

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

FRIDAY, 20TH AUGUST, 2021

[CORRECTED COPY]

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FRIDAY, 20TH AUGUST, 2021

The Parliament met at 9.40 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

HONOURABLE SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Honourable Members were present.

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Thursday, 19th August, 2021, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome – Honourable Members

HON. SPEAKER.- I welcome all Honourable Members to today's sitting of Parliament, those present in the House and those joining virtually.

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.

Response to Written Question No. 163/2021

Honourable Members, the Secretariat has received the response to Written Question No. 163/2021 from the Honourable Minister for Local Government, Housing and Community Development. This has been conveyed to the Honourable Ratu Suliano Matanitobua, and a copy will be uploaded on the Parliament website.

Honourable Members, we move on to the next Agenda Item. The first Oral Question for today, I call on the Honourable Tikoduadua to ask his question. You have the floor.

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

Internal Inquiry – Quarantine Facility Protocol Breaches
(Question No. 182/2021)

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Defence, National Security and Policing, Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management inform Parliament whether a report on the internal inquiry conducted into quarantine facility protocol breaches by soldiers has been produced?

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, I wish to acknowledge the Honourable Member for the question this morning.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in answering the question let me make it clear that my answer is specifically addressing the issue about the soldier's involvement in the alleged breaching of protocol at the quarantine facility and not the other stakeholders. Why do I say this, Mr. Speaker, Sir? Because I think I had already mentioned in this august House that the Commander of RFMF, after having gone through their process of investigating, has asked the Ministry of Health for two things – one, if the statement about the alleged breach by the soldier, based on the evidence that they have from their investigations; and two, for learning purposes, I would say as we improve as we go along.

That was one of the reasons why the Commander of RFMF (I was there in that meeting at the Ministry of Health and Medical Services headquarters) where the Commander asked if that statement can be corrected and of course, if another investigation could be carried out so that it can cover the whole quarantine facility, activities and operations and of course involving the other stakeholders as well, because the RFMF has already done their investigations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I have said, this is about improvement for the future, let me also put some background to this. When the RFMF came into the quarantine facility initially, their simple responsibility was just security; to ensure that no one from outside the quarantine enters, and no one from within leaves without proper authorisation. That was their basic responsibility but as the days progressed additional responsibilities were given to the RFMF personnel and that still continues today. Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I have stated it is important that we learn from the lessons and continue to improve and bring efficiency into the work done.

It is a serious responsibility that is being given to the RFMF for obvious reasons and that is why the Commander has also done his investigations. Because of the seriousness of the nature of the work, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Commander RFMF has a standing directive that was issued in December, 2020 from the lessons learnt of 2020, the early cases – the Commander has a standing directive issued on 2nd December, 2020 that basically says that any RFMF personnel found guilty of breaching quarantine protocols whilst on quarantine enforcement duties or whilst in quarantine, will be discharged.

Because there are also soldiers in quarantine and they should set the examples, those particularly are coming from tours of duty, at the end of tours of duty and those that are providing the enforcement of the quarantine protocols. Sadly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, a total of 18 personnel have been discharged since this directive was issued, so from 2nd December, 2020 till to-date. There is also one pending case that is yet to get through the disciplinary process which you are well aware of, so 18 have been discharged and one outstanding case.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the allegations of breaches in the quarantine facility by the RFMF personnel are investigated as per the RFMF disciplinary procedures. This process includes one, a preliminary investigation conducted by the Commanders on the ground, two, a report is forwarded to the soldier's unit headquarters and this case from the company in Nadi to the 3rd Battalion in Suva who can request the military police to conduct a further investigation based on the decision of the Unit

Commander, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Based on the preliminary report and other investigations conducted, the Operational Commander makes recommendations to Commander RFMF who, in this case, is the Land Force Commander. So, he makes the recommendations or carries out another investigation of Board of Inquiry for him to make a fair decision on the matter. As I have stated, Mr. Speaker, Sir, breaches in quarantine are disciplinary that are dealt with internally by RFMF as and when they arise.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I have stated that the process has been completed and the case has been dealt with summarily. The Honourable Tikoduadua understands that term based on the findings of the investigation, Mr. Speaker, Sir. But again, let me go back again to why I raised the concern by the Commander asking the Ministry of Health if another investigation could be carried out by them because of the Public Health Act 1935 that we all work under as the leading document for all the stakeholders to be included in the investigation because in the evidence that the RFMF had when they had their investigation, all soldiers on the quarantine protocol, they do not leave within the total 14 days - they were staying for another two or three extra days until all the testings and whatever was cleared before they could leave. But how did the case get out of the quarantine facility? That is the question that still remains unanswered today because the soldier did not leave the quarantine facility and all the evidence is there.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have said this in the House and it is not about pointing at someone. It is about the processes and systems in place so that we can do better. Mr. Speaker, Sir all health workers they remain within the facility, all soldiers remain within the facility but not the hotel staff. They go home every day. The question is, how did the case go out to the communities and that is why we need that proper investigation rather than blaming the RFMF. I hope that that can be cleared because the evidence from the CCTV footage and everything is there and we need to do justice to the soldiers. It is only fair that process takes place, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Let me just add a few other remarks. As of last week, a total of 134 RFMF personnel were carrying out quarantine enforcement duties and looking after over 900 personnel in this quarantine facility, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Again, when we started implementing the government's decision to have quarantine facilities, RFMF was just tasked to ensure security in the facilities, but till todate, they have taken on other tasks to ensure that the facilities function properly. Other tasks that have been given to the soldiers include:

- (1) checking in of people and out of the facilities and helping with their luggage;
- (2) delivering food during meal time to individual rooms;
- (3) picking up dirty laundry from rooms and returning them after they are clean;
- (4) delivering clean linen, retrieving the dirty one from rooms;
- (5) receiving and delivering items sent through by family members of those in quarantine;
- (6) supervision of outdoor physical activities including exercises; and
- (7) acting as runners to go and buy items requested by quarantine personnel.

May I also add that whilst we acknowledge that there have been breaches and of course the RFMF and Government condemn such irresponsible behaviours that result in violations of protocol by anyone, but we must not forget the hard work and sacrifices put in by the soldiers and sailors and other health officials who look after our quarantine facilities. At the same time, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have developed an SOP, together with the Ministry of Health for our people in the quarantine facilities.

Let me just say, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the process of investigation has come and of course has been dealt with well. The soldier involved is still serving and is not included with the 18 who have been discharged. Why? Because the formal process of the investigation did not find him guilty as alleged. He is still in the service, Mr. Speaker, Sir, but unfortunately 18 of his colleagues have left. I will leave it there for now and I am happy to take any questions.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. I thank the Honourable Minister for his response in terms of the question that was asked by Honourable Tikoduadua on the internal inquiry.

First of all, Mr. Speaker, I would like to state that we appreciate the work of all the frontline workers that have been there for months including the military, who are at high risk. The Honourable Minister said that some of them have developed COVID and some of them have been discharged of their duties, but as far as the work that they have been doing and the sacrifices that they made for their families, we are very much appreciative of the work that they are doing. The Honourable Minister has also stated the work towards improving the processes which we are encouraged to hear and there is an SOP that you are working on.

Honourable Minister, can I ask, because of questions being asked of us about flights that are coming in from India and the high risks that they pose in terms of getting into the country - we are all concerned about that. The movement of people across borders from overseas to here, India to here and the Delta variant and now the lambda, yet we have 10,000 people who are wanting to move from Viti Levu to other areas of Fiji. So, what is happening there, Honourable Minister? Can you just respond?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, I think that question should be dealt with separately from this question. These are the breaches of protocol and he was asked about the results of those. He has answered that sufficiently so we will leave it at that.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- It is part of the SOP, Mr. Speaker.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- I thank you, Mr. Speaker and I must thank the Honourable Minister most sincerely for the very frank answer that he gave to this question. I was a bit worried when he said that the Commander had given directives to be discharged and I am glad that he said later that they used the process of summary jurisdiction for the disciplinary process of the soldier using subordinate commanders and also the powers of the commanding officers, under the Army Act, 1955.

Mr. Speaker, supplementary question is given the welfare of soldiers on two measures now that AAR has been conducted, alright, and I am sure they have looked at some “fixes” and the Honourable Minister understands this term that I am using. The issue of protection; to make sure our soldiers are safe - what training measures have been put in place to ensure that incidences like what happened to the 18 soldiers who have now been discharged, does not happen again. We should look after the interests of the soldiers carrying out the work - they are not slaves or labourers they are soldiers. They are guided by orders and instructions so what training measures has the Force done to make sure that it does not happen again – factored into training and education. That is an essential element of any military service.

HON. SPEAKER.- Ask your supplementary question. Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, I have answered it already - SOPs. Protective equipment is very, very important but we are dealing with a variant that is highly transmissible. Australia and New Zealand are struggling now with the Delta variant that is the challenge that we equally face.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I do not blame the soldier

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- What is the question?

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Not even the super spreader. My question is whether the inquiry into how that soldier got that from the airport and how that virus Delta come from India to the soldier and the soldier to the super spreader. That is important to come up in the inquiry, Mr. Speaker, Sir, who authorise the soldier and these two from India to be this and this should be part of the inquiry. If it can be properly clarified, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister, you can answer that question.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Sir, again the investigation has been conducted and I have answered that. It boils down to two points whether it was from the baggage collection or whether he walked into the room where four ladies that were doing the cleaning up were in the room, so he dropped his baggage and he came out – so highly transmissible variant and it is quite hard to ...

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. We will move on but before we do, Honourable Minister, based on the question that was asked by the Honourable Kupa, you might like to make a ministerial statement at a future sitting regarding that.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- The whole Ministry will deploy to Nasali.

Engagement of Australian & New Zealand Employers – SWP & PLS
(Question No. 183/2021)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity, Industrial Relations, Youth and Sports inform Parliament on the engagement of employers from Australia and New Zealand on both the seasonal worker programme and the Pacific Labour Scheme during this pandemic?

HON. P.K. BALA (Minister for Employment, Productivity, Industrial Relations, Youth and Sports).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Fiji's participation in the Seasonal Work Programme had seen a steady growth in in numbers since 2015 with a similar trend being witnessed in the Pacific labour scheme since Fiji joined in 2019. However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, COVID-19 pandemic has somewhat restricted the movement of people around the world due to the closure of borders and Fiji is no different.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, during this challenging time, we were able to send the total of 695 Fijian workers to Australia and 70 Fijian workers to New Zealand. Mr. Speaker, Sir, my Ministry continues to consult closely with our counterparts both in Australia and New Zealand, and in particular with the approved employers to monitor the welfare of our Fijian workers during this pandemic.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are also in close consultation with the worker welfare teams under the Pacific Labour facility to address issues and assist our workers during these difficult times. Sir, we also have an Australian Labour Mobility Engagement Manager, Ms. Sasha, who is based here in my Ministry to assist my team on these programmes. Her three-year attachment to the Ministry since 2019 is fully funded by the Pacific Labour Scheme (PLS) and we are very thankful to them.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the aim of having regular engagements directly with employers under the labour mobility programme is to ensure that welfare issues are identified and managed. This includes coordination with the Pacific Labour facility worker welfare team and also directly with our Fijian team group leaders. The welfare of our Fijian workers are paramount under these programmes.

My Ministry recognises the value and importance of having a strong work relationship with the employers, the managing authorities, for each scheme and the workers to ensure all parties fulfill their

obligation and support the mutually beneficially outcome of these two programmes, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The total number of Fijians that are currently under the three-labour programmes are as follows:

- Australia Pacific Labour Scheme - 793 Fijians
- Australia Seasonal Workers Programme - 187 Fijians
- New Zealand Seasonal Workers Programme - 291 Fijians

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the part of our regular engagement with approved employers under this scheme, my team was informed this week of the State-wide lockdown in New South Wales due to the increase in the number of COVID-19 cases which has resulted in the closure of that particular side. However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the employer has also confirmed that these 128 fearless workers are entitled to apply for the New South Wales disaster relief payment of AUS\$750 per person.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the vaccination drive to have all our potential workers to be fully vaccinated by November, 2021 has given our biggest employer under the PLS the confidence not to cancel our October engagement of 175 workers but has been deferred because of these COVID cases in New Zealand as well.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, most recently the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade through my Ministry conducted a stakeholder's consultation on how to improve, streamline and align the two Australian Labour Mobility Programmes namely the Seasonal Work Programme and the Pacific Labour Scheme. The stakeholders' response will be considered as part of the Australian Government's planning for a larger, sustainable and market driven Fiji labour mobility for Australia in future.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with the total of 1,271 Fijian workers that are currently in Australia and New Zealand under these three labour mobility programmes, I firmly believe that many of our fellow Fijian families are benefiting from the scheme during this pandemic. Our regular engagements with approved employers will only strengthen our working relationship as we build good faith and trust when worker issues are discussed and resolved early. This will also give confidence to our Fijian workers to raise issues directly with employers as they arise.

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

HON. A. JALE.- Thank you very much Honourable Minister, the scheme and the programme are working for our people in Fiji and bringing a lot of benefit. I just wanted to ask a two-pronged question:

- (1) What law applies to workers that suffer injuries at work whether temporary or permanent; and
- (2) What arrangement or law applies to people who die and need to be repatriated back to Fiji?

Honourable Minister, what is the oversight role that your Ministry is playing in terms of enforcing the agreement under the programme and the scheme?

HON. P.K. BALA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I will answer the last question first, in terms of what my Ministry is doing.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this programme is a result of the Vuvale Partnership that Fiji has with Australia and New Zealand. The Ministry's role is very paramount in this programme. The reason being from starting to end, the Ministry is responsible for all Fijian workers who go for these two programmes. In terms of injury, it is the responsibility of the employers that intake our workers for any injury that occurs.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Mr. Speaker, one of the primary objectives of the scheme is for

income to come to Fiji. In Savusavu, I met three that have nothing in their pocket, so can the Honourable Minister explain the measures that his Ministry has to ensure that these workers save money not only in Australia, but this is brought to Fiji.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- What a stupid question.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- That is not a stupid question - that is the very reason they go there and they are spending there; what use will it be to Fiji?

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

Do not talk to each other on the floor, it should come through me. Honourable Minister you have the floor.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, unfortunately this Honourable Member always finds people who have got different issues - I do not know whether there is any truth in it or not. But in any case, it depends on the individual workers, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Before they leave, they have a three-day training for all these workers and we do tell them that you need to save money and one of the requirements is, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that these workers who are selected when they come back, they must do some community projects with those funds. We have been receiving reports from the respective workers that there were community works done with those funds that they have brought in. And if someone has spent money over there while working, what am I going to do with that? So basically, it is purely on individual workers to think about their families back here and we make sure when they come back, they come back with their savings and I can tell you that it is not a small amount of money.

I am not going to reveal how much but I can tell you it is not a small amount per annum.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the Honourable Minister for his explanations covering Vuvale Partnership and stakeholder consultation. Just a question, Mr. Speaker, Sir, are workers engaged in this scheme, being encouraged to engage in voluntary contribution to the Fiji National Provident Fund (FNPF) - deductions that has been encouraged by Government?

HON. P.K. BALA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is not the first time the Honourable Member has asked this. If my memory serves me right, I remember two or three times he has asked me this in the same honourable House. We have tried our level best to do that but unfortunately at this point in time there is no such mechanism in place.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, we will move to the third Oral Question for today. I call on the Honourable Qionibaravi to ask her question. You have the floor.

Data Trend for the Second Wave of COVID-19
(Question No. 184/2021)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services update Parliament on the data trend of this second wave of COVID-19 infections and the projected number of cases by 31st October 2021, the target date for vaccination of the target population?

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

Mr. Speaker, as we speak today, we have about 500 to 600 cases per day, we have eight to ten deaths per day and the other thing that we are also beginning to see is that, in the Central Division, the deaths are dropping within the Lami-Nausori corridor but have risen outside of the Lami-Nausori corridor, so within Tailevu and Naitasiri, and we have teams that are now stationed in Korovou and also in Vunidawa and in Navua.

As alluded to by the Permanent Secretary in his statements, we are also seeing cases rise in the Western Division and also the deaths that have risen in the Western Division, so they are all contributing to the eight to ten deaths per day that we are seeing. Sometimes what happens is, because they have to confirm by doing either an autopsy or a virtual autopsy or discussion, that the deaths of our loved ones are actually being called one week later in that regard.

Mr. Speaker, we are also seeing the uptake of the vaccination. We now have more than 90 percent with the first dose and we are nearly reaching 40 percent with the second dose. One thing that is very certain is that, there are a few important facts for us to recognise:

- (1) The Delta variant virus is a very transmissible virus. It is up to 60 percent more transmissible than the initial variant that came through, and more than 100 countries around the world are struggling with it. At this moment, our hearts also go out for our *vuvale*: Australia & New Zealand, as they also combat that – it is very difficult, very transmissible.
- (2) The other thing that we do know is that, even up to six months, there was a study just recently released which showed that in the United Kingdom when they looked at 740 something thousand individuals, upto six months after they have been vaccinated with Astra Zeneca, that the protection offered by the vaccine is strong. So, by 31st October, those who have been vaccinated six months before, will still be protected, if we extrapolate the data from that time and bring it into this discussion today.
- (3) The other thing that we do know is that, by that time there will be a significant number of the population who would have been vaccinated twice and I have said and alluded to in the Ministerial Statement, that we need to be fully vaccinated by two doses and two weeks after, to be able to have the complete protection that is offered by Astra Zeneca.
- (4) We also, as I have alluded to earlier, we are now vaccinating our pregnant mothers with the Moderna and there is discussions about utilising Pfizer for our children and the Office of the Prime Minister as the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Honourable Prime Minister has been working with his team in engaging in that environment. So, to actually throw numbers in this august House this morning, is not right of me to do so. What I can say is that, if everyone who needs to be vaccinated twice, be fully vaccinated, we will see the numbers drop by 31st October, 2021.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, I give the floor to the Honourable Vosanibola. You have the floor, a supplementary question.

HON. P.W. VOSANIBOLA.-Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, my supplementary question to the Honourable Minister; are there likely chances of having COVID-19 healthy carriers in the community?

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

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Honourable Speaker, I could not get the end of that question.

HON. SPEAKER.- Could you repeat the question, Honourable Member?

HON. P.W. VOSANIBOLA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Are there likely chances of having COVID-19 healthy carriers in the community?

HON. SPEAKER.- Healthy carriers in the community. You have the floor, Honourable Minister.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Honourable Vosanibola is asking something that is known within public health circles because he is an environmental health officer by profession and healthy carriers are something that are known with typhoid and that with typhoid, you can have healthy carriers. We know that up to 80 percent, maybe asymptomatic and children maybe asymptomatic. If we are to take that thinking of healthy carriers in typhoid and bring it into COVID-19 discussion this morning that the Honourable Member is alluding to, yes, we do have patients who can be asymptomatic and that can actually carry the virus.

We also know that being fully vaccinated, that even though up to 70 percent may not be able to transmit the virus, that 30 percent, either can have some symptoms or they may also be asymptomatic. Therefore, the policy on being fully vaccinated then travel is so important. We have a lot of people who are actually calling and saying, "I want to go back to Moala, I want to go back to Matuku, I want to go back to Rotuma, I am fully vaccinated". That is why it is so important that they be fully vaccinated, if we follow the public health safe measures because to be fully vaccinated, there is still up to 30 percent chance that you can still transmit the virus. You may not actually show any symptoms, Honourable Speaker.

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

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I thank the Honourable Minister for highlighting the answers to the question. Recently the data released by CDC show that vaccinated people infected with the Delta variant carry viral loads similar to those people who are unvaccinated. My question is; has the Honourable Minister seen cases of breakthrough infections among vaccinated individuals within the frontline workers and also within the general public where the transmission is rampant?

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

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I have alluded to, you can have patients who are asymptomatic with the disease. In terms of the decisions that Honourable Vosanibola had said earlier in terms of whether there would be healthy carriers, we have had frontline workers too, some of them have had symptoms, some of them had not had symptoms. One of them had had just one dose of the disease and was actually quite unwell. We have also lost two of our nurses to COVID-19.

Honourable Speaker, one thing that is very important to understand is that, those frontliners who had been fully vaccinated, none of them were unwell to succumb to the disease. So the data that is available of being fully vaccinated is equivalent to everyone, irrespective of whether you are a frontline health worker or you are person in the community. Being fully vaccinated and two weeks after, actually gives you maximum protection from COVID-19, especially the Delta variant that we are seeing now.

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

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Can I ask the Honourable Minister for a brief indication of the vaccination uptake on a regional basis or on provinces? I ask that question, Mr. Speaker, because there could be a hesitancy factor in some key areas in Fiji, in particular the tourism belt. I brought this up with the Honourable Minister to mobilise the tourism industry to convince people, to promote vaccination in the tourism belts from Serua, Nadroga/Navosa, Ba and parts of Ra. So, an indication of what the uptake is like across the country would be appreciated, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Mr. Speaker, I thank the Honourable Member for that question.

Mr. Speaker, I have the data with me. He can liaise with me later but certainly from our perspective, we have been really pushing and advocating for vaccination. In terms of the tourism belt, the tourism industry is actually being very supportive. We also have to be mindful of the fact that apart from the tourism belt, in the hinterlands, for example, Valley Road in Navosa, they also contribute to the tourism industry, maybe the third backend, in terms of the food that they provide. They have also areas in which we have been going out and advocating for vaccination and I think it is important to understand that we want everyone in Fiji to be vaccinated.

Going back to the discussions that we had yesterday, yes, we want to achieve herd immunity through vaccination. We want to encourage everyone to be vaccinated. If we can get 100 percent, I know it is not possible, if we can get nearly 100 percent of everyone in Fiji vaccinated, that augurs well in terms of protecting health and also minimising the spread and the rising of other variants that happens in places where the virus lingers for a long period of time.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, we move on. The fourth Oral Question for today, I give the floor the Honourable Assistant Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation to ask her question. You have the floor.

Details of Rolling Out Sanitary Pads in Schools
(Question No. 185/2021)

HON. V.K. BHATNAGAR asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts inform Parliament on details of how the Ministry intends to roll out sanitary pads for girls in schools?

HON. R.S. AKBAR (Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to respond to the question asked by the Honourable Member.

Menstrual Hygiene Management is a major health issue affecting women and girls of reproductive age worldwide. Mr. Speaker, 52 percent of the female population of reproductive age at any given time. The transition into reproductive age for some girls is often met with fear and anxiety due to a lack of knowledge about menstruation, a lack of resources about the changes that are occurring in their bodies and of, course, in addition to the support services that they require.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Menstrual Hygiene Management addresses a broader health and hygiene needs of young girls and women, including their wellbeing, gender equality, education equity, empowerment and rights.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the lack of knowledge and facilities in many marginalised communities negatively impact the education of girls and their ability to stay in school, as seen in many countries,

including Fiji. Many communities often hold local cultural beliefs or taboos relating to menstruation that can threaten a girl's physical and/or emotional wellbeing.

The FijiFirst Government has always implemented initiatives that benefit all Fijians, and here is the initiative and it is not only benefiting every girl child of menstruation age, but also brings relief to every household. In the current financial year, the Fijian Government, Mr. Speaker, Sir, announced the new initiative to provide sanitary pads to 55,025 girls in Year 7 to Year 13 under the Menstrual Hygiene Management Programme.

The Fijian Government has allocated \$1.5 million towards this initiative. I will give you the total number of girls from Year 7 to Year 13 in each Division, as follows:

- Central Division 23,859
- Eastern Division 2,416
- Northern Division 8,989
- Total 55,225

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these numbers of girls are targeted through this initiative. These girls will be provided with a monthly voucher to buy their preferred sanitary pad from authorised vendors, which will be determined through a tender coordinated by the Fiji Procurement Office.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, girls in urban and peri-urban areas have greater access to facilities and services, so for the girls in rural and deep rural maritime areas, we will be assisting those girls through their schools with the provision of their monthly supply.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our initial survey reveals that there are some girls in Year 6 who will also need the support. We are making it the responsibility of the schools to ensure that these girls are also supported and provided for. This will ensure that every girl child of menstruation age benefits from this Government initiative.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, under SDG 6, the safe and dignified menstruation is part of a global vision for sanitation and hygiene, and that is exactly where we are moving towards. Lack of basic knowledge on puberty and menstruation, the shame that is generally associated with menstruation, unwanted pregnancies and unhygienic sanitation affects the health outcome of SDG 3.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, girls' non-attendance to schools during menstruation date to lack of WASH facilities or the stigma attached to it, affects the education of our girls under SDG 4. Gender equality under SDG 5 cannot be achieved if girls and women continue to be prevented from full participation in society during menstruation, as a result of taboos placed on them. This initiative by the Fijian Government will go a long way in helping our young girls to reach their full potential in their lives.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is just not about distributing sanitary pads to our girl child, it is about addressing issues of education around Menstrual Hygiene Management, education for both boys and girls to respect and be sensitive towards girls reproductive health and the general wellbeing and, of course, addressing issues such as teenage pregnancies. We would like to see all our girls being empowered to better manage their health and hygiene during this time. Of course, parental support is equally important. But just as important, building confidence and a sense of dignity in them and to know that despite what cultural stigmas may be, it is not the time to be embarrassed or frustrated.

A study by UNICEF published in 2016, Mr. Speaker, Sir, showed that countries where governments have made a commitment to Menstrual Hygiene Management had a positive impact on improving the morale of girls. This study showed that Fiji was one of the five countries that had

Government commitment to improving the quality of menstruation. The study also showed that most sustainable way to address the negative impacts of existing taboos and social stigma is to include the Menstruation Hygiene Management, as part of the school curriculum.

Our school curriculum, Mr. Speaker, Sir, introduces education on menstruation, health and hygiene of girls from Year 8 and is covered in subjects, such as Biology, Family Life Education and Home Economics. The content in the Family Life Education covers a wide range of issues and topics, and helps create awareness on issues surrounding health, reproduction and teenage pregnancies. We will use this initiative to further develop awareness around these areas.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, at a time like this when families are finding it difficult to make ends meet, we want to make sure that the health and hygiene of our girl child is taken care of. The Fijian Government is committed to support our girls and to ensure that their needs are not neglected. My Ministry plans to roll out this initiative when schools reopen.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, every school in Fiji has a Child Protection Officer and we will be conducting workshops to increasing their responsibilities, which will now include creating awareness on menstruation hygiene management with our working group. This will ensure that every girl child is protected from any form of social stigma.

To ensure that the initiative is rolled out with the right type of education and care it needs, the Ministry has set up a Working Group to work on a plan to deliver this initiative. The Working Group comprises of Officials from the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts; Ministry of Health and Medical Services; Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, UNICEF, UN Women, Reproductive Health Association of Fiji, Medical Services Pacific and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). We have already had a meeting with the representatives of all the above agencies and they have shown a keen interest and I am very excited to see this plan being implemented.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Working Group is responsible for:

- Creating timelines of activities that will ensure implementation of this initiative once students return to school.
- Creating mitigation strategies in case of any adverse impact of this on the girls, as this still remains a very sensitive issue amongst our community.
- Preparing awareness and educational materials on this initiative through the Ministry's Curriculum and Advisory Unit that we will disseminate to teachers in all schools.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I have said, the Working Group is very excited and so are we, to see this initiative bear fruition.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry is using this time of school closure to negotiate and discuss the various options available in the market. Before we make a firm decision, we need to ensure that girls are provided with the right type of sanitary pad that will hygienically benefit them. We have already been receiving interest from many suppliers who are offering both, disposable and reusable sanitary pads. The decision will be made in consultation with the Working Group.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, carrying out awareness and education in all schools will be an intensive and challenging task which requires all partners to assist through a comprehensive and effective education programme. The partnership between the Working Group will create a strong mechanism to ensure effective and efficient delivery of this initiative.

I am sure, Mr. Speaker, Sir, our girls and parents are grateful to the Fijian Government for putting

the welfare of young girls as a priority, and we assure them that we will continue to look after our girls until they reach their full potential academically and personally until secondary schools through this initiative.

While the Ministry is working on the logistics on the procurement and distribution of sanitary pads, our partners will work towards developing a comprehensive plan to create awareness and education for all Fijian students. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the awareness and educational materials will be in the form of information pamphlets, posters on general hygiene, radio programmes and social media advertisements and we anticipate to have this produced, printed and done by the end of November this year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on behalf of all our girls, I thank the Honourable Prime Minister for this very important initiative that looks after the health and wellbeing of all girls in our nation. I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the honourable Minister for her response. Honourable Salote Radrodro, you have the floor.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, I thank the Honourable Minister for her response, particularly in regards to the option of re-looking at cloth reusable sanitary pads. Mr. Speaker, because of the time that we are in now, the nagging priority for the people right now is food on the table. Can the Honourable Minister explain how has this become a priority of Government when schools are still closed? Can this hang on until the budgetary revision at the end of the year and use this allocation to provide food to those who are really in need?

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

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would suggest to the Honourable Member that she refers her question to the Honourable Minister for Economy as it has to do with budgetary allocation. Thank you.

HON. RO T.V. KEP A.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the Honourable Minister for her response to this question. My question to the Honourable Minister is, what is the modality used in the distribution of these items?

The Honourable Minister mentioned the sensitiveness of this product, particularly in its distribution to the rural, remote and maritime schools because it is mostly the men who are moving the cargo around and we noticed that during food distribution when these items are in the packages, the men do not like to come near it.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Mr. Speaker, I think Honourable Kepa missed the point. The whole idea, as I have mentioned, is not only about distributing pad, it is creating more respect within both male and female. We live in a century where I believe Fiji has broken down a lot of taboos and there is no harm in a man or a boy or a father collecting a package of sanitary pads that is going to benefit his daughter. So, there are a lot of awareness that will be created.

Of course, I have mentioned that distribution of pads to the 2,900 plus students in the rural and maritime areas will be coordinated by schools, and the schools have a Child Protection Officer and this initiative will start when schools do open, probably after months. The technical Working Group which includes the Ministry of Women, UN Women and other agencies, are trying to work out the logistics around this.

Mr. Speaker, given them the issue of sensitivity, we want to break that social taboo. It is alright, it is normal for a girl to have her menses, as we commonly say. I mean, think about the time, our days when we were young, when I was in Class 8, no one talked to me about this. I am sure the other women MPs sitting in the room, we all have our experience to share and we have always talked about equality. So, this initiative also help to make the boy child understand why is it happening to the girl child. It is normal - nothing to be frustrated about, nothing to be ashamed about and nothing to be feared about. So, if the men in the society have problems carrying packages for the girls in their home, then I think that is the mindset we are trying to change here, together with this initiative.

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

Status of the 2019 Minimum Wage Review
(Question No. 186/2021)

HON. M.R. LEAWERE asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity, Industrial Relations, Youth and Sports update Parliament on the status of the minimum wage review conducted in 2019?

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

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to provide a brief update on the National Minimum Wage Survey that was conducted in 2019. In terms of background, the first National Minimum Wage of \$2 was enforced on 1st March, 2014, and within a span of one-and-a-half years, the new wage rate of \$2.32 was adjusted and came into force from 1st July 2015. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the national minimum wage was again reviewed in 2017. The survey was undertaken in the formal and informal sectors in 2017 throughout Fiji, and as a result, Cabinet endorsed the national minimum wage of \$2.68 per hour.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are 10 sectors which have different minimum wage rates and \$2.68 hour is not the only minimum wage that is set for all sectors. There are 10 sectors, Mr. Speaker, Sir, printing, wholesale and retail trades, hotel and catering, garment industry, sawmilling and logging industry, road transport, building and civil electrical engineering, manufacturing industry, mining and quarry and security services.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, my Ministry conducted a nationwide survey in 2019, the survey was conducted in both the formal and informal sector. The purpose of this consultation was to meet and hear the workers, employers and public at large on the review. The consultations were held in Labasa, Savusavu, Suva, Sigatoka, Nadi, Lautoka, Ba, Tavua and Rakiraki.

Mr. Speaker, a draft report was prepared to be presented to the Employment Relations Advisory Board (ERAB), which is a tripartite forum but, Sir, that could not happen because of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is unfortunate that after we did all the hard work and the good work was distracted by this COVID-19 but, Mr. Speaker, Sir, moving forward, my Ministry is in consultation with the consultant to prepare a report with recommendation considering the current economic situation to be tabled in Cabinet. I thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. A. JALE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Thank you, Honourable Minister for the explanation that you have just given. I have had the experience of working in the Ministry of Labour

enforcing the Labour Laws including the enforcement of Wages Council, the Wage Regulation Orders. My experience was not a very good one. Most of the employers (a significant number) who are employers in Fiji are falsifying wages records, they are registering big amounts but the workers are taking home a lesser level of pay.

My question is, Honourable Minister, with this initiative that you are doing and in terms of the current Wages Regulation Orders under the Wages Council, how confident you are that you are doing a good job in enforcing those.

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

HON. P.K. BALA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am very positive. In fact, the Honourable Member has talked about this Wages Council as we are all aware that there is no more Wages Council but in place of that, we have ERAB, where the tripartite members are, namely the Union representatives, the employers and Government representatives. So all in all, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are very positive about that, there is no doubt at all.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Nawaikula.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Can the Honourable Minister explain to the House why this Employment Advisory Board cannot meet virtually, like we are doing here?

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

HON. P.K. BALA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have not said at that we cannot meet virtually, I have not said that at any point in time. In fact, the last time, we were supposed to meet, I have said in Parliament, which was raised by Honourable Tikoduadua. It was cancelled because there was a quorum issue, so there was never ever a time when we said that we cannot hold our meeting virtually.

Developments Projects by Municipal Council - 2021-2022
(Question No. 187/2021)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Local Government, Housing and Community Development inform Parliament on the development projects that will be carried out by the municipal councils in this fiscal year?

HON. P.D. KUMAR (Minister for Local Government, Housing and Community Development).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I would also like to thank the Honourable Member for the question.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, towns and cities are drivers of economic and social development. The Ministry of Local Government, together with the municipal councils remain committed to the advancement and development of our towns and cities for its ratepayers and visitors.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for this fiscal year, the Fijian Government committed a sum of \$642,300 for the capital projects in our towns and cities. This includes upgrade of new Rakiraki Bus Station, new Savusavu Market, new Levuka Market, Dreketi Market, Nakasi Mini Market and the new Lami Market.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the new Rakiraki Bus Station involves the redevelopment of the site. The new concept design for the bus terminal will cater for 10 bus bays to provide essential transportation accessibility for the people of Rakiraki. The Ministry in partnership with the Construction

Implementation Unit (CIU), has engaged the services of a project consultant. So far, concept drawings and consultation with relevant stakeholders including the traffic impact assessment report has been completed. The Rakiraki Town Council has plans to complete the detailed design in consultation with CIU in this financial year. In other words, this project will be ready for construction in the next fiscal year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the new Savusavu Market will be built to complement the Blue Town Model in Fiji. The concept drawing is complete, the government grant will be used to complete the design and documentation for a modern market that meets the needs of citizens and visitors to Savusavu. The proposed Savusavu Market is a joint initiative of the Fijian Government and the UN Women. Apart from concept design, the funds will be utilised for project supervision and commencement of the market structure.

Levuka Market, Mr. Speaker, Sir, vendors in Levuka have been selling under temporary tents provided by UN Women under its Market for Change Project and we thank UN Women for that. There are about 310 market vendors who are selling from these temporary tents. There is an urgent need to upgrade the existing Levuka Market building which has been out of service since *TC Winston* in 2016. The old market is approximately 110 years old and therefore, we need to remove this market and put up a new structure instead.

This new market will house stalls, kiosks and an office at the ground floor whilst women's accommodation, café and shops for micro and small businesses will be located on the top floor. The facility will have access to people with disabilities as well. Currently, the architect and the structural engineer are working on the finer details of the market and the preparation of the tender documents. The Levuka Town Council will be calling for expression of interest for the construction and this is again a joint project with UN Women and we intend to start the construction of Levuka Market as soon as the border opens.

Dreketi Market: Mr. Speaker, Sir, the site for Dreketi Market is mid-way between Labasa and Nabouwalu. This Market will serve the residents of Dreketi and those who travel to Nabouwalu and Labasa. Looking at the population of Dreketi and also understanding that an average of 500 travellers per day stop over at Dreketi Market, it is important for us to develop Dreketi into a small and commercial centre for the Northern Division. The new market plan is expected to include Kiosk Fish Market Handicraft in general area for other produce. The construction of the Dreketi Market will stimulate other related businesses around the area, providing much needed jobs to taxi operators and other small businesses.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Labasa Town Council has acquired the lease from the Ministry of Land and has engaged a surveyor to survey the site and facilitate the title process. The survey work is expected to be completed before the end of 2021. In addition, the Council will carry out detailed drawings and construction tender documents. Nakasi Mini Market - the project site is the land behind RB Southpoint in Nakasi. This is where the new shuttle bus bay and mini market will be constructed.

For the Nakasi Mini Market project, the first stage of works has commenced with land acquisition, survey and scheme subdivision. The site levelling works started last week and the scheme plan has been approved by the Director Town and Country Planning. The Nasinu Town Council has engaged the architects to come up with the concept design and we intend to complete all the documentation for Nakasi Mini Market.

New Lami Market: Lami Town provides essential services to a large residential area, as well as nearby informal communities. The market currently has 24 permanent and casual vendors. The current structure being at the heart of Lami Town centre, it is imperative to develop the market that will uplift the

image of Lami Town. The plan is to build a three-story complex which will have more space available for different produce and it will also provide shops for small and micro businesses. The Council has plans to complete the first phase of design and documentation of this project in this financial year. In addition to this project, there are a number of municipal council funded projects at different stages of development.

Nausori Town Council for this fiscal year, plans to implement the following projects funded through donor funding and Council funding totalling \$1.2 million:

- (1) Nausori Market Women's Accommodation Centre, which is funded by UN Women in the sum of \$600,000;
- (2) Nausori Market Car Park Development at the old Golf Course with the funding of \$45,000; and
- (3) Rehabilitation of Cakobau Park.

Sigatoka Town Council, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is on the verge of completing Amphitheatre on the riverside funded by the Chinese Government. A new public convenience will be built in Solevu and the new car park at the old tramline is completed.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, moving onto Labasa, the Council will complete the beautification and drainage work and a total of \$41,700 is allocated for beautification work whilst the sum of \$64,521 is allocated for drainage works. The Council has further budgeted a sum of \$108,360 to complete the upgrade work at Subrail Park, a sum of \$45,000 has been set aside for the design and documentation of Seafood Centre at Naiyaca. The Council has completed the site clearing works and are currently finalising the concept design and detailed drawings prior to progressing with the levelling works.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with regards to the Lautoka City Council, there are three projects in the planning and documentation stage. These are botanical garden coffee shop, Shirley Park podium and Lautoka foreshore sub-division at Marine Drive.

Tavua Town Council, Mr. Speaker, Sir, currently does not have adequate parking space for the citizens entering the town area, the lack of parking space creates congestion in the town. The Tavua Town Council plans to carry out levelling work at the vacant land behind ANZ building for a temporary car park space. This temporary space will reduce congestion and also generate revenue to support the municipality. The project will be funded by the Council at an estimated cost of approximately \$40,000.

Suva City Council, has lined up several projects. These are; Flagstaff Mini Market, Raiwaqa Market, Mead Road Mini Market, re-development of Sukuna Park and development of Nubukalou Creek.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with respect to Ba Town Council, they plan to carry out a major project at Ba River Bank which is under design and documentation phase. The project will be funded by the Council through partnership with the private sector. In addition to the above project, there are two others projects which has commenced. This is the Ba Market Extension at a cost of \$74,494 and refurbishment of Women's Accommodation Centre funder by UN Women.

HON. SPEAKER.- One supplementary question. Honourable Tabuya?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank the Honourable Minister for her Ministerial Statement. Mr. Speaker, I do not know if the Honourable Minister is aware but members of the public are being turned away from the markets if they are not vaccinated. This is losing income for members of the public. Is she aware of this and if so, what is the legal basis of this "no jab no entry" that some markets are enforcing?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, sometimes we have to go into details so that there is no confusion, just like what she has created now. This question is not related to the main question.

HON. SPEAKER.- I agree.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- We are talking about projects.

HON. SPEAKER.- We move on.

Frontline Workers - Access to Counselling Services
(Question No. 188/2021)

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

Can the Honourable Minister Health and Medical Services inform Parliament whether counselling services are easily available to frontline workers?

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE (Minister Health and Medical Services).- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the Honourable Member for that question. Counselling services are available to our frontline health workers. I had alluded to this in my Budget response and also in the statement earlier this week, so they are available either through the support groups that we have within the Ministry of Health. Also we are utilising Empower Pacific through AusAID support. There are *Viber* forums that are available; I am on several of them. There are also mechanisms by which they can be able to liaise with their own teams. Certainly there are occasions, for example, when counselling is needed differently from the routine counselling services and we are also cognisant of the fact that we are in COVID-19. So many of them are using virtual platforms. The question is easily available in terms of fronting up, meeting a person, talking that may not necessarily be so because of the COVID-19 protocols that we currently have at the moment.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, yesterday we heard from the Minister for Defence on the high number of soldiers that had been affected with COVID-19. Are there in-house counsellors in the military, police and also now that the infection is picking up in the North and in West, what kind of services are available?

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have recruited an in-house counsellor, that is apart from the counselling services that are readily available. Sir, we also have a service called “psychiatry” of the mental health service. One big component of their support at the moment is supporting in-house again with the work that our frontliners are doing. We try to encourage as much as possible, the frontliners to let us know how best we can support them, that also includes platforms in which the Permanent Secretary, myself, the chief medical advisor are on and the various means. But again reiterating the fact that we are in COVID-19 protocol and being able to actually see a person face-to-face like we normally do before may be a challenge but the virtual platforms we see are working quite well and the ability to actually pick up the phone and text or *Viber* a colleague in this time.

Mr. Speaker, just before I sit down I would also like to thank the organisations - the Fiji Medical Association for the mentoring that it provides; the FNA also does that; the Fiji Pharmaceutical Society; Fiji Medical Lab, Scientists and also the Radiographers Association - these are professional organisations also provide their own form of support to our staff.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of other agencies that work with us we also work with them and allow them to utilise whatever facilities that we have.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, we will move on to the last Oral Question for today to the Honourable Alexander O'Connor to ask Question 189/ 2021.

Update on the Unemployment Assistance
(Question No. 189/2021)

HON. A.D. O'CONNOR asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications update Parliament on the unemployment assistance?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM (Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications).- Mr. Speaker, Sir. Just very quickly in respect of the issue raised about the sanitary pads, I am rather flabbergasted by Honourable Radrodro's comments that this should wait - food is more important. But she should know as has been published, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that food is being distributed and in the food packs we already have sanitary pads. She should understand the dynamics of the patriarchal society that we live in, is that normally when people have financial marginalisation they tend to put women's issue to the side.

This is the reason why, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we said that unemployed families, when they have less money even though we paying them the money they may not actually buy the provisions for their young daughters and other females in the family - it is critically important.

Honourable Kepa, I am again flabbergasted that as a former Minister for Education who said that man cannot handle sanitary pads or will be shy. This is the whole patriarchal system that we have; I mean that is such a backward way of thinking. The Honourable Minister for Education highlighted the privacy surrounding the distribution of pads that is fine, but to say that men will be very shy to handle sanitary pads is such a backward way of thinking and in fact a huge blow to women's rights from that perspective. Mr. Speaker, Sir, obviously she does not understand the power of dynamics nor is she committed to changing the power differentials within a patriarchal society.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, what is also critically important is that, Honourable Tabuya is questioning about vaccination in markets, when her leader is saying that everyone should get vaccinated including children, but she on the other hand does not want people to go to markets be vaccinated in a highly contagious infectious environment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the interests of time, Government has also been providing unemployment benefits through the FNPF - in the formal sector we allowed \$220 per fortnight and also those on reduced hours. To date, through the FNPF Scheme \$387 million has been paid to 114,335 Fijians of which \$205 million has been directly paid by the Fijian Government and \$182 million withdrawn from the members general accounts.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the informal sector Government for the first time, no Government has ever done this provided a first round of \$90 cash assistance and two rounds of \$50 cash assistance to assist Fijians to buy food and other essential items. In total for \$90 cash assistance and two rounds of \$50 cash assistance around \$32 million has been paid out to over 250,000 Fijians, and obviously through the convenient means of MyCash which is through Digicel and MPaiSA through Vodafone.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the Budget we announced an allocation of \$200 million for unemployment benefits. We will be supporting formal and informal sector employees in Viti Levu and formal sector employees outside of Viti Levu, who were receiving unemployment benefits through the FNPF Scheme. So, if a hotel worker, for example, who was on the \$220 a fortnight from Taveuni, the Mamanucas,

Yasawa or Savusavu, they will still be eligible for this \$360 payout that we have got. Of course, if they have got money in their General Account, they can continue to access the General Account through the FNPF Scheme.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the criteria, of course, to access the \$360 is that, you have to have at least received the first dose of COVID-19 by 7th August, 2021. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reality of the matter is that, this has been a huge concerted effort by the Ministry of Economy, working together with the Ministry of Communications, Ministry of Health and Medical Services, Ministry of Women, Children & Poverty Alleviation, FRCS, FNPF, the TSLB, Vodafone and Digicel.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we speak, the applications have closed, we have received a total of around 345,000 applications for the first payment of the \$360 cash assistance. Based on the initial preliminary assessment, 260,000 Fijians will qualify which means a payment of \$93.6 million to all of these individuals. So far, or by this afternoon, \$54 million will be disbursed to around 150,000 Fijians.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we will have that injection of funds, obviously they will be able to use as they please, and we urge them to use it responsibly. Interestingly enough, Sir, those who did not qualify so far, 33,103, who applied but did not get their first dose of the vaccine. What we have said is that because they have applied and applications have closed, we are giving them another week, if they go and get their first dose by next Friday and provide us proof with that, they can get their \$360.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there were 739 who applied below the age of 18. There were some who were currently receiving FNPF or on pension, 17,362 who actually applied also but they do not qualify. Interestingly enough, 4,354 civil servants applied even though they are being paid wages and salaries. Sir, 2,797 of those who applied were receiving TELS allowances, 1564 were receiving Social Welfare Allowances and others did duplicate applications. One person tried to apply more than once, so this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is the current status of the unemployment benefit.

As we have said, they are able to redeem this \$360 by going and buying goods and products directly from shops that have the MPAiSA or MyCash facility. They also, of course, have the ability to take out cash if they wish. We have also been working on VitiKart and MPAiSA allocation for shops so any shop that adopts the MPAiSA QR code we will actually pay for them to do that because in this way it is a lot more convenient. If I receive \$360, if there is a shop nearby I can actually go and buy goods from that shop too. I do not actually have to go and queue up at Vodafone or Digicel to take out actual cash to then buy those goods and services. Of course, they can go online with VitiKart and that is the reason why we have also done that so Mr. Speaker, Sir, that in essence is what the current status is.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When the Honourable Minister for Tourism said that you were up to 91 percent with vaccination I said, 'Let us go to 100 percent' because I have my doubts about herd immunity. I do not know how the Minister of the Economy took that to mean inoculating four year olds. Honourable Speaker, grandstanding in Parliament will not take COVID-19 away, please, let us remember that.

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I believe that it is public knowledge that the virus has infiltrated the most isolated and remote communities in our society where infrastructure and network is very poor and I have raised this earlier in this House that the first unemployment assistance that was going out last year. Can I ask the Honourable Minister, has there been any research done by the relevant Ministry to ascertain the success and the extent of coverage for its intended beneficiaries? Thank you, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sir, frankly, I do not understand his question. What is this research about? I do not understand what he is asking me to research.

HON. SPEAKER.- Could you repeat your question, Honourable Member?

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the research is to ascertain the success of this assistance and the extent of coverage to its intended beneficiaries because a lot of people complained that they have not received this assistance, as I stated last year, in this House. Thank you, Sir.

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

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the coverage obviously, as we announced in the Budget is for those people in the formal and the informal sector, and as I have said previously in Parliament also, that we have never had this type of assistance given to people in the informal sector, so you know, the lady, who may be in Namatakula selling breadfruit by the roadside or coconuts, if she is no longer able to do that, she can actually apply for the \$360. That is the extent of the coverage of this \$360.

We have what we call housegirls in Fiji, who are applying for this, who no longer have work, so that is the extent of the coverage. In Viti Levu, anyone in the formal and informal sectors, there is a particular level, Mr. Speaker, Sir, of trust being placed on individuals. We have of course, been informed, in the last time when we gave \$90, that some people, the moment they got it, were actually at the bottle shops queuing up. That is their choice and obviously, the fact of the matter is, we cannot control that but we cannot for example, just for the sake of 10 percent of the population abusing it, the recipients abusing it, we cannot then neglect the rest of the 90 percent. So, there is always an element of risk percentage that has been built-in to these types of initiatives. So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is the extent of the coverage and we obviously, want people to be able to have facilities, have funding available to help them meet some of the costs that they cannot currently meet.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. That is the end of the Oral Questions.

Written Question

Sigatoka River Mouth - Dredging Process (Question No. 190/2021)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment inform Parliament on the progress of dredging of the mouth of the Sigatoka River, in particular -

- (a) progress made in dredging works since 2018 to date;
- (b) the Ministry's plans for the Sigatoka River; and
- (c) the reason(s) for the non-removal of the dredging machine owned by the China Railway First Group (CRFG) since it has been there since 2018.

HON. DR. M. REDDY (Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment).- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will table my response at a later sitting date, as permitted under Standing Order 45 (3).

END OF WEEK STATEMENTS

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, each Member may speak for up to 10 minutes with a 10-minute response by the Minister or Ministers responsible for the subject matter of the Member's

speech. No seconder is required and there will be no other debate. I now call on the Honourable Qereqeretabua to deliver her End of the Week Statement.

Development of Women in Sports

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, these last few weeks have been historic. Firstly, for the men's Seven's Team retaining the gold medal in Tokyo doing the nation immensely proud and bringing joy to a nation plunged into misery due to the on slaughtered COVID-19. But while Fiji was the favourite for the men's competition for gold medal, there was the Fijiana, who had finished eighth at the Rio Olympics in 2016. And Tokyo 2021 or 2020 proved once and for all that Fiji punches above its weight. The sevens that we used to see in Hong Kong or now a new sensation, the Fijian Women's Team.

The Fijiana's bronze medal win at the Tokyo Olympics brought so much jubilation to Fijians around the world, not least of all, to us here in Fiji. Many Fijians who perhaps, had never watched women play rugby before, stood in front of screens and cheered the ladies on, screamed and yes, swore at the referees, set of fire words or like I did, ran outside to toot the car horn. Many young girls turned to their mums and said, 'mummy I want to play rugby.' Many hopefully, stopped thinking of women's rugby as merely a curtain raiser for the real match by which I mean, when the men play.

As we witnessed, the Fijiana progressed through their pool at the Tokyo Games beating reigning Olympic champions Australia, and going on into not one but two extra times against the Black Ferns to eventually win the bronze, many involved in the sport in Fiji, in particular, girls and women, their families, supporters, clubs, officials and volunteers felt this jubilation that can only come from years of calling for an equal playing field in sport.

But getting that equal playing field is a challenge still being faced by many sports women, Mr. Speaker, Sir, despite the steps taken over the years in traditionally male sports to include women. Much still has to be done to even out that paddock. The Fijiana Team's bronze medal win, despite all the challenges they faced before getting to Tokyo has brought to the fore many discussions about an equal playing field in sports. For this reason, I had conversations with women in sports over the last couple of weeks, as well as with the supporters of women in sport for this End of Weeks Statement.

The Fijiana's road to Tokyo was not an easy one, we all know that. As with many women's international teams who had gone before them, they did not have all the support they needed, nor did they had the support that they deserved. That the Fijiana played their hearts out for the code they love and are taking home bronze medal, is a testament to their own grit and determination, to the support of their coaches, manager, support staff and all who love and truly support them.

But, Mr. Speaker, in order to get to that level and to win; to get to international competitions and to get them to the pinnacle of world sport, the World Cup and the Olympic Games repeatedly and consistently and bring back medals and trophies, there must be a development pathway. There must be adequate and equal and fair distribution of financial support by governing bodies for players, teams, clubs and officials from the government and from the sponsors. They must have equal time in the gym and on the training fields as their male counterparts. There must be regular competition, there must be a reward for a return on investment, and the media's all-important role cannot be ignored.

All this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is wrapped up in perhaps the most important of the points I will mention, and that is, attitudes toward women who play traditionally and historically male dominated sport; respect for them as athletes representing Fiji on the world stage and I am just talking about basics. The difference between accommodation, transportation, meal and kits.

During my conversations, I found out some great things about football or soccer as most of us call it. I want to say, I shout out to Riyaz or since 2016 has been running the International Youth Football Academy (IYFA). For example, who runs Youth Football Development Programmes in Suva and Denarau and has done so since 2016, introducing boys and girls from a very young age to football and getting them ready for club participation. While IYFA is not affiliated with the Fiji Football Association, it is an amazing way to develop players into the athletes that they can later become.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am not bring this End of Week Statement just because I can, I have loved sport from a young age and thanks perhaps to my father's love for rugby, cricket and squash and I have to say that dad was the captain of the QVS Deans Team of 1957. My husband is former Fiji Bati, having represented Fiji from 1994 to 1998, the year when I, I have to admit, I tried my hand at playing rugby league myself alongside international representatives including Merewai Sokovata and Salote Tikoisuva. Years later, my husband became the head coach of the Nabua Broncos Rugby League Team, while I served alongside him, as team manager for three years, so I know only too well the struggles that unpaid team officials face for the love of the game of their choice.

So that brings me, Mr. Speaker, to an important point. While we are revelling in the Fijiana's win, while we are revelling in the steps that women in sport have taken in leaps and bounds since the first time we were represented at the Olympics by Miriama Chambault. There are women and girls who struggled week in and week out playing rugby in the Skipper Cup and all the other local competitions and I know that the COVID-19 pandemic has put a comma in local competition. But I just hope during this End of Statement, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that this pause does not turn into a drop kick to the back seat for women in sport. For those of us who would love to see women aspire to the highest levels of sport, I would like to invite all of us to please support your local players in your local teams. Buy them boots, buy them socks, buy them sanitary pads and buy them sports bras. This is the kind of things that women in sport really need right now.

As we prepare for 2022, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are a few competitions. There is Rugby World Cup, Commonwealth Games to name two competitions that the women's teams of all codes will be preparing for. Where to from here? Mr. Speaker, Sir, I watched this online chat between Sharon Pickering-Smith and Ben Ryan as they talked about being coaches of international teams from Fiji. They said that is more than just coaching. For their sportsmen and women, it is about nutrition, it is about the kinds of backgrounds that their athletes come from and I hope that between now and next year and as we prepare for the next Olympic Games and for the Commonwealth Games next year, that as I said, "women sports will not be drop kicked into the back seat".

Mr. Speaker, I ask the representative of the Fiji Media Association (FMA) had data on how much coverage women in sport received in comparison to their male counterparts in Fiji's mainstream media, unfortunately at this time no study has been done so no figures are available, but I have been assured that a survey has been planned for. I think that it is only fair that sports women be given as many column centimetres or minutes as their male counterparts in the coverage of sports.

To conclude, whilst on the topic of an equal playing field in sport, I want to take this opportunity to once again as I have done all week to condemn the shameful treatment of former Minister Mereseini Vuniwaqa for standing up for what she believes in and highlight the need for an equal playing field for women in public office and women in politics as well as in sport. We will not bow to the misogynistic opinions of male Members of this august House towards women whether in sports or in public life and in politics. Some of the comments we have heard in this august House this week lead me to say this, qualifications and position do not equal intelligence.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations, Youth and Sports, for this response. You have the floor.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The Honourable Prime Minister and Honourable Cabinet Ministers, Honourable Members, ladies and gentlemen; I join the Honourable Prime Minister in congratulating the Fiji Women's Rugby Team (Fijiana) on their bronze medal win at the recent Tokyo Olympics. Sir, in fact, the Honourable Prime Minister has formally acknowledged, congratulated and announced a million dollar package for both the men's and women's team, for the glory that they brought to our beloved country.

To the players, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the officials and management of the team, I want to say thank you so much for the win for this strong statement of everything local. And making it possible for a new generation of Fijian girls and women to aspire towards excellence in sports. Sir, this achievement is an indication of the hard work that has been carried out in this sports association for many years through the inclusion and empowerment of women to participate in sports.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Qereqeretabua has just said that there was not enough funding towards the preparation of the Fijiana Team. I want to ask, where were they before? Where were they in 2016? They are only making this noise because of the success that both the teams have brought in. So, they want to be now relevant in this.

(Honourable Members interject)

HONN. P.K. BALA.- Let me put to this august House that FijiFirst Government provided \$1.47 million for the preparation and participation of our women's team.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, over the past years the Ministry has been working closely with the Fiji National Sports Commission in addressing the need for gender balance in our community sports programme. For the past two financial years, Mr. Speaker, Sir, 2019-2020 and 2020-2021, 14,197 Fijians have benefited from this programmes. Out of the 14,197 that participated 7,174, 51 percent are men and 7,023, 49 percent are women. All programmes are delivered both at rural and urban centres as these programmes are mostly funded by the Government with some support from our donor agencies.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is only through FijiFirst Government that the Fiji National Sports Commission goes down to grassroots and gets all our old and young children out to the ground to do fitness programmes. Donation of sporting equipment to the communities sports group - this has never happened before, Mr. Speaker, Sir. It has all been done under the FijiFirst Government. This also includes programmes like women in youth and sports supported by the Australian government as well as a number of initiatives by national associations based on global framework like the "Just play" FIFA Program that provides a gender inclusive platform.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, here, I would also like to acknowledge and thank the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Fiji Sports Council (FSC) for empowering our women in many areas and we have had many discussions to see how we could empower our women.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji has an extensive competition framework across sports, and all sports in Fiji are gender-inclusive in these competitions. Corporate competitions for women across these codes have an increasing presence and we welcome this.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is also important to note that in the training the trainer's programme, where teachers are trained to be community coaches, officials and administrators of various sports disciplines, a majority of the recipients of these programme are women, which indicate the growing interests of more women engaging in becoming educators or trainers. Had this has been done earlier, some 30 40 years ago, we can say that women would have more percentage compared to our men, unfortunately, it was not done so now it is being done under the Fiji First Government.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is evident that there is an increase in women sports administrators in Fiji with some holding national, regional and international leadership roles and membership representative for Fiji. This is also through support from the Fiji Association of Sports and National Olympic Committee (FASANOC), and in particular, through sports education programmes, as well as the work of its women and Sports Commission whose objective is to empower women through sports. Sir, over the past years, FASANOC supported by the Ministry of Sports and the Fiji Sports Commission, have engaged in numerous women in sports forum, and we continue to work in this regard, to increase the participation of women and the girl child at all levels.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the past year, the Fijian Government has assisted in funding these programmes which is worth around \$2.8 million. This funding, caters for salaries for development officers and coaches for the national sporting organisations with support for training and scholarship for our Fijian athlete as well.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we will continue to work with the National Sporting Organisation to be innovative in their women's representation and participation in sports development programmes and at high performance levels as well. In this regard, we will work with the National Sporting Organisations and FASANOC to ensure pathways for professional sports careers at the elite levels for more women.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, rugby and football are among codes that have greatly expanded their gender-base, increasing participation for women. This adds to codes such as netball, athletics and volleyball that have greater participation by women.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the financial year, one must have noticed that there has been funding for the construction of volleyball courts around the country. The reason for constructing these volleyball courts around the country is to make sure that our women also take part because they do play volleyball, so it will take place, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and with this funding, we will make sure that it is completed within this financial year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as is evident from the participation in the Pacific Games over the past two decades, women in Fiji play and excel in a wide variety of sports. Sir, we will ensure that our programmes will spread the message that women's participation in sports is key to a healthier and a happier Fiji.

HON. SPEAKER.- We move on and I now call on the Honourable Qionibaravi to deliver her End of the Week Statement. You have the floor, Madam.

iTaukei Administration at the Village Level

HON. ADIL QIONIBARAVI.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. I rise to contribute to the End of Week Statement on *Gone iTaukei* Village Administration and I will focus on the need to strengthen and better co-ordinate iTaukei administration at the village level, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Before I get into the substance of my contribution, I would like to make some comments and issues that were raised yesterday in regards to free intellectual property rights-related Bills.

To the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, the required consultations that we are seeking is mandated under law. It remains as one of the established safety nets under Section 11 of the Fijian Affairs Act which I read out yesterday, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The responsibility of the Minister and the Fijian Affairs Board is to review any Bill that is proposed and tabled in Parliament that affects the rights and aspirations of indigenous Fijian people. Therefore, the call for consultation for every pesticide that the Ministry of Agriculture will want to bring in is a non-issue for after all there is already the Pesticides Act Cap. 157 that was introduced in 1972 and, of course, there would be policies that are relevant, that should guide the new pesticides that the Ministry of Agriculture would be introducing.

Secondly, to the Honourable Attorney-General, on the cultural mapping. That exercise had started in the early 2000 and is continuing because it is a massive exercise. A matter that remains is the validation of the information that is collected and we hope that that process will be undertaken to reduce further differences that may arise on claims on the cultural exercise, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

The matter regarding the distribution of funds emanating to registration and commercial use of traditional knowledge and indigenous intellectual property rights, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I had also mentioned yesterday that the discussion of the Bose Levu Vakaturaga on this matter generally agreed that funds be paid into the central Fijian treasury and that those *vanua* who are directly linked to the development of her creation, invention or inheritance of particular birds or flowers or special mat motifs, they would be recognised as the holders or the owners of these matters.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- A Point of Order, Sir. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the End of Week Statement actually have a special place in the parliamentary proceedings for the week where the Members are able to deliver eloquently on the subject matter itself. What the Honourable Member has already done is taken up half her time to respond to issues of questions that were raised earlier on in the week and she is abusing that particular process. End of Week is specifically on that particular subject matter that has been highlighted by the Business Committee.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Member, that is why I was telling you to get on with your statement. End of the Week Statement is a privilege slot. It is a privilege slot. It is only given to three people during the course of the sitting, so when you have it, take it. You have got the floor.

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I now move to the substance of my statement today. The *vanua* had existed before the Deed of Cession, and various studies had been carried out to improve the Fijian administration. The End of Week Statement is not about revisiting those earlier studies and assessing the merits of the studies and the impacts of the approved changes in those studies, Mr. Speaker, Sir. It is about the status of our villages today and to provide example from what are lacking in the villages and the efforts of villages to maintain a cohesive form of governance.

All *iTaukei* will always be attracted to their villages for what the village provide to their forbearers and the continuing generations. The villages depository or the peoples customs and traditions for our villages - the training ground for farming, fisheries, carpentry, boat building, house construction, people of expression and performing arts, traditional knowledge, chants, *meke*, traditional stories and significant historical aspects of the village, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Every child raised in the village are expected to belong to any household. They are trained on customs and rules of living by elders in the village. Young men and women are trained, they turn to the support of their family, their *tokatoka*, *mataqali*, *yavusa* and *vanua*, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

There is a leading chief who has huge leadership, supported by the heads of all other *mataqali*, the *turaga ni koro*, the *nasi ni koro* and the village committees - they all work together for the good governance and the wellbeing of the village. The *turaga ni koro* is the hero in the village administration and is the coordinator of all government and non-government initiatives.

The Churches also play a key role in villages, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Every village belongs to a *tikina* and a number of *tikina* forms a province. The general expectation is that, the village life reflects how the leaders administer the village and how well they link up the Fijian administration and the Government. There is a need to strengthen and better coordinate administration at the village level, there is a need for better coordination of urban dwellers and village dwellers, support in developing their village plans and equipment to support the *turaga ni koro* in the village administration. There is a need for village plans that encompass a better way of living which are harmonised at the *iTaukei* administration and link it to the central government. We value every government and *iTaukei* administrations contribution, more

targeted efforts are needed, as well the support from urban village dwellers to our villages including those that are now living overseas, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

A typical village today, Mr. Speaker, Sir, requires the following to be better addressed. Firstly, to prevent and reduce COVID-19 Delta variant to villages. Every effort should be provided to ensure that the virus does not reach their villages, again with the role of the Ministry of Health and the Government in their efforts to contain the pandemic. For Tailevu North, the infection is found in almost every village, deaths are increasing amongst its citizens, and I value the response by the Honourable Minister of Health today that there is a special team already in Korovou to help in addressing the problem that we now have in Tailevu North.

There is a need for better use of the land and mechanised farming, Mr. Speaker, Sir, leasing of their own land for export license for their own harvest. This would invigorate the economy in our villages. Sustainable practice in both, land and sea is also necessary. The problem that I spoken about in Parliament remains prevalent in almost all villages. This is about drop deterrence. This is a critical need, a generation of village dwellers who embraced drugs will remove all the ideals and reverence that village dweller value in their villages, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

I would like to make the following recommendations, that Government reduced the budget on the *iTaukei* and its contribution to the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, the iTLTB, the Native Land Fisheries Commission, the Land Development assistance to iTLTB. How much money has been received to date and what has been the impact of that provision and how much it has not been used?

The Fijians Trust Fund which was established after the approval of the Bose Levu Vakaturaga in 2001 and under a Deed of Trust in 2002, and further enacted to an Act of Parliament, Cap121(A) on 14th November, 2004, further revised in 2006 and 2012, be encouraged to take active role in improvement of village administration, as outlined in some responsibilities as follows: being established by the Fiji Government to foster their advancement of indigenous Fijians and Rotumans by promoting initiatives that will result in better standard of living and enhanced appropriate culture, tradition and values. Better coordinated efforts between the Government including the provincial councils and the support of the village dwellers, *tikina* regulations and village regulations of 1996, to ensure that villages remain viable as well as revitalise village leadership.

On that note, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is the village chief and the heads of the *turaga ni koro* and all village communities will love to administer their villages improvement, leadership, et cetera provided by the government and the Fijians Trust Fund Board. The tyranny of the villages must and should remain. In that regard, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are unbeaten village protocols which is understood by all at the role of making announcements or *kaci* at all villages remain the call of the *turaga ni koro* if it involves the village administration and to the designated member of the *mataqali* who is the *gusu ni vanua* or the traditionally bestowed responsibility to make announcements on *vanua* matters.

Recently, this long respected tradition in the village was broken with the military officials arriving in villages, asked to meet the *turaga ni koro* and started a meeting with the *turaga ni vanua* without a *sevusevu* at this meeting and the meeting resulted in the military officials making official announcements in the villages they visited. Those chiefs may have agreed to the proposal out of respect for Government or maybe, out of the military uniform that they saw on that day. But it is a serious breach of village protocol. I respectfully ask the Honourable Prime Minister that this should be stopped. The *vulagi* must not overstep the authority of the villagers. *Me rokovi na noda koro, e sega ni dua e lako tuga yani, lai Roko Tui i noda Koro.*

On that note, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we hope that this incident is not to be taken as planned or officials become *turaga ni koro*, to play a supervisory role in our villages. Please leave our villages to be

administered by our village chief, *yavusa*, *mataqali*, *turaga ni koro*, *nasi ni koro* and the village committees. Our villages are the cornerstone, the Fijian way of life (*bula vaka iTaukei*).

With those words, I pray for Government to review its current level of assistance, together with the financial support in the Fijian's Trust Fund and contribution of urban Fijian dwellers as well as overseas village dwellers to help, to make our villages continue to be the cornerstone of the Fijian way of life...

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- *iTaukei* way of life.

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- ... (*bula vaka iTaukei*). I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the time given to me to make this End of Week Statement.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Honourable Prime Minister and Minister for iTaukei Affairs, Sugar Industry and Foreign Affairs for his response. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Mr. Speaker, one can duck from the comments she has been making in the past. This is nothing at all to do with the iTaukei administration at the village level. She cannot even get her facts right. She is supposedly a lawyer and it is not Fijian Affairs, it is iTaukei Affairs. There is something definitely wrong with lawyers such as this.

Mr. Speaker, what we have just heard as I have said, is not a genuine case for better administration. It is just an insidious argument in favour of privileges, of elitism and backwards systems of power we inherited from the Colonial era. I have a different vision, a new vision and at the heart of that vision rests the well-being of the ordinary *iTaukei*. As *iTaukei* people, our culture, our language and our traditions are well protected in our Fijian Constitution.

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

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Our land is protected for all times as a sacred and valuable asset and has been the policy of my Government to help the landowners use that valuable asset to live better lives to build wealth for further generations and to contribute in different ways to the development of the Fijian economy. Sir, *iTaukei* land is held communally and that is why we believe as guaranteed in the Constitution that no *iTaukei* land should be alienated permanently. In other words, the members of landowning units should not lose ownership of their traditional lands.

I am astounded, Mr. Speaker, as a member of a landowning unit, as an *iTaukei* that the Opposition have time and time again, tried to justify the actions of Sitiveni Rabuka and Laisenia Qarase as legitimate. Even Rabuka himself tried to do it lately. Honourable Bulanauca just yesterday or the day before said that it was legally done, so it is okay. Even though the law was wrong, and even though it was morally and ethically outright wrong; what hypocrisy. This is from someone who was a Minister for Lands supposedly in previous governments. I hope that he is not given the opportunity to come on this side of the House.

Only two weeks we passed the law that will make *iTaukei* land a lot more attractive, increase the value of *iTaukei* land, bring more money to landowners but without the single millimetre of the *iTaukei* land been given up but the Opposition held it to be some great infringement of land rights when clearly, it is not the case. Yet, in the same breath when actual land was taken away permanently, depriving the future generations' access to that land, the Opposition unashamedly stand up and say, it is okay.

Mr. Speaker, you cannot selectively be the so-called protectors of indigenous land only, when it politically suits you. We are not selective. We are principled, Mr. Speaker, and we practice what we

believe and what we say.

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

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Mr. Speaker, Government has also ensures that the benefits of landownership must go to all of the landowners, not just a few that has not always been the case and we will not sit idly by while elites line their own pockets, thanks to assets that belongs to all, commoner or chief.

The wealth that these communally owned assets produce must be equally shared and we must look for ways not just to share what we have today but also for and with the future generations. We must, therefore, increase the value of these assets. It is our policy to empower communities to use their land in the most beneficial way as possible.

That means, Mr. Speaker, we have to recognise changes in the modern economy and the new opportunities they bring. It means we must streamline the approval process and remove impediments for landowners and lessees alike. We recognise that a number of *iTaukei* still live in a village setting. We also have to recognise that a number of the villagers are now in urban or peri-urban setting.

The demographics are different, Mr. Speaker. Sources of income and levels of income, the level of literacy and access to education and isolation from amenities and services, differ from village to village or region to region. How we deal with these communities will not be addressed by one size fits all.

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

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Times have changed since the colonial times and indeed structures created then need to be assessed for its practicality and more importantly, the ability of these structures to serve the ordinary villagers and the *iTaukei* at large.

We, the *iTaukei* people are wiser now. We want to be empowered, not merely protected. Some in the Opposition arrogantly believe that they and only they, can be entrusted with the protection of the *iTaukei* people. They speak of the *iTaukei* like we are children who need their protection rather than as leaders and decision makers, capable of shaping our future. If the Opposition had their way, they would assume yoke of colonizers themselves. They would keep the *iTaukei* weak, afraid and ignorant.

Listen to the former speaker but we are not, Mr. Speaker. SODELPA and their cronies are more than one century too late. The *iTaukei* people are not children in need of their protection. They want to be empowered, all *iTaukei* people. Not only those with the right blood line or the right titles or the right gender but women, young people and those with the drive to make something out of their lives for themselves. Instead, what have we heard, an attempt to reinstate and outdated colonial mindset onto a rapidly modernising economy and changing society influenced by *TikTok*, *Facebook* and greater access and connectivity to media information and entertainment.

This is not 1874, Mr. Speaker, or even 1970. Decision making no longer falls like a hammer from the top down. It must flow from the grassroots up.

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

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Community leadership must empower the entire community.

Mr. Speaker, not simply benefit the chosen privilege few. That is our philosophy. That is my Government philosophy and it differs from the Opposition in all of the ways that matter to the tangible

and measureable wellbeing of our people, their level of opportunity, income, education, livelihoods and their future.

Over the years, Mr. Speaker, the iTaukei Affairs *Tikina* and Village Council Regulations have worked with the provincial council officers to guide rural iTaukei communities, with the support of the village councils and the *vanua*, the hardworking *Mata ni Tikina*, *Turaga ni Koro* and the community health workers had continued to assist and guide the villages and had provided the reporting framework for the iTaukei administration. The village boundaries have been surveyed and gazetted and the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs is working on its upload to the GIS platform.

Mr. Speaker, my Government has moved from a development-centred approach to something more comprehensive, it is a people-centred approach that relies not on improved subsistence but on improved opportunity. We need to move from a subsistence economy to the opportunities that a modern market economy presents to all Fijians.

My Government is reaching down to all levels in the society, including within the iTaukei communities. This includes elderly and disability allowances, greater empowerment for our women and our young people, in free education and transport assistance for our school children and land development opportunities for our landowners through the iTaukei Land Development initiative.

Through the National Development Plan, Mr. Speaker, our villages now have access to clean water through the rural water scheme, access to energy through the rural electrification scheme, access to communications and improvement in sanitation through our development partners. The *Turaga ni Koro* allowances were \$50 a month under the previous administration, we increased them to \$75 in 2015 and \$100 a month in 2018, and I thank the hardworking *Turaga ni Koro* for their efforts, especially during this pandemic.

Mr. Speaker, in the provision of basic medical services and the monitoring and promotion of healthy lifestyles in the local communities, the community health workers or *Nasi ni Koro*, play a pivotal role. Together with the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, the position was recognised as part of the village council reporting structure in 2017 and these vital members of the community who were paid about \$50 a month are now paid a reasonable allowance of \$200 a month to help them carry out their duties.

The iTaukei Affairs Board has re-strategised to overcome the challenges left behind by the previous administration. It must make up the huge backlog in the audit of the Board and the Provincial Council accounts which remains an obstacle to the progress we hope to make but we hope that that will be completed come 2022. It remains of paramount importance, Mr. Speaker, that we prudently administer the trust funds on behalf of the *vanua*. For example, Mr. Speaker, these funds have assisted the completion of the Village Community Hall for Yavusa Vunivivi in Nausori; renovated the Nalauwaki Village Hall in Waya in Ba; purchased equipment and materials for fishing projects for the Vanua Laucala in Taveuni; renovated the Vanua of Vuda's chiefly bure at Viseisei Village in Nadi; and they relocated the water system at Yalobi Village in Waya in Yasawa.

The Ministry, Mr. Speaker, continues to advise these communities on viable investment opportunities along with the associated risk to aid the owners in making sound and informed decisions. We are currently reviewing the operations of the Provincial companies, Mr. Speaker, which is one of the main points inherited from previous management. We are building new bridges with the councils. Two successful reviews have been completed in Macuata and Bua whereby provincial rates, targets are reduced as these are subsidised by the injections from the commercial arms on an annual basis.

Mr. Speaker, if we want better village administration, we must make it a priority to develop administrative skills and capacity at the local, regional and national levels. We never hear this from the former speaker. Over the years, the Board had sent staff for further education and has recruited qualified personnel to assist at provincial, *tikina* and village level. This has resulted in better services and greater understanding of what services are needed and how they can be delivered effectively.

In the Board's five-year Strategic Development Plan for 2018 and 2022, a platform was set, concentrating at the village and household levels. A village profiling exercise was conducted in 2018 for all the provinces. The findings were analysed and used as the basis for developing an integrated village development plan and the strategies mapped to address community needs. The implementation of this integrated plan, Mr. Speaker, is well-tracked and has been quite successful in areas such as natural disaster response, climate adaptation and our handling of the current COVID-19 pandemic.

Some of these projects include the catchment system at Nakoro Village in Nadroga; the contour line farming at Bureta Village, Lomaiviti to stop soil erosion; construction of a seawall at Cuvu Village in Nadroga; solar electrification in Dromuna in Bau, Tailevu; and other climate change adaptation programmes such as food security and reforestation initiatives. The *Sauvaki Ni Vanua* programme focuses on empowerment and protection of women, youth and children and the strengthening of Government's processes within the iTaukei administration forums, helping to resolve conflicts and facilitate dialogue within the community continues to be paramount in order to promote social cohesion and community solidarity.

Capacity building programmes through training and financial literacy training are conducted to encourage the culture of saving and investment at the community level. The training sites include Navunisole Village in Tailevu, Nabua Village in Rewa, Naivucini Village in Naitasiri, Nadala Village in Ba, Nabalasere Village in Ra, Namaqumaqua Village in Serua, Wainimakutu Village in Namosi, Naro'i Village in Moala, Lau, Loa Village, Cakaudrove, Daria Village in Bua, Niurua Village in Macuata, Nasinu Village, Ovalau, Gau and Koro islands.

Mr. Speaker, if landowners are to use their precious assets in the modern market economy, if they have ideas for businesses that can thrive at the local level, they need to draw from the experiences of others who know the Fijian economy. The Ministry provides free business advisory services for existing and potential *iTaukei* entrepreneurs including assistance to identify sources of new capital and appropriate market opportunities. For market access, the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs has assisted in identifying markets and helping farmers and *iTaukei* business penetrate them. For instance, kava traders in the USA markets have been identified and linked to the *yaqona* farmers clusters in *tikina* Vanuaso in Gau; the Naivucini *yaqona* farmers cluster in Naitasiri.

The Nabalasere Waterfall Project was a new sightseeing business venture, stemming from the formation of the youth cooperative and the business advice the Ministry provided. COVID-19 has slowed this initiative, Mr. Speaker, for obvious reasons. In times of access to capital, the Wainimakutu women's paper making business was a direct result of the Ministry of Women's Integrated Human Resource Development Programme (IHRDP) grants for expansion of paper making facilities. During this pandemic, interested applicants are assisted through preparation of business plans and cash flow forecast to access the COVID-19 loan assistance scheme from Ministry of Trade.

Increased development is heavily impacted by climate change. The Board has used its conservation platform to strengthen and empower the owners of these natural resources to make informed decisions through innovative best practices so they can sustainably manage their natural resources now and for future generations.

The establishment of the Yaubula Communities and provincial *tikina and* village levels, the introduction of waste management best practices at village levels, identification of traditional taboo sites primarily for preservation of the marine and forest reserves, for example, the gazetting of the marine reserve in Kiuva and the establishment of Vatu-i-Ra Conservation Park, to name a few of these.

The financial year 2022, marks the completion of the Board's 5-year Strategic Development Plan, which will be further evaluated to better address future village development needs. While there would be a need to review existing legislation and frameworks, the *Tikina* administration and Maritime Island Council would be strengthened to drive development and commercial ventures as part of their sustainable use of their resources.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we will continue with our interventions at all *iTaukei* administrative levels in our effort to ensure that all *iTaukei* communities can reap the advantages of the modern market economy and to ensure that these advantages fall to all of the *vanua*, not just a privileged few. That ends my Statement this afternoon and I want to address Honourable Adi Litia Qionibaravi that that is the Statement for the *iTaukei* administration at the village level, not some attack on the Military.

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- *Vinaka*.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Prime Minister. I now call on the Honourable Maharaj to deliver his End of the Week Statement. You have the floor.

Effect of COVID-19 Vaccination Initiative on Tourism Sector

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I thank you for this opportunity given today to deliver my Statement on the effect of COVID-19 vaccination initiative on the tourism sector. There is no doubt that COVID-19 continues to affect every aspect of our daily lives, and has not certainly changed the way we live in Fiji, in the Pacific and the rest of the world. It is now more than 17 months since the pandemic hit Fiji and the situation is constantly evolving. In particular, the tourism sector is struggling to survive, as never seen before in times of peace or even war. This sector was one of our major foreign exchange earners prior to the pandemic but is now struggling to even earn a single dollar.

However, Mr. Speaker, the cooperation and understanding from all the stakeholders has continued to keep the industry afloat one day at a time with locally targeted initiatives to at least assist the industry moving forward until today, although some hotels have succumbed to the drastic effect of this pandemic. The concept of Travel Bubble has been in circulation since mid-2020 when the global tourism and the tourism-dependent economies started sitting down to plan recovery, following the pandemic-induced economic fallout. There were several bubbles planned by trading countries that never eventuated or eventuated but did not necessarily work out within our region. We also announced our own area plans to have a *Bula* Bubble with our regional neighbours, but this too was not realised because the pandemic situation was constantly evolving.

The worst case scenario from the Travel Bubble was a mass community cluster of infection and we just could not risk that, nor do we believe we could recover from it from a tourism perspective. Mr. Speaker, I wish to acknowledge Tourism Fiji for the development of careFIJI Commitment Programme as the Honourable Minister for Tourism stated in this House, the CFC is a COVID-19 safe framework which is set out to enhance onsite standard of safety and health protocols for the industry.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a number of tourism operators signing up for the CFC continues to increase. The Tourism Fiji CEO, Brent Hill, stated on Tuesday this week that a total of 172 tourism operators have been given the CFC approval which is very encouraging. Mr. Speaker, Sir, 28 properties have had 100 percent of their eligible team members fully vaccinated and now have access to CFC vaccine tool kit and

resources. This is the first step to welcoming visitors back to our shores. The CFC compliance and vaccination will be just some of the obligatory requirements.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to acknowledge the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, and all the frontline workers who are assisting and ensuring that all Fijians get the required two doses of vaccine. I urge every eligible Fijian to get their jab as this is the only proven scientific way we can save ourselves, family members, community and the Fijian economy. Mr. Speaker, for Fiji, an effective rollout is critical for everyone's health and safety and revival of the tourism sector and thousands of people getting their jobs back.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, countries around the world including our neighbours New Zealand and Australia intensified their vaccination programme, border advice re-opening condition and timeframes. We also wish to thank our trading partners such as Australia, New Zealand, India and USA for their support for our vaccination campaign. This goes a long way in ensuring vaccine equity. To-date, a total number of people that have received their first dose of COVID-19 vaccine is 533,721 or 91 percent and total number of people who have received their second dose of COVID-19 vaccine is 211,420; 36 percent of the eligible population.

The wide rollout of COVID-19 vaccines means a new beginning for the tourism sector and is the first critical step towards recovery, as thousands of people will begin returning to work. The pace of recovery of this sector is linked to how quickly the majority of our population received the vaccine with the national target set as 80 percent, fully vaccinated of the eligible population. Mr. Speaker, the question is, how prepared will Fiji be towards the inevitable re-opening? Domestically, we are opening up in a COVID safe manner as vaccination rate grows, we can be in a better position to open up more businesses and boundaries and eventually our country to the world.

With sufficient number of people around the world vaccinated, it is hoped that we may reduce the virus to other flu-like occurrences. In beginning anticipatory to the fluid demands of the business operations in this COVID environment, we are giving our second jab and working collectively on how long it might take to get the entire sector ready for re-opening. The tourism sector is working very hard to get everyone in the sector vaccinated. Our tourism operators have already began working on their compliance requirements to have domestic and international guests accommodated safely.

The industry has commenced engaging the needs of marine operators to determine what it would require to get everyone operational and safely compliant. Every vessels that expects to be operating safely or in the water is being asked to check their equipment replacement or repair needs, safety certificate entering and crew training needs so that the industry could support efforts towards the compliance and border re-opening preparations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, even though we have made advance in regional vaccination, the global community needs to urgently come together to develop common protocols for cross border travel including vaccine passport. A common travel pass should be easy to use, fraud resistant and available digitally. Global integration effort could offer a platform for countries to negotiate.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I had mentioned, global vaccine roll-out is not an easy endeavour. As the Honourable Minister for Tourism stated that Fiji is taking destiny in our hands and putting up plans to safely re-open borders. The vaccine is a global effort to fight COVID-19. This is a huge step forward to normalcy; a new normal for Fiji and its people with hopes to restoring the livelihood of thousands of Fijians who for years have depended on the tourism sector.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji is grateful for the far more positive vaccine opportunities that we have been provided. Thanks to our Government who is working very closely with our donor agencies and

international partners. While vaccine will be key to any resumption in tourism, other health and safety measures will remain crucial to recovery. Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me take this opportunity to acknowledge the initiative undertaken by the Fijian Government, more importantly the commitment, dedication and sacrifice of the people of Fiji in ensuring that we battle the crisis together. A successful implementation of strategies and measures put in place by the Government is commended to everyone's effort and compliance.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I call on the Honourable Minister for Trade, Tourism and Transport for his response. You have the floor, Minister.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I support the statement that has been made by the Honourable Member. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we can never overstate just how much the COVID-19 pandemic has devastated the travel in the Tourism industry, not in numbers and sometimes, not in words. The pandemic longer term ramifications will continue to with some more apparent than others. The permanency of health and safety standards, advance adoption of technology and reliance on trust, these will be actually the new norm. Other implications, are more profound, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Unlike the global financial crisis which was largely economical.

Sir, COVID-19 has actually changed consumer behaviour and travel and tourism irrevocably. Financial woes aside, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are thousands of Fijians who still remain without a job, businesses on the brink of closure and markets near loss. So hope for a swift recovery of international travel are now pinned on a silver bullet the rapid in the wide distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the UN World Tourism Organisation has indicated that global vaccination rolled out and increased adoption of digital solution for safe travel is expected to lead to a rise in international mobility over the months ahead. Destination with stringent public health have some of the lowest rate of vaccination. But those with higher vaccination, have reopened to some extent, further indicating the clear correlation between vaccination, speed and easing of restriction.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I have previously mentioned in this august House, the pandemic impact on global economy and its people remain uneven. If we failed to achieve our vaccination target, we will be amongst those countries that remained shut to the world. Sir, this is not by choice of the country but choice of the traveller. Travel is one to feel safe, they want to enjoy their vacation at their favourite destination.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, regional disparity, with regards to restriction remain. The UN WTO further stated that 70 percent of all designated in Asia and the Pacific are almost completely closed, compared to other nations such as Europe reporting about 13 percent closed only.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the US is now expecting to give its citizens booster shot while the world poorest are still waiting for a single dose. This not only exacerbate the vaccine in the quality but in many ways shows our privileged we are to have access to enough vaccine for our entire eligible population.

Tourists are looking for a safe holiday, just the safe destination but safe in business, whether you are a hotel, a transport provider, a restaurant or retail store, tourists want to be assured that their holiday is safe as possible.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as the Honourable Member rightly stated this is where health and safety programmes such as the careFIJI commitment that now includes full vaccination will be an integral element to resumption. We have already seen contrary to belief from the other side that many tourism operators are fully vaccinated, Vuda Marina, Pacific DestinationS, Royal Davui, this Mr. Speaker, Sir, show the level of commitment we have in the industry.

Yesterday, the Honourable Gavoka said that we need to mobilise the industry better to support the national vaccination effort, this was presumably out of ignorance because they have been going above and beyond and we and our industry are very proud of them.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have operated such as Advanced Aviation Training and Sea Mercy who have made it possible for Fijians as far as Lau and Rotuma to get vaccines, stakeholders like the Duavata Collective are providing vehicles and personnel to remote communities in Nadroga/Navosa, Naitasiri so that they too have access, Tourism and the Fiji Hotel and Tourism Association have been working closely with the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, to establish vaccination hubs in key locations. Even Tourism Fiji's Office was used as a vaccination hub.

Tourism-dependent communities will also be considered as part of the CFC to encourage vaccination so that they too can receive visitors and earn a living.

The Love Our Locals Campaign is being used to communicate the importance of health and safety, including getting vaccinated. So you can see, Mr. Speaker, the industry has been working collaboratively, like I mentioned yesterday, to encourage vaccine uptake and not just amongst tourism stakeholders.

It is not very nice to tell the tourism industry that they are not doing enough and that is what Honourable Gavoka said yesterday, but across the tourism supply chain, the nation as a whole is actually being done. If that does not satisfy him, Sir, I am happy to report that Tourism Fiji has an exciting industry-wide-initiative and will be launched next week to encourage every Fijian to get vaccinated.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I mentioned in my Ministerial Statement on Tuesday, there are a number of things we still need to consider simultaneously for a safe real deal, one of which is mutual recognition of vaccine programmes and certificates. The certification programme will be another important endeavour.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, mandating vaccines is not a Government imposition or a political agenda, it is a global alliance that aspires to resume travel and gets millions of people back to work, it is unconscionable to think otherwise, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the fastest way to bring our tourism workers back into employment is by reaching the 80 percent vaccination target because when we open up, it will not only be protecting visitors but protecting Fijians.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as a Government, our commitment is to the people, to the socio-economic welfare of our people, to their health, therefore you being vaccinated will ensure your safety, being employed and being able to go back to living your lives with some dignity, and the same dignity and respect as you always live. I say this because the world's best efforts to eliminate or contain, we find hope for faster recovery in vaccines, Sir, neither we nor the world have the luxury, all the options of multiple panaceas, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, what the Opposition seemingly fails to understand is that the uncertainty of this pandemic impacts more than just tourism budget and visitor numbers, forecast whether national or sectors Pacific are also based on assumptions, assumptions predicated on national and global vaccine levels and test positivity rates, all of which impact the resumption of tourism so if tomorrow, Sir, if we find this magical panacea, that solves the world's problem in a day, our forecast will change.

We are at the threshold of a new age of travels, new age of tourism and the only semblance of normalcy will be a derivative of our vaccination levels.

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

ADJOURNMENT

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

That Parliament adjourns until Monday, 20th September, 2021, at 9.30 a.m.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the Parliament will next sit on Monday, 20th September, 2021 at 9.30 a.m. Until then, the Parliament is adjourned *sine die*.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.31 p.m.