

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

TUESDAY, 3RD SEPTEMBER, 2019

[CORRECTED COPY]

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TUESDAY, 3RD SEPTEMBER, 2019

The Parliament met at 9.35 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

HONOURABLE SPEAKER took the Chair and read the prayer.

PRESENT

All Honourable Members were present, except the Honourable Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts; the Honourable V.R. Gavoka; the Honourable Professor B.C. Prasad; the Honourable L.S. Qereqeretabua; and the Honourable Lt. Col. P. Tikoduadua.

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Monday, 2nd September, 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 Monday, 2nd September, 2019 as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Nays')

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

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CHAIR

HON. SPEAKER.- I welcome all Honourable Members to today's sitting of Parliament.

I also welcome members of the public joining us in the gallery, and those watching the live broadcast of the proceedings on television and the internet, and those listening to the radio. Thank you for taking an interest in your Parliament.

Honourable Members, I have been informed that there are no reports for presentation today.

PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, the Honourable Alvick Maharaj. You have the floor, Sir.

Audit Reports on the Management of Duty Concession Scheme (DCS) and the Management of Prisoners, Employees and Assets Management System – Standing Committee on Public Accounts

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Thank you. Honourable Speaker, Sir, this Report follows the Audit Reports on the Management of Duty Concession Scheme (DCS) and the Management of Prisoners, Employees and Assets Management System.

The Auditor-General conducted a performance audit on the DCS which is managed by the Customs Division of the Fiji Revenue and Customs Service (FRCS) for the period 2013 to 2017. The focus of the audit was to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of the DCS application, processing and approval process, and administration and monitoring of the Scheme by the Customs Tariff and Trade Section.

The audit was also carried out to determine the relevance and adequacy of the frameworks governing duty concessions, suitability of amendments made and compliance by FRCS in its implementation.

The Committee conducted evidence session with the FRCS at their Office on Thursday, 28th March, 2019. Honourable Members raised questions on the inefficiencies identified by the Auditor-General.

The Report also consists of an audit on the Management of the Prisoners, Employers and Assets Management System. This audit was conducted in response to a request from the Commissioner, Fiji Corrections Services (COMCOR) in 2017, to conduct a specific audit into the procurement of the data software under the Swallowtail Contract.

The audit focused on the implementation of requirements of the Master Service Agreement between the FCS and the supplier dated 19th August, 2011 and related transactions pertaining to the procurement of the Swallowtail Software.

The Commissioner of the Fiji Corrections Services appeared before the Committee on Thursday 25th April, 2019 to provide clarifications on the deficiencies identified in the Auditor-General's Report.

The Committee resolved that the two organisations provided satisfactory responses on the queries raised that impacted the efficiency and effectiveness of their performance. The Committee commends the work of these two institutions and recommends that these institutions positively take on board the Committee's recommendations in relation to the audit issues that are reflected in this Report.

I wish to extend my appreciation to all the Honourable Members of the Committee who were part of the successful compilation of the bipartisan Report, namely: the Hon. Joseph Nand, Hon. Vijendra Prakash, Hon. Aseri Radrodro, and Hon. Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu. Further, pursuant to Standing Order 115(5), Hon. Adi Litia Qionibaravi stood as an Alternate Member to Hon. Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu, and Hon. Mikaele Leawere who stood in as an Alternate Member to Hon. Aseri Radrodro.

On behalf of the Committee, I also extend my appreciation to the Secretariat Staff for their timely support on research, compilation and submission of this Report.

With those few words, I commend this Report to Parliament.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Member. Please, hand the Report to the Secretary-General.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move:

A motion without notice that a debate on the content of the Report is initiated at a future sitting.

HON. J.N. NAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

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

Question put.

The Question is:

That a debate on the content of the Report is initiated at a future sitting.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Nays')

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

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I have been advised that there are no Ministerial Statements for today. I have also been advised that there are no Bills for consideration today.

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

AMENDMENT TO THE 2019 PARLIAMENT SITTING CALENDAR

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

That pursuant to Standing Order 22(3), Parliament adopts the amended Parliament Sitting Calendar for November 2019, as previously circulated.

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

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

HON. LEADER OF GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. This has been raised with the Business Committee, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

There are a few events coming up, particularly on the first week of December and thus, the reason why Government has requested that the sitting dates for November, as initially scheduled, was supposed to be on the last week of November from 25th November, 2019 to 29th November, 2019.

But, Honourable Members, COP 25 in Chile commences on the first week of December. This is a very important COP for Fiji, particularly with the Small Island Developing States (SIDS), particularly

in our efforts to bring the oceans issue and, of course, its relation to climate change. COP 25 is being earmarked to be an Oceans COP and thus, the participation of Fiji and SIDS is very critical and, of course, Government needs to prepare well.

So in the amended sitting schedule, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Opening of Parliament will be on 12th November, 2019, which allows us a week to prepare for the debate on the President's Address for the Opening and thus, the request to have the sitting dates from 18th November, 2019 to 22nd November, 2019. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Leader of the Government in Parliament. Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on this motion.

As there being no one wishing to take the floor, I call upon the Leader of the Government in Parliament to speak in reply. You have the floor.

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I have nothing further to add. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament.

Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

The Question is:

That pursuant to Standing Orders 22(3), Parliament adopts the amended Parliament Sitting Calendar for November 2019, as previously circulated.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Nays')

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

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will move on.

Honourable Members, for the first Oral Question for today, I give the floor to the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Sitiveni Rabuka, to ask his question. You have the floor, Sir.

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

Major Transshipment Port in the Pacific Region
(Question No. 201/2019)

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

Can the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and

Communications, please, update Parliament on the progress made thus far in making Fiji a major transshipment port for the Pacific region?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM (Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the Honourable Leader of the Opposition for his question.

There is no doubt that Fiji must take advantage of the geographical location to become a transshipment hub, not just in terms of freight of cargo through the sea but also through air, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are a number of factors that lead to a port becoming a transshipment hub. They are what we call, the quantitative perspective factors and then we have the non-quantitative factors. For example, things like costs associated with a particular transshipment hub and, things like time that takes to actually do the transiting from one ship to the other ship.

Transshipment generally, of course, means, for example, if a company wants to send a 20-foot container to Samoa from Shanghai, do they send it directly to Samoa or do they come through Fiji, then tranship it through here?

It is because the port here is very efficient and perhaps, the ship capacity is not that great in respect of taking those number of containers from Shanghai to Samoa, or indeed that the number of containers being taken to Samoa is very small. Therefore, it is not economically viable for them to send the ship directly to Samoa. It is better for them to drop it off in a port, for example, like Fiji, where Fiji itself may actually be importing containers and, therefore, it makes economic sense for them to do that.

Mr. Speaker Sir, a number of things that have happened in Fiji over the past number of years that has made us a lot more attractive in respect of us becoming a transshipment hub.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the number of containers, what we call the Twenty Foot Equivalent Units (TEUs), just to put it into perspective, in 2012 was 109,856 20-foot containers; in 2017, it was 157,430 which is a 43 percent increase and in 2018, it further increased by another 9,000 containers, recording another 6 percent increase.

Now, obviously, there are lot more containers coming directly to Fiji, which makes it a lot more attractive for other containers that are destined for other destinations to be brought to Fiji and then sent from Fiji to various ports.

The port tariff was reviewed in 2015, Mr. Speaker, Sir, however, the transshipment charges remained unchanged to gain a competitive advantage over other regional ports.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, now the shipping lines are incurring lesser costs, as a result of port efficiency, improvements and fast turnaround times. As you know, Mr. Speaker Sir, we got into a Public Private Partnership (PPP) with Fiji Ports Terminal Limited and also Fiji Ports Corporation Limited, which saw Aitken Spence coming into Fiji which is a publicly listed company of nearly a 200 year old company, a Fortune 200 company outside USA.

We also saw a number of turnaround times and I will get into those details later. But what we also offer now, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is what we call a 21-day free period which is offered for transshipment from point of discharge to the point of loading, which is considerably a cost-saving for the shipping lines. For example, they have a number of free days in Fiji. If they are bringing a container, for example, from China destined for Samoa through Fiji, then they allow a number of free days in Fiji before they tranship

it or before that ship comes to Fiji to take it to Samoa, which obviously makes it attractive.

Similarly, as we have done, Mr. Speaker, Sir, if someone flies into Fiji and if they stay in Fiji for 72 hours or less, they do not pay departure tax which makes Fiji a lot more attractive as a transit point to go to other destinations by air.

The vessels waiting time to acquire berth has considerably reduced, Mr. Speaker Sir, with the port productivity improvements. For example, in 2012, an average berth waiting time for a vessel was 6.5 hours. By 2018, this reduced to less than one hour.

The average ship turnaround time or the vessels time at berth in 2012 was 36 hours, which reduced to 22 hours in 2018, despite the volume growth.

The average gross crane productivity rate or the number of container moves per hour is 5.5 in 2012, which improved to 14 in 2018.

It is also worth noting, Mr. Speaker, Sir, with the mobile harbour cranes now being operational, Fiji Ports Terminal Limited achieves a productivity of 18 moves per hour, Mr. Speaker Sir.

Over the past five years, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to make this a lot more attractive:

- Fiji Ports Terminal has invested over F\$10 million on heavy machinery, handling equipment and technological advancement;
- Port functions are now fully computerised and data is being shared with all shipping lines and major stakeholders;
- Fiji Ports Terminal Limited invested over F\$200,000 annually on training and development to improve the overall performance of port employees because port efficiency is critically important to make this attractive, and Singapore, of course, is a classic example. This includes both, local and overseas training.
- There is currently a prevailing agreement with the Port of Napier in New for the training of Fiji Ports Terminal Limited employees. This is, of course, to give our local Fijian employees exposure to larger port concepts and to comprehend the modern systems of cargo handling.
- Before the end of this year, the Port of Suva will be equipped with two mobile harbour cranes, which will enable the Suva Port to accommodate gearless vessels - the vessels without ship cranes. This will enable Fiji Ports to receive larger vessels with higher volumes.
- Port processes now are certified to ISO 9001 quality management systems. The Port Master Plan which I would like to elaborate on is currently being developed with the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

If we look at the Port itself, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the current situation of the Port is, in fact, it is becoming too small. So, we have been discussing over the past few years to develop a major master plan, and we are working with the ADB to perhaps, have a relocation, where we have a one stop shop where you will have all your container ships, the fishing vessels, your slip repairs and where you may perhaps, have potentially shipbuilding, all in one location.

But we use the Suva Port as essentially only for the cruise liners to come in with a lot more salubrious environment for them and, of course, if anyone knows the Port, one-third of the Port cannot contain the heavy laden machinery or containers. So if you look at the Port, driving from this end when you cross the bridge, on the first part of the wharf, you will never see any heavy machinery there because the foundations over the number of decades have become quite weak. In fact, it is lot more inexpensive to actually have a complete relocation.

We believe the game plan is that because Fiji is a maritime nation, we need to ensure that we actually capitalise on our geographical location, capitalise on the fact that we have now got some good partners and ensure that we further augment the potential economic growth and, in fact, the advantages that we can get by having a dedicated new Port. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General. I give the floor to the Honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I thank the Honourable Attorney-General for his reply. The supplementary question that I would like to raise is, can the Honourable Minister explain on the number of local investors who are now involved in the business of shipment of empty containers from Lautoka to Suva?

With the high volume of containers that he has stated, I was wondering if that could have been the catalyst for local investors as well, to participate in this very important sector, Sir. Can the Honourable Minister explain as to how many local companies are now being involved in the shipment of empty containers because mostly foreign companies are involved in that? Thank you.

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is a completely new question, I do not have the statistics on me. The question was about the development of a trans-shipment hub and a port, but I do not have the figures about how many local companies are transporting empty containers. You can put in a separate question and I can provide the answers to that. Thank you.

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

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. Taking all the explanations into account, the fact remains that the volume of our trans-shipment continue to decline, from 2016, 2017 and 2018. Can the Honourable Minister explain as to what is the problem, how he proposes to fix that problem and how long shall we wait?

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think the Honourable Nawaikula is, again, bordering on being disingenuous. I would love to know where he got those figures from. Please, if you can provide me with those statistics to show that trans-shipment is declining, then I would be happy to answer that.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Are you saying it is not declining?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You said it is declining, where is your proof?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Are you saying it is not declining?

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You should be a better lawyer than that, come on!

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

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, and I thank the Honourable Minister for his explanation. My question is on the cruise liners. In previous Governments, we note the influx of cruise liners into the country, it could be one a day, but recently during this Government's time, we have noted a great reduction in the number of ships coming into our Port. So can the Honourable Minister explain the reasons why the reduction in these cruise liners coming into the Port because as we know, they contribute a lot to our economic growth. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think the Honourable Member, again, may be like her Honourable colleague being disingenuous again. Where is the statistics that she is claiming? The cruise liners have, in fact, decreased in their number of arrivals. In fact, Mr. Speaker, Sir, many people ...

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- would be content that it may have increased at certain times. So, please, provide us with statistics, and we will be quite happy to answer that.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

Honourable Members, we will move on to the next question.

For the second Oral Question for today, I give the floor to the Honourable Alvick Maharaj to ask his question. You have the floor, Sir.

Current Status of Liquidity
(Question No. 202/2019)

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

Can the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications update Parliament on the current status of liquidity?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM (Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Again, we hear some muttering from the peanut gallery.

(Chorus of interjections)

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as of yesterday, 2nd September, 2019, liquidity in the banking system stands at \$626.7 million, more than doubled since 2018. And, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am advised that the Reserve Bank of Fiji (RBF) says, “The liquidity may rise to \$700 million by the end of this year...”

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- “...more than sufficient to meet the credit needs in the economy.”

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I really would urge Honourable Tabuya to heed the call by the Honourable Adimaitoga.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I really feel that I have the need to say this to Parliament, to actually educate Honourable Members on the other side about the factors that actually affect or influence, I should say, liquidity.

There are several factors, Mr. Speaker, Sir, including movements in foreign reserves and the currency in circulation. The RBF activities, including its use of what we call the Statutory Reserve Deposit (SRD) ratio, its lending facilities and investments, and also movements in Government’s deposits with RBF.

In the interest of time, Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me just focus on foreign reserves, the RBF lending facility and the SRDs. First on foreign reserves, this represents income we earn from exports of sugar, mineral water, garments, tourism and influx from external loan drawdowns.

An increase in the foreign reserves, Mr. Speaker, Sir, results in corresponding increase bank liquidity, as exporters convert the foreign currency to Fijian currency. Conversely, an outflow of foreign exchange for import payment, results in a reduction of bank liquidity, as importers drawdown on the Fijian dollar deposits and purchase foreign currency.

As for RBF facilities, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Central Bank has various spread facilities, including its import substitution and export finance and housing facilities it offers to commercial banks and other financial institutions, such as the Fiji Development Bank (FDB) and Housing Authority. When the RBF lend funds to the banks or FDB or Housing Authority by these facilities, the liquidity, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is added into the banking system, and the opposite happens when the funds are, in fact, repaid.

Earlier, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we had talked about RBF SRD ratio. An increase in the SRD, currently 10 percent of commercial bank deposits, would mandate banks to increase their deposits with the RBF and consequently, reduce excess liquidity available for lending to individuals and businesses. A reduction in the SRD will increase bank liquidity. In many countries, the central banks actually use the SRD to suck in liquidity or to pump out liquidity, depending on how the economy is doing. So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, these are the factors that actually affect the liquidity in the market.

The other factor, of course, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we saw towards the end of last year and earlier this year where individual banks (and our bank in point is Westpac), like Westpac, because it is one of the few banks in Fiji that actually has a branch in Fiji, have their own internal requirements. So if, for example, the head office in New South Wales or Sydney says to the branch in Fiji, “We want you to increase the amount of deposits you are going to keep in your bank”, because of whatever risks that they may factor in, whatever internal requirements they may have.

There was, of course, a rumour going around that Westpac was in the process of selling down the Fijian operations. Now, they have sold out in other parts of the Pacific so based on that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, if, for example, I am going to sell my business, I will want to make my balance sheet look good and one of the ways of making a balance sheet look good is that, you will actually try and suck in as much deposits as possible to make your balance sheet look good viz-a-viz, the cash that you have. So, in fact, it was quite telling over the past, some months back, that Westpac was offering very high interest rates for deposits and so that led to a huge scramble for liquidity in the market with the banks.

Now, we can see that those interest rates have, in fact, come down. So you can have a major player, like Westpac, which actually holds the second largest bank in Fiji viz-a-viz its portfolio, have the ability to suck in the cash from the market perhaps, for their own internal considerations. However, now you have seen the rationalisation of that, so as a result of that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, of course, we now have a much more stable market.

There is no doubt, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that as I had highlighted I think in the last session and also yesterday, that we can actually be affected by external factors and these are the things, for example, the prudential requirements by financial institutions that have their head offices offshore. Given what is happening in their own domestic markets, they may actually change their policies in Fiji or secondly, because of the fact that, for example, if an economy does slow down, it can have an impact on our economy. To what extent? Obviously, it is something that depends on how we actually mitigate those potential losses or those challenges that come about in our major trading partners.

Liquidity, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is obviously very critical. One of the Honourable Members, I think from the other side, yesterday spoke about how he knows of some company not being able to access credit, but that depends on the individual company. It has got nothing to do with the banking system *per se*. He may need to change banks. There are some banks where they more readily actually lend and, in fact, in a more credible or a lot more attractive (I should say) interest rates. So, liquidity in Fiji is, in fact, quite good, compared to what it was a number of decades ago.

Of course, it has almost doubled to what it was at the end of last year. We expect that to double, of course, on how the agriculture sector and how the tourism sector performs that have an enormous impact on that.

Also, Mr. Speaker, Sir, you will find sometimes, for example, there is a huge construction that is going on, when people go and buy material from offshore, it will actually suck out liquidity from our market which is obviously a positive thing because they also tend to pay VAT. So liquidity is in a very stable position, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Thank you.

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

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Despite that big explanation, the operational budget for some of the Ministries are still not being released, even after one month. In the Ministry of Agriculture, for example, there is a moratorium. So how come the Government still does not have any money to run its functions properly? How come, despite that and despite all these liquidity thing...

HON. SPEAKER.- What is your question?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- ... the Government does not have money to fully run its functions?

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- True!

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, this liquidity thing that the Honourable Member talks about is different to what we call the appropriation by Parliament regarding Government; Government's expenditure and Government's revenue. They are two separate matters.

Liquidity is the general liquidity in the market. The Government, Mr. Speaker, Sir, has a budget that is approved by Parliament and that budget is affected by, as we state, the amount of expenditure we will have and what Government budgets as revenue.

As we had explained earlier on, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government has a budgeted revenue. Sometimes we get more revenue than what we budget for. Sometimes you get a slightly lower revenue than what you actually budget for but that does not have an impact on the liquidity in the general market.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Opposition do not seem to grasp these very simple basic economic determinants within the market.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Aseri Radrodro, you have the floor.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. Just a supplementary question to the Honourable Attorney-General. The reality on the ground is quite different from what you are explaining.

In terms of factors that you have highlighted, you also included currency movement. Can you just give an explanation to the House why is it that locals travelling out of Nadi Airport are only entitled to take FJ\$500 instead of FJ\$10,000 which is the limit?

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would urge the Honourable Member to give me the information pertaining to which local he is referring to because I know locals are taking out \$10,000 as permitted under the law.

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

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. Now the Honourable Minister yesterday had referred to the BB- rating which I read and it says:

“An obligation rated BB is less vulnerable to non-payment and other speculative issues. However, it faces major ongoing uncertainties or exposure to adverse business financial economic conditions.”

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, we are not referring to yesterday. It is your supplementary question to the question that asked by the Whip.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Yes, Honourable Speaker, it is related to the question on liquidity....

HON. SPEAKER.- Stick to the supplementary question.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Our people are still struggling to borrow from the banks and the decision by the commercial banks is based on overseas decisions because of the risks that we are still facing in our country. They do not have confidence because of the risks in our country and the lending of our people, they are still struggling.

My question to the Honourable Attorney-General is, how can you solve that issue where commercial banks will not feel such a high risk and allow our people to be able to lend easier from the banks?

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would please seek your indulgence. The Honourable Member could ask me the question. I cannot understand because she is sort of meandering, she is trying to put in so many different issues, if she just asks me a question. Please, ask me a question. I am quite happy to answer if she actually asks an intellectual question.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Point of Order.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, you have the floor to ask your second supplementary question.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. Can the Honourable Attorney-General assure the people of Fiji that lending will be easier, that they can easily borrow because the banks will make it easier for them to lend because it is not what it is at this time. The interest rates are still high on the variables. He was misled. On the variables, the interest rates have gone up. So, how can you make lending easier for our people from the commercial banks given that your liquidity is so high?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I remember in the last session of Parliament, I actually talked about the weighted average cost of interest and I actually gave a rundown over a number of decades as to what the interest rates were, for example, in the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, 2000 and now, and I gave that rundown. The Honourable Member should know that, if she is so interested in that area.

The reality of the matter, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that interest rates have come down and I am quite happy to supply her with the list. Again, they come, stand, and make all these really frivolous type of comments without understanding what the reality is. I am quite happy to supply her with a list that is put out by the RBF that has a weighted average cost of interest rates. That actually does demonstrate interest rates in Fiji overall has come down.

In respect of standing up here and saying, "Yes, tomorrow, I will ensure that everyone can go and borrow money easily", it will be quite stupid of me to say that because, Mr. Speaker, Sir, at the end of the day, it is up to the financial institutions to lend. As we have seen, the number of loans, for example, for personal loans, for buying cars, the number of cars that are on the road, are funded through loans. If they did not have access to loans, why would you see so many cars? It actually boils down to the individuals.

The banks assess the individual's capacity to repay the loan. The banks look at what asset that they are purchasing and they also, of course, liquidity comes into consideration too and also, individuals also shop around.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one other thing that the Honourable Member does not obviously know is that, previously, if you have, for example, a loan with the bank and then you want to shift to another bank, they used to charge you penalty rates for shifting the loan. That no longer is applicable in the manner as it was, Mr. Speaker, Sir, which has given people the ability to be a lot more mobile from moving from one financial institution to the other. That obviously increases their capacity to borrow and it makes the lending market a lot more attractive.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you Honourable Attorney-General. We will move on to the next question for today, the third Oral Question. I give the floor to the Honourable Dr. Ratu Atonio Lalabalavu to ask his question.

Status of MRI Scan Machine at CWM Hospital
(Question No. 203/2019)

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services update Parliament on the status of the Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) Scan Machine at the Colonial War Memorial Hospital?

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE (Minister for Health and Medical Services).- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, and I thank the Honourable Member for that question. The answer is, the MRI Machine is working well.

Honourable Speaker, the MRI Machine is a highly sophisticated diagnostic tool and I want to clarify that it is a diagnostic tool; it is not a treatment. I want to clarify to this august House because often, Fijians would say, "I hear there is a machine called the MRI machine at CWM Hospital and I want to go and have my treatment there." No, it is not a treatment, it is a diagnostic tool. It complements the diagnostic tools that are available in Fiji, such as the CT Scanner. It is in areas in which it is very specific and sensitive too and there are many areas in the body which it may not be very sensitive specific too and other diagnostic tools would do very well.

We have had before that the CT Scanner available at CWM Hospital initially and that at Lautoka Hospital and Labasa Hospital, but with the advent of the MRI, we have had the MRI since 2011 and that has been able to help not only Fijians but also people from around the Pacific and also those who have been travelling through and tourists who have come through to Fiji and have had injuries and needed an MRI and MRI was provided for them.

We developed some technical issues with the MRI machine on 13th August, 2019 and we promptly alerted the supplier through its locally based engineer. The engineer from New Zealand and the supplier, through the supplier came over and they identified that the Radiofrequency Ablation, Radio Frequency Amplifier Component was an issue and the parts were ordered, which arrived on 21st August. The test run was done on Friday, 23rd August which showed that the MRI machine was normal and the services resumed on Monday, 26th August, 2019.

Because it is diagnostic efficiency, Honourable Speaker and in the interest of keeping the MRI serviceable, we have a service contract in place which is current until 2022 which means that we have a

service contract with the company that made the machine and the supplier. When we have issues with the machine, they are responsible for the maintenance of the machine. Thank you Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. Honourable Dr. Ratu Lalabalavu, you have the floor

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Supplementary question, seeing that there is only one MRI Machine in Fiji, how long is the waiting list for those that are being referred for diagnostic test on the MRI, and how does the Ministry address this treatment during the times when the machines is not operational? Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, and I thank the Honourable Member for that question.

As I had alluded to earlier, it is not a treatment, it is diagnostic tool that complements the other diagnostic tools in the imaging that we have, such as the CT Scanner, the Ultrasound Scanner and the X-Ray Machines which are now digitalised. Before, we did not have an MRI Machine, so they were diagnosis that were carried out by the CT Scanner.

At the moment, we are very keen on continuing to develop the MRI Machine that we have in Suva, we also ensure that referrals to the MRI Machine are only by specialists because certainly, we need to ensure that it is actually the right diagnostic for the right patient. So only a specialist can be able to make bookings or make referrals to an MRI.

The waiting list is not as long because we have been able to clamp that down and ensure that only specialists can be able to do that. There have been occasions where patients had been thought to have an MRI but it was seen that it was better that they use a CT Scanner, or even an Ultrasound Scanner. So in those occasions, they have not had the MRI.

The other thing, Honourable Speaker, that also helps is the fact that we have a means to report the MRI reports. We have a radiologist who is very senior, who does some reporting; we have also tendered out reporting, and we also have one of our local radiologists, who had just returned from China where she spent three years doing a Masters in Radiology specialising on MRI. Thank you.

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

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. I thank the Honourable Minister for that explanation in reassuring the nation that the MRI Machine is working because a lot of concerns were raised in regards to the breakdown of that machine.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- What is your supplementary question?

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Can the Honourable Minister confirm whether it is also in the National Health Plan to include another MRI Machine in the new Lautoka Hospital? Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

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

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Honourable Speaker, we have just heard yesterday that Lautoka is now part of the Public Private Partnership (PPP) where Healthcare Fiji is the company that looks after it. I am certain that they will look at their own diagnostic tools and that includes the MRI.

Honourable Speaker, our current MRI is now eight years old. Normally, for machines such as that biomedical equipment, we try and ensure that within 14 years we replace them. We have already got plans in place to replace the current MRI, and that will happen in the next two years. *Vinaka*.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister.

We will move on to the next Oral Question for today which is the fourth Oral Question, and I give the floor to the Honourable Alipate Nagata to ask his question. You have the floor, Sir.

Housing Assistance for People with Disabilities
(Question No. 204/2019)

HON. A.T. NAGATA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism, Local Government, Housing and Community Development update Parliament on housing assistance which are available to people with disabilities?

HON. P.D. KUMAR (Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism, Local Government, Housing and Community Development).- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the Honourable Member for his question.

The programme on housing assistance for persons with disabilities was introduced in the second half of the 2018-2019 financial year. The policy framework is administered by the Ministry of Housing and Community Development, in partnership with the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, and Habitat for Humanity Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the policy is aligned to section 46(1) of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2018, which safeguards people living with disability, the right to an adequate standard of living.

According to the 2017 census by the Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 13.7 percent of Fijians aged three years and above are reported to be living with some form of disability.

The Housing Programme for people living with disability is implemented by the Habitat for Humanity Fiji, and what they do is that they retrofit homes to accommodate Fijians living with disabilities.

The funding covers a variety of accessibility upgrades, including the construction of ramps, railings, grab bars, disabled friendly footpaths and accessible sanitation around the home.

Applicants to this housing assistance must be registered with the Disability Unit of the Department of Social Welfare.

Applications can be made to the Department of Social Welfare, or with the Habitat for Humanity that acts as the secretariat. The secretariat will then visit the homes to ensure that they are suitable for habitation before making a recommendation to the Selection Committee for approval.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the Selection Committee is chaired by the Permanent Secretary for Housing and Community Development and this Committee is made up of the Director of Housing, Director of Social

Welfare, Director of Fiji Disabled People's Federation and the National Director of Habitat for Humanity Fiji. The Selection Committee then reviews and approves the application. I thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, may I direct my question to the Honourable Minister. Firstly, this is a commendable policy and certainly we have our people living with disabilities that need this housing. Can you please state to the House subdivisions or areas that actually have been earmarked for this housing assistance or how is it going to be implemented? Thank you.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have just explained that this is a retrofit. In other words, people who have houses and are living in it, but they do not have railings, they do not have hand grabs and they do not have the footpath which is friendly for them. So, these are the facilities that is provided by Habitat for Humanity. Maybe, I should continue with the rest. Then there are other assistance programmes which anyone can access.

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

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, just a question to the Honourable Minister, what is the turnaround time for such applications to be approved before they are implemented? Thank you.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- I do not have the specific detail because the turnaround time depends upon things, for example, the application that is submitted on time. There is a little bit of confusion because one of the criteria that is used is that, the person must be registered with the Department of Social Welfare in the Disability Unit. So, that is one of the first criteria, that you have to be registered and sometimes applications come in where there are some discrepancies, so that needs to be sorted out before the service is delivered.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister.

Honourable Members, we will now suspend proceedings for refreshment in the Big Committee Room, and we will resume in half an hour.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.29 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.04 a.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will continue with the Agenda Item and for the fifth Oral Question for today, I give the floor to the Honourable Inosi Kuridrani to ask his question. You have the floor.

Joint Venture Partnerships - FSC and Landowning Units
(Question No. 205/2019)

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

Can the Honourable Prime Minister and Minister for iTaukei Affairs and Sugar Industry update Parliament on the status and progress made in the Joint Venture partnership between the Fiji Sugar Corporation and various landowning units?

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

Honourable Speaker, before I provide an answer to the question, as Prime Minister and President of the Fiji Rugby Union, I would like to wish our Team all the best as they depart this Friday to Japan.

(Acclamation)

Honourable Speaker, our joint venture partnerships are progressing well. We now operate nine joint ventures, covering a total of around 508 hectares of arable land to grow and supply cane - four in the Western Division and five in the Northern Division.

In the 2019 season, another four of these joint ventures began planting cane, making a total of eight joint ventures currently producing cane, covering a total of 260 hectares. The final existing joint ventures are making final preparations to begin planting cane as well.

While some joint ventures have already recorded serious profits, many of our joint ventures remain in the early stages of their production timelines, meaning they are still recouping their initial establishment cost. However, there are revenues and yields have been extremely positive, putting all of our current joint ventures on track to full profitability in the long term.

The success of our joint ventures, Honourable Speaker, is not going unnoticed. The Fiji Sugar Corporation (FSC) is in the process of establishing an additional eight joint ventures both, in the Western Division and Northern Division. These new joint ventures have a potential cane area of 165 hectares to produce 8,200 tonnes of cane, and this addition will bring the total area of cane under joint ventures to 670 hectares with the potential to produce nearly 40,000 tonnes of cane. This can potentially generate over \$3 million in revenue at the current guaranteed price of \$85 per tonne.

Our vision for our joint ventures remain consistent, Honourable Speaker. We are building the capacity among our *mataqali* landowners and partners to transform these joint ventures into fully-owned self-sufficient business ventures. They will put more profit in the pockets of our landowners and help build economies of scale within our sugar industry, that will bring down costs and make our Fijian sugar more competitive in this increasingly uncertain global market. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Prime Minister.

Honourable Members, there being no supplementary questions, we move on to the sixth Oral Question for today and I give the floor to the Honourable Dr. Salik Govind to ask his question. You have the floor, Sir.

National Emergency Operation Centre
(Question No. 206/2019)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Disaster Management and Meteorological Services inform Parliament on the state of readiness of the National Emergency Operation Centre (NEOC)?

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 on the National Emergency Operation Centre.

The National Emergency Operation Centre is a critical part of the work of the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) work which is now incorporated into the Ministry that I currently head. The NEOC is that part of the NDMO that has the role of coordinating any activities related to disaster monitoring, issuing warnings and also coordinating immediate post disaster response, including the disaster relief work. It obviously needs to be manned on a 24-hour basis whenever there is a disaster in place and it carries out its functions according to its Standard Operating Procedures and it works in tandem with the Divisional Emergency Operation Centres and also the District Level Emergency Operation Centres that will be in operation across the county.

The National Emergency Operation Centre has been fitted with the ordinary furniture and fixtures in the past but since we had the big disaster in 2016, we have seen that there are more intense disasters, so the need to properly equip, update and to improve the National Emergency Operation Centres has become apparent and this in fact has prioritised by a National Steering Committee for the Building Safety and Resilience Programme (BSRP). This BSRP programme was something that was funded by European Union (EU) and the ACP. They had a project that was ongoing in the Pacific. I think it went on for about five years and it will be completed this year.

Out of that particular programme, the BSRP, the EU funding, there was a sum of \$90,000 that came out of that project for the upgrading of the National Emergency Operation Centre and we also have some assistance from the DFAT, Australian Government to the tune of around \$110,000. So this combined figure of around \$200,000 has been used to improve the kind of equipment and the centre that we have for the National Emergency Operation Centre.

The National Emergency Operation Centre has now moved across from the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development, it is now housed in Nasilivata House in Samabula. There has been a lot of improvement that is being done in terms of the IT infrastructure that is in place. The IT infrastructure upgrade to its existing systems, there is now a strong connectivity between the system that we have there with the other existing systems that we have in the country, such as the Fiji Maritime Surveillance and Rescue Coordination Programme that is currently being handled by the Fiji Navy in Togalevu.

We are also now trying to hook up our National Emergency Operation Centre with the Ministry of Defence Operational Room. In the past, what we have always had is that the National Emergency Operation Centre, the backup has always been the facilities that they have at the Fiji Military Forces. The facility that they have at the Queen Elizabeth Barracks has been the backup for our National Emergency Operation Centre but now that we have the software systems that are being put into the National

Emergency Operation Centre are also being put into the Ministry of Defence Operation Centre, we now have to use the Ministry of Defence as a backup to the National Emergency Operation Centre.

Perhaps, in the future, we will be looking at a backup, maybe on the other side of the island, not to have both centres here in Suva. So currently the backup will be at the Ministry of Defence, we will have the National Emergency Operation Centre in Nasilivata House but eventually in the future we will have to look at a backup somewhere else, it cannot be together in Suva. Perhaps, Blackrock might be a place for us to consider putting in a backup for this facility.

Also, as part of the facility, the National Emergency Operation Centre now has a direct connectivity to the Fiji Meteorological Services. The Fiji Meteorological Services collects a lot of meteorological data and this is fed into the National Emergency Operation Centre so from the NDMO they can keep track of issues that might lead to disasters.

It is interesting also to note, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that the Fiji Meteorological Service now also has programmes that they want to be able to forecast coastal inundation of flooding along the coastal zones, especially where you have storm surges, when there is a cyclone coming in, we need to have that ability to be able to estimate the parts of Fiji that might be flooded as a result of these storm surges. So, that sort of information, together with the other programme that is being undertaken now at the Fiji Meteorological Service, they are developing their Flash Flood Guidance System. Through the data they are able to collect, to be able to provide and issue flash flood forecast and warnings to places in Fiji where this might be happening. So, that connectivity is being established in the NEOC.

Also, as part of the NEOC, they are developing their geographical GIS, sort of, systems. There has been an allocation of a GIS work station within the NEOC. This will aid in mapping and geospatial analysis of data needed to help in disaster response planning for the NDMO, and we are looking forward to all of these works to further boost and enhance the vital work of the NEOC.

So, currently we have the work that is being done by the Fiji Navy in terms of search and rescue, the work that is being done at the NEOC, housed in Nasilivata House and we have the operation centre in the Ministry of Defence. So all of these will be speaking to each other, so as we get into the disaster where cyclones are around the corner for us, we are now in the zone now as cyclones are happening. We know that right now, there is a Category Five cyclone that is happening in the Bahamas. We hope that nothing like that will occur here in Fiji, but we are looking forward to the NEOC and its upgrade.

I must give a lot of credit to my predecessor, Honourable Lt. Col. Seruiratu, who was at the forefront of spearheading the development and improvement of our NEOC so that if disasters do happen, we should be in a position to be able to manage it for the betterment of the people of our country. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. A. JALE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I thank the Honourable Minister for his answer.

The question that I would like to raise with the Honourable Minister, the Japanese Government had assisted the Fiji Government in installing machines in some of the remote meteorological offices around the country. I am wondering whether those machines had achieved its intended purpose. One of its intended purposes was to minimise manpower in those locations. How are those machines working?
Vinaka.

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

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I can come back with a more elaborate list of where these machines are.

I think the Honourable Member is referring to the automatic weather stations. These are weather stations around the country where it collects data. The data is supposed to be collected and transmitted automatically to the Fiji Meteorological Service where that is coordinated.

My understanding is that, generally they are working fine. Next week, I will be in Kadavu and we will also be seeing the one that is located there in Vunisea. So I am sure that they are all working in tandem and they are providing that information across to the Fiji Meteorological Service Office which then programmes that in accordance with the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO).

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

HON. M.R. LEAWARE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I would like to thank the Honourable Minister for the vast improvement that has been made at the NEOC. But in terms of the equipment, how well-equipped are the officers who are looking after these equipment in terms of training, communication, et cetera? Are there provisions made available for the purpose of training these officers? Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I thank the Honourable Member for his supplementary question. Yes, if you have all the equipment in the world but we do not have people to be able to use it well, it is all going to come to naught.

The NDMO has had a long standing focus on developing its people. People have been sent for post-graduate training and also smaller programmes that are focussed on the work that they do on an everyday basis.

They have also had a lot of emphasis in developing the Standard Operating Procedures that will be used in case of an emergency. That is used at the NEOC and because we also have Divisional Emergency Operation Centres and District Emergency Operational Centres, all of these need to work in tandem because in the disaster scenario that we have in Fiji, the NDMO comes under my Ministry but the actual implementation on the ground are the Divisional Emergency Operation Centres and the District Emergency Operation Centres that come under the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development.

There is also training undertaken for those who will man the Divisional Emergency Operation Centres and the District Emergency Operation Centre so that if something does happen, that we will be able to work in tandem. So, the information that comes out of this system will allow us to give good information to all of our first responders. Our first responders are, of course, the Military, Police, all of these bodies working in tandem through the training, we should be able to save lives and significantly reduce damage and losses to the property of people that we have in Fiji.

Already this year the NDMO, through funding partnership from stakeholders, has delivered around three of these Emergency Operation Centre trainings for people at the divisional and at the district level, and where it is needed, we will continue to do this. I think I will rest there, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. On tsunami warning systems, there have been recent tests on that. Could the Honourable Minister please explain the response rate or whether

it is acceptable response rate and how would they rectify some of the gaps in there plus whether these systems will be expanded to other parts of the country?

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

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I do not have the exact date in terms of feedback reports of the effectiveness of how people responded to the tsunami warning, the testing that was carried out in Suva. I would invite the Honourable Member to perhaps, address a specific question on that issue and I will try to get the response to it.

But the tsunami warning system that we have, the whole country can be affected by tsunami but it will work in tandem with the Mineral Resources Department (MRD) that assess all of these issues but at the same time when you put in the warning systems, you have to put it initially in the places where you have highest population density.

Obviously, right now the highest population density that we have is in this area and that is why the warning systems have been put in Suva. I think the next stage will be to look at the area around Nadi but in terms of the feedback on how well the drills went, I will have to get that information and as I said, invite the Member to pose a more specific question or email me and I will get that response back to him.

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

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I thank the Honourable Minister for his replies.

The supplementary question that I would like to raise is, can the Honourable Minister explain as to why he is using the word “backup” when it comes to the role of Military in disasters? I thought that they should be right in the front, from the monitoring right down to the execution of disaster roles and that has been done and that has been the practice in the past. Why are you using the word “backup” here? Are they playing a kind of a secondary role now?

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

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. In response to that particular question, the Military will still be the first response. When something happens, they will be there physically.

The backup I was talking about was in terms of the information, the database; the backup for the service. So, when you set up a National Emergency Operation Centre, you have a physical server, you can also back it up in the cloud and you backup your server also in another server somewhere else in case something happens to the server that you have in Nasilivata House.

The way it has been designed in the past is that, the information within that NEOC is backed up in the servers that are in the RFMF. What we are looking at now, the information that we have in our NEOC will be backed up in the server that they have at the Ministry of Defence. So, it is backup in terms of the systems, all the information and everything that is being fed into the NEOC system so that it provides the information that we need.

In terms of the first response, yes, the Military will still be there physically on the ground helping out, but these are the backup in terms of the databases and all of those sort of things.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. Honourable Mitieli Bulanauca, your supplementary question.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. We may have a Centre ready at all times, but what we are concerned with is the communication throughout Fiji to the Centre. Are they all ready or not? In particular, two in Vanua Balavu and Kabara, are complaining about their masts whereby communication has broken down. I think you should also ensure that those kind of communications are ready. Are they ready or not?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you for that question. One of the things that we learnt after *TC Winston* was the need for good communication systems. I think there was a big problem after *TC Winston* happened, the difficulty of communicating with places that were affected. So one of the changes that they are looking at now at NDMO is putting up systems where, in each of these places where you have district emergency operational centres, to have a system where you have masts or something, that communicates.

If there is an impending cyclone, you can lay it down on the ground. And then when that cyclone has gone, you can put it back up again so that you can maintain that communication. That is one of the programmes that the NDMO is working on, to make sure that if we know that there is going to be a cyclone in Lau and we know that our district emergency operation centres are operating there, we change the communication system. Before the cyclone comes, you put the mast down and after the cyclone goes, then you put it back up again so that you can maintain communication. That is now a strategy that is being used in NDMO. Not down; up and down!

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister. We will move on to the seventh Oral question for today and I give the floor to the Honourable Niko Nawaikula to ask his question. You have the floor, Sir.

FHRADC Annual Reports 2009 – 2015
(Question No. 207/2019)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications inform Parliament as to when will the Fiji Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission submit its Annual Reports for 2009-2015 to His Excellency the President?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM (Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I would like to thank the Honourable Member for this question. In fact, the Annual Reports from 2008 to 2015 are yet to be tabled.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for an update to Parliament, the accounts have been audited by the Office of the Auditor-General. However, there are a number of queries that they have had, and those queries have been sent to the Human Rights Commission.

They have sent it on to the former Management and as you know, there has been an entire change in Management, in particular after 2013. So, they sent it to the former Management for their response.

We understand that once the responses are received or not received, they will finalise a response to the Office of the Auditor-General by September which is this month, and then it will be tabled soon thereafter, as soon as the Office of the Auditor-General completes those reports.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, you would also note that the 2016-2018 Reports were, in fact, tabled in Parliament yesterday for that particular period. Thank you, Mr. Speaker Sir.

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

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Mr. Speaker, a significant decrease in the allocation for the Human Rights this year of \$1.1 million. Will that impact on the work of the Fiji Human Rights Commission, including the preparations of these reports?

HON. SPEAKER.- I give the floor to the Honourable Minister. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, I did not understand the Honourable Member's question. Please, if you could repeat.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- There has been a significant decrease of the budgetary allocation with a sum of \$1.1 million to the Human Rights. Will that impact on its work, including the preparation of these reports?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- No, Mr. Speaker, Sir. In fact, as I mentioned, the accounts have been audited by the Office of the Auditor-General. They had some queries. They have sent that to the former Management. They are awaiting their response. Once that is received by September this year which is this month, they will then prepare the reports. So they should not have any impact on the preparation of these reports. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister. We will move on to the eighth Oral Question for today and I give the floor to the Honourable Viam Pillay to ask his question. You have the floor, Sir.

Update on the ITTO Project in the Rewa Delta
(Question No. 208/2019)

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

With the International Tropical Timber Organisation (ITTO) Project on Mangroves in the Rewa Delta almost complete, can the Honourable Minister for Forestry update Parliament on all the developments that have taken place through this Project since it started in 2015?

HON. O. NAIQAMU (Minister for Forestry).- Honourable Speaker, I thank the Honourable Member for his question.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the Mangroves Development Project in the Rewa Delta is co-funded by the International Tropical Timber Organisation (ITTO) and the Fijian Government with the Ministry of Forestry.

The project commenced in September 2015 for the specific duration of 36 months, ending on September this year, 2019. However, I am happy to advise this august House that the ITTO has extended the project for another 10 months until the end of July 2020.

The total cost of the project is US\$387,511 or approximately FJ\$847,970. Of this amount, ITTO's contribution is US\$310,576, equivalent to FJ\$679,617; while the Ministry contributes the balance of FJ\$168,353 which is mainly for administration costs, including staff wages.

The main objectives of this Project are to address problems associated with the increasing population, leading to excessive pressure on coastal and mangrove wetland resources within the Provinces of Rewa and Tailevu.

The coastal and mangrove wetlands generally referred to as the Rewa Delta, comprising approximately 35,238 hectares is a major source of livelihood for the communities in the area. Importantly is that, the Project aims to protect the entire coastal ecosystem that supports the riparian flatlands.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the targeted communities include the villages of Natila, Waicoka, Nasilai and Naivakacau in the Tailevu Province, and Narocake and Muanaira in the Rewa Province. These communities are being empowered to practise sustainable mangrove management and to protect and improve the quality of the coastal ecosystem.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, by the end of this Project, it is expected that the communities will help reduce the pressure from the over-utilisation of coastal and mangrove wetland resources. In addition, at least, 100 hectares of the degraded area in the selected demonstration site would be rehabilitated with appropriate coastal tree species to support ecosystem services and human wellbeing in the long term.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, from a national perspective, the Project will demonstrate sustainable policy programmes and activities that can be amplified in other river systems and communities that live in coastal wetlands and mangrove areas in Fiji and the Pacific Region.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, another increasingly important outcome of this Project is to build the capacity of mangroves, sea grasses and salt marshes to sequester carbon dioxide from the atmosphere as part of climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Of all the biological carbon, also termed as 'Green Carbon', captured in the world, 55 percent is captured by mangroves, sea grasses, salt marshes and other marine living organisms, which are also known more specifically as 'Blue Carbon'.

Mangroves, salt marshes and sea grasses form much of the earth's blue carbon sinks. These coastal vegetation sequester carbon far more effectively up to 100 times faster and more permanently than terrestrial forests. What that means, Honourable Speaker, Sir, is that, this project will directly contribute to Fiji's ability to trade in carbon and mitigate the impacts of climate change.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the developments that have taken place through this project over the years, include; firstly, capacity building and empowerment through training the communities on tree seed collection, raising and planting of seedlings. From the trainings provided, the communities have adopted and implemented alternate livelihood options, therefore, decreasing over-dependence on mangrove resources.

The communities are also empowered economically, as many individuals have started raising seedlings and selling these for income. The project itself has also purchased excess seedlings from these communities to plant in other areas.

Secondly, the project has established permanent nurseries in all the project sites. These nurseries are aimed at supplying nursery stock on permanent basis, even after the completion of the project. The nurseries have a wide variety of seedlings that include coastal species, fruit trees and native trees.

Honourable Speaker, the replanting of these trees will also bring back those traditional fruit and medicinal trees that were previously present in the Rewa Delta, but were lost over time or remain scarce now. In addition, this has also created employment, as all the six villages have a nursery attendant paid to maintain stock in the nurseries.

Thirdly, Honourable Speaker, Sir, the project has established Nursery Distribution Centres in Burebasaga in Rewa and Vunivivi Hill in Nausori. These Nursery Distribution Centres will cater for requests from communities residing in the Rewa and Tailevu Provinces. It will also support the Government's tree planting initiative under the 4 Million Trees in 4 Years (4MT4Y) Programme.

Honourable Speaker Sir, another long term benefit is that the communities will have their very own fuel wood farms in their backyard.

Mangroves will be restored, bringing back all the brackishwater marine species which women in the Delta had relied on in the past to generate income, especially with the sale of crabs.

Fruit trees will be another source of income for them as well, and the communities in the Delta will be protected against strong waves and rising sea levels, as the restored mangroves will provide an important layer of natural protection for the coastal villages.

In conclusion, Honourable Speaker, the ITTO project will result in significant benefits to the communities and to Fiji as a whole. Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. RO T.V. KEPa.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, I thank the Honourable Minister for his response, especially for this project that has been extended to July 2020.

My concern, however, Honourable Speaker, is that whilst we are trying to contribute to the planting of the 4 Million Tree Initiative, why does the Government continue to issue licences to cut mangroves in the other areas of the Rewa Delta where people rely on these areas for their food source, such as fish, crabs, prawns, *moci, kai*, et cetera?

I was just looking at their Programme for COP 23, Honourable Speaker, where in the Fiji Pavilion in November 2018, they were promoting coastal blue carbon ecosystems which the Honourable Minister has spoken about, which involves the mangroves, salt marshes and seagrasses. So, what they are doing is it affects the ecosystems and the habitat in the Rewa Delta.

HON. SPEAKER.- Your question, Honourable Member.

HON. RO T.V. KEPa.- So, that is my question to the Honourable Minister, why are you still issuing licences?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. O. NAIQAMU.- Honourable Speaker Sir, for the information of the honorable House, the Ministry of Forestry does not issue any licences for mangrove harvesting. Thank you.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Government does. The Government is doing it.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Mitieli Bulanauca.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. My supplementary question is in three phases, I suppose. I am thankful for the information that we have been given for planting of mangroves to protect our ecosystem.

The concern that has been raised in the first supplementary question is about reclamation, issuing of licences by the Director of Lands. I am not too sure whether the Ministry of Forests also has consideration towards that or not, because they should. This is a concern with the forest reserves on mangroves.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, my question is on the Mangrove Management Plan of 1985 and 1986, when is that going to be reviewed? Also the 2012 Mangrove Bill, when is that going to come and whether all these Ministries (Ministry of Lands, Ministry of Forests and the Department of Environment) have been monitoring their work properly or not? Thank you, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, you are entitled to ask one supplementary question. You asked about four supplementary questions. I will give it to the Honourable Minister.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- One supplementary question with four phases.

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

HON. O. NAIQAMU.- Honourable Speaker, the Ministry of Land handles the management plans.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Salote Radrodoro, you have the floor.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. Previously in this House, we have heard the Honourable Minister for Fisheries highlighting the importance of the mangrove and its ecosystem. I would like to ask the Honourable Minister for Forestry, what role does the Ministry play in regards to development projects that saw the destruction of mangroves in Nawi, in Malolo, and there are others that I may not have mentioned? What role does the Ministry play in those development projects? Thank you Honourable Speaker.

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

HON. O. NAIQAMU.- Honourable Speaker, when it comes to planting of mangroves, that is the Ministry of Forestry. On the management of mangroves, that is the Ministry of Lands. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

Honourable Ro Filipe Tuisawau, you have the floor.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. The Honourable Minister mentioned mangroves and subsistence livelihood. Subsistence livelihood means the residents or the villagers using resources from the mangrove for their own use.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Question.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- The question is, for this subsistence livelihood which the Honourable Minister mentioned, why is the Government hindering the villagers from having a subsistence livelihood by various licences, improve a lot of finance, even small boats requiring to have licences just for going to get subsistence livelihood? Why is the Government hindering it?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. O. NAIQAMU.- Honourable Speaker, the question is similar to the last question. My Ministry is not responsible for licences, it is the Ministry of Trade.

HON. SPEAKER.- We will move on. That brings to an end the Oral Questions for today and will move onto Written Questions.

For the first Written Question for today, I give the floor to the Honourable Adi Litia Qionibaravi to ask her question.

Written Questions

Update on Landless iTaukei People (Question No. 209/2019)

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

Can the Honourable Prime Minister and Minister for iTaukei Affairs and Sugar Industry please update Parliament on the number of landless indigenous Fijians by province and division in 2019?

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

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Prime Minister. We will move on to the second Written Question for today and I give the floor to the Honourable Salote Radrodoro to ask her question.

Update on Domestic Violence Complaints (Question No. 210/2019)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation provide an update to Parliament on the number of domestic violence complaints from 1st January, 2014 to 30th June, 2019 with a breakdown by age, gender and province?

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA (Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation).- Honourable Speaker, as permitted under Standing Order 45(3), I will table my response at a later date.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you Honourable Minister. Honourable Members, question time is now over.

Honourable Members, we will now adjourn proceedings for lunch and this is being provided in the Big Committee Room. I also thank all Honourable Members for your contribution to today's sitting.

Parliament is now adjourned until 9.30 a.m. tomorrow.

The Parliament adjourned at 11.46 a.m.