

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

THURSDAY, 20TH FEBRUARY, 2020

[CORRECTED COPY]

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THURSDAY, 20TH FEBRUARY, 2020

The Parliament resumed at 9.39 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

HONOURABLE SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Members were present except the Honourable Prime Minister and Minister for iTaukei Affairs and Sugar Industry, Honourable Minister for Defence, National Security and Foreign Affairs, Honourable Prof. B.C. Prasad, Honourable L.S. Qereqeretabua and Honourable Lt. Col. P. Tikoduadua.

MINUTES

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I move:

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Wednesday, 19th February, 2020, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATION FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome

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

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

I was getting lonely, I now am satisfied that we have got a full House.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND CERTAIN DOCUMENTS

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, in accordance with Standing Order 38, I present the 2019 Electoral Commission Annual Report. Thank you.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. SPEAKER.- Under Standing Order 38(2), I refer the 2019 Electoral Commission Annual Report to the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights.

I now call upon the Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, Honourable Mereseini Vuniwaqa, to table her Report.

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, in accordance with Standing Order 38, I present the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation Annual Report for the period 1st August, 2017 to 31st July, 2018 to Parliament.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. SPEAKER.- Under Standing Order 38(2), I refer the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation Annual Report for the period 1st August, 2017 to 31st July, 2018 to the Standing Committee on Social Affairs.

PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Honourable Viam Pillay, to table his Report. You have the floor, Sir.

Standing Committee on Social Affairs - University of the South Pacific (USP) Annual Review, 31st December, 2018

HON. V. PILLAY.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. Honourable Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to present the Report of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs on the Annual Review of the University of the South Pacific (USP) for the year ended 31st December, 2018.

In accordance with its established Annual Report review process, the Committee examines Annual Reports of agencies, in order to investigate, inquire into and make recommendations relating to the agencies' administration, legislative or proposed legislative programme, budget, functions, organisational structure and policy formulation. As part of this process, the Committee conducted public hearings to gather additional information.

The process has proven to be an effective means of gauging its progress and maintaining a high level of scrutiny of the agencies under review. This review was made in accordance with Standing Order 109(2)(b) which mandates the Committee to look into issues related to health, education, social services, labour, culture and media. The review looked at nine key areas covering the period from 1st January to 31st December, 2018, conducted into the University's administration; structure; budgetary allocation; programmes and activities; policies; challenges; highlights; priorities for the coming years and its implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

At this juncture, I also would like to thank the Vice-Chancellor and President of the USP, Professor Pal Ahluwalia and his staff for their assistance in this review process. The Committee is confident that under Professor Ahluwalia's robust leadership, USP will be able to achieve its mission and vision through the implementation of its Strategic Plan 2019 to 2024.

I also extend my gratitude to my Committee colleagues, namely, Honourable George Vegnathan (Deputy Chairperson), Honourable Alipate Nagata, Honourable Salote Radrodoro and Honourable Dr. Ratu Atonio Lalabalavu, for their contributions as well as to Honourable Simione Rasova for availing himself as an Alternate Member for those Members who were unable to attend the Committee Meetings. Finally, I thank the Secretariat for the assistance provided during the Committee's deliberations.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, I commend the University of the South Pacific's 2018 Annual Report to Parliament and request all Members of this august House to take note of the Committee's Report. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, please, hand the Report to the Secretary-General.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. V. PILLAY.- 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. G. VEGNATHAN.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to unanimously.

Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights -
FICAC Annual Reports, 1st January-31st July 2016; 1st August 2016-31st July 2017

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights, Honourable Alvick Maharaj, to table his Report. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. Honourable Speaker, the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption (FICAC) is Fiji's leading anti-corruption agency that was established for the purpose of responding to the people's plea for accountability of public offices and its officials. FICAC was established in 2007 and since its establishment has dealt with hundreds of corruption-related cases, which shows a pivotal role it plays in the lives of all Fijians.

According to the Deputy Commissioner, FICAC has made steady progress in combating, preventing and investigating corruption and has continuously promoted and refined innovation in the nation's anti-corruption work. Efforts have also been made to streamline the referral of non-corruption complaints to the Government Information and Referral Centre (GIRC).

The Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights was referred the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption Annual Report 1st January-31st July, 2016 and the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption Annual Report 1st August, 2016-31st July, 2017.

The Committee deliberated on the Reports and noted a few pertinent matters in its content. These matters were discussed with the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption which were appropriately clarified. The Office provided responses to the questions and these were scrutinised by the Committee.

In its review, the Committee highlighted several findings from the Report. Some of these findings are:

- that the office of the Commissioner has been vacant since the establishment of the Commission, thus sought comments on this from the Commission's representatives;
- on the aspect of human resources of the Commission and whether the number of staff was sufficient;
- on the Commission's statistics of cases recommended for closure with respect to why some cases have names specified and some do not;
- on the procedures that the Commission follows in coming to a conclusion on a particular case and recommends it for closure due to insufficient evidence;
- on the "Good Kiddo" programme of the Commission; and
- on the financial statements such as the use of accounting terms and clarification of certain figures captured in the financial statements and its accompanying notes.

Based on the findings of the Report, the Committee makes some recommendations:

Through the review of the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption Annual Report 1st January-31st July 2016 and the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption Annual Report 1st August, 2016-31st July, 2017, it can be inferred that there has been commendable effort conducted by the organisation in meeting its obligations. However, the Committee, after extensive deliberation, has come up with certain recommendations that it feels warrant consideration by the Office.

I would also like to thank the Honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights, the Honourable Rohit Sharma (Deputy Chairperson), Honourable Ratu Suliano Matanitobua, Honourable Dr. Salik Govind and Honourable Mosese Bilitavu, for their deliberation and input and the Alternate Members who made themselves available when the substantive Members could not attend, also the Secretariat and the officials from the FICAC who had assisted in the Committee's work.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights, I commend the Fiji Independence Commission Against Corruption Annual Report 1st January-31st July, 2016 and Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption Annual Report 1st August, 2016-31st July, 2017 to Parliament and request all the Members of the august House to take into consideration the recommendation put forward by the Committee. Thank you.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move a motion without notice that the debate on the content of this Report is initiated at a future sitting. Thank you.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to unanimously.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the following Ministers have given notice to make Ministerial Statements under Standing Orders 40:

1. Two Statements from the Minister for Health and Medical Services; and
2. One Statement from the Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation.

Honourable Members, as you are aware, each Minister may speak for up to 20 minutes. After each Minister speaks, I will then invite the Leader of the Opposition or his designate to speak on the Statement for no more than five minutes. There will also be a response from the Leader of the NFP or his designate to also speak for five minutes. There will be no other debate.

Honourable Members, I now call on the Minister for Health and Medical Services, Honourable Dr. Ifereimi Waqainabete, to deliver his first Statement. You have the floor, Sir.

Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Outbreak

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. The Honourable Cabinet Ministers, Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament, ladies and gentlemen who are watching today.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in this House to make a Statement on the current situation of this novel strain of coronavirus, now formally called “COVID-19” that has put the international community and Fiji on high alert. It seems that the misinformation about this disease is spreading even more quickly than COVID-19 itself, so I rise today in hopes of adding clarity to the situation and quelling unfounded fear among the Fijian public.

The Director-General of the World Health Organisation (WHO), a few days ago said there is now another epidemic and that epidemic is “infodemic” which is the epidemic of misinformation and you call it “infodemic” and that is why I stand today to quell that fear.

Mr. Speaker, COVID-19 belongs to a group of viruses called coronaviruses. There are seven coronaviruses that are currently known to infect humans, and most cause a mild flu, cold or flu-like illness. However, there are some coronaviruses that may cause more severe disease like Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) which affected countries around the Arabian Peninsula in 2012 and SARS, as we know, originated in China in 2003.

We now have COVID-19 which is like SARS and MERS, a coronavirus that can cause severe sickness and death. COVID-19 was first recorded in late December of last year in Wuhan, the Capital of Mainland China’s Hubei Province. In recent weeks, the disease has spread and risen in severity, with new cases identified outside of China. The WHO has formally declared the outbreak as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) on 30th January, 2020. But any other new diseases are unknown but the following things we know from those who have had the disease:

- 1) Eighty (80) percent of those who are infected have a mild form of the disease;
- 2) Severe disease only occurs in 14 percent of cases, with people over the age of 60 and those with pre-existing diseases are more likely to develop a severe case of the disease;

- 3) 80 percent have a mild form; 14 percent to 15 percent have the moderate to severe form and these are those who are over 60 and those who have pre-existing conditions, for example, they may have an immunocompromising condition, like diabetes. They may have had a previous stroke and therefore they are immobile. They may have HIV and AIDS, for example. These conditions make the more vulnerable to getting the disease and the severe form of the disease.

What we also know is that about 80 of those who have died of the disease are over the age of 60, and 75 percent of them have pre-existing conditions. The death rate, Mr. Speaker, is 2 percent, that means 98 percent of them that get the disease survive, let us get that straight; 98 percent survive, 2 percent die.

For comparison, COVID-19's survival rate is far higher than SARS, SARS which went and went past that 90 percent survival rate and MERS less than 70 percent. COVID-19 is 98 percent survival rate. COVID-19's infection rate is higher than SARS and MERS but lower than measles. Measles, when one coughs in the room, can infect 13 people, SARS and MERS are about two to four, COVID-19 is in between the two, therefore so it is not very contagious like measles.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- That means that simple ...

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Not airborne?

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- ... preventative actions, (listen to the Doctor), and good hygiene like frequently washing your hands can prevent you from getting the disease; it is not airborne.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- It is not airborne. The disease has rarely been diagnosed in children which suggest that young people who do get infected have a very mild form of the disease.

We also know that this virus is transmitted from person-to-person through droplets spread, requiring close human-to-human contact.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- If someone has the disease then touches someone else then they can get it.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Not airborne.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- There is zero, I repeat, zero evidence that this disease can spread through the air, this is what we know so far. This is a Ministerial Statement, not question time.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- We know.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- We will continue to work closely with experts and medical professionals of WHO to stay up to date on every new development and discovery relating to this virus. We expect additional information on the severity of the virus, clinical features, risk factors and transmission patterns to emerge from the research and studies underway in special institutions around the world. At the present time, Fiji's nationwide response has been formulated on the best available information provided by the world's top minds working to address, contain and manage this new disease.

HON. MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- As of today, Honourable Speaker, there are zero confirmed cases of coronavirus in Fiji ...

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- ... despite being recorded in 29 countries and territories around the globe, we have implemented a multi-layered response to prevent an outbreak in the country and we are actively preparing our medical facilities all over the nation to contain a case of the virus should one arise. We currently have two patients with flu-like symptoms who have travelled recently, in isolation while we await their results. Given that it is a flu season, we expect that there will be more people tested over time and that the public should not be concerned about this, as it shows that we are exercising an abundance of caution.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Listen.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Abundance of caution.

Fijian borders remain closed to all visitors from China within 14 days of their planned travel to Fiji. These passengers are screened at every port of entry in the country contrary to what has been implied by Fiji Times, that I will get to shortly.

To guide our national efforts to protect the Fijian people from COVID-19, the Ministry of Health and Medical Services established a national taskforce chaired by Fiji's Chief Medical Advisor that regularly meets to plan and coordinate our national response. This Chief Medical Advisor is a local, very well-qualified, a person of the highest calibre and he is heading our response.

This body includes Divisional Heads, Heads of Divisional Hospitals, Heads of National Programmes, representatives from the private health sector, the College of GPs, medical experts from the university, representatives from technical agencies like WHO, the Secretariat of the Pacific Community's Public Health Division, donor agencies and civil societies.

Border screening protocols ensure that we are able to identify any suspected cases as early as possible and provide them with immediate assistance to ensure they do not become a potential source of infection to others including their family members, health staff and members of the public.

Honourable Speaker, our health divisions and main hospitals have developed their preparedness plans. They are stocking up on essential medical supplies, preparing isolation facilities and training staff on the Ministry's infection control guidelines and COVID-19 public health and primary care management guidelines. Our health teams at the border continue to train staff of other border agencies and airlines to ensure that our combined border responses are enforced to maximum effect and adhere to best practices.

As a component of the overall preparedness and response plan for the Ministry, preventative isolation units in the Western, Central and Northern Divisions are being prepared which include Nadi Hospital and the Navua Hospital which have isolation wards established.

Honourable Speaker, I would like to dispel a number of totally bogus rumours that have been spread about our ongoing preparations at Navua Hospital. There are no planes, Honourable Speaker, of COVID-19 positive foreign nationals en route to Fiji and to Navua Hospital.

Navua Hospital is not a quarantine unit for other nations; it is not. The establishment of an isolation ward is a routine, precautionary measure taken in line with best practice. No risk is posed to residents in Navua. Honourable Speaker, in fact, the presence of the Unit means the risk of COVID-19 outbreak is dramatically reduced. Why? Because isolation units work.

Honourable Speaker, Navua was ground zero for measles, ground zero. It started in Wainadoi and that is where we contained it, Honourable Speaker, in Navua Hospital, that is where we contained it because isolation units work.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- During that time, we went and visited Navua. The Honourable Speaker came and visited Navua. I did not see any Opposition Member come to Navua Hospital, let alone Wainadoi and Navunikabi.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Why? Because they work. During the measles outbreak, there was an isolation unit there and it worked. In this unit, patients are isolated from the public and prevented from leaving. They have separate toilets and bathrooms, they are treated by staff in full protective uniforms, personal protective equipment meaning masks, eye shields, gloves and gowns. Their laundry is done separately, visitations are heavily restricted and, if necessary, Police can ensure these units remain totally isolated from the public but we are not stopping with border control preparing hospitals. We are also preparing and educating the Fijian people how they can protect themselves and others. There is a simple checklist that every Fijian should know:

- Cover your mouth and nose with disposable material when coughing or sneezing to avoid the spread of the infected droplets.
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water to avoid the spread of infected droplets resting on your hands.
- Encourage those around you to see factual information about the disease from credible sources such as the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, World Health Organisation and the Prime Minister's official statements.

HON. MEMBER.- Hear, hear!

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Fiji has not been spared from what the WHO Director-General has called the “infodemic”, the mass misinformation of COVID-19. Unfortunately, lies, it seems, are extremely dangerous.

Honourable Speaker, the *Fiji Times* ran an article online under that recklessly dangerous headline, “2019-nCoV: No screenings conducted at wharf” regarding passengers disembarking from a cruise ship in Suva Harbour.

Honourable Speaker, it blew up on social media and was the top viewed story on their website. In the online version of the story, there was no mention that that cruise ship and its passengers were actually screened at the port of entry of Lautoka.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Shame!

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- For some reason, that vital information was completely missing. Luckily, we got on to them and they removed that online story but the damage was already done, panic ensued and it was the *Fiji Times* who was to blame. This is not the first time that it has done this, gone on the front foot with half a story, but on this note, it went too far. To throw an inflammatory headline like that on *Facebook* with zero facts to back it up was a serious threat to public health and wellbeing. We cannot afford to see anything like that. Mr. Fred Wesley, know that we will be watching your reporting on your newspaper, online and on *Facebook* to ensure you are sticking with nothing but the facts. I urge your readership to do the same.

Mr. Speaker, the *Fiji Times* are not the only ones to blame. Members of the Opposition, mainly Honourable Tabuya, have been proven that they are far more interested in preying on people’s panic than on providing real information.

(Honourable Members interjections)

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Honourable Speaker, Honourable Tabuya is not a doctor, she is not an expert, she is a keyboard warrior who does not hesitate to give away her platform to any cause, no matter how deceitful, which gets enough likes to gain her attention. She recently endorsed a petition regarding the establishment of Navua Hospital’s isolation ward, a step which I remind her, could have saved someone’s life, God forbid if COVID-19 arrived in Fiji.

Honourable Speaker, the petition claims that trade winds could spread the virus throughout the entire nation. Mr. Speaker, this is absurd. This is not an airborne disease. There is no risk of trade winds or any other winds, south winds or western winds, northern winds, no other winds can carry COVID-19 throughout Fiji.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Honourable Speaker, the petition called for the use of

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- A Point of Order.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are concerned that the Honourable Minister is being mere economical with the truth. He needs to explain, Sir, that when tourists got off the cruise ship, he mentioned screening. That could be misleading.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Can he explain in detail what that means? Because the tourists said they were not screened.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Relevance and accuracy, thank you.

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

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Honourable Speaker, this petition calls for the use of isolation wards on outer islands. If that were to happen ...

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Moala.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- ... the edge of an infected Fijian, they said “Moala”.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Yes.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- I want Fiji to hear, they have said “Moala”.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- The odds of infected Fijians surviving would plummet. We simply do not have the capacity at this stage now in the islands the facilities to treat a serious case of a virus. Frankly, the idea is appalling. We will never allow misplaced, ignorant fear to jeopardise the life of a patient.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Some will find it easy for such measures to be discussed when the prospective sick and suffering may not be theirs or what if it is their family, what if it is them or us, it could be me or it could be them. Will they like to be put on another island without any facility to look after them knowing that there is a 98 percent survival rate? Honourable Tabuya should be ashamed to have associated herself with such irrational and inhumane positions. You are supposed to be a leader, real leaders do not fan flames of panic, they seek the facts and they provide our people with responsible guidance.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- But undermining the vital work ...

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- ... of our Ministry, of people who are your colleagues, your friends from school, those who are your cousins, your brothers, your daughters and sons working in the Ministry of Health ...

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.-...by undermining them, making them have mistrust in the people of Fiji, have mistrust in the system, then I am sorry, you have made yourself a clear and present danger to our citizens' health and wellbeing.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- As a doctor, I feel the need to tell Honourable Tabuya this, "Do not think about the 'likes'."

HON. SPEAKER.- A Point of Order.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- A Point of Order, Honourable Speaker. The Honourable Minister is again misleading the House.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- There is absolutely nowhere in my petition on my page that I have ever mentioned the trade winds he is talking about. Please, show that to me or in the House otherwise withdraw your statement.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- That is the Point of Order.

HON. MEMBER.- It is there.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- "It is there" where? It is not here in my petition.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- He is misleading the House, Honourable Speaker. I have not mentioned that all on my post. Thank you, he needs to withdraw that.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- And stop picking on me, my classmates and my family...

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- ... in your statement.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- You have made your Point of Order. Honourable Minister.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Real leaders do not fan flames of panic, they seek the facts. Do not think about the "likes" on *Facebook*, think about lives and I am talking as a doctor now, think about lives.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Think about what is the best thing to be done to save Fijians.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Honourable Speaker,

HON. MEMBER.- Prevention is better than cure.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Honourable Tabuya told her supporters what could happen if they do not prepare isolation wards. Does she ever know that an infected Fijian would be far more likely to die in an outer island?

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- She doesn't know.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Has she told anyone that the petition she endorses advocates positions that condemn our nation to poorly-informed solutions that could cost lives? Does she know that this is the same Ministry in the same Government that makes sure that no child died from the measles outbreak?

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Does she know that the Ministry of Health has taken this step in line with the most up-to-date developments and advice ...

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- ... from the top medical minds from Fiji and around the world?

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- No.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Whether she does not know or do not want to know ...

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- ... I want every Fijian to know she is wrong and her actions have serious consequences.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- She is wrong.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- If we do ever get a case of COVID-19 in Fiji, you will know today, Fiji, that we are prepared and it will not be because ...

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- ... of Honourable Tabuya and her politics.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Honourable Speaker, many of our Health staff, I am passionate today because they are my colleagues, maybe not be yours but they are mine.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Many of our health staff have been on the frontline protecting our people throughout the measles outbreak, working night and day, seven days a week, without respite since November last year. Their dedication to our people and their proven professionalism speaks for itself, Honourable Speaker. Our plans to contain COVID-19 is not political. They are well thought-out by our experts within the Ministry in consultation with WHO and is based on evidence and international best practice, while considering local context best suited to our response and the reality on the ground in Fiji. Honourable Speaker, Members on the other side of the House who would cynically undermine the work of these people, and ultimately the safety of the public for political point-scoring should be condemned by every Fijian who shares the belief that our people's health must always rise above politics.

How does the Opposition think if someone who has been working on the measles outbreak, two tropical cyclone responses and preparing for COVID-19 is going to take this type of undermining? These are our people, these are our families, these are the Ministry of Health staff, they deserve your gratitude, they deserve our gratitude, not this type of behaviour that impairs the ability to work effectively to protect our people. If these preparations are hindered, every time the Ministry sets up a facility to prepare the nation for the possibility of COVID-19 arriving in this country, it has to fight off rumours, criticism, petitions, fake news and community panic, then we will not be ready. It will be more likely that the disease will spread and people will die. That is what is happening here, make no mistake. These actions endanger the health of our people and these actions cost lives.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON.DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Honourable Speaker, I have said earlier inside this august House that my mother from Bemana in Navosa of the *Yavusa Davutukia* have a common phrase. The common phrase is *hai-va-hewa*, meaning to move slowly but with absolute certainty, that the option or action we are taking is the wisest given what is at hand.

I echo the same phrase of *hai-va-hewa*, Honourable Gavoka, *hai-va-hewa*, to Members of the opposite side, because everything we are doing now is to ensure, not only the safety of the few, but the safety of all Fijians. My close friend from Navua would say *dheere, dheere*, this situation is not of our making, but as a member of the global community, our nation is vulnerable.

Honourable Speaker, COVID-19 does not discriminate according to religion, ethnicity or nationality - it just happened to take its origin from mainland China and we must not discriminate either. If COVID-19 came to Fiji, we will need a united facts-based response. The reality is, my family can be just as affected as your family on the other side. We need solidarity, leadership and cooperation. We need to support the people who are protecting our health; your brothers and sisters of the Ministry of Health.

Honourable Speaker, I want to finish with this: throughout the measles campaign, throughout this COVID-19, the Honourable Dr. Ratu Atonio Lalabalabu said nothing. The reason why he said nothing, Honourable Speaker, because he knows his colleagues are more than capable on the ground to look after this case. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

I thank the Minister for his Ministerial Statement. I now give the floor to the Honourable Dr. Ratu Atonio Lalabalavu, you have the floor, Sir.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I agree with the Honourable Minister for Health that I know the capabilities within my colleagues, but it is just the resources and the capacities, I think, they lack to carry out their work.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- There you go.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to respond to the Ministerial Statement on COVID-19. Firstly, I thank the Minister for his timely response and timely update to the nation and I urge him to issue daily video updates to keep the nation informed.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our health system is vulnerable to an infectious disease outbreak and I thank the Minister for outlining the measures implemented by the Ministry of Health. Recently, we had a scare with measles, which became deadly in Samoa with over 80 dead, due to low immunisation rates. Fiji's immunisation rate was around 95 percent and that we still had measles outbreak.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Trues up!

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- If I recall correctly, Sir, with studies done, 95 percent say there should not be any re-emergence of measles. Our measles was important therefore with an ongoing measles outbreak in New Zealand and Samoa, I believe the imported measles show that our border security was not that stringent and tight.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the WHO Director-General has stated that over the past few weeks, the world has witnessed the emergence of a previously unknown pathogen, which escalated into an unprecedented outbreak and has been met by an unprecedented response. Mr. Speaker, we cannot have a business as usual response to this deadly global outbreak. The WHO Director-General congratulated the Chinese Government for the extraordinary measures implemented to contain the outbreak, despite the severe social and economic impact those measures are having on the Chinese people.

While we as a nation consider measures to counter the WHO declared global health emergency, one thing that must always be paramount is that prevention is better than cure. I repeat, Mr. Speaker, Sir, prevention is better than cure. The Government of the day is tasked with the responsibility to ensure that coronavirus or COVID-19 will not reach our shores.

Mr. Speaker, the most important role of any government is to protect the health of its people, the whole nation expects the Government to prioritize their health over other considerations. We must therefore implement and enforce extraordinary measures similar to those of China to prevent COVID-19 from reaching Fiji and spreading.

Mr. Speaker, Government must remember that we are dealing with people, not numbers. These extraordinary measures must include:

- 1) Maintaining stringent border control at all ports of entry, both airports and seaports bearing in mind, we are the Pacific geographical hub for air and sea travel.

- 2) Our national airline, Fiji Airways, continues to service destinations that have confirmed coronavirus cases. Government and the airline have legal and moral obligations to implement measures to protect our aviation industry workers as well as those at our Ports of Entry.
- 3) We must ensure that we have the capacity and resources to detect, respond and treat an active case.
- 4) Government must have a plan of action that guides our response to a positive case and this must include declaring quarantine stations under the Public Health Act, upskilling medical personnel in terms of knowledge, resources and protective gear. The WHO has identified the risk to medical personnel who were treating active patients. Medical personnel have families as well and Government must implement protective measures for them.
- 5) Government must continue to have dialogue and consultation with stakeholders and the public on the national plan of action against coronavirus and measures being implemented by the Ministry under the Public Health Act.

Mr. Speaker, the Government cannot continue its habit of deciding matters in isolation, as it has since 2006, especially for a public health emergency as we are facing. When there is lack of information and a further lack of consultation, the people understandably are susceptible to rumours, especially in the new information, or rather “disinformation” age.

I thank the Minister for his daily updates and statements over the last week and urge the Ministry to give a daily video update that are broadcast on TV news and on social media which many of our people are connected to. This will reassure the people.

Hundreds of demonstrators rallied for a second day in Hong Kong to protest against plans to turn some buildings into coronavirus quarantine centres, reviving anti-government protests. The area is densely-populated and protesters are angry about the lack of consultation.

The WHO Director-General has recommended regular media updates to combat the spread of rumours and misinformation. Government must not be reactive but rather proactive against misinformation. I thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the opportunity to respond to the Ministerial Statement

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member for his Statement. Honourable Members, as the Leader of the NFP or his designate are not here, that ends the debate on that Ministerial Statement. We will now adjourn for morning tea. We adjourn.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.25 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.02 a.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will continue with the Ministerial Statements and I now call on the Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, Honourable Mereseini Vuniwaqa, to deliver her Statement. You have the floor, Madam.

Fiji National Action Plan (FNAP) to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls (PVAWG)

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I rise to inform this august House about the Fiji National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls which the Fijian Government, through the National Women's machinery, has committed to develop. But firstly, I would also like to take this time to remember the many Fijian women and girls who have been murdered, injured, abused or otherwise harmed by men who professed to have loved them.

Fijian women and girls experience violence and abuse at the hands of men they know often in their own homes and often repeatedly, sometimes over many years, if not a lifetime. We know this violence by many names and in many forms - family and domestic violence, intimate partner violence, emotional abuse, sexual assault, sexual harassment, rape, femicide and others.

Honourable Speaker, the prevalence of violence against women in Fiji is amongst the highest in the world with almost two out of three or 64 percent of women, who have been subjected to physical or sexual violence in their lifetime, double the global average (which is one out of three women) and most cases are perpetrated by an intimate partner. The murder of women and girls, especially in the context of domestic and family violence is often the final result of a long history of abuse.

In 2019 alone, 10 Fijian women were killed by their intimate partners. It is important to recognize and acknowledge that there are not only painful personal stories behind these statistics - but there are also attitudes, social norms and cultural complacency - attitudes that are embedded in gender inequality, gender discrimination and patriarchy. To me, knowingly or not, most of us give our boys licence to act abusively and it is up to girls to adjust accordingly. This is not nature, this is not nurture. We dismiss boys' aggression as a function of their masculinity and we rationalize it. The more we conform to gender stereotypes - masculine: strong, assertive and powerful; and feminine: submissive, pretty and weak, the conditions remain ripe for Fijian men and boys to exert power and control over women and girls - power we covertly tell our boys is theirs through tradition, socialization and role models.

Violence against women and girls is rooted in gender-based discrimination and social norms and gender stereotypes that perpetuate such violence. Global evidence confirms that this significant social problem is ultimately preventable. This means there is considerable scope for us as individuals, communities and as leaders to prevent violence against women and girls before it occurs and stop it before it starts.

Honourable Speaker, the Government of Fiji recognizes its obligation to prevent violence against women and girls and I am very pleased to stand here today and share that the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation (MWCPA) will lead, on behalf of Government, the development of a five-year (2020-2025) National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls. This will be done in collaboration with the Ministry for Education, Heritage and Arts, Ministry for Health and Medical Services, and the Ministry for Employment, Productivity, Industrial Relations, Youth and Sports.

Honourable Speaker, Government is not sitting by idly. We may not be riling up people's emotions on social media about the issue, but I assure this honourable House and the people of Fiji that Government is working very hard to address this social ill.

By way of providing some background, the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation organized a small advisory consultation group, made up of experts and key stakeholders to participate in a two-day meeting on the 4th to 5th December, 2019. The purpose of this meeting was to advance critical discussions and obtain an agreement related to the content and development of the National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls (PVAWG), including agreement on what causes PVAWG in Fiji. This workshop was attended by representatives of various government ministries, women's human rights organisations, transgender people's human rights organisations, disabled people's organisations (DPO), faith-based organisations, health-care service providers, non-governmental organisations, and other civil society organisations.

The meeting result was consensus on the root cause and contributing factors that increase risk for PVAWG in Fiji; the scope of violence to be addressed in the National Action Plan and agreement on shared language and definitions to be used moving forward; along with recommendations on the process for developing the National Action Plan. In addition, participants agreed to form and be part of a wider Prevention Advisory Group to support the development of the National Action Plan. As a result, a strategic outcomes document was developed and validated by all members of the Prevention Advisory Group as a foundational first step to developing the National Action Plan.

On the 13th of January, 2020, I, with my fellow Ministers - Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts, Minister for Health and Medical Services and the Assistant Minister for Employment, Productivity, Industrial Relations, Youth and Sports made a public announcement of this shared commitment formally through a press conference.

Honourable Speaker, once developed, Fiji will be one of the only two countries in the world to have a whole of government, inclusive, evidence-based approach to prevent violence against women and girls. The Fiji National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls will focus on preventing domestic violence, intimate partner violence and sexual violence against women and girls with an emphasis on stopping violence before it starts. Data and evidence from Fiji demonstrate that these are the most prevalent or widespread forms of violence against women and girls which urgently need to be addressed. It will include both primary and secondary prevention strategies and approaches. In elaborating to the Members of this august House, a primary prevention approach involves working with whole communities to address the underlying root causes of violence, attitudes, behaviours, social norms and practices that cause violence against women and girls. Secondary prevention refers to respond services that aim to stop repeat experiences of violence after it has already happened.

Honourable Speaker, please, allow me to highlight that the key components of the FNAP will include an explanation of why violence happens in Fiji. In order to solve the national problem, there must be an evidence-based as well as a shared understanding amongst us Fijians for what causes it. The FNAP will explain using data and evidence on what the root causes of violence against women and girls are in Fiji, and what additional contributing factors that makes the violence more likely to happen.

Honourable Speaker, when dealing with violence against women and girls, it is critical that any formulation of policy is based on data and evidence. Data and evidence must always inform and advise policy change. It worries me as a Member of this House and as the Minister for Women, to have read online on Honourable Tabuya's page, a petition on domestic violence. I say this not to criticise, Honourable Speaker, I say this because of the importance of this socially to us as leaders of this House. There is already in place a work plan by experts on this topic. We have our intentions, it may be good but, please, I ask the Honourable Member to think about the lives of the women in this country, to consider the fact that there are already experts on domestic violence that are already working towards a national plan for this. As a leader of this House, I would think that we would all come together and support what the experts of this country and the Government are doing in relation to putting together a national plan.

The national plan, Honourable Speaker, will further define the key strategies and actions needed to address the factors that cause and contribute to violence against women and girls. It will also look at how the different environments in Fiji - where we live, work, learn, socialise, pray and play - can be key settings for prevention activities, including education, health and social services. Sports and recreation clubs and spaces, faith-based contexts and the list goes on. It will also map out the different stakeholders and their roles, responsibilities, expertise and capacities to prevent violence against women and girls.

Honourable Speaker, the FNAP will be accompanied also by a National Communications Strategy and an implementation plan to ensure alignment on consistent messaging on prevention across a variety of channels to reach multiple levels of society in Fiji. Furthermore, the FNAP will be developed in a consultative and participatory manner, engaging citizens both Government and non-Government actors alike, with responsibility for various stages of design and implementation assigned appropriately. This means a series of nationwide consultations and dialogue with Fijian women, men, girls and boys, stakeholders from key setting, sectors and communities will be undertaken in 2020 to inform the development of the FNAP.

The key components of the FNAP include:

- 1) An explanation of why violence happens in Fiji. In order to solve a national problem, there must be an evidence-based understanding for what causes it. The FNAP will explain using data and evidence what the root cause of violence against women and girls is in Fiji and what additional contributing factors that make the violence more likely to happen.
- 2) Key strategies to prevent violence in Fiji. This will outline the key strategies and actions needed to address the factors that cause and contribute to violence against women and girls. Some examples of the types of strategies in the FNAP may include evidence-based policies and programmes that promote respectful relationships, group education with boys and men (sometimes in combination with women and girls), community engagement, ending the disrespectful portrayal of women in the media and leading on public education and social media campaigns.
- 3) Key Settings for Prevention: This will look at how the different environments in which people live, work, learn, socialise and play, can be key settings for prevention.
- 4) Stakeholder Roles and Responsibilities: This will map out the different stakeholders and their roles, responsibilities, expertise and capacities to prevent Violence Against Women and Girls in Fiji. The roles and responsibilities will be linked to the Implementation Plan.
- 5) Implementation Plan: The Implementation Plan will be summarised step-by-step including the national outcomes and targets, and explain how the outcomes will be achieved and the targets met, during the 2020-2025 period.
- 6) Performance Monitoring, Reporting and Evidence: There will be a rigorous approach to monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the National Action Plan, and the success of each outcome and target will be measured over time. This will contribute to building a strong evidence-base for Fiji.
- 7) National Communications Strategy: The National Action Plan will be accompanied by a National Communications Strategy and an implementation plan to ensure alignment on consistent messaging.

- 8) Costed Implementation Plan: A clear and costed budget to match the implementation plan will also be developed.

Honourable Speaker, the National Action Plan will be developed engaging both Government and Non-Government actors alike with responsibility for various stages of design and implementation assigned appropriately. Based on the main recommendations from the Prevention Advisory Group meeting, the following key steps will be taken:

- A series of nationwide consultations and dialogues in 2020 to inform the development. This will be led by the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation and partners; it will be inclusive, ensuring the voices of all women and girls and remote women and girls.
- The Prevention Advisory Group will provide technical guidance to the Fijian Government in the development and roll-out of the National Action Plan.
- A core working group nominated from within the Prevention Advisory Group will further accelerate action and provide strategic and technical oversight and endorsement of the National Action Plan and processes as it develops.

The Ministry plans to complete the development of the National Action Plan by the end of 2020. UN Women is the primary technical partner to the Ministry in developing this plan and UN Women's technical and financial support is provided through the Pacific Partnership to End Violence Against Women and Girls, funded by the European Union (EU) and the Governments of Australia and New Zealand, with support from UN Women Fiji Multi-Country Office (MCO). In addition to UN Women, the Ministry is receiving further technical support from the Government of Australia.

Honourable Speaker, a national conversation that honours and does justice to the experience of women and girls who have for too long suffered in silence, some paying the ultimate price, is very crucial in ensuring we all take responsibility in informing and executing the process. The extent and depth of change required to end violence against women is daunting. It will not happen overnight but the time for change is here and now. It is time to further our collective action and that takes all of us working at the same time, towards the same goal following one process. I am hopeful and dedicated, I am optimistic that we may arrive much sooner than we expect to our desired destination - Gender Equality. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister for the Ministerial Statement. I now call on the Honourable Salote Radrodro, you have the floor.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker and I rise to respond to the Ministerial Statement given by the Honourable Minister for Women on the National Plan of Action on Violence Against Women. Honourable Speaker, talk, talk, talk ...

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- ... talk - that is all we hear, Honourable Speaker. Honourable Speaker, indeed, we share the passion and the dedication that we have heard from the Honourable Minister for Women, the commitment. But, Honourable Speaker, talk is cheap. Without any action to realise our passion, our sharing of the hurts of families, women and children, that have suffered; all this talk comes to null. Honourable Speaker,

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- What did you do? What action did you take?

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- We have always been hearing in this House, the plans that the Ministry has on elimination of violence against women and children, and most times we hear the Honourable Minister for Women sharing their passion and plans on the National Gender Policy and Women's Plan of Action. But, Honourable Speaker, I ask: What has come about from all these plans? What have we achieved? Because the biggest performance indicator of all these plans, is the increasing rise in violence against women and children. That is our biggest performance indicator, so no matter what we say, what we do counts.

The fact that violence against women and children, as alluded to by the Honourable Minister, that in 2019 alone, we had 10 deaths and for that, the women died in the hands of their husbands. Also, we know there was a case of a man who accidentally killed his child. These are the performance indicators and we ask the question: How we, as a nation can address this? How we, as a nation can work together to eliminate violence against women and children?

Honourable Speaker, I remind the other side of the House that many times we have tabled motions, to have a national inquiry on elimination of violence against women. We had tabled the motion from this side of the House on how to counter drug abuse in Fiji. We had raised issues that violence against women and children is a national crisis. It is a national crisis that requires extraordinary measures to be able to address it. But, Honourable Speaker, I thank the Honourable Minister for bringing this national plan of action on violence against women, because we know they have heard and considered what we, on this side of the House, have brought into the House.

We had tabled a motion to have a national inquiry on the elimination of violence against women. I remember Honourable Tuisawau had said that violence against women and children is a national crisis. Honourable Speaker, we will not make any difference until and unless there is political will from the Government, from the Honourable Prime Minister, from the Honourable Minister for Economy. The Honourable Minister for Women will not be able to do anything constructive without those two giving the resources and the commitment. Otherwise, there is just a lot of talk from the Honourable Prime Minister himself, Honourable Attorney-General himself and the Honourable Minister for Economy does not allocate the necessary budget to the Honourable Minister for Women to be able to carry out their work.

Honourable Speaker, even during budget debate when we stand up on this side of the House to request that the budget of the Ministry be increased, the Honourable Minister for Women herself does not support it. Honourable Speaker, and here she comes into the House again with another plan. How on earth are they going to implement the plan without money? How on earth are they going to do that, Honourable Speaker?

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- If that is the kind of attitude we have from the Minister for Women herself, how on earth do we think we will be able to address this problem, Honourable Speaker? We need to have that kind of commitment from the Minister herself, otherwise all these plans have been invalidated by herself. And she should be the one that should be standing up there supporting our recommendation from this side of the House to increase the budget. Otherwise all those plans are all null and void, Honourable Speaker. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. As the Leader of the NFP and his designate are not here, we will move on and I now call on the Minister for Health and Medical Services, the Honourable Dr. Ifereimi Waqainabete, to deliver his second Statement for today. You have the floor, Sir.

Fiji Emergency Medical Assistance Team (FEMAT)

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I thank you for this opportunity to again deliver a Ministerial Statement on something that I believe is very important and something that we, as a nation, should be very proud of. Honourable Speaker, I rise before this House to give a brief on one of the new initiatives of this Fijian Government, and that is on the Fiji Emergency Medical Assistance Team (FEMAT).

Honourable Speaker, Sir, FEMAT comprises a group of health professionals that have been highly trained and equipped to provide services to a population affected by an emergency or natural disaster. When storms strike and inflict life-threatening injuries on our people, we need to get these affected Fijians the urgent care that they need, as soon as humanely possible.

Honourable Speaker, sometimes making the journey to a Health Centre, especially in the rural and maritime regions, can be painful, difficult or even impossible. That is where FEMAT comes in, they are a specialised team of medical professionals who can go directly into affected communities and provide services that save lives in times of disaster. In summary, it is like a special forces of the Ministry of Health, so to speak.

Honourable Speaker, the concept of an emergency medical team has been around the Ministry of Health for a long time. We have been part and parcel of NDMO work, including medical officers embedded into teams that go out into the communities after cyclones and other natural disasters, but during this period and during those times, we realise that there is only a limited amount of work that we can do. Often it is because either we did not have the resources or our people were not trained to look after Fijians and those who may be affected after a disaster.

Following *Tropical Cyclone Winston*, as we all know in 2016, the Ministry of Health and Medical Services participated in a conference on Emergency Medical Teams (EMT) in Japan. We knew before that and after the cyclone that training needed to be done for Fiji because Fiji was going to be experiencing similar or graver threats with climate change and we knew something had to be done. Therefore, Honourable Speaker, we laid the ground work in partnership with the World Health Organization (WHO) and OSPAT to build Fiji's capacity as a regional hub for disaster responses.

Honourable Speaker, as I had alluded to earlier, we were not starting from scratch. As I had said, there have been some work done from previous cyclones from before but more importantly our peace-keeping missions, we have had deployment from the Ministry of Health in a very significant way. Before, there used to be a doctor, maybe a nurse, maybe a pharmacist and also health inspectors, and you, Honourable Speaker, being a former Commander would have attested to this.

But it was in 2013 in Syria that we began to then really send teams of a significant number, that were being deployed to Syria and again in 2015, our first regional international humanitarian assistance disaster response was to Vanuatu after *Tropical Cyclone Pam*. This began to highlight the calibre of our staff and our capabilities.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Hear, hear!

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Honourable Speaker, at one stage over the past few years, we actually ran the United Nations hospital in Syria and to do that, we had to have a complement of nearly 20 Ministry of Health staff imbedded into the Royal Fiji Military Forces. These included qualified surgeons, anaesthetists, health inspectors, pharmacists, dentists, so to speak.

Honourable Speaker, Fiji's local response during *TC Winston* in 2016 again indicated our level of experience and exposure in disaster response. We did relatively quite well. However, we saw the value of ensuring our Disaster Response Teams have to be fully internationally accredited through the WHO Emergency Medical Team verification process.

So, essentially, Honourable Speaker, if a country had an emergency medical team that was not accredited because every nation is sovereign, you could possibly react within its own borders but outside of its borders, it was not certified to do so, and that is why we wanted to be sure that we had WHO verification for both inside and the capability to assist other Pacific Island Nation States if the need had to or even beyond that because of WHO verification.

So the WHO Emergency Medical Team's Secretariat's verification and accreditation system would ensure that our EMTs are quality-assured and wholly self-sufficient when responding to disasters. But this team is not only dedicated, as I have alluded to, to treating only Fijians in the wake of catastrophe, they provide a range of services for Fijians in our rural and maritime regions who have traditionally been beyond the reach of specialised medical services.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, we are grateful for the support of our development partners but let us be clear – FEMAT is a Government initiative. The team works closely with the National Disaster Management Office. We have received funding from WHO and MFAT for workshops. Additionally, the initial logistic supplies, including the tents, were supported by the Australian Government but the vast majority of funds helped in the setting up of the team and the continuous payment of the team until now comes from the Ministry of Health and Medical Services with the appropriation from the Fijian Government.

Honourable Speaker, I am proud to say that our FEMAT is a WHO verification International Type 1-fixed EMT which can provide responses and services equivalent to at least the Health Centres in Fiji. They can also assist other countries in the region when needed.

Honourable Speaker, Fiji is the first developing country, the first small island State and the first country in the Pacific to have an international EMT. In fact, Honourable Speaker, we are the ninth country in the world to have done so.

With FEMAT, the Ministry of Health and Medical Services now has a world-class disaster response system that can assist with organising and managing the National Health Emergency Operation Centre. FEMAT brings with it a high level of standard of care, practice and response mechanism that is timely, well-coordinated so that the Ministry is ready 24/7 to answer any call for disaster assistance and deployment.

Honourable Speaker, up till now we have 350 of our Ministry of Health staff that have been trained in FEMAT. Some of them were trained in Australia but majority of them were trained here locally and they are all over the country. So, there is a need, for example, we can have a team ready in the North, West or in Suva because they are all over the country and we continue with our training. We want to get as many as possible through our training programmes.

Honourable Speaker, FEMAT was internationally-verified on the 11th of May, 2019. Since its verification, FEMAT has been actively involved in surgical outreaches across the country. Under the principle of the WHO Universal Health Coverage, which is also a pillar of development and strategic priority for this Government, the Ministry of Health and Medical Services has started the decentralization of its specialised services to ensure that we reach the unreached and that no one is left behind. We are a nation of nearly 130 populated islands. We face challenges unique to our geography and to our people. That demands we be innovative and seek new ways to bring Fijians the high quality health services they deserve.

Last year, Honourable Speaker, we successfully deployed FEMAT surgical operations to Korovou, Sigatoka and Vunidawa Hospital and a maritime deployment to Kadavu with the support of the *Marine Vessel Veivueti*, Fiji's Hospital Ship, which has a surgical capability.

In the FEMAT community visits, with the use of specialized FEMAT tents, the Team operated on 84 individuals in Korovou, Tailevu, 50 in Sigatoka and 52 in Vunidawa. FEMAT was involved in the planning and testing of surgical facilities in the *Marine Vessel Veivueti* while berthed at the GSS wharf to test the system prior to the ship's first deployment in the maritime region. So far the *MV Veivueti* with FEMAT, has conducted surgical outreach in Lau and Kadavu and was used by the Lautoka Hospital in December, 2019 for two weeks while berthed at the Lautoka Wharf, and has just completed the two-week long outreach visits to the Northern Division.

Honourable Speaker, after *TC Sarai*, the FEMAT team conducted the outreach visit to Kadavu and delivered the following health services:

- 1) 60 Community Assessments
- 2) 120 WASH kits delivered
- 3) 154 Clinical Consultations
- 4) 47 Surgical operations
- 5) 5 Medical Evacuations to CWM Hospital
- 6) 24 Family health consults and Dignity Kits
- 7) 38 Psychological assessments and counselling
- 8) 10 Health Facility Assessments
- 9) 25 Dietetics and Nutrition counselling
- 10) 24 Food Business organisation inspections
- 11) 60 Vector surveillance inspections
- 12) 832 Cakes of soap distributed
- 13) 125 water purification systems distributed.

Then the FEMAT team followed up with a visit to the number of islands in the Southern Lau Group and provided the following health services for the people:

- 1) 591 Clinical Consultations
- 2) 3 operations
- 3) 2 Medical Evacuations to CWM Hospital
- 4) 37 Community Assessments and WASH initiatives
- 5) 15 Health Facility Assessments
- 6) 212 WASH kits delivered
- 7) 1060 Cakes of soap delivered
- 8) 2120 Purification tablets distribution
- 9) 98 Family health consultations
- 10) 193 Psychological Assessments (This was after the cyclone)
- 11) 260 Dignity kits distributed.

While berthed at the Lautoka Wharf for 2 weeks, the team completed 373 operations. At the GSS Wharf in Suva, for 5 days, they did 52 operations.

Honourable Speaker, two FEMAT missions were undertaken in the Northern Division:

- 1) Maritime mission; and
- 2) Mainland mission.

I was fortunate to be part of both. On these two visits, the following health services were delivered to the people of the Northern Division:

- 1) 75 Community Assessments
- 2) 45 WASH kits delivered
- 3) 1,098 Clinical Consultations
- 4) 121 Surgical operations
- 5) 51 O&G Consultations
- 6) 209 Eye procedures
- 7) 72 Paediatric consults
- 8) 2 Psychological assessments
- 9) 238 Dental Consultations, including 118 Dental Extractions and Treatments
- 10) 8 Health Facility Assessments
- 11) 162 Dietetics and Nutrition counselling
- 12) 18 Physiotherapy consultations
- 13) 33 Food Business organisations inspections
- 14) 50 Vector surveillance inspections

Honourable Speaker, there was an island that we went to in the Northern Maritime when there was a lady who had suffered from a stroke and was being looked after by the husband. They were the only couple in their house for the last two years, and our physiotherapist, together with our doctors and nurses went and visited them throughout the day that we were there. They taught the lady how to walk and showed her some simple exercises. That afternoon, as we were passing by the village, she was standing from her house assisted on the doorstep waving to us and thanking our staff for teaching her how to walk in her own home in her own island.

Honourable Speaker, these deployments have brought relief to countless families across Fiji saving people time, money and more life-threatening complications and mitigating the risk of the spread of communicable diseases.

Honourable Speaker, FEMAT has numerous benefits:

- 1) It has shown the world that Fiji is capable of achieving world-class service delivery and we have cemented our position as the hub of disaster response in the Pacific, may I remind this Honourable House that we were the 9th country in the world.
- 2) During *TC Sarai*, FEMAT conducted its first domestic deployment to Kadavu where the two systems were tested: Land-based medical team; and a Maritime team on the *Marine Vessel Veivueti*. The people of Fiji can be assured that in times of emergency or disaster, the Ministry of Health and Medical Services now has the capacity to ensure that 'no one is indeed left behind'.
- 3) More people in Fiji are being reached closer to their homes, villages and settlements by the FEMAT so they do not have to spend money travelling long distances to obtain medical services. The FEMAT has also started to reduce the Ministry of Health's medical evacuation expenditure by performing the needed operations in the rural communities and maritime regions.
- 4) Thanks to FEMAT's timely and well-coordinated responses, the Ministry is on the ground quickly after a natural disaster combatting the emergence of communicable diseases such as leptospirosis, typhoid and dengue fever.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, FEMAT is not a first responder in a disaster. They are activated as soon as the needs of the community are determined. FEMAT is also available to respond in any disease outbreak. It ran the headquarters' emergency operations centre for the measles outbreak and its team and mobile facility is on standby should its capability be needed to deal with any other serious outbreak situations such as the coronavirus.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the Fiji Government through the FEMAT continues to reinforce Fiji's position as a pioneer and leader in health and development across our region. I thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister for his Ministerial Statement. I give the floor to the Honourable Ratu Atonio Lalabalavu. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to contribute towards the Ministerial Statement by the Minister for Health and Medical Services with regards to the FEMAT.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, from the outset, I would like to say from this side of the House as designated by the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, to speak on this matter that we are also in support of the recognition given to our FEMAT, especially in terms of emergency cases. I believe the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services will remember as we used to work back then, it was known as an outreach team, a flying squad in cases of emergency.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the outcome of what we did back then is now being continued and we are thankful that now it is being recognised at an international level. For that, I thank the World Health Organisation (WHO) for recognising our very own local capabilities and it is good that it is being recognised but on the other hand, we need the resources and capabilities for them to do their work to the best of their abilities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have nothing against what the Honourable Minister has said. I am all for it but our concern from this side of the House, the Minister has mentioned about the budgeting of the FEMAT exercises and duties that it will carry. My concern is, if the budget is cut from the Ministry of Health and Medical Services which already has its own issues like medicine shortages, speciality shortages, medical machine shortages, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to put it into context, as my colleague, Honourable Rasova, had mentioned that in cases of emergency when flying in an aeroplane in the air and the mask drops down, make sure you put the mask first before you try and help others.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, from this side of the House, we congratulate the Government that the FEMAT has been recognised at an international level and we are looking forward to the work that they will be tasked to do, not only on our shores but in our neighbouring islands and probably at the international level as well. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member for his Statement. As the Leader of the NFP or his designate are not here, we will move on. That is the end of Ministerial Statements for today.

CONSIDERATION OF BILLS

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

TREATY ON THE PROHIBITION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now call on the Attorney-General, the Honourable Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum to move his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move that the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence review the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. Thank you.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- The Honourable Attorney-General has moved a motion to refer the Treaty to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence.

Honourable Members, I confirm that the Honourable Attorney-General has provided me with copies of the Treaty and written analysis as required by Standing Order 130(2).

Therefore, pursuant to Standing Order 130(3), the Treaty and analysis stand referred to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, for consideration and review. The Committee may table a report to Parliament no later than 30 days from today.

VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT CONVENTION 2019 AND PROTOCOL 2002 TO THE OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH CONVENTION

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Attorney-General, Honourable Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum to move his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

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

That the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence review the following International Labour Organisation Conventions:

- (a) Violence and Harassment Convention 2019; and
- (b) Protocol 2002 to the Occupational Safety and Health Convention.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the Honourable Attorney-General has moved a motion to refer the two Treaties to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence.

I confirm that the Honourable Attorney-General has provided me with copies of the two Treaties and written analysis as required by Standing Orders 130(2).

Therefore, pursuant to Standing Orders 130(3), the two Treaties and analysis stand referred to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, for consideration and review. The Committee may table a report to Parliament no later than 30 days from today.

FIJI FINANCIAL INTELLIGENCE UNIT (FFIU) - 2017 ANNUAL REPORT

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now call upon the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, the Honourable Vijay Nath, to move his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. V. NATH.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. I move:

That the Parliament debates the Fiji Financial Intelligence Unit (FFIU) 2017 Annual Report which was tabled on 2nd April, 2019.

HON. V.K. BHATNAGAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now invite the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs to speak on the motion. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. V. NATH.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. I move that the Parliament debates the Fiji Financial Intelligence Unit 2017 Annual Report which was tabled on 2nd April, 2019. As most of you are aware that the Fiji FFIU is one of the leading agencies in Fiji that is responsible for preventing and detecting money laundering and terrorists financing activities. It was established in 2006 under the Financial Transaction Reporting Unit in the form of an intelligence agency by the Fijian Government. Mr. Speaker, Sir, at the outset, I wish to commend the effort of FFIU for voluntarily producing this Annual Report. I must say that the findings of this Report educate and also provide awareness to all Fijians on the work carried out by the Unit.

As provided in the Report, the FFIU received and analysed 650 suspicious transaction reports amongst the 11 million or more financial transaction reports that they managed on their database. Apart from this, the FIU disseminated 448 intelligence reports to law enforcers. I also dwell on some of the findings made by the Committee after deliberating on the Report. The Committee realised the highly specialised nature of the work done by the FIU and recommends that:

- All necessary support should be given to the FFIU to continue providing these services; and
- Given the data collected by the FFIU, there should be a database to backup these data;

Further to this, the Committee was also made aware of the various strategies of the FFIU put in place in order to expand its network such as signing of a MOU with REALB and INTERPOL. In its Report, the Committee stressed that such partnerships are strongly encouraged and it would enhance the organisations ability to detect and investigate fraudulent activity.

Finally, the Committee supports the agreement for the FIU to have direct access to INTERPOL which will provide direct search functionality to the intelligence database at INTERPOL. To conclude, the FIU surely has made tremendous progress in the fight against money laundering and other criminal activities. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we support the work of the FFIU and its 2017 Annual Report. Thank you, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Chairperson. Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on this motion. Honourable Niko Nawaikula, you have the floor, Sir.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. With your will, I wish to contribute. As you know, we just came back from two days of boycott, exercising our Parliament democratic right. But, we were just only here and from there we were observing what was happening inside the House and I can say that it seems like as bearers of the truth, as soon as we took the truth out of the House, the House crumbled, under its own lies and its own rubbish.

HON. V. NATH.- A Point of Order. Honourable Speaker, Sir, I initiated and I moved that the Parliament debates on the FFIU 2017 Annual Report and nowhere in this Report is the content of what he is saying.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- No, I will come to that.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Chairperson, he is just coming around it, today. You have the floor.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- It is because this House deserves ...

HON. SPEAKER.- Get on with it now.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- ... honesty and let me just illustrate these lies and rubbish that were coming here. Yesterday, they debated about the FDB, patronising it and you have an obligation to tell the truth here.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Educate them!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- But the bank is a bad bank. This is a bank that went out of its way, it is no longer a development bank, it is now a bank for the investors. It is funding the investors who are coming here. It is not funding the farmers. All those lies and the FSC production is down. Why? It is because the FDB is not financing the farmers. I can tell you, Honourable Speaker, this bank financed an investor at Vatulele Resort - \$10 million, and working with the HFC Bank, Nawi Island in Savusavu - \$30 million, that is the \$30 million the FDB should be giving to the farmers, from Sabeto to here

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Sit down!

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, there is a Point of Order.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- A Point of Order.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- It is because you are telling lies, tell the truth.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Listen!

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- My Point of Order is that the events of yesterday have been discussed, have been completed, have been voted on ...

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- He was not here.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- ... have been agreed on and you want to bring it again.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- My point is, you tell the truth.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- You were not here, make an objection when you are here.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Honourable Speaker, this is completely different from what is being discussed. That is my Point of Order.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Tell the truth.

HON SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, just stick to this - what we are talking about now.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Let me give another illustration.

HON. SPEAKER.- Forget about yesterday.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- But that is part of money laundering. Honourable Speaker, yesterday from there, I heard the Minister for Lands.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- The Minister for Lands.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, you can hear it from there, you can hear it from the radio but if you were not present here

You know the rules of debates as well as I do. You have to be here to answer that so just stick to what we are talking about now.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- No, because it is linked to money laundering, it is related - FIA. You know, he talked about how a resort

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- A Point of Order, Mr. Speaker. Honourable Speaker, I think the Honourable Member has got enough leeway, you have allowed him to come in a roundabout way to the motion. He is not doing it. He is going round and roundabout. He is meandering, he is talking about the nonsense. The issues we had discussed yesterday, if he was not here, it is his problem. You have already made a ruling, he has to stick to this motion. The things that he is discussing today have already been discussed, that is another matter. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order! You have made your Point of Order. I did not give him the floor to come to the point in a roundabout way. I gave him the floor so that he can come towards that quick but he has been taking a long time. Just stick to what we are talking about - the motion.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- There is another lie from the Honourable Attorney-General.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Yes, he said I need to apologise because I said this Government is racist. This Government is racist, it is racist.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- A Point of Order.

HON. V. NATH.- Sit down!

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister, yes.

HON. J. USAMATE.- You have just told the Honourable Member to talk about the matter at hand which is the Standing Committee Report on the Fiji FIU. Despite these very clear and simple instructions, he continues to totally disregard. I think this is absolutely contempt for yourself and your position and for this House. If an instruction has been given, he needs to abide by that.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Please, do not lie.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- He is afraid.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, just stick to the subject. You have the floor.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Nothing to say. Sit down!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- No, another try. Honourable Speaker, I hold in my hands here the Report of the Committee that looked into this - the FIU. This is a very important Unit and sad to say that the Government does not give it, its support. If you come to Page 1, it says that “while deliberating on the Report, it was very evident that the data collected by FIU was of great value for law enforcement agencies but the problem is capacity” - lack of capacity. We have just heard in the *Fiji Times* that the RBF has been paid over \$350,000. For what, for doing nothing. This money should be paid to the Head of this Department because it is so important and so very vital.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Well, the Committee Members are doing nothing. Listen to what the Chairman said, “It was established to prevent money laundering and terrorist activities” but the Government has done nothing to give it capacity. They are sitting in an office in the RBF, and they come under the RBF. They deserve a better office of their own - that is if the Government is serious about the prevention of money laundering and terrorist activities. Now, you just look out there, you look at how the values of the properties have risen up.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- *Dina.*

HON. MEMBER.- What has that got to do with you?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- What has that got to do with this here?

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- You read the Report.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- The problem is, because you have not read the Report. It explains here the typical money laundering scheme. How does it happen? Black money from overseas is sent to Fiji and straight into the bank and then it is used to purchase all these properties, and the property value goes up to the extent that no one, not even a local can buy a property now. And who is receiving money? It goes back to them, it is black money, and that is a need here for the Government to increase the capacity of this Unit. Can you understand that?

(Laughter)

Can you understand that? That is your problem.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- So, I was saying that if you go to Page No. 2, it says:

“Although FIU is administered and financed by the Reserve Bank of Fiji, it is operationally autonomous and independent. The Director of FIU is appointed by the RBF’s Governor.”

My point is that, much, much more independence, independence, independence. It should not be subjected to the RBF. It should be independent on its own. It should be like FICAC, it should be like what?

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- FICAC?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- FICAC is not independent, I am sorry for that. The DPP is not independent and you know that.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Send them the recommendations, Mr. Speaker.

Their first recommendation says:

“The Committee appreciates that the production of the Annual Report by FIU is voluntary but given its importance in creating awareness and outreach to members of the public and all stakeholders, the Committee is of the view that FIU should be given the mandate to produce this Report.”

I commend the Committee for recommending that but not just talk, please, do something. Please, allocate money, increase the capacity.

The second recommendation says:

“The Committee realises the highly specialised nature of this work done by FIU”

Do not just realise it, please, put money into it.

The third recommendation says that the Committee notes that the 2017 Report highlights that FIU is compliant and there is a need to amend the Public Order Act. From 2017 until now, still nothing is done. So, my point is, we can come here and talk about the importance of this but the essential thing is to put money into it and the problem is, you do not have any money, *sa lala tiko go*. Ask the Honourable Attorney-General - where is all the money?

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- And how are you getting paid?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Where’s all the money?

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- *Dinau, dinau, dinau*. Now, you have all looked at the Government statistics from 2013 until now, every essential sectors are down, you wonder where is the money coming from - \$2.5 billion?

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- What has that got to do with you?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Because you're asking - Where is the money coming from - it is from the *dinau, dinau, dinau*.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- We do not *dinau* for our operational expenditure.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I challenge the Honourable Attorney-General here to say - how is the Government, Is there enough money for the Government to pay for its services within the month? No, there is nothing there. So, that is my point, Honourable Speaker, thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member for his contribution to the debate. Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to support the Review Report of the Standing Committee on Fiji's Financial Intelligence Unit - 2017 Annual Report. I acknowledge that FIU has voluntarily submitted the Annual Report which is highly encouraging.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I commend FIU's work during the Year 2017 and it is pleasing to note that they have analysed 650 suspicious transactions in 2017 as compared to 383 transactions in 2014, and that clearly shows the work they do and therefore there is no need for a separate office, I just do not get it. If they are doing the work, and we can see the results, they have been supporting a number of agencies, government agencies, they have been supporting banks, they have been supporting individual consumers whenever they face any of these kinds of problems, it is this agency who is able to come forward with the report and facilitate the action that needs to be undertaken.

I have personally used FIU when I was the CEO of the Consumer Council of Fiji and that case is actually reported in this 2017 Annual Report. We need this organisation and this organisation has been doing a wonderful work knowing very well that such kind of money laundering can now happen very easily through ICT, and with internet, we do come across a number of transactions that people can use to syphon the money and that was the case reported and there were two students who actually used internet to transfer money from the landlord's account into their own account.

You can see that it is not just about big transactions that can take place like what was highlighted by Honourable Niko Nawaikula in terms of real estate, but it also relates to individual who can face such similar problems. This institution gives the much-needed transparency and confidence that we need as an investment destination.

My Ministry (Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism and Investment Fiji) uses FIU for due diligence. They need reports before the investors come to our shores and they put in their application, et cetera.

All in all, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I support the recommendation and I think they are doing a wonderful job and we all should be behind this organisation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

The Members on the other side are asking “Where did you go yesterday?” Sigatoka.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- We went to Sigatoka for me to show my colleagues the apocalypse at Sigatoka River created under the FijiFirst Government. So you may want to go and see what you have done to the Sigatoka River, someone dropped the bomb there; a FijiFirst bomb!

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Honourable Speaker, FIU was established during the SDL administration setup by the then Attorney-General, Qoriniasi Bale, and it is normally a standalone agency in any jurisdiction. But for Fiji at that time, it was felt that it should come under the Reserve Bank of Fiji (RBF) until such time that it was strong enough to stand on its own. Indeed, we recommended it at one time (I am part of the Economic Affairs Committee), Honourable Speaker, that one day it will become a standalone agency. But for this time, it is under RBF and that was the way it was planned at that time by the Attorney-General, Qoriniasi Bale.

Honourable Speaker, there are a number of recommendations here that I would like to highlight, one is that, it is a very highly specialised Unit. You bring people from other agencies like the Police and the Tax Unit to be attached to the FIU and its intelligence is such that you need a bit of longevity in the position and we have recommended in here, Honourable Speaker, that whoever is seconded to FIU should be given a bit more time than the normal two or three-year attachment period, because it is highly specialised and I believe in intelligence, you need time on the job - that is part of the recommendation and indeed we have made inquiries. There were presentations made by the Fiji Police Force, Honourable Speaker, and these young policemen and policewomen who presented to the Committee are highly skilled, highly specialised and my only fear is that, they are also highly marketable, somebody can poach them from outside.

Our recommendation is that, they should be given a bit more time than the normal two years' attachment that I believe is the norm in Fiji.

On another recommendation, Honourable Speaker, FIU has a database, that is the most complete in this country. Anyone who needs any data will have to go to the FIU but one of the weaknesses with the FIU is that, they are not connected to International Criminal Police Organisation (INTERPOL). INTERPOL in Fiji is under the FPF and when they want to do something on a 24/7 basis, they have to wait until Monday to secure the data from INTERPOL so the recommendation is that, to review the protocol, that FIU has instant connection to INTERPOL. We have recommended this in this Report, it has come up again and I would ask, Honourable Speaker, that we do it immediately. I believe that they have agreed in principle but somehow it is still not happening.

Honourable Speaker, on the MOU with the Real Estates Licensing Board, the real estate sector is one of the most vulnerable areas in money laundering. People can send money from overseas and it can sit with the real estate companies and that money can be used by criminals. What is important, Honourable Speaker, is for the licensing board to be vigilant and what we noticed is that the real estate agents would need a lot more capacity-building to grow on the job, to become more professional.

Today, a real estate agent can be accredited after three years of experience. What we are recommending here, Honourable Speaker, is that together with the three years of experience, the universities must introduce a course that is relevant to real estates - they have it in New Zealand. We have recommended

it here that perhaps FNU or USP could introduce that course which runs together with experience on the job and may be night classes and the like. But again, it is still not happening and I would urge that this is taken on urgently.

All in all, Honourable Speaker, one thing that we must understand is that, the FIU protects the financial system of this country, that is very important. Yes, they combat money laundering and other criminal activities but the core of their calling is to protect the financial system and that is where we need to focus, Honourable Speaker, there are more recommendations coming.

(HON. MEMBER interjects)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Honourable Speaker, I think they need to be corrected on that one because the FIU is the watchdog, it provides a safeguard and through that safeguarding of the system, we protect the integrity of our financial system. One of the areas that we will be recommending is money lending. Money lending today is where people are surrendering their card and Personal Identification Number (PIN) to the money lenders.

That is where the vulnerability lies and that is where the FIU would come in very strongly to the banks to try and discourage such practices. The Government Member here is questioning my comment that they protect the integrity of our financial system, yes, it is, Honourable Speaker. If not then people from outside would be very anxious in dealing with Fiji that we do not have the FIU to protect the financial system.

Honourable Speaker, that is what the FIU is and this Parliament should continue to support the work of the FIU. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. Honourable Ro Filipe Tuisawau, you have the floor.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. I rise to contribute to the FIU 2017 Annual Report debate.

Just before I go on to that, we, as a Committee, are working very well despite what the Honourable Attorney-General said yesterday that we are here just for money. No, we are not there for money, we are contributing meaningfully and I hope those comments are not designed to divide the Committee because we are working very well.

Honourable Speaker, just going through the Report to contribute to the debate, as also raised I believe by the Honourable Minister for Trade, there was a huge jump if you look at Page 10 of the Report from Inland Revenue Services, possible violations under the Income Tax Act and the VAT Decree, 2016 (83) and 2017 (310). That is a major concern. It could be that the detection has improved inefficiency or there are more tax evaders in the country and probably the Honourable Minister for Economy would provide some further details on that, just to reassure the House and the people regarding the detection in that.

Honourable Speaker, the other issue regarding this Annual Report if you look at Page 14, that is another area of concern, the supervision of financial institutions for compliance with the Act, in particular, there are financial institutions, also designated non-financial businesses and professions. If you look at that list, it includes accountants, lawyers, real estate agents, other financial institutions so that was an area noted as a weakness.

As the Opposition, we would, I suppose, emphasise the improvements in those areas. In particular, in written form, those organisations, designated non-financial businesses and professions that have anti-money

laundering policy and procedures, whether they are conducting awareness and reporting obligations under the FTR Act and whether they are reporting all transaction reports and suspicious transactions.

Thirdly, Honourable Speaker, whether they conduct any anti-money laundering training and, of course, monitoring large and unusual transactions. Of course, as mentioned by Honourable Gavoka, the REALB. The Act relating to that is currently undergoing review in order to strengthen the monitoring element of that, in particular, transactions and the credibility of real estate agents so we are hoping to see a movement in the review of that Act in particular, if there is concrete push from the Minister to facilitate the review of that Act because it has been ongoing for the last two to three years.

Honourable Speaker, on Page 17, there is a particular interesting element - Unexplained Wealth Taskforce. They met three times so there are representatives from the FIU, the FPF, the FRCS and the FICAC. The term “unexplained wealth” is a very interesting term in Fiji, particularly when you look at the political history of this country - *coups*, overthrows of governments, and if we look back at the *Fiji Sun* - 27th October, 2017, the CEO of FRCS, Mr. Visvanath Das stated that there were 527 millionaires in Fiji; there are 334 business owners in that number and 193 by assessment of their annual salaries. It is interesting because if you look at the political history of the nation from 2006 up to now and if you look at the individuals involved in the *coup*, you would be asking, are they included in this 193 and whether they are millionaires. When you look at “unexplained wealth”, do we classify those as “unexplained wealth”?

That brings into question the role of this Committee and as explained by the Honourable Nawaikula, the independence of the FIU and this taskforce, is a concern. Not only that but the general public is losing trust in the independence of these institutions, for example, the FICAC. They selectively investigate and prosecute. We have seen that in a lot of cases and for this particular taskforce, we look at the individuals on the other side. How many of them have become millionaires from the 2006 *coup*? That is the fundamental question, not only that but also what kinds of income do they have. Have they declared all of it? These types of questions arise from the public and it creates mistrust from the public to the institutions and also in leadership. That is a concern as far as the independence of the FIU is concerned.

I know they are dismissing it but it could be a major issue and you will probably need to defend yourselves when the time comes. On page 20, if you look at that, the Fiji FIU having MOUs with other foreign FIUs. We have a list there of the number of countries but the concern is that there are a number of countries not included there so it is encouraged that FIU established MOUs with countries that are not there. Those not there includes Tonga and Tonga has experienced quite a huge influx of cocaine, drugs and drug dealers, also money laundering. Then we have the People’s Republic of China, New Zealand, Singapore and Hong Kong not there and, of course, the South American States which are the source countries for drugs. Those, Honourable Speaker, Sir, are my comments on the Report, contributing to improve our scrutiny of independent institutions. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. I give the floor to the Honourable Attorney-General.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Just a few comments: Before I start, most certainly, we can see that the quality of debate and contribution has dropped compared to what we had in the past two days. Of course, the intellectual ...

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- The intellectual prowess no longer exists because the absence sometimes are many. Actually, they uplift the quality of a particular forum.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to, of course, just highlight some of the issues regarding the FIU. I would like to, firstly, thank Mr. Razim Buksh in particular, who has been heading the FIU for a number of years now and in fact what the Members talk about the FIU being independent, et cetera, in the early days when it started under Q.B. Bale. In those days, of course, it had to be done post the September events in the USA when a number of laws were passed in the USA and countries that dealt with USA banking system, had to and in fact, were compelled to sign up to various laws and various measures in respect, in particular that point in time to stop terrorism financing. We had as a result of that, of course, the Financial Transactions Reporting Act. Under the Financial Transactions Reporting Act, of course, a number of institutions, organisations and professions actually got caught under that, so things like real estate agents, lawyers, accountants and various other professionals actually had to have their accounts audited and indeed submitted to ensure that they comply with the FTRA. That really is the geniuses of that and it propelled in fact an entire segment within the financial sector internationally where each individual country had to have in place intelligence units within their financial systems to ensure or trace or trail the money that came into their country and indeed went out of their country, also, to ensure collaboration between the different countries to stop terrorism financing and, of course, the net enlarged also to stop things like the cleaning of money or what we call “money laundering”.

In Fiji, of course, Mr. Speaker, the FTRA was signed so Fiji actually agreed at that point in time, post the events of September in USA that we will not, for example, allow offshore banking. Some countries actually still do offshore banking but they have put in place certain measures and Singapore is one of those countries that has a form of offshore banking, if you like. Fiji has agreed not to do so at all.

Now, Mr. Speaker, Sir, what has actually happened over the past number of years, the level and the type of intelligence gathering has become quite sophisticated and indeed quite nuanced. It is very critical that our intelligence unit in particular the FIU keeps abreast of that and Mr. Razim Buksh actually has been driving that force, and in fact now through the National Anti-Money Laundering Council (AMLC) which consists, of course, of the Solicitor-General, the Governor of the RBF, the CEO of FRCS, the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP), the Commissioner of Police and the Director of the FIU. They have formed the core of AMLC and the invited members from time to time are the Permanent Secretary for Defence, the PS for Economy, the PS for Foreign Affairs, the Director, Immigration and, of course, the Deputy Commissioner of FICAC.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a number of recommendations actually have been made by the Asia/Pacific Group on Money Laundering regarding Fiji’s need to comply with further standards that they have put out, they are fairly onerous and currently the Council is working on six recommendations and that is to further enhance the laws pertaining to targeted financial sanctions related to terrorism and terrorist-financing, targeted financial sanctions related to proliferation, Non-Profit Organisations, there are a number of NGOs that are now currently acting as fronts. Transparency and beneficial ownership of legal persons and if you will see now under the new Companies Act, if you go and register a company, previously you could actually register a company and have another company as the shareholder of that company so now under the law you are required to trace it all the way down to see who will be the beneficiary of those shares and indeed the dividends that may be declared through the holding of those shares by those respective companies. Now, transparency and beneficial ownership of legal arrangements and again into asset holding. Last but not least is regarding extradition.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, again we have got six of the laws regarding the need to be reviewed to give further compliance with this and, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for example, the Public Order Act needs to be looked at because as you know now that the Public Order Act actually has sections relating to terrorism-financing and that is under the Public Order Act and not what the Honourable Nawaikula was mentioning about the Public Order Act being amended because of what they have been saying. It is to do specifically with terrorism-financing.

Again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there has also been a need to look at what we call “Non Profit Organisation or Non-Government Organisations. Are they acting as fronts? We have now, actually if you look at those of you who try to register a NGO now or a charitable organisation, indeed in some countries they have seen a trend where charitable organisations indeed act as fronts for terrorism-financing or money laundering, et cetera, now will require, for example, police clearance. We need to know actually, originally who are the trustees, who are the directors of those organisations and we will be putting them in force. Again, we are looking at some of the company regulations to be able to get our compliance up to speed.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are also looking at some extradition matters because money laundering in certain parts is so proliferated that we need to be able to work with our partners to be able to ensure whether they have confidence in our system.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just to perhaps clear up some of the misunderstandings in particular from the other side regarding the financial systems, FIU is about ensuring integrity within our financial system but the main boy, if you like, or main girl, and all of this, is the Reserve Bank of Fiji. You have what we call “the ACRA rules” that RBF actually adheres to. If, for example, just putting it simply, if someone tomorrow decides to send some money across to a bank account in Fiji, the institution that actually immediately says, “Yes” or “No” to that is the RBF because they control currency movements in and out of Fiji. Indeed under the relevant law, the banks are compelled to report any transactions, both domestic transactions and also international transactions of any amount of \$10,000 or more.

The Reserve Bank of Fiji, of course, Mr. Speaker, Sir, has a number of other checks and balances in respect of the banking system. FIU actually plays a very pivotal role in respect of the intelligence gathering and also the intelligence dissemination. So, for example, as what the Minister for Industry of Trade was saying that when you get a foreigner coming into Fiji wanting to set up a company and before they are given a foreign investment certificate, now the Investment Fiji actually has to send all their particular personal details to FIU, and FIU does a background check on them.

And in fact we have had also many investors that have come directly to Government or write letters to Government saying, “We want to set up a rail system between Suva and Nausori or we want to set up some energy company.” We immediately refer it to FIU and invariably we find that most of these organisations are actually bogus organisations. They have a false website, they have an address maybe in some country that does not exist. So FIU actually gives that information to us and they are quite pivotal in that respect and therefore they do contribute towards ensuring that we do not allow the pernicious effect of things like money-laundering, because once your borders in that sense become porous then your financial system can actually wither away and people will not have confidence in your system at all.

So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to also highlight that the FIU has currently been working with, as we have mentioned, the Asia Pacific Money-Laundering Unit they have been seconding staff offshore. Of course, the real estates’ agencies, Real Estate Agents are now licensed and they come under the Ministry of Industry and Trade, they are independent body onto themselves. There is absolutely the need to look at, for example, professionalising our Real Estate Agents. But professionalising does not necessarily mean that you will stop money laundering or any deleterious effect of under-hand dealings in Real Estates. You can be a professional real estate agent, you will see that in many countries but you can also be a crook. You can also be facilitating money laundering, therefore there needs to be certain laws in place.

One of the ways that we have also tried to curb that, the Members of Parliament may remember that before 2018, we brought in place a law in Fiji where no foreigner can own any real estate, meaning land within bounds of a municipality as far as residential housing is concerned, because we did see that it was actually pushing up the price of real estate, and as a result of that, we saw the prices actually stabilised.

So, the point that I am trying to make, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that it is a holistic approach. FIU is important so is, for example, the RBF, of course, is critically important, FRCS is important, we need to take a whole of State approach in respect of ensuring that we protect our financial systems and we are also able to work with the various international partners to ensure that there is integrity within our financial system, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

I would like to thank the Committee for the Report, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I note they are not making specifically any recommendations per se but are recognising the work that has been done, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I would like to thank once again the FIU for their work. Thank you.

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

HON. V.K. BHATNAGAR.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to make a small contribution to the motion.

According to this 2017 Report, Mr. Speaker, Sir, FIU received and analysed 650 suspicious transaction reports amongst the \$11 million or more financial transaction reports they managed on their database. Being one of the leading agencies in Fiji that is responsible for preventing and detecting money laundering and terrorist-financing activities, FIU must be applauded for their efforts and achievements, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

According to the Director, Mr. Razim Buksh, I quote: “There is no such mandate for the FIU to produce those annual reports,” so this is a voluntary output but linked to a mandatory function of the FIU which is creating awareness and outreach to the members of the public and all the stakeholders who are either directly or indirectly impacted by the harms of money laundering and financial fraud, so it documents several issues not just on statistics but many things that touch the hearts and lives of ordinary Fijians and the businesses that operate here in Fiji, including our foreign investors. So, Honourable Speaker, Sir, I wish everyone reads this FIU Annual Report.

The other thing, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to highlight or rather I want to commend FIU on, is their contribution towards crime prevention and investigation. Mr. Buksh says that when there is a serious fraud being investigated by the police or FICAC or FRCS, they assist them in almost all of the serious fraud cases and they have a direct contribution in terms of providing financial records and assistance.

The other thing that they do is assisting asset recovery because of the wide reach of the Financial Transaction Reporting Act, they have got access to a lot of asset database in Fiji and they provide asset assistance to law enforcement agencies.

And another thing is that, FIU also assists the Taskforce in terms of identifying unexplained wealth of bank account holders and other people, this is also commendable, a job done by FIU. When Honourable Tuisawau was speaking, he mentioned that the millionaires are there and I do not know what is happening there. Actually the newest thing, according to Mr. Buksh, he says, and I quote: “That the newest thing that we added last year was enhanced scrutiny of us; public sector officials including Members of Parliament, Judiciary and diplomatic heads because we are in authority and we have a lot of empowerment entrusted on us, therefore the amount of transactions we conduct including monetary value, the bank accounts that we have, should require access and enhanced due diligence”.

And that is the whole focus of the entire global community to ensure that those people who are interested politically and otherwise to make important decisions are not subject to abuse and corruption. Therefore the FIU has a mandate to implement this within the banking and the reporting financial institutions,

therefore last year we issued a financial instruction notice to all the financial institutions. So whoever we are, whatever we are, whether we are businessmen or politicians, we are all under the radar and FIU is doing its work on a very transparent basis, so basically this must be applauded as well for their transparency and for the diligent work which they are doing.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, according to Mr. Buksh again, he says that “Currently, we are in financial discussions with the Commissioner of Police to allow the FIU, read only, search only assets to the International Criminal Police Organisation (which is INTERPOL database), which means we will be better-equipped to produce more compete intelligence products that involve foreign nationals. At the moment, we do seek assistance of the Fiji Police Force, Interpol database but we have to write to the Interpol Officer who provides us information but discussions are in the final stages, where we will have access to INTERPOL within the premises of FIU at the RBF Building”, that is in progress and, Honourable Speaker, Sir, I just want to say that FIU is a very small Unit comprising of young, talented staff, recruited on merit with equal opportunities, non-discriminatory and harassment-free environment with equal access to employment conditions.

Again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the FIU needs to be applauded for being an equal opportunity employer, so I congratulate FIU on their programmes, achievements and commitment. Thank you very much.

HON. SPEAKER.- Chairperson, your Right of Reply.

HON. V. NATH.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. Honourable Speaker, Sir, this is a bipartisan Report which is signed by three of the Honourable Members from the Opposition side, namely, Honourable Viliame Gavoka, Honourable Ro Filipe Tuisawau and Honourable Inosi Kuridrani. I will be very fair - three from this side and three from that side.

But during their presentation, the FIU agreed that it wanted to stay under the Reserve Bank of Fiji (RBF) for some time probably not now maybe 10 years later, they might have their own but at this point in time, it is fine with the RBF because of the nature of its work.

Also, a question was raised by Honourable Tuisawau. I have to check my register for his attendance whether he was present or not because during the presentation, the very talented Director agreed when there was a question about a MOU with Tonga, China, Hong Kong, et cetera, the Director said that we do not need formal and bilateral MOUs with FIUs of other countries to exchange information with these countries, they do not need it. The Fiji FIU is connected with more than 160 plus FIUs around the world, with or without MOUs so it is a win-win situation for the FIUs around the world, including the Fiji FIU.

This was the wording which he said, Honourable Speaker, Sir, and probably the Honourable Member might be away for what you call “party duty” as I am not quite clear whether he was in attendance but I will definitely want him to read the Hansard Report which was recorded on that particular day.

Honourable Gavoka mentioned that the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption (FICAC) is not independent or something. He tried to compare the FICAC with the FIU, both of their job descriptions are different, Honourable Speaker, Sir, he should know.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- A Point of Order. I did not mention anything about the FICAC, Honourable Speaker, and may I just refer the Honourable Chairman, the Minister for Economy and the Minister for Agriculture about the integrity of the financial system, it is in their mission statement.

HON. SPEAKER.- Is this a Point of Order?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- The safety and integrity of Fiji's financial system. Please, read the mission statement, stop making

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, is this a Point of Order?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Yes, a Point of Order, Honourable Speaker. He is misleading Parliament and indeed the Minister for Economy and the Minister for Agriculture questioned about the role of the FIU, for the integrity of the financial system. It is in their mission statement. Can you, please, bring things to Parliament that are relevant. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

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

HON. V. NATH.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. I thank all other Members for their contribution to this Report and I have no further comments, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the Parliament will now vote to note the content of the Report.

Question put.

Motion agreed to unanimously.

Honourable Members, time moves on, so we will now adjourn for lunch. We are adjourned.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.45 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.35 p.m.

REVIEW REPORT ON THE UNIT TRUST OF FIJI 2016 ANNUAL REPORT

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Honourable Viam Pillay, to move his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I move that Parliament debates the Review Report on the Unit Trust of Fiji 2016 Annual Report which was tabled on 12th July, 2018. Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

HON. G. VEGNATHAN.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now invite the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs to speak on the motion. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. Honourable Speaker, Sir, the Unit Trust of Fiji (UTOF) was established on the 5th April, 1978 to provide an equal opportunity fund for creating and growing wealth for ordinary Fijians. Over the years, the UTOF has become one of the major investment institutions in Fiji representing a wide range of investors, dads and mums, individuals, clubs, associations, groups, corporates and institutions.

The Parliament, at its sitting on 7th April, 2018, referred the UTOF 2016 Annual Report to the Standing Committee on Social Affairs for review and collation of information which included a presentation from the Unit Trust of Fiji. This assisted the Committee to fully appreciate the organisation's operations, achievements and the challenges encountered during the financial year.

The Committee noted with interest that 2016 was another successful year where the UTOF recorded a better growth and return compared to previous years with the continuous rebalancing of asset classes. The UTOF distributed a record dividend to unit holders of \$6.10 per unit under Income and Growth Fund. This resulted in a dividend yield of 4.02 percent and a positive capital growth of 7.01 percent. The total return to unit holders under this Fund was 11.03 percent.

The Committee was pleased to note that the implementation of the Employee Investment Scheme (EIS) has gained prominence since its launch in 2015 and has continued to provide investment opportunities to the Fijian workplace for their financial wellbeing.

UTOF success is predominantly driven by investor-confidence and competitive tax free return which has led to an increase in the total number of unit holders, investors from 16,111 to 17,309, an increase of 7.4 percent. As a managed fund, the UTOF operates in a very competitive environment in terms of managing risk return for its investors and as a financial institution in the capital market.

Honourable Speaker, one of the key challenges include market competition in its product line, in banks and other financial institutions. The Committee is confident that the UTOF will continue to strive for better performance and deliver unit holders expectations in terms of the return on investment and enhancement of its services and commends the overall performance and immense achievements of the UTOF in 2016. Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Chairperson. The floor is now open for debate on the motion. Honourable Leader of the Opposition, you have the floor.

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- I would like to thank the Chairperson of the Committee for their Report and I also pay my respect to one of the departed Members of the Committee, the late Honourable Vadei. Before I contribute to this, may I, on behalf of the Members of SODELPA, Mr. Speaker, Sir, add our words of welcome to those expressed by the Government and the people who performed in Nadi this morning to His Excellency, the President of the State of Israel, a great friend of Fiji and I hope we can continue to be a friend of Israel.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Report is pretty straight-forward but I believe that the UTOF and its activities need to be publicised a lot more so that our people can take full advantage of its activities because we feel it is a very important institution. We, as a political party, have it contained in our manifesto.

Our manifesto states that SODELPA is committed to further develop the capital market in case of high liquidity, to absorb the high liquidity in the banking system, create awareness of fundraising capacity and ensure that a robust regulatory framework is in place to enhance confidence. Small and micro finance will be given direct funding and targeted subsidies in partnership with all existing financial institutions to support sharing, entrepreneurship and empower small business development, capacity of financial institution for finance investment programmes and close and effective supervision of financial institutions and supervisions.

I would like to commend the Chairperson and the Members of his Committee for the Report and also commend the UTOF on their activities and the services they are rendering to the people of Fiji. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, just a few brief comments in respect to UTOF.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee has talked about the need for the UTOF to create a lot more services in areas outside of Suva and indeed, it has for a number of decades, been fairly Suva-centric like a number of organisations for a number of decades.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are happy to announce that the UTOF officially opened its Nadi branch in April, 2019. The Labasa branch is currently on hold because they are exploring options of opening kiosk perhaps in partnership with other organisations in Labasa and that should be finalised by the second quarter of this year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, they have also opened a customer service centre at the FNPF Boulevard a couple of years ago so people can have direct contact with them. In respect of the electronic database to improve services, Mr. Speaker, Sir, they have already advertised the tender for fund management system. It is currently being evaluated and proposals have indeed been received from various vendors and they are looking at an integrated web page and mobile phone applications where the unit holders can indeed look at the units they hold and the value that increases upon it. The project is already currently under evaluation and they are looking at upgrading the system itself.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are also quite happy to announce that in particular with the Chair that we have and hopefully these numbers would be growing but the UTOF is not the first, but one of the few, I should say, female Chairs of a statutory organisations, Ms. Shaenaz Voss, who has done quite a lot of good work actually and I would like to acknowledge publicly the work that she has carried out with a very good team - the CEO and other personalities like Mr. Sakiusa Bolaira, who has joined UTOF and has done a lot of ground work, in particular, with the landowning units. A lot of people now, with their landowning units, when they get their equal distribution of the lease money, they actually buy units with the UTOF.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the UTOF has also now gone into the regional market and their partners include, currently, there is an investment by the Samoan National Provident Fund. They have invested about a little over \$8 million in the UTOF. The Unit Trust of Samoa has invested about \$7.5 million. The Samoa Parliamentary Pension Scheme has invested about \$800,000 and the Vanuatu National Provident Fund has invested about \$5 million in the UTOF and just having a brief discussion in passing with the Chairman just a couple of weeks ago, there is always a lot more room for expansion in the other Pacific Island countries and indeed for larger sums of investments in the UTOF. They are currently talking to the Vanuatu National Provident Fund and the Tonga Retirement Fund Board.

The good thing about the UTOF, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that because of its reputation in managing the funds well and also being quite creative in the products that they have been offering, it has become quite attractive to some of these regional provident fund type savings where they see a long term security and investment in the UTOF which again, of course, is one of the missions that we have had in respect of creating a regional economy.

The performance of the UTOF has actually been on an increasing trend since 2016. The return on the shareholders equity increased from 31 percent in 2016 to 34 percent, 2017 and further increase of 46 percent in 2018, and again this is mainly attributed to the sales of the units.

The number of unit holders, Mr. Speaker, Sir, unit holders increased from 17,309 in 2016 to 21,800, Year To Date (YTD) and again this is attributed to the awareness that has been created. A lot of people, a lot of ordinary Fijians did not see the UTOF as a means of saving money as a means of investing. The funds and the management has increased by 91 percent from \$137.9 million in 2016 to \$270 million, YTD.

The market share has increased from 61 percent in 2016 to 65.4 percent in 2018. Again, signalling confidence in the UTOF. The audited net profit recorded of \$585,503 and \$824,333 for 2016 and 2017 respectively. This is an increase of 41 percent in net profit mainly due to increase in unit sales of the UTOF's Investment Initiatives, one of them is called the EIS and the other one is the Children Investment Plan.

In terms of dividend, the UTOF declared a dividend of \$292,752 in 2016 and \$412,167 for 2017. A total dividend of \$704,991 was presented to the shareholder which is, of course, the Fijian Government on 18th December, 2019. There are some other assets of UTOF, Mr. Speaker, Sir, which is worth noting. There is a property development at 19 McGregor Road in Suva. The UTOF is expanding in business and plans to build a multi-storey building at its 19 McGregor Road property, there is a demand for office space and high quality office space.

The other one is the Naseyani Water Bottling Project. Those of you who do know Ra would know that there is a Naseyani water source further down the road from Fiji Water and the UTOF is currently rehabilitating and developing its Naseyani Water Bottling Project and intends to export bottled water to international markets very soon and we understand that they are talking to some very good would-be investors and indeed shareholders to participate in the UTOF.

I would like to thank the Committee for the work, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and again, I urge indeed all Members of Parliament too, it is worth an organisation to invest your monies in. Those of you who are concerned about investment also tell other people because a lot of ordinary people actually are benefiting from the scheme and you do not require large sums of money to invest.

You do not require large sums of, for example, term deposits to get a good rate of return. The UTOF is the way to go and we hope to propagate more of the work of the UTOF together with the other Ministries that we have going around Fiji. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General. I give the floor to the Honourable Adi Litia Qionibaravi.

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I rise to contribute to the discussion on the Report submitted by the Standing Committee on Social Affairs. I would like to thank the Chairperson and Members for the Report before the House. I also would like to congratulate the Unit Trust of Fiji's Management in their continuing performance financial results for the last five years that is stipulated on Page No. 7 of the Report and articulated by the Honourable Attorney-General this afternoon.

Their findings, I note on Page 6 has also been endorsed by the senior company officials and they all point to the recognition by the company to continue to improve their investors or the unit holders in this case for better returns for the investors or the unit holders in Unit Trust of Fiji. That is the ultimate reason for investing in any company - to continue to receive returns.

The second recommendation is to strengthen its electronic database and I note that, that is also part of the company's Strategic Plan as well as the need to invest offshore and in the region.

I note that the Honourable Leader of the Opposition's proposal and I endorse that for the continuing awareness both in the Western and Northern Divisions so that more investors or unit holders can invest in the Unit Trust of Fiji.

I also note, Mr. Speaker, Sir, on Page No. 19 is a profile of the unit holders. It is pleasing to note that there is a good representative of Employee Investment Scheme, this is for the Fijian workforce as well as the investment plan for the children under 18 years.

I would like to congratulate the company for bringing out the need for employees to invest in the Scheme such as the Unit Trust as well as our children below 18 years.

It is just a matter that I would like to highlight and that is on Page No. 17 of the Report that there may be a need for the Unit Trust of Fiji to continue to improve its cost to income ratio which I am happy to see has reduced from 79 percent in 2012 to 67 percent in 2016. We would like to see a continuing improvement on the cost to income ratio to ensure that the investors or the unit holders in Unit Trust of Fiji continue to receive high returns from their investment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. A few comments this afternoon, Sir, as the Honourable Attorney-General had alluded to on the plans of having an office in Labasa but the current plan is to have a partnership like a kiosk in Labasa. Given that we have the non-development programme and other economic activities hyping up in the North with landowners, we need an office in Labasa by the Unit Trust of Fiji.

As the Leader of the Opposition already said that first there needs to be more awareness carried out to our community. Most of our communities have cash in terms of the high price of *yaqona* and *dalo* but they are moving towards investment and financial literacy on how to invest those incomes that they earn from the natural resources and the agriculture products that they have, that these types of investments are available to them.

Coming to Suva is very costly and if this could be decentralised in the Northern Division, it will be very helpful given that you have opened up a few iTLTB offices in the Northern Division which has brought many agencies in the Northern Division but at the same time, investment facilities too should be available for young farmers and also entrepreneurs so that they know how to invest and also develop into becoming a participant at a commercial level.

The cost that takes a particular *mataqali* to come right to Suva, for example, if a particular trustee of the Unit Trust from that *mataqali* dies or deems to become a trustee, the requirements that are needed and sometimes it takes years for the *mataqali* members to replace one trustee or two given that they are not aware. If this kind of information will be readily available at a local office and the brochures to be translated also in the vernacular so that people at grassroot level know the basic requirements and pre-requisites in those areas so that they are able to change their trustees, not frequent, but to replace those that have passed on.

Also the other issues when you have trustees and other competing trustees trying to validate the various Minutes that come before the Unit Trust of Fiji and which set of trustees are valid, these are some of the things that need probably a unit within the Unit Trust of Fiji which can also go into trying to resolve this kind of internal dispute especially if units are bought by landowning units.

These are few things that probably could improve the services of Unit Trust of Fiji and bring it down to the Northern Division as assured too by the Honourable Attorney-General. They were opened up in Nadi last year but hopefully a special office will be opened in Labasa and that is the problem too we have with Fijian Holdings Company where we had their Fijian Holdings Unit Trust which also partners with Merchant Finance and they share the same office in Labasa.

They do not have an office on their own and if that could be looked into, given that it is more a good brand for the people for them to identify and to utilise the money that they have earned from the various farming activities that they have done so that they become not only passive land providers but also as entrepreneurship and active economic participants. *Vinaka vakalevu, Sir.*

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. I now give the floor to the Chairperson for his Right of Reply. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the Honourable Attorney-General, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and also the other Honourable Members for supporting the motion before the House. Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

Question put.

Motion agreed to unanimously.

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

Review of OMRS Guideline (Question No. 35/2020)

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

Can the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications update Parliament on the results of the review of the Open Merit Recruitment System (OMRS) Guideline announced by the Public Service Commission in 2018?

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 Honourable Kepa for this question. The Public Service Commission, on its own volition, decided to review the OMRS Guidelines and they have an independent assessment of the OMRS Guidelines.

The Terms of Reference (TOR) for the review was to undertake appropriate research and report on the outcomes of implementation across the ministries, in terms of staffing patterns and any early improvements in service delivery and to identify any issues with the Guidelines with regard to training, operational issues or other aspects that may require changes to the guideline or training provided.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to achieve these terms of reference, the PSC considered the baseline report from 2015 regarding recruitment and selection into Fijian Civil Service and the documentation held in Ministries, for example, Job Descriptions, Selection Reports, Advertisements and other central documentation, for example, payroll records and procedure review requests. An input from stakeholders, permanent secretaries, management, staff and applicants for positions in the Civil Service.

The review found that the principles and structure of the OMRS Guidelines supported the Permanent Secretaries to operationalise their constitutional authority under Section 127 of the Fijian Constitution.

The review found that overall the introduction of OMRS was having a positive effect and was leading to greater efficiency in recruitment and selection processes with vacancies being processed faster than before its introduction, down to an average of less than four months which we want to improve upon, improvements in productivity and service delivery, and the introduction of new ideas and perspectives at all levels of the Civil Service, increased diversity across the Civil Service and increased opportunities for advancement in particular for women with the recognition of the merit of individuals with different experience and from different backgrounds.

The issues with the OMRS Guideline were limited to procedure and administration particularly with regard to the quality of Job Descriptions and the application of the merit process by panel members. These aspects, Mr. Speaker, Sir, have been the focus for ongoing training with Ministries' staff since completion of the review.

The availability of the procedural review process or appeals through the PSC is confirmed to be able to address these issues. In addition to the training I mentioned, Mr. Speaker, Sir, minor administrative changes to the Guideline were approved by the PSC as a result of the review, including the clarification of the role of the HR department and introducing a maximum timeline for selection activities to be concluded.

The PSC, of course, has incorporated these changes into their current OMRS Guidelines and they have also recently collected further data for an analysis of impact and comments, a deeper probe into how well the principles of OMRS are being realised where Ministries and the gains that are being made from these activities. The Commission hopes to get another further analysis by June 2020.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I sit down, I would urge the Honourable Member to go to the PSC website, you will find the OMRS Guidelines that are there, it is up on the website for anyone to see and you will see within that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, a number of three areas which I have got tagged here, that were amended to take account of the submissions or the recommendations made by the Review Committee. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General . You have the floor, Madam.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The Honourable Attorney-General mentioned consultations with stakeholders. My question is in particular to the education sector as most of the schools are owned by other groups and very few, less than 10 percent by the Government.

What kind of consultations were carried out with the stakeholders, the owners of these schools, that is, the faith-based organisations, committees, other groups, teachers, unions, et cetera, prior to OMRS being implemented from 2015 in its early stages? Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Attorney-General.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I wish the Honourable Member had actually asked that question which obviously was the real question.

Before the OMRS was actually implemented, we had invited trade unions, in fact, we were part of that process. They attended some meetings, some meetings they did not attend so they were given equal opportunity to come and make their views known, at least the trade unions were

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Niko Nawaikula.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Honourable Speaker, when the Government is recruiting under OMRS , to what extent that should take into account religion, faith, ethnicity, culture, tradition, previous experience, knowledge and maturity?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Attorney-General.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as the name suggests, it is based on merit. There are various, of course, qualifications so if you are going to apply for a job of a (because they are talking about teachers), Physical Education Teacher and if you do not have any qualification in physical education, obviously you will not necessarily be considered for the job because you do not actually have some of those qualifications which are required for you to fulfil your job.

In respect of faith issues, Honourable Members know very well the matter is before the courts and I hope they are not trying to traverse into that area. But regarding the OMRS itself, Mr. Speaker, Sir, when the job is actually advertised, it sets out the job description and, of course, that is the guideline for any individual who is going to apply for the job. Unlike previously, when in the Civil Service, depending on how long you stayed in the Civil Service actually mattered, now it does not, it actually depends on your ability, proficiency, your ability to fulfil the job.

This is why I think a lot of young people in the Civil Service who are capable young people are in fact getting into positions they previously would not have got into because they are now being appointed on merit as opposed to being based purely on just seniority. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. Last supplementary question, I give the floor to Honourable Ratu Tevita Navurelevu. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. RATU T. NAVURELEVU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the OMRS is more less like a system adopted, a cut-and-paste product. The system is already creating a lot of collision head-on. My question is, why is there a difference in salary between a new graduate who has a Degree gets \$26,000 and an experienced teacher who had spent 10 years on the field who acquired a Degree with \$22,000? Thank you.

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

HON A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I could not really understand half of what the Honourable Member said, but I assume you are talking about the difference in salaries, and that is to do with specific positions - that is obviously a completely different question altogether. If you bring that question I can answer the question. I do not have the figures or statistics with me which I can provide to you if you really want a good answer. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- That is the end of that, we will move on to the next question. The second Oral Question for today, I give the floor to the Honourable Viam Pillay to ask Question No. 36/2020. You have the floor, Sir.

“Youth for Climate Action” Initiative
(Question No. 36/2020)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity, Industrial Relations, Youth and Sports highlight the proposed role of the “Youth for Climate Action” initiative under the Ministry to engage youth and stakeholders in mitigating climate change impacts?

HON. P.K. BALA (Minister for Employment, Productivity, Industrial Relations, Youth and Sports).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I also thank Honourable Pillay.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I provide my response to Honourable Members of this august House, please, allow me to quote from the Sustainable Development Goal’s (SDGs) Summit meeting in September, 2019 attended by the Heads of State and high level Government representatives, and I quote:

“The 2030 Agenda is our promise to the children and youths of today so that they may achieve their full potential and carry the torch of sustainable development to future generations.”

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the climate change is a complex global problem that is interlinked with many issues such as economic growth, human rights and poverty reduction.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, aligned to the International Framework and Government Agenda, the Youth for Climate Action is proposed to support the 30 million trees in 15 years initiative. In addition, Youth for Climate Action initiative is meant to foster and approach between the ministries and stakeholders such as the Ministry of Forests in achieving priority areas through shared resources.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is also aligned to Fiji’s National Development Plan. Youth for the Climate Action was officially launched in collaboration with the Ministry of Youth and Sports, Ministry of Forests and Ministry of Employment in Sabeto, Nadi last month. At this juncture, I would like to thank my colleague, the Honourable Minister for Forests.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, all in all, this integrated approach ensures that our youths are well-versed with where we are going as a nation and as a world when it comes to climate action. Through this initiative, youths will be introduced to skills in gardening, tree-planting and climate change mitigation combining training, education and a premium on youth-centred innovation, that will make them better Fijian and global citizens and better-equipped to enter the workforce.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, youths will be empowered to become champions of climate change and will be addressing the issues head-on, making healthier decisions for themselves and their communities, whilst inspiring others to do the same.

This is in line with youths who are champions of climate action, who has been at the forefront of Fiji's leadership of COP23 and beyond under the Honourable Prime Minister. Mr. Speaker, Sir, every small environment protection action we do today, such as planting trees and collecting rubbish, even if it is not ours, contributes to our environment sustainability and giving a beautiful and safe future for the generations to come.

Life lessons in climate action leads to life-giving and life-reviving actions in ensuring our beautiful, yet delicate human and natural ecosystems are preserved for the future generation. This, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is the vision and ultimate goal for the youths for climate action initiative intents to promote. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. Honourable Viliame Gavoka, a supplementary question.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Honourable Speaker, the youths can be very unforgiving when someone is inconsistent or dishonest. For example, how can FijiFirst claim to be the champion of climate change when under their watch, dredging and mining is happening at the Sigatoka River, causing devastation of apocalyptic proportion.

How can you claim to be a champion when you are devastating the Sigatoka River mouth? Incidentally, Honourable Speaker, the people of Ba on the Ba River have also reached out to us complaining about the Ba River mining?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, do not deviate, just ask your supplementary question.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- How can they claim to be championing climate change through the youths when they are inconsistent and outright dishonest with the way they are treating the mouth of the Sigatoka River, it is devastated. How can you say that you are a champion? Please, answer.

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

HON. P.K. BALA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I stand by what I have said, that youths will be the champions for climate action. We have rolled out the programmes for the youths whom we have appointed. What the Honourable Member has asked, has got nothing to do with the subject matter, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Salote, is that a supplementary question?

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- I thank you, Honourable Speaker. I know the youths are being used in climate change initiatives like he said.

The question I would like to ask the Honourable Minister is, how have the youths been involved in higher decision-making, for example, for this initiative - Youths for Climate Change, how are the youths being consulted or involved in this initiative, rather than just taking them overseas to be used, as to be seen by this Government that we are engaging youths in mitigation climate change impacts? Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

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

HON. P.K. BALA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The youths of this country are listening, they are listening to what the Opposition feels about the future of this country and it is a sad day when a Honourable Member says that we are using youths of this country. Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me make it very crystal clear that “we do not use people”. Unlike the Opposition, Mr. Speaker, Sir, they use and throw, we do not do that. Let me make it very clear.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I have mentioned last week, we have officially launched this programme and we have rolled out the programme for the youths of this country. The day when we launched, we had around 200 youths, Mr. Speaker, Sir, who took part in tree-planting. After that, Mr. Speaker, we went to Lautoka, we had a workshop on the awareness on the plastic ban.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think you people better go now to Ba, yesterday you people were in Sigatoka, I suggest you people go to Ba now. I will see you people there in the weekend.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, coming back to this, I can assure this House that we have got very energetic youths on our Youth Council and they will assist my Ministry in terms of empowering the youths of this country. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. The Honourable Kuridrani, you have the floor.

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, a supplementary question. It is a shame that the Honourable Minister had just said that “we are not using people”. Last year, the Ministry of Youth, with its top Executives visited my village to plant mangroves.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our village has already had a NGO that handles mangrove-planting. We did our own nursery and we do our own planting, they just came and spent half an hour in the village,

HON. SPEAKER.- What is your supplementary question?

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- This is also like at Korotogo Village. My question, Mr. Speaker, Sir, what criteria is the Ministry of Youth using to select the villages where they go and promote their action on climate change?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, before I give the floor to the Honourable Member, a supplementary question is a supplementary question - simple. You ask in relation to the first question that was asked of the Minister. Ask that, simple, you will get the answer. I give the floor to the Honourable Minister.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, very straightforward, it is a very open concept. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- We move on. The third oral question for today, I give the floor to the Honourable Viliame Gavoka to ask Question No. 37/2020. You have the floor, Sir.

Navakai Sewerage Plant
(Question No. 37/2020)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Disaster Management and Meteorological Services confirm to Parliament whether the effluents being discharged into the Nadi River from the Navakai Sewerage Plant meets the standard set by laws for such discharge?

HON. J. USAMATE (Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Disaster Management and Meteorological Services).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I thank the Honourable Member for his question. In terms of the standards being met at the Navakai Waste Water Treatment Plant, yes, the current treatment of waste water at Navakai Waste Water Treatment Plant largely meets the set standards under normal operating conditions.

The WAF, however, in times that they have heavy rains and calamities, the WAF has to work around the clock to try to continue meeting the standards during those particular times.

At present, however, there is a detailed design for upgrades which includes augmentation and consolidation works in place. We will try to increase the capacity to treat wastewater in Navakai for a population of above 75,000. This project has been awarded to a world-renowned company, Hunter H2O.

The work is well underway and it involves early interaction with the people that were supposed to do this. The tender for this has already been advertised locally and this will allow the WAF to extend its wastewater services to Fijians, increasing access to wastewater service. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- The Honourable Minister says that the standards are being met, then why is the population there complaining about the smell in that area? What is the reason?

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

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. As I have mentioned, on the issue of the fall out of the wastewater, what we are trying to do now is to develop the capacity for it to deal with all that is needed in that particular area and the exercise that has been undertaken right now is designed to address that particular issue of capacity.

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

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Honourable Speaker, it looks like the Honourable Minister is admitting that nothing is happening,

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- We are currently in the process of fixing that so of course, nothing is happening and the people are suffering there from the wastewater disposal

HON. J. USAMATE.- Question, question!

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- The question is the Environment Management Act (Waste Disposal and Recycling) Regulations 2007 provide that inspections must be carried out at least once a month. Are these being carried out? What are the results of this inspection? Not only there but also around the country because we have received reports of direct raw sewerage going directly into the rivers, not only in the sea here but the river, et cetera. Thank you.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- I asked a question.

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

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the word “supplementary” means to supplement. It means you have something then you ask the question just to dig a bit further deeper into the answer that was initially given.

I think the Members of the Opposition need to be given a lesson in English. It is easily available on Google, “supplement” to dig into further detail the answer that was originally given.

The Honourable Member has asked the question that asked for detailed access to results of inspection. Inspections do take place. That is a requirement, there are processes. You always have to measure the outputs of what you are producing so in all entities including the WAF, those inspections take place.

They have a laboratory which analyses the results. The result are looked at, if the staff see that there are anomalies in the results in terms of things not hitting the level that it is supposed to be then management is advised on that. Then they have to look at the cause of those things and then try to address, remedial action is taken.

I have already highlighted the fact that for wastewater, what are the challenges that we have? These are some of the systems which were designed when populations were less so there is a need for capacity. The development of capacity to treat the increase in the demand for their services. That is precisely what I am talking about. Just remember, if you want to ask me a detailed question on actual results you have to ask a specific question.

As a Minister, I do not have all the operational details. The design of the structure for water in Fiji, you have a Minister, you set up a board - the WAF has a Board. I operate through the Board which elects the CEO, who manages the operational activities of that organisation. If you want to ask a specific question, ask a specific question. I will get the WAF to give me the answer to your question and I will deliver it in this House. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- We will move onto the next question.

Rehabilitation of the Dairy and Beef Industry
(Question No. 38/2020)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment update Parliament on what the Ministry is doing to help in the rehabilitation of the dairy and beef industry?

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

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji's supplier of dairy products depends on imported products which accounts for approximately 75 percent of Fiji's entire dairy market demand. About 64.5 million litres of milk is needed annually to meet the full demand. The total milk that is demanded is 24 million litres out of the 64 million litres of milk that is annually needed, 6 million litres is produced locally.

The Fiji Dairy Industry has suffered significantly due to the Bovine Tuberculosis and Brucellosis in the past four years. The industry has lost close to 5,000 animals due to these two diseases. Additionally, we are unable to import animals from outside because we do not want to inadvertently introduce any new disease and we have been advised by Bio Security, both from here as well as Australia and New Zealand, that they do not want to take ownership of saying that the animals they will send from there are totally disease-free.

There are diseases which exist in New Zealand and Australia which we do not have it here and we do not want to take the risk of importing any new disease which will add to the existing two that we want to eradicate.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it took Australia 40 years to eradicate their cattle herd from TB and Brucellosis and we have just begun testing, eradicating, isolating and labelling the farms as disease-free farms.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have annually spent \$2 million from the last four years to undertake this work of testing and cleaning up our farms from TB and Brucellosis.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for product development and promotion, the Ministry is taking the approach of promoting dairy in the rural areas by taking the market to farmers through the establishment of mini collection centres, that is to establish chillers where milk will be collected from the farm gate, brought to the chiller and from the chiller, Rewa Dairy Company Limited will collect the milk.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this year, we are looking at establishing a chiller in Sigatoka. At the moment, we do not have a chiller in Sigatoka and we do not have a collection centre in Sigatoka where 21 cattle farmers will benefit from the establishment of this new collection centre.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry is also committed to expanding the dairy industry. This year, a total of 17 new farms has been established in the Wainibuka area. From Rakiraki towards Wainibuka, a total of 89 cattle farmers have been identified and a new milk collection centre will be established.

This area from Wainibuka to Rakiraki, we will be establishing a new collection centre and a chiller will be established and these 89 farmers will benefit by not taking their milk to the chiller from where the Fiji Cooperative will collect it and pass it to Fiji Dairy Limited.

The production targets for this new promising farmers is an annual production of 1.5 million litres in addition to the existing milk we are producing. Progressively and incrementally, we are raising milk production locally. Through right attitude, improvement in management practices, better nutrition of the cattle and introducing new breed, there will be positive trend and as the industry grows, production will definitely grow incrementally.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are factors both internal and external affecting production but our concerted effort for the expansion is timely as we are attacking the problem of Bovine Tuberculosis by the horns. It is the Ministry's prerogative to create awareness and entice farmers who own cattle to be part of this expansion plan.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the basic concept for the Fiji Dairy Industry is that of intensification. We are now looking at how we can develop intensive dairy farms where we grow feed corn and pasture outside whereas we have the cattle inside. This is the concept that we have in other countries where we basically feed the cattle inside, we do not have the cattle move outside and in that way we will be able to really increase the production of milk.

We are now examining one or two existing large dairy farmers who have shown interest in putting their capital investment to establish this intensive dairy farm. The only stumbling block for that is that they are waiting for us to get them the new high yielding Senepol breed that we have got now which will be available by end of this year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we could not import high-yielding dairy cattle from Australia, we were able to import the embryo and plant it in our house here and we have got the pure high-yielding dairy breed but it is young now.

By this December, they will be ready for multiplication and distribution in the first phase to the top dairy farmers as they will be getting this new breed. Once we are able to give them enough then they are willing to establish intensive dairy cattle farms where the cattle will be inside and they will be growing their feed and feeding them daily.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the current milking cows stand at around 6,000 heads - capable of producing around 10 litres per day, per herd. The local dairy industry does have the potential to produce 10 million litres per annum from the 6,000 cows that we already have with the current suppliers. Imagine these 6,000 heads that we have which are producing 10 litres per cow, imagine the 6,000 is replaced by the new breed which will give us around 22 litres per day; instantly we will be doubling.

But this 10 litres that I am talking about, these are the top ones existing but it ranges from 4 litres to 10 litres. So once we introduce this new high breed, we will be able to, at least, double the milk output in the local condition.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Yes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry has a specific programme dedicated towards the rehabilitation of the dairy namely the Dairy Industry Support Programme. The key areas of the Dairy Industry Support Programme is to assist the farms in terms of getting the feed, organising supplementary feed and also the nutritional aspect of the dairy farm.

Secondly, improve of the genetic stock by providing them with breeder bulls to ensure that they provide the genetic purity which was neglected for some time and therefore there has been a lot of inbreeding and they have lost the original traits of Brahman breed, et cetera, that we had.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there has been informed investment decision made to the dairy industry in Fiji and we have, I must say and I would want to acknowledge, the support from the New Zealand Government to assist us in developing our dairy industry.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, allow me now to shift my focus to our beef industry. There have been many Government-led initiatives in the past to develop the beef industry in Fiji, both in the large and small scale farmers.

There was this well-known beef area in the past like Verata, Uluisavou and Yalavou with some still operating today such as Tilivalevu and Yaqara. Mr. Speaker, Sir, Yaqara at the moment is our largest beef farm, we have close to about 10,000 herds there which is now taking shape as the premium supplier of beef meat in the country.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in June last year our Ministry started major works in upgrading and reviving the defunct Yalavou Beef Scheme right up in the interior of Sigatoka. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to tell you, about 20 years ago when the Yalavou Scheme was abandoned, no one bothered to round off the cattle that was there. They just abandoned the scheme, we are now rounding off these cattle which is all over

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to inform the House that in a couple of months' time we will formally do the launching of Yalavou Beef Cattle Scheme. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry's challenge

HON. SPEAKER.- There is a Point of Order.

HON. RO T.V. KEPÄ.- Mr. Speaker, a Point of Order under Standing Order 40. Honourable Speaker, would you allow the Honourable Minister to make a Ministerial Statement in the Order Paper rather than carrying on, if you would allow him to make a Ministerial Statement rather than responding to an oral question. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. Honourable Member, the Honourable Minister is answering the question, this is a wide

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order! This is a wide-ranging question and he is answering it. You have the floor, Honourable Minister.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

You have the floor, but do not converse with those on the other side.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, with regard to the beef industry, we want our beef sector to be the premium beef supplier in the entire Pacific region. It is possible, it is possible.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- There have been some interest from within the region, but at the moment our abattoir is not internationally certified, so we are going to get there. Mr. Speaker, Sir, with regard to the beef industry, there are five key target areas.

One is improving the genetic base of the pure breed stock through Embryo Transfer. For the dairy we got the Brown Swiss and for beef cattle we have got Senepol. Again by December that should be ready and then we want to distribute the breeders to the top beef schemes; Tilivalevu, Yalavou and Yaqara

Then we have got the issue of BTEC eradication. In Yaqara itself, there have been infection, so Yaqara at the moment is going through the third stage of testing for Tuberculosis and Brucellosis, in about three to four months' time we should be able to really separate our infected animals there and then Yaqara would be certified as a Tuberculosis and Brucellosis clean farm and then we can also use Yaqara to supply breeder stock to others as well.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have also allocated funds to develop the beef extension intervention strategy. We are looking at securing the physical infrastructure that will allow the establishment of new beef cattle farms, farmers have shown interest, we have got a database done and we would want to give them the basic infrastructure to develop their paddocks; that is in the process.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, probably in six months' time, we are looking at least establishing a dozen new beef cattle farms. So what we have said was that, vertically going up, we also want to horizontally set up new farms. We have 10 farms, the target that we have, if we expand the base then we can grow very fast in terms of getting the quantity out.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me assure this House and the Fijian people that we will continue to invest in the dairy and beef sector. I had said earlier on, that these key livestock are under our radar - beef, dairy and sheep, given their importance to the economy and given the importance to the consumption for our people. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. That question could have been easily answered by Honourable Prakash because he knows dairy farming, instead of meandering, going around here and there

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- I am coming to the question. I mean he is in that position to answer that question, Honourable Speaker, instead of going around.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Knowledge, Honourable Speaker, is power. How do the farmers

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- I am coming to the question. How does the Ministry go around in conducting awareness programmes for our dairy farmers, whether it is done in the vernacular as well, to ensure they are knowledgeable about dairy farming

(Honourable Members interject)

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- The Honourable Minister.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have relooked at our Extension Section, for the dairy farmer we have got a separate unit which includes both vet, at the moment we have five veterinary officers but we have got para-veterinary. In the team, we have got the Extension Officer, Animal Health and Production, along with the Extension Officer, Animal Health and Production, we also have para vets who will accompany them to have regular meetings with dairy farmers.

In the Central Division where we have got most of the large dairy farmers, there are individual meetings with them. But in the Western Division, the para-veterinary with the Animal Health and Production Officer organises cluster meetings. We have started this new extension programme; once a month they will go and have a meeting with their clusters.

When the individual farmer in the cluster group raises a particular issue, then the officer will visit the farm. So, we have said that it is impossible to visit individual farmers but when the farmers raise that there is a particular issue on the farm to be visited then the Animal Health and Production Officer along with the para-veterinary will visit the farmer and attend to the farmer's issue. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- A supplementary question. You have the floor.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Your predecessor gave to us and even a longer statement but he could not increase production. So, what is new in your current plans that can guarantee us that beef and dairy production will be increased and by when? What is your timeline?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, these are the key variables that I mentioned which will result in increase in production. One is getting new high yielding breeds. I spoke about the Board for dairy, for Brown Swiss and Senepol, we have got that beef cattle breed.

By December, we should have enough to give as a breeder stock. So, we need to introduce new, pure, high yielding breeds. At the moment, the breeds that we have, we have compromised the attributes to in-breeding.

No. 2: To improve the pasture and feed for the farmers. We have established close to 900, just within the one-year period last year, 900 farmers (that 900 also included sheep and goat farmers) where we established the new high yielding drought-tolerant, high protein pasture.

Now they have this own planting material which they can experiment. We gave them the planting material for a quarter acre each, delivered to their farm gate so pasture improvement.

No. 3: We want to ensure that they do not have any particular disease. For beef cattle and dairy, the industry was so badly affected through Bovine Tuberculosis and Brucellosis, so that is being addressed.

No. 4: We want to expand the base and I explained to them so nicely. Instead of having 100 farmers, we want 100,000 farmers. For that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have given one round of fencing material last year, in two weeks' time we will be giving another round of fencing material for goat and sheep, in another six weeks' time for beef and dairy cattle farmers. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. We will move on to the fifth Oral Question for today and I give the floor to the Honourable Adi Litia Qionibaravi to ask Question No. 39/2020.

Update - Restructure of the Dairy Industry
(Question No. 39/2020)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment update Parliament on the status of restructure of the dairy industry since 2012?

HON. DR. M. REDDY (Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment).- Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me quickly take you back. Honourable Kepa is leaving.

(Laughter)

Not on education, Honourable Kepa.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me quickly take you back to the genesis of the restructure of Fiji Dairy Industry which started around 2010.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, before the restructure, Rewa Cooperative Dairy Company Limited had so many branches of operation. It was involved in the collection, processing, marketing of milk and dairy products in Fiji. It also provided essential services to farmers, including supplying tools, machinery, farm houses, dairy sheds, farm chemicals and supplementary livestock feed. Other functions involved the operation of the Chilling Centres and Farmers Advisory Services.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the company suffered from mismanagement, weak governance, inefficiencies and out-dated infrastructure and technology. In the end, Rewa Dairy had accumulated a considerable debt and the years leading to 2010 was facing financial collapse. Simply put, the business model for Rewa Dairy, one that had been operating for decade's in today's rapidly globalised world was no longer viable and relevant.

Its financial losses were such that if left unchecked was to threaten the future of Fiji's dairy farmers and industry. The process of restructure was a culmination of a long process and was timely.

The Government had to step in to revitalise and modernise the dairy industry. The restructure had few simple objectives. They included:

- i) separating the processing function from the supply function. It was initially a totally vertically integrated industry. So, this separation enables specialisation and concentration of the resources in the essential components of the daily supply chain;
- ii) strengthening the services provided to farmers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with the creation of the Dairy Cooperative Company Limited, which was about providing dedicated services to the farmers including milk collection, subsidization of farm inputs such as supplement feed, farm advisory services and financial support. The products of these reformed entities that are able to provide specialised services along the value chain.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, today milk processed in Fiji is operated by Fiji Dairy Limited whose parent company has a considerable track record in the food industry in Fiji and the Pacific.

Let me remind this august House that 20 percent of FDL is owned by farmers through Fiji Dairy Cooperative Limited. Fiji Dairy Limited, 20 percent of that is owned by farmers through Dairy Cooperative Limited.

In the last four years, despite the considerable effort of Bovine Tuberculosis and Brucellosis in the cattle industry, Fiji Dairy Limited has managed to pay out a dividend of \$1.2 million annually to farmers through Fiji Co-operative Dairy Company Limited. This is a tremendous achievement, Mr. Speaker, Sir, when before, there was no dividend payout to the farmers.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- How do you know?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- I know because I have looked at the financials.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, this restructuring process was not only about taking responsibility and driving concerted action in a private business, in this case sole dairy processor in Fiji, but it is also about providing opportunities for farmers to be better served, yet to remain directly involved in business that provides significant comparative advantage. In Fiji Dairy Limited, this means farmers are part of a larger business with significant track record.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, allow me to highlight in this august House other developments in the restructure. I refer to the animal disease - Bovine Tuberculosis and Brucellosis earlier. Mr. Speaker, Sir, these diseases have been present in Fiji since the 1960s. Bovine Tuberculosis is a chronic disease of animals that is caused by bacterial infection. Visible signs of the disease are hard to detect and advancement to the infection is low. Eliminating these diseases needs constant surveillance, testing and eradication programmes.

Unfortunately, despite the knowledge of the presence of these serious diseases and the fact that these diseases exist globally, including our neighbouring countries, Australia and New Zealand, successive governments did not prioritise their focus and resources to seriously address these diseases. Mr. Speaker, Sir, it existed in the 1960s, they did not put aside money, they did not invest to eliminate clean up. At that point in time, if they had done it, if they had invested, then we would not have that problem at this scale now. We have decided to “take the bull by the horns”.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- In the last 10 years (between 2010 and 2020), we have lost over 4,000 dairy cattle to these diseases which have had a major impact on dairy production in Fiji. They presented the single biggest challenge for the dairy farmers in the industry.

Just imagine, Mr. Speaker, Sir, a dairy farmer who owns 500 stock losing 400 animals which were infected. I am pleased to state that this government has prioritised its resources, both technical and financial to eradicate these infectious diseases.

Over the last five years, the Ministry has progressively doubled its investment to a dedicated programme, a total of \$9.6 million has already been allocated to combat these diseases in the last five years, and we are making good progress as I have said \$2 million per year between 2010 and 2019, we doubled the number of cattle tested for Brucellosis and TB.

In 2019, infected cattle were less than 2.8 percent of the total cattle tested.

In 2015 and 2016, the rate of infections was 5 percent.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I must also say that post-restructure, the Fiji Government was supposed to get support from New Zealand Government to help combating these diseases and revitalising the industry.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Bovine TB is found in nearly 48 countries throughout the world, and 83 percent of these countries have control programme for Bovine TB and I am happy to say that Fiji is one of them. In Australia, the Bovine TB programme started in the 1970s and it took them 27 years to declare it free of Bovine TB. Bovine TB also existed in New Zealand and they also have an ongoing strategy to eradicate these diseases. In India, it was estimated that there were 22 million cattle affected with Bovine TB in 2018.

While we may not have the significant financial resources that these countries have, we have put in place a holistic strategy of the industry and stakeholders - one that is about promoting, collaboration of the industry, having consistent testing protocols and strengthening animal husbandry practices.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have got five qualified veterinarians in the Ministry, never ever before have we had that number of veterinarians within the Ministry.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I mentioned earlier the significant number of cattle lost to diseases as we started testing last year, the loss of cattle has obviously meant loss of milk production but things are turning around.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, allow me to say the number of infections that relate to milk production. Total volume of smaller holder milk production increased overall from 2018 to 2019 (from 4.1 million litres to 4.18 million litres). The number of cow's milk in 2019 increased to 5,370, an increase of 20 percent.

Milk yield per cow a key measure farm productivity has increased between 1 to 2 percent. At the Ministry's Koronivia farm, which doubles as a demonstration farm, milk yields average of 5 litres per cow per day in 2017 to now 9.7 litres per cow per day.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am happy to say that our Government has taken the commercial decision in addressing challenges faced by the dairy industry in Fiji head-on. Much more remains to be done, instrumentally and progressively we will deal with this issue to ensure that our beef and dairy industry becomes a leader in the entire Pacific. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- A supplementary question?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Can the Honourable Minister explain to the House how the restructure has impacted on milk production? Has the milk production gone up, stabilised or gone down?

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

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me read it out for him again. The total volume of milk production increased overall from 2018 to 2019 from 4.14 million litres to 4.18 million litres (The numbers are in millions). The number of milking cows in 2019 increased to 5,370 and increased by 20.6 percent. Milk yields per cow per day increased by 2 percent. At our own Koronivia Farm, it has gone up from 5 litres per cow per day to 9.7 litres per cow per day. We want this to transpose on the farm. This is 2.5 times higher than the industry overall.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. DR. R. REDDY.- Calf mortality

(Laughter)

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- What is this?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Do you know what "mortality" means?

(Laughter)

Calf mortality has fallen by as much as 50 percent in various farms between 2017 and 2019. The average standard plate count of all milk supplied to Fiji Dairy Limited, a key measure of milk quality was stable to slightly improve during 2019.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think, that is enough for him.

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

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The way the Honourable Minister for Agriculture is answering that question, I have a lot of supplementary questions here, if I can also be given the time to ask him the many several supplementary questions to his Ministerial Statement, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, what the Honourable Minister has highlighted is, we can term it as a whole lot of hogwash. The milk production before the restructure was about 13 million local litres and now you have just said 4 million in 2018 and 2019?

HON. SPEAKER.- What is your supplementary question?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Like I said, Honourable Speaker, there is a lot of supplementary questions: the milk gate price has reduced from \$1.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- My question, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to the Honourable Minister, can he ensure this House that Government will give to farmers \$1.50 for the milk gate price because that was what we will give to farmers.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- The farm gate price was increased last year from \$0.75 cents to \$1.10. Thank you.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- A Point of Order. That price also includes the transportation costs? It is not the milk gate price?

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- What is your Point of Order?

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- That price is less than a dollar.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order! A supplementary question.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. The Honourable Minister mentioned a few restructures, could he confirm whether those consultancies are related to the restructure, were they tendered or not.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is not related to this question. They can fill in that particular question in the next Parliament Session.

HON. SPEAKER.- We will move on. Honourable Members, I have been informed that the Honourable Rohit Sharma has withdrawn his Question No. 40/2020. We will now move on to the seven Oral Questions for today, and I give the floor to the Honourable Dr. Ratu Atonio Lalabavu to ask Question No. 41/2020. You have the floor, Sir.

Investigating Machines - Detection of Viral disease/Infections
(Question No. 41/2020)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services clarify what investigating machines are available to detect viral disease/infections in the country?

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE (Minister for Health and Medical Services).- Thank you, Honourable Speaker and I thank the Honourable Member for that question.

(Laughter)

Honourable Speaker, the Ministry of Health and Medical Services' main health facilities include the Fiji Centre for Disease Control (FCDC). They have machines, equipment and reagents to diagnose common viral and bacterial diseases in Fiji.

For viral infections, the laboratories at our divisional and sub-divisional hospitals have testing kits that perform serological testing for four viral infections for blood samples of patients and they are Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C, HIV and dengue fever.

So in essence, Honourable Speaker, what I was trying to explain is that, in our health facilities in the Divisional and the Sub-Divisional hospitals, they have the capacity to do their own viral testing, and those are in those four areas that I have alluded to, Hepatitis A, B and C, HIV and dengue. Whereas, we also have the Fiji Centre for Disease Control (Fiji CDC), which is up in Tamavua, which houses the National Public Health Laboratory and that does serological testing involving the identification in the blood of disease specific antibodies that are produced by the body in response to infections.

On the other hand, molecular diagnostic machines test for the presence of particles of the virus or bacteria itself in the blood, bodily secretion or tissue provided for testing because sometimes, when the tissue comes across or the fluid, they may not have the complete component of the virus, and may be just the genetic molecule itself can be separated, and that is what can be used, Honourable Speaker.

Fiji Centre for Disease Control is currently able to test for the following viruses and bacteria through the two modes of testing:

- serological testing: dengue, chikungunya, leptospirosis, measles, rubella and rotavirus.
- molecular diagnosis: dengue, chikungunya, Zika, leptospirosis, measles, rubella, influenza and meningococcal virus.

The National Public Health Laboratory at Fiji CDC, also has the machine for Real Time Reverse Transcription Polymerase Chain Reaction (RTPCR) test for these diseases. The RTPCR test involves the amplification of the detection of the genetic materials of infectious organisms. During the meningococcal outbreak in 2018, over 60 percent of the positive results were tested at Fiji's CDC in Tamavua, and during the measles outbreak, all our suspected measles samplings were tested locally in Tamavua. Testing for influenza is also done at the Fiji CDC.

Honourable Speaker, the RTPCR requires highly skilled laboratory staff, trained in molecular techniques to perform these tests. The Fiji Government has worked with its development partners over the years to up-skill relevant laboratory staff to increase the diagnostic capabilities of our laboratories. Efforts are now underway to establish a dedicated molecular laboratory at Fiji CDC to complement and expand the work currently done at the existing laboratory and the new molecular laboratory is anticipated to be open in the next few weeks.

Honourable Speaker, in an earlier Parliament session last year, I discussed that this laboratory is one of the only four in the Pacific which is of level 2 capability. The other three are New Caledonia, French Polynesia (which is supported by France, of course), and Guam which is an American territory.

Our laboratory also, the Fiji CDC, because of its continuous growth and becoming a reference laboratory throughout the Pacific, has been able to draw support on its own, in terms of development partners and has had some relationships with the Institute of Mallard out of French Polynesia, and now discusses to develop that relationship also, possibly with the Institut Pasteur of New Caledonia and also possibly Paris. There have also been discussions about development partner support in terms of the French Government that has been interested to support it and also other development partners.

Honourable Speaker, conformity testing for COVID-19 virus is done using the molecular methods, similar to what we have. The Fiji CDC has been building capacity to undertake COVID-19 testing with the assistance of our health partners, the WHO and the US Centre for Disease Control (USCDC). We anticipate to be able to achieve this high level of testing capacity in the not-too-distant future.

Honourable Speaker, bacterial diseases are tested by isolating identifying organisms from samples taken from patients. Once the pathogenic organisms are isolated and identified successfully, its antibiotic accessibility is then determined to help to treat the infection appropriately and successfully.

These testing capabilities are available at our main hospitals, namely CWM, Lautoka and Labasa. The process of isolating organisms involve the sterile process or collecting, inoculating, and incubating specimens in special media over a period of time. The incubator machine and the blood culture machine are used in this important process.

For bacterial identification, a number of different processes are followed depending on the type of organism that are going to be identified via chemical test, staining and examination through a microscope and direct antigen testing are used. Molecular testing is used for identifying the Tuberculosis bacteria. Antibiotics susceptibility testing is a crucial step in the bacteria testing. The long culture technique uses antibiotic dish while the liquid suspension method uses the Biotech machine.

Honourable Speaker, the government has recently acquired a new Biotech machine which is the first of its kind that you will have in our hospitals in Fiji. We are working towards commissioning its services and its use will significantly boost our ability to diagnose different types of bacteria thereby improving our treatment of bacterial disease.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are also aware that the laboratories in the major private hospitals in Fiji such as the Oceania Pacific Hospital have similar laboratories diagnosing capability but as I have alluded to, in terms of high and viral, we all use the Fiji Centre for Disease Control which is based in Tamavua. I thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister. The Honourable Dr. Ratu Atonio Lalabalavu.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. With the few suspected cases being mentioned in the media and being isolated, are the samples tested locally or overseas?

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

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- I thank the Honourable Member for that supplementary question. At the moment, it is being tested overseas. We are sending it across to Australia, Honourable Speaker, we are using budget provisions that are being budgeted for the Fiji Centre for Disease Control from the Fiji Government.

As I have alluded to, we have molecular testing which is similar to what is being used for COVID-19 within the Fiji Centre for disease control and we have been in discussion with WHO and recently with the US Centre for Disease Control and we hope to be able to test this locally within the next one or two weeks, or maybe within the next month. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Members, we will move on to the eighth oral question for today. I give the floor to the Honourable George Vegnathan to ask Question No. 42/2020. You have the floor, Sir.

Women in Key Positions - Steps taken by National Airline
(Question No. 42/2020)

HON. G. VEGNATHAN asked the Government, upon notice:

With the International Air Transport Association (IATA) publicly declaring its desire to see increased-participation of women in leadership and technical positions, can the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications inform Parliament on what actions are being taken by our national airline to have more women in these positions?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM (Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications).- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as highlighted, the Fiji Airways has embarked on a leadership programme in July 2018.

The airline launched the Leadership Development Programme (LDP) as they call it, the objective of developing a pool of emerging leaders Company-wide. This is a two-year programme and there are about 26 employees from a cross-section of the Company of which 14 are actually women.

The Fiji Airways have several women in strategic and technical roles. The airline has 15 women who are pilots, 4 of whom are captains and the rest are first officers and second officers. Fiji Links' Manager, Engineering, is responsible for the oversight of the entire domestic fleet and she is actually a woman also. Overall, with the wider Fiji Airways group engineering team, eight women hold technical positions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, furthermore, there are seven women who are actually General Managers and they include (and I would like to read out their names) General Manager, Ms. Ana Morris, Ms. Priya Lal, Ms. Narisha Karan, Ms. Kristina Tempalin and there are two Executive General Managers and recently appointed, Ms. Naomi Vuibureta, who has been made the Chief Finance Officer, together with Shaenaz Voss who is the Group Corporate Affairs Customer Experience of Fiji Link also.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are hoping that with this LDP programme that is currently being rolled out, that will get more females in this position and it is good to know that the two executive general managers are females, who sit on the general executive management team, including two other males, who are also Fijians, who sit on the team and we have been constantly liaising with Fiji Airways.

Of course, this is a part and parcel of using the knowledge and know-how of the expatriates who do come in, passing their knowledge and through the leadership programme, be able to domesticate a lot of these positions that we do have and, of course, with the view to increasing with IATA's desire to see increased participation of women in leadership roles. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Lynda Tabuya.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I thank the Honourable Minister for his answer. I just want him to confirm in terms of their pay for these women pilots that are now in the Fiji Airways, who are local pilots, compared to the expatriate pilots that are coming in now and we see in numbers at Fiji Airways. If you could just clarify their pay, whether they are getting the same or there is a differentiation between the two. Thank you.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, if the Honourable Member could perhaps be a bit more succinct. Is she asking the question of the female pilots getting the same salary as the male pilots or is she asking whether the domestic pilots are getting the same salary as expatriate pilots - the point of difference?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I am happy to clarify that. In fact, if the Honourable Minister would like to clear both issues, he is welcome to, but it certainly is an issue for local pilots whether they are women or men compared to expatriate pilots whether they are women or men. You are trying to improve women leadership, if a local woman pilot getting less than the expatriate woman pilot, please, explain why? Thank you.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I can assure the Parliament that Fiji Airways makes no distinction between males or females. If they fit the bill, if they are appointed on merit, they will get the same salary.

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

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker and I thank the Honourable Attorney-General for that information but I would like to reassure the House that almost all those women rose to those positions from their own work and funding, Honourable Speaker.

What kind of assistance or incentives are given to these women so that they could rise up and occupy the CEO in Fiji Airways one day? Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I think he has already covered that but I give you the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will bow down to your wisdom. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Viliame Gavoka.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. We all know that the A350 is now part of the fleet and it is truly a wonderful aircraft. Do any of the women now qualify to fly that and specifically if they can fly to Chicago and Houston, areas where years ago we had planned to fly to in a Dreamliner but because of the Bainimarama *coup*, it still has not happened so what is happening here, Honourable Speaker? Thank you.

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Member is asking two questions. The latter question, I will answer first. If he was in Parliament yesterday, he would have got the full answer so I am not going to refer to that.

The first question in respect of whether female pilots are actually flying the Airbus A350, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do not believe so but I can check that.

We have already four who are captains and at this point in time, I would be just guessing whether they are the A737 captains or whether they are in the A330s but from my understanding at this point in time, there are no female pilots who are captains of A350s but you can be rest-assured that those female pilots who are on the A350s as either as first or second officers, would be coming up the ranks.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to, of course, take this opportunity to once again highlight to Parliament that Fiji Airways has invested in the Aviation Academy which is situated in Namaka. You would see that driving past it. We hope to have that commissioned in roundabout February or March, we are planning at the end of this month or next month.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have assimilators for the 737 MAXs and the A330s which, of course, gives our local pilots, the first and second officers to get better opportunity in terms of assimilation time and, of course, more on time with assimilators which means more Fijian pilots can come up to speed really quickly.

We hope too in time to come, of course, we get an assimilator for the A350s, they do not necessarily come cheap but with the Aviation Academy being set up, we will be able to fast-track many of these pilots, in particular female pilots coming up the ranks. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. We will move on to the first Written Question for today. I now call on the Honourable Ratu Suliano Matanitobua to ask his Written Question No. 43/2020. You have the floor, Sir.

Written Questions

Rural Water Supply Schemes – 2018-2020
(Question No. 43/2020)

HON. RATU S. MATANITOBUA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Disaster Management and Meteorological Services inform Parliament of the following:

- (a) details of all rural water supply service schemes carried out in the Central Division in 2018/2019 fiscal year;
- (b) total value of all the rural water supply service schemes carried out in the Central Division in 2018/2019 fiscal year;
- (c) details of all the rural water supply service schemes in the Central Division that were not implemented in the 2018/2019 fiscal year; and
- (d) details of all the rural water supply service schemes being planned for the Central Division for the year 2019/2020 fiscal year.

HON. J. USAMATE (Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Disaster Management and Meteorological Services).- Mr. Speaker, Sir, despite the fact that the word “details” is a very broad term, nevertheless, I will table my response at a later sitting date as permitted under SO 45(3).

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister.

The second Written Question for today, I call on the Honourable Lynda Tabuya to ask her Question No. 44/2020. You have the floor, Madam.

Audio Visual Agents Licences
(Question No. 44/2020)

HON. L.D. TABUYA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism, Local Government, Housing and Community Development update Parliament on the number of audio visual agents licences issued and how many of these agents are currently engaged in film production since 2012 to date?

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

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. Question time is now over.

Honourable Members, that concludes our agenda for today.

I thank all Honourable Members for your contribution to today's sitting and we will now adjourn till tomorrow morning at 9.30. We adjourn.

The Parliament adjourned at 4.19 p.m.