

# **PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI**



## **PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES**

### **DAILY HANSARD**

**FRIDAY, 4TH SEPTEMBER, 2020**

**[CORRECTED COPY]**

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## **FRIDAY, 4TH SEPTEMBER, 2020**

The Parliament met at 9.37 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

HONOURABLE SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

### **PRESENT**

All Honourable Members were present, except the Honourable J.N. Nand.

### **MINUTES**

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Thursday, 3rd September, 2020, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

### **COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CHAIR**

#### Welcome

HON. SPEAKER.- I welcome all Honourable Members to the final sitting for this week, as well as this Parliament session. I also welcome all those watching the live broadcast and the live streaming of today's proceedings from the comfort of their home, offices and mobile phones. Thank you for taking an interest in your Parliament.

#### careFIJI App

Honourable Members, on a very important note, I wish to address the House on the issue of the careFIJI App. Honourable Members, as leaders, we all need to work together to ensure that Fiji remains COVID-contained and, therefore, it is crucially important that we all adhere to the advisories issued by the Ministry of Health Officials, including the one on downloading the careFIJI App. As leaders, we must encourage many fellow Fijians to do the same for the reason that it is a health and safety issue for all.

Honourable Members, it has also come to my attention that not all Honourable Members have actually downloaded the careFIJI App. It worries me because as I had alluded to, as leaders, we should be at the forefront, adhering to advisories and in turn, ensuring that many Fijians do the same.

For all Honourable Members who receive official mobile phones and have not downloaded the App, please, do the honourable thing and download the careFIJI App, as has been alluded to this week. This is a health and safety issue.

I have given instructions to the Secretary-General that for those who wish to come and visit me in Parliament, to check that they have the App – anyone coming to visit the Speaker in Parliament, and all visitors. Thank you, Honourable Members.

## PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND CERTAIN DOCUMENTS

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now call upon the Prime Minister and Minister for iTaukei Affairs, Sugar Industry and Foreign Affairs, to table his Reports. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, in accordance with Standing Order 38, I present the following Reports to Parliament:

- (1) Ministry of Sugar Industry 2016-2017 Annual Report (*Parliamentary Paper No. 58/2019*);
- (2) Ministry of Sugar Industry 2017-2018 Annual Report (*Parliamentary Paper No. 59/2019*);
- (3) Sugar Industry Tribunal 2016 Annual Report (*Parliamentary Paper No. 44/2020*);
- (4) Fiji Sugar Corporation 2019 Annual Report (*Parliamentary Paper No. 52/2020*);
- (5) Sugar Cane Growers Council Annual Report 2018 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 50/2020*);
- (6) Sugar Cane Growers Fund Annual Report 2018 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 48/2020*);
- (7) Sugar Research Institute of Fiji 2016 Annual Report (*Parliamentary Paper No. 79/2019*);
- (8) Sugar Research Institute of Fiji 2017 Annual Report (*Parliamentary Paper No. 170/2019*); and
- (9) Sugar Research Institute of Fiji 2018 Annual Report (*Parliamentary Paper No. 171/2019*).

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

(Reports handed to the Secretary-General)

Under Standing Order 38(2), I refer the following Reports to the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs:

- (1) Ministry of Sugar Industry 2016-2017 Annual Report (*Parliamentary Paper No. 58/2019*);
- (2) Ministry of Sugar Industry 2017-2018 Annual Report (*Parliamentary Paper No. 59/2019*);
- (3) Sugar Industry Tribunal 2016 Annual Report (*Parliamentary Paper No. 44/2020*);
- (4) Fiji Sugar Corporation 2019 Annual Report (*Parliamentary Paper No. 52/2020*);
- (5) Sugar Cane Growers Council Annual Report 2018 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 50/2020*);
- (6) Sugar Cane Growers Fund Annual Report 2018 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 48/2020*);
- (7) Sugar Research Institute of Fiji 2016 Annual Report (*Parliamentary Paper No. 79/2019*);
- (8) Sugar Research Institute of Fiji 2017 Annual Report (*Parliamentary Paper No. 170/2019*); and
- (9) Sugar Research Institute of Fiji 2018 Annual Report (*Parliamentary Paper No. 171/2019*).

I now call upon the Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications to table his Reports. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, in accordance with Standing Order 38, I present the following Reports to Parliament:

- (1) Fiji Financial Intelligence Unit Annual Report 2019 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 53/2020*);
- (2) Reserve Bank of Fiji Insurance Annual Report 2019 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 54/2020*);

- (3) Report of the Auditor-General of the Republic of Fiji on the 2018-2019 Audit Report on Government Commercial Companies, Commercial Statutory Authorities and Other Entities (*Parliamentary Paper No. 184/2020*);
- (4) Report of the Auditor-General of the Republic of Fiji on the 2018-2019 Audit Report on Statutory Authorities (*Parliamentary Paper No. 185/2020*);
- (5) Report of the Auditor-General of the Republic of Fiji on the Remaining 2018 Audit Reports on General Administration, Social Services and Economic Services Sectors (*Parliamentary Paper No. 187/2020*); and
- (6) 2018-2019 Audit Report on Municipal Councils (*Parliamentary Paper No. 161/2020*).

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

(Reports handed to the Secretary-General)

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Under Standing Order 38(2), I refer the following Reports to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts:

- (1) Report of the Auditor-General of the Republic of Fiji on the 2018-2019 Audit Report on Government Commercial Companies, Commercial Statutory Authorities and Other Entities (*Parliamentary Paper No. 184/2020*);
- (2) Report of the Auditor-General of the Republic of Fiji on the 2018-2019 Audit Report on Statutory Authorities (*Parliamentary Paper No. 185/2020*);
- (3) Report of the Auditor-General of the Republic of Fiji on the Remaining 2018 Audit Reports on General Administration, Social Services and Economic Services Sectors (*Parliamentary Paper No. 187/2020*); and
- (4) 2018-2019 Audit Report on Municipal Councils (*Parliamentary Paper No. 161/2020*).

Thank you, Honourable Members. We will now proceed to the next Item. I now call upon the Honourable Gavoka, to move his motion.

### **NATIONAL ECONOMIC SUMMIT**

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move:

That Parliament resolves to recommend to Government to convene a National Economic Summit to determine the way forward for our economy, given the ravages of the COVID-19 pandemic.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now invite Honourable Gavoka to speak on his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, and Honourable Members of this esteemed House, I rise to present a motion which I believe is critical, given the state of our beloved nation. A question that continues to plague me, Sir, is when COVID-19 passes and the historians of Fiji look back to what we, the leaders of this country, did during this time, have we as a body done everything humanely possible to meet this crisis?

Honestly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I say sadly we have not. Why; everyone would ask? The answer, Mr. Speaker, is that, one cannot clap with one hand only.

The motion, Sir, is for the Government of the day to hold an economic summit to openly and without fear and rancour determine how we can all contribute or take part in the economic rebuilding of our country. At the moment, the Government is trying to clap with one hand. We need to work together, Mr. Speaker. I, and Honourable Members on this side of the House, are willing to roll up our sleeves and contribute.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to state the obvious, we are in a national crisis, and a national crisis needs a national solution. Let me also remind the House, before I briefly revisit the key statistics for the 2020-2021 National Budget, it is likely worse, given the facts that the projected expected revenue from the Bubble are unlikely to come true. The outcomes are most likely going to be far worse.

As we know, Qantas which is our favourite Airline this week, is projecting that travel will not restart until June 2021. For us, Mr. Speaker, based on this, this should be around our peak season in Fiji. So if we do our work properly and we prepare ourselves well, we can see an instant recovery in the occupancies in our country. But this is the way it is, this is the way major airlines are predicting the future, but it will not be until the middle of next year. Hence, the suggestion here that we prepare for it through a national summit.

We assumed that we would get 50 percent of the 2019 traffic. I think we would be lucky if we get 30 percent, Mr. Speaker. Key Budget statistics were as follows:

- (1) Budget deficit - \$2 billion.
- (2) Government revenue had fallen to \$1.6 billion.
- (3) Government debt is at a staggering \$8.2 billion.
- (4) Economic contraction in 2020 - 21.7 percent.
- (5) Net deficit as a percentage of Debt per GDP – 20.2 percent.
- (6) Inflation rate – 1 percent.
- (7) Debt to GDP – 83.4 percent.
- (8) Debt to GDP, including contingencies – 91.3 percent.

If you run the risk of missing our revenue assumptions, a national economic summit is necessary. If you know that you are going to miss this revenue assumptions, we must have a national economic summit. There have been numerous excellent proposals put forth by some eminent minds in Fiji, like Mr. Savenaca Narube, Mr. Mahendra Chaudhry, Honourable Professor Prasad, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, et cetera.

(Honourable Government Members interject)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- There you go, Mr. Speaker, still clapping with one hand. Exactly where I am coming from. When I bring up names of these eminent Economists and even leaders in this country, they boo from the other side.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- That is exactly where they are coming from, you cannot clap with one hand, FijiFirst. You have been seen to be lacking in many ways.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- It has been proven that you cannot do it alone. That is all from the beginning, we were offering our assistance, like in other countries where the Opposition were part of the initiative but not once have we been invited to sit with the leadership of FijiFirst.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, during the time of Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, he used to call Mr. Koya, the Opposition Leader, for a cup of tea, likewise the Honourable Leader of the Opposition when he was Prime Minister, Mr. Chaudhry and Mr. Qarase. Not once in six years, has Prime Minister Bainimarama invited Honourable Kepa, the Leader of the Opposition then, Honourable Professor Prasad or the Honourable Leader of the Opposition there, not once. He believes in clapping with one hand. Listen to what I am trying to say to you today, change! Do not clap with one hand. We are here, ready to help you. It is time to admit that we are in trouble as a nation and we need ideas across the political divide.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, areas of focus for the economic summit could include:

- (1) Diversification or broadening of export-base areas. We are showing promises, such as mahogany, Business Process Outsourcing (BPO), manufacturing and targeted agricultural opportunities.
- (2) War on Government wastage – identifying and removing wasteful spending, spending needs to be a priority. We see that a lot of spending, Mr. Speaker, is still low priority. We can relook at some of these spending to free up the resources to help generate growth in our economy.
- (3) We may even look at re-introducing the Public Works Department (PWD). This has been part of the dialogue across the country, given the condition of the roads in this country today. Having spent \$3 billion, our roads are in a shocking state, so we may have to bring back PWD.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am frightened to drive my car from Sigatoka to Suva because when I go back, I need repairs and the Suva roads give us a bad name. We look like a failed State when you drive through Suva roads.

- (4) Ease of Doing Business Initiatives. What else hinders or is a bottleneck to investment in Fiji? As you know, we used to be up there with the best in the country and we dropped to below 100 or something.
- (5) We re-examine the tax free incentives similar to 1987 for manufacturing.

- (6) Existing investors in Fiji, what can they do? For example, Fiji Water is interested in Yaqara, what can they do? Can we work with them or just say, “no”, to them?
- (7) Direct assistance in the West, is it enough? Are we helping the West? You need to go to the West to see what Nadi is like. Can you do more for them? It is quite tragic the way Nadi looks so desolate today. You drive through Nadi International Airport that used to be the hub of activities in the Western Division but today, it is all locked up and even at night with no lights, and the shops in Nadi, Mr. Speaker. You are not doing enough for Nadi, or for the West. Are we doing enough for them? Let us address it in the national economic summit.
- (8) Collaboration with NGOs, especially agriculturally-focussed.
- (9) Financial stability of Fiji Airways and FNPF, our favourite topic over the last few days. Get feedback from stakeholders in business - employers and unions. We keep saying, Mr. Speaker, that tribunals and meetings help build confidence in this country. We need to put together confidence-building measures. It is not just one or two people telling us that it is all alright that we follow blindly on whatever they say. Getting feedback from the youth of our beloved nation and the youth have much to offer, so let us include them in the national economic summit.

Out of this economic summit, Mr. Speaker, a clear pathway can be developed to expand the Fijian economy and institute other tax and business reform initiatives to accelerate business growth. Ultimately, GDP growth that is broader and not solely dependent on tourism and sugar that will bring the country what it needs to be the backbone of the economy. For too long, we have been relying too much on tourism and sugar. Yes, they are important to us and yes, we will need them for the future but for this time, let us broaden, let us diversify and that will bring up the other sectors to be the backbone of the economy.

As I had cautioned, Mr. Speaker, Sir, you cannot clap with one hand. It is crucial that we come together as a country through the national economic summit and plot a way through these troubling times. I urge my esteemed colleagues to seriously consider the motion.

I commend the motion for the holding of a national economic summit to the House, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

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

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak against the motion by the Honourable Member.

Mr. Speaker, I am a bit worried, the Honourable Member may be suffering from some form of amnesia, especially in the last couple of weeks. The last couple of months, they keep harping about this bipartisan approach, Mr. Speaker.

We cannot have bipartisan approach with the comments like the one that was passed across by Honourable Jale yesterday. We cannot have that. We cannot have a bipartisan approach until the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and Honourable Members of the National Federation Party come and share breakfast with us or even lunch and morning tea. But they seem to have a notion that we can have a bipartisan approach only when they want it.



This bipartisan approach, Mr. Speaker, comes from here, not from when you want it and I still remember the day I invited Honourable Professor Prasad to come and help with the budget then. He did not want to come in. Maybe at that time, he was not yet in the Party. Maybe, he was thinking of joining the Party then, now he is in the Party and he wants this bipartisan approach.

Mr. Speaker, I am quite sure, I already explained why there is no need to waste time and money to tell us the bleeding obvious about the economic impact of COVID-19. Now, Mr. Speaker, I am scratching my head, wondering how Honourable Tuisawau and Honourable Gavoka, both managed to come up with the same bad idea in the span of the same week. Call it a committee, call it a summit, call it whatever you want, it was not needed two days ago and it still is not needed today.

We already went to the nation during our pre-budget and post-budget consultations to work with our people and to work with our businesses, to put forward a national budget, designed in every way to adjust to the realities of this pandemic and prepare our economy for its comeback once our borders reopen.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, where was the Honourable Member during the consultation for our National Budget? Where was he? He should be asked that. We know exactly where he was. He was locked up in various hotels around Suva fighting with his fellow Party members for power. While they were busy hacking away at each other, not one member of SODELPA could find the time to make a single contribution to our Budget consultations. Not one! And now, having missed the opportunity to contribute, they are calling for an economic summit.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say that their efforts are little too late, worse and it is totally arrogant. They have showed up late to our nationwide *talanoa* and are now demanding to be heard. Do you think this virus waits on the whims of SODELPA?

No, Mr. Speaker, it does not. Its impacts have been upon us for months. In that time, we have already gone straight to the people, we have gone to the businesses, we took on their constructive inputs and we have come up with the right plan for our economy, exactly at the right time. We announced the \$2 billion economic stimulus to reinvigorate the economy. We announced \$100 million in direct assistance to those who need it.

As we have highlighted, Mr. Speaker, everyday, more is being paid out. We have given businesses the flexibility to defer loan repayments. We have introduced the single largest tax cut in Fijian history to incentivise growth and activity. We have pursued safe and innovative ways to resume flows of tourism and we are laying the groundwork for a historic comeback for the tourism industry and for our economy, the day our borders fully reopen.

Businesses across the country, Mr. Speaker, and the Fijians they are employing have given our latest budget two thumbs up across the board. Do we seriously think they support some economic summit to reinvigorate the tax cuts they are enjoying, the unemployment assistance they are receiving and the historic stimulus spending we had put forward? Of course not! They know what we know, that the Honourable Members of the Opposition have nothing to contribute save for hypocrisy. They say we need to give more assistance to help the unemployed while in the same breathe, complaining that we are spending too much money. They say we need to create a sustaining employment but then they attack us for pushing forward with jobs creating new development and construction projects. They say we need to create and sustain tourism more affordable so that we can compete with other destinations, then condemn the tourism rebate package.

Mr. Speaker, the truth is, there is no NFP or SODELPA position on the economy. They have no ideas, they have no meaningful contributions. Their entire game plan is to disagree with whatever

the Government does and we do not need to convene some economic summit to figure that one out. So I am happy to save us all a great deal of time, money and misery by opposing this motion. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to contribute to the debate and this is for Parliament to recommend to Government an economic summit. Let me go back to some history for the benefit of some Honourable Members.

The last mini Economic Summit was done in 2008 conducted by the Honourable Prime Minister with the title, "Rebuilding confidence and growth in the economy". In that Summit, the Honourable Prime Minister had presented the State of Economy Report, followed up by the People's Charter. That is the basis of economic policies that are here, it encourages the public and the private sector discussions and dialogue on building some way forward for the nation.

We also thank the Government in terms of the Budget consultations that had been done around the country. I attended the first one that was held at Labasa College with the Honourable Attorney-General which brings out the various views and probably, the Ministry of Economy Officials aided by the Reserve Bank of Fiji Governor and also other Economists who were present on that day, were able to receive the views of those in the private sector and are factored into the Budget, and that has an impact on the decision-making of Government.

Again, we know that budget-making is also a balancing act where not all views can be taken on board but also put in a way that there is stability in the economy and the best interests of all Fijians is kept and no-one is left behind as per the SDGs. We also note that we have a National Development Plan in place - a 5-Year and 20-Year Development Plan which mirrors the development goals and also the targets in various areas that fall into our policies. Those are some of the things that we note that are already in place and also the current policies that are there. But the motion seems to recommend to Government but Government has things in place but these are some of the things that Government could take into consideration, moving into the future.

I am always of the view that when we have different interpretation of things coming out in the media and also in the social media, there needs to be a national summit or a forum where we can all come together and be on the same page. I think clarifications need to be done probably by the Honourable Minister for Economy so that people will understand the facts and figures of what is really happening.

I think this will be good in the future and now during COVID-19, given that we have a COVID-19 Response Budget already and another one that is in this financial year, it will be good to call this summit probably once we go past this emergency state, from my view, then we review what we have done since 2008 and moving forward to the future. But it has to be a summit that should bring in very constructive ideas. I would not talk about the substance and what will come into the summit and what people want. Let us talk about the structure and policies on how we have this kind of forums to encourage sharing of ideas and also a platform for dialogue so that we can move this country forward.

As a national leader and also national leaders just spoke the other day, it is very important for us to put our country first in everything that we do. We understand the difficulties that our people are facing at the moment due to COVID-19, it is a global pandemic and no one is spared. But I see this motion as something like a recommendation by any Standing Committee Report to recommend to Government but for Government to probably consider this in the future where it can be decided on

the right time to convene this. But the onus is on the Government when is the right time and who are the important stakeholders that need to be called in and also to clear out some of the things that probably will help the economy grow, we regain confidence and move forward as a nation. *Vinaka vakalevu.*

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

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, one thing is very clear, this is a Government which is not in the habit of talking to anyone else. It has taken COVID-19 to show the stark reality of what some of us in NFP and in the Opposition and others outside of Parliament, were saying about this Government. This is a Government which, for the last four or five years, has been reckless and wasteful, spending and borrowing, and today, when the pandemic has hit us, we are obviously in a much more difficult and worse situation than we were.

The Honourable Prime Minister referred to us not coming on board when he asked help from me some years back. As a matter of principle, Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me state this to the people of this country; I have never supported a *coup* in this country, I have never supported a *coup*-led Government. I was a biggest critic of the Honourable Leader of the Opposition when he did the *coup* and when he ran a Government on a racist 1990 Constitution. I was the biggest critic of him, and any Prime Minister who has come out of the barrel of the gun, to say that we are not prepared to help, now that he is the elected Prime Minister and now that we are in Parliament, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have offered since 2014. I personally offered to the Honourable Prime Minister on many occasions, my and our Party's willingness to work with him.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, Sir, his response to the letter we wrote, the three of us from NFP and the Honourable Leader of the Opposition before the COVID-19 Response Budget to actually offer help and be part of the drive to respond to the COVID-19 crisis, was rejected by the Honourable Prime Minister. So let us not come here, Mr. Speaker, and say that we have not offered.

The Honourable Attorney-General the other day talked about us not offering alternative budgets and he compared Australia, but he failed to tell the people of this country that in Australia, there is an independent Parliamentary Budget Office which is resourced, whose job is to provide the analysis, the financial statements for the Opposition, Members of Parliament and Senate to do those kind of things. Here, we cannot even afford an independent Parliamentary Counsel and we are talking about how the Opposition should provide alternative budgets.

That aside, Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me come back to the motion. We have called for the economic summit in the past. The Honourable Prime Minister has forgotten that when he was the Interim Prime Minister, I attended at least two of his Economic Summits and offered my assistance, and the Honourable Attorney-General knows that.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- He is not listening, Mr. Speaker. The Honourable Attorney-General is not listening. He would remember that I actually attended a couple of Economic Summits organised by the then Interim Government and he was there, and we offered our input and it did provide a collective forum for people to articulate issues.

It is also, Mr. Speaker, Sir, not surprising why this Government is so worried about this idea of bipartisanship, because I know they do not even talk amongst themselves.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- Their own friend, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Graham Davis says that they are divided, the caucus is divided. He even said that they are ethnically divided. Shameful!

Let us not come here and say that because we are critical of Government in Parliament, we cannot come and have a cup of tea with the Honourable Minister for Economy. If he invites me, I will come and have a cup of tea with him.

That is not the point, Mr. Speaker. What we say in Parliament is what we say here. That does not mean that when we get outside, I cannot talk to the Honourable Minister for Health, I cannot talk to the Honourable Minister for Fisheries.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- This is ridiculous, Mr. Speaker, what they are saying.

Of course, our job here in the Opposition is to raise issues and ask questions, but we are always ready to talk. We are always prepared to talk, and I think there are many other people out there, Mr. Speaker, who will be prepared to come and participate in a forum which is genuinely looking for ideas, where the Government actually puts its plans and proposals and policies as to what it wants to do, the people in a very structured manner would provide their feedback, so the Economic Summits have worked and have been very useful in this country.

There are many issues, Mr. Speaker, for example, the last Education Commission that we had in this country was in 2000. It is almost 20 years now. There have been reforms, reforms, un-reforms, so many changes in the education system and we have been calling for an education commission, education summit or whatever you may call it, as a result of that Education Commission.

We have been talking about the Sugar Industry, the Dairy Industry under this Government over the last 14 years and it is almost collapsed. These are issues that we need to sit down together and get a kind of input, you can get experts, you can get plans, the development plan is there but no one is looking at that. It is all out of the window. That is the point we are trying to make, Mr. Speaker.

Bringing people together and getting us to talk together is not a big deal. Government is afraid of talking, that was the problem. They are afraid that we might gain some political mileage. They are worried about 2022 already, instead of talking about the COVID-19 Response and how we can deal with it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you Honourable Member. You have had your 10 minutes - five minutes and another five minutes have been taken up. This side has already spoken for seven minutes. The next speaker will only take three minutes. You have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will speak really fast. He will obfuscate, he will procrastinate with no values and principles - the truth he will swindle, let his ego dwindle. I have said this before and that is precisely what he has done.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, when someone starts quoting some disgruntled ex-employee or some other organisation and using that as a political platform, you know he has become very desperate, and I am not going to comment on Graham Davis's credibility or integrity but I will leave it at that. He has become really desperate.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reality of the matter is, that we have had numerous consultations and Honourable Gavoka would know this. We were in Sigatoka, Nadi and Lautoka. We were in Suva, we met numerous organisations, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in small groups and in large groups. We do have alternative businesses - manufacturing, BPOs, we have already highlighted the assembly lines, we are already talking to our counterparts - value adding in the agriculture sector, Mr. Speaker, Sir. If you go to Valley Road, Nabouwalu, Hibiscus Highway, Buca Bay, Boto, Sawani, Serea, Kings Road - all of this has been done during this Government's term, including the Bainimarama Government's time.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have had numerous consultations through the Ministry of Youth with our youth, women's organisations, we have had Employment Relations Advisory Board (ERAB) meetings but sometimes they do not intend to turn up, the RBF has its own consultations, in fact, they went out even before us.

One of the criticisms that they have made and this is why we find it very enriching when they want to come and have these so-called bipartisan approaches, they are not even agreeing with the basic fundamental theories and, indeed, practices. For example, the idea of expanding during the time of contracted growth when you have things like a pandemic, and that is when you invest in infrastructure.

From day one since the Budget they have actually been condemning the various infrastructural projects, including the Prime Minister's Office, which will be the Prime Minister's Office for the future and for decades in the future. That is the Government asset - hospitals, police stations - they have been condemning all of that, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The IMF just released a book a couple of days ago where they talked about how critically important it is to actually have your infrastructure expenditure being built in.

We had called for Budget consultations - Mick Beddoes and Savenaca Narube did provide inputs to their credit, however, SODELPA and NFP did not. Honourable Professor Prasad is saying that he should have access to independent office. If Savenaca Narube and Mick Beddoes can do it without an independent office, how come he cannot do it, supposedly a professor in economics, Mr. Speaker, Sir? We did invite the Opposition also after the delivery of the Budget. We said that there will be a workshop to go through the figures, Honourable Bulitavu, but no one turned up, unfortunately. I mean, these are the kind of goodwill gestures that you need to be able to demonstrate.

Honourable Professor Prasad said, "You invite me, only then I will come." Basically, that is what he is saying. But Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reality of the matter is, and the Honourable Prime Minister has highlighted, there are some fundamental principle differences. Your analysis in particular, SODELPA, and I do not know about NFP but SODELPA most definitely rests on an ethnic divide in the country, a dichotomous approach through ethnic relations. They look at everything from an ethnic perspective. Who is appointed? What is his ethnicity? We are going to give that much money, the scholarship. What is the ethnic breakdown?

We are not into that, everyone is a Fijian. We want to get the best person for the right job. People fall into that. We have now politicians going around, even from NFP doing ethnic compositions of the Civil Service, the Military or RFMF. We do not care - a soldier is a soldier, a

policeman is a policeman, as long as the process of recruiting them is all open and transparent. That is what we want.

In the same way with economics, that is what we want. We have an open tender process. There are so many companies now that are getting Government tenders and they said they never got it before because it was never open tender. It was who you knew, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reality of the matter is that now, more economic participation and people feel a lot more participatory and a lot more included within the economic structure if you have that approach. Thank you.

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

Honourable Member, time moves on. The right of reply, you have the floor, Sir.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We were hoping to finish the week on a high. Now, we say, "Alright, we agreed on something in a bipartisan manner", but I suppose after six years of FijiFirst, the people of Fiji know that we are being governed here by people who behave like lone rangers.

We go to other parts of the world and say, "We believe in Talanoa as a way of resolving things", but here we are. Their *Talanoa* is a *Talanoa* that they control. They will not allow feedback from people in a free community and get the benefit, of the collective minds in the country. It is tragic, Mr. Speaker.

People wanting to ask as to why SODELPA keeps spending time in hotels and leadership meeting about the Party, that is the way Parties work in a democracy. Can we just ask, how do you do it at FijiFirst? Do you have your AGMs? What process do you follow to select a leader? We got the impression here that he is the pied piper, he blows whatever he is blowing and all of you follow blindly.

(Laughter)

This is the 21st century, you cannot be following a leader blindly. You have to have your say, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker, hundreds in the world are holding economic summits. The global committee is meeting at Davos, Switzerland, very soon to reset the economy in the world. I mean, that is globally, and here in Fiji, we have had Economic Summits. The last one here, I believe, was in 2014. So, why can we not have another one and boost confidence in this country, especially the banks?

Confidence is lacking in this country, Mr. Speaker. They are not willing to lend. Interest rates are high because they become very anxious when the governance of the country is going in the wrong direction. All we are saying here is, let us be seen to be co-operating and working together during this crisis, and confidence will improve in this country, translating into economic growth. I mean, let us look at FijiFirst. Have they created a new industry over the last 15 years? No! How can they be saying that we are on the right path, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker, we need to have a Summit and we have many modalities we could follow. One of the best we had was in 1996/1997, the joint parliamentary select committees, following the model in 1996/1997. We have done it in the past, it has helped and I just wish that FijiFirst can look beyond

its very narrow-minded leadership and embrace ideas from across the political divide and get us to come together in a Summit like we are suggesting today.

Mr. Speaker, I just wish that we would all vote to have this national economic summit at this very difficult time in our country. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I thank the mover of the motion for his right of reply. Honourable Members, the Parliament will now vote on the motion.

Question put.

Motion lost.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will now suspend proceedings for refreshments in the Big Committee Room and we will resume when the Secretary-General rings the bell.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.32 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 10.51 a.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the first Oral Question for today is from the Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua and I now call on the Honourable Member to ask Question No. 138/20. You have the floor, Ma'am.

## QUESTIONS

### Oral Questions

Road User Levy – Owners and Operators of Farm Tractors  
(Question No. 138/2020)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Commerce Trade, Tourism and Transport inform Parliament why owners or operators of farm tractors in the sugarcane belts are being charged road user levy when the tractors do not use public roads?

HON. F.S. KOYA (Minister for Commerce Trade, Tourism and Transport).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I thank the Honourable Member for the question.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we all know, roads need regular maintenance and upgrade. We have actually had a lot of legacy issues with respect to previous Governments' lack of maintenance and upgrade of our road infrastructure. This actually led to the Road User Levy in 2009. The purpose of the levy is to generate funds to support road and infrastructure development and maintenance.

The Land Transport Authority (LTA), Mr. Speaker, Sir, is responsible for the registration of all motor vehicles in Fiji and section 49(1) and (2) of the Land Transport Act 1998 states, and I quote:

“(1) A person who owns a motor vehicle or trailer shall register the motor vehicle or trailer with the Authority irrespective of whether the motor vehicle or trailer is to be used exclusively on private property.

(2) A person who has a registered motor vehicle or trailer may apply to the Authority for the motor vehicle or trailer to be exempted...”

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, section 52 of the Act states that any motor vehicle or trailer shall not be registered or the registration of a motor vehicle or trailer shall not be renewed unless that road user levy has been paid under the provisions of the Act.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the definition also of motor vehicle under the laws states, and I quote:

“... any automobile, motor car, motor carriage, motor cycle, traction engine, tractor or other carriage or vehicle propelled or capable of being propelled by means of an engine powered wholly or partly by any volatile spirit, steam, oil, gas, or electricity, or by any means other than human or animal powers...”

As long as a vehicle falls within this particular definition, it must be registered with the LTA and the road user levy must be paid.



Mr. Speaker, Sir, farm tractors fall within the definition of a vehicle. Therefore, registration and road user levy applies. Although most tractors operate off the road, as we all know in farms, including those in the sugarcane belt areas, it actually still can be driven on the roads. Those of us that drive have actually seen tractors on the roads.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the law also has exemption provisions for road user levy, which states that any authority, institution or person may be exempted from that particular payment of the road user levy by the Minister responsible for transport after consultation with the Authority. Exemption applications must be lodged with the LTA who will process and assess those particular vehicles. Not all vehicles are given those exemptions, Sir, only vehicles that cannot be driven on a public road are considered and a classic example of that is, as you would know, Mr. Speaker, Sir, golf carts. I hope that suffices.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister.

Honourable Members I will move to the second Oral Question for today and I call on the Honourable Vegnathan to ask his question.

Endoscopic Services - Ministry of Health and Medical Services  
(Question No. 139/2020)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services inform Parliament on endoscopic services at the Ministry?

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE (Minister for Health and Medical Services).- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the simple answer is 'yes', and it is available in all three Divisional Hospitals.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the endoscopy using a fibre-optic scope to be able to view the alimentary canal either, from the top and also from the bottom and this has been very helpful. Just as we had discussed the other day, the Minimal Invasive Surgery is another addition to the tools that specialised doctors in this field are able to use so that they can be able to treat, diagnose, investigate and reset lesions within the alimentary canal that can be of concern or cancerous. This is a tool that is now readily available, again, as I have said, throughout the three Divisional Hospitals – CWM, Lautoka and Labasa.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, at CWM Hospital, the development that has happened there has been quite rapid to the extent that through the Fiji National University, the CWM's Endoscopic Services and the World Federation of Society of Gastroenterologists, that Unit is now a Centre of Excellence for the Pacific region. It is one of the only 12 in the world and the Honourable Prime Minister actually inaugurated that about four years ago at the CWM Hospital when Professor Malani was part of that process in ensuring that we have been able to meet that standard.

That also meant that we have been able to train not only our locals here but it has become a regional Centre of Excellence where we have had people from right across the region. Doctors to train in this particular area are coming from as far as the Northern Pacifica in the Northern Marianas, Federated States of Micronesia, Samoa, Tonga, Vanuatu and the Solomons Islands. The trainers have been predominantly from CWM Hospital, as well as from Australia where the support has come from.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, they have also gone now into the introduction of the Endoscopic Retrograde Cholangio Pancreatography (ERCP) which is a mechanism by which we can even do more work around the liver and also the pancreas. The wonderful thing about this Minimal Invasive Surgery that I have talked about earlier, Sir, is that we are now practising what best practice is in terms of using a mechanism to diagnose and treat that actually causes less mobility, obviously less mortality and a quick turnaround for our people in Fiji and in keeping with what is happening in other areas close to home, such as Australia and New Zealand.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister.

Honourable Members we will move on to the third Oral Question for today. I call on the Honourable Gavoka to ask his question. You have the floor, Sir.

Mitigating Impacts of COVID-19 - Tourism Industry  
(Question No. 140/2020)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport inform Parliament of the Ministry's plan on mitigating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Tourism Industry?

HON. F.S. KOYA (Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I thank you for giving me the opportunity to take the floor and respond to the question by the Honourable Member. However, I feel that the Honourable Member has not been paying attention throughout the week and to the past Ministerial Statements and responses.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- It is actually true, it needs to be said. We have said this time and time again.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

You have the floor, Honourable Minister.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- This is the problem, Sir, they do not listen. That is why we keep saying the same things over and over again, just like yesterday.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will say it and please, listen this time, today is Friday. It is *jumma*, it is a holy day. We have to go to the prayer at 12.30 p.m.

From the beginning, Sir, we have been strategic and proactive in our approach to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic on the Fijian economy. It is now over 130 days since we have had our last case outside of border quarantine.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am so proud to stand here today and say that *Tourlane* has actually rated us as the safest place in the world to travel to. We have to take our hat off to the entire Government

machinery that has been responsible for that, Sir. I hope he actually listens to that and takes that to heart and realises that we are doing a tremendous job already.

At this point, Sir, I want to stress that mitigating the impacts of the pandemic on the tourism industry cannot be separate from mitigating the impacts on the Fijian economy as a whole, Sir. Managing the crisis and mitigating the impact, providing stimulus and accelerating recovery and preparing for tomorrow, Sir, those were the recommended recovery pillars of the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO). These pillars are actually well entrenched in our recovery.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we started by engaging extensively with the industry to understand the magnitude of the impact caused by the pandemic and to provide immediate assistance and notwithstanding the numerous Budget consultations with the Ministry of Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport held over 20 consultations with the private sectors since March, Sir. Today, we continue to actively engage with our industry partners almost on a weekly basis such as through the Tourism Recovery Team and the COVID-19 Risk Mitigation Taskforce (CRMT). A number of surveys were also undertaken jointly by Government, private sector and development partners to further comprehend the impacts and ascertain how best we can address this immediate challenges, Sir.

Having heard, documented and experienced impacts, we acted promptly and decisively. As a first step, the Fijian Government announced the COVID-19 Response Budget to offer immediate relief to Fijian families, generate economic activity, bolster businesses, safeguard jobs and fund lifesaving containment effort, Sir. Beyond the immediate measures, the Fijian Government implemented a number of strategies to stabilise the economy and to restart the tourism industry.

According to July 2020 figures by the UNWTO, Sir, 40 percent of all destinations worldwide have now eased the restrictions they had placed on international tourism. All the 87 destinations that have eased restrictions, 20 are Small Islands Developing States (SIDS), many of which depend on tourism as the central pillar of employment, economic growth and development.

The Fijian COVID-19 Safe Economic Recovery Framework that lays out Fiji's phased approach to recovery has been our guide. Until today, we continue to refine and align this particular Framework, to ensure Fijians and Fijian businesses are ready to make a living without compromising health and safety. This, Mr. Speaker, Sir, have been the bedrock of our mitigation efforts.

Beyond setting minimum conditions for safe gradual restoration of business activities, we developed COVID-19 safe guidelines for a number of industries, including the tourism industry, Sir. With the significant economic setback and unprecedented job losses in Fijian history, one thing is for sure, Sir, time is of the essence and with priority to keep our COVID-contained status and protect Fijians, travel had resumed.

Tourism contributes a third of our GDP, opening borders is preeminent, so as with other SIDS, our recovery is contingent on resumption of travel and tourism. As I actually highlighted earlier this week, Sir, the Love our Locals Campaign has seen phenomenal success in stimulating jobs and businesses, and we will make every effort to ensure it remains the foundation of our recovery.

Against the backdrop of heightened uncertainty, Sir, we have initiated travel arrangements to various provisions of the Framework with our established Pacific Pathways initially with Tuvalu, Kiribati and Tonga, who rely on Fiji's national carrier for connectivity. We make special provisions for special requests with significant economic value. The Framework also includes the Bula Bubble to provide a safe pathway for Aussies and Kiwis, once they can actually come and the Vacation in Paradise which is the VIP Lane.

There has been a lot of fault-finding and cynical comments on some of these provisions, Sir. Our pathways are contingent, not only on our containment measures but that of our source markets - Australia and New Zealand. So instead of criticising, we should be acknowledging these proactive efforts, Sir.

We have heard this week regarding the Blue Lane Initiative, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Border entry requirements are increasingly becoming complex, as countries endeavour to balance the urgent need to restart travel against the imperative of protecting the health of its people.

No yacht and, in fact, no person Mr. Speaker, Sir, is permitted into the country without complying with strict and stringent health requirements. As of 31st August, 2020, we have approved 70 yachts, of which four are super yachts to enter Fiji under this initiative with 206 passengers and crew, bringing in about \$2 million into the economy. By the year end, we are looking, at least, 100 yachts with anticipated millions of dollars into the economy.

These measures, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have put into the Framework have been successful. Fiji's contact tracing App - careFiji also, the tracks encountered by proximity and duration is integral as travel recommences.

In addition to the App, Sir, we are working with the Industry in what we call the CareFiji Commitment, to create a destination, wide assurance that we are ready to welcome back travellers safely. The commitment programme is essentially a commitment to health and safety of travellers to Fiji, and their commitment to travel responsibility.

As part of this also, participating businesses will nominate a wellness ambassador, Sir, who will be responsible for delivering the CareFiji Commitment within the organisation. Fiji Airways will champion this initiative through their travel ready programme to ensure safety, Sir.

Let us not forget, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that the 2020-2021 National Budget, our biggest and most efficacious move to addressing impacts on employment, relief, support for up-skilling or re-skilling, elimination of STT, reduction in the Environment and Climate Adaptation Levy (ECAL), et cetera.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I briefed the media early yesterday morning on the progress of COVID-19, the concessional finance support package for Micro Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). This is just one initiative that was part of the Budget, Sir. Of the 3,000 applications that were assessed thus far, 2,339 has been approved at the value of \$18.7 million. This support will go towards existing businesses and the worst affected by the pandemic. It will go towards aspiring entrepreneurs, including tourism workers who may have been laid off.

No country has been spared the decimation of the tourism sector. What a lot of us do not realise is that, this pandemic is extremely sensitive and volatile. What this means is that, we have just have to adapt, and adapt and act almost on a daily basis.

There are economies, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that are larger than ours who are learning from us. Take a look at New Zealand, they are now using their Military for surveillance. Honourable Members on the opposite side should actually know this. They should proudly be saying this together with us that we are setting global best practices in our COVID-19 safe economic recovery.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the measures have proven to be relevant, targeted and effective in mitigating the adverse impacts of COVID-19 on our economy, including the tourism sector, and positioning us in an advantageous position once passenger travel in tourism reopens, Sir. I hope that suffices. I thank you, Sir.

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

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Can the Honourable Minister explain, how are you addressing the quarantine of yachts and its passengers?

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

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I think quarantine with respect to the Blue Lane and the yachts has been spelt out in Parliament day in and day out, Sir. I wish he would listen, Sir. The quarantine measures has been answered on many occasions but in short, Honourable Member, if someone is coming on a yacht from New Zealand, he/she has to do the necessary quarantine. It is a 14 day quarantine requirement and that 14 day quarantine requirement can actually be undertaken on their voyage.

You are getting two confirmations here from the Ministry of Health. Once they arrive, they are actually tested here, properly, as you would with any other case, and then the 14 day quarantine again here. So there is a strict and stringent requirement with respect to anyone that enters this country and is no different if you fly in or if you are on a yacht. The only difference is, on a yacht, that 14 day requirement can actually be undertaken whilst you are at sea. Please, remember also that any vessel that enters Fijian waters is actually monitored. I hope that suffices.

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

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- I just want to ask the Honourable Minister, a yacht arrived three weeks ago in my village in Nabouwalu. This yacht invited the children and they went there to have snacks and drinks. On Monday, they went to school and by Wednesday, they were sent back home because they were sick and no one knew. Now, we know that they all went to the yacht and came back. My question is, can you explain what I have alluded to?

HON. SPEAKER.- What is your supplementary question?

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- What is your question? Your question is all over the place.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is not a question. He said, “this yacht”, which yacht? We have no details of what he is actually talking about.

HON. SPEAKER.- We move on to the fourth Oral Question for today, and I call on the Honourable Nagata to ask his question.

2020 International Year of Plant Health  
(Question No. 141/2020)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment inform Parliament on how significant this year 2020 is, as declared by the United Nations as the International Year of Plant Health, and what are the Ministry’s plans for celebrating the event?

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

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the United Nations General Assembly declared 2020 as International Year of Plant Health. This year is a once in a lifetime opportunity to raise global awareness on how to protect plant health. It is not an annual event by the UN, so this year has been declared as a year of plant health. Basically, it gives us an opportunity to raise global awareness on how to protect plant health and how to contribute to various benefits that are direct and indirectly derive from plant commodities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do not have to go in detail about describing and explaining how important plant is to our life, how we derive our livelihood, how we depend on plant and the direct and indirect products of a plant.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, having said that, we take it as given the importance of plant, therefore, plant health is also very crucial. We want to derive the benefits out of a plant in that level.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, plant health is under threat from climate change, human activities, altered ecosystems, gradual reduction in biodiversity and because of these changes, increased incidents and occurrences of pests and diseases.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimates that up to 40 percent of food crops are lost due to pests and diseases annually. At the same time, international travel and trade has tripled in volume in the last decade and can quickly spread pests and diseases around the world, causing great damage to native plants and environment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Agriculture has noted the United Nations Declaration of the International Year of Plant Health and we are now planning to undertake activities to spread to the people the importance of looking after plants, particularly the plant health dimension and what all of us - individuals, households, business sector, service sector, all those who are interacting with plants, nature, the crop and the environment in different ways, on how we could alter our behaviour or conduct slightly so that we can really enhance and look after plant and plant health.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we will be having a number of activities. We have actually started on this, leading up to October where we will do a major activity in Sigatoka. During the celebration, we will organise plant health clinics throughout Fiji whereby farmers will bring their crops and weed samples to plant doctors at designated venues for check-up and for specialist advice.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have got local plant doctors who have been trained by qualified entomologists. Entomologists are the people who are experts in the insect effect on plant, we have got plant pathologists looking at plant diseases and we also have weed scientists. So these plant doctors have been trained by pathologists, entomologists and weed scientists on how to pick up a particular symptom and from that symptom, how to recognise the causal factors behind it.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, two years ago or probably last year, the Honourable Assistant Minister for Environment and Rural Development launched an App called Plant Doctor where if you find some kind of symptom on your plant, you take a photo and upload it on the WhatsApp app and within maybe a minute, someone will respond and say what the issue is and provide you with a solution. But the real trick is, you have to ensure that you get a good photo taken from various angles of that decolouration or deformity of the plant leaf or part of the plant and upload it to the WhatsApp.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, when we are going to do this activity in a tour, we are going to link up with other Ministries and other organisations - the South Pacific Community (SPC), Biosecurity Authority of Fiji (BAF), et cetera, so that we can do it on a big scale and also involve them, who are very important stakeholders with us on this journey to ensure that we protect and enhance our stock of

biological resources, particularly plants. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we take this International Day of Plant Health seriously. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. We will move on to the fifth Oral Question for today and I call on the Honourable Ratu Navurelevu to ask his question. You have the floor, Sir.

Ban of Beche-de-mer and the Use of UBA  
(Question No. 142/2020)

HON. RATU T. NAVURELEVU asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Fisheries update Parliament on the enforcement of the ban on the harvest of beche-de-mer and the ban on the use of Underwater Breathing Apparatus (UBA)?

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I would like to thank the Honourable Member for the question.

Firstly, Mr. Speaker, the ban on beche-de-mer was initiated after extensive research which identified that the status of beche-de-mer stock was at unsustainable level, where individual species were either threatened, over-exploited or loss of resources in most Customary Fishing Rights Areas (CFRA).

As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, two high commercial species were identified to be extinct in around 75 percent of Fiji's CRFAs. Additionally, there was non-existence of medium and high level species in areas accessible during low and high tide. This resulted in the illegal use of the Underwater Breathing Apparatus (UBA) by scuba divers to access deep areas of over 30 metres.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, noting the substantial decline in the stocks and using the enabling fisheries legislation, the Ministry in its management role introduced the five-year ban. The ban is to allow stocks to recover, while scientific research is carried out after three years to monitor the recovery of the depleted stock.

Mr. Speaker, the assessment of stocks had begun and experience indicate that this exercise will take longer due to the vastness of the area to be covered.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, out of the areas that have been surveyed, findings indicate that while the ban is effective, there is slow recovery. For example, while Fiji has 28 species of beche-de-mer, surveys conducted in Moala, Cicia and Noco, only identified 13 species to be available. While this is commendable, the density is still low, with only few species having densities higher than the sustainable reference level.

The bottom line, Mr. Speaker, is prior to the ban, unsustainable harvest level called for immediate action to ensure that beche-de-mer stocks were nursed back to sustainable or healthy levels.

After the announcement of the beche-de-mer ban in 2017, extensive work was undertaken to ensure effective enforcement. The major initiative and the decision was the establishment of the Inshore Coastal Fisheries which started with the enforcement and monitoring of all coastal activities, as I have said, in 2017.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Fisheries' enforcement programme focusses on the different levels of activities within the beche-de-mer trade. Surface patrols are being conducted within CFRAs, whilst spot inspections are being done with known middlemen and exporters of beche-de-mer.

Since 2017, a total of 1,256 inspections were conducted. These inspections included those conducted with private entities including trading companies such as fish exporters and restaurants. Noting this substantial fixed penalty charge ranging from \$10,000 to \$100,000 permissible by law, our team developed procedures to ensure that offenders are treated equally by first, issuing warning to first offenders.

Mr. Speaker, since 2017, we have successfully prosecuted offenders through the work conducted by the Ministry's Investigation and Prosecution Unit. Currently, we have cases in court of offenders found in possession of beche-de-mer and UBA. We have identified that as long as there is trade, the illegal harvest of beche-de-mer and the use of UBA will continue. In addressing, this the Ministry of Fisheries has frequently conducted inspections on facilities that are known and suspected of trading beche-de-mer, and conducted seizures of fish caught with UBA.

Mr. Speaker, through the Ministry's Investigation and Prosecution Unit, we were able to take offenders to task and have identified that the harvest of beche-de-mer is directly linked to the use of UBA. Additionally, through community support, we have been able to receive information of illegal activities that we can act upon.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Fisheries is determined to play its part in continuing its work to ensure that the law is upheld and more importantly, that the depleted marine resources are nursed back to sustainable levels. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. Honourable Navurelevu?

HON. RATU T. NAVURELEVU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I thank the Honourable Minister for his response. A supplementary question; can the Honourable Minister update this House on the progress of the Government initiative you are offering?

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Sir, I thank the Honourable Member for the supplementary question. For such question, I have to go back and look at the programmes that we have. But the delay, Sir, is basically in our effort to ensure that the resources are sustainably harvested and the protection of customary fishing rights owners are also protected.

HON. SPEAKER.- We move on to the sixth Oral Question for today. The Honourable Nand is not here, so Honourable Bhatnagar will ask the question. You have the floor.

Inter-Island Maritime Shipping – COVID-19 Prevention  
(Question No. 143/2020)

HON. V.K. BHATNAGAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, first of all, I wish the Honourable Nand a speedy recovery.

My question is:

Can the Honourable Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport inform Parliament on what actions have been taken to improve inter-island maritime shipping to prevent the spread of COVID-19?



HON. F.S. KOYA (Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I thank the Honourable Member for the question.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the pandemic has a significant impact on the shipping industry and also on seafarers. The International Maritime Organization (IMO), being the organisation responsible for shipping and the world is working diligently with us at all levels to find solutions.

As with other stakeholders, Sir, we have adopted international best practices, including recommendations from the IMO regarding ship crew changes and travels during the pandemic, and other protocols also include WHO guidance to promote public health measures on cargo, ships and fishing vessels.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to outline some of the health and safety protocols in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19 to outer maritime islands. We are working in consultation with key stakeholders, such as Fiji Ports Corporation Limited (FPCL) and the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji (MSAF) and the Water Police and Fiji Navy, to ensure adherence to the COVID-19 safety and secure operations and access control.

In line with this, Sir, the wharf's jetties, such as Mua-i-Walu Jetty will only allow passengers with tickets to enter the port area. All non-travelling persons will not be permitted access to the enclosed port area. Members of the public embarking or disembarking also, Sir, at other main domestic ports or jetties, are also requested to work with the enforcement officials and travel in an orderly manner.

We are in discussions also with the vessel operators continuously, Sir, and the stakeholders in the need to change the way that they actually do business in line with guidelines of physical distancing and sanitisation.

For the roll-on roll-off, what we all know as Ro-Ro, and conventional vessels, all inquiries are actually directed to the Ministry, Sir, and all trucks and shipping containers are required to adhere to the following:

- Drivers are to properly equip themselves with personal protective equipment.
- Proper record keeping for all vessel operators with details of drivers and destinations, et cetera.
- Shipping operators are also to discourage crew members from unnecessarily disembarking on airports and jetties and socialising at these points for inter-island shipping.
- Shipping operators and crew were to offload cargo and freight at a destination located on the jetty or port.
- Members of the public collecting freight are also to collect from this point practicing physical distancing.

Any fishing-related activity, whether subsistence or commercial, members of the public are also advised to liaise directly with the Ministry of Fisheries and our Ministry.

It is the responsibility also of the shipping companies to implement all the COVID safe measures that have been recommended by the Fijian Government when embarking, whilst on board and during disembarking.

We will continue to work in collaboration with FPCL, the Fiji Police Force, MSAF, the Ministry of Health and Medical Services and other stakeholders, to monitor and control the measures

of physical and social distancing. Amongst other things also, we are considering online ticketing and establishment of personal cargo collection and distribution centres or points.

I thank you, Sir. I hope that suffices.

HON. SPEAKER.- We move on. The seventh Oral Question for today, and I call on the Honourable Dr. Ratu Lalabalavu to ask his question. You have the floor, Sir.

Reduction of Social Welfare Bus Subsistence  
(Question No. 144/2020)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, inform Parliament on the rationale in reducing the Social Welfare Bus Subsistence to \$10 a month?

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA (Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I get asked this question quite a lot from, particularly the elderly citizens who have been affected by the drop in the bus fare assistance, and I am going to give the Honourable Member the same answer that I give them. And I only hope that I will get the same level of understanding from the other side as I do from the elderly citizens who actually get this assistance.

We are living in abnormal times. COVID-19 has affected us, as a people and as a nation, in a way that we never ever imagined, prior to the outbreak. Thousands of people have lost their jobs and are struggling to just put food on the table.

Allocating funds during a national budget is not an easy exercise and in the context of COVID-19, that exercise becomes even more of the challenge. So, Government during an exercise in allocating money during a national budget in a time like this, has to consider every sector of the economy to look after the livelihoods of our people, to look after how each sector can contribute to getting us back on to our feet, and to also ensure that there is a continued access to critical public services.

The focus of this question is on transport, on mobility. Government assists around 82,600 elderly citizens under the bus fare assistance, \$10 a month. Out of these 82,000 people, the average usage per month is about 52,000. Around 30,000 elderly citizens who have a card, do not use it.

Apart from the bus fare assistance, we need to remember that Government also assists the elderly through the social pension scheme. For this particular fiscal year, we are looking at \$55.3 million for social pension alone, for those who have never had any access to superannuation.

This, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is the highest allocation of all the social protection programmes under the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation and for this fiscal year, it is the highest allocation ever. To put it into context, for the 2019-2020 fiscal year, the allocation for social pension was \$46 million, an increase of \$9 million from that fiscal year to this fiscal year, to ensure that those that are eligible for the social pension scheme of \$100 a month do get it, even during COVID-19.

That allowance puts food on the table for those who do receive it. It assists our elderly citizens to contribute to the livelihoods of their loved ones, even during COVID-19, so it is a balancing exercise. At such a time like this, Government considers that livelihoods of our pensioners is very critical and will not, therefore, touch their pension. Like I said, it is a balancing exercise. Most of

those who benefit from the bus fare assistance, which is the subject of this question, are also on the social pension scheme.

I hope that I will get the same level of understanding for that answer from the other side, as I do from those who benefit from this particular scheme. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. Honourable Tabuya?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, Honourable Minister for that explanation. Just a supplementary question; can the Honourable Minister just shed light in the House as to why there was so much confusion as we saw on social media reports and videos about the change of receiving of these funds from Westpac and BSP?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, that is a totally different question, not associated with this.

We will move on to the eight Oral Question for today, I now call on the Honourable Adimaitoga to ask her question. You can have the floor.

Unit Trust of Fiji Expansion Plan  
(Question No. 145/2020)

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

Can the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications explain how the Unit Trust of Fiji is empowering its investors, *vis-à-vis*, its regional and future business expansion plans?

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

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the Honourable Member for her question. The Unit Trust of Fiji (UTOF) is a managed Fund and encourages all Fijians to invest and save in a diversified investment portfolio which is proven to be very safe, accessible and ensures a reliable and competitive return to its investors.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as of 30th June, 2020, UTOF has 22,405 unit holders, as compared to 20,753 in the same period in 2019.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the 7.9 percent increase in unit holders is due to UTOF's popularity in the market, ability to get people with smaller amounts made to invest in buying units. It is also evident, Sir, that more people are choosing to actually invest now.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, UTOF's current \$245 million portfolio provides equitable returns to the unit holders through a six monthly tax free dividend and potential capital appreciation under its Income and Growth Fund. This is made possible through the Fijian Government's reform of the Income Tax legislation, which enabled ordinary workers, mums and dads, and other small scale investors to save funds from their disposable income. Of course, it is now tax free.

Just by way of portfolio of UTOF, Mr. Speaker, Sir, its market shares stands at 64 percent as of 30th June, 2020 with key investments in ATH. It consisted of 20 percent of UTOF's portfolio and 5 percent shareholding in ATH. They own 25 percent in HFC which is about 19 percent of UTOF's

portfolio. They have 8 percent investment in Vision Group. They have 4 percent of UTOF's portfolio with Fiji Gas and other small stakes in performing entities, such as the RB Group which is majority owned by Fijian Holdings and, of course, the South Sea Towage.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is encouraging to note that UTOF, over the past five years, has paid an average of 3.75 percent as dividend to unit holders under the Income Fund and an average of 6.7 percent under the Income and Growth Fund. UTOF has paid approximately \$30.8 million as tax free dividend to unit holders over the past five years.

On the domestic market which is important to note, Mr. Speaker, Sir, UTOF has decentralised its customer services to the Western Division with the establishment of a fully-fledged office in Namaka in Nadi. UTOF's current arrangements with Post Fiji Limited and Fiji Development Bank has basically meant that the company can tap onto the postal services network and FDB Branches to boast UTOF's presence in some of the remotest areas in the country, as we are seeing a lot of people in the rural areas and in the maritime areas who are also buying units from UTOF.

The UTOF unit holders are still able to make deposits into their investment accounts through Post Fiji and FDB Offices, despite the absence of UTOF's physical offices in those areas.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, UTOF is currently exploring its options, talking to FDB and Post Fiji to set up kiosks in key strategic locations, including the Northern region. This will be a joined agency approach with the intention of promoting financial literacy and providing investment programmes to fellow Fijians, particularly in the agricultural sector.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, under the National Investment Scheme, that is, the employee investment scheme, UTOF has partnered with 43 employers in directly promoting and empowering all working Fijians to save and invest in the future. They currently, for example, have employer schemes with FRCS, Fiji Commerce and Employers Federation, the Judiciary Department and some of the other organisations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is encouraging to note that in the first six months of this year, UTOF has distributed \$3.16 million to 22,405 unit holders.

Currently, they have put a proposal to iTLTB. As you know, with the equal distribution of land lease monies, many accounts are actually held by children who are below the age of 18 years. Some of them actually will become millionaires by the time they reach 18 years, depending on which landowning unit they belong to. So what they have proposed to iTLTB is that, whilst iTLTB holds those monies in trust, they will actually invest those funds in UTOF so that they not only get an interest rate from the banks but actually get that growth in their monies, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Regionally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the question also talks about regional initiatives. Recently, Cabinet has also approved a direct Bilateral Agreement between the UTOF and organisations in Vanuatu and Samoa. Over the past few years, UTOF has managed to get investments from the Vanuatu National Provident Fund, which has actually bought units in UTOF. The Vanuatu Teachers Credit Union has also bought units in UTOF.

The Samoa Provident Fund has bought units in UTOF. The Samoa Unit Trust has actually bought units in Fiji, and also the Samoa Parliamentary Fund has a pension scheme for their Parliamentarians and they have chosen to invest in UTOF also, which is a huge endorsement of the confidence they have in UTOF, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, traditionally, they used to invest in the Australian and Asian markets but now, we are seeing them actually invest within Fiji itself through UTOF. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General. We now move on to the next stage of questions.

On the first Written Question, I call on the Honourable Adi Qionibaravi to ask her question.

#### Written Questions

##### Status of the Rural Electrification Programme (Question No. 146/2020)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure, Meteorological Services, Lands and Mineral Resources update Parliament on the status of the implementation of the Rural Electrification Programme in the following areas:

- (a) Namau (the landowners of where the Namau Dam is located);
- (b) Qoma Island; and
- (c) Batileka Subdivision?

HON. J. USAMATE (Minister for Infrastructure, Meteorological Services, Lands and Mineral Resources).- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will table my response at a later sitting date as permitted under Standing Order 45(3).

##### Land Buy Back Scheme (Question No. 147/2020)

HON. M. BULANAUCA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure, Meteorological Services, Lands and Mineral Resources update Parliament on the Land Buy Back Scheme, in particular the:

- (a) number of applications received;
- (b) number of applications approved per annum;
- (c) quantum of payment for each buy back per annum; and
- (d) current status of each successful applicant?

HON. J. USAMATE (Minister for Infrastructure, Meteorological Services, Lands and Mineral Resources).- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will table my response at a later sitting date as permitted under Standing Order 45(3).

##### International Youth Training and Development Programmes (Question No. 148/2020)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations and Youth and Sports provide the list of all International Youth Training and Development Programmes in which Fiji took part in from 2018 to date?

HON. P.K. BALA (Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations and Youth and Sports).- Thank you. Mr. Speaker, Sir. I will table my response at a later sitting date as permitted under Standing Order 45(3).

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

Honourable Members, the next Item is End of Week Statements. Each Member may speak for up to 10 minutes with a 10-minute response by the Minister or Ministers responsible for the subject matter of the Member's speech. No seconder is required and there will be no other debate.

I now call on the Honourable Tikoduadua to deliver his End of the Week Statement. You have the floor, Sir.

## **END OF WEEK STATEMENTS**

### Review of the Free Medicine Programme

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present my End of the Week Statement on the review of the Free Medicine Programme. This Statement will highlight the shortfalls as well as the need for a review.

Mr. Speaker, the Free Medicine Programme was introduced in the 2015 National Budget that was announced on 21st November, 2014, to take effect from 1st January, 2015. Turning promises into deeds was the Budget theme. One of the promises of the FijiFirst was to provide for free all price-controlled medicine that would be prescribed by doctors, including for non-communicable diseases, to those earning less than \$20,000 per annum. Mr. Speaker, the review should consider increasing the threshold to \$30,000.

Later, when the programme was rolled out, a Ministry of Health circular stated that only adults over 18 years earning less than \$20,000 per annum, and individuals under 18 years, if their combined parental income is less than \$20,000 per annum, qualify. Mr. Speaker, I am recommending to increase qualification to those from families earning less than \$30,000 per annum.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, firstly, when the programme was implemented, only 72 price-controlled medicines were listed as free medicine, which later increased to 142 in 2016. What concerns me is the contradiction, in as far as the eligibility provisions are concerned.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this policy is discriminatory against anyone in their family below the age of 18 years, whose parents' combined income is more than \$20,000. For example, if both parents in a home each earn \$19,000 per annum, both would qualify for free medicine. However, their children under the age of 18 years will not qualify. At this stage of their lives, it is most likely that the children of the family would still be getting an education and not earning an income.

Mr. Speaker, this is absolutely not fair, in my view, to the children as it is discriminatory. The Honourable Minister can clarify this matter later. But, Mr. Speaker, similar to the FijiFirst's 2014 General Election promise to continue maintaining zero VAT on seven basic food items and prescription medication, the Free Medicine Programme has been a promise turned into a misdeed.

Three years ago, approximately 25,000 people were benefitting from free medicine. This is similar to the Fiji Electricity Authority Subsidy of free electricity as it was called, or the so-called free water when it is actually subsidised water bills. The beneficiaries may have increased over this time, however, it is not fortunate to the segment of our population living in poverty by Government's own statistics.

Mr. Speaker, while more than 28 percent of our population lived in poverty and thousands of others earned less than \$20,000 annually, one wonders why the numbers were not significantly higher if the Programme was as highly beneficial as it was made out to be by the Government when it was rolled out five years ago.

Now, a significantly higher percentage of our population live in abject poverty, ardent poverty or almost on the threshold of sliding into poverty, and we all know why we must make every endeavour to help them. From statistics three years ago, the low numbers then can be attributed to bureaucracy.

Mr. Speaker, one get to spend at an average of \$30 in running around to get his or her documentation in order to qualify for the Free Medicine Programme or the subsidies on electricity and water, the annual total value of which were less than the expense incurred in completing the requirements. Therefore, Mr Speaker, the bureaucracy and the inability to get all prescribed medicine for free was and still is a huge hindrance.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday, Parliament passed amendments to the Pharmacy Profession (Amendment) Act. I believe at the time when our people are cash-strapped and whilst unemployed, we should have concentrated on easing their burden and pain, which is a social responsibility of any Government, most importantly during these days of uncertainty. We should have been giving a thumbs up to legislation to make easy the access to quality medication to our population and ensure free medicine is available at all times in every corner of Fiji.

We should have been collectively ensuring that all our public and private health facilities and dispenses of medicine, have full and unrestricted supply of quality medicine. But all that Government wanted the *Talanoa* to do was to focus on regulatory requirements.

Mr. Speaker, I recall that the retail pharmacies were forced to participate in the Free Medicine Programme because it is a hindrance. They would be liable to be slapped with a \$100,000 fine but this was and is, again, unjust. But how many retail pharmacies are stocking up free medicine, especially now when medication is in short supply due to several reasons?

Mr. Speaker, retail pharmacies have to provide space to store free medicine or whatever stock is supplied. Their staff have to then manually record recipients' details and also that of the prescription, and this is done manually. They do not have direct access to the Ministry of Health and Medical Services' service to electronically ascertain the eligibility of the recipients, but manually record details of his or her card. Electronic link to the Ministry of Health and Medical Services' Database was promised by the Government years ago when the programme was rolled out but I believe that is still not done at the moment. Worse still, pharmaceutical staff have to tolerate abuse when those medication prescribed by the doctors were either not available or are not listed as free medicine.

We have established that in many retail pharmacies. The full list of 142 medicine is not a reality because they were not supplied in the first place, despite being given medicine. Furthermore, our investigation established that there is only one designated staff at the Fiji Pharmaceutical Services, who looks after the stocks where 50 odd retail pharmacists participating in this programme.

That is why stocks get even depleted or expired when not used, and now it is worse as basic medicine are not readily available.

Mr. Speaker, simply, the Free Medicine Programme is in a shambolic state and needs to be reviewed urgently to bring about efficiency and to ensure it is fully maximised by all those eligible recipients.

We, therefore, urge Government, Mr. Speaker, to:

- (1) Change the eligibility criteria so that individuals under 18 years of age, who are mostly students, are able to access this programme, irrespective of their parents joint income reaching the maximum threshold, or if they earned \$20,000, and themselves indirectly qualify for the programme.
- (2) Equip pharmacies with computers, or if not, link one of their computers to the Ministry Database of eligible recipients.
- (3) Remove the list of 142 free medicine and implement a truly genuine Free Medicine Programme where those eligible can access any medicine prescribed by a doctor, thus removing the risk of medicine being either overstocked, undersupplied or expired.
- (4) Remove the need to supply pharmacies with a list of generic medicine, return and dispense medication from their own stock, generate bills monthly to Ministry of Health for payment, eradicating both patient and pharmacy frustration and giving true meaning to free medicine.

Mr. Speaker, we sincerely hope that the Government takes on board our suggestions for the delivery of a genuine Free Medicine Programme. Free medicine should not be restrictive, and there is no better time than now to review it, given that many thousands of our people are either unemployed, on reduced working hours, or simply living in poverty. I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Tikoduadua for his End of the Week's Statement. I call on the Honourable Minister responsible, for the response. Honourable Minister for Health, you have the floor.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- I thank you, Mr. Speaker, and also for the opportunity to respond to this End of Week Statement.

I want to begin by saying that no other Government began the Free Medicine Scheme. It is the Government of the day, the Bainimarama-led Government, the FijiFirst Government that began the Free Medicine Scheme. Now, this Free Medicine Scheme is not something that you will see in any other Pacific Island Countries, that happens outside of the public health system.

I also want to remind the Honourable Member that any person seen in any public health facility, whether you earn below \$20,000 or you earn \$200,000, you receive free medicine. The Honourable Member of Parliament will know, when he was sitting in this chair, when he would go to the hospital, he would receive free medicine.

The public health system receives, accepts, dispenses for everyone. This Free Medicine Scheme was designed for those individuals who earn below \$20,000 which includes children, because children do not work so they also receive free medicine. It is individuals, Mr. Speaker, below \$20,000, not households.



Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Free Medicine Programme is an ongoing programme by this Government, implemented by the Ministry of Health and Medical Services and has continued since 2015. Under that programme, any individual earning below \$20,000 has access to the 142 medicine.

The Programme commenced with the provision of 72 items in 2015 which was then increased to 142 items. I have the list here with me and you are more than welcome to have access to this list. This covers a wide range of medicine, including those for common bacterial and viral infections, eye problems, paediatric care and emergency care. In addition to this was consumable products which include plaster, cotton wool, dressing gauze and elastic bandages.

The medicine, Mr. Speaker, Sir, are targeted to cater for the effective management initially of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) by increasing accessibility to the available medicine. This is definitely a positive step in addressing healthcare for the burden of NCDs in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a lot of those who continue to use the Free Medicine Scheme are predominantly the elderly in that age group, in that category below \$20,000, specifically for NCDs, whilst it is open for everyone who are earning less than \$20,000.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the programme began with only 35 retail pharmacies which now expanded to 36 more pharmacies, bringing it to a total of 71 for the last five years. The programme has become mandatory for all retail pharmacies to participate, to enable better coverage and to reach majority of the population.

Mr. Speaker, since its inception, the Ministry has managed to register 195,477 people. It does not mean that all the 195,000 will leave the hospital premises and go down to the nearest chemist because, for example, in Nayavu they have a pharmacy, in-house. For example, in Korovou, they do not have a pharmacy in town, so they will receive all their medicine from the hospital itself. It does not mean that you register 195,000 that all the 195,000 will go down to the nearest chemist in town because we have a duty of service within the hospital and healthcare system to have our own pharmacies. This is an adjunct to support the role that we play.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to further improve the programme, the registrations continue and last week the Honourable Member should know, we were in Nabouva and Nasautoka, doing registrations and this is apart from the continuous registrations done around the country. Through this outreach, last week alone nearly 100 individuals who were never registered before, were registered for the programme.

The Free Medicine Programme complements the pharmaceutical services currently delivered from the Government health facilities, in further improving the accessibility and affordability of medicine to every Fijian.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the current framework underlines that the Fiji Pharmaceutical and Biomedical Services are to procure and deliver the approved medicine to retail pharmacies. Once received, pharmacies are to dispense those medicine to eligible patients and keep manual records of those released goods.

At the beginning of this year, we have reviewed that because it is going on to five years now, and look at a framework to suits the current situation from the impact of COVID-19 through the global supply chain of pharmaceutical services, and this is what we have done. Through an Expression of Interest called this year, we have approached Island Pharmacy, through this Expression of Interest, to pilot the revised framework. The revised framework will allow retail pharmacies to

dispense their own stock of FCCC price-controlled medicine that are part of the Free Medicine Programme list and generic stock.

Mr. Speaker, “generic”, meaning not a fancy trade component of the drug, because we have to make sure that the medicine that is being given do not have side effects. We do not want the dispenser which is the pharmacies, to be giving their own preferred trade medicine that may have some chemicals that may have undue effects onto the patient. We want them to be able to keep the purity of the medicine through the generic name. Furthermore, the Free Medicine Scheme programme will supply other products which are not under price control. Major revision and fine-tuning the piloted framework is expected prior to the nationwide rollout.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, over the last five years from 2015 to the end of the last financial year, this Government has put in \$34,765,000 into the Free Medicine Scheme in terms of those that were actually being bought. Last year alone, it was \$5,837,697.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Health and Medical Services are in ongoing consultations with regards to having all retail pharmacies providing Free Medicine Programme using the revised framework, allowing more accessibility of medicine to all Fijians who are entitled under the programme. In addition, the Ministry continues its efforts to improve registration, to ensure all eligible Fijians have access to the programme that will support Government’s commitment in improving healthcare services to all Fijians.

I want to finish, Mr. Speaker, Sir, by saying that this is a new programme which has never been done before in Fiji, nor in any other country around the Pacific. We know that there are things that will need to be fine-tuned. There are challenges in certain areas. We will continue to do that, Honourable Member, because we have a duty of care that we will make this a success. I thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. We will move on, and I call on the Honourable Kuridrani to deliver his End of Week Statement.

#### Revitalisation of Non-Sugar Agriculture

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to deliver my End of Week Statement in regards to the revitalisation of non-sugar agriculture, especially in light of the impact of COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it has been proven that the increase in agriculture output and productivity will contribute substantially to the overall economic development of a country. In the case of Fiji, it will be appropriate to place greater emphasis on the revitalisation of the non-sugar agriculture commodities, especially for the few selected crops that hold high value with low volume quantity.

The problem with this Government, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that the Ministry of Agriculture has a lot of plans, a lot of strategies, but lack the practicality and the implementation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have selected a few important crops that will revitalise the economy in this state of economic crisis. These crops are considered traditional and the people are well familiar with its husbandry practices, it does not require skills and can be grown anywhere in Fiji. All we need is to inject more resources by way of finding relevant infrastructure, proper monitoring and evaluation mechanism to increase production.

Before I continue, I need to take this opportunity to congratulate the *yaqona* farmers in Sawau Village, Bua, who have taken the initiative to form an internal committee with the purpose of paving the way forward for the multi-million dollar industry. Thank you, Mr. Tomasi Tunabuna, the Chairman of the committee and your committee members.

The training was funded and organised by the Ministry of Agriculture and I thank them for that initiative - training farmers to understand the importance of producing quality kava. Thank you to the Principal Agriculture Officer Eastern, Mr. Epeli Dumuilagi, for this initiative.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will speak on the *yaqona*, the crop that I believe does not receive enough support, despite its impact or contribution to the GDP. In 2015, *yaqona* produced 6.4 metric tonnes, in 2019 it has increased by 11.7 metric tonnes. The current sale value of *yaqona* is \$107.50 for *waka* and *lewena* fetching \$70.00 per kilogramme. *Yaqona* export in 2015 reached \$8.9 million and in 2019, it increased to \$32.5 million. Based on that information, I believe that we need to inject more funding and resources in the expansion of the *yaqona* farming industry.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is unfortunate that the allocation towards *yaqona* in this year's Budget has been reduced drastically. In 2017, it was \$500,000; in 2018, it was \$500,000; in 2019, it has been reduced to \$300,000 and in this year's Budget, it reduced to \$140,000. *Yaqona* contribution to GDP in 2017 was \$161.5 million and in 2018, it was \$185.8 million. Sir, I do not see the logic in reducing its budget when it is doing enough for the economy, however, only the Honourable Minister will know the reason.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, all that we need is to help rural *yaqona* farmers construct more farm roads, construct their drying sheds, establish collection centres, provide machines such as chainsaws and diggers and regulate the price to protect the farmers.

Mr. Speaker, with your indulgence, I will highlight the concern on how a famous *yaqona* farmer in Naitasiri but originally from Kadavu, Mr. Ulaiyasi Nanovo, who sent me a telephone message on Wednesday, 29 July, 2020, complaining about the Agriculture Marketing Authority. With your permission, may I quote his message, and I quote:

*“Tau, au sasaga qiri tiko yani, dua na kauwai ena vuku ni vei qaravi ni Agriculture Marketing Authority. They are ripping the very people that they are mandated to serve and moreso, hundred percent are iTaukei farmers from the area involved. Tau, furthermore, Agriculture Marketing Authority should set a benchmark price, at least, \$60 per kg for waka or mix at \$35/kg to be the guideline for the other middlemen. They are currently buying \$30 per kg for waka in which they are seen as ripping off the poor iTaukei farmers. Ulaiyasi Nanovo.”*

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I hope that the Honourable Minister will do something about this to keep the industry sustainable and help the poor farmers to be rewarded for their hard work.

Mr. Speaker, this is also the same crop which I believe to be a substitute for marijuana. As I stated during my speech on Tuesday in support of Honourable Tuisawau's motion, the important issue here is how to convince the potential drug farmer and youths to avoid the planting of marijuana and go for *yaqona* or other high-value crops.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in order to convince the community, I suggest that the Ministry of Agriculture use the participatory planning tool in order to drive this message to the community infested with marijuana, especially the province of Kadavu and my province of Navosa. Participatory planning is a method by which citizens of targetted groups participate in the planning

that affects them. This principle is based on the concept that those who will benefit from the plan should sit together with the planners. Unfortunately, the actual role of the citizens in community projects in Fiji is just to accept the plan that has already been drafted by someone else, in drawing up a plan who has a very little knowledge and understanding of the people, their needs and their problems.

The second crop, I believe, that will revitalise our economy, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is *dalo*. In 2015, *dalo* produced 60.9 metric tonnes. However, in 2019, it has been reduced to 51.5 metric tonnes. Does that confirm that there is enough resources given to *dalo* over the period like *yaqona*, despite its high economic contribution to GDP?

Mr. Speaker, I cannot understand why the budget for Dalo Development Programme has been reduced. In 2017, it was \$800,000 but in this year's Budget, it has reduced by \$250,000. Even though, *dalo* export revenue continues to increase from \$22 million in 2015 to \$25 million in 2019.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are a lot of *mataqali* land out there in the rural areas lying idle. We need more funding for *dalo* development to transit from subsistence to semi-commercial and commercial. That is what the Ministry of Agriculture has been preaching about but the reality on the ground is different. I encourage the Honourable Minister and the Ministry for Agriculture to assist the farmers by constructing more roads, organise cluster farmers and organisations, establish collection centres, regulate price, provide machines, diggers, tractors, chainsaws, et cetera, and provide funds for development.

I gather that the digger has been sitting idle at Lakena Agriculture Station for several months with no operator. This kind of traditional farming practices, *dalo* and *yaqona* are intercrops, so you are killing two birds with one stone, give income and food security.

My final crop, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is ginger. Ginger grows in many parts of Fiji and can be harvested as green and matured ginger. Farmers need to be assisted in the development of farm roads, machinery and cleaning equipment. Ginger's contribution to GDP in 2017 was \$4.3 million and \$5.6 million in 2018. This programme will improve foreign earnings, family income and food security. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Member. I call on the Honourable Minister responsible for the response.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to provide my response to the statement by Honourable Kuridrani on the revitalisation of non-sugar agriculture. Often, we hear piecemeal contribution from the other side. Honourable Radrodro talked about no strategic plan, Honourable Nawaikula talked about not strategic plan as well. Mr. Speaker, here is our Strategic Plan for the Ministry for Agriculture 2019-2023.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Wawa! The thing is, Mr. Speaker, Sir, they refused to read reports, plans that we have provided and then come in this House and just simply waste our time.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, he would have done justice, if he would have asked his *tau* to text me rather than him.

(Laughter)

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me update the House on what the Honourable Prime Minister and the Honourable Minister for Economy had said in his Budget speech that we take agriculture very seriously. We are to give agriculture every priority that it needs.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we fully understand that growing agriculture not only means growing the economy but it also means that all those who will benefit who are associated with agriculture whether its farmers, landowners and others who are supplying the factors of production, such as fertiliser or any input that is provided, if the agriculture sector grows and it creates surplus, that all those who are engaged in the agriculture sector will benefit. The landowners will benefit in terms of more rental income, farmers will benefit in terms of more price they will get from their crop, the other resource suppliers and labourers will benefit in terms of getting more wage rates, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is in our interest to ensure that we get agriculture to grow and that is why every now and then, we continue to say that we need to get the land under production, unlike what they come and speak here about and they go behind our back and then tell landowners not to renew their land lease and not to give their land to the Land Bank.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on one hand ...

(Honourable Opposition Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me talk about some of the exclusive revenue side policies which the Government implemented. For commercial agriculture, Government approved the establishment on 1st January, 2009 to 31st December, 2028, that they shall be exempt from tax as follows:

- capital investment from quarter million to one million for five consecutive years;
- capital investment from \$1 million to \$2 million for seven consecutive fiscal years; and
- capital investment from \$2 million or above for 13 consecutive fiscal years.

There will be no tax on any investment on agro-processing facilities.

Similarly, on biofuel production, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the specific tax incentive, for example:

- capital investment from a quarter million to one million for five consecutive years;
- capital investment from one million to two million for seven consecutive years; and
- capital investment over two million for 13 consecutive years.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is a tax free zone where anyone who engages or any company establishes core processing facilities will get a 13-year tax holiday.

There is customs concession, Mr. Speaker, Sir. All agricultural machinery that are imported will attract zero duty. That demonstrates how much the Government has done in terms of enticing investment in the agriculture sector.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, agriculture investment is risky and that is why you will see that commercial banks are not really giving their priority in terms of having more portfolio for agriculture sector. It is in this regard that Government has got the Fiji Development Bank (FDB) in collaboration with the Reserve Bank of Fiji (RBF), to ensure that the agriculture sector is given priority in terms of lending.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, last week, I spoke to the Acting CEO of the FDB and from next week, all the agriculture meeting that we will hold, we will have the FDB personnel there, talking about their products and explaining to the farmers the various products that they have and the cost of borrowing in particular, so that farmers do understand about it and use FDB as a leverage for financial resource.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, you would have noted and seen on the television and you must have read in the papers, how we are now working closely with the Fiji National Provident Fund (FNPF) in getting them to come with us and make farmers members of the FNPF so that they too can be guaranteed social security when they retire after 55 years. They are treated the same way as those who are engaged in the formal sector.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the RBF has increased its allocation in 2020 of \$100 million towards Import Substitution and Export Finance Facility. Now, the full funding for the Facility is \$300 million.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in 2012, the Government established the Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) Credit Guarantee Scheme to encourage private sector lending to micro, small and medium enterprises which is administered by the RBF. As you will know, Government will now guarantee 60 percent of the principal on the defaulted loans up to a limit of \$60,000 per business. The Scheme is expected to improve SME businesses.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Honourable Kuridrani was talking about budgetary allocations. Honourable Nawaikula also mentioned about the reduction in the Ministry of Agriculture budget this year. Absolutely not! I do not know what Budget Estimate he is looking at. You pick up the revised 2019-2020 Budget Estimates.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Wait, wait! You pick up the revised 2019-2020 Budget Estimates and then you look at your 2020-2021 Budget Estimates. Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are two things; one, there is an increase in the budget and two, increase by \$5 million.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Go and read it! Go and check!

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Do not carry out a conversation between you two, Honourable Members.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are now working with exporters very closely in going out and giving the confidence to the farmers by signing up before they get into the field, saying that this is the price.

Honourable Kuridrani was still talking about the price, Mr. Speaker, Sir, precisely to deal with the problem, we are now going and signing with the farmers saying, "We will buy this crop if you grow and this is the price we will buy from and we will buy all". The price is stated in the contract that they sign.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is a new incentive. As of today, through engagement, we have contracted farmers in the areas of Sabeto, Kavanagasau, Dawasamu, Kalevu, Waito, Nadarivatu, Lomaivuna, and the list goes on and on.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Honourable Kuridrani was talking about farm roads.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- No, no!

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have embarked on ensuring that we assist the farmer in getting the produce to the market by building the farm road. We are in phase 1 and we have done 27 farm roads with the estimated length of 47.6 kilometres, which is not a small length of farm road, benefiting 964 farmers. Out of this, 12.6 kilometres were in the Central Division, 12 kilometres in the Northern Division, 12.8 kilometres in the Western Division and 10.2 kilometres in the Eastern Division.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Member had asked, how much? I said 47.6 kilometres which he said is not enough. If I had said 90 kilometres, he would have said, "Not enough", because he just wants to say, "Not enough".

(Laughter)

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in Phase 2, 32 farm roads will be done consisting of 55.5 kilometres, which will benefit 1,216 farming communities.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- We do not need it.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Now, you are saying that you do not need it. They all said that they needed it, do not listen to him!

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, he was saying, "We need water."

(Honourable Opposition Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have just commissioned a water project in Vuqele, Tavua, benefiting 80 farmers. This is how we plan to accelerate the revitalisation of agriculture.

(Honourable Opposition Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Revitalisation started long ago. We are changing the slow speed of revitalisation. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister for his response. Obviously, there are others here who are a bit hungry but I intend to finish this session.

The next End of Week statement, I call on the Honourable Assistant Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations. You have the floor, Sir.

### Safe Water in Adequate Quantities

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Every Fijian has the right to have access to clean and safe water in adequate quantities. This is clearly highlighted in the 2013 Constitution of the Republic of Fiji, and the Fijian Government is working tirelessly to meet this goal. I further concur that Fiji's 5-Year and 20-Year National Development Plan articulates Government's focus on major investment in the water sector to cater for the long-term water supply needs.

I would like to highlight that over 829,000 Fijians nationwide benefit from the current water supply scheme which is due to the efforts from the Fijian Government and Water Authority of Fiji. To take us back to 2009, Government in its commitment of continuous improvement and reform of the Water and Sewerage Department to the Water Authority of Fiji (WAF) to enhance sustainable delivery of water and sewage provision to optimum levels of service.

The WAF has inherited much of the time worn infrastructure that had provided water to the people, many of which was built along the coast in response to development and population trends. As a consequence of this highly exposed invariable infrastructure, WAF had to develop strategies and plans to reduce the risk of this system, while also meeting the demands of the nation and providing clean and safe water to your fellow Fijians.

The WAF is guided by a few policies and statutory documents, such as the:

- 5-Year and 20-Year National Development Plan;
- Water Authority of Fiji Act 2007;
- recently completed Water Authority of Fiji Strategic Plan 2020-2025; and
- Water Authority of Fiji's 20 Year Master Plan.

These documents provide a guide to the operations of WAF in delivering sustainable infrastructure and service to urban, peri-urban, rural and maritime areas.

I would like to take this opportunity to highlight that the Fijian Government has spent approximately FJ\$1.3 billion on infrastructure replacement and constructing new infrastructure. A decade ago in 2010, 138,000 urban and peri-urban households in Fiji were connected to WAF's reticulation system. To ensure Fijians have access to clean and safe water, the WAF has completed 2,375 projects as of 31st December, 2019, emphasising that more than 80 percent of Fijian population have access to water today.

Some of the major projects were taken by WAF in ensuring that Fiji is tracking along the right path towards achieving the target by 2030. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this reflects the nature of the work implemented by WAF, most of which are capital projects aimed at improving the livelihoods of all Fijians and bringing us one step closer to meeting the 2030 target.

Water is and will continue to be the critical resources for Fijians, now more than ever. In prioritising this critical resource, the Government has allocated a total of FJ\$120.25 million in this



financial year (2020-2021) to WAF, helping them in their capital projects to achieve the goal of 24/7 delivery of water to all Fijians and expand Fiji's sewerage network.

I know this week especially, it has put WAF under the spotlight and I would like to commend them for their efforts in trying to restore water supply around the Suva-Nausori corridor. I would now like to mention WAF's list of projects that have been budgeted for this financial year that will help ordinary Fijians:

- (1) \$24.4 million is allocated for Water Treatment Plant. This allocation includes:
  - (a) Upgrading of major water treatment plants, such as Waiwai and Deuba, Namau and Balevuto civil works.
  - (b) Upgrade automation of Nadaro and Matovo, and establishment of Savusavu and Levuka Package Plant, including upgrading of critical infrastructure namely; Benau to Nasealevu Intake and the Naqataqatu Inlet Reconfiguration Works.
  - (c) WAF supplies about 134,000 megalitres of treated water annually to homes and businesses nationwide, including treatment of wastewater to an average of 21,666 megalitres.
- (2) As part of our 5-Year and 20-Year National Development Plan, WAF to undertake major investments to cater for the country's long-term water supply needs including an investment of \$4.8 million to improve the water distribution system. The project listed under this section are Lal Singh to Rewa Bridge Project, Nadarawalu/ Naiselesele Borehole Development and Nadogo to Nadelei Pipeline Construction. A total of 210,000 people will benefit from the completion of those three major projects.
- (3) A total of \$7.2 million has been allocated for wastewater treatment plant which includes consolidation works at Kinoya, Olosara, Votua, Namara, ACS, Pacific Harbour, Naboro and upgrade works at Nakavai Wastewater Treatment Plant. Fijians will greatly benefit from this, as we expect to see an increase in water supply capacity by 26 percent and wastewater treatment capacity by 164 percent.
- (4) The ongoing Rewa Water Supply Project is expected to be completed and will supply 40 megalitres of water into the constrained Suva system.
- (5) Fijians in rural areas should not be left behind and thanks to an allocation of \$6.3 million to the Rural Water Supply Programme. The Rural Water Scheme comprises of 32 projects for this financial year and will benefit a population of 11,000 countrywide.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, an allocation of \$3.5 million has also been provided for rural water carting to communities in non-metred areas during periods of drought, natural disaster and water disruption.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just to wrap up, WAF should strive to ensure continuous water supply for everyone and implement programmes to improve both, the safety and efficiency of water intake structures around the country, and to also fulfil the constitutional right of every Fijian to have access to safe and clean drinking water.

With those words, I thank you for your time, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Assistant Minister. I now call on the Minister responsible for the response. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the opportunity and I want to thank the Honourable Assistant Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations for his End of Week Statement on how Fiji is progressing towards our target of getting clean and safe water to all Fijian households by the year 2030, which is also a target of SDG 6.2.

Today, Mr. Speaker, Sir, over 800,000 Fijians nationwide benefit from the current water supply scheme. Not all of the system have treated water, there are systems in the rural areas that still have untreated water, but nevertheless, the systems are there for more than 820,000 of our citizens.

The UNICEF Report for 2017 highlighted the progress on drinking water, sanitation and hygiene update and the SDG baselines, and look at how well we are progressing, viz a viz, the SDG baselines. The Report showed how well the countries were fairing in providing clean and safe water to its people.

The Report showed that for the year 2000, 13 percent of Papua New Guinea's (PNG) population had access to clean water, 22 percent of Vanuatu's population and 16 percent of the population of the Solomon Islands, compared to 48 percent of the population of Fiji. By the year 2017, here in Fiji, we had moved that percentage up to 56 percent of our population having access to clean and safe water, and we know what our target is by 2030 as per SDG 6.2. We want to make sure that every single household in Fiji in this tenure has access to safe clean water, and that is the target and ambition and that is what Government is going after.

In order to do that, there are a number of things that we need to do, things that we have already started doing and things we need to do in the future to ensure that we get there. These are the four things that I believe are necessary:

- (1) Clear plans and strategies;
- (2) Clear role demarcation - who does what;
- (3) We must invest into water; and
- (4) We must develop strong institutions, because institutions are the things that make things happen.

In terms of clear plans and strategies, the Honourable Assistant Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations has talked about that. There is a requirement in the Constitution that we deliver water to our people, there are plans and strategies in the NDPs and there are also plans and strategies in the three different Government Ministries that focus on water. The Ministry of Infrastructure which has the Department of Water, the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources which has the Mineral Resources Department that looks at groundwater and also in Rural and Maritime Development that looks at emergency water supplies. In all of those three Government Ministries, there are plans there focussed on water.

In terms of national water-related policies, right now, we are in the process of finalising our National Water Resource and Management and Sanitation Policy, the Rural Water and Sanitation Policy, the Ground Water Resource Development and Management Policy and we have the WAF plans that have been talked about by the Honourable Assistant Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations.

Secondly, is clear role demarcation for our national water infrastructure, this is something that is critical. Different bodies are playing different roles in terms of setting policies, in terms of

technical regulatory functions, national monitoring and follow up. Those are being undertaken by the Ministry of Infrastructure and Meteorological Services through the Department of Water and also by the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources in terms of groundwater for the Mineral Resources Department.

The operational arms of this strategy, Mr. Speaker, Sir, WAF is fundamentally important. It is the biggest player and also Lands and Mineral Resources in terms of groundwater and, third, Rural and Maritime Development has a key role to play during drought situations when they help out in getting water to people.

The fourth part of the function is the regulatory function. We now know that FCCC has now been given some regulatory functions in terms of pricing, et cetera. All of those institutions work together from the basis on the way that will help us move towards this target of a clean and safe water for all by the year 2030.

The next one that we need to have is investment. This Government has invested more than \$2 billion over the past 10 years to make more water accessible to all the citizens of this country. The Honourable Assistant Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations has talked about investments through WAF. In addition to that, the Government has also invested around \$9.5 million on groundwater development and in return, has drilled 243 boreholes in which 157 boreholes were successful, 43 have been reticulated, so the water is distributed from the boreholes and this has benefitted more than 20,000 Fijians since 2010.

Additionally, we have around 15 sites for groundwater drilling and 10 of these sites are targeted for water reticulation. With the continuous rehabilitation work for those affected by *TC Harold*, my Ministry has also included Vatulele and Ono-i-Lau in this year's financial targeted sites.

The next pillar that we are focusing on to deliver on this target is strong and effective institutions. Institutions will be here after we have gone and as a government, we need to make sure that these institutions are strong, whether it is a ministry or a statutory body in terms of the Government's functions, corporate culture and their policies, so if we leave, they are still there to make sure that they deliver on what we need.

We need to build these institutions because they outlive us and that is what Government will focus on - a strong Water Authority of Fiji Board, a strong FCCC with all of its Government structures to make sure that it can move forward. After that establishing phase with policy oversight by Government, we will let them carry out their business. These institutions have the operational methods of implementing the broad national strategy that are found in the NDP and Government's plans, and developing their own organisation strategies and executing them.

The WAF has been restructuring itself since the new CEO came in, to strengthen its responsiveness to customers and also very importantly, looking to revise and develop a stronger culture. I think this is something that the new CEO has brought in - a focus on culture, to make sure that the people that work in WAF combined together so that when you serve your employees, they can then serve the customers better. I think that is the focus that they were working towards in the organisation - serving workers better so they can serve the customers well. It does not help when Members of Parliament make all kinds of unsubstantiated allegations in this House about the operational entities like WAF.

Throughout this week, some of these comments have been made by the Honourable Aseri Radrodro and the Honourable Qereqeretabua. I would just like to address some of those statements.

One of those statements made by the Honourable Radrodro was that the problem that we had this week was because of leakages in the Waila Treatment Plant.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are no leakages in the Waila Treatment Plant. The disruption was due to water levels at the Service Reservoir which resulted from the planned power disruption by EFL in which the ATS switches did not kick in. So there was no water leakages, we need to make sure that we make a statement like that and it is based on facts. It is substantiated before we make an utterance in this House because the whole of the country is listening and watching too.

He also said that there is no total preventative maintenance programme in rehabilitation. Absolute hogwash, absolute hogwash! The WAF does have a preventative maintenance programme. Its engineers carry out monitoring checks and assessments by using thermal cameras and loggers to monitor the power cut in major stations, such as Waila.

The Honourable Member asked the question whether necessary maintenance is done in a timely manner, yes, a resounding yes! The WAF does have a planned and organised maintenance programme. It is an asset management programme facilitated by technical working group, and has taken the management of assets to the next level by benchmarking to global and regional best practice. Preventative maintenance occurs right across all assets and websites.

In terms of issues brought about by the algae at Vaturu Dam, that issue has been addressed. There has been a lot of changes put in place and WAF is also putting in long term plans to make sure that it addresses that particular issue. It is now working on the feasibility studies and detailed design of de-silting of the Vaturu Lake and replacement of undersized dam fine bubble aerators to make sure these things do not happen again, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

We are also now finalising the upgrading of the Nagado Water Treatment Plant from 90 megalitres to 120 megalitres. This is something that WAF will be able to treat the water and be able to increase the supply of water in the Western Division.

There were some comments made by the Annual Reports, I can assure this House that WAF has plans in place to make sure that they have all of their audits completed by March 2021 and work is being developed in that particular area, Sir.

There was also a comment made by the Honourable Aseri Radrodro that we should change the WAF Board, with no, sort of, statistics or focus on what it has achieved and not achieved. Anyone who has managed an organisation will know that you always have normal variation and abnormal variation. You do not come with an abnormal - a big solution to a normal variation, there is differences between abnormal and normal variation.

If you manage any organisation you always have variation. You do not jump to say, "Sack the Board", just because a variation takes place, you minimise variation. So what I am trying to say is that for WAF, if you look at the statistics I have talked about, they have increased the percentage of people in this country who have safe water and that is the ultimate indicator of the performance of the entity - its impact on outputs and outcome. Outputs and outcome, it is not just about activity. Activity, output and outcome, look at the outcome. If the outcome is being achieved, then the Board is doing its job. We have an experienced membership at the Board, and we need to make sure....

(Honourable Opposition Members interjects)

HON. J. USAMATE.- Yes, we know that the former CEO is your candidate. I think it is also interesting to see that all the contenders for the leadership positions in your party and the deputy leaders are trying to make sure that they get a lot of airtime during this week.

But once again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Government has a political leadership and the commitment to make sure that this ambitious target of getting water to everyone in this country by the year 2030 will be achieved.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, Sir, throughout this week, every time the Opposition has spoken, they always seem to be hinting that there is some conspiracy from this side of the House.

(Honourable Opposition Members interject)

HON. J. USAMATE.- Let me confirm. Yes, there is a conspiracy. Yes, the conspiracy is to make sure we do the best for all of the people in Fiji. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I believe that brings to an end the End of Week Statements.

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

### ADJOURNMENT

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

That Parliament adjourns until Monday, 30th November, 2020 at 10.00 a.m.

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

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, on a very important note, I wish to reiterate the advisory from the Ministry of Health. Please, download the careFiji contact tracing App. If you are organising an event, make sure that everyone attending the event has careFIJI installed with the Bluetooth switched on. When someone arrives, they should show that they have careFIJI on their phone. If not, they must manually sign in with someone at the front. There should be no exceptions. This is vital as it is a health and safety issue.

In that regard, I call on all Honourable Members of Parliament to ensure that more Fijians are actually downloading the careFIJI App, to be able to not just give security to our own people but also to be able to tell the rest of the world that Fiji is a safe place to come to.

Honourable Members, I thank you all for your participation and contributions during the Parliamentary proceedings in the course of this sitting week, as well as for the duration of this Parliamentary Session. As all Honourable Members are aware, the Parliament prorogues on Monday, 26th October, 2020. When Parliament next sits, it will be for the opening of the new session of Parliament by His Excellency, the President of the Republic of Fiji.

Honourable Members, I now declare Parliament adjourned until Monday, 30th November, 2020, at 10.00 a.m. We adjourn.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.47 p.m.