

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

WEDNESDAY, 2ND JUNE, 2021

[CORRECTED COPY]

WEDNESDAY, 2ND JUNE, 2021

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 Ratu T. Navurelevu.

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the Sitting of Parliament held on Thursday, 27th May, 2021 as previously circulated be taken as read and be confirmed.

HON. A.A. MAHRAJ.- 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 today's sitting of Parliament, those present in person and those joining us virtually from across Fiji. 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 electronic devices. Thank you for your continued interest in the workings of your Parliament.

Business Committee Decision on Parliamentary Proceedings

Honourable Members, at this juncture, I will now advise Members of the decision of the Business Committee with respect to the proceedings this week and next week.

- (1) Parliament will resume sitting today;
- (2) Parliament will have a full sitting day on Friday, 4th June, 2021;
- (3) Parliament will have a full sitting day on Saturday, 5th June, 2021; and
- (4) Parliament to also sit on Monday, 7th June, 2021.

Parliament COVID-Safe Protocols

I wish to inform all Honourable Members that yesterday, the Secretariat undertook some cleaning and sanitising of desks, doorknobs and high contact office surfaces as part of our COVID-safe protocols. This was necessary, following the precautionary closure of Parliament last week.

The Secretariat has strengthened its COVID-safe protocols with the establishment of internal office work bubbles, reduction of face to face contact between staff, and other measures designed to reduce the risk and keep Honourable Members and Parliament staff safe.

I would like to thank the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services, his Permanent Secretary and his Team for their prompt actions on Friday and throughout the weekend with the precautionary measures taken on our affected staff and the disinfection and decontamination of the Parliamentary Chambers and Complex. I have also noted that some Honourable Members are concerned with some misinformation on social media, surrounding the cancellation of last Friday's Sitting and closure of Parliament.

I, again, urge Honourable Members to be mindful of the current situation and note that actions are being taken by the Speaker and the Secretariat to comply with COVID-safe protocols, while at the same time ensure that there is minimal interruption to parliamentary business, such as Committee work, preparations and the sittings. I ask for your understanding that these actions are being taken for the safety of us all, including our families and friends.

Thank you, Honourable Members. We will now proceed to the next Item on the Order Paper.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND CERTAIN DOCUMENTS

HON. SPEAKER.- The following Reports were tabled with the Secretary-General to Parliament and referred to the relevant Standing Committee for deliberation, in accordance with Standing Order 38(2):

Standing Committee on Economic Affairs

- (1) Fiji Financial Intelligence Unit - 2020 Annual Report (Parliamentary Paper No. 21 of 2021)

Honourable Members, on the next Agenda Item, I will now call on the Honourable Kuridrani to move his motion.

(Technical glitch experienced through virtual connection)

Honourable Members we will move on.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- A point of clarification, Mr. Speaker, Honourable Kuridrani's connection has been disconnected. He is trying to get back on, and he is working it out with the IT.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will move on to the Questions and when we have dealt with those, if the Honourable Member comes back online, we will deal with that Item. There is no problem with that but we will move on to the first Oral Question for today and I call on the Honourable Qereqeretabua to ask her question. You have the floor.

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

Direct Cash Assistance to Families - COVID-19 Pandemic
(Question No. 128/2021)

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

Noting the announced budgetary assistance to the Government of Fiji by the Australian and New Zealand Governments totaling \$115 million, could the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications advise

Parliament on how money will be spent by the Government of Fiji (and excluding Fiji National Provident Fund) on direct cash assistance to families affected by the COVID-19 pandemic?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM (Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I would like to give more details in respect of the question that has been asked.

The total budget support, Mr. Speaker, Sir, from Australia has been AUS\$37.5 million which is FJ\$59.2 million; a specific funding of AUS\$20 million which is FJ\$31.1 million is for social welfare support; and the New Zealand budget support of NZ\$40 million which is FJ\$59.4 million.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Australian funds have been received, one tranche is still left and we are in the process of facilitating that. The New Zealand funds that have been pledged, we are still in the process of facilitating the transfer of the funds to the Fijian Government.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I have mentioned in the introduction, the Australian Budget Support is AUS\$37.5 million which is FJ\$59.2 million and there is a specific Australian Social Welfare Support of AUS\$20 million which is FJ\$31.1 million.

That AUS\$31.1 million, Mr. Speaker, Sir, was received in December 2020 and as has been agreed with the Australian Government, will be targetted towards the financing of the following schemes under the Social Protection Network, the:

- (1) Benefit Scheme;
- (2) Care and Protection Allowance; and
- (3) Disability Allowance.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think this question by the Honourable Member, and I see there is a subsequent question by her fellow Parliamentarian, essentially demonstrates a fundamental lack of understanding of how Government finances work and how actual budget support works.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, every year in the formulation of the budget, there is a deficit which has to be funded by borrowing. When a development partner provides budget support, they are helping us to fund existing programmes announced in the budget. Those grant funds will displace the loaned funds that Government would have had to borrow in order to fund the current programmes.

When we announced in the budget a particular set of programmes, we say, "This will be the expenditure, this will be the revenue and this is how we are going to fund the deficit and how much money we will borrow", and that is what Parliament approves - the amount of money that Government will borrow. Government, Mr. Speaker, Sir, sometimes already has the lending sources already identified and others they go into the market, for example, they may go and issue bonds with institutions, such as FNPF, banks and insurance companies who may actually then buy those bonds which actually then funds the deficit.

So, if your development partner comes along, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we then actually do not have to borrow as much as what we would have initially wanted to borrow because then you do not have to because even with the cash that has come in stops you from borrowing. So, that is what we fundamentally do when we get budget support.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this essentially means that projected debt level at the end of the financial year 2020-2021 will be lower than expected. So, debt levels go lower because we are not going out

and borrowing as much as we said we would, because this funding actually has come into the system, which means we do not actually have to borrow. So, it is not like extra cash lying around - that is what they think.

There may be times when the development partner chooses to ensure that a certain budget programme is unaffected during the time of a crisis, such as social welfare support of AUS\$20 million or they may stipulate sometimes. You have some development partners and what they do, when they say they will give you budget support, they may say, "Look, we are going to give you \$60 million hypothetically but can you please ensure that out of the \$60 million, \$20 million goes specifically to fund a particular programme", which is already fine because we already got that allocated in our budget and we direct those funds specifically for that.

The rest of the money, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we then utilise to, for example, not borrow for different projects and different funding requirements as and when we feel like it, as long as those funds are utilised. So, I think there is a lot of misunderstanding about it and I think, unfortunately, there are some people in this Chamber who are very good advocates in social media of misinformation. They go around spreading this information, absolutely no understanding of basic finance and I am surprised that Honourable Qereqeretabua has actually asked this question when the Leader of her Party should actually know better. This essentially is tantamount to grandstanding.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is equally important to know that numerous dialogues and discussions are held at officials level and at ministerial level with development partners before a consensus is reached on how the funding may be utilised. There are dedicated practice of good governance, good financial management, the Fijian Government provides regular reports to development partners indicating on how funds have been used and to give assurance that funds are being utilised as agreed to with development partners.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me just also highlight (and I have said this before in this Parliament) how we have utilised funds in the past year or so. Over \$200 million has been spent directly by the Fijian Government on the COVID-19 assistance programme; unemployment benefit for the formal sector; \$161 million for unemployment assistance paid directly by Government; MSME concessional loan funding of \$13 million paid to over 5,000 MSMEs; the \$90 cash MPAiSA of \$10.6 million paid out to 118,000 Fijians in the informal sector.

As announced by the Honourable Prime Minister in the weekend, another roll out of MPAiSA and this time, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is going to be spread throughout Viti Levu. Why throughout Viti Levu? It is because there are many people who also get affected, even though they may not be specifically in the containment areas. So whilst Nadi and Lautoka was locked down, there was a lot of people in Ba who actually have a source of income or living from Lautoka. They travel everyday to go and work in Lautoka. There are people who sell their rootcrops and vegetables, et cetera, in the Lautoka Market. Similarly, there are people from Sigatoka who go to Nadi. There are people who live in Navua who actually work in Suva but they cannot go. There are people who do business and trade or are in small microbusinesses. So this is why we took a decision, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as announced by the Honourable Prime Minister, that we will expand that to the entire Viti Levu and we have done the \$50.

We found, Mr. Speaker, Sir, when we gave the \$90 to the 118,000 Fijians, there were some people, of course, who were trying to double deep. There were some people who, whilst getting \$220 a fortnight, also wanted to get the \$90. Unfortunately, we find these people doing this, a lot of people do it all the time so this \$50 round as has been announced to see and ensure that we are giving it to the right people, the right people get it, the right people apply for it.

The difference this time, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is this; in the last \$90 MPaiSA give-out, it was per household. This time if people are listening, we said per person. So, you could actually have five people in one home applying for the \$50 and they will be entitled to get it because there are five adults or they may have large families. So, again, we have been trying to finetune it to ensure when we actually restrict it to only one household for \$90, you could have one household with only two people, or you could have one household with 10 people, or 15 people. So we have tried to expand it, that is why the amount is being reduced slightly, but it gives the opportunity for every single Fijian in Viti Levu, who has been affected and currently does not get any other form of assistance to be able to apply for this \$50.

Again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have said this before in respect of the various assistance we have given and I think the Honourable Member's question is perhaps, premise on the false understanding that the money is lying around and, therefore, this is the additional \$160 million free money that we are going to simply give out. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General. Honourable Qereqeretabua, you have the floor.

HON. L.S QEREQERETABUA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is very, very simple. It probably took about 30 seconds to ask but the reply took nearly 10 minutes. Unfortunately, it has pretty much clouded the waters for the public who are listening and had asked this question. So, I will just ask that this additional money to the budget in this crisis make sense to ask, how will the money be used? Is the Honourable Attorney-General saying that none of this money is going to be used? People want to know how much money is coming to them, that was the question. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- We will move on. The second question for today, I will give the floor to the Honourable Maharaj to ask his question. You have the floor.

Core Health Activities - Non-COVID Diseases
(Question No. 129/2021)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services inform Parliament on how the Ministry has been able to continue to provide core health activities for non-COVID diseases?

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

The Honourable Prime Minister and Honourable Colleagues, despite the significant challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in the global supply chain and management systems for medicine and medical supplies, as well as the challenges it has put on the health systems, it is important as a Ministry that we are able to fulfil our functions, both in responding to COVID-19 and also our normative core functions. We know that the reality is that, to combat in response is to be based on proper normative services but we also realise that the challenges are not limited to Fiji but, indeed, many other countries around the world struggle in terms of even being able to maintain their normative functions.

We have strategized, Mr. Speaker, and ever since the beginning of the pandemic, we have gone through our remodelling exercise where we pushed out more outreach-based services, including sending our specialists to be able to do clinics in our health centres and in sub-divisional hospitals,

being able to send out the Fiji Emergency Medical Assistance Team (FEMAT) to go out into these sub-divisional hospitals and to look after Fijians in these areas, and all these have come in a way to be able to help us in terms of maintaining our normative work.

Mr. Speaker, at the moment, as I speak, we have 56 active sites for screening clinics outside or beside our health facilities. Nursing stations and health centres within our communities have been made open, apart from those facilities that have been sequestered as we have known. Previously, for 21 days, Lautoka was sequestered and as I speak, there are areas within CWM Hospital that are on closure from other areas as we begin to look at crushing out the virus from within the facility.

The major hospitals have maintained the essential health services but with the support that has been provided and our health inspectors continue with the environment health services of ensuring that we mitigate for the resurgence of communicable diseases, such as leptospirosis, typhoid and dengue, as we are beginning to see the climate change and as we head towards our cyclone season.

We have also transferred 11 patients abroad since 1st January this year at a cost of more than FJ\$120,000 and also sent patients to New Zealand under the medical treatment scheme that we share with New Zealand.

Mr. Speaker, on the closure of the Nadi and Lautoka Containment Zones, we set up bad weather capable facilities in Sigatoka and Rakiraki Subdivisional Hospitals. They have the capability to be able to operate as a small hospital. We have been able to do emergency caesarean sections, the treatment of trauma, emergency laparotomies and also the management of children, adults with acute and chronic diseases and also the management of antenatal care and postnatal care mothers. The two facilities were manned by specialists that were from CWM Hospital and also a contingent who came down from Lautoka.

During the time that Lautoka Hospital was sequestered for 21 days, the FEMAT Field Hospital went across to Lautoka and at Nadovu Park, set up a Field Hospital which we were able to triage patients, doing general outpatients and special outpatient services, dental clinics, paediatrics, eye clinics, ante-natal, emergency, surgical and maternity services. This was also supported by the *MV Veivueti* which was a hospital ship berthed at the Lautoka Wharf, which was the centre for delivery and also for emergency caesarean sections.

Mr. Speaker, after 24 days, the FEMAT Field Hospital with the support of Commissioner Western and also other civil servants, were able to serve 1,562 patients and out of the 1,562 patients, 359 of them needed to have dental treatment, 170 were admitted, 65 surgical operations were carried out on the *MV Veivueti* and also at the Field Hospital, 69 mothers were delivered, they managed to do 209 diagnostic tests and also multiple prescriptions were dispensed. As I have alluded to, the challenge at CWM Hospital and also as I speak, the Officials, led by the Permanent Secretary, are working in ensuring that we are able to have essential services also available in the greater Suva area. I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While Lautoka Hospital was closed, there was concern that the hospitals from Sigatoka to Rakiraki would not be able to cope with the cases from Lautoka and the question came up about the new Ba Hospital. Can the Honourable Minister provide a more definitive update on the status of the new Ba Hospital?

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

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Mr. Speaker, we can provide further details of the new Ba Hospital but suffice to say that the new Ba Hospital also provides an added support for us, especially at the moment when we are trying to ensure that we get through this COVID-19 outbreak that we have, especially in the Central Division and we are watching with interest what is developing in Nadi.

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

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, just a supplementary question to the Honourable Minister regarding the Naitasiri Containment Area from Sawani upwards. Can you give an update in this House on the reason for taking a separate containment for Naitasiri, apart from the Suva-Nausori area; the current status right now, when will it be reviewed so that the containment can be lifted and people of Naitasiri can come down to Nausori and Suva?

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

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- I thank the Honourable Member for that question. The assessment of lifting of containment areas or movements from outside containment to non-containment and from non-containment to containment is a very measured and strategically-balanced assessment that not only includes health but we are also guided by what is needed in terms of ensuring that we have trade and food security for Fijians in these areas.

The question that you have asked is also very personal to me as you are very aware that my children's mother is from Naitasiri. But I want to say that we have done extensive screening outside of the containment area, the non-containment zones which include; Naitasiri, Tailevu and Navosa, and the many others that are in the non-containment areas, including Rakiraki, which was lifted so that we have a greater insight into what could be happening in those areas.

I would also like to raise, Mr. Speaker, my disappointment and the disappointment of the Ministry of Health that there have been Fijians who have breached and we have heard of stories of people moving into these areas and putting Fijians in those areas at risk, and this is a concern to us. They have gone across rivers, they have moved through the highlands and this is the concern that we have. So when we have reports that come through to our Ministry of Health from the Commissioners, this is duly investigated and there are screening teams that are dispatched to those villages or settlements so that we can work with them. In some instances, communities have taken upon themselves to quarantine those Fijians who have breached that protocol for a certain period so that we can work with them to ensure that this is actually contained. As I have alluded to earlier, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the release of those containment areas will happen when a measured assessment has been done.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Nawaikula, you have the floor on a supplementary question.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Can the Honourable Minister, please, explain the differences in requirements and protocols? For example, here in Parliament, we were told 14 days and then seven days but especially in the hospitals, Lautoka was totally locked down for a number of days, the RFMF only two days and here we have the CWM Hospital only parts of it. Why are those differences, can you clarify those and explain, please?

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

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The assessments that happen are based on guidance from WHO on containment. In terms of the hospital, this is based on the

ability or the possibility of infectious spread. So, what is assessed is the patient and where the patient has been admitted, the travels that the patient has done and the contacts, meaning those who the patient had come into contact with.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the case in Lautoka is different from the cases that have been seen in Suva and that can be discussed later but to be able to answer that question, the case in Lautoka was more likely to spread, he has been in the hospital for quite a while and had also gone into intensive care where aerosol is likely also to spread from the patient to staff and also those who had been caring for the patient. So, that is why the risk from that patient is higher from the case that had been detected at CWM Hospital.

Again, as I have said in my earlier response to the question by Honourable Aseri Radrodro, it is a measured strategic assessment that is done, including the guidance by WHO. We are constantly in touch and talking with WHO on guidance as they are a repository of best practice from all around the world, including many countries that have had infections within their hospital.

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

HON. ADI L.QIONIBARAVI.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I would like to ask the Honourable Minister for Health to, please, inform the House on how the Ministry is ensuring that front-liners are strictly following COVID-19 protocols, given that it does appear from the data coming out from the Ministry of Health and Medical Services that it is the front-liners who are the super spreaders of COVID-19?

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- I thank the Honourable Member for that question. I would like to say that the super spreader of COVID-19, as far as we know from the evidence that we have at the moment, is the funeral that we have had and also instances of the back-end industries where COVID-19 safety measures may not be entirely up to standard.

In terms of the front-liners that had been alluded to, it would be disappointing for this august House to say that front-liners are the super spreaders of the disease. For the front-liners, many of them are given strict adherence protocols to follow. But we also note that there are individuals who may be different, who may not be able to follow all the individual protocols and when we do find breaches, we deal appropriately with them, including those who are from other departments, agencies and ministries. We talk with their Permanent Secretaries, the Ministers and also within the Disciplined Forces about the issues at hand and ask them to deal appropriately with them.

But I would like us, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and Parliament not to say that front-liners are the super spreaders of the disease. I would feel that if they hear that, they would be very disheartened. I can assure this august House that the front-liners will give their best for this nation.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. The last supplementary question, I will give the floor to the Honourable Dr. Lalabalavu.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- I withdraw my question, Mr. Speaker, as it has been asked by Honourable Qionibaravi.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. We will move on to the third Oral Question for today. I call on the Honourable Saukuru to ask his question. You have the floor.

Ration Distribution – Outside Containment Zones
(Question No. 130/2021)

HON. J. SAUKURU asked the Government, upon notice.

Can the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications inform Parliament if the areas outside the containment zones have been included in the ration distribution, considering that they have been locked out of their normal trading centres?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM (Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I would like to thank the Honourable Member for this question. The short answer is, no. They have not received food ration and I will explain to you why.

Food rations were originally given for two purposes and one of them is obviously continuing and that is, for those people who are in specific lockdown areas. For example, in Muanikoso, et cetera, all those are specific lockdown areas. They cannot leave, they are there for seven or 14 days or however the number of days they are there for because the Ministry of Health tells them not to leave those places, therefore, they are given food ration.

Of course, there has been in some instances a need to perhaps, redouble the efforts and as you would have known, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have also advertised, getting the private sector involved where the Ministry of Health can then purposely focus on their core functions and that can be delivered by those people who need those ration.

It is not only about food ration, Mr. Speaker, Sir. When you get locked down in your homes for about 14 days, you need access to things, such as toilet paper, soap, toothpaste, sanitary pads, whatever the case may be. If there are babies in the home, they may need baby formula, so this is why we have reached out to suppliers who could cater specifically for those households and get a better understanding of each household, the age group, et cetera, and supply those items to them.

The second group which obviously has discontinued, were in areas that pertain specifically to the Suva-Nausori corridor where there was a four or five-day lockdown or curfew, so people could not leave their homes at all, so they did their shopping. The last time we had the lockdown, they were given nearly three days' notice, they were able to do their shopping but not withstanding that, we did say that those people who would have run out of food subsequently could also get some basic food ration which include; rice, flour, tinned fish, cooking oil, powdered milk, tea, dhal - those types of things which were included in that ration pack. Some people started calling up late Sunday evening or Monday and they were given those ration packs.

The reason why those people who are outside the containment zones were not given a ration pack based on that logic was because they were still able to go to shops. It may not necessarily have been the big supermarket but still, they were able to access basic food items from the corner shops or the nearest shop that they could go to because they were not in the containment zone as such. So, the rationale behind the containment zone, the curfew and the food ration is different to those people who could actually move around and be able to buy those food items that they wanted.

Just as a matter of interest, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the breakdown of some of these is, we have distributed also on top of that over 5,000 ration packs to the lockdown areas. In the lockdown areas when we had the 24-hour lockdown time, 24,315 ration packs were distributed on the 16th to 19th

and 22nd May. Then we had those quarantine and isolated areas with another 5,000, then we had specific areas; Naqali, Muanikoso, et cetera, that were given the ration packs.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Saukuru, your supplementary question?

HON. J. SAUKURU.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General for his response to my question. Mr. Speaker, I had raised that question specifically for the Yasawa Group of Islands. You know that people from the Yasawa Group of Islands do their trading in Lautoka City. That is the only trading centre that they have, to be accessible to the market, accessible to shops, like he has mentioned, and that was why I raised that question about the rations for the people from the Yasawa Group of Islands since they have been deprived from accessing the market or trading centre.

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Honourable Member.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, last year when we had the lockdown also, we found that a lot of people actually traded at the border and were also able to get their goods across the border. Also in any case, should there be any shortage where people do not have any food at all, they are able to reach out to the emergency numbers and that is why we had the emergency numbers. If people did not have food, they were able to ring up those numbers and we attended to them.

In the same way, Mr. Speaker, Sir, when we had the five days of lockdown, there were some people who had actually called and said, "I want a specific need", and then we got the Police to get those things for them because they could not get out of their homes. So, those kinds of special arrangements were made and the system is actually flexible enough to be able to accommodate those types of requests, whilst still maintaining the health protocols that need to be put in place. Thank you.

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

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is a group of people who are struggling and actually need essentials at this time, and they are the mothers of new-born babies. So their request is to inquire of the Government if they would consider the suppliers of items for new-borns, not just diapers and milk, but also clothing, blankets and the like, if they could be considered an essential service at this time, not just for people within containment but also outside of containment areas and maritime areas, who need these items. Thank you.

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, no, we do not have any arrangements at this point in time to give people clothes or be it baby clothes, because of COVID-19. We would assume that people had clothes.

Of course, if there are new-born babies, we have seen that a lot of families are prepared. Of course, if they have issues, we have people in the various hospitals or health centres and that would be raised with the Honourable Minister for Health. If there are any issues in the rural and maritime areas, that would be raised with the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development. There is actually a question later that is being asked of the Honourable Minister for Rural and Maritime Development specifically about what his Ministry is doing regarding maritime and rural areas.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I just wanted to go back to explain, because I think a lot of these questions seem to stem from the original question by Honourable Qereqeretabua. I think the Opposition needs to understand that when we do get funding, we actually go out. When we are under a deficit, we go out and borrow money. When we get budget support, we have to then go and borrow less money. But there are also a lot of times when there is unanticipated expenditure, for example, last year when the Budget was developed, we did not have any COVID-19 cases.

Yesterday, we just approved \$4 million to \$5 million in paying hotels for accommodation costs. As the Honourable Minister highlighted and also the Permanent Secretary for Health in last night's statement, the nurse who actually tested positive for COVID-19 at CWM Hospital and all those personnel actually live in a bubble. She was staying at Holiday Inn. There are people staying at Tanoa Hotel, in different hotels where people have been brought in from their homes to stay in hotels, so all their expenditure is borne by the Government. These are all unanticipated costs.

What Honourable Qereqeretabua is asking is like me saying, "Oh, you collected corporate tax from Punjas, where did you use that money? Did you use it to pay for the Police or did you use it to pay for social welfare or did you use it to pay for the Parliamentary staff?" That is how absurd her question is! If people

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- A point of order, Mr. Speaker. I think the Honourable Attorney-General forgets that we are here representing the people who vote us in. Therefore, the questions we are asking are from the people, *vinaka*.

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, I get asked a lot of questions by people but I do not bring them all to Parliament. If those questions are really ridiculous and the Honourable Members need to have a basic level of acumen as a Member of Parliament, a basic level of intelligence and information to be able to answer such rudimentary questions when members of the public ask them. You should be able to understand Government finances - how the budget works, if you are going to be in this Parliament.

You need to know that so that when a member of the public asks that question, you are able to respond to them. That is what I am saying, Mr. Speaker, Sir. You do not have to use this notion that because they have asked me, I have to ask this question but you can also explain it to them. It is your responsibility as a Member of Parliament, as a citizen of this country - the sovereign State of Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, going back to Honourable Tabuya, no, we do not have provision for clothes at this point in time nor have we had any overwhelming request for provision of clothes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Bulanauca?

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. A supplementary question on food ration distribution, particularly caution taken to ensure the food that are distributed within containment areas or outside are good. We also thank those who have donated. What measures have been taken to ensure that rice that have been given are not repeated?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Attorney-General.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think the Honourable Member seems referring to a video that was circulating about rice and that is why he mentioned rice.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Yes.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have had, for example, in one instance of a person who rang up and said, "Look, the packet of rice that you gave us, there was a hole in it." Some rice spilt and we were able to then go and replace it. Not all of it spilt but nonetheless, we replaced it. In this particular incident, the person who is claiming the rice was bad has not revealed his/her name, has not revealed when he/she got it or where she/she got it from. Was it, indeed, part of the ration or was it, indeed, a ploy to discredit the ration distribution?

HON. SPEAKER.- Supplementary question, Honourable Gavoka, you have the floor.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are talking about distribution here and it appears that when it comes to distribution, the network established by the NGOs is quite effective. I ask the question as to whether Government is working in close liaison with the NGOs and making sure that the distribution, as we are discussing today, is more effective. It went to the extent, Mr. Speaker, that the NGOs have spoken very strongly over the weekend, lambasting one of our senior Ministers in Government.

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, the food ration distribution, again, if I could explain in very simple terms, I have explained the food ration distribution by Government - what Government is targeting and the targetted population. So, when we have curfews for four days or five days, we give food ration to them. We have on top of that, as I have highlighted earlier on, given the \$90.

There are many members of the NGOs or civil society that actually have given food ration packs to members of the public - not to those people that we are talking about but to those people who they think may need it because they have not been working for a while. For example, people in the Nadi-Lautoka areas, they feel that they have not worked for a while so they want to do that out of the charitable work that they do. Of course, let us call the elephant in the room.

This organisation called FRIENDS has been making a lot of political mileage out of it, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and that is the only organisation that the Opposition talks about. There are several other faith-based organisations and several other NGOs that are doing their work quietly. They do not go out and seek public attention and they do not get in touch with politicians. Some of them have rung us and said, "Look, we are thinking of going in this area, are you people distributing there or not?" If we say, no, they will say, "We are going to do that", and that is fine.

This form of charitable work, Mr. Speaker, Sir, has been a feature of the Fijian way of life for years and decades since Independence. After cyclones or some event takes place, or someone's house burns down, some NGO or faith-based organisation turns up and some of them specialise in cooking food on the spot as we found after *TC Yasa* last year. A lot of people went from Viti Levu and built people's houses. These were NGOs that actually collaborated with Government, but the Opposition obviously just stopped on this one particular organisation which is making a lot of political statements. It is obviously the NGOs.

You have the Red Crosses of the world, various other organisations, faith-based organisations and they do they own work. A lot of them collaborated with us. As I have said in the last sitting of

Parliament (I think) that when we gave food ration the last time, we had a group and I think it was Diva. Noeleen Nabalivou emailed and said, "Look, we have got some of our members in this particular area, there are women who have not received their ration. Can you please attend to it?" We have attended to them. They did not go to the newspaper, they did not go and contact any politician but they simply wanted to deliver that particular service.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Members, we will now take an adjournment for tea break and we will resume in half an hour for the fourth Oral Question. We adjourn for tea.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.32. a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.03 a.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will move on to the fourth Oral Question for today and I call on the Honourable Nand to ask his question. You have the floor.

Management of Quarantine Facilities
(Question No. 131/2021)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services update Parliament on the number of quarantine facilities and how they are managed?

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE (Minister for Health and Medical Services).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I thank the Honourable Member for the question. Mr. Speaker, there are four quarantine facilities in the Western Division, Nadi, and also four in the Central Division, in the greater Suva area.

Mr. Speaker, quarantine facilities are places where we bring people from areas that may have a disease and we put them on quarantine for a period that is stipulated according to the incubation period of a particular disease, in which case COVID-19 for 14 days and watch them do testing to see if they develop that particular disease. We must separate quarantine facilities from isolation facilities. Isolation facilities are actually places where we have those who are sick, taken to and looked after, some of them can be in a hospital health facility or can be in a community isolation.

I think it is important, Mr. Speaker, just to demarcate the difference between quarantine facilities and isolation facilities. The quarantine facilities in Nadi, Mr. Speaker, since the flights and passengers have been reduced remarkably and because of the closures that have been imposed and now predominantly, those of our staff and those within the Nadi area have been put aside because they are possibly primary contacts of cases that have been in those areas. At the moment, we are using Nalagi, Tanoa International Hotel, Nasau Resort and Sofitel, in which we have 222 Fijians in those facilities.

Since the increased number of cases that we have had in the Central Division normally in the Suva to Nausori corridor, a number of hotels have been designated as quarantine facilities after thorough assessments and the following hotels have been used as quarantine facilities:

- Grand Pacific Hotel;
- James Cook Hotel;
- Holiday Inn; and
- Peninsula Hotel.

At the moment, there are about 151 that are in those hotels and some of those who are in these quarantine facilities are our staff. The Honourable Attorney-General had alluded to that earlier, in that, we have staff working in bubbles.

Mr. Speaker, each quarantine facility is assessed and is manned by a health quarantine officer and in the initial assessment into quarantine facility last year, there was a competitive expression of interest that was put out and they expressed their interest to be able to be used and that is how they were then put through the assessment strategies that were in place. The assessment is done and training for infection control is also provided for hotel staff and also the facility management. They are briefed on the protocol and procedures to be able to safely manage the facilities, together with our support staff and also the Disciplined Forces - the RFMF, who are working with us to ensure the safety and security of the premises and its occupants.

All the persons are quarantined and monitored daily for a period of 14 days and also, taking of swabs are conducted by a swabbing team. It is also during this period that importantly, bubbles are created and they work within those bubbles and also quarantine corridors in terms of those who are coming to check it daily. There is an existing standard operating procedure to safety requirements. This is at all levels.

Mr. Speaker, in the facilities I have alluded to earlier, they are within their bubbles and clusters, and rules and policies are discussed with the staff and also to those who are in those quarantine facilities. Also, security is monitored by both, the Disciplined Forces who are there and the CCTV that is also being watched by our Disciplined Forces. I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Roll-Out of GP Partnership with Ministry of Health
(Question No. 132/2021)

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

Before I ask my question, I wish to declare my interest. Can the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications update Parliament on the roll out of the GP partnership with the Ministry in helping out with outpatient care during the COVID-19 outbreak?

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

The update is that, we are actually about to send out the contracts to the General Practitioners (GPs). Unfortunately, there was a bit of delay in respect of the responses that we got from the GPs, unless the Honourable Member wants me to go through those delays.

The fact is that, we are now on track. There are about 17 GPs that have been shortlisted to be able to provide those services. We are looking at six from Suva, one from Nausori, five from Nadi, one from Lautoka, three from Ba and one from Sigatoka. Hopefully, more will come on board. There were 24 applications sent in but some of them were ridiculously expensive. Some wanted us to pay \$50 per consultation, some wanted \$40, some wanted a higher rate after 4.30 p.m., some wanted different rates on weekends so we obviously went for those GPs who are bit more reasonable and were able to provide particular services. We are hoping to send out contracts to them today and then once the contracts are signed, then we can have those services, going ahead. Thank you, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. We will move on to the seventh Oral Question for today and I call on the Honourable Gavoka to ask his question. You have the floor.

COVID-19 Vaccination Programme - Progress of
(Question No. 134/2021)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services update Parliament on the progress of the vaccination programme for COVID-19?

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE (Minister for Health and Medical Services).- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the Honourable Member for that question. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we started with our COVID-

19 Vaccination Programme on 10 March, 2021, where we first started with our front-liners and since then, we have initially vaccinated 7,217 individuals from the first batch of vaccines.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, every vaccine that comes through in terms of the required minimum that can be given is about usually about 10 and because the nurses can give more than 10, 12 or 13 doses provided from that variant, therefore, initially 6,000 were able to safely and hygienically give 7,000 vaccines. This was followed by another 100,000 by the Indian Government which we are grateful for and for doses 1 and 2, and also 50,000 was set aside for the second doses. This was followed by another 24,000 through COVAX and 120,000 from Australia with AstraZeneca vaccines.

At this juncture, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is important to also note that since we have started with our vaccination team now, we have been using only one type of vaccine which is the AstraZeneca or the AstraZeneca COVID-SHIELD which is the one produced by Serum Institute of India.

We know to-date, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and we are thankful for the Honourable Prime Minister in his discussion with the Honourable Prime Minister of Australia that Australia has now committed 1 million doses of which 120,000 have arrived and we are looking towards having the rest of the doses come through by the third quarter of this year. And 500,000 doses also committed by the government of New Zealand through the discussion that the Honourable Prime Minister had also with the Honourable Prime Minister of New Zealand.

The COVAX vaccines continue to arrive and although they have been delayed according to the schedule, this has been boosted by the arrival of vaccines that are coming through our Vuvale Partnership with Australia and also New Zealand and 100,000 that came through from India.

Our initial strategy, Mr. Speaker, Sir, before this outbreak has been changed because we are now targeting the containment areas that have re-strategized our vaccination programme with going closer to the communities. In this, we are using the buses that are available with the government services that we have. We are thankful to the ministries such as the Ministry for Women and our Ministry and also using some of the Team FEMAT and also the Disciplined Forces ability to set up tents. We are also trying to make sure that where ever we are closer to our people, these are the places that can also be people-friendly in terms of making sure that we look after the elderly and having rest rooms available on the sites.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have managed to vaccinate 28,954 with first doses for people living in the greater Suva to Nausori corridor and a total of 33,077 outside of the Suva-Nausori corridor. As of 29th May, 2021, 136,247 people had received their first dose of COVID-19 vaccine.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is 21 percent of the Health Services targeted population estimated at usually 650,000 individuals and a total of 3,808 are now fully immunised after receiving their second dose. As we continue to get the regular supply of vaccines from Australia and New Zealand, we anticipate completing the first dose of vaccination by July or August, with the second dose hopefully finishing by November. Our teams on the ground are split into different directions, one towards the COVID-19 containment, fever clinics and mass screening while the other is also doing the vaccination.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is very important, I again stress, that all Fijians who have not been vaccinated to be vaccinated, to look at the notifications that comes through the Fiji Government websites, the Fiji Government *Facebook* page, the Ministry of Health *Facebook* page and also in the media, but more importantly to be registered before you come for vaccination; this is so important. The registration is so important before the vaccination because then we can do away with the queues that we have in place.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, last week we had news to hand that because of the registration that we have done and the proper detailing of the zones and the medical areas that we have in place, that the initial 650,000 that we had could be lower or could be more towards 600,000 than 650,000, but despite that we make sure that we are looking at being able to achieve the target that has to be achieved, including if it has to be more than 600,000 or 650,000.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Gavoka, your supplementary question.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Over the weekend, we learnt that Israel has now achieved herd immunity with 60 percent of the population vaccinated. What would be the percentage for Fiji?

Listening to the Honourable Minister for Health, he is talking about a lot of donations from our development partners but in February, we were told in this House by the Honourable Minister for Economy that \$16 million has been set aside to purchase the vaccines. So, where are we going, are we acquiring it and at what point do we achieve herd immunity, Mr. Speaker?

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

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, our aim is to achieve herd immunity by vaccination. I have just alluded to the strategy that we have in place and the support that we have received to be able to achieve this. Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is also a lot of investments that has been done by the Fijian Government in terms of cold chain storages and the ability to be able to move our assets around to be able to provide vaccination. Yes, we are thankful to the support that we are having from multi-lateral partners in terms of the vaccine itself, but also remember that we have to have the resources in terms of our staff and that we are able to vaccinate.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, vaccination with the COVID-19 is labour intensive more than we had for measles. With the measles we had our nurses who were predominantly going out vaccinating. For COVID-19, it is different in that we must have medical officers on site with the ability to be able to provide support in terms of an anaphylactic type reaction. Therefore, in every place where we have a vaccination site, we have doctors and also the ability to be able to provide necessary action if an anaphylactic does happen. This is the guidance that we have had and we have used it all along.

Unfortunately, up until now, we have not had been be able to do that. Yes, there is a lot of labour intensive, there are a lot of resources that are done, and these are actually being borne by the Government and the Ministry of Health using the COVID-19 budget, but also the other Ministries that are supporting us. They are giving us their transport, they are giving us their human resource, they are giving us their drivers and they are giving us their buses, for example. These may not be measured and these all has to be taken, because at the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this was not initially thought of, about two years or three years ago. So this has to be factored in when you are talking about the comprehensive provision of vaccination services.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the reasons why we were the first country in the Pacific to receive vaccination was the fact the we had our plan in order, we had our vaccine deployment plan in order and we were ready in terms of the strategies and mechanisms to be able to deploy. I think that is important to note in terms of what we are trying to achieve.

Mr. Speaker, the vaccination coverage that we are hoping to achieve is more than 95 percent of the targetted population that had been alluded to, all those 18 years and above. As I have said earlier in this august House, we are watching with interest on what is happening in terms of children and when that does happen, we will deal with effectively.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. We will now move on to the sixth Oral Question for today, and I give the floor to the Honourable Alipate Nagata to ask his question.

Protection Against COVID-19 - Rural and Maritime Islands
(Question No. 133/2021)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Defence, National Security and Policing, Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management inform Parliament on how the Ministry is working with other stakeholders to ensure that all rural Fijians in maritime islands are protected against the fast-spreading COVID-19 virus?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU (Minister for Defence, National Security and Policing, Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I wish to acknowledge the Honourable Member for his question.

Let me begin by saying, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that the health, safety and wellbeing of all Fijians, including those in the rural areas is of paramount importance to Government and, of course, we will ensure that we do our best within the resources that we have to ensure that that is being achieved.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also wish to clarify, I think there was a question raised by the Honourable Nawaikula last week on what the Fiji National Disaster and Management Office (NDMO) is doing and why NDMO is not involved in some of the activities, particularly ration distribution. It does not mean that we are not involved. No, we are involved, Mr. Speaker, Sir, but I need to clarify the fact that the Ministry and its stakeholders have well complemented this Ministry of Health-led response, together with our stakeholders to the global COVID-19 pandemic through the existing machineries of Government. So, it is a whole of Government approach but Ministry of Health-led.

The principal guiding Act, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is the Public Health Act and not the Disaster Management Act 1998. That is the big difference. If people are asking what NDMO is doing, there are certain tasks which I will elaborate on while answering the question this morning that are delegated to the NDMO. But people, probably are so used to our Disaster Emergency Framework and that is why they are asking the role of NDMO. So I wish to acknowledge, again, the Honourable Member for this question because the Principal Act, as I have stated, is the Public Health Act and not the Disaster Management Act 1998 which is currently under review, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

To ensure that all rural Fijians and the maritime islands are protected, there are a few measures and strategies taken, again, implemented on the ground as per the guidance and the directive of the Ministry of Health through the Permanent Secretary.

One of the key responsibilities given to the Ministry is on the public health campaign which is on risk awareness. I am grateful to the Permanent Secretary for Health for his trust in the Ministry and particularly, the four Divisional Commissioners, Provincial Administrators and the District Officers to lead this campaign – the Public Health Campaign, particularly focussing on the risk awareness and the COVID protocols.

I wish to acknowledge all the key stakeholders, particularly the machinery in the rural areas, the Provincial Offices, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Roko Tui, Turaga ni Koro, Mata ni Tikina and the Advisory Councillors. They are very much heavily involved in the Public Health Campaign. If you go around rural Fiji, Mr. Speaker, Sir, they have come up with their own arrangements within the

communities, villages and settlements which is really helping us and the Ministry of Health particularly in the control of the likely spread of the virus into the rural areas.

That is one of the key responsibilities given to the Ministry, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and that is still ongoing. The messaging continues to evolve as the trend progresses in Fiji because one of the key aspects of the whole plan is proportionate response and that is why the messaging as well goes together with the level of risks and the relevant responses that are happening in the various Ministries.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is the enforcement or maybe I can say the oversight over the COVID safe protocols. Again this is where we depend on the community leaders, religious leaders, individuals, members of household to take responsibility because this is a whole of nation approach that we are taking, Mr. Speaker, Sir. After the public health campaign and risk awareness, what is important is the enforcement and the employment of these COVID safe protocols, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

One of the key measures that was taken by Government at the very initial stage of the COVID-19 particularly in Viti Levu is to restrict the movement of people into the maritime islands. And for that we understand that they still need to be supported so cargo still continue as usual and there is a committee led by the Ministry of Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport. Again, that is a delegated task from the Ministry of Health.

The Honourable Minister and his Permanent Secretary and the Director of Transport are responsible for the coordination and the approval of movement, particularly into the outer islands. As we speak, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as you would know, there is an initiative in place for the safe return of some who were in the maritime islands and there is also consideration but subject to the strict protocols where perhaps, people that are also here in the containment areas can be allowed to go back but, of course, subject to all the protocols that are in place. That is the movement that is very well managed by the Ministry and, of course, the key stakeholders are, again, the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji and the Ministry of Transport, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

The whole of Government support to the health sector, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I have stated, it is a whole of Government and a whole of the nation approach. There are civil servants who cannot travel to work because of containment protocols and the list together with the Ministry of Public Service, are distributed within the respective Divisional Commissioners Offices and they coordinate the work. Of course, we let health concentrate on their technical and very roles whereas all Government agencies under the Commissioners and together with the Permanent Secretaries are coordinating these efforts in the rural areas. This also includes, apart from manpower, our allocation of resources as well.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are some friends and donors who are so used to the nine cluster systems that we have at NDMO and they continue to liaise with us throughout this pandemic. As I have stated, we do not take all the responsibilities on ourselves but there are some elements that we still take advantage of, particularly because of the nine cluster systems that we have.

There were questions this morning about diapers and baby infant formulas, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I am glad to say that through this cluster systems, donors came and we have handed over diapers and baby formulas to the Ministry of Women, Social Welfare, Children and Poverty Alleviation. Those were donated through the rural development NDMO machinery but that has been passed to the relevant agencies as well, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, logistic as well, so a lot of these activities involve a lot of logistics. I will not go into the details but that has been coordinated by the Ministry as well. Of course, everyone is looking forward to the vaccination programme and that includes people in the maritime islands, as

well as rural Fiji. But based on the priorities of Government, the Divisional Commissioners and the Government machinery in the rural areas are also there to coordinate this vaccination rollout when it does come to the rural and maritime communities. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I give the floor to the Honourable Jale for his supplementary question.

HON. A. JALE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. In the unlikely event that a positive COVID-19 case is found in one of the villages in the island of Lau, what is the contingency plan that your Ministry has to cater for the situation?

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

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Again, we will provide most of the supporting role but, of course, it is mainly a health tasking. Like in all other cases, the first thing is the isolation before the rest of the activities can be easily coordinated.

The good news, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that now in the maritime islands, even in incoming cargo vessels, all the protocols are done and enforced at the port of entry or the disembarkation point before people or cargo are allowed into the communities. Of course, the Ministry is always ready to assist the Ministry of Health and once a known case is isolated, then we will get our cue, like all other agencies, from the Ministry of Health and to ensure the safety of all other inhabitants or islanders in the rural communities. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I give the floor to the Honourable Rasova for a supplementary question.

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I would like to ask a question to the Honourable Minister and I thank him for his answers. We have been talking about vaccines, but there has not been any medical support for the rural areas. What if someone tests positive for COVID-19 in the rural areas, specifically on the islands, are there any herbal remedies or what can they do before the teams arrive to attend to them?

HON. SPEAKER.- I give the floor to the Honourable Minister for Defence.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am not qualified to answer that question. I will leave it to the Honourable Minister for Health, but you have the option to seek God's interference.

HON. SPEAKER.- We move on. I give the floor to the Honourable Leader of the Opposition for a supplementary question. You have the floor.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Thank you for the opportunity, Mr. Speaker, Sir. My supplementary question is towards the Honourable Minister for Defence and the Honourable Minister for Health because the way the Honourable Minister for Defence couched his reply, he was kind of taking in both, in terms of the role that they play, so along those lines, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to ask the Minister for Health and the Minister for Defence, when was the last time the Health Ministry encountered a pandemic as such and how big the problem was?

I say this, Mr. Speaker, Sir - for the Minister of Defence to say that the enabling legislation here is the Health legislation, but again has he forgotten the NDMO 1998? Even the Honourable Prime Minister is empowered to make a declaration on disaster and the 31 days that is provided for

there, including the enlisting of support staff. The question that I would like to say is, when was the last pandemic, and why was the role of the NDMO left till late?

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

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have stated clearly from the beginning that the powers are with the Ministry of Health and, of course, the Permanent Secretary. I do not have any idea, Mr. Speaker, Sir, about when we did have the last pandemic but however, I wish to also state, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and may be the Honourable Member may be referring to this, there was a different situation that we went through last year when we had COVID and then Harold came in, in April last year. That is why we also had a declaration because of the resources of Government that led to the decision to have the pandemic declared as a state of disaster as well, so that is the difference.

However, in the planning, Mr. Speaker, Sir, worst case scenarios, even in Vanua Levu, if I may say to the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, that while we are running this campaign on COVID, we are also worried about LTDD (Leptospirosis, Typhoid, Dengue and Diarrhoea) which is still high as we speak in Vanua Levu. If that gets beyond our control then probably there is an option but as I have stated also, Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the characteristics of this campaign plan is a proportionate response, based on the level of threats.

Let us not be alarmed by the number of cases because the Ministry of Health is looking at clinical severity, transmissibility and a lot of other factors. That is why Government is taking this proportionate response according to the level but, of course, that was the situation last year, Mr. Speaker, Sir, when we had the declaration at the same time but probably, the Minister for Health can clarify later on, when was the last pandemic that we had in Fiji. Of course, the measles last year was an outbreak that also activated the Public Health Act and the Government machinery as well. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Assistance in the COVID-19 Response
(Question No. 135/2021)

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

Can the Prime Minister and Minister for iTaukei Affairs, Sugar Industry and Foreign Affairs inform Parliament on how have the Turaga-ni-Koros have been assisting in the COVID-19 response?

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- (Prime Minister and Minister for iTaukei Affairs, Sugar Industry and Foreign Affairs).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I was just laughing at the sight of a cat that just walked past someone's picture - he is probably in a zoo somewhere.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to respond to the question raised by Honourable Maharaj for Honourable Dr. Salik Govind. I want to begin by thanking our loyal and dedicated frontliners and support workers who have sacrificed and put their lives on the line. There are many and they responded to the call to protect Fiji and the lives of our citizens, and I commend them and their families.

Integral to this national effort are the Roko Tuis, the Mata-ni-Tikinas and the Turaga-ni-Koros; they are responsible for 14 provinces, 189 *tikinas*, 1,172 villages, 39,022 households and 166,524 occupants. These do not include the *iTaukei* settlements all over the country. They are, Mr. Speaker, a part of the *iTaukei* administration which I head as the Minister for iTaukei Affairs, responsible for the good governance and wellbeing of the *iTaukei*.

The iTaukei Affairs Act and its subsidiary legislations provide the legal framework for our work. Since its inception in 1945, it has gone through a number of reviews for one purpose only and that is to improve the services of the *iTaukei*. It has withstood the test of time and it remains resilient.

Mr. Speaker, a well-defined system and structure is easy to oversee and leverage. At the onset of the current outbreak, I had endorsed an introduction that was issued to the Roko Tuis, Mata-ni-Tikinas and Turaga-ni-Koros to implement lockdown measures in all the villages. This was proactive containment measure derived from the powers vested in me under the iTaukei Affairs Act as the Minister for iTaukei Affairs and the advice issued to the iTaukei Affairs Board by the Minister for Health under the Public Health Act.

The purpose of this instruction was to secure the wellbeing of the villages. The Roko Tuis, Mata-ni-Tikinas and Turaga-ni-Koros were decisive in their actions which were instrumental in protecting the villages. Mr. Speaker, they undertook the following:

- (1) implement the lockdown instructions from the iTaukei Affairs Board;
- (2) network with the NGOs the CSOs and business leaders for information sharing to reduce vulnerability;
- (3) mobilising the *vanua*, the traditional leaders, traditional protocols and reinforce cultural values to support COVID-19 measures;
- (4) Advise villages to implement COVID-19 protocols i.e. practicing social distancing, restricting social gathering, enforce sanitising and wearing of mask at all times;
- (5) establish safeguarding measures such as setting up of command centres and village taskforce;
- (6) committees to oversee the manning of 24-hour checkpoints, monitor curfew restrictions in villages and monitor maritime movements;
- (7) focal point for the Ministry of Health, Fiji Police Force and frontliners and undertake public health awareness in all villages;
- (8) assist in screening and contact tracing with the Ministry of Health;
- (9) set up isolation centres, disseminate village profile information to relevant authorities; and
- (10) a focal point for food ration distributions in the villages and organise shopping and market trips for villages.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Roko Tui, the Mata ni Tikina and the Turaga ni Koro are our food soldiers in this areas, without their support, I want to say that enforcing COVID-19 safe protocols in the villages would be quite a challenge.

There are also our link to the traditional leaders as unseen but very effective arm of the *itaukei* administration is the traditional leaders to the *Bose Vanua*. Their traditional reach has been very effective in enforcing COVID-19 measures. They too issued instructions to the respective *vanua*. We clearly saw the integration of approaches because there is only one vision and the vision is to ensure COVID-19 safe villages, a COVID-19 safe Fiji. Their swift response, Mr. Speaker, Sir, has proven the efficiency and effectiveness of the *itaukei* administrative system in normal times and of course during any crisis.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, technology is a great equalizer. Through social media platforms, I receive daily updates on COVID-19 related activities in the province, in the *tikina* and the villages through the reports from the *Roko Tui*. These communication platforms are also used to convey daily updates from the Ministry of Health to the *Roko Tui* and down to the village level through the *Turaga-ni-koro*. The iTaukei Affairs headquarters translate the updates into the *itaukei* language for

dissemination across Fiji and the same channel Mr. Speaker, Sir, is used if I want certain intervention to reach the villages.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the *itaukei* administration does not operate in isolation. The government acknowledges that defeating the virus requires a multi-stakeholders partnership approach. No one can do it alone and to this end support to the district administration is very critical, led by the Divisional Commissioners, the Provincial Administrators (PA) and District Officers (DO) have undertaken a massive task to support the Ministry of Health led by government operation to defeat COVID-19.

While the Ministry of Health and Medical Services has been working to contain the transmission of the COVID-19 pandemic, the PAs and the DOs under the leadership of the respective Divisional Commissioners have been leading a multi-sectoral effort, including NGOs, CSOs and the private sector to help reduce the impact of the pandemic.

This effort has helped build the resilience of communities in the phase of the COVID-19 pandemic and I will also be critical when our communities and nation recover from the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic. Established four Divisional Emergency Operation Centres and their respective provincial and district emergency operation centres or DISMAC to support the Ministry of Health with logistic support to the COVID-19 and mobilise about 867 civil servants which include municipal staff to report to the respective DOs and PAs through DISMAC.

In addition to this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, 235 Government assets, vehicles and boats have been allocated to the various DISMAC to support their work. These assets and personnel have contributed to the following activities, provide surge capacity for screening; provide logistics support for swabbing; logistics support for FEMAC field hospital; logistic support for the conduct of community awareness; set up and manning of call centres in addition to 158 and 161; coordinate and facilitate Government food ration distribution in the Central Division, and coordinate private sector and CSO food ration distribution and surge capacity and logistics support to vaccination programmes.

The CSOs, Mr. Speaker, Sir, have been coordinating the response efforts towards contact tracing, mass screening, community awareness and food ration distribution. In areas where Government assistance could not reach, the machinery have fostered positive partnership with the private sector and has allowed the business to provide assistance to members of the community badly affected by COVID-19, and also coordinate with the Ministry of Health to ensure that despite the lockdowns and containment strategies, alternate strategies have been provided to ensure that our essential services are not disrupted and communities access basic services.

The CSOs have been able to set up call centres in addition to establish 158 and 161, to cater for the public enquiries regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. In the Western Division alone, where the transmission started, where the Lautoka Hospital was compromised, and which experienced the first lockdown and containment in the country, a total of 26,000 calls were received from the public enquiring on the containment areas, food ration requests and accessing screening and swabbing facilities.

To-date, Mr. Speaker, Sir, a total of 44 community isolation facilities have been set up across the four Divisions. I thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Adi Litia Qionibaravi.

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I would like to echo the Honourable Prime Minister's appreciation this morning for the *iTaukei* administration's efforts, and

in particular the role played by the Roko Tui, the Mata ni Tikina and the Turaga ni Koro. It comes out quite clearly that it is the Turaga ni Koro, the person on the ground that ensures that the requirements from the *iTaukei* administration is complied with for the safety of the villages, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

My question to the Honourable Prime Minister is: The Turaga ni Koro have been paid at \$100, Sir, they have been receiving \$100 a month, my question is whether you would consider increasing the allowance of the Turaga ni Koro eventually? Thank you.

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

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Sorry, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that question can be answered during the budget debate. Thank you.

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

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Thank you. I would like to acknowledge the response from the Honourable Prime Minister and also the role played by our front liners, and the different Turaga ni Koro and Mata ni Tikina in the villages. *Vinaka vakalevu.*

My question is related to the Government support for the Turaga ni Koro and Mata ni Tikina in the current role in this COVID-19, because from the few I have spoken to, they need the support from the Government in terms of the thermometer guns, masks, sanitises, et cetera which are items but they do not have the cash to buy that. There are quite a few whom I have spoken to have said that they not received it, and I would like to, may be request rather than ask, that the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs conduct a survey regarding those needs to be supplemented as soon as possible, especially here in our Honourable Prime Minister's Province; Tailevu, Rewa with Nausori-Suva lockdown and the increasing incidents of COVID-19 in this area. Thank you very much, Honourable Prime Minister and Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- I am sorry, Mr. Speaker, I did not get the question. What was the question?

HON. SPEAKER.- Could you repeat your question? Just ask the question and do not make the statement.

HON. RO. F. TUISAWAU.- Honourable Prime Minister, can you supply thermal guns, masks and sanitizers for our village Turaga ni Koro, Mata ni Tikina who are guarding the entrances to our villages in our Provinces Rewa and Tailevu?

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

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- No *leqa* in Tailevu, Sir, only in Rewa. Enough equipment has been provided to our Turaga ni Koro and Mata ni Tikina. If there is any shortages, they will come back to us to make sure that they are provided with these items.

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

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the Honourable Prime Minister for the answers given. Just a supplementary question. The use of the Turaga ni Koro as foot soldiers in this difficult time, especially when we dealing with COVID.

The question that I would like to ask is, has a Turaga ni Koro been trained to detect COVID-19 symptoms and also to assist them to take them probably to the isolation facilities? If it is not, what is the Ministry doing about it?

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

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is very easy to detect someone who does not have COVID but the sickness. We have been told about those in the health ministry's propaganda for the last 12 months or so. The Turaga ni Koro is not the only people that look after our villages.

The Ministry of Health officials go to the villages with the assistance of the Turaga ni Koro. They provide all these information to the Ministry of Health Officials.

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

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I thank the Honourable Prime Minister for his reply but at the same time, I would like to ask this supplementary question on the issue of protocols been observed.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I put in the supplementary question proper, I would like to raise an issue, especially if the Honourable Prime Minister cares to look at the results from the Ministry of Health testing and everything. It is kind of concentrating mostly in the urban areas.

In mentioning protocols that have been observed, I wonder if what sort of protocols they have been undertaken to deal with these urban areas. In the past, we used to have Roko Tui Urban, I do not know whether that still exist or not. That is the question that I would like to raise because in observing and we have to be mindful of the Ministry of Health advice in trying to curtail and cut down on traditional observance of death, et cetera. This is a whole new ball games, Sir, and if you want to do that you have to enlist your Roko Tui Urban that used to be there in the past.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Prime Minister.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- What is the question?

HON. SPEAKER.- Could you repeat the question?

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The question is, in observing protocols especially for the urban areas, can we enlist the Roko Tui Urban that used to be there in past or they are no longer there? Another thing that comes from that question is the advice given by the Ministry of Health, as to how do we improve and cut down on these gatherings that occurs during the funeral or whatever.

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

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The instruction by the Ministry of Health has gone out to everyone, not only to the Turaga ni Koro and the Mata ni Tikina but to every individual. It is our responsibility to ensure that that is carried out.

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

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- In my view, a state of declaration of emergency will only help the Honourable Minister for Health. So if the Honourable Prime Minister can explain to us why this option of declaring a state of emergency has not been looked at for the whole of Fiji or even parts of Fiji?

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

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Mr. Speaker, it is dealt with under the Ministry of Health Act. I do not see any reason why we should declare a state of emergency.

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

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker, Sir. It appears that the Turaga ni Koro may not be aware of the symptoms. So it is important that someone in the village should be aware of the symptoms so that they can report it to the nursing station or to the medical doctor. If the Turaga ni Koro is not aware, maybe the village nurse should be more aware of that. It is important that someone in the village should understand those symptoms.

HON. SPEAKER.- Question.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- What is the question?

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- It is important to have that, Mr. Speaker, Sir. If the Turaga ni Koro is not aware, is the village nurse aware or not?

HON. SPEAKER.- Question.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- They need to be aware of the symptoms and also report on whatever arises in the village to the medical doctor or centre.

HON. A.D. O'CONNOR.- That is a statement, not a question.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Someone in the village should be aware of the symptoms, apart from the Turaga ni Koro?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, do not make statements like others as well I will to. Just ask the supplementary question so we can get on with it. That is the end of Oral Questions.

We move on to Written Questions and I give the floor to the Honourable Nawaikula to ask Written Question No. 136/2021. Honourable Nawaikula, you have the floor.

Written Question

Details of Food Ration Distribution (Question No. 136/2021)

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

Can the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications inform Parliament on the details of the distribution of food rations during

the two no-movement 24 hours curfew periods during the 2021 lockdown in the three containment areas Suva, Nasinu and Nausori?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I will provide the answer at a later date as provided for under the Standing Orders.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Members, we will now move on to the motion for debate, and I give the floor to the Honourable Kuridrani to move his motion. You have the floor.

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I apologise for the interruption this morning.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I speak on my motion, I want to express my disappointment, dissatisfaction, concern and anger on why we are still not touching on the issues that are very important to the nation regarding COVID-19. Secondly, I am also concerned about why the Honourable Minister of Economy is still allowed to enter our august House.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Move your motion!

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Yes, I said I will speak on this before I touch on my motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- No, you just speak on your motion. Move your motion and I want a seconder. I have not got a seconder here.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES TO REVIEW PERFORMANCE OF NON-SUGAR AGRICULTURE

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move:

That the Standing Committee on Natural Resources review the performance of non-sugar agriculture.

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

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, you have moved and there has been a seconder and I have given you the floor to speak on your motion. That is what you should be doing now, so speak on your motion.

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I believe that we all agree that agriculture will continue to be the mainstay of our economy. However, it is unfortunate that this Government is only doing lip-service in supporting the agriculture sector.

Agriculture is very important for the following two reasons, firstly, foreign exchange earnings through our exports and, secondly, food security for our people. But now, we have only realised that the Government is trying to focus on agriculture through seed distribution and other initiatives.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I asked for this motion because of the poor performance of the Ministry over the years and I want to focus on the human resource - the recruitment process, especially in the top-management positions, the Permanent Secretary and its Directors. I want that reviewed as to whether they are actually following the Open Merit Recruitment system.

I also want to speak on the staff quarters. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I visited some of the staff quarters around the country and they are in very dilapidated condition. To me, it has been quite some time, may be six or seven years, that nothing has been done to upgrade the staff quarters and the worst quarters are in the rural areas for Extension Officers - very bad condition.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also want the Ministry to refocus their resources, especially on farming programmes. The crops that have high value, we need to put more funds into these crops, such as *yaqona*, cocoa, vanilla and ginger. They have to relook at the Livestock Programmes and the Brucellosis Eradication Programme. I gathered that there are only three Officials in the Livestock Division to handle the Western Division and that is the reason why the Brucellosis Eradication Programme has been delayed, if we can look into that.

Also, in the Agriculture Marketing Authority (AMA) recently, we have noticed that experienced people are being terminated or their contracts not renewed in the AMA. They need to relook at the purpose of establishing the AMA.

On the Committee for the Better Utilisation of Land (CBUL), this programme has been receiving millions of dollars over the years and yet, we do not see any impact on the production side of agriculture.

The Navuso Agriculture School needs to be upgraded, put in more programmes so that future farmers could be trained, equipped and empowered to continue the culture of agriculture.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also want to speak on the delay in the annual reports by the Ministry. The latest report was for 2016, as I have already mentioned in the House. I also ask the submission of the Agriculture Census Report that was conducted in 2020. We have still not had that Report. That would be a very ideal document during this crisis.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also want to highlight in the House the Honourable Minister for Agriculture's programme that he introduced, the Commercial Agriculture Scheme, when we was still at FNU. I gathered from some of the recipients that they were promised a hundred acres of land, \$70,000 cash as start-up capital, two-bedroom house and farming equipment but some of the recipients only got seven acres with five years paid lease and \$2,000 to develop their infrastructure and utilities. This should also be part of the review.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on this motion and I give the floor to the Honourable Jale. You have the floor.

HON. A. JALE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I speak in support of the motion before the House to Review the Performance of Non-Sugar Agriculture. I do believe that most of us in this House watch *Facebook* at times and there are some exemplary actions that have been shown on *Facebook* by some of the people sitting in this House.

I would like to state some of those because it is good for agriculture and good for the people of Fiji: Honourable Nawaikula at his yam farm and grog farm in his village; Honourable Tuisawau weeding and planting *dalo* on his land in Rewa; I know Honourable Tikoduadua too does a lot of farming in Tailevu and I see Mr. Vosarogo, one of the politicians and his family planting vegetables in small plots of land near their house. I also note, Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Minister for Agriculture promoting home gardening and handing seeds out to people.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Minister for Agriculture is promoting home gardening and

handing out seedlings to the people. I would say that it would have been more effective for the Honourable Minister to show the people of Fiji how those seedlings are planted. When you talk about promoting home gardening, he should be seen with his fork outside his own compound digging and planting. That is what the people would like to see, not handing out seedlings to people. They have been planting and they want you to go and show them how those seedlings are to be planted.

There are some people on the other side of the House that I envy a lot and I name two of them - the Honourable Naiqamu and the Honourable Assistant Minister for Health. These two Honourable Members speak very few words but when they speak, they talk a lot of sense.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Honourable Naiqamu, the former Minister for Forestry. He has been very exemplary in the way he promotes the plans and policies of his Ministry. I think he will be remembered by a lot of people in Fiji for what he did. He goes to all corners of Fiji and you see him in his *sulu vakataga*, digging soil by using his hand, planting trees in those areas that he goes to. I think these are things that really catch the eye of the people, which will remain in the minds of the people of Fiji, particularly our young people. Someone like that showing the way for us and I thank you Honourable Naiqamu. Thank you for your excellent service to the people of Fiji. You have shown us the way and I hope others will do the same.

I was chatting with Honourable Salote Radrodro during the last Parliamentary Sitting at the SODELPA Office and she did not ask me anything about the Public Service Commission where we both worked at one time, but she asked if I was still planting yams. I remember the reason why she asked me that, because when I was in Government, I used to plant a lot of food around the quarters I was allocated. When I harvested yam, I used to invite all the senior officers of PSC to come and see the fruit of my labour and I showed them the yams I planted.

I not only do that on Fridays. I used to call the Directors and tell them to advise their staff not to bring food. I would then cook some yams and bring a pot of curry to be shared amongst the five Divisions in PSC. I think that is the reason why she asked me about planting yam. She did not ask me anything about work but she asked me about planting and I thank her for that. I am sure that some of the lessons they might have learnt through our being together at PSC and working together for the Government of Fiji has really stuck with her and she has been able to replicate that wherever she is at the moment. I think they are planting more yams than me at this moment.

We need to diversity Fiji's economic base. A lot of people have been talking about that for long. Parliamentarians here have been telling the Government to diversify. We have been concentrating too much on tourism, and that has been shut down for now. We do not control tourists coming into Fiji. There are a lot of other factors that affect their coming and COVID-19 is one right now, and we must learn from that. We need to diversify our economic base to focus more on the primary industry. We have been telling Government about that.

Agriculture is most important. What we should do and I recommend the Government to consider it in the budget that would be coming. Let us plant more *dalo* and *tavioka* for export and plant a lot for the needs of the people in Fiji. Construct roads to increase *yaqona* plantation and production. There are lots of people who want to venture into *yaqona* plantation but they are limited, because they do not have access roads. Please, open up the roads for them because this is another area that you can bring income into Fiji.

Copra needs to be revived. In some of the rural areas, people depend a lot on copra. Some of the developments we have seen in some islands have been through coconut sheds, what was deducted from copra at that point in time. They have contributed that copra money for the

development of this nation. I know that in the last Budget, they had a provision for the replanting of coconut. We need to do that. We use coconut in our food and other things that we use coconut for, but I think it is time that we look seriously into producing and planting more coconuts, so that we can lift the standard of living of people who live in rural areas.

At the last household survey, we have found out that the Eastern Division is the worst of all. People are living in poverty, so we need to look at how to salvage and improve their situation. I thank this motion because it is talking about how we can focus and look at the performance of non-sugar industries in Fiji. We are short of pork meat, we heard from the Honourable Minister in one of his speeches recently that we are short of pork meat and goat meat too.

I am suggesting to the Ministry of Agriculture to look at the rural and the maritime areas. They can rear and produce pigs to be slaughtered for pork, and also they can rear goats so that we can have more goat meat, even for their own local consumption. I am not talking about export, we are short of that. Goats live very well on sandy soil, so the islands are good for goat farming because it does not cause footrot which goats normally suffer from. So I am asking the Ministry, this is another area that you need to look into.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for allowing me to contribute to this motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I give the floor to the Honourable for Agriculture.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to speak on the motion by Honourable Kuridrani, who is asking that the Standing Committee on Natural Resources undertake a review of the non-sugar sector. I wish to explain why I will not support the motion, why it is not required, why it is a waste of our time and why this motion demonstrates lack of knowledge and understanding of what is happening in the agricultural sector and the economy. Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I do that, I need to explain economic realities because agriculture does not operate on its own, but on economic direction and leadership.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to respond to the question made by the Honourable Tabuya and Honourable Nawaikula for the Minister for Economy to resign, saying he is not functioning well or he is the Minister for everything. First of all, let me explain how the Ministry of Economy portfolio is very different from the portfolio of a Minister of Finance.

The Finance Minister's position is one of a book-keeper. He receives submissions from ministries, puts all submission in a basket and distributes available resources to various ministries. The various ministries undertake and run their ministries as per the budgetary allocation. The Finance Ministry provides an oversight on financial disbursement and management to ensure that books are properly kept.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, where is the collective vision of the Government? Who ensures that all the ministries work in tandem and combine resources for efficient service delivery? Who ensures that all ministries target the common vision of the Government to improve living standards in quality of life, to deliver inter-generational equity on resource evaluation, consumption and quality of life, to invest in soft and hard infrastructure for long term consumption? It is not the Finance Minister who can do that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, but the Minister for Economy. The question is, who then should be the Economy Minister? The person should be the leader of the Party as they formulate the vision which is super-imposed on government vision. It is for this reason that it is only critical that party leaders, the top two, should not only formulate but lead and execute the economic vision of the party and the Government.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we do not need a Master's Degree in Economics, we do not need a PhD in Economics to be an Economy Minister, rather you need intellectual capacity to articulate the long-term path to articulate the national vision of a Government. You need intellectual capacity to reign in all ministries and statutory bodies to remain on the path to a common vision. Is the Minister for Economy entrusted with the overall direction of the Government? Ministries and all statutory bodies work in tandem so that the common vision is delivered.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, ability, charisma, skill sets diplomatically liaise with development partners, internal agencies to attract technical and financial resources, is a critical attribute that the person must have. The Honourable Attorney-General and the Minister for Economy has clearly demonstrated time and again his ability and attributes on that front. Who else other than Honourable Attorney-General has these combined skillsets?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- A Point of Order, Mr. Speaker. I am just waiting to see when he will actually get to his Ministry and the motion. He needs to speak to the motion at hand which is on non-sugar agriculture, not come here and to carry on with this grandstanding. Please, refer to your Ministry and what is the motion, thank you.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- I will explain.

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

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, he has deep understanding of the commercial realities and private sector experience. I had the pleasure working under him when I was Chairman of the then Commerce Commission and now FCCC. I too, like some academics and some in the academia, was thinking that a commercial sector functions as articulated in the textbook. But I must say that I learnt a lot from the Honourable Attorney-General on dealing with the commercial sector while I was working under him and I wish to continue to support him while holding this important portfolio as Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with the Opposition's personal hatred for Honourable Attorney-General and their obsession with ethnicity, they cannot see these qualities in him. It is a shame. Honourable Tabuya said they can better run the economy and if they are in Government, the economy will be much better. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I was wondering what his magic strategy was. Albeit he slipped last week and revealed our strategy.

When they come into Government, they will establish printers all over Fiji. They will print money, give it out to everyone so people will line up.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Oh!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Yes, she said it, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is on record in the *Daily Hansard*.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- A Point of Order! The Honourable Minister is misleading the House in saying that I said, "We should establish printers all over Fiji" the Reserve Bank of Fiji. Please, quote properly. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- She said "print the money."

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

Honourable Minister, speak on the subject of the motion but on that note, I will stop the debate here because it is 12.30 p.m. and you can continue after lunch break.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Mr. Speaker, Sir...

HON. SPEAKER.- Hold it, hold it!

Honourable Members, after the Honourable Minister, we have 12 other speakers and in this order so be ready; Honourable Adi Litia Qionibaravi, Honourable Jone Usamate, Honourable Viliame Gavoka, Honourable Praveen Bala, Honourable Ratu Atonio Lalabalavu, Honourable Mikaele Leawere, Honourable Lynda Tabuya, Honourable Jese Saukuru, Honourable Ro Filipe Tuisawau, Honourable Professor Biman Prasad and Honourable Simione Rasova. That is the order.

We will adjourn for lunch and we will continue after lunch with the Honourable Minister for Agriculture. We adjourn for lunch.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.32 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.34 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will continue with the debate and I give the floor to the Honourable Minister for Agriculture. You have the floor.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you for this session. The part one of my address to this House this morning, is basically linked to the lack of understanding of the Opposition Members on the Economy and the link between economy and agriculture, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the agriculture sector remains the backbone of the Fijian economy since independence and in fact, you look at any developing country, the growth trajectory shows that the growth and development of the non-agriculture sector whether it is manufacturing, industrial or service, that particular sector's growth and development has been firmly pegged on how the agriculture sector performs.

This is a standard skylight fact, Mr. Speaker, Sir, except for a few countries like who have basically survived on oil, et cetera. So, generally, you will see that all economies, developed economies, developing economies, their transition towards service, manufacturing, et cetera have been depended on how well the agriculture sector has done, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, when you talk about the performance review of the agriculture sector, when you call for a review of the agriculture sector, basically would be based on alarming statistics on declining population into agriculture sector, declining number of households in the agriculture sector, declining agricultural output over time, declining agriculture's share of exports.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am going to demonstrate to you today in this House that none of these indicators reveal an adverse or negative trend or a negative slope.. In fact, in 2020 relative to 2019, we have seen an increase in the number of households participating in agriculture by 26 percent. Mr. Speaker, Sir, 26 percent is not a small number. It is a large number, 26 percent of households have undertaken farming activity. That clearly demonstrates you know, households interest in agriculture, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in fact from last year, 2020 to this year, there is significant movement of people from urban, peri-urban area towards rural, back to rural, whatever you may call it, back to rural, back to agriculture, back to maritime, back to village movement, Mr. Speaker because they see future in agriculture. Of course, we all know that this is pandemic has also pushed and accelerated this particular movement, so this statistics of 26 percent, it is for 2020 compared to 2019, Mr. Speaker, there is a larger number of households that have moved to agriculture and in fact, more and more land are now coming into agriculture which used to be unutilised, under-utilised, Mr. Speaker, Sir and thanks to the pandemic in a way.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if you look at agriculture's contribution to GDP, of the 2010-2019 period, agriculture on an average contributed to eight percent to GDP, so agriculture's share of GDP, vis-à-vis the other sectors have been eight percent, if you compare it with the other economies in a similar trajectory, it is not bad. It is not bad, the share and if it is normal, I explained to this House a number of times that look, the share will be declining, any country over time or if you compare over the last 30-40 years, you will see that agriculture's share of the national cake would be declining because non-agriculture sector are now expanding rapidly. So you will see, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that in two years' time pick up this year's data and you will see that agriculture's share will be majority because the entire tourism sector is closed. So, it is a normal thing, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if you look at the non-sugar agriculture sector, the non-sugar agriculture sector in the same period actually from 2010 to 2019 increased by 83.4 percent, nearly double, Mr. Speaker, Sir. In 2010, the non-sugar output, the non-sugar agriculture output was \$343.6 million, now increased to \$630.1 million. What is the reason for an inquiry when we see such a substantial growth in the non-sugar agriculture sector? Similarly, we have seen a major increase in agricultural exports.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I had presented in this House the statistics that demonstrate that despite the pandemic, despite an increase in freight rates, despite all the hurdles over the pandemic last year, our first produce export with all the work that the Ministry of Agriculture, farmers, exporters, middlemen, we have pushed exports beyond bounds.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on an average the exports of fresh and chilled produce increased from 2016 to 2020 by 3.4 percent and the fresh and chilled produce substantially increased from 2016 to 2020 from \$67.9 million to \$106 million.

So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, what is the reason? What are they talking about? You listen to the presentation by the mover of the motion. What did he say? Mr. Speaker, Sir, nothing. He said, I want to know about this. I want to know about this. Mr. Speaker, Sir, where is your basis? Where is your basis for calling an inquiry? Do not come and waste our time here and make a joke of such a valuable time in this House Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a total non-sugar production from 2016-2020 continued to increase at an annual average growth rate of 7.9 percent per annum. The 2019-2023 Strategic Development Plan of the Ministry clearly states that our strategic areas are:

- (1) Ensure that our household sectors are secured with regards to food and nutrition; and
- (2) Ensure that we expand commercial agriculture in national interest and doing so we will be able to push growth of export of our agricultural produce and at the same time which area that we are a bit behind is that we want to move from export of produce commodities to export of products.

That is something that we are working on, we cannot do that alone, we need to work with the private sector, food processors. There are other private sector operators who are gradually getting into the development of products. That is where our strategic advantage rely, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

There are a lot of products that we can develop out of our produce, our commodities and then when you do that, you will have strategic key advantage. Developing products out of produce commodity, will allow us to then hatch against market. You can store your products and then push it into the market when you see the returns are higher, when the prices are higher. Your shelf-life would be increase, your ability to transport throughout the world will be easier because you are dealing with products rather than produce, commodities which are perishable in nature.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the strategy that we have adopted and I want to say and I said this to our staff, that we do not want to create a dependent agriculture. I do not want another Minister later on to come and say that Dr. Reddy messed up by giving out subsidies and created a dependent agriculture which we are fighting at the moment. Changing the mentality and say, that you treat agriculture like business. We can do it, we can do it.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, according to the 2017 population and housing census, it was confirmed that Fiji's largely subsistence economy were 63 percent of the agriculture were engaged in the farming

consumption and that is why you will see that we are working very hard in terms of ensuring that we reach out to the rural, maritime, outer island population and enhance the ability to engage in agricultural production.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, any assistance we provide through production driven, is a much sustainable way of providing assistance rather than or basically cash grant.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, you must have seen on the television yesterday, read on the newspaper today that we have developed this cash for cultivation programme. The cash for cultivation programme is doing wonders in terms of:

- (1) reaching out and assisting households in terms of improving their livelihood;
- (2) securing food by engaging them in agriculture production;
- (3) by stimulating the rural economy if these household spend most of that money in the rural economy; and
- (4) green wonders in terms of getting them to bring these idle learning to agriculture, national interest so that later on, it will boost our export.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, some people have said to me, “You are increasing agriculture output. Where will they go? Where will they sell? Eventually, the market might get saturated.” Mr. Speaker, Sir, we do not want to put our tools down. When borders open and when the tourism sector opens up, we would not want to withdraw our produce from the export sector and push to the tourism sector, we want to be ready at that particular point in time so that while we fulfil the requirements for the tourism sector, we also will want to continue to increase our export of agriculture produce.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I note there were several questions raised today by Honourable Members of the Opposition on the human resource in the Ministry. Contrary to popular belief of the Honourable Members of the Opposition, the Ministry of Agriculture follows a robust, transparent and fair recruitment process. For senior staff, we have got external members sitting on the panel. Ministers do not indulge or interfere in the appointment process. If they truly talk about recruitment based on merit, then they will not be raising this question because they will find out that there are Directors, Permanent Secretaries, et cetera, more of them are from a particular ethnic group.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, they need to get out of the obsession about ethnicity if they truly want the people there get the best service. It is about who can deliver the best service, and that is what the recruitment process tries to ensure - that we get the right people to deliver the right job.

They questioned about AMA’s reach, Mr. Speaker, Sir, AMA is progressively doing an excellent job. They are contracting out to the farmers so that they are giving guaranteed market and a guaranteed price upfront, Mr. Speaker, Sir, so that more farmers can respond to that. The model of agriculture production that we have now is, we want to create demand, production and supply based on market signals.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, AMA is taking the market signal to the farmers in the rural, maritime, interior by saying that we will bio-produce this volume at this price, you produce, you supply. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we do not want to induce production and supply based on subsidies and grants. We want market signals to get the farmers to respond to that. That is the strategy that is sustainable, and AMA has reached out to the areas which all farmers were looking forward to. I clearly said to AMA, ‘your mandate is to reach out to the farmers in the interior, maritime.’

Mr. Speaker, Sir, someone raised about CBUL. Since its inception in 2008, CBUL has assisted a large number of farmers in terms of renewal of leases. The CBUL money every year, \$6.9 million is allocated which is utilised to subsidise the rent component. At the moment, for ALTA leases, the rental rate is 6 percent maximum Unimproved Capital Value (UCV). Government has decided that we incentivise landowners to utilise their land and to offer it for lease. Government will pick up the balance of 4 percent, and that is where the CBUL money goes.

For this Member to come into the House and say that the Government has done nothing, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in 2017/2018, 12,577 farmers were assisted with \$7.7 million; in 2018/2019, 12,577 farmers were assisted with \$7.7 million; 2019/2020, 11,000 farmers were assisted with \$6.9 million; 2020/ 2021, 10,000 farmers were assisted with \$6.9 million. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to tell the Members of the Opposition to get their data and facts before they come and criticise, saying that CBUL has done nothing.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Navuso Agricultural School is one we are working very closely. Government is giving grant to the Navuso Agricultural School, paying the salaries for all the lecturers and teachers out there in Navuso Agricultural School. All the students in Navuso Agricultural School are from the interior and maritime who come there to learn hands-on technical, agricultural skills. These are the young farmers who are the future of this country, because our farming sector is aging out, we will continue to support them. Unfortunately, I just cannot understand why Members of the Opposition are not being receptive. Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is no use and no purpose of getting this motion, I oppose this motion, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. I give the floor to the Honourable Qionibaravi. You have the floor.

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to support the motion before the House.

The agriculture sector is important to Fiji's economy for two reasons, firstly, food security and, secondly, foreign exchange earnings. Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate, Sir, that the agriculture sector's contribution to the economy continues to decline from 16 percent in the mid-1990s to about 11 percent in 2012 and to an estimate of 3.7 percent in the 2020-2021 Budget, which is in terms of the GDP. That figure is from the Supplementary Budget document for 2020-2021.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I acknowledge the contribution by the Honourable Minister for Agriculture this afternoon. There has been a surge of our people returning to the land, yes, as well as our rural communities that have taken to farming, but their farming needs to be supported.

The motion before the House is calling for a review of the non-sugar sector. There is a need to review the non-sugar component of the agricultural sector. Our nation needs to increase the agriculture sector's contribution to the GDP and the route facing us is through the non-sugar sector.

In my contribution to the COVID-19 Supplementary Budget in April last year, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have suggested for consideration, an increase in the budget for the Ministry of Agriculture to ensure that every community, every *Tikina* and other rural settlements are supplied with a digger. In that contribution, I had said, "*Sa oti na gauna ni i sivi kei na i sau*". There has been much emphasis on the sugar industry, which is already declining. Placing emphasis on non-sugar agriculture would be more favourable in terms of increasing the contribution of the agricultural sector to GDP, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

More *dalo*, *tavioka*, ginger and turmeric for exports, as well as vegetables, to meet the local demand; improving the dairy industry, beef and pork production; would be the game changer for Fiji, Mr. Speaker, Sir. In addition to planting, their addition in these products via food processing would aptly support the need to increase foreign earnings for our nation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would further ask that Government relook at the two major programmes that were ready to be rolled out by the SDL Government, to ensure that Fiji benefits from non-sugar agriculture - the Rural and Outer Island Development Programme and the Alternative Livelihood Programme. The two Programmes are put aside but Fiji can still benefit and they are in the reintroduction of the two Programmes, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

A peaceful approach to the agricultural sector is not sufficient. Fiji's backbone is the agriculture sector. Fiji is endowed with resources, both land and sea, to support the Fijian economy. Of course, to be used sustainably for the benefit of the landowners and the *i qoliqoli* owners to future generations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have raised a need to improve the quality of beef and pork for export before this august House earlier this year and there is the potential to increase goat farming for export, et cetera. I would also like to add, Sir, the need to improve the dairy industry in Fiji. Dissatisfaction of the manning of the dairy company was reviewed and reformed remains to the dairy farmers today.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the dairy industry also tend to contribute to the agriculture sector's contribution to the GDP. I have previously questioned in the House on how Fiji can increase the average milk supply per cow when comparing the average milk supply between a cow raised in Fiji and that in New Zealand. The declining dairy industry has seen a great reliance on milk imports to supplement local production to meet domestic demand, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

At the time of writing the Report, in-depth country assessment of the national system of agriculture and rural statistics in Fiji, and implementation of the global strategy to improve agriculture and rural statistics during Honourable Seruiratu's term as Minister for Agriculture, the industry was spending over FJ\$70 million to import milk products to meet 87 percent of the domestic consumption.

Mr. Speaker, at that time, local dairy production averaged from 20 million litres to 25 million litres annually, compared to domestic demand of 80 million litres that is required for Fiji. Professor Healy, Fiji National University's Vice-Chancellor then, had commented that Fiji can be better than New Zealand in the dairy industry sector.

On that note, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I urge and request that the plight of dairy farmers and association of farmers in Tailevu and Naitasiri be also looked into. I would like to reiterate my support for the motion before the House. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. I give the floor to the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure, Meteorological Services, Lands and Mineral Resources.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for giving me the opportunity to contribute to the motion. I do not support the motion that is before the House and I think the Honourable Minister for Agriculture has responded on this quite well.

I was looking forward to this motion because I wanted to see what data is going to be provided, that is, the grounds on which the motion has been made. What is the reason for this

particular motion?

Honourable Kuridrani pointed out a lot of things that are actually activities or things that happen in the Ministry. He talked about Brucellosis, the AMA, Navuso Agriculture School, the annual reports and all those sorts of things.

But really, if you want to talk about the need, if you are talking about the performance of non-sugar agriculture, you really need to look at the outcomes that we have been able to achieve out of non-sugar agriculture. Also, the outputs over a period of time, nothing that was presented has shown that there has been a decline, or that there is a big problem that needs to be solved, so nothing has been presented as shown.

All of the data you have is showing that over this time, back from the 1990s up to 2000, from 2006 up to the present time, there has been a constant increase in non-sugar agriculture outputs and outcomes. There has been an increase. It is like watching a rugby game and you are just watching some players and say, "Oh, the halfback has dropped a few balls, neither the first five-eighth missed a few of drop goals", but then you forget that they won the match. You do not look at the overall outcome but you pick nitty-gritty on small isolated incidents that had happened.

All of the data that has been shown so far from the Ministry of Agriculture, the Bureau of Statistics and the Reserve Bank of Fiji have shown the real GDP, the real value of everything that we produce from agriculture that is non-sugar, has increased over the past few years.

It has all increased, those are the figures that I have seen. The growth has happened, despite in some cases sugarcane being a bit flat in some years at the overall period of 2014 to 2019. The growth in sugarcane, some of it has been fairly flat in some cases but nevertheless, the overall output has increased substantially for agriculture.

You are winning the match, maybe there has been a few drop balls here and there but you are winning the match. There has been a substantial increase in terms of your real GDP, the real value of what you have been able to produce out of agriculture. That increase does not just come airy-fairy, it comes from people who put in place measures and plans to make that thing happen.

I was looking at the figures that we have here in terms of the real GDP in agriculture, in the year 2014, it came around \$7.2 million and in 2019, it was around \$9.7 million. That is substantive increase within that point in time around five years.

There has been massive increase and increase that has been continuous. So when you are looking at the sector, you need to look at two things - you can look at the level of change relative to other sectors and you can also look at the rate of change within that sector itself.

Within agriculture as a whole, it has been increasing, maybe the increase has not been at a speed with which things increase in other sectors but it has been increasing. In non-sugar agriculture in particular, that rate has been very prolonged in terms of the increase of this portion of agriculture – the non-sugar agriculture rate of increase has been significant and it has been increasing constantly.

Also, Mr. Speaker, Sir, when I look at these figures for agriculture last night, as I was looking in particular at the non-agriculture for the past two decades - the decade of 2010 to 2019, the data has shown that there has been higher average growth in that decade, compared with that in 2000 to 2009.

The Bainimarama-led Government started governing Fiji in 2006. The rate of change from 2000 to 2009 was such, but the rate from 2010 to 2019 has been increased, it has been far higher. That is the change that has been taking place over these past few years.

Also, in the decade 2010 to 2019, non-sugar recorded positive growth rate from nine out of the 10 years, compared with only five years of positive growth in the preceding decade. That means things have been put in place, what we have been able to get out of it has been improving far more in the decade from 2010 to 2019. That shows that the plans that have been put in place, the leadership or the structures and systems are beginning to bear more and more fruit in that second decade that I have been talking about.

Even though we have been very dependent on tourism, some of the statistics that we have in some of this period that we have from 2010 to 2019, along the way in some parts, the non-sugar agriculture has grown at a higher rate than the growth in visitor arrivals. Now, we all talk about tourism and we know that we need to decentralise, I mean, we do not put all our eggs in one basket and all Governments have been talking about that. If one has been looking at what has been happening over this past decade -2010 to 2019, that has begun to take place in terms of non-sugar agriculture. Those changes are taking place.

I had looked at some figures of value-addition for real GDP for non-sugar agriculture and, again, the numbers are quite substantive. It points to value-addition, increasing over this point in time for non-cane agriculture and the figures have also shown that from the non-cane exports, there is significant increases over the period from 2016 up to 2020. The exports that we are having out of non-cane agriculture have increased quite substantively. Agriculture value has increased. While its share has declined, the output and value have continued to increase over the years, Sir.

As a middle income country, we, in Fiji, like all other countries, our service sector and the rate at which our service sector begins to be a part of our GDP has risen much higher than the agriculture sector. That is known, but it does not diminish the fact of what Government has been able to do to enhance the agricultural sector.

So what I am trying to say, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that, there is nothing that has been presented so far that seems to show that there is a huge problem that we have with non-sugar agriculture. There has been a constant rate of change. Yes, the rates have not been the same as the service sector but that change has been there.

In terms of the Government's approach to agriculture, it is not just the Ministry of Agriculture that has a part to play, but also Ministries like mine, the Ministry of Infrastructure. We need to make sure that as much as possible, we can provide power, water, roads, jetties and all of those things. The massive investments that we have done into transport, power and water makes the rural areas much more attractive for our people to stay, even though we know our younger generation now do not intend or want to stay in those areas.

Despite that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think the point that I want to raise is that, the data shows that non-sugar agriculture has been expanding, it has been increasing and the rate of change is not that high, but is continuing to grow. I will not be surprised that with this emphasis and with the leadership that we have with the current Minister for Agriculture and also with the current Minister for Economy, as has been pointed out by the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, we are well on our way to making sure that we continue to enhance agriculture and in particular, non-sugar agriculture, that can take more of the burden in maintaining the growth of our economy. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak in support of the motion before the House that the Standing Committee on Natural Resources review the performance of non-sugar agriculture.

Mr. Speaker, we are hearing some very impressive figures today. The Honourable Minister for Agriculture says that non-sugar export was more than \$600 million.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- That is output.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- \$600 million output.

That is quite impressive, Mr. Speaker, given the way it was a few years back under the FijiFirst Government. We will recall that we were promised an agriculture revolution but I think the time is here now to see that the revolution come into reality. But, Mr. Speaker, in quantum, yes, very impressive but relative to GDP, it is still very poor, and that is where we are coming from. That is why we want a review of agriculture in the non-sugar sector.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have always said in this House that the most impressive support system in Fiji was the CSR, SPSM and the FSC today. The way it grew, the way it developed the sugar industry from the grassroots, to milling, to marketing, and that is the support system that we need to see in the non-agriculture sector. That is why we believe we should have this review.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Honourable Members from Government are talking about the figures but if \$600 million is an output today, not long ago, the Honourable Minister for Agriculture said that there is opportunity for cassava export to Australia to the tune of \$42 million a month. Now, that is more than \$300 million a year. So, if you do that and focus on cassava on the basis that he was proposing, Mr. Speaker, you are very close to a billion dollars.

I remember, Mr. Speaker, Sir, when we talk about tourism, in 2004 we had the Tourism Forum in Savusavu and from there, we decided to head towards a billion dollar industry and we coined this slogan that said at that time, "Towards a billion dollar industry", which we achieved in 2006. Perhaps, it is time that my colleague, the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, can also say that - towards a billion dollar industry for non-sugar agriculture. But to do that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, a lot of changes have to be made.

The Honourable Qionibaravi spoke about equipping the *tikinas* and villages around Fiji. Mr. Speaker, Sir, at a time like this when we are trying to improve productivity, especially in agriculture, I believe the *tikinas* and villages can play a big role in boosting production in non-sugar agriculture. Sir, the last count was that about 1,410 villages are in Fiji. If you look at those villages as economic units and you develop them with non-sugar agriculture, you can imagine what the production would be.

Just a bit of background to this, Mr. Speaker, in Nadroga/Navosa, we built a Collection Centre in Keiyasi to help all the farmers in the upper reaches of Navosa to bring down their produces to the Collection Centre which was set up by ADRA, an NGO and that either AMA or a company to collect from there and market them. But we had difficulties in meeting production because we discovered that land ownership in a traditional setting, Mr. Speaker, does not encourage our young men and women to start growing crops on a commercial basis.

We spoke about it quite at length in my Province and I said, “We have this land, just divide them between our young people, two acres or three acres each, let them produce tomatoes or carrots or whatever, harvest about three times or four times a year, the return can be quite significant.” But, I would ask the Honourable Prime Minister as the Minister for the iTaukei Affairs, we need to try and encourage this. You do not always have to go and lease land, a lot of the land is reserved and it can be apportioned on a traditional basis.

Most people today in the villages are surviving on a subsistence-kind of farming, there is no formal ownership. But, it can set up in such a way, Mr. Speaker, that a young man or woman can say, “I have two acres and I will grow something that is in demand, and thereby earn some income and boost agriculture production.” If there is a time to do this, Sir, it is this time. As we know, a lot of people are returning to the land; lots of them.

Last week, I said that in Sigatoka, the villagers from Volivoli to Nayawa and Laselase have two tractors now, and they are going full throttle in preparing land for cultivation. Honourable Qionibaravi is right, if you can also have a digger in each *tikina*, can you imagine what they can grow. These are the types of things that we need to look into, Mr. Speaker, hence the need to set up this review. We agree totally with Honourable Kuridrani, that it needs to be done. The income and earning capacity for our people can improve significantly, and we should do it.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a bit about tourism; I know people today are saying we put too much in tourism and forgot about this. Let me just ask everyone to understand this, when tourism comes back, it will help quite significantly or quite dramatically in reversing the economy of this country, the way it has been going. The reason, Mr. Speaker, is that, tourism has an inventory that is of a high level and much in demand - inventory in terms of airline seats and inventory in terms of hotel rooms.

As soon as travel comes back, the demand comes back and I was talking about pent-up demand, and once this thing is opened, they will flock to Fiji. So tourism will come back very quickly, we need it, but I think we have learnt a very important lesson here, that we need to also develop our agriculture sector, Mr. Speaker.

My colleague, the Honourable Whip, is talking about Fiji Airways. Yes, Fiji Airways, has been here for quite some time - Air Pacific and now Fiji Airways. It is just amazing how the FijiFirst Government appears to have taken ownership of Fiji Airways and saying that we do not appreciate the value of Fiji Airways to this country.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me just remind the FijiFirst Government that Air Pacific and Fiji Airways has been there since 1970s. The FijiFirst Government was only born yesterday, so do not try and preach to us about the importance of Fiji Airways.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Do not try and preach to us.

Last week, it was always the importance of Fiji Airways. You do not understand! Come on, you were only born yesterday. We know about Air Pacific, we know about Fiji Airways, come on!

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Who are you trying to teach here? We were the ones who brought up the Airline, Mr. Speaker.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- As we talk about agriculture, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we also need the market. I know the export market is quite buoyant, the demand is there, but when we are going to produce at a level that we envisage, we will need to have that market domestically. That is why, Mr. Speaker, I am always trying to emphasise that we do more food processing.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Food processing, Mr. Speaker, will help absorb the excess production that we will have in this country.

Let us remember one thing, a food processing company was the one that got this country on its feet for quite some time. That is why Fiji is surviving, and that is, FSC. Mr. Speaker, Sir, FSC is a food processing company, Rewa Dairy is a food processing company and PAFCO is also a food processing company, so we need to put a lot of more money into that.

On *Facebook*, I visited Ra and I bought pineapple in one of the villages in Ra. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, I have eaten pineapples all over the world but nothing like what I have tasted in Ra, and that is the opportunity there to process pineapple. The biggest processor in the world today is Puerto Rico. When I was in Canberra, they do not can it, they produce it in a kind of plastic container. I am sure you have bought it, Mr. Speaker, but I tell you, that is the kind of potential we have and we need to focus on that and start processing pineapple. Cassava, I am happy to say, Mr. Speaker, that people are really committed to milling cassava and the backup is there to produce it.

So, Mr. Speaker, all these things would tell us that we need to pause, have a committee to look into these things, establish what is there, review where we are today and see what else we can do about non-sugar agriculture. Mr. Speaker, I think we have made a very persuasive case here - I think we need to do it, the potential is there but we still need to set the formula right, hence the need to support this motion, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. I give the floor to the Honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity, Industrial Relations and Youth and Sports, you have the floor.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to contribute to the motion that is before us that the Standing Committee on Natural Resources review the performance of non-sugar agriculture.

At the outset, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do not support the motion. I believe the mover of the motion thinks that nothing is happening, apart from sugar industry. Seriously, this Honourable Member who is the mover of this motion is not aware of what is happening in this country in terms of agriculture.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the wording of this motion is a bit of concern. It is obvious that they are using the sugar versus non-sugar crops, which is the same old tactic of divide and rule. This is nothing new for the Opposition, Sir. What is the point of a review of non-sugar agriculture apart from the other crops? There is no point, apart from politics.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as mentioned earlier on by the Honourable Member, it is only under this Government that we have progressed from the preparation of seedlings to crop handling during harvesting to marketing. We have had more than 50 years to greatly diversify and strengthen agriculture in Fiji, but sugar politics and lack of foresight has badly let down our rural sisters and brothers. It is a task that has been taken in a serious and sustainable manner, and we can only start to see some of the benefits of the initiatives of the FijiFirst Government, which will continue to diversify and grow for the future generation to reap the benefits of a strong, diversified agriculture sector.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our Government's plan of action in this area has been a whole of Government approach, supported and guided by the Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of Agriculture. The current national development plan recognises that a stronger product-based agriculture is the key, and it will provide protective options for other crops, livestock and aquaculture. This is not only to ensure widespread of industry-based agriculture, Sir, but to create a stronger food security foundation for the future.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as part of the whole of Government approach, the Ministry of Youth has provided grants to youths across Fiji and recognised the need to expand our food security options. Grant recipients include those other than from the large industry-based agriculture sector, including sugar. This has also been extended on an inclusive basis of gender and to cater for youth in the large urban and peri-urban sectors.

The targeted funding, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the youth group has been taken on a sustainable mode by bringing together the rural youth and labour, and technical expertise, and whether to embark on a wide range of agricultural projects. Not only do we provide those projects for employment, it also provides local area for food security.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for my Ministry, a total of 145 youth clubs have been assisted from August 2020 to August 2021, with a total of 4,095 youths engaged in farming. And here, Sir, I wish to thank the Honourable Minister for Economy for rolling out this programme. The Ministry provides direct funding in the form of equipment hire, farming tools and equipment, such as spades, forks, knives, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, my Ministry with the assistance of Ministry of Agriculture, including the technical team, also provided advice and technical support to the youth. Sir, the Ministry also provides training for agriculture practices in partnership with OISCA, training centres and also the technical team from the Ministry of Agriculture.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our youth have been mostly engaged in the cultivation of rootcrops and vegetable farming, such as cassava, *dalo*, *yaqona*, yams, water melon, ginger, et cetera. Sir, we had signed an agreement with the Japanese Government to provide the youth with the much needed training for piggery and poultry farming as well.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank you and I wish to oppose the motion that is before us.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. I give the floor to Honourable Dr. Lalabalavu. You have the floor.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir for the opportunity to speak on the motion. First of all, the performance reviews are important because they help each side of this august House to gather thoughts and actually become more familiar with the areas that need improvement, and take note of those that are working well especially in the non-sugar sector.

Mr. Speaker, all my colleagues on both sides of the House will also talk on this motion and with statistics, but I would like to limit myself to what is happening on the ground. I currently reside in the rural area and one of the unfortunate things is that, I get to be close to the people and listen to their stories of success, struggles and hardships. Now and again, I always find time, and at times I get invited to visit farms, sit down with farmers, villages, settlements and I am sure we always also do that on both sides of the House. Out there in Cakaudrove, Taveuni and nearby islands, you do not have sugarcane plantations, although in Salialevu Estate we still have the remnant of probably the first sugar mill in Fiji. Furthermore, evidence of our sugar industry has impacted our livelihood in the village on projects such as churches, community halls, houses, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are also well-known for non-sugar crops such as *dalo* and *yaqona*. In the earlier years, coffee, cocoa, coconuts, currently eco-tourism, livestock and not forgetting our well-known marine eco-system. Last but not least, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are also well-known for our illegal marijuana cultivation. Our contribution to non-sugar agriculture ranges from subsistence farming, semi-commercial, commercial and a very few have successfully branched into exporting. While I need to acknowledge what we currently have on the ground, we are thankful for the Northern Development Programme (NDP), in that it has touched the lives of its recipients and in doing so, improved their livelihood.

I have been personally told of how fortunate some of the recipients are with the aid of NDP such as fibreglass boats and engines, farm aids, aquaculture, et cetera. But more can be done with NDP and in supporting this motion, can address issues such as how successful is the NDP? What are some of its success stories? What are some of its unsuccessful stories? Has there been a review of the NDP? If so, what is the outcome of the review?

Another point that needs to be acknowledged are the farm roads and roads under FRA. Roads, in general, aid farmers to and from their respective plantations and we acknowledge and are thankful for ongoing development of farm roads, however, there are always issues with regards to farm roads and roads under FRA in general. Most of the time farm roads and also to some degree roads - under FRA, are poorly maintained and serviced.

A poorly maintained road whether it be a farm road reduces the value of produce from the respective farmers, especially if the middleman drives the rough road to get to the farmers. I was informed during my visit to the farming community in Nalovo, South of Taveuni, that their road had not been maintained for more than one year and this is the effect of it, bus route is limited to the good parts of the road, school kids have to walk some distance to the good part of the road, come rain or shine. More expenses on car parts due to increased wear and tear. The water carting never reaching its intended destination.

Farm road requests is one of the most favourite of requests from the village, *tikina* and *yasana* meetings and most of the time, no feedback and that needs to be improved. Another thing that I also acknowledged is the Ministry of Agriculture programmes and aid. This must be acknowledged. While the various programmes initiated has, in one way or the other, improved knowledge, best

practices, innovations, outcomes and more importantly value for money. Some of the issues brought about by farmers include follow up to various programmes and evaluation. This can be improved by regular field visitations and consultations and more awareness of new initiatives through their respective zones. Too often and this is common that most farmers are there by accident and upon enquiring it to the Ministry of Agriculture and the respective places, they are told to come back because of limited supply.

Another issue, Sir, is, deforestation is a by-product of extensive farming. With the limited knowledge of how to farm efficiently and sustainably, this issue needs to be urgently looked at for the survival of our forest and contributing to tackling climate change.

I had mentioned before, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that our province is also known for illegal marijuana cultivation. The point that I would like to bring which I believe has a sensitive issue is industrial hemp cultivation. My province is famous for having golden triangle. At the moment, there is nothing golden about it. As far as those that cultivate it are caught because of its illegality. I am not proud of it and I also cannot ignore it. Around the world, countries have taken on board industrial hemp to contribute to their respective GDP and we do not have to look far but rather to Vanuatu, have also tapped into this lucrative industry with the involvement of government and its Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is just an idea and I believe it is worth looking into. Our contribution to GDP of the non-sugar sector in 2019 was \$725.8 million and the forecast for 2020 was \$757.3 million. Mr. Speaker, Sir, our known sugar sector, agriculture has the potential to deliver and contribute more to our GDP and believe more so on sugar and food security as well. It needs more resources and support to be able to achieve that.

I support the motion before the House and I thank you for the opportunity, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member and I give the floor to the Honourable Leawere. You have the floor.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise in support of the motion under debate which is now before the House.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I begin, I would just like to comment on what the Honourable Minister for Agriculture said in the House where he goes to such length to praise and commend the Honourable Minister for Economy for more than five minutes. The Honourable Minister for Agriculture wasted precious minutes by indulging and praise, which shows his lack of understanding, so my advice to him is to throw away the towel and let the Honourable Pillay carry out his work as Minister for Agriculture.

My brief contribution, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is taking this topic under debate to our schools and strengthen it. The Honourable Minister for Defence has been quoted as saying that the Ministry of Health, as well as his Ministry, are working closely in ensuring that COVID-19 safety protocols are an all Government effort. Likewise, Sir, it should be the way forward for the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Education by working together.

By way of background, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Education re-introduced Agriculture Shows in schools and invited the late Mr. Jonetani Cokanasiga as the chief guest. Students enjoy showcasing their garden produce and later returned as winners from the prizes they received, as well the knowledge gained from such an experience. It was a day of celebration and joy. The idea planted in the minds of the students were very useful.

In saying that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry should try and revive gardening in schools. An important issue is that, on that day, there was a paper presented by the teachers of Navuso Agriculture School at the Ministry Headquarters on why agriculture should be strengthened and made compulsory in schools.

The Navuso Agricultural School, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is set at a pace and should be targeted to be the school sits for agriculture. I thank the Honourable Minister for Navuso Agriculture School and hope it is fully supported to improve quality in the School. A walk in history, Sir, is to bring back agriculture advices at the Ministry of Education level. It is a must if we are to be successful in this sector.

Agriculture Education Offices had an important role to play during the SDL Government and SVT Government. They promote and strengthen agriculture in schools. The Ministry of Agriculture Minister should work in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and promote agriculture in the school curriculum from primary to secondary, as well as align with courses that are taught at the Fiji National University, University of Fiji and the University of the South Pacific. I call on the Government and the Ministry of Agriculture to listen to the Opposition's views in order to assist in the promotion of non-sugar agriculture, such as *yaqona*, poultry, cocoa, copra, *dalo* farming, ginger, other wood planting and nursery to those who are in horticulture.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to sum up, the Ministry of Agriculture's ongoing programme in research, extension and quarantine needs a boost with the correct and appropriate personnel qualified in their own specialities to be strengthened, as well as the human resource capability to enforce the programmes available in the Ministry.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for this opportunity and I support the motion before the House.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. I now give the floor to the Honourable Naiqamu. You have the floor.

HON. O. NAIQAMU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I would like to contribute to the motion before the House.

At the outset, I do not support the motion. I believe that the Opposition have failed to understand and witnessed the reality on service delivery by the agriculture sector, especially outside the sugarcane area. Our current markets are crowded with crops and vegetables, such as *dalo*, *kava*, cassava, tomatoes, et cetera.

Last week, the Opposition was not supportive with the Fiji Airways motion. They failed to see that the same Fiji Airways is transporting products from land outside the sugar sector. They need to be educated on development programmes that are happening in the non-sugar sector.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fiji Airways is supporting the non-sugar sector, especially in exporting turmeric, *dalo* and *yaqona* to overseas markets. The current work of the Ministry of Agriculture has recreated huge impact on the livelihood of our people during this pandemic. It clearly demonstrates the efficient and effective programmes developed by this Government through the Ministry of Agriculture, and I repeat that, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

I take this opportunity to thank the Honourable Minister and his staff for their hard work and commitment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. I give the floor to the Honourable Tabuya. You have the floor, Madam.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for this opportunity. I rise to fully support the motion before the House. As has been shared by my colleagues on this side of the House, and yes, of course shared by the Honourable Minister, that the primary sector does offer great hope for our country, because we are so blessed with many natural resources, including plenty of incumbent land, sunshine, water and strong and capable workforce, who are used to working together in communal settings. While FijiFirst has not prioritised the agriculture sector, which saw the decline in the sugar industry in the last decade, it still remains important to the nation's economy for income generation and food security.

The Honourable Minister for Agriculture stated that the agriculture is the backbone for any economy. So, please tell us this, Honourable Minister, how exactly those 8 percent of the national GDP represent the backbone? How does it explain the measly budget allocation year in and year out to agriculture by his precious Minister for Economy? After hearing the Honourable Minister playing the violin, going on about the Honourable Minister for Economy, I have only one word to describe it, "humorous", so look it up. Like what my uncle says; "too much".

Now, we currently produce a variety of traditional crops that have been mentioned like sugarcane, *dalo*, coconut, cassava and sweet potatoes but unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, we faced major shortages and I have raised this earlier in fruits and vegetables.

The market is often unable to supply the local demand, especially during a time of natural disasters and especially, during this time of COVID with the restriction in movement that we have. We have farmers up in the interior that are struggling to sell their wares at the borders when they come down. They are struggling to sell them so they have to take them back because of these strict rules that are applied and Government should consider what they are going through. As a result of inconsistent supply and lower than ideal quality vegetables and fruits are often imported and the Honourable Minister knows this.

The Honourable Minister for Agriculture and the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure have both defended the Non-Sugar sector that is steadily increasing but why are we still importing so much non-sugar products. Why? If it is steadily increasing why we are still importing so much?

In the year prior to the pandemic and I brought this up, Fiji imported almost \$300 million in vegetables and fruits. So, is the steady increase helping with our imports substitution? No, how is it that what you are gaining out of it is more than what you have been putting, Honourable Minister for Infrastructure?

Honourable Naiqamu has stated that we fail to understand that Fiji Airways is flying our non-sugar products overseas; really! Do we need all the aeroplanes to be flying? All of them are sitting on the runway? Is the return greater? Stop with the rhetoric please and the humorous.

Any future significant economic growth in Fiji must include, Mr. Speaker, the agriculture sector. I have alluded to this in my prior speeches in this House but I feel obliged that I have to repeat it. I have to keep repeating it to the other side until something meaningful is done. Now, Mr. Speaker, the steady increase started by this Government is simply not enough, especially at a time of crisis as this is what we are facing. Right, we are facing the crisis.

Fiji needs an agricultural revolution. We have talked about this so many times. It needs to happen now. Not this piecemeal attempts by the Government. They still sees a meagre budget allocation and is a direct reflection of how low our priority agriculture still is in their overall plan to revive the economy.

A large portion of money save from our national budget cost cutting measures from last year and funds source from overseas must be directed to revitalising our agriculture infrastructure and knowledge. Now, to grow Fiji's economy, we must grow Fiji's agriculture foundation. It is the key to faster recovery and poverty reduction.

The recent studies by the World Bank, Mr. Speaker, done in the Philippines found that, and I quote:

“Transforming the countries farming and food systems is even more important during the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure strong food value chains affordable and nutritious food and a vibrant rural economy”.

This is why I strongly support this motion, Mr. Speaker, for Parliament through the Standing Committee on Natural Resources which by the way majority are the Government Members. I do not know why they are opposing this to reveal the performance on Non-Sugar Agriculture. Sugar is a declining commodity, yet this Government told us by consuming to pump more money to sugar than non-sugar agriculture. So, since the Government is not doing their job, then Parliament neither needs you. That is why the call for a motion for the Standing Committee.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Then open up Kadavu!

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- We need to redirect our resources to invest in our agricultural infrastructure, diversifying our agricultural products, value-adding and using newer technology, Mr. Speaker. We need to upgrade our ease of access to modern agriculture equipment and technology.

The Government policies must encourage farmers through incentives and grants to invest in the latest farming equipment, technology and be trained in it, not just giving out seeds like the Honourable Minister is doing. We cannot allow cheap farm machinery, Mr. Speaker, to flood the market and take us back to the stone age. If we do not have the money or knowledge to invest and keeping our inflation economy alive then we must find an alternative that can replace it. That is the call for the review of non-sugar agriculture. It is time to grow Fiji by focusing on the primarily industry, niche markets where we can become the highest quality player using our rapidly growing international reputation and pristine environment as our marketing strength.

Mr. Speaker, I have spoken at length about such products, for example, industrial hemp which if we are serious about it, is being grown around the world, specifically for industrial use, including paper, rope, textiles, clothing, biodegradable plastics, paint, insulation, biofuel, food and animal feed. What else can Fiji produce that Fiji can look to take advantage of our brand? How about our bananas, guavas and our mangoes, as the Honourable Gavoka had mentioned, the world's best pineapples, organic fruit juices, organic coconut water and milk, pawpaw, essential oils, organic seaweed for food and medicine, cosmetic products, organic fertiliser, gluten free flour from cassava, *dalo* and breadfruit.

I acknowledge and thank the Tavioka Growers Association for making strides in raising the profile of *tavioka* and its value adding potentials, also products like cocoa, coffee, *saijan* or *boro ni dia* or moringa, and honey and vanilla.

Mr. Speaker, while large scale commercial agriculture projects are always needed, fast implementation projects can significantly increase Fiji's productivity in the short term which is what we need right now. Building the capacity for our rural communities to diversify agriculture to higher value crops and commercial agriculture will improve on and off farm livelihoods and opportunities for processing and value addition. Let us empower our small holder farmers, we have thousands of them across the nation.

Mr. Speaker, I want to turn to something that was mentioned by the Honourable Minister for Agriculture last week, I am actually very rarely in an agreement with him. Our over dependence and excessive cultivation of sugarcane as a monoculture over the last century, has resulted in the depletion of our soil nutrients, compaction reduced moisture storage and low yields. The fertilisers that have been brought in, have replaced nutrients and assisted with water retention producing better yields, they have also been like a two-edged sword since most of the fertilisers used in Fiji have synthetic or inorganic in nature which has caused negative effects on our environment.

The soil structure on ground water lands and surface water flora and fauna as the Honourable Minister for Agriculture had rightly pointed out last week so no matter which alternative high value crops we decide to focus our attention and resources, fertilisers are genuinely required furthermore, to assist with crop productivity.

The Honourable Minister for Agriculture noted that we spent an upwards of \$20 million a year, importing synthetic fertilisers which not only cause environmental damage as I outlined, but also sends valuable dollars overseas other than imported fertilisers itself provides our economy with really no ongoing benefits. We could import organic fertiliser but it is relatively expensive compared to synthetic alternatives and importing would still create a trade deficit. The problem will only get worse if we look to expand agriculture to be a greater part of our overall GDP. The good news is, there are solutions to this problem, there are technologies already in the market place for us to produce our organic fertiliser.

Now, to the Honourable Minister for Agriculture's credit, I understand they are already aware of these technologies and are actively involved in encouraging the use of it so thank you, Honourable Minister. The widespread adoption of technology like this in Fiji would almost certainly eliminate our \$20 million importation bill and quickly begin to reverse the negative environmental effects of synthetic fertilisers.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, diversification into high-value alternative crops to sugarcane and the adoption of newer agricultural technologies are the long-term out-of-the-box solution, focus-thinking and budgeting we need from our Government and since they are not listening, we really need this to go before Parliament and the Standing Committee on Natural Resources, to advance our nation and to protect our people and assets from the current and any future pandemics.

That is why, Mr. Speaker, I fully support the motion by Honourable Kuridrani before the House. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. I give the floor to the Honourable Jese Saukuru.

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I will be speaking in support of the motion.

Sir, Fiji's economy was relying heavily on revenue from tourism, sugar and agricultural exports and remittances as important sources of household income. Being one of the more remote countries on earth, the COVID-19 pandemic only further inflicted severe disruptions to the economic and social fabric of the country.

With global travel restrictions, diminishing tourism, interruptions to international trade and weakening remittances, Fiji is facing one of the most challenging times in history. Fiji is in dire need to put measures in place to safeguard its population from the multi-dimensional vulnerabilities that the people are exposed to.

At this juncture, I wish to take this opportunity, again, to thank the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, who, together with the Ministry of Defence and National Security, are spearheading our fight against the pandemic. A special acknowledgement to those frontline workers, who left the comfort of their homes to assist Lautoka residents during the 21 days isolation at the Lautoka Hospital.

It is common knowledge, Sir, that the pandemic is here and we need to put in measures to protect our communities. My concern, however, is the application of these measures because our people are already suffering a lot through unemployment, reduced wages, poverty, some broken families, high school dropouts, high mortality rate and many others that are related to the pandemic.

While it is important to secure our borders, let us not forget, Sir, that we are dealing with humans, who are also highly-social beings.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to repeat the statement I made last week on 26th May, and I quote; "We have been hit, our economy has been hit, our people have been hit, and as leaders of this beloved nation, we need to stand together and fight the enemy". From the Opposition side, we have been offering a bipartisan approach to prioritise our strategy through this crisis. Some of us may have very strong reservations which we must respect, but at the end of the day, we are all representatives of the people, regardless of which side of the House we may occupy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, my fear is that, we are falling into a vicious cycle of poverty and a death trap, if we deny our people the greatest opportunity to work together and collectively find the way forward for our nation. At this time in this august House, allow me to give some important pointers on our current situation.

Our economy is in crisis and may lack the confidence and low on investment. We need to focus on improving demand. Our key sectors of the economy are not performing, poverty continue to increase, revenue continue to decline and expenditure must be strictly controlled. We need better synergy between fiscal and monetary policy, and there is a need for proper policy mix.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in supporting the motion before the House and our path to economic recovery, allow me to share the story of a government that was only established on 14th May, 1948. Its total land mass is 22,145 square kilometres and is only 3,812 square kilometres bigger than Fiji. They developed their country with missionaries' zeal. Over half of the country's saline soil was arid or semi-arid, only 20 percent of the total land was arable, but then it tripled the territory used for farming.

Its production also multiplied 16 times since then, its agricultural success is a learning lesson. Close cooperation between farmers, agro industry and technological research are key to their success. Its research and development is 17 percent of its total agricultural budget. Israel's success story is

neither its military nor the sophisticated technology, but agriculture. Israel has zero imports on agriculture.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I reiterate my earlier call to revitalise the resource sector of our economy. According to the 1996 ADB Report on agriculture, it says and I quote:

“Fiji has an impressive quantity and range of traditional food crops grown. These are grown throughout Fiji and are identified as a hidden strength of the economy, yet only 40 percent of energy needs come from locally-grown food”.

This, Mr. Speaker, Sir, would be true for other non-sugar sectors. Our people need policy options that would address the issues that I have raised and to allow Government to successfully mitigate the impacts on our people through the various social protection responses.

In this regard, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am asking Government to consider the relaxation of some lockdown areas, of course, without compromising protocols to allow the much-anticipated agricultural activities and the resource sector as a whole, ready for the domestic and export market.

Sir, I agree with the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, that we need to be exploring value-adding for our raw agricultural produce.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to end my contribution by saying that our nation still need divine intervention and God’s healing. That is the reality that, we, as leaders and policymakers must accept and respect. From the Holy Scriptures, II Chronicles 7:14 reads, and I quote:

“If My people who are called by My Name will humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from Heaven and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”

Thank you, Sir, for the opportunity to contribute to the motion, and I fully support the motion before the House.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member, and I give the floor to the Honourable Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport. You have the floor.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for allowing me to contribute to this motion for debate.

First of all, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think some Honourable Members of this august House have actually gone and researched Roget’s Thesaurus or the Oxford Dictionary for the battle of who can come up with the biggest word, nothing that is rather hilarious actually, Sir, but in a very simple term, I think, it is utter stupidity to be doing that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Opposition seems to be living in a world of their own, with very selective memories. The Fijian Government has actually been working tirelessly for the agricultural sector and, in fact, our efforts have actually doubled or even better than double during this particular pandemic.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am not surprised at all as to how the Opposition keeps beating their own set record for their narrow-mindedness. On the one hand, the Government is looking for ways to encourage those that are engaged in the agricultural sector to not only think about selling cash crops

but instead, to focus on diversifying and also on value-adding- a matter that was just mentioned by Honourable Saukuru about value-adding and the mover of the motion is actually talking about two crops and, that is, taro and cassava. It would be nice if the Honourable Members of the Opposition could open their eyes, just broaden the horizon a bit and broaden their perspective. Fiji has actually come a long way, Sir, and let me try and introduce a change in the Opposition's thought process.

A decline, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in export of agricultural products does not mean that there is an overall decline in the agricultural sector, rather this signals an important move towards value addition and economic diversification. Fijian exporters are now simply not exporting raw materials but instead, they are actually converting these raw materials into semi-processed and processed products. I do not disagree with the Honourable Gavoka, of course, yes, we can do more, but we are doing it already. You can actually convert these raw materials into semi-processed and processed products.

Now, in trade terms, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we call this 'substantial transformation', which means that the good underwent a fundamental change and value addition. This, as a result, helps exporters seek a higher value for their commodity in a particular processed form than it would have, otherwise, fetched in its raw or original form. This is also highly useful in the case of Fiji and any other country, whose agricultural sector is actually threatened by climate change and I think we all know about this.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, comparing the consumption patterns and the trends for agro-based products, you would also notice that a dramatic shift in consumer choices over the years, and this is actually induced by a fast-paced and busy lifestyle of individuals in today's time. Consumers actually prefer healthy and wholesome food that is also fast and easy to prepare. For example, bottled ginger paste, lollies and tablets, tamarind chutney and organic juices - a lot of which we actually see in our own supermarkets and even products that are used for social activities, such as coffee and chocolates, instant kava and kava capsules. Just go to one of our local supermarkets and you will see a plethora of stuff that are actually being made in Fiji, using one of our own local products, and these are all examples of value added agricultural products. So you cannot come up with a motion like this, Mr. Speaker, Sir. You cannot say the things that all other Opposition Members were saying, making it look like that nothing is being done.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our agricultural sector has continued to perform consistently, even during a pandemic, even despite so many cyclones. This clearly indicates that despite the challenges that we have had, agriculture will remain an important sector for the generation of economic activity, and also for the access to fresh, healthy and nutritious Fijian-grown produce.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Opposition harps on about the percentage of contribution of the agriculture sector being low. Does the Opposition even understand what makes up the GDP? They compare figures from more than 20 years ago, when the GDP was significantly small and the contributors to the GDP were only a few sectors or industries.

As the economy grows and as we have new contributors becoming part of the GDP, even when the value of the contribution, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is increasing, the percentage may be low and coupled by the fact that our tourism services sector is actually quadrupled. This, by no means, is an indicator of a failing sector. As the Honourable Minister for Agriculture has stated, the agriculture sector continues to grow, and it continues to grow in new and innovative ways.

Now for the past five years, Mr. Speaker, agriculture's contribution to GDP has averaged around 4.2 percent and in 2019, agriculture and only crop and livestock, contributed around \$725.8 million. And in the same year, more than 87,000 farmers produced approximately 327,000 metric tonnes of agricultural commodities as compared to 315,000 metric tonnes in 2018. You tell me that

is wrong! Now, this is the kind of information that everyone needs to know. So, please, do not come to the House and just pick something out of the air and just say it without any statistical evidence.

Our agriculture export, Mr. Speaker, continue to grow and in the first half of 2020, exports of our fresh and chilled commodities grew by 15 percent, and this is in comparison to 2018. This actual growth, Mr. Speaker, is attributed to kava exports to the United States of America (USA), taro to New Zealand and Australia, turmeric and ginger to the USA, and Fiji is one of the top three exporters of turmeric to the USA. That is no small feat, Mr. Speaker, Sir. We have actually exported spices to the Netherlands and fresh produce and exports to the Pacific Island Countries, and we continue to do so, despite the challenges that we have.

Now, Mr. Speaker, Sir, instead of pouring scorn on the agriculture sector, we need to help it grow. As the Minister responsible for Commerce, Trade and Tourism, we have actually worked very well. There has been a collaboration. So, it is no use coming and saying, "Oh, the Minister for Agriculture did not collaborate with anyone." We have, and as a matter of fact, the collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture started many, many years ago.

I remember when Honourable Seruiratu was the Minister for Agriculture. Through these particular partnerships that started then, we have accelerated agricultural diversification in areas of competitive advantage and I am talking about high-value niche exports - turmeric and ginger. There has been an increase in livestock farming, especially goat farming, and there is a move towards the production of cheese, a cheese called feta cheese. I think you all know about feta cheese and this comes from goat milk. Feta cheese is actually a gourmet product, and it is actually made from goat milk.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, through these particular programmes and through our own national brand, the Fijian Made - Buy Fijian brand, it provides the opportunity, especially for our farmers, to get brand recognition not just locally but also globally. Under this brand, we have actually also gone ahead and created the Fijian organic label. This branding is actually for the high-end and niche Fijian produce and products. Now, being licensed under this particular campaign provides leverage to market Fijian produce in the global market.

Over the years, licensed businesses have benefitted from this consolidated branding approach. It has given them a national brand (platform) which depicts quality, authenticity and actually standards. As part of this national branding, the Fijian Trade Commission, Mr. Speaker, based in the critical markets that we have, such as Australia, New Zealand, China and the USA, actually provide technical support and guide the businesses on procedures to be met to enter these markets. Along with these, there are so many pathways that have actually been created by the Ministry. So, it is a whole of Government approach that is assisting agriculture to grow, to diversify and to get it to where we want to take it to.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have worked on linking the sector to tourism, despite what Honourable Gavoka may say. He thinks it is actually being done or has not been or just being done today, but we have actually been quite successful in that arena.

According to a report that was just released by the International Finance Corporation in this area in 2018, there was a significant reduction in imports of agriculture produce. Honourable Tabuya, please read it. From 80 percent in 2011 to 52 percent in 2017 and was noted that in 2018, 48 percent of the fresh produce needs of hotels were actually produced and sourced locally, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think they just need to show a whole lot more patriotism regarding our agriculture sector. They have forgotten their resources and the incentives that are provided for in the agriculture sector, especially for commercial agriculture and agro-processing.

In addition, the smallholder farmers, Mr. Speaker, Sir, are assisted through the provision of farming implements to expand their livestock farms into commercial. Furthermore, within the Ministry of Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport, we have the co-operative business. We are actually encouraging farming clusters through the formation of co-operatives to engage in, and farm mechanisation programmes in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture.

For example, Mr. Speaker, Sir, newly formed co-operatives are actually able to access tractors, rice harvesters and other value addition equipment. I hope this gives the Opposition some idea, if they have actually listened, of the significant amount of work that the Fijian Government and the Fijian people have actually done, and I take my hat off to the agricultural sector. They continue to grow, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Opposition creates the problem and I say this again, it is the Opposition that creates the problem and wants to act as if they are suddenly finding the solution. Let me tell you why, Sir.

The Fijian Government introduced the concept of the Land Bank where resourceful Fijians who are willing to put their land to productive use, with the consent of the whole unit, could deposit their land. But no, Sir, the Opposition has become its biggest roadblock. They have chastised the Fijian Government for this particular initiative. They have created a stigma, that the Government will actually take away their land. These landowners, Sir, deposit their land and this is actually done, and there are many people who are interested in large scale farming. So, sometimes they should just look at their own house and stop this kind of rhetoric because they are the ones that are being the obstacle in the first place.

I would ask, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that there is no need for a review but for the House and the Opposition to realise that if they stop these rhetoric, stop the nonsense and just work together and work with the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport in our efforts to continue to add value to the sector and put our natural resources to productive use, in order to continue to produce the whole class Fijian broad and organic products.

I see, Sir, there are some novel ideas already, some even talking about medicinal marijuana, they are being creative, so more credit to them, Sir. Maybe, it is something that can be done, we do not know, it has to be explored and there are many ways to think about these things. But I wish they would stop for a moment and realise that is not just us, they are ones that are being an obstacle at every turn. This started many, many years ago, with the Honourable Nawaikula in the agriculture sector, who was stopping all the leases. I could go on and on and on.

In short, Mr. Speaker, we do not want the Opposition to be our biggest impediment as we grow as a nation. We want them to, at least, stop and think and stop pouring scorn on it at all times. This is a sector that we can actually turn into a huge industry, absolutely huge industry! And none of those reports are wrong, of course, we can. Yes, we can, and we must all think along the same lines as I have just actually spelt out.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also wanted to make a comment regarding the gibberish that has gone on about the Honourable Attorney-General. Please, it is becoming childish. It really is, Sir. It

is quite ridiculous and preposterous to be going on because at the back of it, it would seem that it has got nothing to do with anything, except that the basis of where it comes from is wrong.

It is not good for Fiji, asking for his removal. The prerogative of who becomes the Minister for Economy belongs to the Honourable Prime Minister. It is his choice, leave it alone! That is his choice, he decides who does it, and we support him wholeheartedly as the Honourable Prime Minister does, Sir. We need to grow

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Is that not a crime? That is a crime.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Honourable Gavoka's comments regarding Fiji Airways, "Awh, do not tell us about Fiji Airways, before that Air Pacific was around." Yes, it was around but you nearly ran it into the ground.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for allowing me to contribute. I do not support the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. For the purposes of complying with Standing Orders, with respect to sitting times, I will allow a suspension motion to be moved.

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

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move under Standing Order 6:

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

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

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

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. We are on the last item on today's agenda and I know that you still have in your list a few speakers from both sides of the House, thus the request for us to sit beyond 4.30 p.m.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is open for debate on the motion. Does anyone wish to take the floor - there being no one wishing to take the floor?

Honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament, do you have anything further to add

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- No, thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES TO
REVIEW PERFORMANCE OF NON-SUGAR AGRICULTURE**

HON. SPEAKER.- We continue, Honourable Members, and I give the floor to the Honourable Tuisawau. You have the floor.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to contribute to the motion at hand on non-sugar agriculture. I know a lot of issues have been covered and I would like to request the Members on the other side of this honourable House to refrain from using various derogatory terms, for example, stupidity, narrow-minded, need to be educated. I think it is good that we keep it level-headed and that we move away from our superiority attitude that we are smarter than others, and then we should be alright.

I know a lot of comments have been made regarding the motion at hand but I would like to share the budget in terms of the Ministry of Agriculture with the non-sugar sector we are discussing, in particular the sector on crops which is covered under Head – 30 of our budget (Programme – Crops, Activity 2 – Extension) and I note in particular SEG 8 where a lot of the non-sugar crops are covered and there are various programmes there which are commendable, and are as follows:

- Agriculture Extension Services Crops - \$600,000;
- Rice Farming Programme - \$222,000;
- Nadarivatu Farming Programme;
- Cocoa Farming Programme - \$300,000;
- Ginger Farming - \$600,000;
- Vanilla Farming Programme - \$350,000;
- Yaqona Farming - \$250,000; and
- Dalo Flat Land Development - \$400,000

We do have Potato Development, Farm Access Road and Pineapple Farming, so there are various programmes there which have been covered in the budget. However, I feel that the budget is inadequate as mentioned by the Honourable Members with regards to the development of that non-sugar sector. And given the current situation we are facing on COVID-19 there is a need to review that and I hope that in the current 2021-2022 budget formulation, this will be looked at in detail.

We have also raised the issue about farm mechanisation and there is an amount thereof \$500,000. I heard the Honourable Minister of Youth mentioning the distribution of farming implements, et cetera to youths. I work with a youth group and I know that is helpful but mechanisation is the way to go as mentioned by the Honourable Minister and for that we need diggers and tractors for land clearance, drains, land preparation for planting. There has been an announcement just recently about the \$200 for farmers, and I believe that needs to be complemented by tractors and diggers especially for our rural based farmers. The issue about the use of manual labour is something that we need to deal with and also look forward to mechanisation.

While mentioning that budget, I note the press release by the Permanent Secretary for Prime Minister's Office, Mr. Karan, on 21st July, there was a table provided in terms of the years of sugar help by government and from 2016 to 2020 that amounted to \$299 million, and that is quite a huge amount. Some have queried why we are comparing sugar and non-sugar. I believe it is good to make a comparison not for issues of discriminating against anyone but rather to look at the benefits we derive from a certain amount of inputs. Unfortunately, with those benefits the sugar industry has not recovered to its original or prior state.

Just sharing some of those figures, the assistance includes Cane Planting Grant and Cane Access Roads, for example, cane access roads for those years or for one year ranges from \$3 million to \$7 million, while the cane access roads in this crop sector is \$800,000. So, that is why we from this side of the House believe that there should be a review in terms of the return on investment of public funds, which is why I am pointing out the budget we have and also the ones which was allocated for the sugar industry. Not only that but in the sugar industry we also have cane top up payment. There is also assistance with fertilizer subsidies which range from \$269 million to 2019-2020 \$15 million. So, all in all those government assistance amounted to, as I mentioned, \$299.2 million from 2016 to 2019.

The other issue I would like to point out, especially to the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, is the 5 Year Development Plan 2017-2021 and there is a section there on non-sugar agriculture. I point out in particular the paragraph which states, and I quote:

“Commodity plans for each product will be developed or reviewed. These plans will set targets and map out clear strategies to be implemented over the planned period. Government will support initiatives for crop replanting, supplying agro inputs, extension services and training for young farmers, relevant crop-oriented research, provision of high-yielding and climate resilient seeds and crop varieties, and better land-use planning. Apart from these initiatives, the commodity plans will provide directions for cluster farming, contract farming, and access to finance and labour requirements.”

There is fundamentally one question I have; with this 5-year development plan 2017/2021, what is the progress on this? Where is the report which updates us on these plans? These commodity product plans, I am not sure whether that has been produced or not, but it would be useful for the Honourable Minister to report on that.

When you are still on that section, there are also specific programmes and projects which are specified there. For example, mechanisations of farms through corporative and cluster system. From 2017 to 2018, there are figures for the percentage increase, and by end of 2022, the target or the output - 40 percent farms mechanised through cluster system. So, we are now in 2021, and these are the kind of things I would expect the Honourable Minister of Agriculture to report on. There are others, for example, Agriculture Extension – Crops (No. of staffs trained), Export Promotion Programme, Food Security Programme (number of farmers assisted).

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Yaqona Development Programme is quite interesting because they had 2,000 per year from 2017 to end of 2022 and the output expected by the end of 2022, is 10,000 *yaqona* farmers assisted. That again would be interesting and we also have the Ginger Development Programme 400 in the year 2017-2018 and by the end of 2022 it would be 2000. Again there are also figures on the livestock sector (increase in livestock production by 5 percent per annum) and I know that has not been achieved.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the Dairy Development Programme there is 60 for 2017/2018 and by the end of 2022 it would be 300 farmers and a 15 percent increase in milk production. Again, it is doubtful whether that has been achieved.

We also have the Tuberculosis Control Programme, Livestock Rehabilitation Programme and again it will be useful for us as a Parliament to receive a report which updates us on the progress on this section on non-sugar agriculture KPIs, which should have been achieved by 2022. We also have farm access roads, 140 by 2022. Again as mentioned, there is inconsistency in the development of

farm access roads in the various sectors between the sugar and non-sugar sectors. These are some of the details I thought is important for us to highlight in order to support our motion at hand.

To summarise, it is quite discouraging to note that the agriculture sector contribution to GDP continues to decline. In 2005, the agriculture contribution to GDP was around 10 percent and in mid-2020, it is only around 6 percent.

The Honourable Minister mentioned a figure of 8 percent and I am not sure where he got that figure from, it has probably increased from that 6 percent, but the fact of the matter is that, it has declined as a contribution to GDP from 2005. Nearly 48 percent of our total population reside in our rural areas and depend very much on agriculture for livelihood and income and 52 percent of our population living in the urban centres, also depend on agriculture produce.

The Government policy on food security seems to have failed despite all the hype made by the Honourable Minister for Agriculture to revitalise the agriculture sector. Food security is a basic human right and it is at risk. It is also draining our foreign exchange earning which is on a declining trend because we import more than 40 percent of our food products.

Most of the imports of our agriculture products can be grow easily in Fiji sustainably. There is too much emphasis on the sugar industry rather than trying to strike a balance with the Non-Sugar Agriculture.

Mr. Speaker, there is no genuine commitment to allocate necessary resources to non-sugar. The cancellation of the alternative livelihood programme and the Rural and Outer Island Development Programming in 2007, clearly shows the lack of commitment to the agriculture sector.

I believe that we should move away from subsistence and focus more on commercial farming through well-developed mechanisation programmes, better research and development and robust marketing of our local products.

We also need to support incentivise resource owners to utilise arable land available to them which is why we are insisting on a more efficient, more effective way of mechanisation. Work closely with various villages the *tikina*, *bose ni yasana* and various entities including the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs in how to better improve this mechanisation programmes and of course, in terms of not only mechanisation but organising our landowning units to engage in commercial agriculture from planting crops but also value adding up to export. That is the area which we feel that needs to be really improved on. The need to be facilitated in order to ensure that our traditional landowners are part of this agriculture revolution to commercialisation which you are talking about.

I end by reminding us of the whole Chinese proverb; “Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a life time.” And that is what we are proposing, Sir, in this motion we have in front of us, thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. Honourable Members, we will now take a break for half an hour, after which we will continue with the debate. I still have six speakers on my list.

The Parliament adjourned at 4.32 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 4.59 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will continue with the debate. I give the floor to the Honourable Professor Prasad. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me, first of all, start by saying that I was not surprised at the very narcissistic or egoistic comments by those from the Government side about the need for a Parliamentary Standing Committee to look at this particular issue.

In the last six years, Mr. Speaker, we have not heard one motion in the previous Parliament and in the last two years in this Parliament, accepted by the Government to actually look at issues either by the Parliamentary Standing Committee or by a Joint Parliamentary Committee appointed by Parliament. It gives me this impression that this Government feels that they are the most important people, they know everything, whatever they have done is alright and there is nothing wrong. I think this kind of tendency, Mr. Speaker, is quite depressing and especially, in this particular situation.

Mr. Speaker, I know there has been a lot of statistics thrown around and a lot of stories, so I am not going to repeat some of those but I am going to put this whole motion into a particular context. But before that, Sir, I wish to respond to the Honourable Minister for Economy in answering Honourable Qereqeretabua's question, whereby he made some reference to me and said that I need to understand this better. I actually understand the budget process better and I think what the Honourable Minister for Economy actually said in his response to the question was actually quite misleading, in my view.

When we have a budget and everyone knows this, Mr. Speaker, you look at the first page of the Budget Estimate where you have estimated revenue, then you have estimated expenditure, then you have the net deficit, then you have the debt payment and then the gross deficit. For example, if you look at the 2020-2021 Budget, the revenue forecast was estimated at about \$1.6 billion, the expenditure was \$3.6 billion and the net deficit was about \$2 billion.

When you talk about the budget support, when two Governments decide to give budget support to us, it could only be for two reasons, Mr. Speaker. The first is, our revenue target is not achievable. That means we have a shortfall and in this particular situation, that would be quite understandable. If, for example, it is not a revenue shortage, then the other reason could be that we cannot borrow what we approved in Parliament, which means we need additional budget support.

I think the Honourable Minister for Economy was not honest in his answer. I think he should honestly, in a transparent way, say whether budget support is coming because we are not getting the revenue, or we are not able to borrow all that \$2 billion which is the net deficit that we ought to borrow and, therefore, we need budget support.

If we are saying that this budget support is going to lead to a reduction in deficit because we do not have to borrow, then, again, Mr. Speaker, it does not make sense. For example, if we had the revenue, if we had the borrowing and if we are getting additional budget support from additional activities, that is not leading to a reduction in deficit or debt, and if you look at the gross deficit - \$749 million, we are actually borrowing to pay our debt. So, I think what Honourable Qereqeretabua asked was whether that \$115 million that the Australia and New Zealand Governments have given for budget support, is going to be used for this particular purpose because we are in a crisis, we may not have the money in the budget. So, I think we need to be honest and transparent, and all the more reason in this crisis to be honest and transparent about what we are doing.

Coming back to the motion, Mr. Speaker, let me also say one more thing. I am quite disturbed that some Honourable Members from both sides, whenever there is a discussion on sugar, some of them feel that the sugar industry is just about one ethnic group. When someone talks about non-sugar crop sectors, they think that it is about just one ethnic group. And I was hearing the Honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity, Industrial Relations and Youth and Sports, and that is the impression he is trying to give. Let us cut this crap! Sir, 25 percent of the farmers in the sugar industry are iTaukei and more successful farmers.

HON. P.K. BALA.- You tell your colleagues in SODELPA, your coalition partners.

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- You have to understand that, and you deliberately do that because you want to create that feeling.

HON. P.K. BALA.- You are the creator of all these!

So within the non-agriculture sector, more than 30 percent to 40 percent of the people would be from all different ethnic groups, so let us put this into context, Mr. Speaker.

Let me come back to the context, I was going to talk about this motion. I think it is an important motion. It is not about the percentage of GDP, I think if you look at the context in which this discussion should take place, Mr. Speaker, and I want to highlight this - the number of individuals living in poverty as estimated from the 2019-2020 Household Income and Expenditure Survey, to be 29.9 percent. This would equate to about 258, 053 of the total population or 45,724 households or 22.9 percent of all households living in poverty during that period.

Out of the four Divisions, Mr. Speaker, the Eastern Division recorded the highest poverty rate of 42.7 percent. The rates of poverty in the Northern and Western Divisions are estimated to be around 35.2 percent and 32.4 percent respectively. So, of the total population, Mr. Speaker, the incidence of poverty in rural areas is twice the rate of poverty in urban areas.

Of all the people, Mr. Speaker, who had been defined as living in poverty, around 62 percent live in rural areas. So, the question is, Mr. Speaker, if what I have heard from Honourable Government Members that agriculture is expanding and they have done all the right things, why are so many people in the rural areas still living in poverty?

I notice that the Honourable Minister for Agriculture did not make any reference to the Fiji 2020 Agriculture Sector Policy Agenda. The Honourable Minister for Defence would probably know this because I think this Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) Joint Study was done by the Ministry of Agriculture and FAO. And in that document, there is a very clear plan as to how the agriculture sector as a whole included sugar, Mr. Speaker, in that plan, although sugar is being dealt with separately by a separate Ministry, but let me just talk about agriculture in general.

One of the stark realities from the impact of COVID-19 on our economy is that, it has brought out the reality that a diversified economy is always better than putting all our eggs in one basket. And over the last 10 or 12 years, Mr. Speaker, we may have cautiously put all our eggs in one basket. Today, if we had been producing 3.2 million tonnes of sugarcane that we were producing in 2006, the negative impact of the reduction in the tourism industry, the loss of jobs and income in the Western and Northern Divisions could have been cushioned, in a big way, through the incomes of the sugarcane industry if we were producing about three million tonnes of sugarcane.

Under this Government, the sugar industry has declined to about 3.5 million tonnes, 6 million tonnes to 7 million tonnes and let me say this on this occasion, Mr. Speaker, that this was a time when Government did not heed the call of the growers to have \$20 payment for the four cane payments.

(Honourable Member interjects)

(Technical glitch experienced through virtual connection)

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- into the economies of the Western Division and the Northern Division, this was an opportunity missed. In fact, I would say that this is some sort of economic sabotage by the Government about the Western and Northern economies by not....

(Honourable Member interjects)

(Technical glitch experienced through virtual connection)

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- So, let me put the whole context of agriculture into perspective.

The other point that I want to make, Mr. Speaker, is, if you look at the Fiji 2020 Agriculture Sector Policy Agenda which I referred to earlier, , you will notice that there were plans, for example, on how to revive the copra industry.

That Report actually talked about going back to 1977 level of production because the production had declined, because the new imperatives of the international market, new technologies and new products coming out and the coconut industry was supposed to plant 615,000 trees per year within 5 Years from 2015. We do not know what happened. No one from the Government side, not even the Honourable Minister for Agriculture talked about it.

Yes, we have had some success stories about individual farmers, coconut farmers and products - that is fine, that is understandable. We applaud that no one is pouring scorn as the Honourable Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport said. No one is pouring scorn on the success stories, Honourable Minister. We understand and we support that and, in fact, there are even more opportunities for high valued crops, such as vanilla. In fact, in some parts of the country, the climatic and soil condition is quite conducive to exploring some of these high value products.

Yet, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fiji 2020 Agriculture Sector Policy Agenda Report is actually quite a good Report. It actually talks about how there should be a land use plan. I am not sure if the Ministry of Agriculture has actually done a proper land use study and identified areas where different new high value niche non-sugar crop could be grown and identify investors into those areas. So, those are some of the important observations in that Report.

I do not begrudge the Honourable Minister for Agriculture for going out and be with the farmers and doing things but I think their focus, Mr. Speaker, has been to be out there and somehow do a reactive thing to see where farmers can be helped. Yes, that is fine.

I know he talked about this funding from the Australian Government through ADRA and incidentally, I did not hear the Honourable Minister say anything about the funding from Australia. He puts it as if the funding is coming out from the Ministry itself, so those are important interventions.

That is fine. We are giving cash to the farmers to equip and empower them, to buy certain tools or whatever, or income support for them to be able to do farming.

Some of the statistics that the Honourable Minister for Agriculture quoted, he should have explained that. He is an Economist, although today he sounded like he surrendered his economic credentials to the Honourable Minister for Economy, but he should understand that in 2020 when people started losing jobs around March or April, when the tourism industry started going down and the impact of the tourism industry also had a multiplier effect like sugar, it slowly affected the whole country.

There are many people that I know, Mr. Speaker, Sir, who would not have gone back to the village or to the settlements in the rural areas, but they actually went because they were finding it very, very difficult with reduced wages and loss of income to actually pay rent and live in the urban areas. So, if you are saying that suddenly, there has been an influx of interest in farming and somehow implying that it is deliberate Government policy which is incentivising these farmers, then the Honourable Minister ought to correct that - this is a temporary phenomenon.

However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, going forward, this is what I am going to say to the Government and to the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, that this is a time to reset the economic agenda because as we know and as every Economy Minister or Finance Minister around the world would know, that we are going to have a new normal. There will be new imperatives that will play out from different sectors of the economy, so this is one time we need to relook at where our priorities are, which other sectors in the long term in the next five to 10 years and, in fact, we must plan for 10 years.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I said five years when we were looking at the COVID-19 Response Budget but at that time, we were all hoping and praying that things would return to normal as soon as possible. But it appears, Sir, that even if things return to normal and we have the borders open by the end of the year or we hope before that, but things are not going to be the same for the tourism industry and for many other sectors of the economy. And we have to now think very carefully which sectors of the economy would be constrained by budget.

We know that we are not going to have all the money to put out into the different sectors. That is why a very, very proper intelligent planning, looking at the opportunity costs of doing this or that, putting money in this sector or that sector, and I think only when we are able to do a thorough planning and analysis of where we are going to prioritise, we will be able to come out of this in the next three years to four years, five years or beyond. So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, let us support this motion. It is not as if somewhere, the Opposition is going to get some political mileage or if it is chaired by the Government and you have majority of the Members ...

(Honourable Members interject)

(Technical glitch experienced through virtual connection)

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- Do not be fearful about a Parliamentary Committee!

It seems to me from what I hear that somehow, forming a committee to look at what is happening in the non-sugar crop sector is going to be a political stunt by the Opposition. The Government is so obsessed about not letting the Opposition being part of anything. It was quite shameful and in some way, disgraceful of how the Honourable Minister for Economy was attacking

the Director of FRIEND and said that she is getting political mileage. Come on, Honourable Minister, you can do better than that!

Mr. Speaker, this is an organisation which is helping people, which is working with different faith groups, religious groups and cultural organisations to help people. And just because someone from there talks to an Opposition Member, it does not mean they are having political mileage. This is not the time to talk about it.

HON. P.K. BALA.- There is more to it, Honourable Professor Prasad!

(Technical glitch experienced through virtual connection)

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- Government to support these organisations and NGOs to help our people.

I know that FRIEND does a lot of work for agriculture. You need to have that supply chain - you need to have that link to the market from rural areas to the urban areas, and these are the organisations which provide that. You may not like the political views, Mr. Speaker, but let us not berate and condemn the good work that organisations, like FRIEND, are doing.

I think in terms of agriculture, Mr. Speaker, we need to build that coalition from two different sectors. I know we talked about the Land Bank. We need to bring all the stakeholders together - the landowners, iTLTB, the Marketing Boards, the exporters and investors - these people need to come together. We need to ensure that the rural agricultural sector and a lot of those farmers are engaged in small activities.

In the next three or four years, the poverty level is likely to increase and the only way we can stamp that increase in poverty is to ensure that the agricultural sector at all levels in the rural areas are supported and protected. Most of the time, Mr. Speaker, it is not just the handle, it is just bringing people together. The Honourable Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport talked about cooperatives, I agree with him. When people come together, share ideas and work together then they can increase their output and production.

So, Mr. Speaker, I would urge Government to support this motion. Let the Standing Committee, chaired by one of their own Honourable Assistant Ministers. They do not do much, anyway, they sit in the Standing Committees all the time and that is what they do, except that some of them and this concerned one Assistant Minister, for example, when someone called him and said, "I need rations", he said, "Call Biman Prasad in NFP". I mean, this kind of jokes are being perpetrated by some of these people. One of them said, "Oh, farmers are calling me, I have given a conman's number to them."

So, let us support this motion and cut out the crap of checking each other. Let the committee get what is happening in the non-sugar crop sectors and what could be the direction from thereon, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Professor Prasad. I give the floor to the Honourable Maharaj. You have the floor.

HON A.A. MAHARAJ.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the outset, it is very disrespectful and pathetic for Honourable Professor Prasad to actually say in the Parliament that Assistant Ministers are not performing and not doing their job.

A person of his calibre should not be actually stooping down so low to bring up this kind of things in Parliament.

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, I did not say that. I was saying what they were doing.

HON A.A. MAHARAJ.- What the hell are you doing before questioning us?

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Get on with it.

HON A.A. MAHARAJ.- Think twice before you bring this kind of things to Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I actually stand in this Parliament to give my short contribution towards the debate but before that, I would like to give a piece of health advice to Honourable Gavoka that first produce are healthier than the processed foods.

Market is growing for fresh produce all around the world, like okra/bhindi, dalo, cassava, pineapple, eggplant, ginger, turmeric, et cetera. So we need to go for fresh produce, it is increasing in demand.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, I am not an economist but it does not take a wise person to actually think that we should not be comparing import to export.

The Honourable Opposition Whip actually just compared export to import. We actually export things like as I have mentioned: okra/bhindi, *dalo*, cassava, pineapple. The import amount comes from things like grapes, apple, kiwi fruit, pears, garlic, onion, potatoes, how can we actually compare different items within the same commodity? It is not. Then she actually goes on to say that we should be supporting substantive and small farmers and then Honourable Ro Tuisawau stands up and says that we should be assisting commercial farmers. As usual - confuse Opposition.

Mr. Speaker, my first and foremost question is to the mover of the motion. He is actually proposing the review of our performance which is very much similar to a performance audit, which by law is done by the Office of the Auditor-General, as per the law and as per the Audit Act. So let the Auditor-General do his part and we do ours.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Hear, hear!

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- My question to the Members of the Standing Committee on Natural Resource would be, are they auditors or do they even have the expertise to carry out an audit which is performance in nature. No, we do not. Through the annual report we have seen the agriculture sector evolve over a number of years. We have seen the Ministry of Agriculture empowering farmers to go into commercial farming along with the seasonal and multiple crop farming.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to echo the Honourable Minister for Agriculture's comment that we have been exporting tonnes and tonnes of fresh produce. One thing I want to emphasise, this fresh produce is carried out from the country by our own Fiji Airways. Just imagine, Mr. Speaker, had we not had Fiji Airways, how would we have continued exporting to help farmers in this pandemic? Here the Opposition comes and talks about agriculture produce and on the other side they do not want to support the survival of the major resource, Fiji Airways which plays a pivotal role in the supply chain of fresh produce.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- No one is against Fiji Airways.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, we need to think big, we need to empower our farmers so they can get into commercial farming. While maintaining our food security, export also gets foreign exchange into the country. This is what the Ministry is already doing and we in the region are leading this because we have our own carrier, Fiji Airways and the number of countries it flies to creating a market for our fresh products.

Mr. Speaker, I agree with my colleagues that the mover of the motion had nothing to justify for the review to be conducted nor does the Committee have the expertise to conduct such a review, therefore I oppose the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. I give the floor the Honourable Rasova. You have the floor.

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- *Bula vinaka*, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I would like to support the motion by the Honourable Member and my colleague from Namatakula.

The motion reads, "That the Standing Committee on Natural Resources review the performance of non-sugar agriculture." I would like to talk about, when we focus on non-sugar, what happens to sugar?

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- If you are not ready, do not stand up.

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- Alright, hang in there!

Before I go into non-sugar, I would just like to, without prejudice to the sugar industry which has had the slightest performance since 1999, we have considered an alternative livelihood.

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge the *Girmitiyas* where the British and the Colonial Government brought 60,553 Indians to Fiji mainly from Calcutta and Madras from 1879 to 1916 on 87 voyages. The majority were from the State of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Although some have gone to India after the expiry of their contracts, majority stayed back and made Fiji their home particularly in the cane belt. Today, Fijians of Indian origin citizens are fourth and fifth descendants of the labourers brought by the British to Fiji. I acknowledge their contribution to the sugar industry. Nonetheless that we are now into the non-sugar, I would just like to take the topic on crop diversion.

Mr. Speaker, crop diversion is a critical aspect of the agriculture industry and in addition to new crops or cropping systems to agriculture products, in particular, taking into account their different returns. It implies the use of environmental and human resources to grow a mixture of crops and shifting of resources from low to high-value crops. With globalisation and increased trading opportunities, domestic and foreign, crop diversification is increasingly attractive.

In the case of Fiji, Mr. Speaker, Sir, increased air services between Fiji, Australia and New Zealand provides opportunities to export locally produced fruits, vegetables and root crops. Farmers can also compete with fruits and vegetables imported for our tourism market. Fiji's economy needs a variety of cash crops, not only fruits and vegetables but also poultry, meat and honey. For example, to substitute for imports and provide much-needed income and opportunity for those living in poverty, Fiji has the opportunity to substitute a significant portion of \$14 million, in imported fruits and vegetables. In addition, there is also an opportunity to substitute imports of meat products particularly lamb with locally produced goat.

Globally it is argued that the crop diversification results in comparatively high net returns per unit of the labour and more optimal utilisation of resources. From Fiji's perspective, a cash crop farmer has a high degree of control, not in relation to the impact of weather or natural disasters, but in relation to the price and customers on his or her crops. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the farmers can find their own customers or sell directly to market and vendors at roadsides or in urban centres. Cash crops such as pumpkin, dried corn and grains can be sought for three to six months from harvest and sold when the prices are attractive. An added benefit in that crop, cash is received instantly.

Root crops and vegetables, Fiji's tropical climate enables farmers to grow a different variety of root crops and vegetables throughout the year and the demand of these crops remain, Mr. Speaker, relatively stable. Some of the popular crops in this category include long bean, cow peas, tomatoes, *duruka*, corn, *bhindi*, *karela*, watermelon, cucumber, rockmelon and a wide variety of green leafy vegetables like *chauraiya*, *saijan* and dalo leaves. The popular varieties of root crops are cassava, *kumala*, *dalo* and yams. All these crops could either be grown side by side or easily inter-cropped with sugarcane.

Farmers have been generating income, Mr. Speaker, Sir, from fruits, vegetables and nuts to supplement income derived from sugarcane farming. Some of the popular fruits that yield high income include mangoes, jackfruit, breadfruit, pawpaws, oranges, bananas and coconut (reminds me of the level nine low-bearing trees) could easily be drawn on the sugarcane farmers. From the perspective of farmers, these are long term investments that have the potential to provide a decent, sustainable return for a long period of time.

Income of livestock, farmers have traditionally kept bullocks on their farms. Over the years, farmers have started through young calves during the harvesting season and later sell them at a good price to other farmers. Due to the increased demand for meat products, farmers now have the opportunity to venture into small scale livestock farming particularly goat, piggery, duck and poultry. In addition, a small number of farmers have invested in bee farming.

The decline in the sugar profitability and production over the last 15 years is likely to continue. The low profit margin from sugarcane farming is resulting in farmers exploring other options to meet shortfalls and family income.

Other food production, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is the most easily identifiable ecosystem service. People in Fiji obtain significant quantities of edible plants and animals from ecosystems. For example, fin fish and shellfish. There are more than 70 different edible species of shellfish in Fiji; crabs, freshwater mussels, eels, seaweed, ferns, nuts, fruits, wild yams or breadfruit. These products are harvested both commercially and at the subsistence level. The open sea ports and industrial tuna fisheries will represent a significant source of paid employment and foreign exchange.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, 58 percent of Fiji's land mass is covered with forests, consisting of 85.3 percent natural forests, 2.4 percent is pine plantations and 5 percent of mahogany plantations. Fiji forests are home to at least 1,518 species of vascular plants, of which 50.1 percent are endemic and 9.9 percent of Fiji is protected under IUCN categories.

There are initiatives in the forestry sector in Fiji on enhancing the role of Fiji's forestry biodiversity. Due to the increase in deforestation in the country related to agricultural development, housing and the expansion of urban areas in some areas has contributed to the decreasing in forest bio-diversity. In relation to food security, forest biodiversity plays an important role in the protection of ecosystem for all organisms, thus contributing to the protection of bird species, river and marine

ecosystems.

Forest biodiversity if well protected Mr. Speaker, Sir, will contribute to sustainable agricultural and fisheries development that will contribute to food security for all people. The REDD+ Project in the forestry sector in Fiji not only contributes to carbon dioxide and oxygen level in the atmosphere and carbon trading for climate change projects, but plays a role in the protection of forest biodiversity that links to good agricultural practices, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

There other important projects that enhances the role of biodiversity for food and agriculture in Fiji. One of this is a GEF funded project, the Ridge to Reef concept implemented in Fiji with three thematic areas; Biodiversity, Land Degradation & Climate Change.

The five top exports for Fiji is mineral water which is related to agriculture, sugar and woodchips and also fish, molasses, taro or *dalo* and ginger. I will speak on the value of kava because it is related to where I come from in Kadavu. Government targets to assist about 10,000 *yaqona* farmers by the end of 2022.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, kava exports earns about \$30.7 million since 2019. Fiji exported a total of 148,141 kilogrammes of kava to USA, 79,952 kilogrammes to New Zealand and 13,220 kilogrammes to Hawaii in 2018. There are 22,282 *yaqona* farmers in Fiji whilst 2,700 of them are from the Lomaiviti Group. Today kava has become a very lucrative cash crop and is in great demand by both local and overseas markets as Fiji's import value.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- You listen, *wawa!*

Today the kava has become a very lucrative cash crop and is in great demand by both, local and overseas markets. Fiji's import value of kava is \$15.2 million, the value imported is 169,902 kilogrammes mainly from Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea and that is somewhere that is missed by the Honourable Minister for Agriculture. You have got to look at that if we have to minimise the import of kava, where we spend about \$15.2 million. We would like to thank the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, the Government is fully committed in supporting kava as one of the alternative industries to sugar but the industry needs to be fully restructured.

I reserve my support and not supporting the formation of a Kava Council which has not been thoroughly sought going forward. We would like to see that every kava farmer is well addressed before the Kava Council goes through.

I am grateful that the Government has also established an export arm, an extension of arm with qualified extension offices supporting the advisory roles. There are also plans to establish this research institute in our national university. Fiji acknowledged the Fiji Kava Limited for setting up the new *Taki Mai* Tissue Culture Laboratory in Levuka and there are efforts to help communities thrive in *yaqona* farms. The Government is targeting to assist about 10,000 *yaqona* farmers at the end of 2022 in recognition of the significant foreign exchange earnings it raises into the economy.

Fiji earned about \$32.4 million through the kava export from 18 countries last year. In 2015 to 2018 the kava was exported to 41 countries which shows there are markets available and there is a need to increase the number of *yaqona* farmers in the country. The kava industry is important to Government and has implemented measures to ensure the targets are met through the continuing *yaqona* farming programme budgeted at \$250,000 for the coming financial year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is not enough to support the 22,282 farmers all over Fiji without prejudice in comparison to the sugar subsidies to the Fiji sugar cane farmers. The Ministry has also aligned its priorities by assisting *yagona* farmers through the land preparation, providing organic manure, planting and farm house material building, farm access roads and technical advice, but the farmers do not think that they have received the fair share of any Government assistance, even though there is another 900,000 on Government assistance for rural and maritime.

As for the home grown marijuana in Kadavu, thank you, Honourable Prime Minister, now that we brought it up and I will touch on the base. Not only Kadavu but Nadroga, Navosa, Lomaiviti and parts of Vanua Levu, which Honourable Nawaikula had asked as a question five years ago in this Honourable House - 'People who plant marijuana as a source of income, can the Honourable Minister consider recommending to Government to legalise the commercial planting of marijuana?'

I think the former Honourable Ratu Inoke Kubuabola did not recommend this motion or this question to Government. As of late, the legal arm of law, through the Honourable Sayed-Khaiyum said that Government has no immediate plans to legalise the production of marijuana for medical purposes, where there are different species of marijuana and one known as Indian Hemp. In other countries of the world under strict conditions and under strict licences, they are actually given the opportunity to grow that and supply directly to pharmaceutical companies. There are very strict guidelines and that, of course, becomes agricultural produce for them. There are different varieties of it, Mr. Speaker, Sir. There is one variety where you could release stress but it could also be used to make fabric, paper and other materials which could be used again. There is also a need to ensure that everyone gets into the spirit of following the law and not abuse it.

It is for medicinal purposes and various other purposes. It is very interesting that you will find, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that mainly countries in the northern hemisphere actually grow this for medicinal purposes. Fiji has specialised farmers in this field - the villagers, the mentally affected or work stressed workers in Fiji - illegally use this crop to balance their daily lives, or somehow use marijuana leaves for medical masseur as I have witnessed. Therefore, growing of the crop, selling and usage is a criminal offence in Fiji and other parts of the Pacific or the world all over.

Farmers still beg the question on when will the Government of Fiji come to realise that a serious consultation on the legal practical, ethical, economic, environmental and social impacts of this cash crop can be made public. Last year, the Police Force seized about 8,469 marijuana plants with an estimated street value of more than \$321 million. In 2018, Police seized narcotics with an estimated street value of \$40 million, while marijuana was valued at \$68 million. The prices would depend on the market value and the maturity of the plants and it would jump from place to place.

In Kadavu, one marijuana plant will make up 1.2 kilogramme whereas in Navosa, five to seven plants of marijuana will make 1kilogramme. More than 800 plants believed to be marijuana were uprooted from different farms in Naqaravutu Village, Tunuloa, Cakaudrove in the Northern Division after it was detected through a drone and a raid was conducted. In Rakiraki police uprooted more than 200 green plants believed to be marijuana from a farm in Nabalabala in Ra. More than 1000 green plants believed to be marijuana were uprooted from an unknown farm in Nacomoto, Kadavu. The country's first police drug raid this year had netted marijuana worth half a million dollars on street value where more than 500 plants believed to be marijuana were uprooted from the Tukuinadi Settlement, Wairabe in Navosa. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this cash crop is almost planted in every part of Fiji and in Gods and natures grace even under the COVID-19 pandemic. That is my contribution to this motion, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Finally, the reason for unprofitable sugar cane cropping has been highlighted and the sugar industry has suffered from the withdrawal of preferential sugar price arrangements that Fiji enjoyed since 1975 under European Union LOME Convention which guaranteed that 175,000 to 200,000 tonnes of sugar would be sold up to three times above the world sugar price with the balance to be sold in the markets.

The expiry of the Convention in 2000 paved the way for the introduction of the Cotonou Agreement; a treaty between the European Union and the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (ACP). The Cotonou Agreement adheres to the World Trade Organisation principle at the level playing field for the global economy and it extended the preferential sugar price but only until 2012. This was despite the pressure not to extend it for another five years for Fiji but then it was a clear indication that there will be no further extension.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, secondly, the land tenure system in Fiji, sugar cane farmers were given about 30 year leases under the Agriculture Landlord and Tenant Agreement (ALTA) which lacked an option renewal after expiry. After the leases started expiring from 1998 a number of landlords expressed their desire not to renew the leases.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the Honourable Kuridrani for his motion before the House. I have no doubt that the review by the Standing Committee on Natural Resources on the performance of the non-sugar agriculture sector would be the best way forward. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I support the motion before the House.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. I now give the floor to the Honourable Prime Minister. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.-Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak on the motion by Honourable Kuridrani and I will be very brief in my comments.

I would just like to say, Mr. Speaker, that while most of Government resources and capacities are being redirected towards national recovery and containment efforts, here before us is a motion calling for the review of the performance of non-sugar agriculture. Frankly speaking, I am a bit worried with this irrational motion to direct Honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources to review the performance of non-sugar agriculture.

All Honourable Members of this side of the House know that Government, through the Ministry of Agriculture, is mandated with annual budgetary allocations to pursue opportunities that will ensure food security for all Fijians with the primary objective to achieve agriculture expansion, diversification and contribute positively to Fiji's economic recovery and sustainable livelihood.

Mr. Speaker, clearly the Honourable Member needs to take note, while I speak, that it is the responsibility of the Ministry of Agriculture with its given resources and capacity to assist the non-sugar agriculture sector, and not the Standing Committee.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to point out that the motion is also flawed, in that, it assumes that those who plant sugar do not plant other crops or keep livestock. When we talk about non-sugar agriculture commodities in Fiji, we are talking about floriculture to dairy, poultry, *dalo*, cassava, livestock, ginger, breadfruit, plantain, the various leafy vegetables, such as *dalo* leaves, *bele* and *moca*, to name a few, and to conduct a review at this time would be ridiculous.

Mr. Speaker, given the national lockdown and the vast dynamics of the non-sugar agriculture sector, this motion will only be time and resource consuming. Given that Fiji's main foreign exchange earner, the tourism sector, is being drastically affected by the border closures and COVID-19, the agriculture sector was noted as the only sector that is increasing in its performance in relation to the size of GDP. It is forecasted to contribute approximately an annual average of 9 percent for 2020 to 2022, as compared to around 6 percent in the previous years.

This shows, Mr. Speaker, that our agriculture production is increasing. Government will continue to work with the commercial and small scale farmers and, of course, all Fijian households to realise the aspiration of "grow beyond", which will target incremental growth and spearhead the paradigm shift in agriculture.

Mr. Speaker, Government has continued to function and served those affected, despite the unnecessary criticisms from across the aisle. The Opposition should note that Government has the matter well on hand with new policies, initiatives and strategies being developed to meet the current economic demand and business climate from our agriculture sector.

The policies and strategies were not plucked from thin air. They were formulated and developed after consultation, careful evaluation and continuous assessment of what the Government is doing. While the rest of Fiji understands that the pandemic is no small battle but the fight for our lives, the Opposition with this motion are in disarray, not knowing whether they are coming or going.

Mr. Speaker, I assure the Honourable Members in this august Parliament, particularly our colleagues with the misguided agenda, that this Government and its partner agencies are doing all they can for the benefit of all Fijians. There is clearly no need to add another line of bureaucracy to a system that is working and moving in the right direction.

Before I take my seat, Mr. Speaker, I would like to tell Honourable Qionibaravi that she is wrong. Her statement this morning said that frontline workers are the super-spreaders of COVID-19. I would like to tell her that frontline workers are not super-spreaders of COVID-19. At this very moment, Mr. Speaker, around the nation, our doctors, nurses, healthcare workers and thousands of other essential personnel are on the frontline, battling the COVID-19 virus that threatens Fiji, putting themselves in the path of this deadly virus and shielding us, our families, our friends and our neighbours.

While the COVID-19 crisis has left its mark on the lives of every single Fijian, those brave heroes, Mr. Speaker, go above and beyond the rest of us by not only risking their health and safety, but sacrificing their precious time away from their families and loved ones. We must not waste the blood, the sweat and the tears shed by those selfless Fijians, who are assuring the safety of our beloved nation during this unprecedented crisis. We are in this together, Mr. Speaker, and we must all do our part.

To our frontline workers, please, do not feel disheartened by people who do not appreciate the work that you do. Thank you for the brave and selfless work you are doing, I salute you all. Thank you and on that note, Mr. Speaker, I do not support the motion. *Vinaka*.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Prime Minister. I now give the floor to the Honourable Attorney-General. You have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will be very brief. The Honourable Member moving this motion, when talking about a review, actually started talking about

Government quarters and started talking about OMRS and the appointment of people which I thought was very misplaced because if we are talking about the agriculture sector, we should be actually talking specifically about it.

But just to highlight, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the staff appointments are done under OMRS. There has been not a single iota of evidence that the Honourable Member has pointed out nor has any Member from his side pointed out that there is something wrong with it. This is probably bringing some personal agendas to it on people he may know personally.

The other issue is about Government quarters. I have got a list of all the Government quarters in respect of agriculture stations that have been completed in this financial year or just very recently:

- Lomaivuna Agriculture Station staff quarters – 1 x 2 bedrooms;
- Naitasiri has been completed;
- Nameka Agriculture Station - 1 x 2 bedroom staff quarters;
- Tailevu completed;
- Naqali Agriculture Station - new office and maintenance of 3 x 2 bedroom quarters which is currently in progress;
- Dawasamu Agriculture Office - 2 x 2 bedroom quarters nearly completed;
- Nabouwalu Agriculture Office - 2 x 2 bedroom quarters and the lead consultant has been appointed;
- Agronomy Building under a lead consultant stays in Koronivia Research Station; and
- Design of standard livestock and farm shed is completed and the Construction Implementation Unit (CIU) is currently doing the material listing standardised design for the whole of Fiji which can be replicated everywhere.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a lot has been talked about - the Honourable Minister for Agriculture actually talked about this, various Honourable Members talked about it and, of course, Honourable Professor Prasad did not talk about it. He has been very egregious in his analysis and we can expect that from him now.

But, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reality of the matter is that the pie, if you compare it to 2006 or even a few years ago, the GDP or pie for Fiji is much smaller, so as the percentage of contribution by the agriculture sector would be higher. When the pie gets bigger and notwithstanding the fact that the total value of the output of the agriculture sector is higher, it will still be as a percentage of GDP much lower.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for example, in 2006, the non-agriculture sector contributed \$330 million in nominal GDP terms. Now, it is contributing \$1.2 billion but as a percentage of GDP, it has come down. It is very simple, I have used this example previously. If you have \$100 and \$20 comes from the agricultural sector is 20 percent. If your pie becomes \$500 and agriculture sector contributes \$50 which is two and half times more than the \$20, it would be 10 percent. Previously, it was 20 percent, now it is 10 percent, but the total value of the output has actually increased. So, I cannot understand why they cannot actually grasp that, they probably do that but they want to obfuscate the whole issue.

Mr. Speaker, the other point is that, the Honourable Gavoka talked about, you know yesterday I think he also mentioned subsistence is the way of life for us and that is what we want to do. Mr. Speaker, Sir, you know, *teitei* and subsistence farming is great. It is good for your own consumption but it does not lead to large commercial agriculture farming. That is the reality of it. Large scale investment in technology, Mr. Speaker, Sir, only comes about by investment of capital. He gave the

example of people up in Keiyasi saying why do we not have your individual lots, you can give that, it does not work because if it worked, it would have worked by now.

The reality is, I also know people in Nadroga where they got in touch with me, individuals from landowning units and saying I want to actually lease the land so I can get a 99-year lease, so I can go to FDB, so I can get a loan because I can then invest because if I still have this very loose arrangement, people will come and take my crops, they will come and take my livestock. The reality is that, you have to hit the nail on the head and the reality of the matter is that people need to own their resources through the leases. That is the only way you will get investment.

If you are saying to set up a mill, so many are saying let us set up a cassava mill but you do not actually have a regular supply, who is going to invest millions of dollars in it. That is the reality. There is no point building a hotel, if you do not know how the tourists will come to your hotel. If you know that there are people who cannot book the resorts, you do not have a booking system, that is fundamentally the issue in agriculture sector and as I have highlighted a couple of days ago, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the fundamental problem in agriculture sector in Fiji has been that agriculture leases were only for 30 years. Only for 30 years, you cannot get a large scale commercial investment in a 30-year lease and the banks will not use that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, yesterday, there is a press release on the 1st of June by the Reserve Bank of Fiji and this is what is happening in the market. The RBF has announced effective from 1st June, 2021, commercial banks, licenced credit institutions, FDB and Housing Authority can access funding from the RBF at a lower rate of 0.25 percent per annum, compared to 1 percent previously. In line with the reduction, the interest rate the RBF charges, the maximum interest that lending institutions can charge on lending to eligible businesses and households will be lowered from 5 percent to 3.99 percent. So, in other words, debt with government subsidisation will be able to offer much lower rate even in the agriculture sector. But of course, FDB needs to have some form of security. We have to address the issue which is security of tenure of land and that is the fundamental issue regarding agriculture.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point that I also want to make was that there has been talk about pork, beef, yes, we actually import and the \$300 million that the Honourable Lynda Tabuya is talking about, the Honourable Whip actually addressed this, that \$300 million is actually made up of products that we actually do not have in Fiji. We do not grow onions, we do not grow garlic and we do not grow potatoes, yet some potatoes but not enough to feed ourselves. We do not grow grapes, we do not grow apples, we do not grow oranges, and yes, there is a shortfall in the supply of pork and the supply of beef, which we import.

In fact, at one point in time, we were importing lamb, we importing goat meat and this is why we have got this investment in the goat industry and also Mr. Speaker, Sir, at one point, we were also importing all sorts of shrimps for the hotel industry. So, there needs to be a connectivity, you cannot say, let us grow this sector when there is no one going there to buy it. You need to develop the supply chains, you need to improve the quality of these products, and that is precisely what has been happening.

Now, obviously we need to do value-adding, value-adding needs to happen. Some people on fresh produce, we need to do value adding. We have had food processors now developing a lot of products that goes to the export market, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

The other point, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is critically important that has not been highlighted, is that there is a number of tax incentives. So, the importation of any agricultural items even prior to

the reduction of the 5 percent came in duty free. If you invest in the agriculture sector, you get tax holders, five years, seven years, 13 years, Mr. Speaker, Sir. All of these incentives were put in place.

We also have the import substitution export finance facility that financially provides credit to exporters, large scale commercial agricultural farmers, public transportation, et cetera were also affected, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Loans that are now guaranteed up to \$60,000 that government had announced, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I think someone talked about the allocation of farm roads, I think the Honourable Tuisawau, \$800,000 in this financial year and we anticipate to work on 64 farm road projects, an estimated length of 103.1 kilometres benefiting 218 farming households.

The Honourable Members talked about the fact that budget is too low. It is not about the amount of budget *per se* but it is about the ability to utilise the funds. You do not just simply say, oh! Here is a lot of money, but you cannot utilise it or you waste it and if the Honourable Members have actually were not this ingenious, if they look at the budget, we have reduced our expenditure.

But if you look at the couple of the Heads of about four Heads, obviously, we increase the funding for Health, obviously we have increased the funding for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation and obviously we have increased the funding for Fiji Police Force given what was happening with COVID-19 and obviously agriculture, modesty as it is, if you compare to the previous year receive an increase funding of \$3 million.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, and of course, Forestry also got a slight increase. Mr. Speaker, Sir, Rural and Maritime also about \$500,000. So, all of these things need to be looked at within a context and holistically, as supposed to simply picking one or two things.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there was talk about diversification and again these figures are available to everyone. If you look at the makeup of the Fijian economy 10 years, 15 years ago, it was not as diversified as it is today. The Honourable Jale talked about diversification and tourism sector towards investment but when he was Chairman of FNPF, they bought the two largest properties.

Now, the Honourable Professor Prasad is saying too many eggs in the basket, but the fact of the matter is that, we are now more diversified than ever. We now have the financial services sectors, we have call centres, our manufacturing based has a percentage of contribution to the GDP has increased significantly. So, there is diversification, of course that needs to be done more. Of course, we need to do more, it does not happen just because you flick your fingers, you need to have right condition. You need to create a right environment. You have to build the confidence for investors to be able to do so.

But the reality of the matter is that, it is happening and we need to do more. Of course COVID-19 has brought the point that tourism dependency is there, but again, as Honourable Gavoka highlighted, that the tourism industry does not stand on its own, it also realises that once more agriculture produce. This is why the Reserve Bank of Fiji actually gives an award to the chef who uses Fijian produce, in the local award when we have the Hotel Tourism Industry Award. All of these connectivity are being done. It needs to be nurtured, it is not built overnight.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point that I also want to highlight was, there are again lot of talks about Fiji Airways, I do not want to talk too much about. The issue about industrial hemp was raised. We have the DAGs conference I think a couple of years ago, we talked about the legalisation, whether it should be legalised or not. Our laws, currently, Mr. Speaker, Sir, very rudimentary, very basic, it

is from the British days, it is just like cannabis basically made, it is criminalised. But there are two things, a lot of people talk interchangeably about industrial hemp and medicinal purposes. There are two types of cannabis or Indian hemp as it is called, one is called industrial hemp, which is if you smoke an entire field of industrial hemp, you still will not get high. Because that is industrial hemp, it has a t lot of fibre in it, so you make clothes, paper, et cetera.

The other one that is for medicinal purposes is the stuff that you actually smoke. Now, a lot of people extract the oil from it. They extract the oil from the buds and that is used for medicinal purposes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is not easy, like tomorrow saying, 'let us legalise it' and tomorrow Parliament sits and legalises it. There are various international ramifications. Will you be blacklisted as a country that deals in drugs, when other countries actually are made it illegal? Will the American banks recognise deposits made by sale of marijuana in our banks? Will they blacklist us? It is not as easy as that. Of course, many people, as someone highlighted, have talked about as if it can be done overnight. You need to get licence, and someone said on the floor of this Chamber, that it is mainly the Northern countries that are doing this.

Yes, because they have a particular level of connectivity. We are a developing country, they view us differently. Australia grows Opium in Tasmania through a particular licence. They grow Opium for medicinal purposes, for the pharmaceutical companies but under licence and it is very rigorously monitored, Mr. Speaker, Sir. So, these things do not happen overnight and I understand that, of course they are saying to throw a seed in Kadavu and marijuana just grows. But if we are able to do that, we should be able do that but we have to ensure that we understand the ramifications of bringing in drugs in modification of the laws.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think the other point that I also wanted to highlight, is that there are many things that are happening. The Fiji Correction Services, I was just liaising with the Commissioner for Corrections, because I remember a few years ago, I went to Naboro Prison and visited the piggery. Fantastic size of the pigs, we need more of it, because we do not want to buy imported pork. They have about 965 pigs and 495 pigs ready for sale. They have 10 to 12 piglets per sow and several piglets per week. These are the things that are happening. We see every village if you go down the Coral Coast that the entrance of the village, you will see a small shed of pigs, Namatakula comes to mind. It has got fairly quite a number of that.

In the \$1000 grant that we gave, a lot of people applied because they want to build a number of pigsty, and I have mentioned this in Parliament a few years ago and people the other side laughed at me. That was the capacity building that we talked about, and that is the reality of the matter.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point that I also want to highlight is, someone made a mockery about the goods carried out, I just got the statistics here, from April 2020 to March 2021, in 12 months, the total cargo carried by Fiji Airways, 55 percent was exports, 9403 tonnes, 30 percent was imports, 5,236 tonnes, 15 percent was transshipments of 2,552 tonnes, in other words stuff that were going to New Zealand transited through Fiji. In the export commodity by weight, general cargo 3,344 tonnes included garments, Fijian-made goods, general exports including kava.

First produce: perishable items 4,716 tonnes - turmeric, dalo, dalo leaves, fresh vegetables, chilled fish, 1,193 tonnes; Fijian saw-sea food, pharmaceutical - 62 tonnes, because we make pharmaceuticals through Douglas Pharmaceutical and also Hill Laboratories; Express mail - 45 tonnes; human remains and live animals, 17 tonnes, aquarium fish - 25 tonnes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, imports: 4,708 tonnes, mainly PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) for COVID-19, medical tents and other medical supplies, baby milk formula, dairy and meat products, health supplements, general food items, fresh produce, youapples, oranges and grapes - 143 tonnes, chill sea food 243 tonnes, pharmaceuticals - 95 tonnes which include of course the vaccines, consumables, Swap-test kits, PCR test kits, gene-expert machines, express mails - 17 tonnes, human remains live animals 28 tonnes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am highlighting this also there are more details to this, because time and time again, Fiji Airways has been berated. The Honourable Lynda Tabuya put a *Tik Tok* where she is eating an aeroplane, Mr. Speaker, Sir. This is the level of standard of Members of Parliament where now being reduced to, anyone that knows about the airline industry knows that this aircraft was ordered four years, five years ago.

We all know the delays for it. We all know the ramification, you actually pay for it, and then the aircraft comes. It is not as if we gave them money now, and therefore we have taken money out of people's mouths. This is the level of contribution by Members of Parliament from the other side. The obfuscation of reality, the obfuscation of facts.

I went home and I thought about the other day when the Honourable Tabuya said, "You should see how many people are giving the 'emojis' or whatever they call it. Mr. Speaker, Sir, running a government, being a Prime Minister, being Ministers is not driven about the number of emojis you get. You need to make, Mr. Speaker, Sir, decisions.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You do not run government by spontaneous reaction.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You do not make decisions by spontaneous reactions. What I say instantaneous ratification. As we all know, instantaneous ratification does not last long.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- And that is precisely what the Honourable Members are doing. The same thing about this motion. Mr. Speaker, Sir.

The other point, lastly, I would like to say is that the Honourable Professor Prasad, as I said, he has been particular defensive in trying to defend his Member. He said that the only reason you get budget support is because there has been a revenue shortfall, the only other reason you get budget support is because we cannot borrow.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, when we produce the budget, we put in place realistic figures about revenue, about how much we can borrow and we can only borrow what this Parliament approves. Mr. Speaker, Sir, our development partners, Australia and New Zealand, came forward on their own volition to support Fiji. So, that is the third option that sometimes development partners actually come forward

because they realise, for example, that we have a particular issue that we want addressed. They want to help us.

What he also did not say is that, as I said yesterday or today whenever it was when I was answering Honourable Qereqeretabua's question is that when someone comes and gives you budget support, it is great because we do not actually have to go out and borrow that amount of money in the market, but to maintain financial discipline, we want to stick to the budget - what we have outlined.

If we are saying that we need to fund the particular deficit by \$1.1 billion and someone comes along deficit by its very nature means you have to borrow, and someone comes along and says we are willing to give you \$100 million, then we say 'great!' That means we do not have to go into the market and borrow \$100 million, we have saved that borrowing.

They talked about debt, you want to reduce the debt. If we are able to reduce our debt in this financial year, it means there is less burden in the next financial year, which is about to come. So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I cannot understand this type of egregious argument, argument for the sake of it.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I really hope that the Honourable Member, in his motion, is not driven by any other motivation other than something that he wants to positively contribute.

My last point is this, Honourable Gavoka said 'you're all born yesterday'. I was actually quiet flabbergasted because I thought Honourable Gavoka was being very ageist.

(Laughter)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Because we know that the other side's average ageist is far greater than ours. We are the much youngest but we never said to them 'you old people'. We never said, 'you old people'. Everyone should be respected and to dismiss someone just because they said 'Oh, you were just born yesterday' I think really is an indication to the young population ...

(Honourable Opposition Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- To the young Fijians, the SODELPA is actually ageist against the young people of this country. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do not support this motion.

(Honourable Opposition Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!.

I thank the Honourable Attorney-General, I now give the floor to the Honourable Inosi Kuridrani to speak in reply. You have the floor.

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I want to remind the House that the issues that I have raised earlier in my motion are fundamental issues that directly relate to agriculture production. Unless we relook at those issues, then we are not going to improve production.

I gather the Honourable Minister of Economy had just mentioned the quarters in Lomaivuna, what about the quarters around Fiji, in urban areas, roofs, plumbing are leaking. They are paying

rent but they are not being repaired for almost six to seven years, that is what I am talking about. Unless the staff are well-accommodated then they will produce the goods.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it seems that we have two sets of data, the data on sugar quoted by Government that it is using and the actual one that the Opposition are referring to. The actual data confirm that agriculture's contribution to GDP has declined from 10 percent in 2005 to 6 percent in July 2020. That is why I am moving the motion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, maybe the Government is claiming to have some increase over the period but the fact that they are not being able to equalise or accedes the achievements by previous Governments despite being in power for the last 14 years and also of increased budget.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if the Government is serious about our economy and food security for our people, expanding commercial agriculture and growing our export, we need to review the performance of non-sugar agriculture.

We thank the Australian Government for the recently announced financial support but such support shows the dire strait that we are in, that we have to give cash to farmers as incentives. This is the reality on the ground, if everything was going well as claimed by the Minister of Agriculture and other Government Ministers, you would not have panicked as showed by the Minister of Agriculture, personally distributing \$2 and \$3 worth of packet of seeds to the people.

The sad truth, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that the Ministry has not done enough, especially in the allocation of funds to priority areas and higher value commodities. To make matters worse, they fail to provide monitoring and to ensure that funds allocated are actually directed for each intended purposes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Dr. Reddy and Honourable Usamate said everything is increasing but our imports of meats, milk and other commodities continue to increase over the years. How can you say that the Ministry is performing when the Minister has failed to submit the annual report since 2016 and failure to table the Agriculture Census Report in 2020 that cost the taxpayers' money - \$4 million. This is a simple indicator of the Minister and his top management's incompetency and incapability.

The Government must be transparent and accountable and no more pay lip service in the development of the non-sugar agriculture. This is why, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Standing Committee on Natural Resources must review the performance of non-sugar agriculture. I am convinced, Sir, that that is the key to feeding our people and improving our economy to prepare us for a post-COVID world.

I have the honour, Sir, to commend this motion to the House. *Vinaka va'levu.*

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

Question put.

Motion lost.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, that brings an end to today's agenda. I thank you for your contributions, cooperation and forbearance.

We will now adjourn until 9.30 tomorrow morning.

The Parliament adjourned at 6.22 p.m.