

# PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



## PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

### DAILY HANSARD

**TUESDAY, 5<sup>TH</sup> APRIL, 2022**

**[CORRECTED COPY]**

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**TUESDAY, 5TH APRIL, 2022**

The Parliament met at 9.30 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

MR. SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

**PRESENT**

All Members were present, except the honourable N. Nawaikula, the honourable Professor B.C. Prasad, the honourable Adi L. Qionibaravi and the honourable S.V. Radrodro.

**MINUTES**

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Monday, 4<sup>th</sup> April, 2022, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

Question put

Motion agreed to.

**COMMUNICATION FROM THE SPEAKER**

I welcome all honourable Members to today's sitting. I also welcome those joining us in the public gallery and those watching the live broadcast of the proceedings. Thank you for your continued interest in the workings of your Parliament.

**PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES**

Review Report - 2016-2017 Audit Report Financial Statements of Government and 2016-2017 Agency Financial Statements of the Ministry of Economy

HON. J.N. NAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Report provides the Committee review findings for the Report of the Auditor-General on the 2016-2017 Audit Report on the Financial Statements of Government and the 2016-2017 Agency Financial Statements of the Ministry of Economy.

The Office of the Auditor-General (OAG) is established under Section 151 of the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji, and the Audit Act 1969 further specifies the powers of the Auditor-General to audit the whole of Government Financial Statements and the Reports of all entities of Government. At least once every year, the Auditor-General must report to Parliament on the audits conducted and on other significant matters the Auditor-General wishes to bring to the attention of Parliament.

The Committee reviewed the three parts of the 2016-2017 Audit Report on the Financial Statements of Government and the 2016-2017 Agency Financial Statements of the Ministry of Economy Audit Report and these include:

1. Part A: 2016 -2017 Financial Statements of Government;
2. Part B: Report on the Financial Statements of Government; and

3. Part C: 2016-2017 Agency Financial Statement of Ministry of Economy.

The Committee noted that the OAG had issued 33 audit opinions on the 2017 financial statements of State agencies. Out of the 33 Ministries and Departments out of which 21 or 64 percent were unmodified opinions and 12 or 36 percent were modified opinion. Therefore, in most cases, material misstatements, individually or in aggregate were not noted in the audits which would affect the financial statements of agency.

It was noted in the review that there were matters highlighted by the Office of the Auditor-General in its Audit Report which was a matter of concern that the Ministry of Economy with other relevant Ministries and Departments needs to strengthen and addressed in moving forward.

The Committee commended the efforts of the Ministry of Economy in trying to address the gaps highlighted by the Office of the Auditor-General, however other relevant Ministries and Department Heads should work closely with the Audit Office to address the gaps identified and implement the Committee recommendations accordingly.

At this juncture, I wish to thank my fellow Committee members, namely, honourable Alvick Maharaj (Chairperson), honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa, honourable Virendra Lal and honourable Aseri Radrodro for their efforts and contributions in the scrutiny process and in the final compilation of this Report.

In addition, I wish to inform the House that the Committee continues to discuss and deliberate with interviewees from Ministries/Departments on their commitments, implementation and monitoring of the SDGs. It is also important to note that most Government Ministries and Departments are working towards achieving their contribution towards Fiji's 5-Year & 20-Year National Development Plan in line with the relevant SDG targets.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. J.N. NAND.- Mr. Speaker Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move:

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

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, on that note, we will take a break for morning tea and resume at 11.00 a.m. We adjourn.

The Parliament adjourned at 9.40 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 10.58 a.m.

## QUESTIONS

### Oral Questions

#### Cath Lab Equipment & Angiogram – CWM Hospital (Question No. 61/2022)

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- My question is to the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services and with your approval, Mr. Speaker, to save me from having to stand up on a Point of Order during the reply, if I could just ask the honourable Minister to, please, follow Standing Order 45(4) where it says that the Minister must reply to a question, a reply must be relevant, concise and confined to the subject matter, so that we are not getting a ministerial statement for oral questions. My question, therefore, is ....

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, you do not put any conditions into your questions. You ask the question and the Speaker will take it on from there. No conditions!

Honourable Member, you have the floor.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question is:

Can the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services inform Parliament of the reasons that led to the malfunction and in-operational status of the Cath Lab equipment and Angiogram at the Colonial War Memorial Hospital?

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Mr. Speaker, I thank the honourable Member for that question. As we speak, the Catheterization Laboratory that we have is working very well at the Colonial War Memorial (CWM) Hospital. Not only is it working very well, it is also serving and looking after our people.

The previous Catheterization Laboratory was installed in 2009 and i2010 and this was through a collaboration between Dr. Vijay Kapadia and his group, the Rotary Club, and also the group in Australia, who had a vested interest in the training of our staff. So, that Catheterization Laboratory served us well throughout that time and was also involved in the training of our three Cardiologists, including our two Intensive Interventional Cardiologists that we now have. During that period of training, the team will come from overseas and when they come, then the Catheterization Laboratory could open and work because they have to train under supervision. It was not available all the time, it was only available during the time that our team came.

In 2020, the machines started having some issues and problems and working with our biomedical technicians and Mr. Peter Koern, who was our biomedical engineer, initially with Philips but now doing his own consulting after retiring from Philips. He worked with us and remotely, we were able to fix issues as we went along. Unfortunately, we reached a stage where we could not fix it anymore and discussions were done on being able to bring forward the current machine that we now have and is working at the CWM Hospital.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in 2009 and 2010, the Catheterization Laboratory at CWM Hospital was the only one in the country. Throughout that period, with the tax incentives that have been put in place

and the support to the private hospitals, we now have a Catheterization Laboratory also available in Oceania and also Heart International which we must also commend because Heart International consists of a group of Fijians from New Zealand, who also have a vested interest in our country and they have set up a Catheterization Laboratory in the West.

What we have also done during the period that in between the last one to two years when we have had some times when the Catheterization Laboratory was not working, those patients we were able to pick up from the system and we were able to support them, depending on the threshold in terms of their salaries, as we do with any other cases that we send overseas.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we also have to realise that the Catheterization Laboratory has gone from a training Catheterization Laboratory for Angiograms to now our fully qualified Cardiologists who are able to do interventional cardiology.

Moving forward, what we intend to do and what the Fijian Government and also the honourable Minister for Economy has alluded to is that, we have Health Care (Fiji) which is coming online and they will be offering cardiovascular services, including cardiology services.

We also have begun discussions and we have put it as a policy in the Budget that we would like to outsource some of the interventional and also diagnostic work that is being done within the public hospital system. What we will do is a few things, it means that we are able to have this, that we can actually look towards and go and utilise outside, but we can also ask them for a standard of care and also ensure that the biomedical equipment has a service contract and fixed on a regular basis.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, a supplementary question to the honourable Minister; can he update Parliament in terms of rebooking patients who were supposed to undergo Angiogram or attend Catheterization Laboratory procedures, what is the process now in following up and rebooking of patients to undergo the services that is now available?

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for that question. As I have alluded to earlier, we now have three areas in which cardiology service such as Catheterization Laboratory is available and those are at the public system, in Oceania and also in the Heart International. If you are booking patients and I presume that the honourable Member is asking the question whether it is a public patient or a private patient, because we also have a private practice. So in the private practice, as you are aware, those patients can either be referred to us or referred into the private system. The system is through the Fiji College of General Practitioners (FCGP) and also the links that we have with Oceania through FCGP to Heart International.

With our system, the referral is the same. That comes through and it is triaged by Dr. Bharat, Dr. Sahin and Dr. Sukapa and if it is coming from Taveuni, for example, then they will state a date in which the person can come in and also receive their care. During the tea break, I was able to go up and within that period from the morning till about 10.30 a.m. when I was there, they had done three cases already. So, certainly they are rolling.

The other important thing is, and we must congratulate the team and the Government for supporting this, is that we have cardiology services at that level available now on a regular basis rather than waiting for the team to come from overseas. Honourable Dr. Lalabalavu would understand that in the interim period, they had to wait until the team comes to able to do interventional cardiology services, but that is now available.

Really, when we talk to them, there are three types of patients that they have. There are those who:

1. have an angiogram and they need interventions through stenting or angioplasty;
2. need an open-heart surgery; and
3. may not need anything at all or cannot receive any other treatment.

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- A supplementary question to the honourable Minister; can he enlighten the House on what the Ministry has considered as a backup service for the Catheterization Laboratory and Angiogram in case there is a malfunction in the future?

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, even with the last Catheretization Laboratory, we had considered that and that is why we had the backup in Australia. As I have alluded to in my previous reply to honourable Qereqeretabua, the discussions were being held by the biomedical engineer in Australia with our technicians here remotely, albeit remotely had some challenges. They sent across a computer that was different but again, now that the borders are opened, the ability to travel is actually much simpler.

Revised 2021-2022 Budget - Benefits to Rural & Maritime Teachers  
(Question No. 62/2022)

HON. J. SIGARARA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts and Local Government inform Parliament on how rural and maritime teachers will benefit from the Revised 2021-2022 Budget?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for his question. While the Government provides Free Education Grant, Transport Assistance and Free Textbooks, it is also our responsibility to ensure that students in remote, rural and maritime schools are not disadvantaged in terms of accessing qualified teachers for quality education.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we see it necessary to support school management in their efforts to provide teachers with quarters. This, in turn, ensures that teachers are comfortable and are able to provide better support to our students. School quarters and now with the reinstatement of rural allowance, both these two things being put in place will assist the Ministry to attract teachers to serve in the rural and maritime areas.

Government is doing what it can to provide support to our teachers to go to these remote and maritime areas to teach our students by assisting with their accommodation. Our teachers are our assets and we want to do whatever we can to make their lives comfortable in their job. In the Revised 2021-2022 Budget, the Ministry of Education received a funding of \$1.3 million for the building and maintenance of teachers' quarters in 10 schools. These include schools in the Ra, Ba, Tavua, Lautoka, Nadi, Yasawa, Nadroga/Navosa, Macuata, Bua, Lomaiviti, Koro, Lau, Kadavu and Nausori Districts. It includes the renovation and construction of approximately 40 teachers' quarters.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the last seven years, the Ministry has spent around \$4.4 million to upgrade teachers' quarters for 187 schools around the country through its building grant allocation. After *TC Winston*, schools that were rebuilt included teachers quarters and some of those quarters were built mostly as duplexes and triplexes, just to increase the number of teachers' quarters in the rural areas. For example, at St. Teresa School, we have built teachers' quarters which are duplexes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Australian Government has provided around AU\$12.5 million to rehabilitate nine schools in the North that were damaged by *TC Yasa*. In this programme, they will also refurbish and rebuild teachers' quarters in these schools.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, while teachers' quarters belong to the communities and the responsibility to maintain quarters is with them, the Ministry has been encouraging School Management Committees to rent quarters to teachers and use the rent to maintain the quarters and wherever possible, the Ministry is also rebuilding and renovating these quarters.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, teachers in the rural areas, particularly in the maritime areas, are quite excited about the new Revised Budget with the reinstatement of rural allowance.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the provision of proper housing quarters and the reinstatement of rural allowance in the Revised Budget will greatly benefit our teachers in the maritime areas.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am intrigued by the words of the honourable Minister saying "reinstatement". Apparently, this allowance was paid way back in the time of Ratu Mara. Why did you stop it? Now, you are wanting to bring it back.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think the honourable Member was also in Parliament when the honourable Attorney-General presented the Revised Budget and because of COVID this rural allowance was held back.

HON. M.R. LEAWARE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I commend the Ministry for the work that it is doing, especially in the renovation of quarters, but as far as the allowance is concerned, when will this be implemented?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- The announcement was already made by the honourable Attorney-General and we all sit in Parliament. The problem is, we are not listening carefully. The allowance comes into place from 1st April.

Fiji Education Management Information System – Status of SLA  
(Question No. 63/2022)

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

Can the honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service, Communications, Housing and Community Development update Parliament on the status of the Service Level Agreement or Memorandum of Understanding with the Information, Technology and Computing Services (ITC) regarding the Fiji Education Management Information System?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I understand that the honourable Member's question is premised on the Auditor-General's Report. That is where he is coming from without, of course, fully understanding and reading the Report. What is really interesting and, again, this is what we are talking about the incompetency in the Office of the Auditor-General. It says, and I would like to read the extract:

“MEHA stated that a SLA is ideal and the MEHA IT Department will liaise with ITCS to draw up an SLA. However, one of the disadvantages of SLAs could be that sometimes it can make service worse because they can let the provider take the full amount of time specified in the SLA. If the provider is allowed three days to fix something that takes five minutes, then the provider will probably take three days. Attention needs to be given to non-compliance and how will this be captured in the SLA. Given that there is no contractual relationship between MEHA and ITC except that they



are both part of the same government machinery and the ITCS responsibilities are mandated through the legislations, it may be difficult to put in place an SLA.”

However, having observed all of that, the Auditor-General’s Office, in their wisdom, comes up and says:

“MEHA in consultation with ITCS should consider having a SLA or MOU on the type of services that would be provided by ITCS and what would be MEHA’s responsibilities.”

Unfortunately, honourable Member, in your quick win to try and score some points, you overlooked and did not read the Report itself.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Lands pays the lease in their allocation for all the land that Government leases from the iTaukei Land Trust Board. There are different Ministries, but we do not have an SLA between Ministry of Lands and Ministry of Rural Development, where they may have some Government stations. They do not have an SLA between themselves. We have the Ministry of Economy paying all the rental for all the Government Offices we rent. They do not have an SLA between them, it is part of Government, so obviously we do not need an SLA.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Can the honourable Minister inform Parliament does ITC have an MOU or an SLA in place with other Government Ministries?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have already answered the question.

Government Investments in Rural Areas  
(Question No. 64/2022)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Defence, National Security and Policing, Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management inform Parliament how Government investments in the rural areas since 2018 have improved living standards in rural and maritime communities?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for this question, which I have a great pleasure in presenting to this august House on how Government’s investments have improved the standard of living in the rural areas around Fiji. Government is committed to rural development as it is a key national priority. This is an inspiration outlined in the 20-Year National Development Plan.

Our commitment is built on the foundation that the development of our rural areas is a solid measure of the progress of the nation, and Government is fully aware that investment, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in rural infrastructure is critically important to foster Fiji’s economic development and prosperity. This will also contribute to higher productivity and growth, facilitates trade and connectivity and promotes economic inclusion. In fact, the social and economic development of rural communities is integral to the wellbeing of any society and the economy.

The Honourable Minister for Education has touched briefly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, on some of the initiatives that the Ministry of Education is covering under their allocation, but I will speak specifically on a few areas, mainly rural water, rural electrification, rural infrastructure and, of course, a few of the programmes that are allocated to the Ministry for Rural Development.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government provides allocation to various Government Ministries to implement capital projects and services. In recent years, we have witnessed substantial Government investment in the development of rural infrastructure, provision of education and health services, rural electrification, access to water, income-generating opportunities, better communication and transportation infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the last two weeks, I have been visiting communities in the Northern and Western Divisions and before that, I was also in the Eastern Division, in the islands of Ovalau, Moturiki and, of course, Kadavu. We were commissioning some of the Government-funded projects that were implemented by my Ministry. But I am pleased to note the scale of new developments implemented recently, not only rural development allocation but projects that were given to the Ministry of Rural Development but, of course, with the other key stakeholders.

I will begin with water, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Water is a basic necessity in life and Government is committed to improve the access of our rural communities to safe drinking water in adequate quantities. One thing that I wish to mention here, and it is also the same with rural electrification, we are, sort of, into the second cycle of development, meaning some of the water projects that were done previously are no longer meeting the demands because demands have increased in some communities. The same thing applies with electrification, some were given diesel generators in previous years but now, most of them want the EFL grid because of the extension by Government and, of course, we are going clean and most are into solar as well. So, this is the new cycle of development that is happening in the rural areas which is encouraging to see, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

On water, as I have stated, new projects particularly for catchments, for those that have water directly from source, then boreholes and, of course, there are places and I will not go into the list, Mr. Speaker, Sir, who are asking for ecological purification systems so that they can have better quality drinking water.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a sum of \$1.25 million has been allocated to the Ministry in the last two financial years to address a higher priority Water and Sanitation Programme.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on rural health centres and nursing stations, we have also seen upgrading in subdivisional hospitals to provide access to basic healthcare and medication, and the children in rural and maritime areas in general have good access to health facilities. Of course, the same applies to education, for their transportation with the subsidised allocation given from the Ministry.

Sir, on infrastructure, Government is committed to restoring, upgrading and building new roads, bridges and jetties through its Rural Roads Programme. Investment in roads alone has increased from \$26 million in 2015 to \$39 million in 2018 respectively.

In the last three financial years since 2018, a total of \$76 million was allocated towards the jetty replacement programme and upgrading of rural roads. In addition Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government invested around \$6.9 million during the same period on Shipping Franchise Schemes, which is in line with the Northern Development Programme (NDP) goal of ensuring safe, efficient, reliable and affordable shipping services.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on Rural electrification, Government has progressively invested in this Programme through grid extensions and the installation of solar home systems. And for some of these grid extensions, the Rural Electrification Team and EFL are in the final process of finalising the connections, particularly with the inspections from EFL so that the communities that have already been wired will get their connections to the EFL grid. For that, in the last three years, Government has spent about \$34.4 million on rural electrification projects.

On some of the projects undertaken by the Ministry of Rural Development, I have been commissioning a lot of Community Access Roads, Footpaths, and Footbridges (CARFF) related projects. Across the four Divisions, about \$4.4 million was allocated in the last few years, benefitting more than 200 communities. These projects have made accessibility easier and improved access to essential services for about 41,000 Fijians.

To name a few, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Nakida Village Access Road, they have never had roading before and that will benefit the community. That came at a cost of around \$47,000 for the initial access that has been cut.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I was in Ra last week, the Nalaba District School serving the *Tikina* of Nalaba and Tokaimalo, their access road, because the carrier was not willing to take the students directly to the school because of the state of the road, so we fixed that for the community.

On Self-Help Programme, we are now focusing not only on social projects but more on the livelihood approach as well on the income generating projects as a means of empowering rural communities. Women's groups, Mr. Speaker, Sir, having solar freezers, canteens, some farmers get their animal sheds, so those are examples of income generating projects and we are shifting slowly from the usual social projects into empowering rural communities. Of course, this also supports the basic needs of life, including access to water, communication and transportation in the social aspect of the projects.

On Government's major investments, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have highlighted a few but for water and sanitation, we continue to construct and upgrade water projects which allows communities to access safe drinking water in their homes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I had mentioned rural roads, it underpins the ability for the communities to access services, such as health, education, water, et cetera, as well as the franchise shipping services.

May, I also add that Government in terms of its decentralisation and empowerment and taking services closer to the rural people, have also constructed DOs or Government Stations in some of the areas, particularly for the services of the DOs and the Assistant DOs Mr. Speaker, Sir. To name a few in the West, we are just in the process of completing Namarai in Ra and hopefully, that facility will be commissioned soon. The same in the North, Sir, Kubulau in Bua is operating, likewise Lekutu in Bua, and there is a new DO stationed now in Wainikoro, Macuata. In the Eastern Division, Nasau in Koro, Qarani in Gau and, of course, Kavala in Kadavu. These are new projects that will help improve services and, of course, access to it as well by the rural communities. In the Central Division, we have also constructed a DO's post Dada, Namosi, Sir. So, these are the many projects that will bring a lot of benefits to our rural communities.

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Sir, a supplementary question to the honourable Minister. According to the Household Survey Report of 2019-2020, our poverty rate was 36 percent and 74 percent of these are rural dwellers. Can the honourable Minister enlighten the House about what type of monitoring and evaluation is done to ensure the effectiveness and success of these investments in rural areas?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, each agency that is involved in rural development have their own monitoring systems as well and for us in the Ministry of Rural Development, this is something that we take seriously and, of course, we are also reviewing policies in the Ministry particularly in trying to elevate those recipients from their current status. We are calling it an incubation period of say the first five years for all project recipients, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

That is what we are looking into in the Ministry of Rural Development so that we continue to have effective monitoring. With that as well, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have talked about income-generating projects. One of the things that we are demanding from the recipients now is for them to have bank accounts and not only that but if they can have savings and of course possibility of having investments as well.

I am pleased to say, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that it is quite encouraging. Even in some of the projects when it comes to monitoring particularly those by IHRDP, some projects have issues, probably with previous managements but the good thing is, they still have money in their savings accounts. So I wish to assure this august Parliament that we take monitoring seriously and it will show its impact definitely in the years to come.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Speaker, I thank the honourable Minister for the answers that he gave for the substantive question. I just want to ask the honourable Minister, how can his Ministry assist rural-based communities that have independent water sources, who have to relocate their catchment areas or the dam themselves because traditional communities actually encroach into the catchment area for their own survival because they do not have leases to these catchment areas? For example, WAF, to retain their catchment area would have to take an exclusive lease of the area to protect it but rural communities use the same land for their own survival, therefore, sometimes it becomes untenable, so what kind of assistance can you offer them? I know there is a whole lot of communities where the catchment areas have actually been intruded into, so how can you, perhaps some funding or how can your Ministry help in that regard to these communities?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, first, we also have the rural water component with the Ministry of Infrastructure. Rural communities are advised if they can have their local water committees to look into their issues. Development is taking place at a very fast rate in rural areas, particularly with agriculture and the expansion of agriculture, livestock, or even with crops and these threaten some of the water sources.

There are few categories of water sourcing in Fiji. One is directly from the streams and dams are constructed. These are the communities that probably the honourable Member is referring to. For these communities, I have talked about ensuring that they have quality drinking water because it is coming directly from the source, it goes directly into the tap as well. So that is where the ecological purification system comes in to. There are a lot of these cases all over Fiji.

The first thing that the Government does whether it is the Ministry of Infrastructure, through the Rural Water Team or in the consultations with the Ministry of Rural Development, the first thing is to identify an alternative source within the area because particularly, when landowners are involved, we have to have the consent as well, ensuring that all the requirements are met before Government can put the infrastructure in place. So the first option will always be for an alternative source.

That alternative source must not only serve the needs now, but one thing that learning from the past as well based on the trend in the rural communities as well, population particularly. I must here acknowledge all the *turaga ni koro* and the *mata ni tikina* because right now in the Ministry of Rural Development, working together with the iTaukei Affairs, we have the profile of almost every village in Fiji; their water sources, type of houses, type of energy is provided to the village and their sanitation issues. It is a big improvement from where we started off.

When we have this information, we are able to plan in advance on the requirements of the area. One thing that Government is seriously looking into now, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is not only this specific community but the wider area. For example, I have talked a lot about Namara and Verata,

they have water issues and the Water Authority piping is quite a distance away. We are now working together with Water Authority of Fiji to identify a source that not only will cater for Naiborebore or Tobuniqio, but it is the wider community.

It is a strategic approach rather than just reacting to the needs of one community only. This is one thing that we are doing. Otherwise, borehole is the other alternative or rainwater harvesting. Those are the two other alternatives that we have for these communities. So direct source from the dams or boreholes or rainwater harvesting. Rainwater harvesting is vulnerable as well because dependent on the weather because it is Tailevu, no problem, Sir.

Fiji Plan of Action for Food and Nutrition Security  
(Question No. 65/2022)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment update Parliament on the status of the Food and Nutrition Security and the Fiji Plan of Action for Food and Nutrition Security?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.-Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to thank the honourable Member for asking this question. When we talk about food security, there are two key aspects, one is accessibility and affordability. Within this framework of accessibility and affordability, I am going to explain to this Parliament about what we are doing in terms of ensuring that we do have food security for Fijians in the country.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Food and Nutrition Security for all Fijians is one of the key strategic priorities in the Ministry's 2019 and 2023 Strategic Development Plan as well as Fiji's 5-Year and 20-Year National Development Plan. So, the entire activities that we undertake basically emanates from this overall framework – The Strategic Development Framework for the Ministry of Agriculture and Fiji's 5-Year and 20-Year Development Plan.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this guiding strategy is the basis of the related policies and initiatives formulated during the course of our 5-Year Plan to develop and boost the achievement of at least food security for all Fijians. Furthermore, the Ministry is also working with the other line ministries, for example, the Ministry of Health in ensuring that we are able to guarantee as far as possible food and nutrition security for all Fijians.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, over the last two years, we have several policies, activities and programmes that was implemented to achieve food security. Two key notable programmes over the last two years that we undertook was the Home Gardening Programme and the Farmers Support Package. When you talk about accessibility, then the accessibility will happen when we have production and supply distributed throughout Fiji. When you have production and supply, let say in Taveuni, Kadavu and Cicia, then it is accessible. But when you talk about affordability then the only way to guarantee affordability is to have sufficient supply on the ground. The temporary issues about increasing wages and salaries, price-cap, et cetera is not a sustainable solution to deal with the issue of affordability.

When there is a temporary price hike due to COVID-19, flooding or a cyclone, there had been calls made to the Ministry thinking that the Ministry can set price caps. But neither do we have powers to do that nor it being a sustainable solution to deal with an issue that is temporary. I always believed that to deal with a temporary measure, we should not have policies to deal with a temporary measure. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the strategy is to ensure that we work on the ground to deal with production and supply.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the two programmes that we introduced at the beginning of 2020, we had 228,744 home gardening seed packs, which had \$1.1 million individual seeds packs given out to households throughout Fiji. That programme is still being implemented where households were able to grow their own food. There is an amazing mobilisation of households throughout Fiji in terms of growing their own food. The dust has not settled yet with the crisis between Ukraine and Russia and the increasing shipping freight cost. We have not put our guards down, we are on the ground ensuring that we continue to get people motivated in terms of growing their food as far as possible and as much as possible.

On this note, we were also able to mobilize the farmers who were able to grow and expand production for their own household income as well as national interest and there is a substantial growth in the agricultural output which fed the entire nation and in addition to that, were able to export in surplus.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the total agriculture grew at an annual average growth rate of 3.2 percent from 2016-2020. In addition, agricultural production also grew at an average growth rate of 3.6 percent from 2016 to 2019. The latest GDP Release still notes that there is a major positive growth in agriculture, despite a decline in the other sectors of the economy. Of course, one would say that it is a temporary measure because these people moved back to agriculture and they have come back. But we have got new land under production that shows that agriculture is here to stay.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in nominal terms, when you are talking about the value of agriculture, at the moment, it is \$1.5 billion but our target over the next 10 years from last year, we want to get agriculture to have a value of \$2 billion. Having said that, the question that arises is, what do you do with the surplus, Mr. Speaker, Sir? In 2020, the agricultural exports - fresh and chilled was \$106 million. The latest figure for 2021 shows that the agricultural exports - fresh and chilled after feeding the entire nation, has gone up to \$121 million.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, leading the charge in exports is *kava* which is around \$40 million; \$30 million - *dalo* (fresh and chilled); \$21 million - turmeric (a new crop on the board) and over the last three years, has surpassed the other traditional export crops; and ginger at \$21 million; we have got eggs being exported to Pacific Island countries. So all these have pushed exports to \$121 million in 2021.

Not only that, Mr. Speaker, we have also identified, given food security issue, strategic crops (staple food crop) that we need to grow if we have a strategic advantage within. Rice, for example, we are spending about \$42 million every year. There is a major boost in rice production in the Northern Division, as well as in the Western Division.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, over the last two years, we have raised self-sufficiency in rice from 16 percent to 20 percent and my feeling is, it could be 22 percent, if we account for this year's production. There is substantial savings in the money that we are losing, which we are gaining from export of traditional crops, tourism, remittances, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I have said, pushing production on the ground, ensuring this is accessible, ensuring this is in the volume that will reduce prices and make it affordable, is the long term strategy to ensure and guarantee food security for ordinary Fijians.

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, a supplementary question; we have just heard about the many programmes and policies that have been introduced by the Ministry of Agriculture, to ensure accessibility and affordability of good nutrition to the people. Can the honourable Minister enlighten the House on four key result areas that have made their programmes a success or failure?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am currently baffled that they do not listen to our responses and asking about the four key result areas.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, first, the prices of agricultural output in the markets and on the roadside stalls will demonstrate to you whether it is affordable or not.

Second is the supply issue. If you go and ask people whether they are able to get vegetables that they consume daily and if they are not able to get them, then there are food security issues, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Third is the data. The data that I am presenting in terms of production, I am saying that while all the other sectors have declined or 13 percent declined, agricultural output has increased over the last two years. The RBF and the Bureau of Statistics data shows that agricultural outputs have increased, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Then, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that surplus where exports have gone up, from 2022, we have gone up to \$106 million, in 2021, \$121 million. What other data or evidence would you want us to show that our food security are under control? And not only that, we are exporting the excess after feeding the entire nation, to get that much needed foreign currency into the country.

Impact of Natural Disasters - Groundwater Usage and Consumption  
(Question No. 66/2022)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Infrastructure, Meteorological Services, Lands and Mineral Resources inform Parliament on the impact of recent cyclones and other natural disasters on groundwater usage and consumption?

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Geological Services Division of the Ministry of Lands, in particular the Mineral Resources Department (MRD), has the responsibility of looking after groundwater assessment, investigation to confirm boreholes that might provide water and also do groundwater drilling and reticulation.

I can confirm that a lot of boreholes were affected by the cyclones, in particular *TC Yasa* which hit us in December 2020, which is the second strongest cyclone to hit Fiji, and also *TC Cody* in January 2021. It affected the whole number of boreholes and examples of these included the 10 Villages in the Kubulau District of Bua. Also, there are about nine communities around Labasa and another seven communities in the wider Macuata Province. It was good in a sense that the damage was mostly done to the infrastructural equipment - solar panels, associated electrical systems, water storage tanks, pump house and also the distribution pipes that reticulated water to the various houses that are hooked up.

One of our concerns was that the cyclones and the saltwater intrusion would actually affect the aquifers, but the good thing to note is that it did not affect the aquifer, so the Ministry then had to focus on just fixing the infrastructure around the boreholes. Because of the severe impact of the tropical cyclones, the MRD put together a quick response and recovery team with technical expertise in equipment and responded to damage assessments and restoration works from December 2020 to January 2021. But since 2015, the Ministry has assisted around 47 communities by providing groundwater supply systems to supplement the existing water systems, whether this is rainwater harvesting, or whether it is actually surface water systems that they already have.

The technical team continues to design and develop water supply systems that should withstand the impacts of tropical cyclones. The cost of restoration work was about \$400,000 and this included the drilling of two boreholes for Yaro Village on Kia Island, which was one of the most heavily affected communities.

HON. V. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, a supplementary question; can the honourable Minister inform Parliament what assessment does MRD do to ensure borehole water quality is appropriate?

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, a number of things MRD does in order to make sure that the quality of the water and the capacity of the water is in accordance with what we need for human consumption. Over the years since it has operated, it has developed a number of Standard Operating Procedures, developed on the basis of what they have done in the past, so this is aligned to the minimal acceptable standards of water well drilling globally. So it involves making the best use of materials and the right materials, because we have found that sometimes if the wrong materials are used, then the borehole itself gets contaminated, and that is something we have seen over time. There is a heavy emphasis on using scientific methods and equipment in determining the potential for groundwater development and also in implementing test to determine the capacity of an aquifer or the amount of water that is in an aquifer to release the groundwater from storage.

The Ministry also carries out community consultations and engagements before and after each phase of the groundwater, to ensure that the needs of the communities are met and various issues relating to access to safe and water source are considered and recorded. For instance, the issue that was raised by the Honourable Tikoduadua, when you have surface water making sure that people do not intrude in your water catchment area, the same sort of things are done with respect to groundwater. In this way, groundwater users are empowered. They give the knowledge and skills so that they can work in partnership with the Ministry in making sure that groundwater is made available.

The other thing that I have just said here that the Ministry also tries to make sure that we do not over extract from any borehole because if you do that, you will get dirty water or the borehole dries up.

The Ministry also conducts annual monitoring of all the boreholes drilled by Government and installed with water reticulation systems. If we do find that some boreholes are not producing water that is of good quality for people to drink, that borehole is flushed and sanitised and if the aquifer or borehole is still heavily contaminated, then the borehole is decommissioned.

MR. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. Honourable Rasova, you have the floor.

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to ask the honourable Minister, can he inform Parliament how can the Government better assist companies that are involved in the extraction and export of groundwater, considering the amount of money received from exports?

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

HON. J. USAMATE.- I am sorry, Mr. Speaker, I did not fully grasp the question.

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- Mr. Speaker, can the honourable Minister inform Parliament how can the Government better assist companies that are involved in extraction and export of groundwater, considering the amount of money received from its exports?



HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have had the occasion of working with companies that are interested in extracting groundwater. Our MRD has helped them out in trying to get the land where is needed and also checking to make sure that there is water where they need to extract that particular water. So, that sort of thing is done.

One of the concerns that we have at the moment is to try to get a firm grip on the amount of water that we have in our aquifers. One of the concerns that we have in the future that it is theoretically possible for us to over extract water from our aquifers. So, this is one of the things that we are developing at the moment, trying to get a firm grip on how much water is there. Water in our aquifers comes from rainwater. So you have to look at the amount of replenishment that is going into the aquifers and look at that in relation to the extraction. So, this is a process that is being undertaken now by the MRD because water is a vital resource.

You know that there are countries in the world now that fight over water, so this is one of the things that we are looking at. We do help out these organisations, but as much as possible over the long term, we want to make sure that we do not over extract because our people and our country can be affected.

Social Welfare Recipients Insurance Eligibility- Fiji Care Limited  
(Question No. 67/2022)

HON. S.R. RASOVA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation inform Parliament on the eligibility requirements of the insurance scheme for social welfare recipients through Fiji Care Limited?

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the Honourable Member for the question with a smile, of course.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in 2018-2019, the Fijian Government in partnership with the Fiji Care Insurance Limited, introduced the Micro Bundle Insurance for all Civil Servants and Social Welfare recipients, a first initiative for the country.

The insurance cover included; life, funeral, fire and personal injuries, and a total of around 11,000 beneficiaries were initially covered with a total cover of \$10,000 which included; \$3,000 for Life; \$1,000 for Funeral Expenses; \$3,000 for Fire; and \$3,000 for Personal Injuries. This cover was provided as an annual premium of initially \$70, which is now \$65 just for social welfare recipients. Mr. Speaker, Sir, since its inception, Fiji Care Limited has paid out \$21 million in claims to 16,690 insured people.

In terms of social welfare recipients, the question is, what is the eligibility? Of course, you have to be a social welfare recipient and you have to be a recipient of one of the four Social Protection Programmes that we have, that is, Poverty Benefit Scheme, Care and Protection Scheme, Social Pension Scheme and Disability Allowances.

To date we have 86,000 people under these four Social Protection Programmes and all of them are covered. Since November last year, one of the criteria to be eligible for this Fiji Care Micro Bundle Insurance Scheme was that you have to be vaccinated. I am proud to say that most of our social welfare recipients complied with that and of course had access to the insurance payout.

Apart from funeral expenses that is covered by this insurance, the Ministry also has fire

assistance to non-recipients. So, if you are a non-recipient, not covered by the Fiji Care Insurance, the Ministry has a budgetary allocation where upon the receipt of the fire report and the police report, we pay out \$1,000 immediately for emergency supplies to fire victims.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Scheme is reviewed annually and of course the government will continue to pay the premium so that we are sort of expanding our financial security net for these welfare recipients and we will continue with this.

This is a Scheme that has benefited over 16,000 of our social welfare recipients and apart from this Scheme, of course, the Social Protection Programmes assist people in terms of food vouchers and monthly allowance. Of course, this includes the disability and social pension scheme where the age limit is now 65 years. So, if you are over 65 years of age, you qualify for the Social Pension Scheme per month which is \$100 per month. Never before! So, this is a Government that has put in place this initiative to protect our poor and the vulnerable.

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, a supplementary question to the honourable Rosy Akbar. Can the Minister inform Parliament why those who passed away without receiving the COVID-19 vaccine, their relatives are not eligible to benefit from the insurance paid in their relatives name under the Scheme?

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I already said that. One of the conditions of the insurance scheme is that you have to be vaccinated. If you did not comply with that requirement, obviously, you will not receive the payout.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to ask a supplementary question regarding this Scheme. Has a cost benefit analysis been done? The reason I am asking is that, from the figures she gave - 86,000 recipients, \$65 per recipient as premium, that comes to \$5.5 million and the payout for beneficiaries has been \$23 million.

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- \$21 million.

MR. SPEAKER.- What is your question?

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- \$21 million?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Yes.

(Laughter)

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- The question is, has a cost benefit analysis been done on this Scheme in terms of premiums being paid and the benefits?

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, please allow me, I do not understand what your problem is. Are you against us helping our vulnerable?

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- It is just a cost benefit analysis. The cost of ....

(Honourable Members interject)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I see a lot of benefits for the social welfare recipients,

never given to them before.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- So, please, honourable Member, if it is too hard for us to give credit the Government ....

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- No, no, that is not it.

Easing of Inflationary Pressures from Food & Fuel Prices  
(Question No. 68/2022)

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

Can the honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service, Communications, Housing and Community Development update Parliament on measures that the Fijian Government has adopted to ease inflationary pressures emanating from rising international food and fuel prices?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the honourable Member for his question. Sir, as mentioned yesterday in response to one of the other questions, we all know the inflationary pressure in fact has been rising globally, in particular, the second half of 2021 due to high import price and freight costs. The entire world is actually facing global supply chain disruptions pent-up demand, in fact, there has been now, is outpacing supply itself with supply chains further affected by the Ukraine and Russian war.

Crude oil prices, Mr. Speaker, Sir, are currently hovering over US\$100 a barrel and wheat and other commodity prices have been rising rapidly. Domestic prices, Mr. Speaker, have also risen in recent months reflecting international price developments. Annual inflation stood at 4.7 percent in March 2022. As mentioned yesterday also, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we expect price rises to actually continue due to global food and fuel supply disruptions exacerbated by the war.

As highlighted also, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in countries like USA, inflation rate is now 7.9 percent, India is 6.07 percent, New Zealand is 5.9 percent, UK is 5.5 percent, Singapore is 4.3 percent and Australia is 3.5 percent. These go back to December and January, February of this year. Mauritius, a country like ours, a tourism-driven country, the inflation rate there as of February this year is 9 percent. Of course, Samoa is 4.5 percent as of January 2022.

So, what have we done, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and this is precisely the reason why we have also carried out various revisions to the 2021-2022 Budget. As highlighted, we have reduced or zero-rated VAT on 21 household items. Just to reiterate – sugar, flour, rice, dhal, tea, potatoes, onions, garlic, canned fish, cooking oil, salt, liquid milk, powdered milk, baby milk, sanitary pads, soap, bathing soap, soap powder, toilet paper, tooth paste, cooking gas and kerosene. Of course, this will mean Government forego \$163 million, Sir. However, of course, we see there is a benefit for the overall population in Fiji too.

International crude oil prices have increased to US\$100 a barrel as stated earlier on. Mr. Speaker, Sir, to mitigate against these rising fuel prices, we have removed the 20 cents levy per litre of fuel, a duty that we had, we had introduced earlier on. As a result of this, Government will lose out about \$56 million in direct collections. Again, this is to help ordinary Fijians, businesses, carrier drivers, bus companies, mini bus companies, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as highlighted also the other day, the price of fertiliser is skyrocketing. Countries like Ukraine and Russia, they make a lot of urea and potassium, et cetera that goes into the fertiliser mix. China and Russia combined together, we are told, produces about 90 percent of the entire world fertiliser production and of course as a result of that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have seen prices increased quite substantially. International sanctions on Belarus also propelled spot prices on GMO fertiliser or muriate of potash to almost double and, of course, shipping rates has exponentially grown.

Just to put it into context, Sir, prior to COVID, a bag of fertiliser that Government used to subsidise was \$45.65. A sugarcane farmer paid \$20, Government paid \$25.65. Before the Ukraine war actually broke, Sir, we received the figures and we have to input it into the Budget that it will rise to \$80 or to \$90 a bag. So essentially the sugarcane farmer will still pay \$20, Government will have to, if it goes to \$80, we would be lucky if it goes to \$80 and not more than that, will have to pay \$60 a bag. That is how much it has increased, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Obviously, we will be bearing the burden for that and we have allocated an additional \$9.7 million through the Ministry of Sugar Industry under the Fertilizer Subsidy Programme.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for Electricity Fiji Limited (EFL), we are continuing with our 50 percent subsidy. We had in fact made it a 100 percent with some collaboration with EFL, but now goes back to 50 percent of the bill as allocated in the Budget. Sir, we have allocated \$13.2 million in the Revised Budget. It will assist domestic customers, with a combined annual income of less than \$30,000 per household for the first 100 kilowatt of electricity consumption. Currently, under the Scheme, about 58,192 customers are benefitting from this. Some, of course, some more can apply too.

In addition, the honourable Members seem to forget what is actually in the Budget, but we had also announced last year and which is continuing is that Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) where they are now paying domestic rates. We are actually subsidising the difference between the domestic rate and the commercial rate which they used to pay with an annual turnover of \$1.25 million or less and we are covering the first 1,000 units of electricity consumed.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are extending under the Revised Budget, we have extended this programme now to July 2022 with an allocation of \$2 million. Of course, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as highlighted in the Budget, and as the honourable Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation also highlighted, we are also paying a one-off \$50 to all social welfare recipients in the Revised Budget, you will see that in SEG 50 - \$7 million has been allocated.

Also Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have allocated \$13 million as a \$100 one-off payment to all those in the informal sector in Vanua Levu because they had not received anything during the past two years. Of course, Mr. Speaker, Sir, about 34,385 WAF customers will continue to get their water subsidy which we provide for those households earning less than \$30,000.

The major announcement of course, Mr. Speaker, Sir, taking into account on what has happened globally and following the undertaking by Government in 2018 that we will revise the National Minimum Wage every two years. Some politicians, I think the *paapi* lot have said that we should have revised it two years ago in 2020.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, obviously, it is quite silly to suggest we should have reviewed the wages in 2020 when over 100,000 Fijians lost their jobs. You could not do a review when 100,000 people have lost their jobs and do a minimum wage review then. Of course the borders have opened up, honourable Gavoka seems to be shaking his head. Obviously he does not understand this at all, nor does he appreciate it. If he had appreciated it, he actually would be applauding this initiative, honourable Gavoka. Unfortunately, you need to look within to find out the solutions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the National Minimum Wage has been reviewed. I have to remind honourable Members of Parliament again, because they tend to forget, it was the Bainimarama-led Government that introduced the National Minimum Wage.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- There was never a National Minimum Wage. It was only the ten Wages Sector that had their own minimum wage, the Bainimarama-led Government introduced it at \$2 and I hope just to reiterate, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have to say this because they need to be schooled on these matters that National Minimum Wage means that you cannot pay anyone below this particular rate irrespective of what job they do, whether they come and cut grass at your house, or dig a hole for foundation or any job they do, you cannot pay below the National Minimum Wage. The other ten Wages Sectors have their own minimum wage which is a lot higher than the National Minimum Wage. So, it was \$2 in 2014, the review was done in 2013, it went up to \$2.32 an hour, then it went up to \$2.68 an hour in 2017.

Now, of course Mr. Speaker, Sir, through the assistance of Dr. Partha, we have now said that the minimum wage will be increased to \$4 an hour but we are doing it responsibly, not for political stunting like they want to do. We have done it in four stages because we have to be considerate, we do not want people to lose their jobs. If tomorrow someone is paying \$3 or \$2.68 an hour, you cannot expect them to overnight pay immediately \$4. In this way, we will be able to make sure the jobs are still maintained and then we will be able to meet the rise in cost of the inflationary impact that has been brought about by the pandemic and of course the war in Ukraine.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, of course, we have provided the unemployment support in respect of how we would people meet their cost of living in respect of this inflationary impact. We have already disbursed \$205 million to top up members' balance to the FNPF system and, of course, the rounds of the \$360 and \$50, and the two rounds of and the \$90 - a whopping payout of \$225 million.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, again, we have seen a huge consumption increase during the times when those payments were made out, and again we see a particular level of confidence that are coming back to the consumers - psychological and it is also real. On the ground, if you go out and look at retail stores, you will see a lot consumption taking place.

In that respect, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we need to ensure that we continue down this path, as already been announced, and should there be any dramatic changes within the global economy, we as a Government will always maintain that flexible position to be able to respond to any of the inflationary matters, should they get out of hand.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- May I suggest going forward, we remove the Ministerial Statement from the Order paper, Mr. Speaker? We are getting it everyday.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable member, ask your question, if you have a question.

HON.V.R. GAVOKA.- Yes, Mr. Speaker.

In the last few days, Mr. Speaker, a litre of unleaded fuel has gone up to \$2.77 and that is when one barrel of oil is pegged at about US\$100. The honourable Minister has said that it might go up to US\$300.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I didn't say \$300.

HON.V.R. GAVOKA.- He said that.

If that happens, Mr. Speaker, a litre of unleaded fuel can go up to \$8.31, or even \$10. Now, that will cripple this country. Is the Government planning for an eventuality such as this, because the way things are going, this war and the ramifications elsewhere will bring about this thing wasting, and Government appears to be asleep – sleeping on the job? They need to be showing us their plan, in the event things get worse than what we have today.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, and for those who wish to ask supplementary questions, ask your supplementary question, but do not make a statement.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it would appear that the honourable Member's disruption with his own Party is disorientating him.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have already answered this question yesterday. He had asked a similar question yesterday about what is going to happen in the future. I never said the price of a barrel of fuel will go up to US\$300 a barrel. I never mentioned that, please, check the *Daily Hansard*. Please, do not misrepresent what I had said.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we did say that the prices can actually go up. Yesterday, when he asked whether we have any reserves or we can keep any reserves, we did also say in that context that the Americans are thinking of releasing some of their oil reserves. If they do, do that, then it will reduce the pressure on the global fuel price. There is a lot of geopolitics that goes along with it because if they release their reserves, Sir, then it could mean the price will come down but, of course, other countries may benefit from it if they do not want.

As I have said yesterday and I have also said just now, Mr. Speaker, that we will maintain a flexible position. We have already said that, and we have shown that through our policies that we have a very flexible position in being able to meet the inflationary impact, whether it has a detriment on our economy or not, that is something that we will deal with. We cannot look into the future and say, "Exactly, this is what is going to happen." And that is a sign of a good government - it does not commit to something that he cannot actually put his finger on, but maintains a particular level of flexibility to be able to deal with a situation as and when it occurs.

MR. SPEAKER.- I thank the honourable Attorney-General for his contribution to the debate. Honourable members, Oral Questions is now over, but before we move on, I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and welcome to the House, the Non-Resident Ambassador for the State of Israel, His Excellency Roi Rosenblit.

(Acclamation)

His Excellency, you are most welcome to the House and I trust that your time in Fiji is enjoyable and rewarding for both of us. You are most welcome. It is good to have you here.

Honourable Members, we will move on to Written Questions. The Written Question that is here was to be asked by the honourable Professor Biman Prasad, but I have allowed for the honourable Pio Tikoduadua to ask the question on his behalf.

#### Written Question

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

Can the honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service, Communications, Housing and Community Development answer the following in respect of the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption:

- (a) the number of cases/complaints processed by FICAC in respect of each year from 2018 to 2021; and
- (b) the number of cases where charges were laid and prosecutions were completed in respect of each year from 2018 to 2021?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will provide the answers as provided for under Standing Order 45(3).

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, that brings us to the end of today's agenda. We will now adjourn until tomorrow morning. I thank you for your co-operation.

We have an early day today, it is not everyday we have an early day. So, I have worked you late in the past, you are going to be worked late in the future, so enjoy this solace. We adjourn.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.22 p.m.