period, meaning that we are looking at establishing 140 orchards in Fiji over the next three- year period.

In the first phase, we are looking at the establishment of the following fruit tree orchards; mango, avocado, guava, dragon fruit, breadfruit, citrus, passionfruit and *ivi*.

In the second phase, we are looking at the establishment of the following other fruit tree orchards, namely; mangosteen, rambutan, mandarin, oranges and other tropical fruits which can be grown in Fiji.

Honourable Speaker Sir, this project, the establishment of fruit tree orchards, was formerly launched in Sigatoka last month with the establishment of guava orchard at a farm in Volivoli with 100 plants of the new improved variety put on the ground. Since then, we have a total of 900 plants established on eight farms in the Western Division of this improved variety of guava.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, I will now speak on our new initiative, the Backyard Gardening Programme. Honourable Speaker, Sir, I wish to elaborate that this innovative Backyard Gardening Programme was initiated to encourage home gardening in our urban communities as a source of livelihood, improving and importantly, reducing the incidents of NCDs.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, from the outset, please allow me to remind this august House that the Government is strongly committed to ensuring national food security. This is stipulated in Section 36 of our 2013 Constitution which requires, and I quote:

“The State must take reasonable measures within its available resources to achieve the progressive realisation of the right of every person to be free from hunger, to have adequate food of acceptable quality and to clean and safe water in adequate quantities.”

Therefore, the Fiji's 20 year and 5 year National Development Plans have set food security goal that every Fijian has access to adequate food of a certain quality and nutritional value.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, this similar target is clearly articulated in our Draft Ministry of Agriculture five year Strategic Development Plan, indicating our commitment to ensuring a food, nutrition secure Fiji.

Honourable Speaker, as I had mentioned earlier this week, one of our five key objectives of the Strategic Development Plan of the Ministry of Agriculture is to provide food security and nutritional security to all Fijians.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, over the recent years there has been a growing interest to strengthen and increase local food production in order to mitigate the adverse effects of global food shocks and food price volatilities as well.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, you would have noted that the current generation if they are not exposed to provision of quality fruits and vegetables, you will see that their consumption basket is changing, which has a major implication on the health and nutritional status of this young generation.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, backyard gardening and home gardening represent an opportunity to boost our economy, especially when combined with specific policies aimed at social protection and well-being of our communities.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, Fiji suffers from the triple burden of malnutrition, obesity, underweight and micronutrient deficiency.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Agriculture has developed a programme to encourage urban dwellers to undertake backyard gardening to meet the households' nutritional and health needs.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, this initiative was launched on 25th April, 2019, and I am proud to acknowledge the great support rendered by His Excellency the President in advocating this programme to urban residents.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, His Excellency the President launched this programme on 25th April in Tavua. During the launch, the Ministry distributed to each selected household a backyard gardening package worth \$65 which include; a guide for gardeners, upto 25 potting bags, five bags of garden soil and seeds of four crops of their choice and seedlings of two fruit trees of their choice.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, each recipient were required to fill a gardener profile form to allow the Ministry of Agriculture staff to monitor the activity and evaluate the impacts of the Programme.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, I wish to recapitulate the benefits of backyard gardening highlighted by his Excellency the President during the launching of the backyard gardening programme in Tavua and he said that fruits and vegetables from our own garden are higher in nutrients and saves urban people money on imported food. Having our children assist us in the garden can increase the chance that we will eat more of the fruits and vegetables we helped to grow. Growing our own fruits and vegetables can offer us

an ideal opportunity to reduce the amount of pesticides that we use in our garden, making us healthier and ensuring that it is safe for consumption.

Gardening increases physical activity, as it is a great way to engage the whole family in physical activity and allows us to take responsibility for our own gardens. The fruits and vegetables grow in our garden will promote health, because they are rich in nutrients, especially in phytochemicals, antioxidants, Vitamin C, Vitamin A and folate.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the Ministry will continue to support the Backyard Gardening Programme throughout Fiji. We have begun in Ba/Tavua in a smaller scale by

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, fruits and vegetables on the backyard gardening are an important part of a healthy diet. When consuming appropriate amounts and linked to a better lifestyle, they could also help to prevent micronutrient deficiency and NCDs, such as cardiovascular diseases and certain cancers.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, if you look at Honourable Members on the other side, a good 60 percent of them needs rehabilitation.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- If you would have listened to this statement....

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister for Agriculture.

Honourable Members, that is the last End of the Week Statement. The other End of the Week Statement was withdrawn. I know you are disappointed.

(Laughter)

But I cannot please you all the time.

Honourable Members, I now call on the Leader of the Government in Parliament, the Honourable Inia Seruiratu, to move his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

ADJOURNMENT

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

That Parliament adjourns until Friday, 7th June, 2019 at 7.30 p.m.

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

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

The Question is:

That Parliament adjourns until Friday, 7th June, 2019 at 7.30 p.m.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of “Noes”)

HON. SPEAKER.– Since no Member opposes, the motion is, therefore, agreed to unanimously.

At this juncture Honourable Members, I sincerely thank you all for your participation and contribution during this very historic session of Parliament that we have had this week, and for the proceedings that have taken place in the course of the sitting period.

I now declare that Parliament adjourns until Friday, 7th June, 2019 at 7.30 p.m. Thank you very much, Honourable Members. Parliament is adjourned.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.31 p.m.