

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

TUESDAY, 21ST NOVEMBER, 2023

[CORRECTED COPY]

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TUESDAY, 21ST NOVEMBER, 2023

The Parliament met at 9.29 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

MR. SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Members were present, except the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation, honourable F.S. Koya, honourable M.D. Bulitavu and honourable S.S. Kirpal.

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Monday, 20th November, 2023, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- 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 of Parliament. I also welcome all those who are joining us in the gallery and those watching the proceedings on television and the internet. Thank you for your continued interest in the workings of your Parliament.

2024 CALENDAR OF PARLIAMENT SITTINGS

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

That Parliament adopts the Sitting Calendar for the year 2024.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as all honourable Members are aware, Standing Order 22(1) stipulates that the Business Committee must recommend to Parliament a programme of sitting periods of each session of Parliament or each 12-month sitting period of Parliament, whichever is the shorter. In that respect, the Business Committee had convened and undertook discussions on a proposed Sitting Calendar for the year 2024.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I can confirm that the Business Committee agreed and approved the Sitting Calendar for the year 2024, which was circulated to all honourable Members this morning. Whilst we will try our utmost best to avoid any amendments to the calendar, only the essential and necessary re-adjustments will be subsequently tabled in Parliament. Primarily, this is to allow some flexibility, as most honourable Members may be aware that this has been the accepted practice in the last two terms of Parliament, of course, including the former Government.

As honourable Members, we can see that Parliament will not sit until March 2024. This is to allow for the Parliament's ICT overhaul upgrade in the Chambers, which will involve the complete removal of the current system and installation of the new system. These works will be very extensive and one which will require time for the benefit of all honourable Members, as well as the general public at large. The endorsed Sitting Calendar outlines the following sitting periods:

2024 PARLIAMENT SITTINGS CALENDAR		
March	Monday 4 th	Official Opening of Parliament
	Monday 11 th – Friday 15 th	Parliament Sitting
April	Monday 15 th – Friday 19 th	Parliament Sitting
May	Monday 20 th – Friday 24 th	Parliament Sitting
June	Monday 28 th	Budget Address
July	Monday 8 th – Friday 12 th	Budget Debate
	Monday 15 th – Friday 19 th	
August	Monday 5 th – Friday 9 th	Parliament Sitting
September/October	Monday 2 nd – Friday 6 th	Parliament Sitting
	Monday 30 th – Friday 4 th	
November	Monday 18 th – Friday 22 nd	Parliament Sitting

Sir, we need to endorse the Sitting Calendar. It will allow all the six Standing Committees to continue with Committee work on the Annual Reports that are currently pending with the Committees and Bills that may be moved in Parliament for consideration. Honourable Members, I request you to support this proposed Sitting Calendar as it is envisaged that there will be more time for debate on matters before Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is also pertinent to note that Committees are essential mechanisms which Parliament can reach out to members of the public. Committees are essential in terms of accountability and scrutiny and, therefore, it is vital to allow them time to undertake their work as we had done when we were in the Opposition.

With the proposed calendar, the Government will continue to be able to execute and implement its plans and policies and programmes whilst Parliamentary Standing Committees undertake and discharge their functions as mandated in the Standing Orders. In that respect, Sir, the proposed Sitting Calendar before Parliament needs all our support as it would greatly ensure that the Fijian Parliament will continue to undertake its legislative representative and oversight functions.

Sir, I do commend this motion to Parliament, and I hereby seek the support of Parliament and all honourable Members to approve the proposed Sitting Calendar for the year 2024. Sir, I thank you for your indulgence.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you for the opportunity. I take this opportunity to also convey our best wishes to our athletes who are in the 17th Pacific Games in the Solomon Islands. We wish the management and all the athletes the very best and we hope that they will bring in more golds to add to the past achievements of our athletes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the motion by the honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament, I thank him for all the good words that he has used in order to gain the confidence and the trust of this side of Parliament. Let me assure the honourable Leader of the Government and the honourable Prime Minister and Government that we have no objections to the Sitting Calendar before us for 2024. But again, as we have raised in the Business Committee, Sir, let us hope that the Government will commit to this Sitting Calendar. We have flexibility as well and we understand the engagements

that Government need to undertake but let us not forget the fact that we also have a responsibility to our people and that is something that we need to continually highlight.

Sir, 2023, I think in the record of Fiji Parliament, is the worst year in terms of Parliament Sitting.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Hear, hear!

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- I will say that again, 2023, on record is the worst for Parliament in terms of the number of sittings...

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Very poor!

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER. - Order!

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- If we are unable to meet rather than totally cancelling the schedule, it can be re-scheduled.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- You have made your point, move on.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- That is exactly the point, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

The problem is, the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and all the Ministers are undertaking too many ministerial travels.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- I know for a fact, Mr. Speake, Sir, in the previous government, it is the directive of the honourable Prime Minister, whenever there is Parliament sitting, cancel all your overseas commitments. Parliament is important.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS. - Hear, hear!

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- And that is what we are pleading with Government. We are flexible, we have served in government, but we have a responsibility to the Fijian people as well and that is why this institution is so important. We need to scrutinise, we need to look at

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD. - This is working much better now.

(Laughter)

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU. - Well, that is what you are saying.

We have taken away the number of sittings, we have reduced the debate timings and number of speakers. We have a responsibility, Mr. Speaker, Sir. As I have stated, we have already served in government, but I urge on the Government, please make a commitment on our national priorities because we all have a responsibility to serve our people and serve them better. We support this but we will continue to raise our concerns particularly given the record that we have in this year's sitting, Mr. Speaker, Sir. We support the motion, but I hope that Government will take our concern seriously.

MR. SPEAKER. - I now call on the honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament to speak in reply.

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Mr Speaker, Sir, I am thankful that the honourable Members have been persuaded by what I have presented and are in support of the motion before us. Various points raised regarding flexibility, yes, definitely we take into account. Some of the comments in terms of our planning have been taken into account in this calendar and, of course, as experienced by the last Government, there are always issues which come up as we move in the year. As experienced by them, they have also exercised that throughout their term of Government.

There was also a comment made on overseas travel. Again, as I had mentioned, the calendar before us has taken into account some of the regular international commitments.

The point regarding the scrutiny role of Parliament, we all know the experience of the Opposition in the last few years during the FijiFirst Government in terms the suppression of the Opposition ...

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- ... which has been ongoing for over several years, despite some of the justification we brought up. It is not a matter of, as they are mentioning that we are taking revenge, no it is not that. We have move up another level in terms of allowing for Opposition accountability, not only in the Committees but also in what we as a Coalition Government stand for, which is an open and transparent government.

Of course, they mentioned the number of speakers, the way we put in motions and how it has been programmed, they have broken the record in terms of Standing Order 51. The numbers are already there in public, but we will never ...

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- ... reach that record in terms of the abuse of Standing Order 51.

I end by thanking the Opposition and those in the Business Committee for supporting the calendar in front of us. You should be ashamed, why have you been missing from Parliament? For 16 years we have been suppressed but now we are free.

(Laughter)

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER.- Just a comment on the calendar, honourable Members, we are almost completing one year of governance by the Coalition Government. It has not been an easy journey, quite a trying one, as the Government is trying all its best to govern. So, the calendar has been affected one way or another because as they try to forge ahead, they try as well not to be restrictive in the way they do things.

Hopefully, with all the comments that have now been passed regarding this new calendar, I hope that that should be able to send a strong message to Government that we will try our best to make these little changes as possible to the agreed calendar that we have now approved.

All I want to say is, it is not easy being in the Chair and to go through all these with changes. Perhaps, it is a new ship, trying out its best to trial the seas, the different weather and all that goes with it in sailing a boat and by sailing a boat, it will be remiss of me not to mention the presence in the gallery of the former Assistant Minister for Health, Mr. O'Connor. He is a former navy man and he fully understands what we are talking about when we are talking about weather in the seas. Welcome to Parliament, Mr. O'Connor.

PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

Consolidated Review Report on the Media Industry Development Authority of Fiji 2010-2018 Annual Reports

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, this morning, I am pleased to present the Report of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs on the annual review of the Consolidated Annual Report of the Media Industry Development Authority of Fiji 2010-2018. Mr. Speaker, this review was undertaken in accordance with Standing Order 109(2)(b) which mandates the Committee to look into issue related to health, education, social services, labour, culture and media.

The Standing Committee on Social Affairs was referred the Media Industry Development Authority of Fiji Consolidated Annual Report on 13th February, 2023, and due to its process for report scrutiny, the Committee was mandated by Parliament to review the Annual Report and report back on its findings.

Mr. Speaker, the Standing Committee was not able to investigate or inquire due to the Media Industry Development Authority of Fiji Act 2010 being repealed on 6th April, 2023. The Committee acknowledged the work carried out by the Media Industry Development Authority of Fiji (MIDA) during the period under review from 2010 to 2018.

Nevertheless, I would like to thank the honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs - honourable Ratu Rakuita Vakalalabure, honourable Sashi Kiran, honourable Parveen Bala and honourable Viam Pillay, for their valuable input and support.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, I commend this Report to Parliament and request all honourable Members of this august Parliament to take note of the Report.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move:

A motion without notice that a debate on the content of the Report is initiated at a future Sitting.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

Review Report on the Ministry of Local Government 2018-2019 Annual Report

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, this morning, I am pleased to present the

Report of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs on the annual review of the Ministry of Local Government 2018-2019 Annual Report.

Mr. Speaker, the Standing Committee on Social Affairs of the last term of Parliament was referred the Ministry of Local Government 2018-2019 Annual Report. In this new term of Parliament, the Annual Report was reintroduced and referred to the current Standing Committee. As per the normal process for report scrutiny, the Committee was mandated by Parliament to review the Annual Report and report back on its findings.

Mr. Speaker, for the year 2018-2019, achievements that were highlighted by the Ministry were the:

1. Commissioning of the Nakasi Fire Station in the year 2018-2019 financial year which actually completed works in June 2020.
2. Redevelopment of Govind Park Phase 1 which was completed in the 2020-2021 financial year.
3. Reopening of the Suva Civic Centre which reopened after 18 months of redevelopment and that was under a partnership with the Guandong Nanyue Group in China and basically completed around September 2018.
4. Completion of mini markets around August and November 2018. These were the mini markets in Tavakubu in Lautoka and Cuvu in Sigatoka.
5. Completion and commissioning of the Rakiraki Fire Station in September 2019.
6. Reappointment of a special team of Special Administrators for all Municipal Councils.

Mr. Speaker, the Committee commends the achievement of the Ministry for the fiscal year under review and pleads with the Ministry to continue its main objective in providing essential services and amenities and facilitate development at the local level.

Mr. Speaker, to understand these essential services, the Committee undertook a site visit to some of the capital project sites that were implemented in the 2018-2019 fiscal year and commends the Ministry for its assistance in this review process. Though the annual review was for 2018-2019, the Committee acknowledged the current data and information provided by the stakeholders. This, however, greatly assisted the Committee in its review.

Mr. Speaker, the Committee acknowledges the Permanent Secretary for Local Government, Ms. Seema Sharma, and her staff, for their assistance rendered in the Committee's inquiry, as well as the bipartisan shown by honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs for without their support and valuable input, this Report would not have been a successful one.

I wish to thank the Standing Committee on Social Affairs - the honourable Ratu Rakuira Vakalalabure, honourable Sashi Kiran, honourable Parveen Bala and honourable Viam Pillay, for their valuable input and support. My deepest appreciation to honourable Ketan Lal and honourable Penioni Ravunawa for alternating on certain occasions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, I commend this Report to Parliament and request all honourable Members to take note of the Report.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move:

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

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

Review Report on the Ministry of Defence, National Security
and Policing 2018-2019 Annual Report

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to present the Review Report of the Ministry of Defence, National Security and Policing 2018-2019 Annual Report. This Annual Report was tabled on 14th July, 2023, in this new term of Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee has a total of five recommendations in this Review Report. The Committee feels that if implemented, it will assist the Ministry in the overall delivery of its services to the public.

I take this opportunity to thank the honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence and the Committee Secretariat for the work put into the compilation of this bipartisan Report.

On behalf of the Standing Committee of Foreign Affairs and Defence, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I submit this report to Parliament.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move:

A motion without notice that a debate on the content of the Report is initiated at a future Sitting.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

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

1. Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Climate Change, Environment, Civil Service, Information, Public Enterprises and Veteran Affairs.
2. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-operatives, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications.
3. Minister for Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management.
4. Minister for Agriculture and Waterways.

We will begin with the honourable Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Climate Change, Environment, Civil Service, Information, Public Enterprises and Veteran Affairs. The floor is yours, Sir.

Government Policy on International Conflicts

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise under the authority of Standing Order 40 to make a Ministerial Statement on Government policy on international conflicts.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I, make this Statement with a background of conflict going on around the world. Some of it could affect some of our peacekeepers on duty in the Middle East at the moment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have just come back from the meeting in San Fransisco, the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Meeting, where we had the opening cocktails on Wednesday of last week, at the end of which there was a very lively fireworks display. The welcome reception was put on by the Mayor of San Fransisco. There was very lively fireworks, and as some of us were enjoying the fireworks, I was quietly thinking of the young people in Russia and Ukraine, and also those in Gaza and Israel. What they would be doing, particularly the children, when they saw or heard loud bangs around them. They very quickly learned to know whether it is incoming or outgoing, and they would take necessary and needed actions to stay safe.

On the following morning at the Roundtable of the Leaders present at the APEC Meeting, I mentioned that at the function the previous evening, and I said, “Your Majesty (there was a king there), Excellency’s, and honourable Prime Ministers, I do not know what you were thinking about last night when we were having the firework displays. I was thinking about the young children, the young people in Gaza and Israel, and also those in Russia and Ukraine.”

Then there was the other thought that perhaps, we were celebrating the four-hour long meeting held by President Biden, who was sitting opposite me, and President Xi Jinping, the Chinese President, who was sitting towards my right. I said, “I thought we were celebrating their summit. I thought we were aware that these two men, between them, can bring peace to the world. And I encouraged them to continue to talk to those who were engulfed in conflicts around the globe at this time. I also told them, “Around this table, I am the only former peacekeeper present. I, and our troops now are called to go and keep the peace in conflict that had nothing to do with us but have gravely affected us in our cost of living, cost to us and lost lives.” It attracted a lot of attention, and I am glad to say that 48 hours after that, peace negotiations had started around the world.

This morning, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to speak a Ministerial Statement as Minister for Foreign Affairs, to elaborate on Government policy on international conflicts. We make our views and our stance based on rules based on international order and decision-making.

This morning, Sir, I received an envelope on my table from those who were trying to attract international attention towards the alleged atrocities suffered by our kinsmen - the Papuans, the Melanesians of Indonesia. I am glad that in the discussion I had with President of Indonesia, I did not mention West Papua or Papua as their concern, but my colleague, the honourable Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea mentioned it. And we have been asked by the Pacific Islands Forum of Leaders in the Melanesian Spearhead Group to spearhead the Pacific’s attempt to get attention focused on the people of West Papua.

After our discussion with the President of Indonesia, he invited me to make that State visit and I hope it does not interfere with the parliamentary programme that we have. In fact, I would plan it so that we do not interfere with the sitting of Parliament next year. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we may be

small, we may not have the power to influence the economies of the world. But we enjoy a profile in international peacekeeping, and thanks to those who serve in the

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we may be small, we may not have the power to influence the economies of the world. But we enjoy a profile in international peacekeeping, and thanks to those who serve in the Military and peacekeeping efforts, thanks to those who started the idea - the late Ambassador Berenado Vunibobo, the late Colonel Paul Manueli and the late Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara during their time of leadership and representatives of Fiji.

We, at the moment, would like to continue to make our decisions based on rules-based international order and decision-making. When we participate in global debates or consider resolutions, we prioritise the sovereignty of UN Member States, as outlined in the United Nations Conventions. Our approach is premised on the determination of whether the issue at hand affects the sovereignty of States recognised as part of the United Nations.

States are signatories, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and parties to international conventions and rules set out by the United Nations. By our very membership of this world body, we hold each other accountable to that standard. How do we deal with non-State actors and proxies?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the issue of accountability raises the question of what happens if and/or when non-State actors or proxies are involved in international conflicts? Where these entities initiate conflicts and ignore the international rules governing corresponding conducts, including the laws of wars, who will come for them, or precisely, how can they be made accountable?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I was in the UNDA when the group of pilgrims from Fiji were preparing to go to Israel. My wife and a girl from home were on the passenger list. I called the organisers, and I called home and said, "Please, cross off my wife's name." Master Mika asked, "Why, Sir?". I said, "They will be there on 7th October, 2023, which is a Saturday." He asked, "What has that got to do with the trip?" I said, "That is the 50th Anniversary of the Yom Kippur War."

I asked my wife to excuse me for that, but on the afternoon of Saturday, 7th October, as the people of Navatu were having a meeting remembering the Republic Day of Fiji before the Fiji Day Celebrations on the following Monday, word came out that the war had broken up on Saturday, 7th October, 2023 - 50 years exactly to the day the Yom Kippur War started.

We had to work out how we were going to extract our pilgrims. We got the co-operation of Fiji Airways, we got the co-operation of our Embassies, of our Permanent Representative in the United Nations, who arranged with all the countries over which Fiji Airways would fly, to be on standby should we need refuelling coming back because we would not have had time for Fiji Airway to refuel on the ground.

We got word that the Iron Dome had been activated, that no missiles would fall on Ben Gurion Airport, we had cleared the air route, Fiji Airways was on standby in Singapore with full fuel tanks, which meant they could not bring back all the passengers. They could bring back everyone who went but not the others who did not go by the charter flight.

We managed to do that, Sir, because we have a very good reputation with countries around the world who are willing to cooperate with Fiji Airways should they need to refuel on the way back. The flight returned, picked up our passengers and came back. Sadly, while they were on board, they heard the news that the Mayor, who had entertained them two days before the conflict broke out, had been killed in the kibbutz he was defending as the Mayor in the very first assault into Israel.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, battlelines nowadays are not drawn. All former military men know that Forward Edge of the Battle Area (FEBA) is no longer applicable. There is no longer an FEBA. The enemy is no longer in uniform and wears no rank. Things are very difficult. Definitions and identities of combatants are no longer discernible. These are the nature of conflicts that we have to think about in our role as leaders in the legislative assemblies of nations, so far remote from the conflicts yet suffer most of the effects.

Such things as human shields that we used to read about are reality in the conflicts of today. The brutal atrocities we thought might be fiction in a lot of things we see and read and view on social media are real, but we must abide by the international standard that we uphold. And, that is, we respect the sovereignty of nations, and we must also continue to serve to the best of our interest and the interest of the world because I believe we are there, we believe it is for the world that we have our peacekeepers out there.

Sir, we have our own faith, our own religion, and we also have our own sovereignty to protect. Our policy stance on managing international conflicts, we respect the sovereign integrity of States. We stand for non-aggression, for non-interference in domestic affairs of States and the resolution of conflicts by peaceful means in line with Chapter VI of the UN Charter. When it comes to the required action with respect to threats to peace, breaches of the peace, and acts of aggression, Fiji is guided by Chapter VII of the UN Charter.

At the same time, and as a sovereign State, Fiji does not take a position simply because it is popular, or because it is the easy way out. Instead, we will stand for truth, for what is right, even though this may not be pragmatic at times because, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the very principles we stand for as expressed under Chapter VI and Chapter VII of the UN Charter, demonstrates our belief in the sacro-sanctity of life, in truthfulness and human decency, in good faith and accountability - that no meaningful and durable solution will come out from situations where a party to a conflict refuses to take responsibility for its actions. How else can a doctrine of consent be applied when it comes to an agreed third party role?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, from an ethical standpoint, the embracing arms of forgiveness and acceptance can only come from admission and repentance. Therein lies the dignity of life and peace restoration, built on truth in the One in whom we live and move and have our being. This is Fiji's hope for the world. Thank you, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Leader of the Opposition or his designate to make his response.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the honourable Prime Minister for his elaboration on the policy that the Government has on international conflicts and how this is consistent with the Foreign Affairs Policy of being friends to all and enemies of none.

He has explained at length talking about the people that went to Israel as part of the trip earlier on and I am glad to see some of the things that he mentioned.

Listening to the words I am trying to put things together to see how they gel up with what the Government has actually done and the great words that have been expressed by the honourable Prime Minister.

Our Foreign Policy, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I believe must always serve our national interest: our national interest of today and our national interest of the future. This must be fundamental at all times. It is not an easy thing to do because sometimes we are at pressure to do things that others want us to

do. It is also very important that the Foreign Policy must reflect our values. One of these key values is humanity.

The honourable Prime Minister has talked about the important role that is made in terms of peacekeeping: peacekeeping today in the Middle East there are between 15,000 to 20,000 people that have passed away. At least 6,000 children. I do not know what the figures are in places like Ukraine. What those numbers are but this morning, I just googled those numbers.

I think this value of humanity must be crucial in everything that we stand for. We are a country that stands for humanity. We have stood for climate change because climate change impacts on humanity. We have stood at the forefront of this world and shouted these matters to everyone. When you are for climate change you are for humanity.

So, I am saying from our part this key value of humanity we must never deviate from it if people are dying around the world. Humanity is also about the lives of our peacekeepers. If you are going to make decisions at the United Nations, we need to be very careful that they are not decisions that might impact the lives of our very own peacekeepers that are in that part of the world, and I know that the honourable Prime Minister is a former peacekeeper knows that and that is our concern that we have.

When we make decisions whether we support this motion or that motion in the United Nations, we have to think about humanity around the world, humanity of our very own people. As I talked about this today, they were talking about the causes for humanitarian issues. I think humanitarian focus on humanity must be critical in all our notions that we have.

Mr. Speaker, in doing this the perception of what the honourable Prime Minister had said that we need to be able to stand on our own feet and not be pushed by the powers that be whoever they are and we totally agree with this. We must not try to appease people just because they are strong. Our sense of who we are must not be bought by anyone else. So, the sentiments are there we want to see that this is implemented well. We maintain that we maintain the importance of humanity, the importance of our people, the importance of this world to make sure that it is preserved for all the future generations.

The words I heard from the Government, I look forward to seeing the execution to make it really happen where the rubber hits the road, where people's lives are saved, where children can grow up to become adults. The babies that are in incubators are not killed because they have done nothing wrong at all. That is our great concern, honourable Prime Minister, so thank you for those words.

Please, maintain the interests of this country. Maintain our values and do not be torn asunder by the perceptions that people have when they want us to do what they want to do for their own benefit. We must do what is in the best interest of the world, of our people and our country.

Google South Pacific Connect Initiative and Google's Investment in Fiji

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I stand before you today to make a Ministerial Statement on Google South Pacific Connect Initiative and Google's Investment in Fiji (in short at which it will be known: the Tabua Cable Connection). Let me just say Mr. Speaker, Sir, when the history of this Government is written in years to come, the creation of the Tabua Cable is the collaboration between the tech giant, Google, and the Government of Fiji will go down as a major achievement and significant building block in rebuilding the economic architecture in the new Fiji.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Let me say again, when the history of this Government is written, the creation of the Tabua Cable will go down as a major achievement and a significant building block in the rebuilding of the economic architecture of the new Fiji.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Where is your dagger?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Sir, today, I wish to share some information on this transformative investment and why, as Minister of Communications and by extensions naturally, the People's Government is very excited about this partnership with Google and the further opportunities, we believe, this initiative will unlock for Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this initiative aligns well with the Coalition Government's long-term goal of diversifying the economy, progressing into a more digital economy and cementing Fiji as the hub of the Pacific. We not only speak about it, but we also actually do it. We make it happen.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Hogwash ...

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, to start, please, allow me to share some details on Google South Pacific Connect Initiative.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Listen, you'll learn something.

HON. P.K. BALA.- We have nothing to learn.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Google will establish and lay a new sub-sea cable that will link United States, Fiji, Australia and French Polynesia. Google will lay the Tabua Cable which will connect the United States, Australia and Fiji and additionally, Google will lay a second cable dubbed the "Honomoana cable", connecting the United States to French Polynesia and onward to Australia. There is also potential to eventually link Fiji to Japan and Fiji to Chile through South America.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Google plans an interlinking subsea cable connecting Fiji and French Polynesia.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- When did you start the negotiation with Google?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Listen, listen!

(Laughter)

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Google plans for the interlinking subsea cables connecting Fiji and French Polynesia will truly make Fiji the technological hub of the Pacific and continue this desire, and this is another thing that differentiates us from them.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- When we do things, we do things for other Pacific Islands, with the Pacific. This investment Mr. Speaker, Sir, will open up the technology to whole of the Pacific.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Who started the discussions with Google?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- This ring will include pre-positioned branching units that will allow other Pacific Islands

Let me address that question, Mr. Speaker, Sir. They were mucking around with Google.

(Laughter)

Google approached them, they were mucking around with Google. In seven months, we got it done.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- When we met Google, they said, “We have been talking to these guys, they are not talking to us.”

HON. J. USAMATE.- You were talking to Fiji Water all the time.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P.K. BALA.- Look at him.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- No action, Mr. Speaker, Sir, with too much talk.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Very good action.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Seven months, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are bringing our transformative investment into this country. This ring that I am talking about will include pre-positioned branching units that will allow the Pacific Island countries and territories to take advantage of the reliability, diversity and resilience resulting from this initiative.

The President of the United States and the Prime Minister of Australia announced their support for the Google Pacific Connect Initiative on the 25th October this year providing funding for some of the branching units which will allow for potential future submarine cable connections to other Pacific Island countries.

The South Pacific Connect Initiative is a collaborative effort with Google making a significant step in the advancement of digital infrastructure in the Pacific region. It is one of the first projects of its kind in the Pacific providing the ability to bring redundant international connectivity to a region that is susceptible to natural disasters.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, listen to this - Google will also construct a diverse cable landing station and ICT facility in Fiji which will create the first Tier III data centre in the Pacific improving reliability, adding capacity and reducing latency for users in the Pacific and around the world.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one would ask, “why is Google Pacific Connect Investment and Googles investment in Fiji important to us? With Googles investment in the Pacific Connect Initiative their plan to construct a diverse cable landing station and ICT facility this is a game changing initiative for Fiji, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The estimated investment by Google into Fiji is FJ\$200 million.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have spoken in this august Parliament about the initiatives to turbocharge the economy. This, in itself, has the potential to turbocharge, diversify and strengthen the economy and more.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Are you the new Minister of Finance?

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, even prior to becoming a politician, I have been very supportive of the BPO and outsource sector in Fiji and vocal for the need of an additional landing station and submarine cable connectivity to provide redundancy, greater connectivity, reduce risk in the case of a cable being damaged. I am pleased to say to the people of Fiji this has now come to pass.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you FijiFirst.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- I am not sure if the Members of this august Parliament are aware, but with Viti Levu having one cable station, if something goes wrong, God-forbid, we would be severely and adversely affected. The risk is there, and we saw this in Tonga two years ago. The economic impact if Fiji were to lose connectivity would be severe, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Imagine not having internet connectivity for an extended period in this day and age.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Coalition Government acknowledges that developing resilient infrastructure is critical to development advancement and we have prioritised supporting initiatives such as this, initiatives that have the ability to not only strengthen the ICT infrastructure but revolutionise digital connectivity in Fiji and the region providing a robust and reliable network, vital backup, expanded capacity and minimising delay for users in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to talk briefly about some of the high-level benefits that the South Pacific Connect Initiative and Google's investment will have in Fiji. Sir, we anticipate long-term economic benefit of this investment to Fiji, and it will be significant.

First, the fact that a global multinational technology company like Google is investing in Fiji shows investor confidence. The fact that we did it in seven months, Mr. Speaker, Sir, has placed much more confidence (Google) in Fiji as opposed to the other side that marked them around for almost two years. With the additional submarine cables, increased infrastructure investments and improved digital network infrastructure, there is an opportunity for greater international internet bandwidth capacity, faster internet speed, potential cost savings to Fiji, increased resilience and reduce latency.

HON. K.K. LAL.- *Levu na vosa.*

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- You might learn something.

Improved network infrastructure will support new and emerging technologies including frontier technologies such as, Artificial Intelligence, 5G, Internet of Things, Quantum Computing, and will have the potential to make the greatest progress in areas such as, education, agriculture, communications, medicine, manufacturing and combating climate change. Now I have made them quiet.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let us not forget the economic impact. The estimated impact from the new subsea cable infrastructure on Fiji's economy and society will include a higher economic output and supporting employment directly attributed to the market effects of this new cable infrastructure. By 2030, it is estimated that the economic output over seven years will reach approximately US\$295 million and has the potential to create almost 3,600 jobs economy wide.

This is very conservative, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The above economic output and job estimates excludes the economic contribution of building and operating subsea cable infrastructure. Just as important, this new subsea cable would act as a catalyst for new digital technology-enabled opportunities. This investment will greatly support the Fiji Business Process Outsourcing sector, by not only offering greater network infrastructure, but by reducing the risks mentioned earlier.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this investment would also provide further confidence backed by this greater infrastructure for current and new BPO investors to consider investing and expanding their investments in Fiji. You can see, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that there is a major interest in Fiji right now. This will lead to increased employment and economic activity in the BPO sector.

The BPO sector has the potential to provide 25,000 jobs and contribute greatly to Fiji's GDP. This initiative further supports the business case for greater investment in the BPO and outsource sector. Improved digital connectivity and greater network infrastructure leads to technologies supporting social objectives, such as, digital technology in healthcare and education and even disaster management, to name a few. Online digital education programmes will enable people to develop new skills and open up new additional career opportunities.

In Fiji, *Google* is collaborating with key stakeholders - FINTEL and FNPF. These partnerships will strengthen Fiji and FINTEL's telecommunications hub status, and also provide much needed reliability, resilience and connectivity between the people of the Pacific and the rest of the world. We also believe, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that Fiji's institutional investors, such as FNPF, Fijian Holdings and BSP Life, may have an opportunity to invest in the Tabua Cable. This is also an excellent opportunity for Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is no secret that this Government, the People's Government is very excited about this initiative and this investment in this country. It is a big deal and will have real economic benefits for the people of Fiji. I wish to assure the people of Fiji, we are just getting warmed up, and this Government not only talks, it actually walks the walk and takes action. Remember that!

Before I end, I would like to acknowledge all the collaborators who have taken part in this initiative from the team at *Google*, to the Office of the Prime Minister, the honourable Minister for Trade, Co-operatives, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications, Investment Fiji and the Trade Commissioner at the Trade Commission Office, Mr. Alika Cooper, and finally, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Fiji.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- We did it in seven months.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for making this contribution.

MR. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Leader of the Opposition or his designate for their response.

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to reply to the Ministerial Statement by the Deputy Prime Minister and I thank him for his Statement. Connectivity is a must for development and modernisation. One of the biggest pillars in strategies for the FijiFirst Government was to modernise Fiji and the connectivity ...

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. K.K. LAL.- And we did it!

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- ... that we have right now is as a result of that strategy to modernise the nation.

In the margins of the 77th General Assembly, the honourable Prime Minister met with *Google* in Washington and started off this discussion on *Google* Investment in Fiji and for the honourable Deputy Prime Minister just to ...

HON. K.K. LAL.- Listen, listen!

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- ... whitewash it and say that this is just their own, is a lie. We started it all in October.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- He is a liar.

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, connectivity has both good and bad sides to it. We hear the benefits it will bring to Fiji but there is a bad side to connectivity, and it is called cybercrime. The Budapest Convention, which is the Convention on Cybercrime, was brought to Parliament, we dealt with it in the Committee and the honourable Attorney-General was supposed to come back to Parliament and move a motion that Fiji ratifies this Convention. That is the smart way of doing things. When you have connectivity, you make sure that you cover yourself from the negative aspects of connectivity and we are still waiting for that motion to come to Parliament so that Fiji can ratify the Budapest Convention so that we can partner with those countries that are at the forefront of fighting cybercrime.

Yes, connectivity is good, it is good for development, it is good for modernisation, but we must not forget the downside to it. That Convention will help the nation to curb the downside of having connectivity. You open up the internet nowadays, everyone has a phone, for kids, you open it up, you open to the ideologies of extremists of the world. We have dealt with that Cybercrime Convention and we are hoping that the honourable Attorney-General can bring it to Parliament so that Fiji can ratify.

I would also like to mention that yesterday, the honourable Prime Minister said that the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdictions (BBNJ) Treaty that he signed had already come to Parliament and with the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence. I would like to correct it that it has not come to Parliament, he definitely got bad advice. The BBNJ was just drafted, I think, in March 2023. I am expecting the Solicitor-General or the honourable Attorney-General to bring a motion to Parliament so that Parliament can then push that across to the Committee and we can come back to Parliament for ratification of the BBNJ.

Yes, that cable will help Fiji, it is good for our country, it is good for development but please do not forget the bad side to it. I certainly hope that we can ratify that Cybercrime Convention (Budapest Convention) which helps us in dealing with the downside to connectivity.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now intend to adjourn Parliament for tea. For those in the gallery, you are also invited to share some tea with the honourable Members of Parliament.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.40 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.14 a.m.

National State of Preparedness by the National Disaster Management Office

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Mr. Speaker Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Ministers and honourable Members of Parliament, *ni sa bula vinaka*. I rise in this august Parliament today to share some ongoing initiatives that are part of the disaster preparedness works undertaken by the Ministry through the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO).

Mr. Speaker, Sir, at the outset, please, allow me to provide a brief historical background of natural disaster events that we have witnessed over the years. As we know, Fiji is situated in a region prone to various environmental hazards, including cyclones, floods, earthquakes and tsunamis. These natural calamities have, over the years, brought about devastating consequences, prompting the Government to prioritise disaster preparedness and mitigation efforts.

In response, our team at the NDMO has embarked on ongoing initiatives aimed at enhancing the nation's resilience and preparedness in the face of natural disasters. To understand these initiatives, it is imperative to have a look at the historical background of natural disaster events that have plagued Fiji in the past. This historical perspective not only sheds light on the challenges faced by the country but also underscores the importance of proactive measures in safeguarding the lives and livelihoods of its people.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a study by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) revealed that Fiji is expected to incur climate change-related losses equivalent to 4 percent of our annual GDP by the year 2100 due to rising temperatures and more frequent extreme weather events, which will have adverse effects on agriculture and the broader economy. According to the study, Fiji is likely to experience increased droughts, floods, and temperature spikes by 2070 with a potential temperature rise of 2 degrees Celsius from 1990 levels under a medium emissions scenario. Sea levels could also rise by as much as 1.41 metres by the year 2100.

Contextualising reality with theory, Mr. Speaker, Sir, observed sea levels have been rising at a rate of 4 millimetres per year from 1992 to 2018. Additionally, over the past 75 years, there has been a noticeable increase in the frequency of extreme rainfall events. For the Nadi River, out of 84 floods recorded since 1870, 54 flooding events alone occurred after 1980, with 26 major floods since 1991. In January 2009, major flooding resulted in tragic consequences, including at least 11 fatalities, displacement of 12,000 people and economic damages amounting to US\$54 million.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in 2020, *TC Yasa* was the strongest tropical cyclone to have hit the South Pacific since *TC Winston* in 2016, and the fourth most intense tropical cyclone on record in the Southern Pacific Basin causing significant destruction to infrastructure, buildings and livelihoods. It was also the second severe tropical cyclone in 2020 after *TC Harold*, impacting Fiji during the COVID-19 pandemic. Around 24,413 people were displaced, four deaths with one missing person recorded with economic damages mounting to over US\$100 million.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is of utmost significance to acknowledge that the heightened occurrence of flooding and cyclones cannot be attributed solely to rising sea levels, temperature increases, or extreme rainfall events. These consequences are compounded by the gradual silting and sedimentation of our river channels, primarily resulting from deforestation in the hinterland.

Additionally, various forms of development have led to the depletion of a significant portion of our mangrove fringe, a critical natural barrier against flooding and coastal erosion. Therefore, the

imperative to take immediate action to prioritise resilience has never been more pressing than it is now.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a significant concern for our small island nation is that 76 percent of our population resides within a 5-kilometre radius of the coast, making our homeland highly susceptible to future disasters. Forty-two vulnerable communities in Fiji have been identified for potential relocation. Our approach has transitioned towards involving disaster survivors in their own efforts to recover housing.

Earlier this month, in partnership with the International Office of Migration (IOM) and Korea International Co-operation Agency (KOICA), we soft-launched the Evacuation Centre Retrofitting and Newly Built Guideline. This Guideline will undergo testing in all the evacuation centres that will be built and retrofitted through this project before it is finalised. It will also include a standard design for evacuation centres.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, disaster preparedness plays a critical role in the work of the NDMO due to the country's vulnerability as I have aforementioned. We recognise that being well prepared for disasters is essential to saving lives, reducing the impact of damages to infrastructure and effectively managing emergency response operations.

The NDMO greatly appreciates the support received from its partners in its efforts to enhance disaster preparedness in Fiji. These partners, ranging from regional organisations to international aid agencies and donor countries have provided vital assistance in terms of financial resources, technical expertise and capacity building. With their support, the NDMO has been able to strengthen its capabilities in disaster response, early warning systems and community awareness programmes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, at this juncture that I would like to acknowledge the New Zealand government for its investment of FJ\$3.2 million towards providing support to improve disaster preparedness and response. The funding and support comprise a suite of interventions designed to increase the capacity of the NDMO to manage disaster awareness and response in Fiji. It will involve:

- technical assistance to the NDMO;
- upgrade of early warning and flood protection systems;
- construction of warehouses, upgrade of divisional Emergency Operation Centres; and
- development of information management system and preparedness and capacity building.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are working on upgrading the National Emergency Operations Centre for disaster preparedness and for monitoring and coordinating disaster response and relief operations. Some of our equipment that was damaged from *TC Yasa* will be upgraded to ensure efficiency during disaster operations. I am pleased to inform this august Parliament that in collaboration with the Korean National Disaster Management Institute, we are presently working on an ongoing project titled the "Construction of the Forecasting and Warning System for Disaster Reduction Project in Fiji."

We have installed flood early warning systems within the Ba Province Catchment, encompassing four rainfall stations, seven water level stations and six warning posts. The primary objective of this joint project is to offer early warning to vulnerable communities, facilitating timely evacuations to safeguard lives and properties during flood events. The project had commenced on 1st May and is expected to conclude on 30th November, 2023.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji will pilot an initiative in partnership with the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Response (UNOCHA) to implement Anticipatory Action within

the Central Emergency Response Funds. This initiative will receive US\$2 million through the Fiji Cluster System to support Government priorities during disasters.

Anticipatory action aims to enhance existing Disaster Risk Reduction frameworks by enabling pro-active actions and financing to be initiated based on forecast of impending hazards rather than waiting to respond after the disaster has occurred. This approach is supported by growing evidence suggesting that taking action before a predictable shock occurs as both timely and cost effective, in addition to upholding human dignity.

As an aside, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the *TC Mal* if it had come directly towards Viti Levu, this would have kicked into anticipatory action, meaning that funds would be issued to targeted groups along the path of the cyclone.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to share an update on an important development regarding Fiji's disaster response capabilities. In March of this year, the Cabinet granted approval for the establishment of Fiji's inaugural National Emergency Response Team (NERT). It is my pleasure to inform this esteemed Parliament that the first induction training for our dedicated first responders took place from 2nd July to 9th July, 2023.

A total of 35 Government Officials across 19 agencies took part in the exercise. A training programme took place outdoors at the Ministry's warehouse in Lautoka, where our participants were accommodated in the First Responders accommodation block on the premises. The training spent seven days and included a total of 85 learning hours with 24 hours dedicated to Simulation Exercise (SIMEX).

The training sessions focused on disaster response scenarios, including standardised tools and methodologies for efficient disaster response, specifically the Tropical Cyclone Response scenario during the learning sessions, and Earthquake and Tsunami Response scenario during the simulation exercise.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, having Fiji's own National Emergency Response Team (NERT) is crucial for a swift and effective response to disasters, as it allows for local expertise, tailored strategies, community empowerment and enhanced collaboration with international partners. Together, these factors contribute to a more resilient and prepared Fiji in the face of emergencies.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, recognising the significance of investing in disaster preparedness, the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) has verified that investing just one US Dollar in risk reduction and prevention can save up to 15 US Dollars in post-disaster recovery. This reaffirms the significant impact and cost-effectiveness of prioritising risk reduction measures to mitigate the consequences of disasters.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in accordance with Cabinet's approval for the National Emergency Response Team (NERT) mechanism, I am pleased to inform this Parliament that we had successfully completed a National Simulation Exercise focused on tsunami and earthquake scenarios marked as a key event in our National Disaster Awareness Week which was conducted from 12th October to 18th October, 2023.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the National Disaster Awareness Week is mandated by the Natural Disaster Management Act 1998 to be conducted annually. This year's Disaster Week was extra special, as we were graced by the attendance of Ms. Mami Mizutori, the Assistant Secretary-General and Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction at the UNDRR, marking it her first visit to the region.

I would also like to thank the Office of His Excellency the President of Fiji, for His Excellency's gracious presence on the day, supporting us in this worthy cause with his participation in the Tsunami Simulation Drill and presenting our guest, Ms. Mizutori, with our 'thank you' token at the closing of the Disaster Week. I would also like to thank all honourable Members of this august Parliament who had participated on that day.

This year's Disaster Awareness Week started with training conducted by the Australian Disaster Assessment Response Team for three days and the first of its kind on Urban Search and Rescue, followed by a Communication Sub Exercise, an Academic session, Tsunami Drill, Marine Search and Rescue, Oil Spill, Urban Search and Rescue, with two full days of a public exhibition in tents on Albert Park.

The theme for this year's Disaster Awareness Week, Mr. Speaker, Sir, was "Fighting Inequality for a Resilient Future". It is a topic that not only underscores the challenges we face, but also the immense potential we have to create a more equitable and resilient world.

In the realm of disaster risk reduction, we often discuss strategies, early warning systems and preparedness. While these are undeniably crucial, we must also recognise that disasters do not affect all individuals or communities equally. Inequality amplifies the impact of disasters and exacerbates the vulnerability of the marginalised and disadvantaged among us.

Through our active engagement and the involvement of our disaster risk reduction community, we have evaluated our collective level of readiness concerning earthquake and tsunami scenarios. Organisations have also assessed their Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). However, what is the most significant is the relationships building and network creation of our first responders - a worthy investment we witnessed first-hand during the *TC Mal* response.

Mr. Speaker, allow me to provide an update on the preliminary damage assessment data analysis for *TC Mal*. Some districts are still conducting their assessments and we anticipate receiving more data by the end of this week.

In the Ba Province, a total of four homes have sustained partial damage. Additionally, two households have reported damage to their sanitation facilities, while three households have reported damage to their kitchen. Three houses have experienced damage to their water supply systems, affecting 21 families.

A team is currently deployed to the Yasawa Group of Islands to conduct an Initial Damage Assessment (IDA) and so far, majority of the damages reported are from their agriculture farms. Food rations have been deployed to alleviate suffering, while we collaborate with the Ministry of Agriculture to normalise their food security and livelihood.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the 2023 National Disaster Awareness Week was, for the first time, where we tried out this scenario event where we attempted to simultaneously evacuate over 1,203 individuals from 16 different locations nationwide. This represents the largest scale evacuation exercise we have ever conducted at a national level. The seamless execution of this operation is a clear testament of the high level of professionalism that we now have in country.

Based on these exercises, we are also comfortable that we can scale up evacuee numbers and locations nationwide, if the need arises. The evacuation encompassed a total of seven schools, one community, a hospital, the Suva Market, six businesses in the greater Suva area - all of which actively participated in the tsunami drill.

I would like to thank them all for joining efforts with us and would like to extend a special acknowledgement to the Pacific Disability Forum for their valuable contribution to the drill. It is important to recognise that every individual's wellbeing is of utmost importance, and we are all on this collective journey together.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to express my gratitude to our partners who collaborated with us in ensuring the success of the National Disaster Awareness Week - the New Zealand Government, the Australian Government, Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, the Pacific Community, UNDRR, UN Women, IFRC, UNICEF, UNOCHA, WFP, IOM, USAID and Walesi.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, standing resolute in our commitment to the principle of leaving no one behind, we have extended invitations to our neighbouring countries. Over 10 Pacific Island Countries actively participated in the exercise, with the inclusion of their respective Red Cross Offices.

Early this month, Sir, we completed our operational readiness checks for evacuation centres and emergency operation centres. These checks are crucial for assessing preparedness and effectiveness, ensuring the safety and wellbeing of individuals during emergencies and disasters. It was done just in time to coincide with *TC Mal*, and I suppose the results speak for themselves.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Coalition Government committed to making a significant commitment towards mainstreaming of the 122 Action Items outlined in the National Disaster Risk Reduction Policy. This commitment will be executed through a coordinated effort across Government agencies and Civil Society Organisations, following a whole-of-society approach.

I am pleased to update this august Parliament that we have circulated the first draft of the Western Division Disaster Risk Reduction Plan. This marks the first plan for Fiji when Disaster Risk Reduction is integrated into our planning and development. We intend to complete this plan once all disaster historical analysis are finalised and incorporated into the programme.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I express my gratitude to all the people of Fiji for their cooperation during *TC Mal*, despite uncertainties about the cyclone's path. We successfully disseminated crucial lifesaving messages. The absence of casualties or injuries reflects remarkable collaboration and support from the public, businesses, the media and first responders. It is vital for all stakeholders, not just the Government, to unite during such times.

Effective disaster response requires a collective effort and shared responsibility involving Government agencies, NGOs, community organisations, businesses and individuals. Collaborative preparedness activities, such as emergency planning, drills and resilient infrastructure investment, are key to minimising the impact of disasters and safeguarding lives and livelihoods.

Early preparedness contributes to economic growth during emergencies when communities and households are ready with robust disaster plans and mitigation measures, the response and recovery processes become more efficient. Swift action and minimal disruption allow businesses to recover faster, saving jobs and ensuring continuity in livelihoods. This resilience not only protects the economy but also fosters confidence in investors, contributing to long-term economic growth and stability.

It is essential to acknowledge that neglecting preparation is equivalent to preparing for failure. By working together and investing in early preparedness, we can bolster our resilience, protect our communities, and lay the foundation for economic growth even during times of emergency.

With that, Sir, I thank this august Parliament for giving me this opportunity.

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you, honourable Minister. I now call on the Leader of the Opposition or his designate, to deliver their response.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the bell was, indeed, loud enough for the honourable Minister to end his statement.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, like the statement made by the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-operatives and Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications on Google, stating their excitement about the project, we are equally excited too from this side to see that they are continuing the work that we have started and it is not about the politics, it is about Fiji, Sir.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- The honourable Deputy Prime Minister yesterday talked about this great partnership and participation of honourable Koya and, of course, the Leader of the Opposition as part of the COP 28 delegation. We could be childish and refuse this, Sir, but we look at the big picture. This is about Fiji.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- We have served as Ministers for eight years, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and we have a lot to offer this Government. So, I thank the honourable Minister for stating the state of preparedness, but this is nothing new. The National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) is where it is today because of the leadership of FijiFirst.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- I will say that again, NDMO is where it is today because of the leadership of FijiFirst. No one can contest that, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

In 2016, as we prepared for the World Humanitarian Summit in Turkey, we came up with a statement and this was the main statement for the Pacific because we are linking the Sendai Framework, we are linking the SDG Goals, and we are also linking the Paris Agreement. The change in our paradigm - what is that change, Mr. Speaker, Sir?

The way we live is changing. That is what we call the 'new norm'. He talked about the changing rainfall pattern, the intensity and the frequency – that is the new norm, and we are the ones that suffer most. We are amongst the most vulnerable because the way we live is changing. The way we do development must also change. Let us not do development just for the sake of doing development and I will continue to urge the honourable Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance, when it comes to investing in DRR, the biggest problem that we used to face in the machinery of Government is we do not see money put into DRR as investment. We always see it as expenditure, so that change the way we do development.

The honourable Minister correctly stated about the need for us to shift to sustainability and resilience. We have always talked about the debt. This is linked to the debt that we had accumulated because every one dollar is going on \$15 but usually the figure is around \$7 saving for the country. That is good for us in the long term – for sustainability and for resilience as well because we need to prepare better come the next one. If electric cables need to go underground like we did in Nadi, it has to go underground because of the tourism industry and how it also contributes. This is the change, the paradigm that we initiated, and I am thankful that it is continuing.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, because the way we live is changing, the way we do development has changed, the partnership is important. Sustainable Development Goal 17 is about partnership and, again, the honourable Minister has talked about that partnership as so critical. Within the country and, of course, regionally and the multi-lateral organisations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, you are well aware of the issue about forced migration and displacement and, unfortunately, the trend right now, there is no appetite multi-laterally on changing the 1951 UN Convention of Refugees and they are coming back to the regions now to look at ways. This is why partnerships are so important. We have done so much.

Because of my time, Sir, just a few things that I have picked up from the honourable Minister's speech that they probably need to look at. He had talked about the 1998 Act – that Act has been under review now for the last four years.

When we went to Tonga, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Tonga has come up with a new Act and I congratulated the Tongan team. I told the Director NDMO, I do not know what is still happening with the Act in Fiji because that Act has been under review now for the last four years. I hope that, that can be fast-tracked, honourable Minister.

Our state of preparedness, I asked the honourable Minister about the state of our fleet because Fiji, given our layout, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are always worried about the islands. The state of the jetties or otherwise, the state of the airfields and Australia has already done some work on the state of our airfields because air, land and sea passages is something that the Government should always be critically aware of when it comes to response.

Together with that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is prepositioning. We have got the strategic reserve in Black Rock. We have got the warehouses in the North and in the Central Division, and hopefully we can also push forward prepositioning in the outer islands, particularly where we do not have the infrastructure. It is hard to get to Ono-i-Lau when it is low tide. These are things that they need to consider in terms of our state of preparedness.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just on the multi-hazard early warning system, that is a priority. We need to be proactive rather than reactive. I congratulate Government for the continuation of the early warning systems when it comes to flooding, but we have to do a lot as well on our coastal areas. We have installed the first 13 sirens for Suva, there is a plan to start and continue from Kiuva right through to Rakiraki, but I do not know where that is now, and we hope that we can continue with that.

Lastly, again, I plead with the honourable Minister of Finance to invest in DRR. We have a DRR Policy. It is good for us in the long term because when it comes to sustainability and resilience, investment in DRR is the solution. So, I plead with the Government, please, invest in our DRR and, of course, let us look at how we can continue to support the work of NDMO.

Again, the work of NDMO is critical and needs the support of every stakeholder, so be assured honourable Minister and Government that we will always be available to support our Government in its DRR and DRM efforts. Congratulations as well for the establishment of the National Emergency Response Team (NERT). Thank you, Sir.

Plans for Self-Income Generating Agro-Based Projects

HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think it is good to start speaking agriculture for some form of peace in Parliament.

(Laughter)

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to speak on the plans for self-income generating agro-based projects in pursuit of agricultural diversification. Just before I do so, I would like to thank all honourable Members of this august Parliament who managed to visit the National Agriculture Show and had a look at the 1.4 tonne bull. Unfortunately, I did not see my good friend, honourable Bala, because I would have introduced you to the Bull.

(Laughter)

HON. P.K. BALA.- Next time.

HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- On the same token, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have just received information from the Animal Health and Production Division that we have finally succeeded in freezing cattle semen in Sigatoka Research Station. I must commend the Animal Health and Production Division Officials for a job well done. The process is quite hectic, and it requires the bulls be maintained on a formulated ratio to ensure their status as sexual athletes (forgive me for the language).

The semen is extracted by an electric ejaculation and analysed and processed in the reproductive laboratory, and then loaded into straws and frozen. The semen is then stored in liquid nitrogen tanks ready for future use in artificial insemination. Not only does this allow for dissemination of genetics across Fiji, it also preserves the bull genetics that we currently have, and it is anticipated that at the current capacity of Sigatoka Research Breeding Centre, we will be able to produce in excess of 1,000 straws per week. That is quite a lot of semen, enough to sustain the cattle industry in Fiji. For your information, we will be receiving the liquid nitrogen generator, which is currently on order, and it is expected to arrive next month, and we will be expected to produce around 20 litres of liquid nitrogen per day.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Deputy Prime Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Cabinet Ministers and honourable Members of Parliament, ladies and gentlemen seated in the gallery and those who are listening via live telecast of this sitting; I stand before this august Parliament today to outline a vision for the future of agriculture in Fiji - a vision that goes beyond traditional market practices and embraces a future for self-income generating agro-based projects or value added agriculture. Our nation has long been blessed with fertile lands and a rich agricultural heritage, and it is time to adopt innovations that not only enhance productivity, but also create new opportunities for our farmers that contribute to greater economic growth.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is a need to shift from our over-dependence on fresh produce exports to value adding and agro-processing. This shift has already started and augurs well for the sector given the vast distance to these new markets with the obvious advantage in extended shelf life of processed products. There is also the advantage of reduced volume and increased value of exports. Australia and New Zealand are considered to be Fiji's largest export market for fresh agricultural products, but Fiji has the potential to expand its export base through increased efforts on agro-processed products, targeting the huge markets like China and the USA.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, agriculture production plays an important role in setting up small scale agro-processes while at the same time, channelling any surplus raw materials to large agro-processes. The value-added agriculture imports on average is around 53.6 percent of the total agricultural imports over the last five years. Fiji also imports an average of \$121 million worth of wheat for production

of flour and other by-products. This data indicates the importance of the domestic demand for value added products and flour in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, potential commodities for value added processing to name a few, include:

- Staples like cassava, plantain, sweet potato (gluten free flour, chips, starch and animal feed);
- Coconut flour, desiccated coconut, virgin coconut oil;
- Lemon grass, moringa powder;
- Ginger (candy, powder, paste or juice);
- Turmeric powder;
- Pulses to substitute the amount of dhal consumption;
- Tomato (tomato juice, puree and canning of peeled tomatoes);
- Pineapple (juice, candy and fruit canning);
- Duruka;
- Mango and other local fruits for jam, pickles and juice.

Various methods of preserving fruits and vegetables can be explored such as canning, refrigeration, drying, pickling, sugar preservation and others. There is a lot of traditional knowledge that could be expanded with modern technology.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, my recent visit to India was an eye opener to the opportunities that small scale food processing can bring to the economy. Fiji needs to mobilise resources that are needed to exploit opportunities in the agro-processing space.

Over the years agricultural production in India has consistently recorded higher output and according to World Agriculture 2019 India has been ranked first in pulses and milk production; second in vegetable, fruit, wheat and rice production and third in cereals and egg production. Their food processing sector grew at an average annual growth rate of 8.4 percent between 2016 to 2021.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the information of this august Parliament I had the opportunity to meet with the Minister for Food Processing Industries of India and key amongst matters discussed was the possibility of bringing to Fiji those small scale food processing equipment and machineries. These will be made available to those individuals and communities willing to venture into food processing enterprises.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the last financial year the Ministry was allocated a sum of \$150,000 which assisted 11 exporters/agro-processors from the four Divisions on a cost sharing basis for infrastructure development, provision of equipment, machinery and I must say that more funds is needed for this activity.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry continues to embark on modernising Fiji's agriculture sector through agriculture entrepreneur's mechanisation and agro-processing through value addition.

This financial year the Commercial Agriculture Development Programme (CADP) received \$1.177 million to establish and upgrade agro-processing facilities to facilitate the transformation of raw agriculture products into high value processed goods. This will not only address current issues with the market access of commodities like ginger, turmeric, cassava and pineapple but also achieve sustainable economic growth through consistency in supply, increased export competitiveness, value addition and diversification. The programme includes:

1. Manufacturing machines for value adding cassava, pineapple, ginger;
2. Procurement of cooler and freezer storage facilities;

3. Procurement of trucks, cooler and freezer trucks for transportation of harvested produce;
4. Infrastructure development such as establishment or improvement of packhouse and processing or exporting facilities;
5. Procurement of equipment for diversification purposes, such as cassava flour machines.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, through the existing capital programmes including crop, livestock and research, the Ministry is seeking to fund and scale-up the following areas for diversification:

1. Promotion of high value crops: The Ministry will identify and promote the cultivation of high-value crops with high market demands such as organic fruits and exotic vegetables. Creating such market linkages for these crops will ensure steady income for farmers.
2. Investment in Post-Harvest Research and Infrastructure: The Ministry will upgrade and expand post-harvest infrastructure including storage facilities and farm access roads to minimise post-harvest losses and ensure the quality of agricultural products.
3. Capacity Building and Training: The Ministry will provide training programs and initiatives for farmers, individuals and communities on value addition techniques, quality control, and market trends. The Ministry will further collaborate with academia and research organisations to develop expertise in value-added agriculture.
4. Technology adoption: The Ministry will encourage the adoption of modern technologies in agriculture such as precision farming, smart irrigation systems and advanced processing equipment. The Ministry will facilitate the integration of information and communication technologies to improve farm management and market access.
5. Certification and standards: The Ministry will work with relevant government agencies to establish and enforce quality standards and certifications for value-added agriculture products to enhance consumer confidence and facilitate exports.
6. Public-Private Partnerships (PPP): The Ministry will encourage partnerships between the public and private sectors to leverage investments and expertise in value-added agriculture. The Ministry through these partnerships especially private sector involvement will create a conducive environment for agri-business to thrive through policy support and incentives.
7. Market Diversification: The Ministry intends to reduce dependence by exploring and diversifying export markets for value-added agriculture products. The Ministry in collaboration with other key stakeholders will develop marketing strategies to promote Fijian agricultural products internationally.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the plans for value-added agriculture in Fiji are ambitious but necessary for the sustainable growth of the agriculture sector. As we embark on this journey, let us remember that the success of these plans depends on the collective efforts of farmers, policymakers and all stakeholders in the agricultural value chain.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this sector is capable of addressing critical issues of food and nutrition security, food inflation and alleviating poverty. I call upon each one of you to join hands in realising this vision, for in doing so, we not only secure a prosperous future for our farmers and agro-processors but also contribute to the overall development and prosperity of our beloved nation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you for providing me the opportunity to deliver this Statement.

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you, honourable Minister for Agriculture. Those are very interesting topics of the bull and what you are able to get out from the bull, especially with your Assistant Minister there.

(Laughter)

I now call on the Leader of the Opposition or his designate to deliver their response.

HON. S. NAND.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir,

HON. S. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to reply to the Ministerial Statement by the honourable Minister for Agriculture. I would like to thank the honourable Minister for his insights on the agriculture sector and I always said it and I must reiterate again that irrespective of how many industries we have in the country, irrespective of how many factories we have in the country, Fiji is still an agro-based industry and each and every Member, each and every individual to support the industry.

I must congratulate the Agriculture team for successfully freezing the AI straws. It is a good start but what I was trying to hear from the Minister was, what is happening to the dairy industry? Are we also concentrating on the dairy industry? That is the industry that needs a lot of support and unfortunately not a word has been said about the dairy industry.

The animals are decreasing due to disease and the production is decreasing.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. S. NAND.- Now, the meat industry is good but the dairy industry should also be concentrated on value adding which the Minister has talked about is good for the country and good for export but this trust has been ongoing for ages. Last year at Koronivia Research Station there was a trial display, and we all went there to taste how the cassava flour tasted and everything else. So this has all been done. Why are we trying to reinvent the wheel again, why are we not moving forward?

Timely introduction of technology: The extension services need to go out to the farmers and improve production, introduce technology, train farmers. It is no good sitting in the office or in the research station doing trials when the knowledge is not being transferred to the people that really needs to produce. What are we doing to control the cost of production in the agriculture sector?

Day in and day out the cost of production on farms is increasing. The fertiliser cost is increasing, the sea cost is increasing, the labour cost is increasing, what support are we going to give to our agriculture sector to enable farmers to produce? It is good to say we will value add but value add what? We need production on the ground for the produce to come up and then we value add.

(Hon. Prof. B.C. Prasad interjects)

HON. S. NAND.- It is a very minute amount which the honourable Minister of Finance is talking about. You go to the farm and see how much assistance they are getting - it is negligible.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. S. NAND.- I would highly recommend our Minister of Finance to get off from his four wheel drive, get out of his overseas trips and go to the farm and talk to the farmers. It is no good sitting here and saying 'we give subsidy, we give fertiliser subsidy, seed subsidy' no, talk to the

farmers ...

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. S. NAND.- Go and talk to the farmers and then you will understand the plight of the farmers.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I do not do the BBQ from the road like you.

HON. S. NAND.- That statement is uncalled for and I must remind the honourable Minister of Finance, I do not do that.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. S. NAND.- I do not do that and you should retrack your statement. You know the facts then you say something about it. What are we going to do about the supply chain management?

(Chorus of interjection)

HON. S. NAND.- There is a huge disparity

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. S. NAND.- Minister for Finance, are you done with your childish statement so I can continue? If you need time to do some more, I will give you time then I will continue. Grow up, please!

What are we doing about our supply chain management? There is a huge disparity in the income of farmers in Bua, Nabouwalu Vanua Levu and farmers here. They do not have access to markets because of the supply chain. They cannot take their produce from their farm to the market in a quality that is palatable to the buyers. We need investment in the supply chain. These things are not being done - market accessibility and supply chain management.

These are investments that the Ministry need to do, getting the farmers to increase production, train them, assist them, our farmers need support. You may see a doctor once in two months, you may see a lawyer once in six months, but you see a farmer everyday and every time you put something in your mouth, that is the produce from a farmer. So, we must appreciate their hard work and assist them in improving production and getting their produce to the market so that they can sell, survive and our consumers can get good quality products.

We do not need to import all the produce that are being imported. Most of it can be grown locally and supplied in better quality. So, if we can give them an opportunity to produce in an environment where they can bring it to the markets, we are helping our farmers and our country.

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

Leadership Training for Multi-Ethnic Groups
(Question No. 160/2023)

HON. N.T. TUINACEVA asked the Government, upon notice:

The Ministry of iTaukei Affairs offers leadership training for *iTaukei* leaders. The training, packaged as the *Sauvaki* Programme, assists them in their community leadership roles. Can the honourable Minister for Multi-Ethnic Affairs and Sugar Industry inform Parliament if the Ministry has any plans to provide similar leadership training for other multi-ethnic groups?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to respond to the question by honourable Tuinaceva. In fact, I did talk to honourable Tuinaceva during tea break to give him the programmes and plans that we have. However, for the benefit of Parliament, I would like to talk some more on his question.

As per my response in the April Sitting of Parliament, I mentioned that the work of the Ministry is in progress.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister, just a point of interest, is it a military strategy that you get to the person who is going to raise a question first before the time is given for him to ask his question?

(Laughter)

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I somehow like the honourable Member. That is why I am alright about it.

(Laughter)

MR. SPEAKER.- That is good - very promising.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the consultation has focussed on the key issues in the ethnic-affairs space and how they address the new Ministry. The overall tenure of the consultation has been very positive and the level of expectation from the community and the new Ministry is very noteworthy. At this juncture, I would like to mention that we have brought in two consultants from New Zealand who are former Fiji residents, but at no cost to the taxpayers of Fiji. They have volunteered to do the service free of charge, to write, a report for the Ministry of Multi-Ethnic Affairs.

Together with that, I would like to send my humble appreciation to the High Commission of New Zealand, in particular, the High Commissioner. The New Zealand High Commission paid for all the expenses surrounding the consultation, air fares and accommodation throughout Fiji wherever they will go. So, at least, the work is in progress now. We expect to receive a detailed report from our advisors in the next four weeks to six weeks on the framework for the Ministry, with detailed plans on the implementation. This will begin the development and the implementation of the new Ministry's substantive work programme.

While it is premature to identify the specific priorities of the Ministry at this stage, the honourable Member can be assured that the intension is to include specific programmes that will promote social cohesion amongst all ethnic groups, including our indigenous community. It will be expected that there will be a significant co-operation between the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs and the Ministry of Multi-Ethnic Affairs where learnings from the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs could be beneficial to the multi-ethnic affairs that will begin in the fourth quarter of this year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to report that the work has commenced as planned, and we have substantial progress established by the Coalition Government. It has appointed a core of 12 support staff, and it is making a good progress on the setting up of the administrative system.

With the assistance of the two advisors, over 50 consultations have been undertaken with a wide range of ethnic groups representatives and leaders, State agencies, academics, political leaders and lead institutions, including Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, *Turaga Na Roko Tui Bau*, *Marama na Roko Tui Dreketi*, *Tui Noco*, the Ministry for Education, Ministry for Women, Children and Social Protection and the two gentlemen who have also met with the honourable Prime Minister.

To other Ministries, the co-operation will help leverage the experience. Our Government works on the principles of consultation, inclusiveness and commitment. I want to assure the honourable Member that suggestions and recommendations made during the consultation will be taken into consideration, with the assurance to include leadership training.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, just very quickly, the honourable Minister for Agriculture highlighted about the bull, if it is not controlled, it can become very reckless, of course, a mass destruction. Speaking of reckless, honourable Minister, I just want to quickly highlight in Parliament that he has threatened farmers - ...

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Question!

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- ... a bulldozed threat to the farmers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, he spoke about the framework that is being established for the Multi-Ethnic Affairs and it is almost 11 months into Government. Because you said that consultations are happening, does this framework include cultural competence to address ethnic disparities that is being faced in this country?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think this honourable Member should read the entire article, if not, then just the headline. What I have said to the farmers is that the variety of cane which is not approved, that has to be removed.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Listen!

We cannot waste our time and money on the sugarcane farms that do not give the right variety of cane. That is it.

(Laughter)

HON. K.K. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask a supplementary question to the honourable Minister for Multi-Ethnic Affairs, but before I do, I would like to make comment, just like honourable Rinesh Sharma.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Question!

HON. K.K. LAL.- The honourable Minister conducted a consultation where honourable Bia was also present and he gifted those who were present with PAP mugs - mugs with PAP logo. I do not know what the honourable Minister was trying to implement there.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- What is your question?

(Laughter)

HON. K.K. LAL.- But Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are about to end the year and the Coalition Government is about to finish its first year in their term. The question to the honourable Minister is, has the Ministry conducted any surveys or consultations to gauge the interest and specific needs of leaders from different ethnic groups regarding leadership training? If so, what were the findings and how are they being incorporated into your planning?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Member is daydreaming. I just answered that a report is coming out, just wait for it and be patient.

(Laughter)

HON. K.K. LAL.- You watch out, we will make a statement.

MR. SPEAKER.- Hold on, do not threaten the honourable Minister.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Point of Order!

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Section?

HON. J. USAMATE.- What is your Point of Order?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- An honourable Member should not be issuing threatening language. He pointed at the honourable Member and said, “You watch out”. It is, sort of, a physical threat, he should withdraw that.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Lorry *awe*.

MR. SPEAKER.- Yes, you have the floor, that will be the third supplementary question.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Minister has just mentioned that they have engaged two consultants who are basically sponsored the New Zealand Government. In doing so, there must have been an MOU done, so I want to find out the amount that the New Zealand Government has given for this exercise?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do not actually have the figure.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Oh!

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Hold on! But I think it is somewhere around \$200,000.

(Honourable Members interject)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order! They are former Fiji residents, honourable Bala.

Status of Issuance of PSV Licence
(Question No. 161/2023)

HON. RATU I. TUIWAILEVU asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport update Parliament on the status of issuance of a PSV licence?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for the question. Before I respond, I would like to provide some background in the uplifting of the freeze on the four permit types.

In 2011, the former Government had imposed a freeze on permit types with a justification that Land Transport Authority (LTA) undertake a comprehensive review on the demand and supply of PSV permits in Fiji, and to clearly assess and determine the future viability and sustainability of Fiji's land transport industry. However, this comprehensive review did not materialise but instead, substantive changes to the law were made, in particular, relating to PSV permits and the sale of those, and also in terms of financial institutions being somehow accountable. It is now up to this Government to correct some of these.

The Ministry and LTA had undertaken a nationwide consultation, seeking views of all stakeholders on PSV permits. The information obtained has been crucial, to enable the Ministry and LTA to address gaps in policies and processes and also in relooking at operations within.

In October 2023, Cabinet had endorsed the uplifting of the freeze for the four types - Licence Hire (LH), Licence Rental (LR), Licence Carriers (LC) and Licence Minibus (LM). This has become a necessity, especially with the increase in activities, particularly in the tourism industry. There are currently more than 14,000 PSV permits issued - more than 7,000 issued in the Central Division; approximately 7,561 in the Western Division; and 1,038 in the Northern Division. Majority of these permits are taxis operating in Fiji with more than 4,000 in the Central Division; 2,883 in the Western Division; and 519 in the Northern Division. There are 57 bus companies currently in operation - 27 in the Central Division, 25 in the Western Division and five in the Northern Division, a total of 1,250 buses.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, prior to issuing applications for new PSV permits, the LTA first issues out a checklist to customers so that they acquire the necessary requirements for the application. This has been an ongoing process, for example, in the Central Division, the LTA has issued checklist for LM - 445, LR - 215, LH - 737 and LC 183. In the Western Division, 266 for LM, 123 for LR, 205 for LH. Out of the total of 615 in the Western Division, 43 have provided, for example, relevant documentation; 25 had been issued with applications which are currently under process and seen as complying, 18 did not meet the criteria, 11 appeared for applications and more than 500 of those who had been issued with a checklist have yet to submit.

One of the things which we have noticed is the delay in the submission of applications due to the various compliance requirements, in particular, difficulty in acquiring base letters, obtaining consent letters for applicants wishing to operate from commercial properties, support letters for private bases and also for binding contracts. So far, LTA has not issued any licence given the issues, and for us, it is an indication of rigorous checks in place and assessments before licences are issued.

HON. N.T. TUINACEVA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, a supplementary question to the honourable Minister; most of those who are waiting for the lifting of the freeze from those that have been wanting to get a licence on taxis and minibuses, however, that has not been included in the list of licences being lifted. Is there a reason for that, or when can they expect these licences to be opened up for them?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- The minibuses are included but the taxis, the freeze is still to be lifted and that is currently being assessed. One of the issues is further consultations regarding the operations from the base and the open taxi rank system. The other one which we are currently looking at, which we will be presenting to Cabinet, is the review of the sale of permits. That is another contentious issue which is also urgent, and we should resolve it by the end of the year.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Honourable Minister, special cases, special needs because we need to serve the people as well because when you do not fix the roads, taxis cannot go. This is a major problem in Seaqaqa. They prefer not to use cars, they prefer to use four-wheel drives. Where do they fit into this plan that you have?

HON. V. PILLAY.- Do something honourable Minister?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- New question.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- It is hard to fix 16 years of neglect.

(Laughter)

It is very hard to fix it in 12 months.

In the Northern Division, they are approached individually, including Seaqaqa. Definitely, on the village-based ones in terms of carrier, we have received applications for those and also looking at it in terms of the criteria. But there is also a concern by bus companies that whatever LTA approves should not result in undermining the operations of the buses. It has to be very balanced, and we need to proceed carefully so other PSV licences are running and we do not destroy the bus industry, as we have managed to do since, I suppose, before Independence.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the opportunity to ask a supplementary question. The last time I was in Seaqaqa was last year, the road was fixed. So, obviously, if that road is deteriorated, then it became deteriorated this year, just like we have the potholes at Nakasi.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- What is your question?

HON. J. USAMATE.- Coming.

In relation to the Public Service Vehicles (PSVs), my concern, honourable Minister, is in relation to the people who drive these vehicles. This past month, I have had to tell-off bus drivers and taxi drivers about calling on the phone, loud music - personally doing that. I am just wondering, when you give these PSVs, is there a stronger process to get these PSV operating drivers to really serve the people rather than do this loud music, answering the phones and all that? It is a big concern. I hope you can come up with a solution to that.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- I just give some examples of numbers in Divisions who have taken the checklist and they have tried to adhere to the checklist and after that, they are assessed. So, upto now, LTA has not issued a licence. That shows that a more vigorous assessment is being done before we issue that. In that assessment, we are envisaging that such persons will not come through - those whom you have mentioned who are not operating according to ethical standards in terms of operating a public service vehicle.

Unfortunately, every supplementary question starts with the roads. This is about LTA, so let me remind honourable Members.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Those two connect and you should know better.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- A major reform was done in terms of roads management by the FijiFirst Government when they were on this side.

HON. K.K. LAL.- What will PWD do?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- So, in that reform, they managed to get rid of the major entity which was dealing with the rural roads and now they are criticising, which is the Public Works Department. Before there were depots in Seaqaqa, but who closed it?

HON. J. USAMATE.- The road was alright last year.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- That is something we are trying to fix. It needs multi-million-dollar support to bring back those depots and re-equip them. It will take perhaps, one budget cycle and another budget cycle because it cannot be done immediately. I mean, not only did you muck up PWD, you also mucked up the budget with your huge debt and that is why he cannot give me the money.

(Laughter)

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will now move on. The third Oral Question for today is now redundant, since the honourable Prime Minister has made a Ministerial Statement to that effect.

(Question No. 162/2023 was withdrawn)

Before I adjourn Parliament for lunch, I would like to acknowledge the presence of Reverend Kania and his colleagues sitting in the gallery, not forgetting Pundit Swami Maharaj. It has been a while since we have seen you again.

On that note, honourable Members, I would like to adjourn Parliament for lunch, and we will resume when the bell is sounded.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.29 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.28 p.m.

2023-2026 Strategic Action Plan Framework – Agriculture & Fisheries Co-operation
(Question No. 163/2023)

HON. I.S. VANAWALU asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Fisheries and Forestry update Parliament on the 2023–2026 Strategic Action Plan Framework on Agriculture and Fisheries Cooperation between the Government of the Republic of China and Pacific Island Countries?

HON. K.V. RAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the honourable Member for the question. Before I move onto my response, I wish all honourable Members of this august Parliament, all fisherfolks nationwide, all industry stakeholders, partners in development and members of the public at large, a Happy World Fisheries Day.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, China continues to be an important development partner for Fiji and the Pacific Island Countries (PICs). Since the establishment of our diplomatic relations in 1975, the friendship and bilateral relations between Fiji and China have grown significantly across all fields of co-operation, but more so notably in the agriculture and fisheries sectors. It is, therefore, important that Fiji continues its pathway to strengthening its partnership and forge new pathways to developing and sustaining these sectors into the future.

From the onset, the 2023-2026 Strategic Action Plan Framework on Agriculture and Fisheries Cooperation, is one of the outcomes of the second China-Pacific Island Countries Agriculture and Fisheries Ministers Meeting hosted in Nanjing, China, May 2023. This second China-PICs Agriculture and Fisheries Ministers Meeting attended by Fiji and nine other PICs resulted in China presenting two outcome documents – the Nanjing Consensus and the 2023-2026 Strategic Actions on Agriculture and Fisheries Co-operation between China and PICs.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the 2023-2026 Strategic Action Plan, aims to identify the direction and priorities for our agriculture and fisheries cooperation over the four years, leverages our complementary strengths and promotes our shared growth in agriculture and fisheries.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, key strategic actions identified under this Plan are as follows:

- China will formulate regional or bilateral agricultural and fisheries cooperation plans with PICs in accordance with their will and aspirations to facilitate, coordinate and guide the collaboration between businesses and research institutes of the participants and follow-ups.
- China will organise agricultural and fisheries technology training sessions for PICs and invite agricultural professionals from the Pacific to China for exchanges on agricultural and fisheries technology or graduate programmes in universities or research institutions.
- Parties will strengthen South-South co-operation under the Framework of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). Technical assistance and training will be provided to PICs through, inter alia, expert fielding, training courses and demonstration activities.
- In accordance with the agreements entered with the recipient countries, China will continue to support the agriculture and fisheries development in the PICs by strengthening

collaboration in juncao production, animal farming, agricultural and fisheries product processing, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Cabinet has endorsed Fiji's participation to the Strategic Framework Action Plan through the Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways and the Ministry of Fisheries and Forestry.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to conclude, in the second Ministers Meeting headed by the honourable Minister for Agriculture and Waterways, Fiji and China urgently resounded the importance of strengthening cooperation in sustainable agriculture and fisheries as a critical way forward for us small island countries to help elevate living standards of our people.

Thank you for your indulgence, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for his explanation on the assistance by China. What I would like to ask the honourable Minister, if he has done a comparison on the assistance provided by our friends from other countries, compared to the assistance provided by China in the last eight years?

HON. K.V. RAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for the question. I think it is a new question and I will work on it and I will come back on another day of the sitting.

MR. SPEAKER.- No, I will decide on that, honourable Minister. Will you come back to honourable Koroilavesau with an answer?

HON. K.V. RAVU.- Yes, Sir.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The honourable Minister for Agriculture, this morning, talked about the downstreaming process and the need to shift away from commodities into products because that will bring a lot of economic benefits. How is the Ministry of Fisheries approaching this as well based on this agreement that they have signed with China?

Mr. Speaker, this is an area that probably needs to be looked at seriously too by the Ministry of Fisheries as it has a lot of wild harvesting going on and we need to go into technology. Where is the Ministry of Fisheries heading in this regard?

HON. K.V. RAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think it is also a new question, but I will try to elaborate.

MR. SPEAKER.- No, no, it relates to the earlier question. Do you have an answer, or you do not have it?

HON. K.V. RAVU.- I will answer, later.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji and China...

MR. SPEAKER.- What is Fiji-China? Honourable Minister, where are you taking us?

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- To China, Sir.

(Laughter)

MR. SPEAKER.- You still have the floor.

HON. K.V. RAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for the question. As I have alluded in my speech, Fiji and China have diplomatic relations since 1975 and they are coming up with questions. I think Fiji is taking it lightly to partner with China. They are looking at China as a karate kid.

(Laughter)

HON. K.V. RAVU.- Yes, they are scared of coming closer to China so when the Coalition Government...

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister, I am very confused as to where you are taking us.

Do you have any other supplementary question honourable Members?

HON. J. USAMATE.- Yes.

MR. SPEAKER.- It is alright, honourable Minister, we will take another question.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you for the opportunity to ask a supplementary question. China has been a friend of Fiji for a long time. They stood by our side in difficult times and has continued to do so as part of our foreign affairs policy of friends of all and enemies of none. It is good to see this particular question.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, earlier on this year when we were looking at the fishing industry in Fiji, we noticed that a lot of our offshore fisheries boats are not moving. If you go now, they are parked in the harbour. One of the difficulties that they have, a lot of the companies that they compete against are subsidised by their home countries. Would that be something that you will also address in this strategic cooperation with China because our boats are being parked, they are finding it uncompetitive to compete and because of that, people that are employed in our local industry are not earning income for their families.

HON. K.V. RAVU.- Yes, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is a new question. I will come back with a response on that at a later date. I can refer to Foreign Affairs.

Market Employability Survey
(Question No. 164/2023)

HON. H. CHAND asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Education inform Parliament if Market Employability Survey is conducted before Government grant is allocated to training institutions?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for this question because it is, no doubt, a very important question, especially when the honourable Member is a former Director of Human Resources in the Ministry of Education. He could have made some submissions to the relevant institution to adopt such tool.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Answer the question!

HON. H. CHAND.- Answer, answer!

MR. SPEAKER.- I do not know what has happened to our sitting down and discussing things because that earlier stance taken by the honourable Minister for Fisheries, I do not know what bait he has been bringing in. It has gone on a tailspin, I think.

(Laughter)

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Market Employability Surveys guide us on whether our graduates are competent to meet the job demands, they will have and also assist our nation identify the areas that may need certain kind of skills.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, job markets in the rapid developing world pursue employees with the right kind of knowledge, skills and capacities. For a developing country like Fiji, a Market Employability Survey is crucial, to ensure that we are generating a workforce that not only meets the demand of our various job sectors, but it complements any new markets that are presenting itself in our fast-evolving global economy.

The preparation for our young generation for the labour market, as we know, is a critical responsibility for universities and accordingly, the curricula of universities should continuously reflect and improve the quality of their graduates to fit into dynamic and diverse job markets.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as part of the prerequisites for the Higher Education Commission Fiji (HECF) on the university grants allocation, they are regulated and disbursed through the Higher Education Commission Act 2008 and the Higher Education Commission Regulations 2009. In there, it specifically provides the requirements that the Commission must consider when determining the allocation of grants to institutions. The primary requirement for accessing these grants, Sir, is that they should be registered with the HECF.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, under the current Coalition Government, we have made it mandatory for the three Universities to submit Graduate Destination Surveys with grant application. This requirement came into effect on the 2023-2024 National Budget. However, due to data unavailability, the Universities could not fulfil this requirement for the 2023-2024 grant allocation. They are currently working on it and will be now required to submit these survey results for the 2024-2025 grant allocation and beyond.

Using the survey, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the HECF will work with the Tertiary Scholarships and Loans Scheme (TSLS) to ensure that scholarships and loan assistance are directed to qualifications that are in demand and reduce for the qualifications where students are unemployed.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, TVET qualifications are essential and special funding was allocated in the 2023-2024 National Budget.

Also, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have requested the HECF to analyse the audited financial statements of the Universities as part of their grant allocation. The idea is to ascertain the Universities' financial sustainability and understand their funding requirements. I am talking about the detailed analysis of the audited financial reports.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government funds for the three Universities' operation and capital budgets, while they also charge student fees, it is natural to think that if Government funds universities, should they not subsidise tuition fees for the local students as a way forward? I am thinking the HECF to benchmark to the university funding system of Australia, may be, and if a similar funding system can be adopted in Fiji universities, where local student fees are subsidised by the Government funding.

Also, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to inform this Parliament that a detailed review of the three Universities will be carried out in 2024, as I will be alluding to it in my Ministerial Statement tomorrow. Amongst other things, we will consider the quality and relevance of tertiary qualifications and financial sustainability of the three Universities.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, can the honourable Minister for Education inform Parliament if there was a Market Employability Survey conducted before the Government grant was allocated to Pacific Polytech?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think I have alluded to that supplementary question earlier on, that there was none done because of unavailability of data.

HON. P.K. BALA.- A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I am a bit worried. If the survey was not done for Pacific Polytech, how come before Budget, \$1 million was allocated?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- There was no survey done.

HON. P.K. BALA.- See, again, he is interrupting.

(Laughter)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- He told you very clearly.

HON. P.K. BALA.- He has to tell me, not you.

And then in the budget, \$1.6 million was given.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think I have to re-state my answer again, that there was no survey done, as in the previous years. So, this is what we are trying to improve on, going forward.

MR. SPEAKER.- We will leave it at that.

Total Road Upgrading Cost - Queen Elizabeth Drive to National Stadium
(Question No. 165/2023)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport inform Parliament on the total cost of upgrading the road from Queen Elizabeth Drive in Nasese to the National Stadium?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Queen Elizabeth Drive upgrade project between Ratu Sukuna Road to Laucala Bay Intersection comprise a total distance of 4.23 kilometres. It has the following features:

- dedicated online bicycle lane for 8.5 kilometres in both 4.25 kilometres in each direction;
- two roundabouts at Vuya Road and Muanikau Road signalised pedestrian crossing;
- improved parking facilities; bus shelters, bus bays and recreational areas.

The above project is currently nearing completion, and it is targeted to be completed around 31st December.

It started in March 2019. The original contract price was \$61.9 million on 14th August, 2020 when there was variation in design change - redesigned for the purpose of shifting alignments towards the sea to avoid land acquisition. This also included delayed damages to contractors as this was a design and build contract.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on 12th January, 2021, another variation of \$3.3 million to meet climate resilience, lifting of whole pavement works and services relocation of WAF, EFL and TFL. So, the total variation was \$3.7 million and payment to-date was \$49.7 million. The estimated cost of completion is \$65.7 million, so those are the costings.

I suppose the Opposition will claim or say that “Yes, this is the FijiFirst project”. I am sure it was started under the previous Government but some of the fundamental questions we need to ask regarding projects such as this is, what should we be prioritising, given the extremely high cost because if you look at it with that estimated total cost at the completion of the project of \$65.7 million, that will work out with 4.23 kilometres - \$15.5 million per kilometre?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Wastage. Investigate it!

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- This is what this Coalition Government is relooking at whether we will be repeating such projects which are too costly and reassign hard-earned funds of the country.

There are other priorities, for example, double lanes from Laqere to Kinoya and Fletcher Road. That was in the original plans in terms of traffic alleviation - Fletcher Road and MGM to Laucala Bay. So, we could have looked at double lanes there.

The upgrades of rural roads and bridges and community roads - these have been neglected for too long and this is an area which we need to prioritise into.

(Hon. P.K. Bala interjects)

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Listen, Listen!

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Sir, to conclude, just looking at the cost as a Coalition Government moving forward, our priorities will be different

(Hon. K.K. Lal interjects)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.-... rather than looking at too shorter distance and a huge amount. Also, if you look at the amount of traffic there, I think it finishes about 5.00 p.m. to 6.00 p.m. compared to improving the Laqere to Suva Point ...

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- You change it.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- ... to four lanes and other priorities, including some of our rural roads which definitely need improvement and which we are looking into where school children cannot even reach school ...

HON. K.K. LAL.- *Levu na vosa.*

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- ... when gravel is being washed away.

HON. P.K. BALA.- The students are protesting in Lautoka, do you know that?

(Laughter)

HON. P.K. BALA.- No, they are protesting!

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- So, that is the answer to that question.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- You have wasted \$65.7 million.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are arguing about whether it is a waste or not, from our perspective as a Coalition, it is excessive and a waste and wrongly prioritised.

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Can the honourable Minister inform us as to what was supposed to be the real cost for the road?

HON. RO. F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for the question. If we look back into the history of the road, it sort of coincided with the approval of the development lease for Tian Lun Investments Pte Limited in 2018 where a development lease was issued in September 2018 and this project started in 2019.

(Honourable Members interject)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. RO. F.Q. TUISAWAU.- So regarding that development which is linked to the road, the honourable Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources has taken action on Tian Lun Investments that failed to obtain a subdivisional approval or scheme plan. They failed to submit approved engineering plan and all sorts of non-compliance, Sir, which resulted in the cancellation of their lease on that road. So, the question is, who approved the lease to Tian Lun Investments?

(Honourable Members interject)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. RO. F.Q. TUISAWAU.- When we look back, this is the kind of thing this country should be avoiding - building the road for a particular investor and we ended up wasting \$65 million.

Going back to answering that question, I asked some of the experienced engineers, can you develop Queen Elizabeth Drive from what it was before to an acceptable state? They said, "Yes, \$15 million..."

HON. A. BIA.- You are on record.

HON. RO. F.Q. TUISAWAU.- ... as opposed to \$65 million." So, \$65 million minus \$15 million, if you ask a secondary school student, \$50 million extra was used where we should have just used \$15 million. Just imagine where we could have used that \$50 million on rural roads, community

roads and even in informal settlements. We could have improved everything, but we are working on that.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Albert Park and look at how Albert Park is currently utilised. There was a recent article in one of the dailies, Sir, about the value of the estates (got a valuer) from within this corridor. You are looking at the cost, but you are not looking at the benefits out of the investment.

We talked about resilience infrastructure this morning, that is resilience infrastructure. It is going to raise big time the value of the properties there, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I know for a fact that the former Leader of the Government in Parliament has a three-storey building just at the end, that is investment, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is good.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, my question is, despite the high cost, what major projects are you going to tell the people of Fiji and, particularly, Suva, you have in place in the next four years while in Government?

HON. RO. F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have already explained our priorities and they are already there.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Think big, man!

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- The double lane is from Laqere to Suva Point.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Do not lower your standards.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Upgrade of roads and bridges, rural roads and bridges in Vanua Levu. You mentioned Seaqaqa and, of course, the sealing of non-sealed roads and new roads, of course.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is all and we will give you the list of the new projects at the end of this financial year.

MR. SPEAKER.- The next Question, I am allowing honourable Aliko Bia to raise this Question on behalf of honourable Bulitavu.

Policy on Menstrual Health and Hygiene
(Question No. 166/2023)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Education inform Parliament what the policy is with respect to the distribution of sanitary pads under the Menstrual Hygiene Management activity?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wanted to correct the question that has been raised because the Ministry of Education does not distribute sanitary pads. It only distributes the sanitary pad vouchers.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- It is talking about the policy.

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- It is about the young girls.

MR. SPEAKER.- So, we will leave it at that, honourable Members, let us move on.

Written Questions

Assistance to Commercial Vegetable Farmers
(Question No.168/2023)

HON. S. NAND asked the Government upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Agriculture and Waterways update Parliament on the number of commercial vegetable farmers in Fiji and what measures are being undertaken by the Ministry to assist farmers?

HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have the written answer to the question and I¹ will table my response.

(Response handed to the Secretary-General)

Assistance to Farmers on Cost Sharing Basis
(Question No.169/2023)

HON. S. NAND asked the Government upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Agriculture and Waterways update Parliament on the following:

- (a) how many farmers have been assisted by the Ministry on a cost sharing basis in the last financial year;
- (b) provide a breakdown on cost sharing in each commodity and division; and
- (c) how many farmers are expected to be assisted by the Ministry on a cost sharing basis this financial year?

HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have the written answers to the question and I² will table my response.

(Response handed to the Secretary-General)

Installation of Ice Plants from 2014-2022
(Question No.170/2023)

HON. J.R. VOCEA asked the Government upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Fisheries and Forestry update Parliament on the following:

- (a) how many ice plants have been installed around the country in the last eight years from 2014 to 2022 by location; and
- (b) how many will be installed in this financial year by location?

¹ Editor's Note: Reply to Written Question No. 168/2023 tabled by the honourable Minister for Agriculture and Waterways is appended as Annexure I.

² Reply to Written Question No. 169/2023 tabled by the honourable Minister for Agriculture and Waterways is appended as Annexure II.

³HON. K.V. RAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will now table my written response.

(Response handed to the Secretary-General)

Number/Status of High Court Judges
(Question No.171/2023)

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

Can the honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Justice update Parliament on the following:

- (a) the total number of High Court Judges required by the Judiciary of Fiji and the breakdown of the same by locations;
- (b) the total number of positions which are filled as of 30th September, 2023 with respect to the vacancies created in the High Court of Fiji; and
- (c) the total number of Judges (High Court of Fiji) positions which were vacant as of 30th September, 2023?

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir I have the written answers in respect to the questions⁴being asked today, and I am ready to submit the same.

(Response handed to the Secretary-General)

iTAUKEI AFFAIRS (AMENDMENT) BILL 2023

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 51, I move:

That the –

- (a) iTaukei Affairs (Amendment) Bill 2023 (Bill No. 26/2023), be considered by Parliament without delay;
- (b) Bill must pass through one stage at a single sitting of Parliament;
- (c) Bill must not be referred to a Standing Committee or other Committees of Parliament; and
- (d) Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament on Thursday, 23rd November, 2023, but that one hour be given to debate the Bill, with the right of reply given to me as the Member moving this motion.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise today to introduce and to table the iTaukei Affairs (Amendment) Bill 2023 before this august Parliament. This is an important aspect of our history where we wish to give legislative recognition once again to the establishment of a fundamental institution, which is the Great Council of Chiefs (GCC) or Bose Levu Vakaturaga (BLV).

The GCC is a historical institution of our forefathers, whose role was recognised under the 1990 and 1997 Constitutions to be consulted on, make recommendations and take decisions in

³ Editor's Note: Reply to Written Question No. 170/2023 tabled by the honourable Minister for Fisheries and Forestry is appended as Annexure III.

⁴ Reply to Written Question No. 171/2023 tabled by the honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Justice is appended as Annexure IV.

matters concerning the good governance and wellbeing of the *iTaukei* people. This requirement to have the GCC in place is specified under the *iTaukei Affairs Act 1944*, which also makes reference to the GCC in various other provisions under the Act and in other legislation relating to *iTaukei* affairs.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in 2012, these important key provisions were removed entirely and also extended to the regulations or subsidiary laws that were made under the Act, and I say, without consultation or consideration of our traditional leaders' input, when it came to the *iTaukei* people. In fact, the deletion of provisions under the Act was done by way of a Decree, and as you all know, there was no Parliament in 2012, therefore, no opportunity was given to debate on the changes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I stand not to marginalise anyone, but simply to highlight that it is our Coalition Government's priority to restore the recognition of the GCC whilst under the Act to ensure that the voice and opinion of our traditional elders are considered when matters concerning *iTaukei* people, their traditions and culture arises.

Clause 1 of the Bill provides for the short title and commencement. If passed by Parliament, the amending legislation will come into force on a date or dates appointed by the Minister by notice in the Gazette.

Clause 2 of the Bill amends section 2 of the Act by inserting the definition of "Council" to mean the Great Council of Chiefs and the definition of "Permanent Secretary" to mean the Permanent Secretary responsible for *iTaukei* Affairs.

Clause 3 of the Bill inserts section 3 of the Act to provide for the constitution and primary function of the GCC.

Clause 4 of the Bill amends section 4(4) of the Act to require the *iTaukei* Affairs Board to refer to the GCC any question relating to the *iTaukei* people that the Minister may submit to the Board.

Clause 5 of the Bill amends section 5 of the Act to empower the Minister to make regulations in relation to the GCC.

Clause 6 of the Bill amends section 11 of the Act to require the Minister to refer the Board or the Council any proposed Bill that is intended to be introduced in Parliament and which may appear to the Minister to affect in any important matter the rights and interests of *iTaukei* people. The Board or the Council, as the case may be, is then required to submit the proposed Bill with a memorandum to the Permanent Secretary. This memorandum contains respective comments on the proposed Bill to be used in parliamentary debate by Members of Parliament.

Clause 7 of the Bill consequentially amends the *iTaukei Trust Fund Act 2004*, among other things, to include reference to the GCC.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is this Government's priority and promise to institute fundamental provisions and laws to give legislative recognition to the GCC. It is only imperative that Parliament deliberates on this in an expeditious manner, as there are so many laws that have been made that have direct impact on the *iTaukei* people. It is without doubt that this Bill must be considered so that institutions, specifically dedicated to look into matters, are afforded the legislative authority to do so.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Attorney-General for his presentation on this particular Bill. We stand only on one issue and Government has the right to

present its Bills and what it needs to change, and it has that particular right. But there has not been a single legislation that this Government has brought to Parliament that has not gone through Standing Order 51; not a single one. Let me say that again, not a single one. This is from people who always talked about not using Standing Order 51. This Government has not given a Bill; a single one.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- We are clearing up your mess.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Not one!

People who say something and do the exact opposite are hypocrites. I am not calling you hypocrites, but people who do that, they are hypocrites.

On that ground alone, we object to this going through Standing Order 51.

MR. SPEAKER.- There being no other comments to be made on the Bill, I now offer the floor to the honourable Attorney-General for his right of reply.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- I think if honourable Usamate was listening to the honourable Minister for iTaukei Affairs' comments, he would have understood the purpose as to why this is to be brought forward. As we debate on the Bill on Thursday, the reason will be fully articulated.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will now vote on the motion.

Question put.

Votes cast:

Ayes - 28

Noes - 22

Not voted - 4

Motion agreed to.

EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS (AMENDMENT) BILL 2023

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 51, I move:

That the -

- (a) Employment Relations (Amendment) Bill 2023 (Bill No. 27/2023), be considered by Parliament without delay;
- (b) Bill must pass through one stage at a single sitting of Parliament;
- (c) Bill must not be referred to a Standing Committee or another Committee of Parliament; and
- (d) Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament on Thursday, 23rd November, 2023, but that one hour be given to debate the Bill with the right of reply given to me as the Member moving this motion.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- I beg to second the motion.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr Speaker, Sir, the Employment Relations Act 2007 has been the focus of considerable Government, social partner and International Labour Organization (ILO) interest over several years because of amendments to the Act from 2011 onwards, which did not

comply with fundamental ILO Conventions, including the:

- Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention 1948;
- Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention 1949; and
- Abolition of Forced Labour Convention 1957.

The motion is for this august Parliament to consider the Bill, to amend the definition of “essential service and industry” (particularly section 185 of the Act) without delay, which is necessary in order to restore the rights of workers and unions’ right and to bring Fiji’s employment legislation in compliance with international labour standards.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji is under increased pressure, including at the ILO Conference 2022 and this year, to bring its employment legislation in compliance with the fundamental ILO Conventions that it has ratified, including the International Labour Organization’s Freedom of Association and the protection of the right to organise a convention. There has been widespread criticism over the past decade, both in Fiji and internationally, in relation to other amendments in the Act in 2011, 2013 and 2015, which dramatically increased the scope and number of industries that are defined as essential services and industries.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, initially when the Act was promulgated in 2007, there were 16 services listed as essential services in Schedule 7 of the Act. Following the amendment over the past 12 years, there are a number of entities that are now considered essential services and industries, including Government workers, all statutory and local authorities in Fiji and all public enterprises.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji’s current list of essential services includes industries, like the finance industry and pine and mahogany industry, that fall outside of the definition of essential services. The effect of Fiji’s wide definition of essential services means that under Part 19 of the Act, workers and unions’ right to strike and right to free assembly and free speech are severely curtailed.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fiji Government had also signed the Joint Implementation Report and the Tripartite Agreement on 29th June, 2016, which effectively closed the case under Article 26 of the ILO Constitution which may have led to the Commission of Inquiry for Fiji. The Coalition Government has reconstituted the Employment Relations Advisory Board (ERAB) and ILO Convention 144 and has brought the tripartite parties together for a genuine dialogue with a commitment to review and amend the ERA.

Over the past 10 years, ILO has repeatedly called on Fiji to review its list of essential services so as to restrict limitations on the right to strike and to essential services in the strict sense of the term. The ILO supervisory bodies have indicated that Fiji’s original list of essential services in Schedule 7 contains an appropriate list of resource service, and the effect of the proposed amendment to section 185 is to revert to the original list of essential services in Schedule 7.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this amendment is an important first step and Fiji in taking action is to show its commitment to bring Fiji’s employment laws in compliant with International Labour Standards, in order to promote decent work and recognise the rights of both, employers and workers, who are the lifeblood of our economy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I must emphasise that the urgency is underscored by the need to uphold the right to assembly, organisation and free speech. This, Sir, is one of the many longstanding non-compliance issue with international labour standards and safeguards. There have been wider consultations, and I, therefore, endorse the Bill.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion. At the end of the debate, we will have the right of reply from the mover.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I once again on behalf of this side of Parliament do not agree with this notion that this should be discussed using Standing Order 51. The honourable Attorney-General needs to know that Fiji is not the only country in the world that has not fully ratified all the ILO Labour Conventions.

Some of the biggest countries and richest countries have not done that. They look at what is necessary for their country. The group that is now in Government have always portrayed themselves as the bastions of democracy. We have talked about the importance of this Chamber and for us as the representatives of the people to discuss these things. Just because someone says it, it does not mean that you automatically do it. Those large countries that you are talking about, not all of them have signed on to all of these fundamental ILO Conventions, not all of them.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- So what?

HON. J. USAMATE.- They have not signed the ones they are pushing to do and they have not signed themselves and you are saying just because they say 'we should do this' we should automatically do it. Why do you not bring it to this Chamber? Let the Committees go through it. Let us discuss it. You talked to yourselves about the passion and democracy, but you are suppressing democracy.

The representatives of the people are here. Why are you always going to Standing Order 51? Now you are not acting just like it, well you are not hypocrites, but when you do things and then you suppress the opportunity for us to debate it, let us debate it in Parliament. Let it go through the whole system with the Committees. Just because someone say something you just want to bow down to them. Stop it. Stand on your two feet. Let us discuss it here. Let it go through the process and do the right thing. We object to this going through Standing Order 51.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- This is precisely what I am going to speak on Standing Order 51. Honourable Usamate is showing the height of hypocrisy. He is talking about hypocrites, but the height of hypocrisy is coming from the other side. This is a legislation, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Attorney-General very carefully explained that this is the Government that is correcting the fundamentals of democracy that was destroyed by those sitting on the other side.

After the 2006 *coup* in 2007, the first attempt and those who were part of that became part of the FijiFirst Government, continued in 2015. Even in Parliament, they passed the legislation to further curtail the rights of the workers.

So, Standing Order 51, Mr. Speaker, was used by those who are sitting on the other side now, to do that. This is essentially a process where the Employment Relations Advisory Board (ERAB) was re-established ...

HON. J. USAMATE.- You are the one complaining the most.

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- ... where the employers have come together, where they have all agreed and they all see that this is an urgent Bill to be passed because the consultation with those that mattered had already taken place.

On Thursday, they will have the right opportunity and so for him to come out and say, you know we are not practising democracy and somehow, we are overriding Parliament, I mean, there is a lot of hogwash.

(Laughter)

Coming from the honourable Member who blames everyone else about hogwash but the biggest hogwash comes from him. The demonstration of the biggest hypocrisy comes from him because he was the Minister for Employment.

In 2015, we brought further restrictions, so Standing Order 51 is the right thing to do. Let us pass this on Thursday and restore the rights of the workers. I support the Bill, thank you.

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- Mr. Speaker Sir, I would like to contribute to this motion and against the Standing Order 51 being used. On 16th September, 2017, if I can just read to you what was reported, it says in the Fiji Times, and I quote:

“National Federation Party Leader Professor Biman Prasad yesterday told Parliament that rushing important Bills under Standing Order 51 was inappropriate.”

That was what he said. Professor Prasad said this after the Government fast-tracked three Bills and three motions for Government guarantees.

On a point of order, he said the Opposition should be given a few days to prepare a comprehensive response to the motions. This is what he said, Mr. Speaker Sir, “It makes sense to get the Bills in our hands for a few days before we can make meaningful contributions,” Hypocrisy - that is what we are saying, Mr. Speaker.

(Honourable Members interject)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- That is why we are saying, that is hypocrisy. Try and stop using Standing Order 51 and let Legislature do its work and take this out to the people. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

(Honourable Members interject)

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Naupoto and Honourable Members, I have indicated several times in the past, Standing Orders 51 is a Parliamentary process. That is available for us to utilise and the Government, for this matter is now utilising Standing Orders 51 as previous Governments have done in the past.

Previous Governments have done it in the past. They have gone under 51 to work on the Parliamentary process that is available to bring into the Parliament at the earliest time possible, the motion that is being followed here, so the motion that we have before us, is on 51.

I now call on the Honourable Attorney-General to speak in reply.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. If I can recall clearly, a term that I used during my Maiden Speech was “restoration”. That is basically what we have done here. We are going back to where it was before, so that it is acceptable to the whole world. That is why it needs to be

debated expeditiously.

I endorse the Bill, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

Question put.

Votes cast:

Ayes - 28

Noes - 21

Not Voted - 5

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER. We shall continue, and I now call upon the honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Justice, the honourable Siromi Turaga to move his third motion.

MAHOGANY INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT (AMENDMENT) BILL 2023

HON. S.D. TURAGA. Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 51, I move:

That the –

- (a) Mahogany Industry Development (Amendment) Bill 2023 (Bill No. 28/2023), be considered by Parliament without delay.
- (b) Bill must pass through one stage at a single sitting of Parliament;
- (c) Bill must not be referred to a Standing Committee or other Committee of Parliament;
- (d) Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament on Thursday, 23rd November, 2023 but that one hour be given to debate the Bill with the right of reply given to me as the Member moving this motion.

HON. RO. F.Q. TUISAWAU.- I second the motion, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to speak on the Mahogany Industry Development (Amendment) Bill 2023 and why Parliament must consider it without delay.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Mahogany Industry Development Act 2010 was introduced to provide for the restructuring of the Mahogany Industry in Fiji for the purpose of facilitating its further development, having regard to the interest of indigenous landowners and the people of Fiji generally.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it would be an understatement to state the importance of Fiji's Mahogany Industry, however, one cannot deny that this industry requires specific knowledge and technical skillset for its sustainable development. For this reason, the Bill seeks to amend the Act to transfer the overall responsibility of the Act and by extension, the regulating of the Mahogany Industry from the Office of the Prime Minister to the Ministry of Forestry, which will be able to provide the much-needed technical expertise, advice and guidance in the Mahogany Industry.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Act repealed by the Fiji Mahogany Act of 2003 and transferred oversight of the Mahogany Industry from the Ministry of Forestry to the Office of the Prime Minister through the establishment of a Mahogany Industry Council wherein the Prime Minister is appointed as the chairperson.

The Bill, therefore, is really just an avenue for the reinstatement of what was previously the *status quo*. There have been consultations on the 16th of June, 2023 conducted by the Office of the Prime Minister with the Ministry of Forestry; the Ministry of Finance, Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics; Ministry of Public Enterprises; the Office of the Solicitor-General; Fiji Hardwood Corporation Limited; Ministry of Fisheries and the Ministry of Trade, Co-operatives, Small and Medium Enterprises.

Therefore Mr. Speaker, Sir, I recommend that Parliament considers the Bill without delay and that it be debated upon on Thursday, to allow the Ministry of Forestry to be the appropriate custodian that would assume responsibility of the Act, to begin with.

MR. SPEAKER.- The floor is now open for debate on the motion and at the end, we will have the Right of Reply from the mover.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, perhaps, I come to assist the honourable Member and maybe that will mean a change of heart with the other side of Parliament. We oppose this Sir, again, on the use of Standing Order 51. I have one major concern.

The honourable Attorney-General did state about the need for this Bill and the simple reason behind it was the reinstatement of the *status quo*. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have progressed a lot since the inception of these Acts. Time has changed and that is why we object to the use of Standing Order 51. I have had one observation that I wish to state in front of Government this afternoon.

Initially, when we debated the President's Address, most of the statements that were coming from this side of Parliament, we stated that this is where we have left off and hope that you will take it from there. However, I have noted that instead of where we left off, they are going back to 1997 where they left off and then trying to bring in these changes, so it is the context. That is why we objected to Standing Order 51 because I, at some stage, served under the Fiji Mahogany Board under Mr. Winston Thompson and Mr. Uday Sen. I was given the Chairmanship for about a year before the Mahogany Decree came into place, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Again, this is critical. We have just had some discussions about the pine industry business, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and it is not that we want to deny landowners the opportunity but, again, from the transition from Forestry into Fiji Hardwood and the problems that they faced and the need for this, that is why the role of the Committee is so important to look into the issue. That is why we are not just objecting for the sake of objecting, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are better ways to do this, particularly given the importance of this industry and how it can contribute to Fiji's economic progress, development, employment opportunities, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we really need to seriously look at some of these issues, not just reinstating the *status quo* for the sake of doing it but within the context of the time that we are in, the history, the changes and the challenges that it went through and use this Parliament to bring better alternatives and look at things, scrutinise them well so that we can be in a better position to make some informed decisions and bring the best legislation that will not only meet the needs for today but most importantly, for the future as well.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I understand the comments from the honourable Leader of the Opposition, it is a cosmetic change. Once it is reverted to Forestry, there will be significant review that will go through the Committee stage. We want it to go to Forestry and, Mr. Speaker, Sir, you would probably understand more.

The honourable Minister has a lot of things on his plate, that is why it must be engineered by

the Ministry of Forestry. That is the very reason we bring it under Standing Order 51.

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

Question put.

Votes cast:

Ayes	-	27
Noes	-	22
Not voted	-	5

Motion agreed to.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (AMENDMENT) (NO. 2) BILL 2023

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 51, I move:

That the –

- (a) Local Government (Amendment) (No. 2) Bill 2023 (Bill No. 29/2023), be considered by Parliament without delay;
- (b) Bill must pass through one stage at a single sitting of Parliament;
- (c) Bill must not be referred to a Standing Committee or other Committee of Parliament; and
- (d) Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament on Thursday, 23rd November, 2023, but that one hour be given to debate the Bill, with the right of reply given to me as the Member moving this motion.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to speak on the Local Government (Amendment) (No. 2) Bill 2023 and why Parliament must consider it without delay. The Local Government Act 1972 is the primary legislation that regulates, amongst other things, the governance of local government.

In its practical note on the topic, decentralised governance for development, a combined practice note on decentralisation, local governance and urban-rural development, the United Nation's programme has articulated that to quote:

“For development and governance to be fully responsive and representational people and institutions must be empowered at every level of society; national, provincial, district, city, town and village.”

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Local Government currently oversees 13 Municipal Councils - two City Councils and 11 Town Councils. However, the last Local Government Elections was held in 2005 and since then, Municipal Councils have been governed by appointed Administrators.

For over 17 years, the Local Government Elections have not taken place. That is a history. We have a collective responsibility to provide our people with a chance to elect councillors that will safeguard the interest in various municipalities. Local Government elections serve as the most accessible means for the public to engage with the authorities and State institutions, and for these institutions to be held accountable for their decisions.

The holding of Local Government Elections is a manifestation of democracy at the grassroots level, which will offer an avenue for heightened civic participation. This, in turn, fosters a stronger civic culture and empowers our citizens to engage in governance and decision-making.

In alignment with the Coalition Government's commitment to conduct Local Government Elections in 2024, the Bill seeks to amend the Act to allow for the execution of Local Government Elections to address related matters. Consultations were held on the Bill, and based on the outcome of these consultations, the Bill is now being introduced in Parliament.

From 11th September this year, consultations were held within internal stakeholders, which included the Electoral Commission, Fijian Elections Office, Chief Executive Officers of Municipal Councils, Special Administrators, political parties, members of the media, Civil Society Organisations and diplomatic and development partners.

From 15th September to 14th October this year, face to face public consultations were held in 13 Municipalities. In addition to these face-to-face consultations, the Bill was also made available on the Ministry's website, to collect input from those who could not be physically present during the consultations. Lastly, the consultations were held with the following key stakeholders:

1. Office of the Prime Minister;
2. Ministry of Finance and Strategic Planning;
3. National Development and Statistics;
4. Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, Culture, Heritage and Arts; and
5. The Office of the Solicitor-General.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are only 16 Clauses of the Bill. As alluded to earlier, the Local Government Elections are of great importance and given its significant public interest and the need to hold the elections at the earliest and most feasible opportunity, I recommend that Parliament considers this Bill without delay and that it be debated upon on Thursday.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, our reason remains the same as to why we are objecting to this Bill, that this Bill has come under Standing Order 51. I have previously listened to what other honourable Members said, that we had done consultation and, therefore, we have brought it here under Standing Order 51.

Anyone who has worked previously in Government which I did and I am sure most of you sitting in this Chamber have worked previously under different Ministries and we know the process, even your good self, you had worked under the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources. There are two processes involved, first is consultation with the public and second is, once the legislation is drafted, it comes to Parliament and it is the work of the legislature to scrutinise the Bill, take it to the public and then bring it back to Parliament. That is generally the process. However, for the honourable Attorney-General to read out a long list of consultations that he has done, we have not done any consultations on the Bill collectively in a bipartisan manner.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reason I am raising this is simply because it was the Opposition then who objected the use of Standing Order 51. They objected, even during election time, they were talking about that, but what do we see? They are using Standing Order 51. What they are saying and what they are doing are two different things.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, they need to do what they told the public that they will be doing and we are here to ensure that these legislations that we want to introduce and pass in this Parliament is done collectively and without the use of Standing Order 51. That is the point we are making, Mr. Speaker,

Sir, nothing else. Just that particular point that we never said that we will not use it, they said that they will not use Standing Order 51.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- We did not say it.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Of course, you have said it so many times. So based on that, we are objecting, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- There being no other speakers, I now offer the floor to the honourable Attorney-General to speak in reply.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the mission and vision of the Coalition Government is quite clear. We said it from the beginning that we are going to hold elections and that is what we have done. Subsequent to this, there will be further changes. There is really nothing else to say in relation to Standing Order 51, as you had rightly advised Members of the Opposition, it is a parliamentary process and as Government, we are doing it for good reasons.

Question put.

Votes cast:

Ayes	-	28
Noes	-	22
Not voted	-	4

Motion agreed to.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

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

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

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- I second the motion, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have Schedule 2 - Motions for Debate, there are still a few motions there in terms of extending the time.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion, if any.

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- I have no further comments to make, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I intend to adjourn Parliament for tea break.

The Parliament adjourned at 3.59 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 4.35 p.m.

**CONSOLIDATED REVIEW REPORT –
PACIFIC FISHING COMPANY LIMITED 2018-2019 ANNUAL REPORTS**

HON. S. TUBUNA.- Mr. Speaker, I move:

That Parliament debates the Consolidated Review Report of the Pacific Fishing Company Limited 2018–2019 Annual Report which was tabled on 4th April, 2023.

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

HON. S. TUBUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Pacific Fishing Company Limited (PAFCO) is one of the largest fish processing companies in the Pacific region. It is the largest employer in Levuka and immensely contributes to the economic activity of the Island. The Committee, as part of its deliberations, had visited the PAFCO site earlier this year to fully understand the operations of the company.

The years 2018-2019 Annual Reports were filled with its unique opportunities and challenges for the company. In 2018, PAFCO achieved a milestone when the former Prime Minister visited the factory to officially open the new cold storage facility.

During the year, PAFCO continued its efforts to upgrade its infrastructure, plant and equipment. However, the company faced significant challenges during 2018-2019 due to inconsistent supply of albacore tuna. This led to the factory aligning its processing operations throughout to adjust to the incoming fish stock.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, while deliberating on the Report, the Committee noted that the causes of the \$3.2 million loss in 2019 was due to the low supply of tuna. Apart from the 20,000 metric tonnes of albacore supplied by Bumble Bee, the Committee recommended for PAFCO to explore engaging other suppliers under strict contractual terms to ensure consistency and supply of tuna and to ultimately optimise the plant's productive capacity.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee also noted the need for the company to have a comprehensively documented Risk Management Policy for high risk areas that are not covered, given the two years of consecutive losses from 2018 to 2019. The Committee recommended an overall organisational review be conducted to assess both, the short term and long-term strategic issues, and determine future directions.

The Committee agreed that PAFCO must continue their initiative of finding the right people to undertake the various roles available in the company. We were made aware of their cadets in the Quality Control and Production Department and an accountant was being recruited. We were also made aware of their successful Apprentice Programme through which five apprentices successfully completed their four-year programme and one was the runner up in the Apprentice of the Year Award given by the Fiji National University. Sir, PAFCO must continue its efforts to upgrade the skills of its workers.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion and before I offer the floor, perhaps, may I remind you, honourable Members, once more that the Business Committee has decided that there are, at least, two speakers from each side of Parliament before the right of reply is provided by the mover of the motion. The two speakers from each side will be given five minutes each. I have been given a list from the honourable Whips and is as follows:

1. Honourable S.T. Koroilavesau;
2. honourable Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign affairs, Climate Change, Environment, Civil Service, Information, Public Enterprises and Veteran Affairs; and
3. honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-operatives and Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications. .

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the motion before the floor on the Consolidated Review Report of the Pacific Fishing Company Limited (PAFCO) for 2018 to 2019. I would like to thank the Chairman and the Management Board of PAFCO for the period under review.

I must thank the late Mr. Iqbal Jannif for his commitment and dedication during those difficult years, as the company continued to face significant challenges in the supply of albacore. The company is the mainstay of the economy in the Lomaiviti Group and the largest employer in Ovalau with the workforce of over 870 people, comprising of senior management, production line supervisors, team leaders and skilled and general workers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are, at least, 100 people indirectly employed as contractors to transport and other business, as well as on a call basis with the major shipment of tuna that arrives at PAFCO in Levuka. Overall, the positive financial impact is spread across the entire populous of the Lomaiviti Group.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, PAFCO has helped to diversify the source of income and employment in the seven islands of Lomaiviti. In 2018, as had been alluded by the Chairperson, PAFCO opened a new storage facility to store raw tuna for processing. This led to the factory aligning its processing operations throughout the adjustment to incoming fish stock.

We deliberated on the \$3.2 million loss in 2019 because of the lack of albacore. Ultimately, there has to be an avenue sought, now that the company is under FCF Company Limited of Taiwan. There could be an avenue to open a joint venture and I would encourage the honourable Minister for Fisheries to relook at that as I have opened the discussions with few companies that are involved in fishing in Kiribati, that could have a mother ship that actually collects fish, especially albacore, from Kiribati as a friendly neighbour that can provide a concession on the fishing licences. If this is done and the mother ship collects raw tuna from Kiribati and directly bring it to Levuka, it will help PAFCO during times when albacore is greatly demanded in the open market. The FCF is the second largest buyer and supplier of tuna in the world. That has provided a base where the honourable Minister can actually discuss.

I have had discussions with the Shanghai Deep Sea Fishing in China and they have agreed for a joint venture but, ultimately, the process of negotiation was not completed. They will provide purse seiner vessels with the mother ship that will collect it and deliver it to PAFCO in Levuka. If that is done, it will greatly help PAFCO to survive in these challenging times and more so, provide employment opportunities for the whole the Lomaiviti Group. If PAFCO dies, Levuka dies and Lomaiviti will really get the repercussions of the non-existence of any economic activity in Ovalau and the whole of the Lomaiviti Province. Thank you for the opportunity Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs for their Report. They would have had a very good look at the Annual Report from PAFCO to come up with the report that they have presented to us.

I agree with the comment made by the former Minister, honourable Koroilavesau, and we note the difficulties that PAFCO had gone through because of the shortage of supplies of tuna, as

well as the dilapidated condition of the various machinery and infrastructure supporting the industry in Levuka.

I would like to go straight into the recommendations. It is a public enterprise under the Prime Minister's portfolio so we have taken note of the recommendations. Earlier on this year, I received a dividend of \$268,000 from PAFCO that has gone into Government.

The PAFCO and Bumble Bee have had lengthy discussions about the tuna supply shortage, the subject of Recommendation No. 1. Furthermore, PAFCO is currently exploring new revenue-generating alternatives, in order to strengthen its financial performance and position.

Earlier on, we had a bit of a tussle on the use of the wharf but that was amicably resolved when a shipping company tried to unload stores for the agriculture and photovoltaic projects on Ovalau. However, it leaves open the question on maritime transport infrastructure for Lomaiviti, particularly Levuka.

The influence of climate change will continue to have a significant impact on tuna supplies. We have had *La Nina*, I do not know whether *El Nino* will balance it, but we live and learn. In the meantime, PAFCO will have to be looking at risk management.

Recommendation No. 3 - The lease commitments were derived from both land and buildings. The 2019 audited accounts show the liability to be realised in the future and also the offsetting of right of use assets to be utilised in the future.

The Suva Office exists for several reasons. Firstly, the annual sales of fish meal and packs of canned tuna are done from the office which is the dispatch office for all sales to Punjas and export of fish meal.

Majority of the Board Members are based in Viti Levu and often travel to Levuka for meetings. Thus, the Office provides the opportunity for meetings to be held in Suva and it saves cost. It eases the movement of PAFCO sales stock, as it is more accurately controlled from the Suva Office.

Recommendation No. 4, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the financial year 2020 and 2022 have been profitable and the average of return on equity is 10 percent for the three years.

In addition, PAFCO has reviewed its Organisational Structure to ensure that the company has the right people in the right position, to implement the company's strategies and achieve its vision. The Government is also appreciative of the late Iqbal Jannif's performance in the control of PAFCO and its Board.

Recommendation No. 5, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we note the recommendation from the Committee and Government will continue to support the apprenticeship programme, as well as the graduate cadet training programme.

Recommendation No. 6, Mr. Speaker, Sir, have been the liaising between the relevant Ministries and other relevant agencies to assist the company in resolving the issues that they have raised in their report.

Those, Mr. Speaker, Sir, are my comments on the Report and I, once again, commend the Committee for their Report and also the Company for its performance.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the Pacific Fishing Company Pte Limited 2018-2019 Annual Reports and I would like to thank the Standing Committee for their review and assessment of the Annual Reports.

Let me join the sentiments raised by honourable Koroilavesau and my neighbour in Lami, the late Mr Iqbal Jannif, a well-known personality in our country, who served well on the Board of Pacific Fishing Company (PAFCO) for so many years and would like to just pay tribute to him in terms of the Report.

As we all know, Mr. Speaker, Sir, PAFCO has been around for some time. Actually even at one point in my life, I went and did audits on PAFCO, and that is how long PAFCO has been - 55 years actually to be exact. It has played a significant role in, not only in the economy of the country, but certainly in the economy of Lomaiviti and Levuka, as also mentioned by honourable Koroilavesau and the honourable Prime Minister.

Basically, PAFCO is the anchor for Levuka, Mr. Speaker, Sir, or the economic epic centre for Levuka and that being the case, this side of Parliament certainly are committed to continuing the investment of PAFCO. I thought I would just change the angle a little bit, Sir, and talk about some of the things, from trade perspective, that we are thinking about PAFCO for.

Before I do that, Mr. Speaker Sir, I need to raise something in Parliament that probably not all of us are aware of. Some years ago, the other side actually introduced a fishing levy - \$450 metric tonnes, which basically meant that all supply of fish into Fiji became uneconomical. So, when we talk about the lack of supply of fish in PAFCO, that side of Parliament has a lot to do with that. They only reviewed the pricing in 2022 and I was trying to make it an issue during the Elections as well.

However, if you want to talk about self-inflicted injuries on your own goals, Mr. Speaker, Sir, just like the blunder we heard about in FRA, this is a classic blunder. Sir, \$453 metric tonnes, after that you have to add on the cost from Suva to Levuka, is uneconomical. So, they are all going to Solomons and Samoa right now and as we know in business, once we turn them away it takes them about 10 years to come back.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- ... production of the domestic market.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Well, you got it into PAFCO. Look at what you did to PAFCO.

Let me just keep on going from there, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The albacore that we get from our own fishing vessels, not all of it goes to PAFCO. So, the question that this side of Parliament and certainly, the Ministry of Trade is asking is, is there a way we can encourage those of our own fishing vessels? About 7,000 metric tonnes, Mr Speaker, Sir, that are caught in Fiji Waters, but it is not all going to PAFCO. It is something that we should be discussing and we will certainly be discussing and addressing in the near future.

In terms of skipjack tuna, Mr. Speaker Sir, currently it is expensive to export our skipjack tuna into the European Union because there is duty imposed on it. Now, with the new Economic Co-operation Agreement that is about to be signed, we will be taking steps to try and remove the duty and ensure that we are able to export economically into the EU market which, in itself, is one of the largest markets in the world.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, again, I agree with honourable Koroilavesau on the need to look at regional co-operation when it comes to fish supply. In fact, this is a conversation I have just been having on

a regional level. The question that we have to ask is, why are we getting foreign vessels from outside to come and fish in our own waters?

We need to change this, it is wrong. You have oil in your country. Do you get other people to come and get your oil? Your oil is your own and so as our fish stocks, Mr. Speaker, Sir. So, over the next 12 months, you will see a lot more activity. Certainly, I know that PNG is interested in having that conversation and through the honourable Minister for Fisheries, we will try and actively pursue this because ultimately, what it means is more jobs to our country, more money to Levuka and also a bit more economic activity in our country, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Report did mention something about insurance. I am assured by the current management that they did have some issues with insurance but is now being sorted. It is to do with the cyclone insurance and that is comforting from a risk management perspective.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we would also like to congratulate PAFCO for introducing capacity building into their workforce. It is the largest employer of workers in Levuka, over 780 people with salary of about \$8 million. It means a lot to Levuka and the Lomaiviti Province. As I had mentioned, certainly this side of Parliament will be trying to do things to make PAFCO more profitable and more successful in years to come. *Vinaka saka vakalevu.*

MR. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee of Economic Affairs to speak in reply.

HON. S. TUBUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the honourable Members for their comments and insights into the Annual Report and the challenges and opportunities being faced by PAFCO. It is quite important that we take note of all these challenges and, of course, Government has to address some of the pertinent issues that have been highlighted by the Report and we hope that this will ensure that we have a sustainable tuna industry in this country to be managed now by PAFCO.

I would like to thank everyone who has contributed and, particularly, Members of the Standing Committee. I have no other comments to make, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

REVIEW REPORT – MINISTRY OF WOMEN, CHILDREN AND POVERTY ALLEVIATION AUGUST 2018 TO JULY 2019 ANNUAL REPORT

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, I move:

That Parliament debates the Review Report of the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation Annual Report for the reporting period from 1st August, 2018 to 31st July, 2019 which was tabled on 5th April, 2023.

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

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation oversees three departments - the Department of Social Welfare, the Department of Women and the Department of Poverty Monitoring Unit.

The Department of Social Welfare administers Fiji's Social Welfare Programmes which include the:

- (1) Poverty Benefits Scheme;
- (2) Child Protection Allowance;
- (3) Food Voucher Programme; and
- (4) Social Pension Scheme.

In managing these Programmes, the Department is responsible for ensuring that assistance target those most in need and eliminating corruption and fraud in the process.

Mr. Speaker, the Department's statutory responsibilities to ensure the protection and wellbeing of children which includes managing Juvenile Centres. Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, the Department also manages three State-owned homes for senior citizens and plays a leading role in the National Council for Older Persons and the National Coordinating Committee for Children.

The Department of Women and Children is responsible for mainstreaming gender in the Public Service through the National Gender Policy and does so by promoting and protecting the Rights of Women and Girls through the implementation of the National Women's Plan of Action.

Mr. Speaker, the National Women's Plan of Action is aimed at boosting women's employment opportunities, increasing women's participation in decision making, eliminating violence against women and girls, improving Women's Access to Basic Services and Addressing Women's issues in new legislations. The Department works with other Ministries to promote gender equality, to ensure gender perspective are addressed in all Government policies and initiatives.

Mr. Speaker, the Department of Poverty Monitoring Unit evaluates Government's poverty related programmes and makes policy recommendations to the Ministry and Cabinet.

The Department is committed to ensuring that all such programmes deliver tangible outcomes that improved livelihoods and reduce poverty.

Mr. Speaker, in the 2018-2019 financial year, the Ministry received its highest budget over the years. This had enabled the Ministry to provide better for the welfare of the neediest Fijians by sustaining all existing social and protections programmes administered by the Ministry.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry continues to work in collaboration with its stakeholders and partners from Government and civil society to ensure the best possible results were obtained from its work and reviewed areas that needed improvement for better service delivery.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry continued the implementation of its plan in place for policy changes, projects, programmes and better adherence to international governing instruments of the United Nations and other international and regional organisations that Fiji has ratified in relation to the benefits of its clientele.

Mr. Speaker, the Committee is yet to receive the substantive response on the Standing Committee Report as according to Standing Order 121(6)(b) which requires the agency to provide

its response within 21 days of receiving the Report.

MR. SPEAKER.- The floor is now open for debate, honourable Members. I have a list of speakers before me supplied by the Whips. There are two each from both the Government and the Opposition. Honourable Tuinaceva will lead the batting followed by the Minister for Women, honourable Tabuya and then followed by honourable Sachida Nand and then it should be rounded off by the honourable Assistant Minister Sashi Kiran.

HON. N.T. TUINACEVA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to give my contribution on the motion before Parliament. At the outset I just want to thank the Committee for the work done in putting the Report together.

On Recommendation, Item 4.2 of the Report the call to the Ministry to work in collaboration with other relevant Government agencies and NGOs to address and reduce the number of street dwellers. The simple term most people understand is ‘homeless’, the modern term they use nowadays in many countries is “streetism.”

In fact, to be honest, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am disappointed that we have decided to settle for second best which is to reduce and not to eradicate street dwelling problems in our country. There are countries that do not have homeless problems or the lowest rate. They have successfully battled homelessness by focusing on prevention, early intervention and a comprehensive support system.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to talk about a special case of extreme concern, and that is the increase in the number of children who are below the age of 16, who are dwellers, especially in Suva. I always want to believe that with the kind of family values and network, religion and *vanua* systems in our community, on which it is founded on, no one should be homeless in this country. I do not think that we have reached a crisis point. I believe that we better work, or deal with this problem and we still can do that.

The figures released in 2018 and 2019 Report says that 37 minors roamed or lived in towns but have been returned home. A survey conducted by a prominent media agency in 2022 stated that close to 20 children, the youngest being nine, live and sleep under Stinson Parade Bridge every night and they do not want to return home. However, in June this year, it was confirmed by the Police through a media report that there were more than 30 adults and children living on our streets, namely Suva.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, through *talanoa* with the children themselves, we found out that there were more than 20 children alone who were homeless in Suva. They get shelters to sleep at Thurston Garden, Suva Market and under Stinson Parade Bridge. When you talk to these kids, we can easily put them into three groups: street living, street working or street family.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the question is: why children leave home and come to live on the streets? Every single child we talked to has their own unique story. Economic poverty plays a major role, although other factors are of equal importance. Some have been pushed into the streets because, they have been forced into criminal activities, or being rejected from the family for so call moral reasons, some have mental issues or substance abuse while some are through peer pressure. The big question is, how can we help these children go back home or move away from the street life? They do want to go back home. They will even share the views on what needs to be addressed to make them go back home.

The assistance like, provide them with food, clothing, shelter, education, healthcare, love, protection and basic rights. Assistance like, to provide them with an opportunity for a career outside

of begging. Assistance like, prevent conflict with their family, if we can do that, or to reduce poverty in the community and homes. Enforce law systems to protect them, promote their integration into the society and also encourage more programmes that support them.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, while the Ministry, NGOs and other institutions and agencies are trying to take children away from the streets, we all need to ask the question: how through parenting can Fiji control children coming down to the streets? Tackle the problem at home! For a child to decide to come down to the streets, it does not happen overnight. So, why wait for the problem to happen? Why cannot education and awareness on this “streetism” be taken down to parents through agencies and some kind of preventative measures?

We need to create detection and early intervention measures, we need a support system that involves everyone, including government, communities, regional organisations, *vanua* NGOs and the people! Everyone to work together to save our generation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, most of these children went through a normal life in the beginning of their journey. Something not normal happened along the way which drove them to the streets. I am sure if that not normal is addressed, most of the children will willingly go back home. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I support the motion before the Parliament.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to commend the Committee for their great work in reviewing the Annual Report from 2018 to 2019 which is four years later now. I thank the honourable Tuinaceva for raising that issue about our street children and as you know, my Assistant Minister honourable Sashi Kiran has been spearheading the work in this regard from the Ministry so I will let her address the issue. It is an issue that speaks to all of our hearts and something that we all agree on, is the need to take better care of our children.

In the report, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee does talk about the need to have legislation as well as the need to strengthen the new Department of Children. Currently, the budget that has been allocated, \$100,000 for this budget year is really to set up the Department of Children with skeletal staff including the Director of Children which we are finalising the interviews. As s we prepare for the new budget year, we are to put together our programmes that will then justify the budget to have it up and running fully. We still have the Child Services Unit, but it will become a fully-fledged Department in the next financial year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to work towards that, we have been working with UNICEF, so thank UNICEF as our development partner to partner with us on coming up with an overarching vision of the Department of Children and to strengthen any existing programmes targeted at the care and protection of children which does include what honourable Kiran will cover.

The other recommendation, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the Report is the need to fill the vacant positions in the Ministry. When we came into Government, there were 76 vacancies, we have advertised for 50 which is provided for in this budget and we hope to cover the balance in the next budget. We have interviewed and we are finalising in the last three months 38 positions so far.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to strengthen the Department of Children, we currently are looking within the Ministry to reach out to any welfare officers who will want to become full time child welfare officers, so we are now going to demarcate those roles so that you have those that work in social protection and those at work in child welfare. So hopefully it will contribute to improving the services for our children, otherwise our welfare officers are dealing with adults and children 24/7 and it is a really tough job. I commend our welfare officers for the great work they do.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in terms of working closely with the *Turaga ni Koro* and advisory councillors on our Poverty Alleviation Programmes, Poverty Monitoring Unit as I had stated yesterday has been reviewing programmes across Ministries and have come up with recommendations which include the need for greater engagement with the *Turaga ni Koro* and advisory councillors to be aware and to also monitor and report back on our Poverty Alleviation Programmes on all the ministries across the board.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the last point about the timely manner to determine our recipients. Yes, we have a way to go but as I had stated earlier, we are digitising our database in the hope to make our systems more efficient. I apologise to the public, there are sometimes cases that falls through the cracks, we ask you to please visit your nearest office and raise that issue so we can attend to it.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to wrap up, the honourable Leader of the Opposition had asked yesterday about programmes that have been underutilised. One of the issues raised in the Report is the Welfare Graduate Programme, which is one of those programmes that has been underutilised in the past, where money was given, for example, there was allocation from the World Bank of \$2 million but by the time it came into Government, only \$400,000 was utilised. So, it was underutilisation for Jobs4Nature Programme.

However, we are now stepping it up, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we digitise the database, we now have identified close to 3,000 recipients who potentially should not be in the database or should not be receiving welfare. We will not just kick them off because really welfare is for temporary shocks, you should not be on the programme for many years. It is really to buffer and so we are looking at these recipients to graduate them out of the programme and with that assistance from TVET, the Ministry of Education as well as the Ministry for Youth in reviving some of our Youth Centres around the country, it assists us to be able to transition them out of the welfare into training programmes and then as the honourable Prime Minister had mentioned, Apprenticeship Programmes and then finally to meaningful employment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the Committee for their work, and I commend the Report before Parliament.

HON. S. NAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to commend the Ministry for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation Annual Report. I must start by thanking the Government for increasing the allocation to the Ministry for Women and Social Protection. It is a commendable job, however, there is a question which I ask, “Is the Ministry or the Government serious about our poverty alleviation and bringing people out of social issues?” Passing belittling comments on people and discouraging them is not a way forward in dealing with the issue.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just this morning the honourable Minister of Finance and Deputy Prime Minister stated, “go and do roadside BBQ”. I do not do roadside BBQ.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I did not say that.

HON. S. NAND.- This is a direct insult on hundreds of roadside BBQ sellers who work hard to make ends meet.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Point of Order, Mr. Speaker, Sir. First of all, irrelevance and also the honourable Member is misleading. He said

HON. S. NAND.- What is the Point of Order?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- He said that I was taking too many trips and I said, “you want me to do roadside BBQ instead of doing this job. ...

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Standing Order 44, so I think he should not mislead that.

MR. SPEAKER.- Continue honourable Sachida.

HON. S. NAND.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. It is a usual trend of the honourable Member to back track what he is saying. This is an insult to the hundreds of people who sell roadside BBQs to makes ends meet. These are the people who do hard work to feed the people. These are not the people who go around texting other people’s wives, inviting them over; these are not the people It is important that these people should be, we are talking about poverty alleviation.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Member is imputing improper motive. He knows what happened and he knows how that matter was disposed off. I think his totally going down to gutter level and insulting, hurling insults using this parliamentary Chamber.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Sachida, could you just continue with your speech rather than....

HON. S. NAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I must stress, I did not state any names.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Withdraw that statement.

HON. S. NAND.- I am not going to withdraw, I did not state any names. There are no names stated. But if the shoe fits, wear it, please.

It is important that we need to work towards alleviating poverty. It is important that people who are doing hard work, who are trying to make ends meet are desperately working, we should assist them and encourage them. People need assistance on time. There is one of the recommendations in the Report ...

MR. SPEAKER.- I have not ruled, honourable Sachida. We have gone overboard here into a very sticky situation. It is for and against.

Honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics said something to the effect of BBQ, and then you have come up with another one to counter that one, on texting some women. So, I strongly suggest and implore upon each and every one of us here, just to debate in a proper way rather than stooping low and doing gutter level attack on each other because it does not augur well. You will end up breaching some privileges, and then we will be loaded with the task of trying to come up with another way of rectifying all these problems when the milk has already been spilt. That is what I try and implore upon each and every one of you.

Honourable Sachida, you continue with the way you are addressing this motion and that is good and stay there, please.

HON. S. NAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the poverty in the country, as we see it on the ground,

is increasing. People are struggling to make ends meet. If people are denying it, go to a supermarket on a Saturday or Friday and see parents with children trying to pick things from the shelves, and many a times, the children are left crying because the parent cannot afford to pick that stuff out of the shelf. Things have gone beyond the reach of ordinary people, and this is a social issue that we need to address. How can we decrease the cost of living for our people?

The economy may be booming, may be in the tourism sector, but the other sectors are struggling. People are struggling to put food on the table. This is a social issue. This Report recommends that assistance needs to be given on time, and that is what we are asking for. The assistance should be given on time and people's cost of living needs to be brought down. People need to be able to put decent meal on the table. Are we working towards that? Are we talking about that? I do not see anyone doing that. Why are we putting other policies in front of the normal citizens issues, the normal issues that our citizens are dealing with? We need to ensure that people are able to feed themselves. Food on the table is the primary course for people, the primary objective is food on the table, and secondary is everything else.

I highly recommend the Ministry together with the Government, to look into these issues. Social problem arises when people cannot live comfortably. Street children arise when people cannot feed their children and they run away from home. We need to look into all these things. It is one of the causes of social problems. Poverty is one of the causes of social issues, so let us look at poverty seriously, and I hope this Government and the Ministry will deal with this issue. With that, I support the motion in Parliament.

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you, honourable Sachida Nand for your contribution and I now offer the floor to the Assistant Minister for Women, Children and Social Protection for her contribution.

HON. S. KIRAN.- Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the former Minister, Permanent Secretary and the Ministry Team for their work in serving our people. The Ministry has a huge responsibility to serve our people, there is no two ways about it. I would like to remind the honourable Member that this Report is four years old and since the honourable Member has discussed about other recommendations, I will just discuss the issue of street kids, Recommendation 4.2.

Mr. Speaker, until this year while there was a taskforce for street dwellers and there were profiled over the years there did not exist a programme to help them lived out of their situation. Wherever possible they were taken to their families and most children landed back on the streets.

There is a very strong commitment to the most vulnerable by the Coalition Government which is not only indicated by the increase in social protection alarms for the vulnerable with an allocation of \$200.2 million overall by far the biggest ever allocation to this Ministry but also visible by the high level of commitment to the work on assisting our people on the streets.

I wish to thank the honourable Attorney-General, the honourable Minister for Home Affairs, the honourable Minister for Youths, the honourable Minister for iTaukei Affairs for their high level of commitment towards the support of our efforts to help us work with the street dwellers.

Over the past few months, we have had very strong partnerships between different Government Ministries and Civil Society sector including the churches in trying to find solutions for people living on the streets. This year, we have profiled 144 people in the Suva-Nausori corridor, 14 were found to be below the ages of 14, 66 between 15 to 35, 47 between 36 and 59 and 17 above the age of 60.

Mr. Speaker, 31 people were profiled in the West; 26 below the age of 14. There were 68 new persons identified in the last few weeks rather and are currently being profiled.

Mr. Speaker, 157 of those profiled have been placed in either a State home, Faith Based Shelter or reunited with the family.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, right now, 12 street kids are in a Home undergoing rehabilitation and will be joining the Ministry of Youth Seeds of Success Programme to be held later this month.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, seven others have been enrolled in a yearlong rehabilitation programme, 12 from Lautoka have been trained under the Ministry of Youth Programme Seeds of Success and another batch is ready to start.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, six joined TVET: 15 were trained by Red Cross and once trained there are pathways identified for job placements.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, 35 street dwellers have been placed in various Aged Care Homes or to seek treatment from St. Giles. There are 23 street dwellers we are working within Suva who keep returning. There have been efforts made to support beggars with income generation, social protection however some of them struggled with being integrated with their families and land back on the streets. Where needed some of these people are referred to social support.

In order to be able to reach out to street dwellers and build trust, we have worked with different organisations who have been feeding street dwellers and Faith Based Organisations to reach out and help start rehabilitation.

I wish to acknowledge Faith Based Groups for opening up shelters for these youths and different Government Ministries for opening up the training facilities, in particular Salvation Army that has opened up a shelter in Lautoka and Suva for their rehabilitation. There are some very committed volunteers within Salvation Army who have been actively supporting the work.

I also wish to thank the Methodist Church for availing their facilities in Serua that be used for rehabilitation.

The Ministry of Youth has also been very supportive with not only availing their motivational programmes for the young but also the training facilities.

Mr. Speaker, increasing number of dysfunctional families, drug abuse and neglect are seeing some increasing numbers on our streets. However, Mr. Speaker, we are committed, and I thank all partners on the taskforce who have been working tirelessly to provide support to those on our streets. With that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I support the motion.

MR. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs to speak in Reply.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to thank the honourable Members for their comments and contributions on the Motion before Parliament. Also, I would like to wish the honourable Minister and honourable Assistant Minister the very best in implementing the various programmes within the Ministry to better serve our women and our children. I thank you. Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

REVIEW REPORT - FIJI REVENUE AND CUSTOMS SERVICE 2018-2019 ANNUAL REPORT

HON. S. TUBUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move:

That Parliament debates the Review Report of the Fiji Revenue and Customs Service 2018-2019 Annual Report which was tabled on 14th July, 2023.

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

HON. S. TUBUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs tables its report on the Fiji Revenue and Customs Service 2018-2019 Annual Report earlier this year. While reviewing the Report, the Committee noted the benefits of the CEOs forum held by Fiji Revenue and Customs Service (FRCS) annually and recommended for forums of such nature to be held at least on a biannual basis to further strengthen engagements with stakeholders.

The Committee agreed that because of the significant role FRCS plays, it is important to maintain a strong relationship with its stakeholders. The Committee noted the 14 Memorandum of Understandings (MOUs) signed during the period under review and recommended that these stakeholders work in collaboration to ensure compliance at all levels.

The Committee noted with concern the significant increase in debtors due to outstanding fees and charges as well as a significant increase in outstanding inventory funds. The Committee recommended that more practical measures be pursued to alleviate these matters.

The Committee also made recommendations for continuous awareness sessions to ensure that people are able to understand the compliance requirements. Services and programmes such as Stock which appear in newspaper articles and border control, TV shows are a positive form of spreading awareness and similar initiatives must be taken on.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate and before offering the floor, I have a list of speakers before me from the Whips:

- (1) honourable Vijay Nath;
- (2) honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade and Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises;
- (3) honourable P.D. Kumar; and the
- (4) honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the debate on the Review Report of the Fiji Revenue and Customs Service 2018-2019 Annual Report. As we delve into this comprehensive report, I would like to highlight a few key points.

The CEO Forum is a resounding success and has gained the Committee's recommendation for biannual rather than the current annual. This shift will foster deeper engagement with stakeholders and strengthen relationships with relevant parties.

The signing of 14 Memorandum of Understanding (MOUs) during the review period underscores the willingness of stakeholders to collaborate with FRCS for mutual benefit. This positive attitude towards compliance is commendable.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government initiative like the Gold Card Services and Authorised Economic Operators Programme has been instrumental in recognising and rewarding the compliant company with priority and privileged services. This approach not only encourages tax compliance but also contributes to reducing the black economy, a significant loss in tax revenue that is crucial for our national development.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I urge the Coaling Government to recognise that running of Government is not an easy task. It demands funding for various initiatives including economic stimulation, infrastructure maintenance and upgrading quality and free education for primary and secondary levels, accessibility to healthcare and dental care and many more. It is imperative to understand that the majority of the funds required for these initiatives which the Government has yet to present to Parliament will be generated through tax revenue.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in year 2018-2019, FRCS collected \$2.8 billion, accounting for 66.4 percent of the overall Government revenue. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2019 dealt a severe blow to FRCS revenue collection, causing the dramatic drop to \$1.692 billion. In the post-COVID fiscal year (2022-2023), FRCS managed to collect \$2.285 billion. While this represents a recovery, I sincerely hope that FRCS revenue collection will return to pre-COVID level in the near future.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Customer Service Survey rating of 2.55 out of 5.0 raises concern about the need for improvement. This rating indicates an approval rating of only 51 percent. As the Report aptly states, FRCS has identified areas for improvement to enhance their rating. I eagerly anticipate seeing the improvement in the approval rating in recent years and the specific measures implemented to elevate service delivery.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) analysis revealed and encouraging 47.95 percent female staff representation. I applaud this achievement and hope to see an even higher percentage of female staff in the years to come.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, prior to concluding, I would like to address the fact that during the period covered by this Report, the Cost of Living and debt were manageable. However, this situation drastically changed with the offset of the COVID-19 pandemic which plunged our beloved nation into a state of economic hardship. While we witnessed a low inflation rate during COVID-19 crisis, we are now facing a surge in the Cost of Living and inflation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Deputy Prime Minister has said yesterday that ANZ should be very careful while making such wild projections because the methodology they used is based on the gross value added of the retail sector. The Minister further explained “inflation” is measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI) based on the representative basket of goods and services purchased by the consumer with different weights. I urge the honourable Minister of Finance to consider updating the CPI basket as it relies on the outdated data of 2008. The Coalition Government must recognise that the higher cost of living, the increase in VAT and the increase in inflation is inevitable led by reducing consumer spending constantly diminishing tax revenue.

In conclusion, I commend FRCS for its comprehensive report and commend the organisation for its significant contribution to the nation’s economic development. I urge the Government to heed the recommendations present in this Report and prioritise measures to enhance FRCS’s efficiency,

effectiveness and consumer service to ensure that continued success of our nation's revenue collection effect. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I support the motion.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the Review Report of the FRCS Annual Report 2018-2019 that was published this year. I would like to congratulate the Committee for their comments. Because my contribution is brief and will focus really on MSMEs, I just thought I respond to some of the outlandish statements that were made in the last question. The first thing I would like to mention or state, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is this adage, “if you cannot measure, you cannot manage.” That is the summary of the government on the other side.

The honourable Minister for Women and the honourable Assistant Minister were very modest. What they have been doing over the last 12 months is trying to collect data, which will enable them to start creating a pathway out of poverty for the people who are impoverished in this country. They have gone so far as to talking to the Australian Embassy to develop a database which will then allow us to say, “how many are genuinely impoverished in our country, let us create a pathway for them.” Simple!

The other side, after 16 years, did not come up with something that this side of Parliament and the two learned honourable Members have come up within less than 12 months. So going forward, you will find that there will be a concise, very clear plan to move people out of poverty and it will be measured. The other side of Parliament used to come up with outlandish statements about, “we have reduced poverty by blah, blah, blah.” No statistics.

Secondly, honourable Sashi talked about interagency corporation. The other side of Parliament, I think there was only one person who used to credit himself with everything. That is the secret to how we are going to get out of poverty in this country. We have to work together as a country. Every single agency in this country needs to work together to get us out of poverty. It is not their problem, it is not our problem, it is not Kamikamica's problem, it is our total problem. As a country with data, we will be able to get out of poverty in this country.

The final point I would like to make, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is you may recall that in our budget speech, we talked about rebuilding Fiji. In order to realise this alleviation of poverty, this side of Parliament is saying we need to rebuild Fiji, we need to rebuild the economic architecture of Fiji, which means:

- (1) *Google* is landing a second cable into Fiji. Trust me, Sir, it will transform Fiji digitally; and
- (2) the honourable Minister for Agriculture talked about how he wants to transform agriculture using mechanisation at farm level to try and value add.

These are the types of visionary ideas that will get us out of poverty. So, when the other side of Parliament is saying, “what are we doing?” We are doing a lot more than what you ever did in 16 years. Remember that.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Where is your data?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Finally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to contribute very quickly on the Report. I would like to congratulate FRCS in terms of their Report.

Firstly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, over the years, being an accountant myself, I have seen a transformation in FRCS. They have moved from what used to be a very almost vindictive way of operating into a risk-based management system. So, if you are good taxpayer, you get rewarded as was alluded to by honourable Nath. That is the way of the future, that is the way we should go,

looking at compliance and then managing taxation based on that.

The second point I would like to make, I would like to credit the FRCS is they have started focusing on MSMEs as a specific area of interest. They now have a unit that actually deals with MSMEs. We are working very closely with that Unit and again in terms of rebuilding this country, that piece of work will ensure that we continue to make the small steps in order to rebuild this country, rebuild the architecture and alleviate poverty which is something that these Members have mentioned for 16 years, all they did was take us backwards.

HON. P.D KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is the kind of response you get when he has nothing much to say about the subject matter.

(Laughter)

Mr. Speaker, Sir, FRCS play a very important role in the revenue collection, and it also assists in the overall development of Fiji. In other words, for revenue and customs services if they do not collect the revenue the Government is crippled. They will not be able to provide the services that we often talk about, for example, the support system that we need to provide to the vulnerable group or the roads that are needed in the rural areas.

We need the revenue but who are the people who are paying these revenue to FRCS and collecting all these? It is definitely the taxpayers of this country, whether you are running a business or you are an employee or sole trader, whatever you are, there are certain amount of taxes and duties levied which is collected by FRCS. In other words, FRCS' real client are the public, Fijians, people who live in this country and, therefore, it is very important for them to be customer centric service oriented.

For that, over the years FRCS underwent major reform, they continue to reform the taxation system from the customers' point of view, they focused on simplifying tax administration system for better customer service experience. FRCS introduced the standard interpretation guideline to remove subjective decision making and for the first time automated economic operator programme was introduced for its trusted traders who are accorded benefits by the customs in the movement of international cargo.

Sir, IT investments were also made by the Government to assist FRCS in designing and implementing an online new tax system. Again, all that was done so that things become easier for the taxpayer.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to provide a better avenue for aggrieved taxpayers, Fiji also has a tax court which further builds confidence in our taxpayers and investors. So, it is not one way, if people are aggrieved, they can take their matter to the tax court and recently the tax court had ordered FRCS to return a sum of \$26 million to a foreign company; that builds confidence in the system.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, all these reforms took place during FijiFirst Government with the intent to shift away from the authoritarian mindset to promoting a service-oriented approach where the goal is to enhance the overall experience of those receiving services. In this regard, the Committee also recommended that FRCS identify areas of improvement to enhance the customer survey rating, which was 2.55 out of 5, and suggested that they need to develop better strategies to improve this customer service.

It was interesting to note when you go through the Report where the staff in terms of atmosphere within FRCS and how staff are operating within FRCS, they gave a very high rate which

means it is a very conducive environment to work which is good but do the customers feel the same? Well, this rating shows the other way.

Fiji Financial Intelligence Report, it identified the two top possible underlying criminal activities identified in the suspicious transaction reporting were tax evasion, frauds and scams were right there than anything else which means we still have people who are avoiding tax and FRCS is trying their best to arrest that but for the Government, it is loss of revenue. Every effort must be made to recover every cent that people owe, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

So, again, if you read the report during the year, FRCS paid around half a million dollar to whistleblowers which is again a very good strategy to encourage people to come up and report tax evasion. Very briefly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Kamikamica mentioned that Ministry of Women are collecting data and creating a database so that correctly we can identify the vulnerable groups and we can pay them et cetera. Let me make it very clear rather than each Ministry making their own little database to give this and that, it is important to work on the national ID for each and every citizen; that is the way forward.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank all the honourable Members, I thank the Chairman of the Committee. I think the contributions from the honourable Members have been very good. I thank the contribution from the opposition both from honourable Nath and honourable Kumar.

Mr. Speaker, FRCS as rightly pointed out is a very critical and important arm of Government because as honourable Kumar said quite rightly, if this organisation does not collect the revenue, the whole fiscal situation, revenue and expenditure for Government is dependent on how effective and efficiently we are able to implement all the tax policies, how efficiently and effectively we are able to collect revenue? If you look at the contributions that we have had so far from yesterday and the budget debate, despite the articulation of how Government should manage their budget.

There is always, Mr. Speaker, Sir, demand for more expenditure, demand for more revenue from every sector of the economy and the Government has to have that fiscal space to be able to provide those services. What has happened, Mr Speaker, Sir, over the years apart from notwithstanding the impact of Covid-19 and the devastation on the economy. What we have seen over the last 10 years or 12 years is a kind of economics (what I can voodoo economics) where we have concentrated on borrowing, spending and perhaps, not looking at it carefully on how we can also mobilise resources through the appropriate tax system.

In the 2023-2024 budget, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have carefully navigated our way, we have made sure that we provide a platform in the budget where we are able to collect reasonable amount of revenue, where we are able to than put out the appropriate expenditure into appropriate sectors, particularly health, social welfare, agriculture that all has seen an increase in the last budget. So as a government, what we are looking at, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is to make sure and I take all the points that have been raised by honourable Deputy Prime Minister Kamikamica and honourable Premila Kumar about what FRCS is and how it has changed. The allocation for FRCS in the current budget is about \$45.5 million. This is an increase of about 13.8 percent compared to the budget of \$40 million for the last financial year. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this increase in budget is timely for the newly unveiled strategic plan that has substantial plans, objectives and once operationalised effectively, it can produce substantial windfall gains not only for the organisation but for the government as a whole in terms of collecting revenue.

Honourable Nath talked about the basket, in fact, it is not 2008 it is 2014, the base that they are using to calculate the CPI and I agree with him. The Bureau of Statistics, we have brought back the Government Statistician who was unceremoniously removed by the previous Government. The

Bureau of Statistics, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is already working on re-basing the calculation of CPI. We are going to also re-look at the basket, his is right, it is an old basket, things have changed, consumption patterns have changed, we need to look at the weights.

While sessions from some of the Members, unlike a very good contribution from honourable Premila Kumar and honourable Vijay Nath on specific suggestions about how the cost of living has increased simply because of the budget or because of the new tax measures, they do not realise, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that we are still transitioning from the impact of COVID, loss of jobs and loss of income. What the figure show, as I had pointed out yesterday, Mr. Speaker, there is job growth, in fact, as I have said, in the formal sector. This is FNNP data which shows that the salaries and wages have actually increased somewhere between 10 percent to 12 percent, which is also a factor of the demand for a tight labour market. We have lost some labour but the other side of the coin is that there are more jobs being created as well.

All I am saying is that, in the FRCS, contrary to the assertions that was made by the honourable Member who is not in Parliament now that we will lose tax revenue because the disposable income has gone down and because the cost of living is so high, in fact, for October 2023, Mr. Speaker, Sir, net tax collection is \$26 million or 10.7 percent above the forecast, compared to the same period last year.

Tax revenue is higher by about \$18.9 million or 43.8 percent and it comes from a number of measures that we have in the budget and if you look at the increase in revenue, we are adding about \$500 million to \$600 million as a permanent increase in revenue into the budget. And if you look at the expenditure that has gone out of that, increase in the social welfare Ministry's budget, increase in the education budget, increase in the health budget. We are fixing some of the infrastructure in the health sector. I was in Nausori the other day and I met people and they were related by the fact that after so many years of neglect of the Nausori Health Centre, suddenly it is being renovated. Similar things we have done in the last 10 months throughout the country.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if you go to Dreketi, Wainikoro and Korovou you will see Government quarters being painted now. The things are happening, and I have been told that the CWM Hospital is for the first time in many years, you know that clean that people can go there. So, these are things that are happening as a result of what we have done and all these, Mr. Speaker, can be done properly if we are able to collect enough revenue. So as a Government we have put all these measures. If we did not take some of these tax measures if we did not look at FRCS as an important institution that can collect this on the basis of the policies of the Government, we will not be able to do this.

I urge honourable Members on the other side when they speak to look at the facts of what is happening. On the part of Government we will continue to support FRCS. I think we have seen what they are capable of doing. There has been a lot of efficiencies that I have seen in the last six months coming out of the organisation and I want to take this opportunity to thank the Board and all those who are at the helm at the moment for driving and making sure that Government's policies - measures in the Budget are effectively implemented and revenue collected.

MR. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs to speak in reply.

HON. S. TUBUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the honourable Members for their valuable contribution on the Report. We realise the important role that FRCS played its contribution to revenue collection. We would like to thank FRCS for the reforms that they have undertaken as we believe that it will significantly contribute to revenue collection in this country.

We also noted the support being provided by the Government in trying to strengthen FRCS through the Budget support and we hope that this will enhance the performance of FRCS to continue their role in revenue collection for this country.

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

Question put.

The motion is agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I have just been informed that dinner is ready in the Big Committee Room. I intend to adjourn Parliament now. We come back after dinner to complete the two remaining motions.

The Parliament adjourned at 6.04 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 6.57 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now invite the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs to speak on this motion.

CONSOLIDATED REVIEW REPORT – FIJI DEVELOPMENT BANK 2020-2021 ANNUAL REPORT

HON. S. TUBUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs tabled its Report on the Fiji Development Bank 2020-2021 Report in July early this year. The Committee noted the Fiji Development Bank achieved a net profit of \$0.99 million, in comparison to \$1.14 million in the 2020 Financial Year. Furthermore, the lending portfolio recorded profits for both years: \$541.88 million in 2020 and it grew to \$618 million in 2021, despite COVID-19.

The Fiji Development Bank witnessed the impacts of the novel coronavirus, COVID-19 pandemic, tropical cyclones and subsequent floods. The Bank then implemented the strategies that prioritised business continuity and resilience. The Committee received submissions from the Chief Executive Officer of Fiji Development Bank (FDB); government ministries and other relevant institutions such as the Fiji Crop and Livestock Council and Business Assistance Fiji to understand the assistance they provide to FDB customers.

The Committee identified the gaps and duplications amongst stakeholders and recognised the need for collaborative efforts between the government ministries and other stakeholders to assist the applicants and customers of FDB to succeed in their business venture. The Committee was updated on the Agro-Photovoltaic project in Levuka. It was noted that there were delays in its implementations and request for urgent action to be taken by Government to expedite the commencement of the project. The Committee commends the bank in assisting several customers with working capital loans during the pandemic by borrowing from the Reserve Bank of Fiji through its Disaster Recovery and Contentment Facility.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate. Before I offer the floor, I have a list from the honourable Whips and the speakers are:

- (1) honourable Semi Koroilavesau;
- (2) honourable Minister for Housing and Local Government; and
- (3) honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, before going into the FDB Report, let me just highlight a correction on the issue on PAFCO. I wanted to talk to the honourable Deputy Prime Minister Kamikamica and highlight the issue, but I could not get the honourable Minister for Fisheries to be there so that I can double check that the facts that I was going to state are correct, that is why I am highlighting it.

Firstly, licences: Licences are restricted to 60 and they are all local companies that fish within Fiji's EEZ. If any other foreign vessel that is licensed in Fiji, it is licensed to unload and load, establish their business here but they fish outside the open waters or in other territorial EEZ of other neighbouring countries.

Secondly, is the unloading of catches. For PAFCO, this is driven by price so most of the fishing vessels that come here are attracted to more better pricing overseas and they prefer to be loaded into containers and sent out especially for raw tuna.

Thank you for this opportunity to contribute to the debate on the Consolidated Review Report of FDB for 2020 to 2021. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will comment on the findings and recommendation by the Economic Affairs Committee. The Committee noted the increase in not performing loan portfolio during the period under review. The Committee recommends the strong collaboration of FDB, government ministries and other stakeholders to assist the clients of FDB in improving operations of their business. I will highlight this later in my contribution because it is one of the issues that is affecting the operation of FDB. There seems to be some disconnections with the sporting ministries, live agencies especially with Ministry of Fisheries and Ministry of Agriculture, Small Enterprises.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee noted a good opportunity that is provided by government agency called Business Assistance Fiji (BAF). That small agency actually can help especially for iTaukei landowners that would like to go into business. The BAF has a small office (I think in Victoria Parade) it is only consists of three and they have Government fundings. What they do is, they take in the project, they work it and then they allocate a consultant to help the small businesses to go to the various bank agency in Fiji to assist them to obtain their loan. I will highly recommend to small businesses to go through BAF if they want to improve their opportunity to get loans from loaning agencies.

The Committee noted after thorough discussions with FDB as I have alluded to that Government Ministries really need to coordinate their activities in conjunction with the loan portfolios that have been given out by FDB. It is a development bank, and we appreciate the fact that they actually have a lot of threats that can damage their loan portfolio. It is very important for Government agencies and Government Ministries to assist them to work through the repayment and schedules that have been set with our local population especially our resource owners in our communities.

The Committee was pleased to note that the Fiji Development Bank dedicated a section of its report to include the progress towards achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that was relevant to them. In 2020 the bank has its financial solution such as the Agriculture Family Loan facility that ensures women are actively involved in business as well as promotes the use of renewable energy projects within farms as solar irrigations. Further the bank exports credit facility, imports substitution and export finance facility and other financial available for the agriculture sector which contribute towards achieving various targets in the National Development Plan and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, very quickly one of the highlights of our review was the Northern Development Programme (NDP) and we highly recommended that the other Divisions in Fiji follow that pattern because it has materialised and uplifted the lives of our people in the Northern Division. We have suggested that the other Division in Fiji follow suit and do the similar investment through NDP and I would urge Government to imitate that to the other Divisions to assist our local people to invest in our economy. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute towards the Consolidated Review Report of the Fiji Development Bank 2020-2021 Annual Report. Before I commence, I would like to thank the Standing Committee for doing a marvellous job in assessing the Report as well as come up with very practical observations as well as considerations.

The Fiji Development Bank, Mr. Speaker, Sir, plays a pivotal role in the promotion of development in the rural areas and most importantly in the agriculture sector. This is one of the key mandate of the Fiji Development Bank that is clearly stipulated in the Fiji Development Act 1966.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with agriculture as a key sector which benefits the most, the 2020-2021

Annual Report has highlighted that FDB has closed to 51 percent of the total market share in Fiji. In the agriculture sector of its 91 percent of these loans are in the category of sugarcane farming. Therefore, it is very encouraging to witness such expensive assistance to our sugarcane farmers. However, I also urge FDB management to also fund innovative solutions and packages for other sub-sectors of agri-business.

Also, Mr. Speaker, Sir, echoing the sentiments shared by the Standing Committee to venture out to other non-sugar sectors and unconventional farming projects, such as, agricultural value chain, financing which was piloted with a baby ginger industry. Despite there is a decline in the loan portfolio from 2019 to 2022, in 2019 it was \$110 million, by the end of 2022, it has gone down to \$91 million, even though there is a decline, there is room for improvement. The FDB management to encourage a review of the products that are currently on hand as well as the promotion and participation of our people in the agricultural sector.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as also alluded to earlier by honourable Koroilavesau, I think there is a need for the Bank to actually review the import substitution facility as well as the export financial facility with the Reserve Bank of Fiji to ensure that there is a promotion of activities. We are still importing more rice and lamb chops from overseas, so there is opportunity there to venture into sheep farming. I believe we are working with the Ministry of Agriculture, we should be able to venture into some of these industries which is going to impact the economy greatly. We urge the FDB management to consider increasing sector portfolio, market share to reserve related ventures, business process, outsourcing projects and sustainable renewal energy projects.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, FDB is accredited to the Green Climate Fund being the first development bank in the South Pacific to achieve this amazing achievement. Through the Green Climate Fund, the Bank undertook the first agrophotovoltaic project in Fiji and the region. It is a great initiative for Levuka, however, due to unfortunate delays, this project has to be realised. I urge those involved in the project to work towards setting realistic targets and achieving results for our old capital. Another issue that was raised was the large number of portfolios because of the effects of COVID-19. It is very important for the Board and the management to device immediate plans in the recovery of payment of those loans.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as aptly highlighted by the Standing Committee, FDB as well as the Business Assistance Fiji to work closely in assisting the loan applications over the potential Micro Small and Medium Enterprise clients. With those few words, I once again thank the FDB Board and management for the 2020 and 2021 Annual Report and I hereby support the motion.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Members for their contribution, and also the Chairman of the Committee for the presentation of the Report and highlighting some of the key issues within the Bank in the period of the review. The Bank's history is one which has been tasked to stimulate and facilitate the promotion of development of natural resources, in particular, agriculture sector, transportation and other MSMEs.

My first job, Mr. Speaker, Sir, was with FDB and I remember the late Laisenia Qarase used to be the Managing Director of the Bank. Even then the focus of the Bank was Small, Medium Enterprises, unsecured loans and many of them, a good percentage of those who helped by the Bank would go on and develop further.

The Bank, Mr. Speaker, Sir, has already embarked. We have a new Board, and the management are working very well. They were embarked on a new five-year strategic plan. The focus will be a value driven organisation. We expect the Bank to create a more open, less hierarchical organisation by having few layers between the staff and management. Obviously, the interaction of

the Board with the Management in a much more inclusive and closer manner is expected to produce those results and allow the Bank to implement the strategic plan in a much better way.

Just on the Report for the review period, Mr. Speaker, Sir, obviously the Bank has gone through a lot of experience and learning exercises in terms of the natural disaster by providing financial assistance and supporting the business continuity and recovery of some of the businesses at that time.

Obviously concerns about the Non-Performing Loans (NPL). Again, transition from COVID, we saw a lot of growth in 2022 and now in 2023 the Bank is obviously on a much better footing in terms of recovery. And because of the strong growth in the economy, strong performance of not only the tourism sector but also a very strong pick-up in business generally has allowed the Bank to improve its repayments and we expect the Non-Performing Loans to decline much faster.

The Bank is also, Mr. Speaker, Sir, working very closely with the different ministries and honourable Koroilavesau is correct. I think some of the key Ministries such as the Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Fisheries and Forestry ought to work very closely with the Fiji Development Bank. These are some of the things that we have talked about before in this Parliament where we said that the FDB's mandate really should be to focus on supporting Small Medium Enterprises, particularly those in the natural resource-based sectors.

On that, Mr. Speaker, the good news about the Bank's future, the FDB has been producing recently very remarkable results in terms of not only the change from very low profit to increase in profit in 2022, but the most important feature that we see is the doubling of the account holders from 4,500 to around 9,300 in 2023.

It looks like that the Bank is on track to hit the 10,000 mark very soon. I think it is an indication of the refocus and the close cooperation between the FDB board and the management team and I want to thank the Chairman of the Board, Mr. Darmend Gounder, CEO and the management for taking on board the Government's vision and priority in terms of supporting the Small Medium Enterprises.

The launch of the FDB Loan for Women Entrepreneurs, in the last four months, I am told that the Bank received 4,000 applications, approved about 1,000 loans totalling about \$2.5 million. In terms of the overall figure, Sir, it may not sound very big but if you are looking at thousand loans individually, it proves the point that the Bank is really focusing on the small, medium enterprises and the pleasing thing is that these are women entrepreneurs who are actually engaging with the Bank. Most of it is unsecured loans so in other words they do not need any security, all they have to do is to present good proposals, the Bank will assess it and if the feasibility shows that it is going to be successful, they get that as well.

The other point in relation to this, all these applications came digitally, it was launched very early this year. A lot of the women who were applying, they actually expanded the reach to outer islands such as Batiki, Cikobia, Gau, Kadavu, Koro, Lakeba, Moala, Moce, Moturiki, Ovalau, Rotuma and Vanuabalavu. All these were done digitally (online applications). Again it is a good innovation and it will allow the Bank to improve its financial literacy programme as well. In fact earlier this year they also launched a new financial literacy programme and that I think is going to bring the Bank back to one of the key original objectives and that is to support the small, medium enterprises and more particularly those which are linked with the natural resource sectors.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, once again, I want to thank the Chairman, Board and the management for taking on the new approaches and making sure that the Bank is getting back on its original objectives

and also on a good financial footing.

HON. S. TUBUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the honourable Members for their contribution towards the Report. As highlighted by some honourable Members, it is critical that FDB and other stakeholders forge strong partnership.

The issue of access to non-sugarcane farmers has been highlighted and it is very critical and perhaps more allocation and attention to be given to the non-sugarcane sector. Sir, FDB has formulated other innovative products towards women and SMEs and we should encourage FDB to continue along this innovative path.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

REVIEW REPORT – MINISTRY OF INDUSTRY, TRADE AND TOURISM 2018-2019 ANNUAL REPORT

HON. S. TUBUNA.- Mr. Speaker, I move:

That Parliament debates the Review Report of the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism 2018-2019 Annual Report which was tabled on 14th July, 2023.

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

HON. S. TUBUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs tabled its Report on the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism 2018-2019 Annual Report in July this year.

The Ministry represents some of Fiji's most important sectors that impacts the socio-economic development. The Tourism Industry contributes significantly to Fiji's economy as the country's largest foreign exchange earner.

The Committee was informed of the importance of the International Visitor's Survey to improve services. Furthermore, the Committee noted the significance of the impact of cruise tourism and the need to engage with Municipal Councils and other stakeholders to improve and market the unique cultural activities in the different centres and geographical locations in Fiji.

The Committee noted the significance of the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) and strongly recommend that MSMEs Fiji needs to engage with all stakeholders to further develop the sector. In addition, the Committee received contributions from the Fiji Development Bank, the Ministry of Agriculture, Business Assistance Fiji and the Fiji Crop and Livestock Council.

The Committee commends the Ministry on the launch of this Fiji Portal and looks forward on a positive result on future Annual Reports. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- The motion is now open for debate and before I offer the floor, there are four speakers that have been identified by the Whips. They are:

- (1) Honourable Jone Usamate;
- (2) Assistant Minister, honourable Alitia Bainivalu;
- (3) Honourable Premila Kumar; and
- (4) Deputy Prime Minister, honourable Kamikamica.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you for giving me the opportunity to talk on this Report. I congratulate the Committee for the outstanding work that it has done in the Report and the various recommendations that have been done. The Ministry, of course, as we know is a very critical one in terms of the lifeblood of our economy and I just like to talk to some of the recommendations that are there, and I congratulate the Committee for the recommendations that it has done.

The first recommendation that I want to talk briefly about is the second one. It is the importance of strengthening standards for development, implementation and monitoring for trade promotion in consumer protection. The Committee has actually recommended that there should be a standard unit to become a statutory entity. I think that is a very good suggestion because the world over we note that Governments are beginning to change to take out a lot of these operational activities out of the ambit of Government proper or it maintains the policy and regulatory role and set up these bodies. I think that will be a good move.

The only thing that we have to make sure is that if the standards unit is set up to be a unit on its own then it must be able to be sustainable. It should not be such that Government has to come in and then to keep funding this unit. So, I think overall that is a good policy drive, that is why we created things like Fiji Roads Authority and Water Authority of Fiji. We take out the direct operational arms into specific entities so they can be quick and nimble and get on with the lot. So that recommendation I agree with them entirely.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the second one that I want to talk about briefly too in my five minutes is the first recommendation in terms of MSMEs and in terms of MSMEs, micro enterprises is something that we all need to look after and we should congratulate people who sell BBQ on the roadside, people who sell fruit drinks, people who sell kava, we should not make fun of them because these people are trying to struggle to make a living and as they graduate from Micro to Small to Medium Enterprises, that is something that we should encourage.

I am glad to see that there has been quite a lot of work done in the Ministry in terms of this MSME Fiji and the BAF programme that was identified by the honourable Koroilavesau. I had noticed here is that, what this recommendation is trying to do, is a very important one. Because what you tend to find is that, Ministries try to create their own empires, so if someone is doing micro enterprise here, someone else wants to create it again. So, the idea of consolidating that altogether under one umbrella is a very good one. It eliminates duplication and allows us to be able to focus our resources much better on what needs to be done. So, I am totally in agreement with the first recommendation that we have.

The third recommendation is something that I had the opportunity of participating in some of the Committees. This particular recommendation no. 3 is recommending for future reports to have their achievements against KPIs. This is very important. A lot of reports just talk about activities, we did this and we did that. What we really want to know is what you have done relative to your targets, your outputs and the outcomes. What have you achieved out of your activities? This is a good and solid recommendation, and I think this is something we should make sure that all Government Ministries should do. When they report, do not just report on the activities, but what was the output, and the outcome. What has been the trend over the past few years, you can see, the trend is improving. That is a very good recommendation.

The last one, and I think it is probably related to recommendation no. 4, which is talking about the Fiji's trade commissions, which were not reflected in the report. Hopefully, I am sure the Ministry would be looking into that. Along the same lines, we need to know whether they are getting money out of these establishments, the trade commissions, the trade departments, and it should not be activity based. It must be output against the target, leading to outcome and showing a trend of a number of years. That will give us a good information to discuss in this Parliament and to see what needs to be improved.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to acknowledge and thank the Standing Committee on Social Affairs for their assessment and the compilation of this Report. I would like to commend the Ministry for incorporating the alignment of its work with the UNs SDGs as well as having an unqualified audit opinion.

As highlighted in the Chair's foreword, the Ministry represented some of Fiji's most important sectors that impact the socio-economic development of the country, with tourism being the driver of our economy, contributing close to 40 percent to our GDP. The years leading up to 2019 was a record year for tourism. In the period under review, we welcomed 895,137 visitors, a 4 percent increase from the previous financial year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this year has been one of the books for the Fiji tourism industry. For the first nine months of this year, Fiji welcomed 689,142 visitors, which is a 2 percent increase over the same period pre-COVID-19 with visitors mostly from Australia, New Zealand, US and China. In addition to exploring the new destinations, Fiji's efforts to enhance regional connectivity remains a priority. At the end of this month, Fiji Airways will commence its new service between Fiji and New Caledonia. There will also be direct flights from Nadi to French Polynesia by Aircalin starting in December.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to congratulate the honourable Deputy Prime Minister Gavoka for being elected as the Chair of the International Civil Aviation Organisation Conference that is currently underway in Dubai. I would like to take this opportunity to commend some of the work done by the Department of Tourism, who are now part of the Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation.

In the 2018 to 2019 financial year, Cabinet endorsed the Fijian tourism 2021, Fiji's tourism sectorial plan, which sets the strategic priorities of the industry. As shared in this Parliament, the Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation is now close to finalising a 10-year strategy that will build upon the Fijian tourism 2021 document.

Mr. Speaker, two very important studies were also commissioned in an effort to create strong linkages and diversify our tourism products:

- (1) The assessment of the economic impact of cruise tourism in Fiji. The assessment identified seven investment opportunities that if pursued would lead to an added USD \$43.98 million to the Fijian economy in the next 10 years.
- (2) From the farm to the tourist table study which shows hotels and resorts in Fiji's main tourism areas spent over \$75 million buying fresh produce in 2017, with 48 percent of that spent on locally items. It also identifies barriers to increasing local production such as poor networking between hotel chefs, purchasing managers, suppliers and farmers and outline recommendations to increase local food sourcing by Fiji's tourism sector.

Mr. Speaker, implementation of the recommendations of these reports also commence such as the chef training undertaken in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture in the Coral Coast and

in Rakiraki.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to share that the Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation will in this financial year continue this so that we see more of local produce and cuisine been used in the industry. Another commendable achievement of the Department was the successful rollout of the modernise online international visitors survey. The IVS is available tool not just for the Department but for other Government stakeholders and industry from April to December of 2022 587, 406 visitors arrived and contributed \$3 billion to the economy. Approximately, 47 percent of spending occurred prior to arrival and approximately 54 percent of spending occurred after arrival. The average visitors spend was around FJD \$3,572 per trip and around FJD \$376 per night. The average spending per trip has increased by six percent.

Mr. Speaker, such insights are possible when we prioritise robust data collection and reporting. I would also like to commend the Ministry and the Tourism Fiji's efforts in promoting Fiji as a top sporting destination by hosting events like super rugby and earlier this month I am pleased to share that we successfully hosted the Fiji's Spartan Event. This event brought over 3,000 participants from 25 countries to Sabeto over four days.

To conclude, I commend the achievements of the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism and their contribution to the economy. Thank you for giving me the floor Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you and I now offer the floor to the honourable Premila Kumar to make her contribution.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir. Ministry of Industry Trade and Tourism (MITT) is responsible for developing and implementing policies and strategies to shape Fiji's economic landscape. The Ministry's policies and initiatives have a direct impact on job creation and overall economic prosperity. We have seen the effort made the hard-working staff of MITT to come up with strategies to create supportive environment for the growth and success of businesses at different stages of development.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, over the years MITT has introduced innovative programmes and policies such as start-up incubators, skilled development programmes, market access and support programmes regulatory simplification in e-gov services example base Fiji. Incentives for innovation research and development, access to finance by collaborating with RBF, FDB and Ministry of Finance by setting up this credit guarantee scheme.

Also, MITT came up with community engagement initiatives that have been organising networking events and workshops including recognition and awards and that is where we have the Prime Minister's International Business Awards. They are also involved in international collaboration for exports, and they continue to provide business advisory services to the clients. So, they do all these works and Recommendation (7) clearly states that this institution must be well resourced. If they are well-resourced then they will be able to deliver better.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the committee had the opportunity to hold a round table meeting with varies Government agencies and entities involved in MSME's space. From this meeting it was crystal clear that there was lack of coordination and cooperation amongst them.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in 2019, MITT set up the SME Unit by consolidating varies programmes and funding within the Ministry with the intention of reducing the bureaucratic hurdles and creating a more accessible and efficient ecosystem for MSMEs.

There is a lot of merit in Recommendation No. 1, Mr. Speaker, Sir. We suggest that SME Fiji should be able to respond to the dynamic needs of the private sector and particularly, NSME small business, small and micro businesses and MSME Fiji can then think like a private sector and operate like a private sector, and not like a government entity - involved too much in bureaucracy and this and that. It will allow better collaboration between different parties, and it will be able to address the unique challenges.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as a statutory body, MSME Fiji will have a greater visibility both, domestically and internationally, and that is when it can tap into donor funding. They can also tap into human resources, and it will be able to coordinate with other MSME programmes dished out by other agencies. So, it will give better value for money by consolidating all these under one roof.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee also recommended the replication of the Northern Development Programme to other Divisions in Fiji. Sir, NDP as we call it, was initially established in 2007 to address the severe impact of the expiry of sugarcane leases on the economy of the North. The NDP actually comes under the 'Look North Policy' and under that when this programme was introduced, it became highly successful and the recipe for success was that anyone that was entrusted to tap into NDP had to get commercial loan and if they get the loan, then the Ministry will provide the grant.

There was a lot of handholding, making sure that when they started off with the business at every step they were guided, they were mentored and that produced the results because they knew their money is also involved in the project. So, it was extremely successful in 2019. The success rate was about 84 percent which is very high and even this grant was not given just like that, it was disbursed based on what their needs are. If it needs to be paid to the supplier, then it is paid to the supplier, it was not given cash on hand.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I take my seat, I just want to go back in 2019, when the MITT report was being discussed in this Parliament the honourable Prime Minister then the leader of the Opposition and later SODELPA Leader, honourable Gavoka raised their concerns on PACER Plus. The question was Fiji had not signed the agreement while other Pacific Island countries has signed PACER Plus in 2017. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I request honourable Kamikamica to provide the position of the Coalition Government on this matter, so that we are clear on that. Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you, honourable Premila Kumar. I now offer the floor to the Deputy Prime Minister honourable Kamikamica.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I know it is getting on late in the evening so I will be as quick as I possibly can. As I rise to contribute to the Report into the Ministry of Industry Trade and Tourism 2018-2019 Annual Report, I thank the Committee for their contributions and recommendations.

We all agree, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism (MITT) as it was back then called and now it is somehow different because tourism has peeled away from the Ministry, but they have a pivotal role to play as a key driver, enabler, facilitator in creating a friendly business environment and creating investment opportunities in our country, stimulating SME growth co-operatives in Fiji which are very important to the People's Coalition. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the recommendations which have been discussed by the preceding speakers are helpful and instructive, and some of them, I would like to sort of touch on today.

So my discussion today, Mr. Speaker, Sir, will touch briefly on the report but try and provide a bit of a feel to the Members of the august Parliament, on where the Trade Ministry and the Communication Ministry is headed, going forward. In terms of the MSMEs, Mr. Speaker, Sir, right

now, as the Committee had recommended that a statutory body be considered. I think that is probably a journey that we will take as a Ministry, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Right now, from what we can see, there is a very good ecosystem already being developed in Fiji, Mr. Speaker, Sir and some of the key entities have been mentioned by respective parties here today; Business Assistance Fiji, by honourable Koroilavesau. The FDB, of course, MSME Fiji and there is also a tremendous level of accelerator programmes already evolving through private sector participation and that is one of the fundamental key things that we are trying to develop in this MSME ecosystem to try and encourage private sector to provide their support to the MSME sector.

You would have seen recently that Tappoos announced, and I was honoured to be at the ceremony that they were announcing that they support their own MSMEs in their business. That is quite a significant added contribution by the Tappoo Group. We thank them for that. And that, in itself, Mr. Speaker, Sir, will be an impetus for more activity and more opportunity for the MSMEs that are in that sector.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, BSP Life now has a training for entrepreneurs. There are about 25 women and men that they train every six months, and they are committed to do this over a period of five years. So, in a period of five years, 250 potential entrepreneurs and existing entrepreneurs will get expertise in that kind of training. Mr. Speaker, Sir, in terms of the MSME sector, yes, it is fundamental.

At the moment, it is only 18 percent of GDP according to statistics. We would like it to sit around 30 or 40 percent of GDP, but to do that, it requires building a comprehensive ecosystem that we are currently in the process of doing. In terms of the co-operatives, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are seeing good growth in co-operatives. In 2018-2019, there were about 371 co-operatives in existence. Now there is about 545, and it is growing. We will continue to use that as a means to stimulate the economic growth in our country and it is a fundamental part as well, Mr. Speaker, Sir, of the MSME ecosystem that is currently developing, and we hope to bring more direction to the Parliament next year.

In terms of the trade needed, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is one of the most important units in our Ministry and just very briefly, they have been involved in some very significant negotiations, the most recent of which was the IPAF negotiations which has been substantively concluded in San Francisco. The honourable Prime Minister was also in San Francisco to attend the first High Level Meeting in San Francisco.

It was initiated by the Fiji First Government, it will be a significant economic agreement for Fiji, Mr. Speaker, Sir. It represents 40 percent of the GDP in the world and there are 14 countries, and Fiji is there as the Small Island Developing State representative, and we expect to benefit quite significantly from that initiative.

Just very briefly, we talked about standards, and I agree with the sentiments raised about standards. Mr. Speaker, Sir, at the moment, I have convened a taskforce that is just looking at standards in the country. It is an inter-agency collaboration, and it is interesting that it came up through the recommendations of the Committee. And we are looking very closely at the creation of improved standards for Fiji, and it is something that we can work on going forward.

Finally, the question around the Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (PACER) Plus. I am happy to report that one of the reasons why we have been, if you like, slow on PACER Plus is basically, Mr. Speaker, Sir, our Trade Team which is only about four people who are totally immersed in the Inter Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) negotiations but we have very clearly

articulated to colleagues in New Zealand and Australia that now that the substantive negotiations are over that we will begin the engagement on PACER Plus with the view to coming up with the position next year.

In terms of PACER Plus, we all know that there are genuine concerns on the Fiji side and those will be looked at very carefully in terms of the overall position that we finally take PACER Plus.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the final comment I want to pick up from honourable Usamate was that he did mention - the need for KPIs, and that is something that we have been discussing in the Ministry as well. It will be worthwhile, for instance, to have good data on investment in Fiji.

We do not even have a hand on how much foreign direct investment or local direct investment we have in Fiji, depending on who you talk to we do not know what the number is. So that is an area that we are looking at. Those are some of the things that we can use to really measure how our economy is doing, how well it is doing and also the Ministry is also committing some resources into that endeavour.

With that short contribution, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank this opportunity to contribute very briefly. I have not spoken at length about the historical report but try to sprinkle the appetite with a little bit of forward thinking and I support the Report of the Committee.

MR. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs to speak in reply.

HON. S. TUBUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the honourable Members for their contribution on the Report. The comments were very valuable and, of course, very insightful. I hope that the comments would assist in improving the performance of the Ministry as they forge ahead in trying to deliver services to the people of this country.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, that brings us to the end of the agenda for the sitting today. I thank you all for your contributions. Parliament is now adjourned until tomorrow at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 7.54 p.m.

ANNEXURE I

Reply to Written Question No. 168/2023 tabled on Tuesday, 21st November, 2023 by the honourable Minister for Agriculture and Waterways (Ref. Page 2050)



Minister for Agriculture and Waterways (Hon. V.T.T.K Rayalu)

Response to the question by honourable S. Nand is as follows:

The Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways' five-year Strategic Development Plan (SDP) has five key Strategic Priority Areas. Strategic Priority Area 4 of the SDP aims to establish and improve commercial agriculture to accelerate the process in transitioning smallholder farmers to semi- commercial and commercial level.

The Ministry has registered 24,174 agricultural households in Fiji, who grow vegetables at subsistence, semi-commercial and commercial level. About 370 of those farmers are growing vegetables at commercial level, utilising a minimum 1 hectare of land.

The total number of commercial vegetable farmers in Fiji by Division is as follows:

- Central - 66 farmers (63 male and 3 female);
- Eastern - 13 farmers (9 male and 4 female);
- Northern - 10 farmers (9 male and 1 female); and
- Western - 281 farmers (272 male and 9 female).

In addition, it is worth noting that 44 percent of total commercial vegetable farmers are registered under the Bilateral Quarantine Agreement (BQA) - farmers who influence the export of fresh/chilled vegetables in Fiji.

Furthermore, 5 percent of commercial vegetable farmers in Fiji are female. The Western Division continues to dominate vegetable farming in Fiji, mainly from the salad bowl – Sigatoka, where 40 percent of commercial vegetable farmers are located.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways is assisting commercial vegetable farmers through the Commercial Agriculture Development Programme (CADP) and Commercial Farmers Equity Package (CFEP). These Programmes are designed to specifically address targeted outcomes of Strategic Priority Area 4 of the SDP.

The CADP encompasses component of the existing Demand Driven Approach (DDA) Programme, Food Security Programme (FSP), Export Promotion Programme (EPP) and Rural and Outer Island (ROI) Programme. The CADP for vegetable farmers will provide borehole assistance for irrigation to farmers during the dry season in the Western and Central Divisions, while scoping has been done for the Northern Division, to be implemented in the next financial year.

The CFEP directly supports commercial farmers to improve their capacity to expand production through the provision of loan equity in partnership with the Fiji Development Bank (FDB). Moreover, the assistance is to inspire existing local commercial farmers to acquire financial

support outside Government, that will modernise their agriculture production.

In addition, the Ministry has other capital programmes which support commercial vegetable farming through the following:

- (1) Highland Farming Programme
Focuses on the highlands of Western Division (Sigatoka, Nadarivatu and Saivou in the Ra Province). This Programme includes provision of planting materials, infrastructure development (land clearing, construction of drains), protective structures, crates and small farm equipment (irrigation kit and rototiller).
- (2) Agriculture Extension Services
Provides farm support on supply of vegetable seeds.
- (3) Farm Mechanisation Programme
Purchase of machines (tractor and digger and rice harvester) on one-third and two-third basis where the farmer contributes one-third of the total cost and the Ministry contributes two-third.
- (4) Small Farming Equipment
The supply of small farming equipment on one-third and two-third basis (mini rototiller, power tiller, dryers and portable value adding machines).

The Ministry will assist commercial vegetable farmers in Fiji through the following measures:

- (1) Research and Development Support
The Ministry has allocated funds for research and development initiatives focused on improving vegetable varieties, pest and disease management, and sustainable farming practices. This has been done through establishing partnerships with agricultural research institutions to facilitate the transfer of technology and knowledge to farmers.
- (2) Training and Extension Services
The Ministry organizes training programs and workshops to educate farmers on modern and efficient farming techniques, including crop rotation, irrigation methods, and organic farming practices. The Ministry also strengthens its extension services to provide timely information and advice to farmers on best practices, market trends, and weather forecasts.
- (3) Infrastructure Development
The Ministry has invested in rural infrastructure such as farm access roads, irrigation systems, and storage facilities to enhance the overall efficiency of the supply chain and reduce post-harvest losses in vegetable farming. The Ministry also supports the establishment of farmers' cooperatives to improve collective bargaining power and facilitate the sharing of resources and knowledge.
- (4) Market Access and Linkages
The Ministry facilitates the creation of market linkages and diversification between farmers and agribusinesses, supermarkets, tourism sector and export markets. For instance, large scale maize production is currently being discussed to replace wheat imports for livestock feed reducing our import bill.

(5) Data Collection and Analysis

The Ministry has a comprehensive database on vegetable production, market price, and market trends to aid in informed decision-making and policy formulation. With the use of data analytics helps to identify emerging challenges and opportunities in the vegetable farming sector and tailor support programs accordingly.

(6) Promotion of Value-Added Products

The Ministry encourages the development of value-added products from vegetables, such as processing facilities for canning, drying, or freezing, to enhance the income of farmers and promote economic diversification.

(7) Environmental Conservation

The Ministry promotes sustainable farming practices that focus on soil conservation, water management, and biodiversity preservation to ensure the long-term viability of commercial vegetable farming.

In conclusion, by addressing these areas, the Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways can significantly assist farmers and contribute to the success sustainability of commercial vegetable farming, fostering economic growth and food security.

ANNEXURE II

Reply to Written Question No. 169/2023 tabled on Tuesday, 21st November, 2023 by the honourable Minister for Agriculture and Waterways (Ref. Page 2050)



Minister for Agriculture and Waterways (Hon. V.T.T.K Rayalu)

Response to the question by honourable S. Nand is as follows:

The Ministry implemented cost sharing programmes to facilitate the transition of the sector from previous level of production to a fully fledged commercial production system by improving access to means of implementation. This evolution will boost foreign exchange earnings further, promoting the expansion of commercial agriculture in the country.

For the 2022-2023 financial year, the assistance provided directly to farmers will increase food production and levels of food security thus create market opportunities and improve livelihood, respectively.

The support provided was divided into two categories to facilitate equal opportunities to farmers based on their level of production and progress - for individuals who have never received Ministry of Agriculture assistance before and for those who have been assisted in the past and have progressed well.

In the cost sharing arrangement, each party contributes a portion of the total cost, which includes direct costs like materials, labour, agro-inputs and indirect costs such as administration and salaries.

Cost sharing is an effective way to cushion financial burdens and risks among multiple stakeholders, fostering collaboration on shared responsibility for achieving the primary goal, which is production in this context.

- (a) During the 2022-2023 financial year, the Ministry had 16 cost-sharing programmes and have assisted more than 989 farmers, as illustrated in the table below.

No.	Programme	Total Number of Farmers Assisted
1	Poultry & Poultry Extension Programme	142
2	Animal Waste Management Programme	23
3	Sheep Extension Programme	131
4	Beef Extension Programme	37
5	Goat Extension Programme	138
6	Dairy Extension Programme	45
7	Dairy Development Programme	232
8	Apiculture	1
9	Small Farming Equipment	129
10	Agro-Processor Infrastructure Support	15
11	Commercial Yaqona Farming equipment	34

12	Purchase of Digger	5
13	Purchase of Rice Harvester	9
14	Purchase of Tractor	25
15	Commercial Farmers Equity Package	8
16	Land Preparation Facility	15
	Total	989

- (b) Tabulated below is the breakdown of the cost-sharing programmes in each activity and Division.

No.	Programme	Activities (Include commodity)	No. of Farmers Assisted	Division	MOA Contribution	Farmers Contribution
1	Poultry Extension	Poultry Shed Initiative	81	West – 33 North – 30 Central – 16 Eastern – 2	Up to \$2,500 worth of Shed Material.	Labour and Construction
		Broiler Package Initiative	10	West – 3 North – 2 Central – 3 Eastern – 2	Up to \$3,500 worth of package (shed material, chicks, feed & feed equipment)	Labour and Construction
		Layer Package Initiative	5	West – 1 North – 1 Central – 2 Eastern – 1	Up to \$3,550 worth of package (chicks, feed, A-frame case and feeder/drinker)	Labour and Construction
2	Pig Extension Programme	Pig Pan Initiative	23	West – 7 North – 5 Central – 4 Eastern – ?	Up to \$6,000 worth of Shed Material, Water Tank.	Labour and Construction
3	Animal Waste Management Programme	Biogas Digesters	23	West – 6 North – 5 Central – 7 Eastern – 4	Up to \$4,500 worth of portable biogas digester.	Labour, water, animal manure and set up of base site for installation and area of security
4	Sheep Extension Programme	Sheep Fencing Kit	101	West – 61 North – 37 Central – 2 Eastern – 1	Up to \$2,500 worth of Fencing Material.	Labour and Construction
		Sheep Shed	30	West – 15 North – 10 Central – 3 Eastern – 2	Up to \$6,000 worth of materials.	Flooring, Labour and Construction
5	Beef Extension Programme	Stockyard	10	West – 4 North – 2 Central – 3 Eastern – 1	Up to \$7,500 worth of materials.	Labour and Construction

		Fencing Kit	27	West – 13 North – 6 Central – 7 Eastern – 1	Up to \$1,500 worth of materials.	Labour and Construction
6	Goat Extension Programme	Goat Fencing Kit	90	West – 58 North – 26 Central – 5 Eastern – 1	Up to \$2,500 worth of fencing material.	Labour and Construction
		Goat Shed	26	West – 8 North – 15 Central – 2 Eastern – 1	Up to \$9,000 worth of materials.	Labour and Construction
		Goat Rearing	22	West – 16 North – 5 Central – 1	Up to \$10,300 worth of shed and fencing materials.	Labour and Construction
7	Apiculture	Honey Processing Equipment	1	West - 1	\$47,290.95	Labour and Construction
8	Dairy Extension Programme	Dairy Shed Construction	25	West – 6 North – 2 Central – 17	\$250,000	Labour and Construction
		National Certificate in Dairy Level 2	20	West – 2 Central – 19	\$16,000	Farmers to attend training sessions.
9	Small Farming Equipment	Purchase of power tillers, hand rotavator, yaqona pounding machine & dryer	129	West – 17 North – 24 Central – 18 Eastern – 3	The Ministry provides 2/3 of the total cost.	Farmer provides 1/3 of the total cost.
10	Agro-Processor Infrastructure Support	Infrastructure Development, Machinery Equipment	11	West – 2 North – 5 Central – 4	The Ministry provides assistance up to a maximum of \$10,000.	Farmer will provide 1/3 of the total.
11	Commercial Yaqona Farming Equipment	Infrastructure and Equipment	34	West – 3 North – 11 Central – 9 Eastern – 11	The Ministry provides assistance up to \$5,000.	Farmer will provide \$1,200, labour cost and pounding shed.
12	Purchase of Digger	Provision of Digger	5	Western – 2 Central – 3	The Ministry contributes 2/3 of the cost - \$83,333.35.	The Co-operative provides 1/3 of the cost - \$41,666.65.
13	Purchase of Rice Harvester	Provision of Rice Harvester	9	Northern – 8 Western – 1	The Ministry contributes 2/3 of the cost - \$33,266.67.	The Co-operatives provide 1/3 of the cost - \$16,633.33.
14	Purchase of Tractor	Provision of Tractor	25	West – 11 North – 5 Central – 9	The Ministry contributes 2/3	The Co-operatives provide 1/3 of

					of the cost - \$31,080.	the cost - \$15,540.
15	Commercial Farmers Equity Package	Provision of equity payment to Fiji Development Bank.	8	West – 4 North – 3 Central – 1	The Ministry assists farmers applicants through different categories ranging from one to eight with their equity package.	The farmer will be submitting payments to FDB.
16	Land Preparation Facility	Clearing of land	15	West – 3 North – 5 Central – 7	The Ministry provides 9/10 of the total cost.	Farmer will provide 1/10 of the cost.

Source: Crop Development & Extension Services Division and the Animal Health Division.

Furthermore, the Ministry has also implemented cost-sharing activities with Fiji Dairy Co-operative Limited through the Dairy Development Grant. Activities include:

- Milk Cartage Smallholder Farms
- Calf Fee Support
- Calf Milk Replacer
- Dairy Mesh Support
- Pasture/Fodder Seeds

Breakdown of cost-sharing activity is attached as Annex 1.

- (c) In the 2023-2024 financial year, the Ministry will assist more than 846 farmers on cost-sharing programmes. These Programmes include:

Crop Extension Division

Programme	Number of Farmers Assisted		
Small Farming Equipment	72		
Farm Mechanisation	44		
Fertilizer Subsidy	300		
Outsourcing	No.	Tractor HP	Hourly Rate (\$)
	1	45 HP – 64 HP	60.00
	2	65 HP – 75 HP	75.00
	3	>75 HP	80.00
	Digger		
	4	6 tonne – 7.5 tonne	80.00
	5	8 tonne – 10 tonne	100.00
	6	>10 tonne	120.00
	Bulldozer		
	7	D4	120.00
	8	D6	170.00
Land Preparation	111 farmers will be assisted through the Land Preparation Programme. Through the criteria of the Programme, farmers will need to pay 1/10 of the total cost.		

Animal Health and Production Division

Programme	Number of Farmers Assisted
Poultry Extension	29
Pig Extension	11
Animal Waste Management Programme	24
Sheep Extension Programme	32
Beef Extension Programme	48
Goat Extension Programme	39
Dairy Extension Programme	115
Apiculture	5
Total	246

Programme	Number of Farmers Assisted
Commercial Agriculture Development Programme (Exporters & Agro Processors)	13
Commercial Farmers Equity Package	3
Total	26

To ensure that all farmers get access to these cost-sharing assistance, the Ministry will be publishing Expression of Interest (EOI) forms and will be shared to respective Agriculture geographical Office. Each programme will have its criteria and package of assistance.

Fiji Co-operative Dairy Company Limited

FIJI CO-OPERATIVE DAIRY COMPANY LIMITED – DAIRY DEVELOPMENT GRANT \$1,200,000 VIP [2022-2023]		
Utilization 2022	Total	Remarks
Project Activities	2022-2023	Year
VAT Payment		
Payment to FRCS	\$92,460.53	Paid to FRCS
Total	\$92,460.53	
Milk Cartage Small Holder Farms		
Farmers \$0.04 contribution	\$144,000.00	Farmers contribution in cartage reimbursed to farmers.
FCDCL contribution to contractors	\$583,078.68	Government paid cartage of farm gate milk.
Total	\$727,078.58	Total Expenditure by Government on cartage.
Calf Feed Support		
Calf Feed Grower	\$35,870.00	3,000 bags support to farmers 1/3 paid by Government.
Total	\$35,870.00	Paid by farmers.
Calf Milk Replacer		
CMR	\$128,400.00	\$150 per bag paid by Government. \$85 paid by farmers. 856 bags subsidy to farmers.
Total	\$128,400.00	
Dairy Mesh Support		

Dairy Mesh	\$63,600.00	6,000 (farmer dairy mesh subsidy) – 1/3 by Government and 2/3 by the farmers.
Total	\$63,600.00	
Pasture/Fodder Seeds		
Seeds	\$32,390.79	1/3 by Government and 2/3 by the farmers.
Total	\$32,390.79	
Dairy Advisory Officers		
Four Officers	\$80,200.00	Full government paid FCDCL to cater for other operational expenses and safety.
Total	\$80,200.00	
Infrastructure Improvement	\$40,000.00	Upgrade feed loading area.
Total	\$40,000.00	
Grand Total	\$1,200,000.00	

ANNEXURE III

Reply to Written Question No. 170/2023 tabled on Tuesday, 21st November, 2023 by the honourable Minister for Fisheries and Forestry (Ref. Page 2051)



Minister for Fisheries and Forestry (Hon. K.V. Ravu)

Response to the question by honourable J.R. Vocea is as follows:

- (a) The Ministry of Fisheries and Forestry currently has a vast and wide footprint in our four geographical Divisions. Ice plants have been very beneficial to our rural communities in recent years and have greatly assisted the development of subsistence fishers to small scale artisanal fishers in providing the infrastructure necessary for preserving and maintaining the quality of fish products, enabling coastal communities to participate more effectively in the fisheries industry and enhancing their economic wellbeing.

According to the latest 2021-2022 Annual Report tabled in 2023, the Ministry has 32 Fisheries Stations all over Fiji. Of these 32 Fisheries Service Centres, the Ministry also has 24 Ice Plants. Listed below are the 24 Fisheries Service Centres that have ice plants.

Service Centre Locality	Facility	Status
Central Division		
Wainibokasi Fisheries Service Centre	Ice Plant	Operational
Navua Fisheries Service Centre	Ice Plant	Operational
Western Division		
Sigatoka Fisheries Service Centre	Ice Plant	Operational
Lautoka Fisheries Service Centre	Ice Plant	Operational
Ba Fisheries Service Centre	Ice Plant	Operational
Rakiraki Fisheries Service Centre	Ice Plant	Operational
Namarai Rural Fisheries Service Centre	Ice Plant	Operational
Eastern Division		
Vunisea Rural Fisheries Service Centre	Ice Plant	Operational
Kavala Rural Fisheries Service Centre	Ice Plant	Operational
Gau Fisheries Service Centre	Ice Plant	Operational
Lakeba Fisheries Service Centre	Ice Plant	Operational
Vanuabalavu Fisheries Service Centre	Ice Plant	Operational
Moala Fisheries Service Centre	Ice Plant	Operational
Levuka Fisheries Service Centre	Ice Plant	Operational
Rotuma Fisheries Service Centre	Ice Plant	Operational
Northern Division		
Kubulau Fisheries Service Centre	Ice Plant	Operational
Nabouwalu Fisheries Service Centre	Ice Plant	Operational
Lekutu Fisheries Service Centre	Ice Plant	Operational
Labasa Fisheries Service Centre	Ice Plant	Operational
Wainikoro Rural Fisheries Service Centre	Ice Plant	Operational
Savusavu Fisheries Service Centre	Ice Plant	Operational
Rabi Fisheries Service Centre	Ice Plant	Operational

Since 2014 to 2022, the Ministry of Fisheries and Forestry have established four additional Ice Plants as outlined below:

Service Centre Locality	Status	Year Established	Total Budget
Kubulau Fisheries Service Centre	Operational	2018	\$1,600,000
Rotuma Fisheries Service Centre	Operational	2017	\$1,700,000
Moala Fisheries Service Centre	Operational	2019	\$852,930
Cicia Fisheries Service Centre	Operational	2019	\$852,930

- (b) The Ministry of Fisheries and Forestry has plans of establishing one ice plant for the 2023-2024 financial year. Government has allocated \$900,000 of funding for a Fisheries Service Centre, Ice Plant and Staff Quarters in Navaga, Koro Island, in the Province of Lomaiviti. Requisition to Incur Expenditure proposal has been approved the Ministry of Finance for project implementation.

Also included in this 2023-2024 financial year's budget is the development of groundwork and site assessment for the establishment of a Fisheries Service Centre, Ice Plant and Staff Quarters for the next financial year. This Fisheries Service Centre is earmarked to be established in Cawaro, Udu, in the Province of Macuata. This is expected to be progressed at the middle of the 2nd quarter of this financial year.

The Ministry of Fisheries and Forestry would like to acknowledge the Overseas Fishery Cooperation Foundation of Japan for assisting the Ministry through its funding for procurement of ice machines and the guidance of technical specialists that assisted in the setup and maintenance of ice machines.

ANNEXURE IV

Reply to Written Question No. 171/2023 tabled on Tuesday, 21st November, 2023 by the honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Justice (Ref. Page 2051)



Attorney-General and Minister for Justice (Hon. S.D. Turaga)

In response to the question asked by honourable L.S. Qereqeretabua, the following is a breakdown of the status of the judicial positions in Fiji:

- (a) Supreme Court
Currently, there are 16 appointed Sitting Judges in the Supreme Court Panel, who are appointed on an *ad hoc* basis.
- (b) Court of Appeal
In the Court of Appeal, Hon. Mr. Justice Filimoni Jitoko is the President Justice of Appeal while Hon. Mr. Justice Prematilaka and Hon. Mr. Justice Mataitoga each hold the position of Resident Justice of Appeal.
- (c) High Court
As of date, there are 25 approved Judges positions, inclusive of the position of the Chief Justice. Of these 25 positions, 23 have been filled and two positions remain vacant.

Prior to September 2023, 21 Judges positions were vacant. In 2023, eight local Judges were appointed with four of the appointees currently holding acting positions. As of date, three Judges have either resigned or completed the duration of their contracts.

The Western Division comprises three Civil Judges namely; Hon. Mr. Justice Lyone Seneviratne, Hon. Mr. Justice Anare Tuilevuka and Hon. Mr. Justice Mohammed Mackie. There are three Criminal Judges in the Western Division namely; Hon. Mr. Justice Riyaz Hamza, Hon. Mr. Justice Sunil Sharma and Hon. Mr. Justice Aruna Aluthge. There is also one Master of the High Court who is based in Lautoka.