

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

WEDNESDAY, 17TH APRIL, 2024

[CORRECTED COPY]

CONTENTS

	<u>Pages</u>
Minutes	428
Communications from the Speaker	428-429
(1) Welcome	
(2) Words of Gratitude – Deputy Speaker and Members	
(3) Chamber Electronic System	
(4) Written Question No. 29/2024	
(5) Shipbuilding Industry – SVT Government	
Presentation of Reports of Committee	429-432
(1) Review Report – Fiji National Sports Commission 2020-2022 Annual Reports	
(2) Review Report – Ministry of Sugar Industry 2016-2020 Annual Reports	
(3) Review Report – Parliament of the Republic of Fiji 2018-2019 Annual Report	
Ministerial Statements	432-453
(1) COP 28 and Climate Change – Hon. S.L. Rabuka	
(2) Fiji’s Engagement at the 13 th WTO Ministerial Conference – Hon. M.S.N. Kamikamica	
(3) Fiji National E-Commerce Strategy - Hon. M.S.N. Kamikamica	
(4) Naleba Youth Training Centre Fire Incident – Hon. J. Saukuru	
(5) Wood Utilisation Project – Hon. K.V. Ravu	
Questions	453-467,469-481
<u>Oral Questions</u>	
(1) Fiji Airways’ Charter Policies and Procedures (Q/No. 20/2024)	
(2) Revival of the Rural Housing Programme (Q/No. 21/2024)	
(3) Measures to Combat Increase in HIV Cases (Q/No. 22/2024)	
(4) Mining and Land Use Policies (Q/No. 23/2024)	
(5) Plans to Improve Team Fiji in the Pacific Games (Q/No. 24/2024)	
(6) New and Innovative Approach for MSME Businesses (Q/No. 25/2024)	
(7) Selection Criteria - Appointment of Special Administrators (Q/No. 26/2024)	
(8) Workers’ Complaints and Labour Inspection Cases (Q/No. 27/2024)	
<u>Written Question</u>	
(1) Immigration Laws and Policy (Q/No. 19/2024)	
Suspension of Standing Orders	468
Review Report – National Fire Authority 2016 Annual Report	481-489
Review Report –Fiji Financial Intelligence Unit 2021-2022 Annual Report	490-495
Review Report – Ministry of Agriculture 2018-2019 Annual Report	496-502

WEDNESDAY, 17TH APRIL, 2024

The Parliament met at 9.42 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

MR. SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Members were present, except the honourable F.S. Koya, the honourable T.R. Matasawalevu, honourable V. Nath and honourable J. Usamate.

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Tuesday, 16th April, 2024, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE SPEAKER

Welcome

I welcome all honourable Members to today's sitting and all those joining us in the public gallery and those watching the proceedings on television and internet. Thank you for taking an interest in the workings of your Parliament.

Words of Gratitude – Deputy Speaker and Members

Also, I would like to thank the honourable Deputy Speaker for holding the fort whilst I have been subjected to medical test yesterday. I heard when sitting in the office that the sitting in of the Deputy Speaker and your participation, honourable Members, all went well. I thank each and every one of you for that and also, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Chamber Electronic System

Honourable Members, you are kindly requested to refrain from or avoid moving your Chamber Bosch System Cards. These are the ones on your electronic system that you have there with you. Over the last two days, the ICT team experienced some disruptions to the control system and the Technicians had advised that it was caused by the card movement. That was quite similar to when we came in in 2014, we even took the card out. We were then advised, again, by my predecessor, "No, you don't take the card out, you leave it as it is, otherwise it will not work." So, honourable Members, please, could you leave the card where it is. As soon as you touch it, it shuts down that particular unit with the control system at the top there.

The other complication that can arise is that microphones of Members of Parliament will be disconnected from the main central control unit where all microphones are connected and controlled.

A Member will not be able to register a vote and he/she will be registered as absent, as the card will not be recognised in the system. So, please, honourable Members, I trust that we will take heed of this advice.

Written Question No. 29/2024

For the information of honourable Members, Written Question No. 29/2024 by honourable Sashi Kiran will be dropped from the Order Paper as the honourable Minister for Agriculture and Waterways had provided a substantive response during his Ministerial Statement on Monday this week.

Shipbuilding Industry – SVT Government

I would just like to reflect a bit on the issue that was raised by the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-operatives, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications in response to a statement that was made by the honourable Leader of the Opposition yesterday regarding the shipbuilding industry and what transpired after that.

For the information of Parliament and honourable Members especially, I happened to be around as a Member of Parliament then. The then Minister of Finance, James Ah Koy, had tried to balance the books of the Government. In so doing, the Government with the leadership of the honourable Prime Minister under the SVT Government, had worked on a plan to try and balance the books and in so doing, they sold off existing assets of the Government and this included shipbuilding.

When we came back into power and the books were balanced, they were finally balanced, that was an achievement. But, again, sitting here, I am hearing you talking about \$10 billion, et cetera, but when we tried to balance the books, it is a bit of a long story. For this one here, it is totally different from when the honourable Prime Minister was leading the Government then. That is the great story about that.

It was not SVT Government that killed the shipping industry, even though I was tasked to revive the shipbuilding industry when I came back as Minister for Transport after serving time in prison. We managed to begin that huge task of trying to find the people who were highly experienced in the shipbuilding industry and most of them had gone abroad, seeking better opportunities, working in shipbuilding industries in Australia and New Zealand. So that is the story of what was raised by honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-operatives, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications to something that was referred.

We have checked the *Daily Hansard* and, again, nothing sinister was said by the honourable Leader of the Opposition to indicate that the SVT Government caused that. No, it was an exercise done by the SVT Government to balance their books.

PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

Review Report – Fiji National Sports Commission 2020-2022 Annual Reports

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to present the Report of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs on the annual review of the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 Annual Reports of the Fiji National Sports Commission. This review was undertaken in accordance with Standing Order 109(2)(b), which mandates the Committee to investigate matters related to health, education, social services, labour, culture and media.

The Committee with its thorough inquiry and deliberation, was able to fulfil its mandate and report back on its findings to Parliament. Although the years under review were hampered with the presence of COVID-19, this did not impact the work of the Commission in delivering its services to every citizen to actively participate in sports and physical activity. The Committee was grateful that during these years, sports development continued to be improved for our youth and communities and also for the welfare of our players.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, although the annual reviews were from 2020 to 2022, the Committee acknowledged the current data and information provided by the stakeholders. This assisted the Committee in its review. Therefore, I commend the work that is being carried out by the Fiji National Sports Commission (FNSC) and extend my deepest gratitude to the Executive Chairman, Mr. Peter Maze and his staff, for their timely assistance in this review process.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs; honourable Ratu Rakuita Vakalalabure, honourable Parveen Bala, honourable Viam Pillay, honourable Aseri Radrodoro and a former member of the Committee, honourable Sashi Kiran, for their valuable input and support. May I also thank the Committee Clerks who have served and assisted the Committee for the past 14 months - Marica, Leba, Tevita, Lia and Susana. Thank you very much for your hard work and commitment. I would also like to thank honourable Ketan Lal and honourable Penioni Ravunawa for their assistance during several occasions, serving as Alternate Members for the Standing Committee.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, 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 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 the 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 - Ministry of Sugar Industry 2016-2020 Annual Reports

HON. S. TUBUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs is pleased to submit to Parliament the Consolidated Review Report of the Ministry of Sugar Industry 2016-2017, 2017-2018, 2018-2019, 2019-2020 Annual Reports.

The Committee conducted a site visit to the Western and Northern Divisions late last year and earlier this year, to gain a better understanding of the current practices of the Sugar Industry. The Committee also heard submissions from Officials of the Ministry of Sugar Industry.

The Committee was made aware of the various challenges that the Ministry has been facing which include acute shortage of labour, aging infrastructure and abandonment of farms, amongst many other reasons. The Committee noted that the Annual Reports presented by the Ministry of Sugar Industry lacked essential data during the period under review, which would have enabled the

Committee to make more informed recommendations.

The Committee further noted the various programmes introduced by the Ministry of Sugar Industry to assist sugarcane farmers, such as Sugarcane Development and Farmers Assistance, weedicide and fertilizer subsidy, cane access roads, mechanical harvesters, grants to new farmers and cane cartage grant. While discussing the Reports, the Committee noted that transporting cane through rails would be far more cost effective than through trucks which required more fuel. It would also relieve road congestion and damage caused by cane trucks.

While the Committee was satisfied with the Annual Reports during the period under review, it noted that there were areas that can be improved through more enhanced coordination, commitment, and accountability of all stakeholders. At this juncture, I would like to extend our appreciation to all the stakeholders for their valuable input.

Finally, I would like to thank our Committee Members who were part of the team that produced this Report - Deputy Chairperson, honourable Sashi Kiran, honourable Tomasi N. Tunabuna, honourable Premila D. Kumar and honourable Semi T. Koroilavesau.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, I commend the Ministry of Sugar Industry 2016-2017, 2017-2018, 2018-2019, 2019-2020 Review Reports to Parliament.

(Report handed to Secretary-General)

HON. S. TUBUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move a motion without notice:

That the debate on the content of the Report is initiated at a future sitting.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

Review Report - Parliament of the Republic of Fiji 2018-2019 Annual Report

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to present to Parliament the Review Report of the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji Annual Report 2018-2019.

Pursuant to Standing Order 38(2) of the Standing Orders of Parliament, the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights was referred the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji Annual Report 2018-2019 on 14th July of last year. This Report captures the review findings and recommendations of the Committee with respect to the Department's Annual Report.

The Committee noted six key findings from its review which are as follows, the:

1. High staff turnover in comparison from 2018-2019 to-date.
2. Low budget allocation for the reported year which, in turn, constraints parliamentary work.
3. Lack of awareness of the powers and authority of Parliament and its Committees by civil servants.
4. Lack of full digitisation of its Committees.

5. Significant number of Bills stated for the reported year that stands at 88.5 percent and as a comparative, 99 percent for the year 2023 that were enacted under Standing Order 51.
6. Parliament has considered the inclusive participation of communities at all levels through the medium of broadcasting, and further notes the lack of information supplied with respect to gender composition within the two divisions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, those were some of the key findings that the Committee noted in its review. I, therefore, would like to highlight some of the recommendations that the Committee had agreed to unanimously:

1. The Committee recommends the timely submission of Annual Reports.
2. The Committee recommends that a Job Evaluation Exercise (JEE) be conducted for the Department, given that the last JEE was conducted in the reported year.
3. The Committee recommends the upgrading of IT systems and full digitisation of Committee sittings.
4. The Committee recommends that Standing Orders be amended to review the use of Standing Order 51 by referring it to a specific sub-committee.
5. The Committee recommends that the Department ensures there is a formal SDG compliant component in all future reports.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as mandated by the provision of the Standing Orders of Parliament, those were some of the recommendations that the Committee had sought following its review.

I would like to commend the Members of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights. In that regard, Sir, on behalf of the Standing Committee, I commend the Committee's Report on the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji 2018-2019 Annual Report to Parliament and seek the support of all Members to take note of the recommendations by the Committee.

(Report handed to Secretary-General)

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move a motion without notice:

That the debate on the content of the Report is initiated at a future sitting.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

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

1. Honourable Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Climate Change, Environment, Civil Service, Information, Public Enterprises and Veteran Affairs;
2. Honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-operative, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications;
3. Honourable Minister for Youths and Sports; and
4. Honourable Minister for Fisheries and Forestry.

Ministers may speak up to 20 minutes and after the Minister, we will then invite the Leader of the Opposition or his designate, to speak on the Statement for no more than five minutes. There will be no other debate.

I now call on the Prime minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Climate Change, Environment, Civil Service, Information, Public Enterprises and Veteran Affairs to deliver his Statement.

COP 28 and Climate Change

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, it is good to see you back. You were very capably replaced by your Deputy Speaker yesterday. While we enjoyed her presidency of the meeting, we also prayed for your good recovery.

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you.

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- I welcome all honourable Members this morning - the honourable Deputy Prime Ministers, honourable Ministers and Assistant Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition and Members of the Opposition, as well as ladies and gentlemen in the gallery and ladies and gentlemen who may be watching us on the livestreaming of our procedures in Parliament. Sir, we also wish our Hindu brothers and sisters a very meaningful and happy *Rama Navami* celebration today.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to deliver this Ministerial Statement on the proceedings of the 28th Conference of Parties, otherwise known as COP 28, held in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

The Statement will elaborate on the following:

1. the outcomes of the Conference of Parties (COP 28) Meeting;
2. reflect on global progress in responding to climate change; and
3. outline directions and priorities on climate change in Fiji.

On the Overall State of Play – Towards a Region of Peace, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as Prime Minister and Minister for Environment and Climate Change, I remain very concerned at the scale of the effects of climate challenge that we face and the existential threat it poses to the wellbeing of our nation and the region.

As we have seen and experienced, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the seasonal patterns our ancestors lived by are very quickly shifting. From more frequent and extreme rainfall events to unseasonable droughts, intensified cyclones and higher average temperatures, the challenges and changes are disorienting for the island population for the Blue Pacific.

At the same time, we experience different localised permutations of climate threat, depending on where we are, how we live, and what we depend on. What is constant in this complexity of crisis is that the collective effort of Pacific Leaders to build unity and mobilise action to protect our collective future.

While we can rely on this unity in the Pacific, unfortunately, in many cases, this is an exception to the rule. Looking further afield and reading beyond the political rhetoric, it is clear that global cooperation is faltering at a time when we need it most.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, geopolitical rivalry remains a core driver of many interests. Rather than find motivation and common purpose to -combat the shared suffering of the climate crisis; combat the staggering loss of biodiversity we are experiencing; or commit a realistic and equitable share of international capacity and resources to reduce damage to livelihoods, many large economies remain focussed on short-term gain and inter and intra-regional competitions. We are experiencing some of those right now, and this is why we continue to bring attention to the broad concept of peace and security, which must underpin our regional and global vision.

Rivalry and disunity is undermining efforts to address climate change at the scale that is required. So, when it comes to concepts of peace and security, and the need for our region to share these aspirations, I speak to issues of geopolitics and climate change as one and the same.

On the Mitigation and Global Stocktake, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as you have heard in Dubai, the world is not on track to keep global average temperature rise to below 1.5 degrees Celsius. Keeping global temperature rise below 1.5 degrees is not a political objective, or by perspectives or preferences, instead, it is a guardrail identified by thousands of leading scientists and is the threshold beyond which life on earth changes dramatically.

In the Pacific, the difference between 1.5 degrees and 2.0 degrees or 3.0 degrees is the difference between habitability of our island homes and forced migration. It is the difference between catching your own fish and growing your own family's food or being wholly dependent on imported protein. It is the difference between economic sovereignty and fully fledged dependence on external aid and disaster relief.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the difference between 1.5 degrees, and 2.0 degrees or 3.0 degrees Celsius is a distinction that involves great consequences for all people in all regions, not just for our people in the Pacific. However, here in the Pacific, the difference is not subtle - the difference is a knife edge.

The Pacific must continue to present the voice of pragmatism and influence to those who appear increasingly committed to disunity and ultimately, self-harm.

Last year's 28th Annual Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) (COP 28) convened from 28th November, 2023 to 13th December, 2023 in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, COP 28 was mandated to reflect on progress made since the Paris Agreement agreed in 2015 (COP 21) - seven years prior to that. The final decision text agreed upon in Dubai, which is referred to as the *UAE Consensus*, documents the lack of progress made to-date.

It is also the first decision, Mr. Speaker, Sir, text agreed upon in the 28 years of these gatherings that makes explicit reference to fossil fuels and introduces a global commitment to transition away from fossil fuels.

While there are few large economies that continue to push against this transition, many are working hard to embrace it and there is increasing potential in the uptake of renewable energy globally.

Mr. Speaker, to ramp up our own efforts to decarbonise our economy, we need to be clear on why we are pursuing decarbonization in Fiji. With our minimal contribution to global emissions, our reasoning is more about economic benefits of this transition.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as you know, Fiji is heavily dependent on imported fossil fuels and as such, we are exposed to the increasing oil price volatility that we see annually. The price of oil impacts all aspects of our daily lives. It is felt across our value chains, at the shops and markets, in our daily purchases, in our transport systems and our whole economy. In fact, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it drives our inflation and the high cost of living. While we must be practical about how and where renewal alternatives will be viable, we know that there is huge benefit that is largely untapped.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we must be pragmatic when it comes to decarbonization. We must focus on transitioning energy systems in ways that build resilience and increase economic independence. Whether it is landowners (either *iTaukei* or freehold) releasing their land to host solar arrays to power communities, or electric buses that reduce emissions and increase public transport uptake, or strategic investments into locally produced biofuels, we must be open to these opportunities.

At COP 28, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we signed the Global Renewable and Energy Efficiency Pledge, to triple the world's installed renewable energy by 2030, which involves a further commitment to collectively double global average energy efficiency improvements every year until 2030. We hope Fiji can benefit from this global pledge.

On Loss and Damage, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for our people, struggling with flood waters and rising fuel costs, we must continue to bring attention to the loss and damage we already are experiencing. At COP 28, a major headline was the agreement on the operationalization of the new Loss and Damage Fund agreed to at COP 27. Fiji and the Pacific nations engaged in a 12 months negotiation process through the Transitional Committee to design the governing instrument of this new Fund in 2023.

Our collaborative work with our Pacific Small Islands Developing States (PSIDS) family led to Fiji's inclusion as a member of the new Loss and Damage Board. What Fiji brings to this process is our experience with the limits of adaptation which we are actively facing daily in Fiji.

At the national level, following endorsement of the Standard Operating Procedures for Planned Relocation last year, we are moving forward with the relocation of Nabavatu community. We had a question raised yesterday on that.

On Adaptation, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we signed our additional pledges and declarations at COP 28 and these are:

- The COP28 Declaration on Climate and Health.
- The Climate Relief, Recovery and Peace Declaration.
- The Gender Response, Just Transition and Climate Action Declaration.
- The UAE Declaration on Sustainable Agriculture, Resilient Food Systems and Climate Action.

We will follow up on opportunities for these pledges to translate into tangible benefits for vulnerable Small Island Developing States.

Following COP 28, it is clear that irrespective of support and opportunities that exist, Government must take the lead in ramping up domestic adaptation efforts. This means developing more robust and larger scale climate financing proposals and engaging effectively to support our access to finance.

On the Overarching Priorities into 2024, with those in mind, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government will accelerate adaptation programme to build resilience and create a prosperous future for our

communities.

In addition, for the rest of 2024, we will focus on the following priorities on the domestic front:

1. Delivering against the Strategic Implementation Roadmap for Fiji's Climate Change Act to increase collaboration across sectors and better coordinate efforts.
2. Increasing access to financing through the new Loss and Damage Fund; the new Pacific Resilience Facility; and other international climate finance mechanisms.
3. Engaging effectively in global negotiations on the new quantified collective goal for climate finance in preparation for COP 29.

In concluding, on Bipartisanship and Collaboration, Mr. Speaker, Sir, please, allow me to thank the members of the Fiji delegation to COP 28. In particular, I must thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and your team, and respective Cabinet Ministers for engaging in the COP 28 process.

I also wish to specifically thank honourable Inia Seruiratu, Leader of the Opposition, for joining the Fiji delegation and in so doing, embodying the bipartisan approach to climate change which is so important for our nation, and he brings along with him the experiences from the previous Government where he was one of the Champions of climate change.

Within this Government and this nation, addressing climate change and preventing further harm to the people of Fiji is a bipartisan priority, which is above politics. In saying that, we must now shift gear to accelerate the implementation of our objectives. We need to be increasingly strategic, collaborative and open minded to manage the long-term nature of this existential threat.

Fiji maybe recognised as a world leader for our efforts to lead on policy and international advocacy on climate change over the years, but we will be judged by our ability to deliver results. It is the results, rather than the diplomatic fanfare upon which the People's Coalition Government is focused.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the outcomes of COP 28 are a reminder for Fiji to deliver at the national level to underline our commitment to both, international leadership and domestic action. No nation is exempt from the impact of climate change. No nation can address it alone, but if we work together, we can achieve much more. Keeping momentum on this priority is the only way to create the enabling environment for the peace, security and prosperity we all expect from the future.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, at this stage, I would like to join with the people of Namosi, in welcoming back *Na Turaga Bale na Vunivalu na Tui Namosi*, who will be instrumental in one of his new developments of the search for a new source of renewable energy from Namosi inland waterways. I thank you, Sir.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do join the honourable Prime Minister and also on this auspicious occasion of *Rama Navami* to convey to the Sanatan followers who are celebrating *Rama Navami* today a very happy and meaningful *Rama Navami* celebration.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do acknowledge the honourable Prime Minister for his Statement and he has stated a lot, particularly on what is happening at the global scene and, particularly, what is relevant for Fiji in terms of the way forward, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Again, I also acknowledge the honourable Prime Minister for hearing the plea and advice from the honourable Chairman, to do participate in COP 28. I know that it is a big learning

experience for all of us. I do acknowledge as well the Government, especially the honourable Prime Minister, in considering including the Leader of the Opposition as a member of his delegation and, of course, as member of the IPU joining your delegation, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

I have made some recommendations, honourable Prime Minister, to the Senior Officials. I think we need to have a debrief, and congratulations to the Permanent Secretary for Environment and Climate Change – Dr. Sivendra Michael. I think he is in the process of organising this because there is a lot to learn from COP and COP is not easy because there are geopolitics, there are thematic areas and there are processes within and there is a lot that we could learn.

There are Senior officials and Diplomats out there, who are already exposed in this arena, who can help us, help the Government and help all of us. Even in the discussions in the Opposition Chamber on Friday last week, they were interested, and I talked about COP and SIDS4, et cetera. These are capacity development, but it is good that we have a debrief, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Honourable Prime Minister, Sir, and honourable Members of Parliament, I will just focus on three areas, probably just to look at Fiji particularly as a country, and the honourable Prime Minister has alluded to most of what Fiji is considering. Of course, in terms of our role in the wider Pacific Small Island Developing States (PSIDS) and Alliance Of Small Island States (AOSIS), that is very, very critical and I link that, Sir, with SIDS4 that is going to happen in Antigua and Barbuda in May this year. This is a very critical year for SIDS, given the special circumstances of SIDS in the space of sustainable development and, of course, the role of Parliament, as you have alluded to earlier, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for Fiji, again, on the areas of improvement, you have mentioned it, honourable Prime Minister, Sir, but the increase to climate financing is so important for us. It is one thing to have finance available, but it is about the accessing of those finances that is very important for us.

Strengthening our pathways to Net Zero in terms of renewable, in terms of transportation and the so many good things, we need to focus on that. But may I remind Government, let us not only concentrate on adaption. Adaption is for our survival, but mitigation is important in every aspects where we can do mitigation, that is always recommended because more mitigation now means lesser adaptation in the future.

Loss and damage, of course, we are in the Board, and we congratulate Fiji for that.

Waste and pollution, of course, the monitoring of our biodiversity. Perhaps, in terms of few of our priorities forward, Sir, the improving of data, the enabling environment and also finalising the National Adaptation Plan, the National Biodiversity Strategic Action Plan because these will complement the work that has already been undertaken.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will just focus on the year 2022 to 2024. As I have stated, we have come a long way from 1990 into 1994 where we had the Bridgetown Barbados Action Plan, and then we have the Mauritius International Agreement - that was the first cycle after 10 years, then we have the SAMOA Pathway, and this year is a critical year for Small Island Developing States.

The honourable Prime Minister said we really need to strengthen the link between PSIDS and AOSIS. If I am correct, Samoa is now the Chair of AOSIS, so let us support Samoa because although the priorities have not changed in terms of the SAMOA Pathway, the Barbados Action Plan and the Mauritius Strategy, but what worries us is that the situation has gotten worse. There are special

circumstances for SIDS, and that is why Antigua and Barbuda this year in May is so important for the AOSIS.

In terms of leadership, honourable Prime Minister, Sir, I will beg the Pacific Leaders, including you, me and Mia Mottley is doing an excellent job as a leader from the Caribbean. We need that strong voice as well from the Pacific, given the situation that we are in now and the review of the SAMOA Pathway that is happening this year. We can discuss too on this.

Lastly, Sir, the role of Parliament. We have an Act, you are reviewing the National Adaption Plan, and then we have other plans, we need to continue with this. You are well aware with this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, because there need to be a convergence between what the IPU is doing and Mr. Speaker is well aware of this, what is happening in the General Assembly and what is happening in the UNFCCC process, particularly, when it comes to this issue.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in COP 28, the Pacific has launched its mobility framework. This is one issue that we have been raising as a country and Mr. Speaker is also leading on this, honourable Prime Minister, Sir, on the issue of migration and forced displacement. You have mentioned it, but the question that we have now is, we have the Pacific Mobility Framework but what will we, as a receiving country do, when it comes to our brothers and sisters from the Pacific Islands coming into Fiji? We need to prepare for that.

There is so much to discuss, but thank you for the extra time allocated, Mr. Speaker, Sir. We will always work together on this and we, from this side of Parliament, will offer all that we can so that we can continue to move this forward. Thank you, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you, honourable Leader of the Opposition. Thank you so much for your great contribution.

Honourable Members, I intend to adjourn Parliament now for morning tea and we will resume when the bell is sounded.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.32 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.05 a.m.

Fiji's Engagement at the 13th WTO Ministerial Conference

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, before I begin my remarks, may I just first re-echo as did the honourable Prime Minister the well wishes to our brothers and sisters on a blessed *Ram Navmi* celebrations today. Also, may I be allowed to just offer a word of tribute to a leader of Fiji who served as a Minister as well for a short time, and I speak of the late Ratu Esira Rabuno who passed away about a week ago. After serving his country well, he spent a lot of time in university academia and served as a Minister in the 2006 Government. He, of course, is my chief and I rise on behalf of the people of Tailevu and *vanua* of Navitomi to acknowledge his great contributions to our country and also to our *vanua*. We will miss him and may his soul rest in peace.

Madam Deputy Speaker, honourable Prime Minister, honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Members of Parliament, ladies and gentlemen, I rise today to deliver a Ministerial Statement on Fiji's engagement in the recent World Trade Organisation 13th Ministerial Conference held in Abu Dhabi from 26th February to 2nd March 2024. Every two years, the Ministers for Trade for all WTO member States converge on what is called "the Ministerial Conference" which is the highest governing body of the WTO, which decides on the rules of trade for the globe. The meeting this year was held in Abu Dhabi, and it was the 13th Ministerial Conference of the WTO, or as it is commonly called "MC13".

Madam Deputy Speaker, two new members were admitted into the WTO - the Republic of Timor-Leste and the Comoros bringing the total membership of the WTO to 165 members with 24 observer governments. Fiji attended MC13 together with five other fellow Pacific countries who are member States namely, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tonga, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. In fact, the Pacific had a very high level delegation attending MC13 which included two Deputy Prime Ministers from Vanuatu and Fiji and full Trade Ministers from Papua New Guinea, Samoa and Tonga, the exception being Solomon Islands only because the honourable Minister could not attend due to election commitments. At this juncture, I wish to acknowledge the Pacific Heads of Delegation which formed a very formidable team for the Pacific at MC13.

For Vanuatu, the honourable Matai Seremaiah Nawalu, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Internal Co-operation and External Trade. From PNG, the honourable Richard Maru, Minister for International Trade and Investment. Samoa was honourable Leota Laki Lamositele, from Tonga was honourable Dr. Viliami Uasike Latu and from Solomon Islands was honourable Natalia Patternot, Director for External Trade, Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In some ways, Madam Deputy Speaker, the quality of the delegation reflected the importance of the topics that were to be covered at MC13.

Apart from the issues around e-Commerce, moratoriums and agricultural subsidies, MC13 was viewed as the Conference to resolve the final issue relating to fisheries subsidies over capacity and overfishing as we know a very dear topic to the Pacific and its people. Fiji was invited to head the delegation and, Madam Deputy Speaker, I can assure you we fought really hard for the Pacific. I hope when the history of MC13 is written, I am confident or relatively confident that all WTO member states will be in no doubt, that when matters relating to oceans or climate change arise, the Pacific are big boys, not small boys and I will return to this later.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in the Conference our negotiating posture was to advocate for fair and equitable trade practices that prioritise the needs of developing nations, stability in trading systems, a functioning multilateral system and reliant supply chains that includes smaller nations. The WTO Conference provided the Pacific and Fiji an opportunity to shape policies that resonate

with our own unique circumstances, contributing to more equitable and prosperous global trading systems. Fiji particularly emphasised the importance of addressing challenges such as Climate Change and Sustainable Development within the framework of the trade agreements.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I will now just focus on the Fisheries Subsidies which was in essence the main purpose of the Pacific's attendance at the MC13. Why are Fisheries Subsidies so important? According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization - 2022 State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture Report also known as the SOFIA Report, 35 percent of fish stocks worldwide are exploited beyond sustainable levels.

We suspect, Madam Deputy Speaker, that that has increased. Experts note that Governments around the world are paying more than US\$22 billion a year in subsidies and this drives overfishing. The subsidies primarily go to industrial fishing fleets to artificially lower their fuel and vessel construction costs while enabling them to catch more fish farther and farther out to sea for longer periods.

As a result, Madam Deputy Speaker, it should be no surprise that there is virtually un-negligible presence of a local tuna industry in the Pacific in terms of vessels and operations. Fiji and the Pacific, of course, has been an advocate for international disciplines on Fisheries Subsidies and the preservation of the last sustainable stock of tuna in the world. In fact, Madam Deputy Speaker, the Pacific holds two-thirds of the world's tuna stock.

The Pacific leaders when mandating the Trade Ministers to attend MC13 had given very clear directives, encouraging that we conclude a comprehensive set of disciplines of overfishing and overcapacity which will deliver reasonable outcomes for the Pacific. What do I mean by comprehensive disciplines?

After more than 20 years of negotiations at the WTO, a Partial Agreement of Fisheries Subsidies was concluded at the last Ministerial Conference (MC12) in June of 2022 in Geneva. The Partial Agreement prohibited certain forms of Fisheries Subsidies in the following three situations:

- Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing;
- Fishing of already over-exploited stocks; and
- Fishing on unregulated high seas.

I wish to acknowledge the contributions of honourable Koya who was quite instrumental in concluding the first wave, if you like, of the Fisheries Subsidies Agreement. However, as was acknowledged at the time, it was merely a partial agreement that was concluded which did not fully achieve the Ministerial mandates on Sustainable Development Goal 14.6. It did not address subsidies that contributed to overfishing and overcapacity. For this reason, the WTO viewed the MC13 as the Conference where this was going to be resolved. How did we go, Madam Deputy Speaker?

The Pacific did go to Abu Dhabi to fight for the Pacific. We worked very long hours to protect our key offensive and defensive interest on Fisheries Subsidies. We demanded that our voices be heard as equals. We asked the WTO to ensure that fisheries resources are sustainably managed and not overfished. We pleaded that our oceans and resources are protected for future generations and the Pacific.

Fiji was honoured to lead the Pacific group with an aim to negotiate disciplines on the Fisheries Subsidies considered harmful that contribute to overcapacity and overfishing. We emphasised that it was vital to recognise that appropriate and effective Special and Differential Treatment (S&DT) be in place for developing country members such as Fiji and least developing

countries and these were to be central parts of the negotiations. In layman's terms, we simply wanted to correct the injustices of the past and present, that is, to enable nations that own the fisheries resources to develop their own fisheries sector and to do so sustainably.

The Distant Water Fishing Nations (DWFNs) that fish over 90 percent of the fish stocks may not do so sustainably. If current practices continue, Madam Deputy Speaker, the risk of overfishing and overcapacity is real. This will be disastrous for the Pacific. We have not been able to have had any significant input in our own industries as I had mentioned, thus it is better that we be custodians of our own resources. As such, Small Island States like Fiji, will need the flexibility to assist local fishing co-operatives and communities with support such as fishing equipment, provision of outboard motors and fishing nets, to name a few. Additionally, we also needed an equitable platform where the Pacific and Fiji has not been able to compete with the bigger operators that are subsidised, as I had mentioned. Therefore, that is why the meeting in Abu Dhabi was very important.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we worked tirelessly to attain the support of the Members when we got there. We went past that deadline of a conclusion of the negotiations on 29th February, which was extended into the early hours of 2nd March. We regrouped countless times, re-drafted our textual proposals, we met the WTO Director-General, Secretariat, Chairman of the Rules Committee and in fisheries negotiations, the Permanent Representative of Iceland to the United Nations in Geneva, His Excellency Einar Gunnarsson and the Fisheries Facilitator, the Permanent Secretary for State (Assistant Minister) for Iceland, Mr. Martin Eyjolfsson respectively.

The main reason for the numerous around the clock meetings was to ensure that we would have a successful outcome and deliver a comprehensive agreement on Fisheries Subsidies for our people and our leaders. I had the pleasure and honour of working with the Chairman of MC13, His Excellency Dr. Thani bin Ahmed Al Zeyoudi, the UAE Minister of State for Foreign Trade who expressed his understanding in terms of our Fisheries Subsidies aspirations. We did not stop there, Madam Deputy Speaker, we continued to have meetings with the WTO members such as Australia, New Zealand, Bangladesh, Barbados, Canada, CARICOM Group, European Union, Guyana (Coordinator for CARICOM), Japan, India, New Zealand, Singapore, United States of America (USA), United Kingdom and the Distant Water Fishing Nations such as China, Korea and Taiwan.

Just imagine this, Madam Deputy Speaker, the Pacific was talking as equals with some of the largest economies in the world when it came to our fishing resource and our oceans because our future generations' lives and livelihoods were at stake. What was the result? Unfortunately, despite all our hard efforts of the Pacific, Fiji and other like-minded members in calling for prohibitions that contributed to over-capacity and over-fishing, unfortunately MC13 was not able to conclude an outcome for a Comprehensive Agreement on Fisheries.

Since the World Trade Organization (WTO) is a consensus-based organisation, it is required that all the 165 members provide full endorsement and even one dissension means that an outcome cannot be reached. While the WTO members were not able to conclude a second wave at MC13, trust me, Madam Deputy Speaker, when I say, our efforts have not been lost.

At the concluding remarks in the General Council session, in the informal session, I made an impassioned plea to all WTO members to not let this opportunity of safeguarding our oceans particularly the Pacific slip. Whilst we could not seal the deal in Abu Dhabi, we should continue to negotiate with the same passion and vigour. I asked as a symbolic gesture for all Trade Ministers and Ambassadors that agreed with Fiji and the Pacific to stand up and be seen. I am happy to report, Madam Deputy Speaker, that almost every delegate stood and gave a standing ovation to the Pacific and Fiji towards the continuation of negotiations. It was a strong signal of the commitment to continue negotiations after MC13 and we are acutely aware that time is ticking.

I am also happy to report that we are not giving up. There are two positive developments, Madam Deputy Speaker, that I would like to share with this august Parliament. A coalition against over-capacity and over-fishing. While we will continue to fight and progress our efforts towards negotiating a comprehensive and balanced agreement on Fisheries Subsidies, Australia, Fiji and New Zealand will instigate a regional and multi-lateral initiative to form a coalition against over-capacity and over-fishing. This idea is a start of what we hope is a group of like-minded countries that are ready to act in terms of disciplining high subsidies that lead to over-capacity and over-fishing and eventually building global momentum. The idea is to also reach out for low hanging fruit that can lead to more sustainable practices including channelling investments in the Pacific and other countries.

The second news that I would like to share, Madam Deputy Speaker, is that, out of these discussions with MC13, there is a clear desire now for the Pacific to create their own industry. I have the blessings of the honourable Prime Minister to explore these opportunities seriously and there are actually about, at least I can count, three opportunities on the table to move this forward. I liken it, Madam Deputy Speaker, to the Arabs getting foreigners to come and mine their oil. Why should we surrender the tuna resource of the Pacific to others to come and harvest for themselves when we should do it in our own backyard?

Finally, a word of appreciation, Madam Deputy Speaker. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Pacific Islands Forum who through their Secretariat supported us in the meeting. I acknowledge Secretary General Henry Puna and the Ambassadors of the Pacific in Geneva; Ambassador Falemaka, Ambassador Daunivalu, Ambassador Levy from Samoa and Ambassador Antas from Vanuatu. I would also like to acknowledge the small but hardworking team in my Ministry who assisted in the negotiations and who have left an indelible mark on WTO MC13 in ensuring the momentum continues.

As we move forward, Fiji remains dedicated to harnessing the benefits of international trade while ensuring our policies promote inclusive growth and protect the welfare of our citizens. Above all, we remain committed to ensuring a meaningful agreement on fisheries subsidies that would ultimately contribute to sustainable fisheries management, a thriving fisheries sector and meaningful livelihoods for our peoples in the region. With those few words, Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank you for allowing me the floor to deliver my Ministerial Statement.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank the honourable Deputy Prime Minister Kamikamica for his extensive covering on the Fisheries Subsidies Agreement. I would restrict myself to the operationalization of the Agreement and what Fiji has contributed to in the past as the honourable Deputy Prime Minister has exclusively covered the negotiations that has been recently held.

Fiji was the first Pacific Island to sign this agreement on fisheries Subsidies which is a major step for Fiji's position in the Pacific. The agreements basically restrict harmful subsidies that continue the depletion of fish stocks. It also includes provision for technical assistance and capacity building to help developing countries implement this agreement.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this is an agreement that basically take the rich and big successful nations against the small developing nations and these subsidies has been an ongoing subject for a very long period. As the honourable Deputy Prime Minister has stated, they have exclusively come into our fisheries zone and take everything that is within. Fiji's position has always been that Fiji, Samoa and Tonga do not have the stock that is available to our small island nations up the north, Tuvalu, Kiribati and all those rich tuna stocks. However, Fiji has taken the stand that we will take the lead role even though the benefits are for our small island friends. Fiji has taken this position

because it has allowed our voice within the international arena. You might have heard that Fiji negotiated for the US Tuna Trade Agreement which was increased from \$19 million to \$60 million a year. So, the Pacific nations looked to Fiji as the fighter at the front and they will get the benefit at the back. We have developed a great idea in fighting for our small island Pacific states.

In the international arena, I have always called us “big ocean states” because even though our landmass is quite small, our oceans are quite big. So, to put the positives on discussions, I always say, “we are large ocean States”.

The benefit to this agreement is to conserve fish stocks and the issue is that these fish stocks are migratory. Basically, when it comes to your EEZ, you have the opportunity to catch as most as you can. But Small Island States do not have the capacity to be able to catch the fish themselves, and that is where subsidies come in. They are basically being funded by their home countries to come and fish in the Pacific and now the Caribbean Islands, take the fish and then have it for the benefit of their population or increase their trade capacity within the International Trade Organization.

The WTO and Food and Agriculture Organization FAO have been quite vocal in trying to protect the Small Island States so that they can get the maximum benefit out of their fish stocks, but it is a huge war.

As the honourable Deputy Prime Minister has stated, we will have to keep fighting until there is some recognition from the big island States to say, “we know that you own the fish, we will develop and take away the subsidies so that more benefit is realised by small island States”. Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Fiji National E-Commerce Strategy

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Deputy Prime Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Members of Cabinet and Assistant Ministers, honourable Members of Parliament and those of you who may be listening in today, *bula vinaka* and a very good morning to you all.

I rise today to provide an update on Fiji’s National E-Commerce Strategy and also the next steps, once it is formalised. You may recall in some of my utterances this week, I was talking about Nabukalou Creek, I was talking about the need to plan better in our country, and I was talking about, where we can, look at some of the work that has been done by previous Government and actually leverage on it.

This strategy falls into a bit of the planning side, Madam Deputy Speaker, but also more importantly, it falls into the groundwork that was done by the previous Government to actually move this forward.

The other thing that I thought I would mention, Madam Deputy Speaker, is that from the People’s Coalition’s perspective, we are looking at a very strategic process for Fiji in order to digitise the whole Fijian economy. There is a national strategy for digitisation that is currently underway and it is underpinned by the e-commerce strategy as one of its central pillars.

In actual fact, Madam Deputy Speaker, you would recall that I was talking about the MSME sector and the MSMEs strategy will fit in well with the efforts that are being made currently in e-commerce. So, going forward, the people of Fiji will have a very clear direction in terms of where we want to take both, the MSMEs digital aspirations and also e-commerce in our country.

In today's rapidly evolving world of digital economy, e-commerce, as we all agree, plays a pivotal role in driving economic growth, fostering innovation and expanding opportunities for business, especially micro, medium, small and medium enterprises. We have witnessed a global shift towards online transactions and digital marketplaces, and this is crucial for Fiji to capitalise on this trend and position itself strategically in the digital landscape. Hence, developing a national e-commerce strategy for Fiji is imperative to harness the potential of e-commerce and ensure that our businesses can access global markets, reach a broader customer base and compete effectively in the digital marketplace. It will also encourage innovation and entrepreneurship, driving job creation and, of course, the diversification of the Fijian economy.

Madam Deputy Speaker, one of the positives, I think, is that Fiji's e-commerce sector is currently in an emergence state of maturity or is really maturing with various sectors showcasing growth trajectories. The tourism industry has been at the forefront of e-commerce adoption in Fiji. The business process outsourcing industry is another success story for Fiji, contributing significantly to the economy and offering employment and thousands of employment opportunities for Fijians. As someone who was involved in the setup of the industry whilst I was outside Government, it is pleasing to see the progress that has been made.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in the domestic market, sectors such as food delivery, groceries, electronics, tools and furniture, are experiencing significant e-commerce activity, driven by the consumer demand for convenience and variety.

Cross border e-commerce activity is also present, particularly in export agricultural markets, like kava. Some of you might be aware that people can actually order Lami kava from Fiji. It gets on a plane through DHL and arrives on the other side of the world. Ginger and turmeric are other examples. Fiji has made strides in exporting these products to markets such as the United States, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and United Arab Emirates, with opportunities for further value addition.

Madam Deputy Speaker, furthermore, e-commerce platforms are also facilitating the promotion of wellness, beauty care products and unique Fijian crafts to global markets. Rising Beyond the Reef products are now available on Amazon - the world's fastest growing online shopping site.

As we navigate through the vast opportunities presented by the digital age, we are also confronted with significant challenges, such as access to viable internet payment gateways, access to finance, trust in e-commerce transactions, lack of consumer and data protection.

Considering these challenges, Madam Deputy Speaker, the development of a national e-commerce strategy became a strategic imperative for economic development and resilience in the digital age. This strategy will provide a five-year roadmap, outlining tangible measures to support the enabling environment for e-commerce and setting a clear plan for its implementation.

Madam Deputy Speaker, our journey towards developing the National E-Commerce Strategy has been one of collaboration and foresight. With the support of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTD), we thoroughly consulted stakeholders from Government, statutory bodies, the private sector, particularly MSMEs, civil society and academia. Hence, they have actively participated in the strategy design process.

Our journey towards this milestone began even before the onset of COVID-19 pandemic, as I had alluded to, Madam Deputy Speaker, with the National E-Commerce Readiness Assessment, which was conducted under the previous Government in 2019 and early 2020. One of the key

recommendations stemming from the Readiness Assessment was the imperative need for Fiji to develop its comprehensive e-commerce strategy, involving both public and private sector stakeholders.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in early 2023, amidst our recovery from the pandemic impact, we embarked on formulating the e-commerce strategy with invaluable insights gathered from national stakeholder consultations held in September 2023. Recent validation workshops were held in March 2024, which have provided a platform for further discussions with diverse stakeholders to refine our strategy.

In addition to this, Madam Deputy Speaker, a roundtable discussion to engage our development partners in the National E-Commerce Strategy implementation was conducted with the aim to foster collaboration and identify areas where our partners can contribute their expertise and resources effectively. Once finalised and endorsed by Cabinet, its implementation plans will pave the way for our competitive digital economy in our beloved country.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish to extend my appreciation to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) Team and all the development partners for their invaluable support in shaping this trajectory in our e-commerce landscape. I thank you for this opportunity.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to thank the honourable Minister for his Ministerial Statement. Yes, we need a strategic plan in developing our e-commerce, there is no two ways about it, we just have to get that done.

The use of electronic medium to do business has really taken off after COVID-19. There is more B2B and B2C transactions taking place in e-commerce, so it simply means that we have to protect both, the buyers and the sellers, in the marketplace. The strategic plan can work towards developing those protective mechanisms required for consumers, as well as the businesses.

E-commerce landscape has significantly changed with time because of the new technologies that were introduced, like MPaiSA, MyCash, and other mobile wallets that is in the marketplace. This has given ways for Fijians to engage in online shopping, buying goods and services or paying their bills, transferring money, et cetera, and it is the most convenient way of carrying out a transaction. From the comfort of your home, within the 24 hours at night, whenever you want, you can carry out this transaction. Gone are the days where you have to go and line up physically outside a shop to make those payments. So, that is how convenient it has become.

It is not just convenient but also secure. However, this security that I am talking about is actually not fully secure and that is where the strategy needs to take that into account as well because we do hear about the cybercrimes and many other forms of financial crimes that take place through online mechanism.

I do agree that with e-commerce, new businesses can be created for women and youth and, in fact, for all of us. We can have a day job, we can have some kind of hustle business after hours, and that you can through online. So, it is going to contribute a lot to the economy.

Madam Deputy Speaker, consumer choice has widened now with access to technology and when we talk about access to technology, it comes with a lot of problems. I have mentioned a few, but the problems are there because you physically do not see the product. You cannot feel the product, but you are buying it online, so that gives rise to substandard products to be sold to consumers.

When you are not happy with the product, how do you return this product? Is there a cooling off period where, if you are not happy, you will be able to get your money back? So, there are a range of issues that need to be addressed, so protection is needed.

The Fijian Competition and Consumer Commission (FCCC) had already developed a separate relating Guideline for e-commerce and a lot can be seen from that Guideline and more can be done from that particular document.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the FijiFirst Government had a vision to develop a modern economy. In 2018, Government announced its intension make Fiji's economy cashless and contactless. MPaiSA and MyCash has greatly helped the nation moved towards a cashless society.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I was disappointed when I saw the headline just recently which says, and I quote, "No consultation done on cashless payments, and it will be withdrawn". This statement was made by the honourable Prime Minister. Now, this is shocking. It is shocking because we are talking about e-commerce on one hand, and we are trying to remove this cashless payment system.

In the 2023-2024 National Budget, every Ministry was given \$50,000 to turn their systems into cashless mode. The Ministry of Health and Medical Services had done but now that system has been withdrawn. So, I am emphasising the words "consultation" and "withdrawn".

Consultation, in my view, is overromanticized by the Government side - over, at the expense of the taxpayers. What is there to consult? There are only two options there, Madam Deputy Speaker, and they are, you can provide the cash payment system, you can also provide the technology-driven system...

HON. P. TIKODUADUA.- That is what we are doing!

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- ...both systems can be there. But to say that we are withdrawing, what are you withdrawing? I am merely speaking from the statement that was made, Madam Deputy Speaker, and that needs to be looked into because it seems that the Government side is in disarray, and they do not know what we are talking about.

The honourable Minister of Finance is saying, "Loo, we will go towards cashless society, we will do a cashless economy." The honourable Prime Minister, despite sitting in Cabinet, is aware of the National Budget but still says, "Hey, but we are going to withdraw this." So, this is not sending a good signal to the people, the country and to the Fijians.

Finally, Madam Deputy Speaker, my concern is, which generation do we belong to? We belong to either silent generation or baby-boomers. We have got Gen Z and we have got Gen X, these are the modern people - the young ones, who only know about digital age. They are born in digital age, and here we are sitting and saying, "Guess what? We are going to withdraw this." So, take your words back and, please, look into this matter.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Thank you for your contributions so far, honourable Members.

At this point, we will suspend proceedings for lunch. I know that several Members of Parliament want to go and celebrate Rama Navami. We will resume proceeding at 2.00pm.

The Parliament adjourned at 11.47 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.08 p.m.

Naleba Youth Training Centre Fire Incident

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Cabinet Ministers, honourable Members of Parliament and viewers who are watching through live television broadcast from the comfort of their homes; I rise today with a heavy heart to address a strategy that recently struck the Ministry of Youth and Sports.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, four days ago, the boy's dormitory at the Youth Training Centre in Naleba, Labasa, was engulfed in flames, leaving nothing but ashes in its wake. While we are grateful that no lives were lost in this devastating incident, it pains me to report that the 25 trainees who called this Centre home have lost everything they had possessed.

On the background of Naleba Youth Training Centre, Mr. Speaker, it is one of the two Training Centres situated in the Northern Division and it is one of the five Youth Training Centres under the Ministry of Youth and Sports.

It became fully operational in 2005 with the construction of proper classroom for learning. Prior to that, youth were only called in for short courses lasting for three weeks to learn about agriculture. The land area of the centre is approximately 22 acres.

Mr. Speaker, approximately 30 to 50 youth enroll at the Centre annually. The Training Centre provides Certificate Level IV Training on Organic Agriculture to encourage self-help project, entrepreneurial opportunities and farming amongst young people.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, other short courses, such as screen printing, SRHR and Climate Resilience Training, are offered at the Centre to create an institution where young people are able to make informed choices and wise decision for their lives.

Mr. Speaker, the Training Centre provides a second chance to education to education, particularly for those who have fallen through the mainstream education system. A major focus of the Training Centre is towards creating young replacement farmers, who then return to their communities to practise intergraded farming for diversified income, as well as to contribute towards reducing hunger and poverty by improving food security, creating employment and building resilience to disasters and shocks.

On the importance of the Youth Training Centre at Naleba, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Centre was more than just a building. It was a sanctuary for young minds seeking guidance, education and opportunities for a better future. It serves as a beacon of hope for our youth in the North, offering them a chance to learn variable skills, engage in meaningful activities and connect with their peers in a supportive environment.

The Centre's aim is to provide non-formal vocational training for unemployed young people and to provide pathways where they would gain practical skills, enabling them to establish sustainable living through employment, income generating activities, or provide a platform for progress to further education in either the formal or non-formal context.

Mr. Speaker, Naleba Youth Training Centre offers free education to young people on agriculture and is accessible to both, male and female. Training is intended to substantially increase the number of youth with relevant skills learnt for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship opportunities within the agricultural sector, involved with semi-commercial farming.

At our Naleba Youth Training Centre, we accommodate and have facilities for young women and provide them with equal opportunities for learning.

Through our agriculture training, we educate our young people on organic farming methods in order to cope with the current impacts of climate change with respect to farming for sustainable living.

On the impact of the fire on the trainees, Mr. Speaker, the destruction of the dormitory not only robs these young individuals of their material possessions but also shatters their dreams and aspirations. It has left a profound impact, not only on the trainees themselves but also on the entire community, which has lost a vital resource for youth development and empowerment.

As alluded to, all items in the dormitory were completely destroyed by fire. However, there was no casualties during the incident. The incident had left the trainees in a state of shock and questions of whether training will continue is a lingering thought in the minds of these young people.

Our immediate relief efforts for the affected trainees – As the relevant Ministry, we pledge to work closely with the relevant authorities to provide immediate support to the 25 trainees who have been left affected as a result of this tragedy. We have begun coordinating with local and international organisations, businesses and community leaders to mobilise resources for emergency relief efforts including temporary shelter, clothing and essential supplies.

On the investigation into the cause of the fire - Mr. Speaker, Sir, we recognise the urgency of conducting a thorough investigation into the cause of the fire. As a Ministry, we cannot allow such senseless acts of destruction to go unpunished. I assure you that the Ministry will collaborate with law enforcement agencies and relevant authorities to ascertain the causes and to ensure that justice is served with the measure put in place to prevent similar incidence in the future.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the extent of the damages being currently assessed by the relevant authorities, National Fire Authority (NFA) and Fiji Police Force and a comprehensive report is expected to be released soon. Just recently, the Youth Training Centre has completed the OHS compliance requirements as a training centre for this year with completed inspections and clearance by NFA and the Ministry of Labour. Effective from the date of fire, the police have been exchanging shifts to oversee the site of the accident.

On our commitment to rebuilding the Youth Training Centre – The Ministry is committed to overseeing the re-construction of the Youth Training Centre in Naleba, Labasa with the utmost urgency. This Centre must be rebuilt sooner, stronger and more resilient than before, equipped with modern facilities and amenities to better serve the needs of our youth. The main aim is to make a very fast turnover from current destructive form to normalcy. This initiative will obviously incur costs, however, the return on investment on educating these children will be repaid in an estimated four years' time. This will be achieved through employment, beefing up IGP's and knowledge sharing among the peers and communities. This will have direct impact of the GDP hence benefitting the Government.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the training centre started with scoping for minor repairs and maintenance to organise temporary accommodation for the trainees continue with the training. The centre will propose for a capital project in the new financial year through the normal budget process. Preliminary works will be completed this financial year to prepare the plan and the scope of work of the new construction.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our efforts to rebuild and strengthen our youth infrastructure cannot be

achieved in isolation. We have plans to work hand in hand with local authorities, line ministries, organisations and community leaders to ensure that the needs of our youths are met and that they have access to the supported resources that require to thrive. The Commissioner Northern Division was informed, and the team are on standby for any support that could be rendered. The list of items needed instantly has been prepared and shared with our divisional network through the Commissioner Northern Division for support.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, sincere appreciation to respective line ministries that have assisted in various ways to return their trainees back to their respective homes, accompanied by staff to advise parents on the incident.

Long term sustainability of Youth programmes - Mr. Speaker, Sir, our efforts cannot stop at rebuilding the Youth Training Centre. We must also invest in the long term sustainability of our youth programmes, ensuring that they are adequately funded, staffed and equipped to empower young people across our nation.

The Training Centre is earmarked to be one of the major source of training providers for the youths in terms of formal and non-formal in the Northern Division and these will require the expansion of the infrastructure and its staffing as well and the diversification of youth programmes in accordance with the need of the nation in terms of the skills.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with the Ministry's aim of leaving no youth behind, the Youth Training Centre is a stepping stone towards achieving this long term goal for the benefit of the Northern Division as well as the nation at large. This incident will ensure security is strengthened and further enhanced to ensure that government assets are secured at all times.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in closing I plead with our stakeholders and individuals to let us not forget the resilience and spirit of our youth who have faced adversity with courage and determination time and time again. Together, let us stand in solidarity with the trainees of the Youth Training Centre, Naleba and reaffirm our commitment to supporting and nurturing the next generation of leaders, innovators and change makers. The fire incident at the boy's accommodation building of the Youth Training Centre was swiftly responded to and brought under control by the timely intervention of National Fire Authority and Police for the fire not to spread further into other buildings in the Youth Training Centre.

In response to this incident, the Youth Training Centre management is committed to undertake appropriate measures to prevent similar incidents in the future. This includes conducting thorough review of the facility's fire safety protocols, implementing any necessary improvements and organising mandatory fire safety training for all staff and students. I wish to take this opportunity to address the parents and guardians in the vernacular.

Kivei kemuni kece sara na i tubutubu, na dauniveisusu ni cauravou kei na goneyalewa vuli e Naleba, au kila ni ra se tiko voli ga e vale na gone ena gauna oqo ena vuku ni kama ni bure mai koronivuli. Ena vukudra saka na Turaga na Paraiminisita kei na nomuni Matanitu Cokovata, au sa vakadeitaka saka tiko yani nira sa cakacaka vata tiko na veitabana ni Matanitu ena kena vakarautaki vakavinaka na koronivuli, me ra rawa ni ra lesu tale ki vuli na gone ena kena gauna tolo. Mo ni tiko vakacegu saka ka mera maroro'i vinaka na gone.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, last but not least, I wish to, once again, sincerely thank everyone who assisted in this through one way or another. I thank the management and staff of the Ministry and in particular the honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations who had visited the Centre on behalf of the Government immediately after the incident to provide reassurance

and comfort to the trainees in such a crucial time.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I take my seat, please, allow me to respond to honourable Premila Kumar's comment on a cashless Fiji. I wish to advise the honourable Member that the Coalition Government is not withdrawing the project, but we are doing everything right in consultation with all stakeholders. We will eventually get there. I will share with the honourable Member what Ronnie Chang of Martintar, Nadi wrote in the *Fiji Times* in the Letters to the Editors column, and I quote:

“In doing so, please remember our fellow sisters and brothers who are not computer, tablet, fast phone and IT savvy. The poor members in our community who do not have access to internet services will suffer the greatest. Our old school senior citizens unfortunately will be left out, they toiled to earn a decent dollar. To them cash and their cheque books is their means of economic survival. Let us have a generous and accommodative heart, let us have a more caring nature in this field of economic progress. Most back office employees still have work to do manually. Do not deprive them of their bread and butter in progress's name.”

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are a leadership that listens because we do care about our people.

HON. A.N. TUICOLO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you for allowing me to respond to the Ministerial Statement presented by the honourable Minister for Youth and Sports on the importance of the Training Centre and the impact of the recent fire on trainees and the community, the Ministry's commitment to rebuilding the Youth Training Centre and the long term sustainability of youth programmes. We are all now aware of the importance of vocational training and their opportunities as it provides for personal and professional growth. The training programme fits a much needed role in providing for training and education in sectors that are not found in formal education institutions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, during the FijiFirst's term in government, we invested considerably to the Naleba Youth Training Centre by ensuring that there was sustainable recognised curriculum with modern agricultural machinery as well as standard infrastructure in place. The Naleba Youth Training Centre has accredited its training through the Fiji Higher Education Commission, where school dropouts can further their education in agriculture tertiary institutions after graduating from the Training Centre.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there were negotiations in place to also introduce the Seafarers Training Programme where youths from around Fiji, particularly, those in maritime areas are to access this firsthand training on deckhand, cook, engineers, to name a few. The FijiFirst Government further invested in the Youth Training Centre by building a hostel and a gym worth \$381,200 in the year 2020. This goes to show that the FijiFirst Government was always committed in ensuring increased educational, employment and leadership opportunities for young Fijians. It was rather unfortunate to hear of the recent fire incident that destroyed Naleba Youth Training Centre's boys' hostel building and all its contents. We understand that this incident will have some drawbacks and impacts on the trainees, and we sympathise with all the youths who have been affected by the fire.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, since the cause of the fire is yet to be established, we urge the Youth Training Centre's administrators and staff to supervise their trainees and practice fire safety. It is important that the Training Centre administrators take the lead role in teaching its students on fire safety. The Naleba Youth Training Centre serves the Northern Region, and we thank the Ministry of Youth and Sports for its commitment to rebuilding the boy's hostel in order for our youths from the North to continue with their training. Having heard of the importance of the Youth Training Centre from the honourable Minister, it would have been wise to provide a grant to the Ministry of Youth and Sports Training Centre rather than to Pacific Polytech, an institution that is occupying a

school illegally in Nabua, Suva and the Government is funding it. Please, fund the Ministry of Youth and Sports and rebuild the Naleba Youth Training Centre.

Wood Utilisation Project

HON. K.V. RAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Prime Minister, honourable Deputy Prime Ministers, honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Members of Parliament, ladies and gentlemen; a very good afternoon to you all, *ni sa bula vinaka*.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to deliver my Statement on the Wood Utilisation Project with the main objective of maximising wood resource utilisation through the use of harvesting and processing residues as an alternative sources of raw materials for wooden products manufacturers. The project focuses on utilising mahogany wood left in the forest after a harvesting operation and, in this regard, works closely with the Fiji Hardwood Corporation Limited.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry completed a baseline survey, extraction, processing and classification of wood residues using specialised machines at our Ministry of Forestry workshop in Nasinu. Following the internal research and information gathering, the project started an initiative to engage and train selected mahogany landowners on how to utilise these mahogany harvesting residues to operate as small cottage industries.

Consultations were undertaken initially in the three villages within the Nukurua Mahogany Station, that is, Sote, Savu and Naimasimasi where mahogany harvesting was being undertaken. The main objective was to engage and select suitable young men and women from these villages to be trained in wood processing and furniture making at the Ministry's Timber Industry Training Center in Nasinu.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government, after taking up Office in December 2022 saw the potential of this initiative to significantly improve the livelihoods of our rural communities and jobless youth. Additionally, this programme was seen to have to have potential enhance the forestry's contribution to the national GDP and identified that the level of funding was not sufficient to invest in this initiative.

As the Minister responsible for Forests, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is my aim to have the forestry sector adequately supported so that it is able to continue to enhance its capacity to improve the livelihoods of our people, especially our rural landowning communities. This can be achieved through increasing our investments in the training of our people to have the right skills and knowledge, and also in having the appropriate value adding machines and the application of new technologies.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in line with this objective, Government during the financial year of August 2023 to July 2024 announced an increase in the budgetary allocation for Forest Subsidy Grant from \$50,000 in the previous financial year to \$200,000 which is an increase of \$150,000. This grant is supporting our people to purchase value adding machines, especially our mahogany landowners who were trained at the Ministry's Timber Industry Training Centre to operate as small cottage industries.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are currently engaging four small cottage industries and one registered co-operative. The Gaunavou Co-operative, comprising the villages of Sote, Savu and Naimasimasi has also recently received the Ministry of Trade and Investment's approval to use the Fiji brand on their products. Three cottages are currently working on manufacturing products, while members of one are currently undergoing training in wood processing and manufacturing.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, at this juncture, I would like to inform Parliament that my Ministry is not only providing training and technical advice to support the above initiative but has also taken the step to connect the cottage industries to the markets. Market outlets for the wooden furniture items to be produced were arranged and each cottage industry was taught to focus on a specific product.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in April last year a contract agreement between Gaunavou Co-operative and Vision Group was signed by the two parties for the supply of mahogany wooden beds through Courts (Fiji) Limited. Gaunavou Co-operative managed to supply 80 beds and with the support of the Forest Subsidy Grant of \$28,864 managed to generate a total revenue of \$70,200. The other three cottage industries also supplied mahogany wooden products which generated a total revenue of \$220,500. Currently, there is ongoing discussion between my Ministry and the Ministry of Rural Development for the funding of a workshop for Gaunavou Co-operative. This is crucial as it provides the opportunity for Gaunavou Co-operative to run on their own using their own facility.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Forestry is happy to inform Parliament that one of the cottage industries from Kalabu Village has begun construction of their own workshop at Colo-i-Suva. With their own workshop and machines, the cottage industry will be in a better position to be hived off from the Ministry and to operate on their own. The Ministry will continue to monitor the cottage industries once they are hived off focusing on the quality of products being produced and also in terms of their administration and finance. During their engagement period in Nasinu, each cottage industry is expected to build sufficient working capital to allow smooth operational transition once they are relocated to their own premises. The support and assistance of other arms of government are also being solicited to strengthen our monitoring of these cottage industries.

The Ministry of Fisheries and Forestry has plans to widen its scope of assistance of cottage industry and value addition to the 14 mahogany based stations and other interested forest-based communities. The Ministry of Forestry believes that this initiative will boost economic activities, for the rural sector will contribute to rural economy and improving livelihoods. The engagement of young men and women in forest-based businesses will reduce urban migration, alleviate poverty, reduce crime including drug related activities, and also create a generation of people who are contributing positively to the development of their communities.

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- Mr. Speaker, I thank the honourable Minister for the Statement and thank him for the continuation of this project. The project started way back in 2010. I know it very well when I was the Permanent Secretary for Fisheries and Forests. It was born out of this argument, if you like, with Fiji Hardwood.

The Forestry staff was saying that the utilisation rate for mahogany was too low, about 40 percent at that time. We asked for a budget and so we would go in and collect the waste. As we know for mahogany, you cut it from as close to the ground and then when it begins to branch, that is why you chop it off and then that log is sold off. So, we collected those branches. We employed a gentleman who had a very good qualification in interior decoration, and he started to turn those branches into pieces of furniture, and we started to learn from there.

We went back to Fiji Mahogany and said, "Hey, look, this is the waste that you are leaving in the forest. The utilisation rate for that mahogany needs to be much higher than 40 percent." We planted those trees in 1960 and then 40 years later, started harvesting them in 2003. We thought that after waiting for 40 years and then just use 40 percent of the plantation is not a good return. So that was where it was born, at the Utilisation Division.

I thank the honourable Minister and the Ministry for its continuation. It is helpful to the youth. We would bring in our young people and train them at that facility in Nine Miles. At that

time, there were two main machines that we thought was useful to set up those cottage industries. One is a lathe machine where it rotates and you can do bowls, lamp stands, et cetera. The other machine is the bench saw that cuts it down into workable sizes for those communities.

One of the suggestions we had before I left and maybe you can take this up was, for those who are doing those pieces of ornamental mahogany, we can supply those ornamental pieces to all our embassies overseas, to put in those embassies as a marketing tool where people come in and visit. You can tell them, “Look, this is available in Fiji, it is Fiji mahogany.”

Fiji has the second largest mahogany plantation, apart from Brazil, it grows well in Central America. The mahogany that we have in Fiji is *Swietenia macrophylla*, commonly known as big leaf mahogany from Honduras. The Fijian mahogany, according to those that deal with it, say it is very unique because it has pin knots. If you look at Fiji mahogany, you see a lot of those black dots which are very unique and some of the importers would not buy it because of those pin knots. So, we are always in competition with those that sell mahogany from Central America because theirs is like free from pin knots. Even those pieces of mahogany that has those pin knots can be turned into wonderful pieces of furniture and brand it as the brand for Fiji Mahogany which has got all those dots. I wish the Ministry well and I hope those cottage industries thrive and extend it to all the landowners.

One of the problems we face then, I do not know whether you face it, is that mahogany belongs Fiji Hardwood Corporation Limited and if they can give those pieces for free or the standing low grade mahogany. I think they mostly buy A to C and D to E grade - mostly left standing, if that could be given free, it will benefit those landowners very well. But thank you for continuing with the project and I wish you well.

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

Fiji Airways' Charter Policies and Procedures (Question No. 20/2024)

HON. P.D. KUMAR asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics inform Parliament of Fiji Airway's charter policies and procedures they follow when processing charter requests?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I answer this question, I think it is important for me to state this. If the Opposition were to be in Government and we were in the Opposition, and if we were going to ask this question, we would have been told that it is a private company. It is a private company in which Government has more than 50 percent share and that is why, Sir, as a Government, we will present to Parliament the Annual Reports and Financial Reports of the Fiji Airways in May.

But let me answer this question on the policies and procedures followed by Fiji Airways when processing charter requests. These are normal commercial policies that different organisations have and they devise this as part of their check and balances and how they offer charter services.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji Airways has a very detailed set of procedures when it comes to assessing charter flights. To begin with, upon receipt of the request, the Fiji Airways Charter Team gathers all relevant information from the customer, including flight dates, number of passengers, special needs,

ad hoc items, potential flexibility on dates and times in case aircraft is not available on preferred dates and an assessment is conducted to determine available resources to support the requested charter, aircraft, crew, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker Sir, if a request cannot be supported with the available resources, the request is declined and if the resources can support the charter, then Fiji Airways proceeds to assessing operational feasibility and cost quote. The goal with any request is to ensure that safety and security are achieved, operational feasibility is confirmed, and revenue covers the cost and justifies the efforts, complexity and a reasonable amount of risk.

Operational feasibility, Mr. Speaker, Sir, depending on the nature of the charter, a complex geography, short timelines, et cetera, internal teams such as the Operations Aircraft Crew, Safety and Security Ground Handling and Catering Crew, et cetera, are asked to assess the operational feasibility before the cost quote is finalised.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a comprehensive analysis is conducted to determine the cost of operating the charter to Fiji Airways. This starts with an assessment of the Airline's related costs, further proposed routes such as fuel, route costs, accommodation costs, catering, insurance, engineering, et cetera, and the expenses that are associated with any flight. This may also include the cost of flight consolidation, opportunity cost or cost to cover additional risks, particularly when operating a charter to destinations Fiji Airways does not normally operate to.

Once an operational cost forecast has been assessed, a profit margin is added to the cost to finalise the quote. The quote is provided to the customer, who then has an option to accept, decline or negotiate. Fiji Airways may decide not to negotiate the rate.

The charter agreement, Mr. Speaker, Sir, upon confirmation from the customer, and as I have said, which is normal in any charter services, that the cost quote is acceptable and operational feasibility is attained. A charter agreement, usually a contract is drafted and provided for sign off by both parties. Fiji Airways has a template - a charter contract drafted by its in-house legal team that is provided which can be subject to negotiation and adjustment on a case-by-case basis.

On payment, Mr. Speaker, Sir, apart from providing a cost quote, a payment timeline is negotiated with the customer and documented as a part of the agreement. And if the customer fails to meet payment, the standard charter contract gives Fiji Airways the right in its direction to cancel the charter and retain a pre-agreed cancellation fee. Alternatively, it would be open to the company to accept revised payment terms.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji Airways tendered charter contract requires full payments to be made by no later than 38 days prior to the first charter flight. More complex charters may also require initial deposits to be made before the 38 day deadline, to fund costs associated with obtaining approvals and otherwise preparing to operate a charter flight. Many charter requests are made at the last minute and within days or hours of the requested charter flights.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in a nutshell, each case is assessed individually, and in some cases, Fiji Airways may be willing to accept other payment terms after the charter has occurred. Factors that are considered, include -

1. credibility, financial or reputational, of the customer;
2. Previous business activity of the customer; and
3. an assessment or review of the past payment history.

Passenger taxes are generally finalised and paid within one to two weeks after the charter operation and all details are fully accounted.

Last point, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the policies and procedures adopted by Fiji Airways to assess charter flights, in my view, and anyone who looks at it would find that it is transparent, robust and all decisions, if you consider the whole policy, is based on operational feasibility and is in the best interest of the company, without bias or political intervention, as claimed by some in the recent case. So, that, in a nutshell, is the process, the procedures and the assessment when a charter flight is requested or booked with Fiji Airways.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for his comprehensive explanation which we appreciate. During the FijiFirst time, we never had a ‘travel first pay later’ scheme but now, with the Coalition Government during their time, a so-called private company which was funded by the Government, the pensioners or which we can call FNPF account holders and we all have shares in it, so being commercial, honourable Minister, why in this particular case such as small deposit was taken by Fiji Airways when they were assessing this charter arrangement - a very small deposit?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are two points. I think the honourable Member is confusing herself. It is a private company in which Government has more than 50 percent share and that is the point we were making that if Government has survived eight years, it is like other organizations where Government has more than 50 percent share, which means that taxpayers are involved and, therefore, it requires any Government in the past, except in the case of the FijiFirst Government, where they refused to bring Annual Reports, Financial Statements to this Parliament. We will do that, Sir, we will be tabling Financial Reports.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we could have done another thing in the Business Committee. We could have said, “This question is a subject of investigation.” I do not want to get into the details but let me say that any decision as per the policy, as per what I have described, the company assesses each case on its own merit. Sometimes, it may be based on the previous record, the company was involved in charter flights, it could be potential, but any company that does business will assess the risk. There is always a risk in anything any business entity does, either you book a flight, you cancel it and Fiji Airways has processes and procedures.

The CEO is on record to make it very clear that as far as they are concerned, they have a payment plan that they are confident that whatever is owed to Fiji Airways will be paid and that is a normal business transaction and decision. This is within their policies, within their procedures, within their operational feasibility, cost feasibility assessment that they make and these are people who have the experience and who have the legal basis to do so.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have a simple question to the honourable Minister. We understand that it is a company policy but two parts to this question. What is the update on the repayment and is Government concerned?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Leader of the Opposition, as I have said the CEO is on record to say that they have a repayment plan, already agreed and they are confident that what is due to Fiji Airways will be paid. Let me just remind the honourable Leader of the Opposition, again, Government has a majority share, the other shareholder is FNPF, and there are other minority shares by other countries as well.

Of course, the Government would be concerned about any commercial company in which Government has a share and that is why, Mr. Speaker, we, on the other side, for eight years, had been

asking them to bring reports to Parliament because it is here in this Parliament that the report is presented, it goes to the Committees and it is debated, but they denied the taxpayers of this country for eight years. Now, we are teaching them what is transparency and that is why we are answering these questions.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, just a clarification from the honourable Minister of Finance. I think in his first response, he suggested that within 38 days, payment should be made. Then during his second explanation, he went on and said that it was within the company policy to get an agreement done, whereby they will actually ensure the payment will be done to Fiji Airways. That is contradicting. If someone has actually surpassed that 38 days, is there any interest charged to the company who owes money to Fiji Airways?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think they are trying very hard to score a point.

(Laughter)

It is actually getting them nowhere because I said very clearly and let me just read this again for their clarification and to get their mind to ease. “Fiji Airways standard charter contract requires full payment to be made by no later than 38 days prior to the first charter flight”.

Then, Mr. Speaker, I also said, in the policy, that every case is decided on its merit on a case by case basis, then there is an agreement. The agreement is there. If the agreement is not adhered to, it can happen in any commercial agreement, those who run businesses know this on a daily basis, it is being renegotiated and this is what the CEO has said very clearly, that they have a repayment plan, as per the agreement, and it will be paid.

We are confident from what the CEO has told the Board, and the Board has communicated that to me as line Minister. I am confident that the company will do what is in the best interest of the company and the country to run the business in an efficient way. We are very confident in the ability of the people and the Board to deal with this effectively.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me remind them again. They will have the opportunity to peruse, debate and discover what was happening in the Fiji Airways in the last several years from the annual reports.

That is the standard that this Government is setting. That is the standard of democracy, transparency and accountability that we practise on this side, and I want the Opposition to learn from it.

Revival of the Rural Housing Programme
(Question No. 21/2024)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management inform Parliament on the progress of the revived Rural Housing Programme Initiative?

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Cabinet Ministers and Assistant Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition and honourable Members of Parliament, I had addressed this subject in my last Ministerial Statement last year but I believe an update is due. I thank the honourable member for the question.

If I can give an update on the re-establishment of the Rural Housing Unit, it was reinstated in the Ministry. This involved transfer of the Unit staff who were previously with the Ministry of Housing, who were mostly carpenters.

The Head of Rural Housing Unit and other key personnel were recruited at the beginning of this year. The team is to oversee the administration of the programme from the Ministry's Headquarters and inhouse carpenters to assist in the implementation of the Programme.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the four housing schemes offered under the Rural Housing Assistance Programme are:

Scheme 1

Government assistance to applicants to purchase building materials at a minimum cost of \$30,000, to which Government will facilitate the cartage cost of building materials.

Scheme 2

Requires the applicant to pay one-third contribution in cash, while the Ministry pays two-thirds of the total project cost. The Scheme is targeted at individual applicants with the following options:

- (i) Newly built house construction using the approved 24 x 16 feet house plan.
- (ii) The extension of an existing structure which includes the attachment of sanitation and kitchen facilities.
- (iii) Retrofitting of the existing structure to withstand Category 4 and Category 5 tropical cyclones.
- (iv) Completion of an existing structure.

Scheme 3

Mainly targets timber resource owners with either pine schemes, native tree resource owners or lease beneficiary holders who can use these resources as their one-third contribution. The Ministry works with the Ministry of Forestry on this Scheme.

Scheme 4

Meant to assist beneficiaries under the Family Assistance or Social Welfare Housing Scheme. This Scheme will adopt the same Rural Housing Unit Standard House Plan with additional disability friendly facilities. So, those who request this assistance needs the support of the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the Programme prioritizes assistance to those who are permanently residing in villages and rural settlements and in non-urban and peri-urban areas. The Ministry is developing this initiative to maximise the assistance to the most overlooked communities in our Fiji, thus the Ministry, through the Rural Housing Assistance Programme, will work to narrow this gap.

On the progress to-date, the Rural Housing Unit has produced an engineered approved designed timber framed house plan with material list as part of the Rural Housing Assistance New House Programme, and as I speak, rural and maritime communities are receiving this assistance through the four Divisional Commissioners.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the Ministry has allocated \$3 million for the Rural Housing Assistance Programme in this financial year in which the Ministry has released funds for the implementation of the Programme. The Ministry is targeting to complete 130 projects in the current financial year, and the breakdown of released funds and the number of projects per Division are as follows:

No.	Division	Number of Projects	Cost
1.	Western	42	\$816,578.32
2.	Northern	23	\$607,164.15
3.	Central	37	\$684,365.00
4.	Eastern	28	\$498,221.00
Total		130	\$2,606,328.47

This year is the first financial year that the Ministry is taking on the responsibility of Rural Housing Programme again and based on the experiences encountered this year, the Ministry is working on reviewing the Standard Operating Procedures and Guidelines for the Rural Housing Assistance Programme, taking into consideration the different earning power of our rural communities and the fluctuation of the market prices that prompted the increase and the cost of building materials.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the review will also allow the inclusion of women and children privacy and promote the inclusion of safety and security of our vulnerable population in our new model design.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I believe, as honourable Members of this august Parliament, we are aware of the objectives of the SDGs and you have a responsibility to institute strategies to achieve those goals and targets. Sir, SDG11 relates to making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. Target 11.1 states and I quote, “By 2030, ensures access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums.” The Ministry is doing its best to work towards achieving this target and to ensure that our rural and maritime communities will have conducive and durable houses that they can call home.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for his detailed response. I had a look at the question and chuckled to myself, the question said, “revival of rural housing programme initiative”. There was no revival as such, this programme was already revived by the Ministry of Housing with a couple of things that was done. One was the review of the policy, plus the development of various plans, like CAT4 Engineer Certified Programme, so quite a lot of work went into it. My question to you, honourable Minister is, how many projects have the Ministry completed in the 2023-2024 financial year?

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the projects at the moment are ongoing, none have been completed yet. There are quite a number of applications that were received, about 6,600 applications and at the moment, we are working hard to complete whatever needs to be completed and we will come back to Parliament with a report when those projects are completed.

HON. N.T. TUINACEVA.- Honourable Minister, we have NGOs like the Habitat for Humanity Fiji, that is heavily involved in rural housing, and those kinds of projects. In this framework or policy, do you have some kind of working partnership with them because I feel that they can be involved and assist with your projects in a bigger way?

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have some working partnership with some of these NGOs, Habitat for Humanity in some projects, as well as ADRA Fiji, as I had mentioned yesterday. But as far as the Rural Housing Project is concerned, it is a purely Government enterprise.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have a simple question to the honourable Minister. When the Rural Housing Unit was with the Ministry of Housing, they had come up with a new design, but you have stated that you have gone back to the normal 24 x16. So, the question honourable Minister is, has the plan been approved?

When I inquired late last year, according to your staff, it is still going through the approval process and what is critical in the plan is whether that 24 x 16 also includes the ablution unit, meaning the bathroom and the toilet, because this is something that was learnt from previous disasters.

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the current houses that we have are engineer-certified and this has been approved by the Ministry of Works as well. Sorry, what was your second question?

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- The ablution block.

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- The ablution block is part of the plan as well.

Measures to Combat Increase in HIV Cases
(Question No. 22/2024)

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

There is an increase in HIV cases and a contributing factor, amongst others, is the practice of injecting diluted methamphetamine into bloodstreams, then sharing the drug-infused blood with other users. Can the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services inform Parliament on the measures in place to combat this issue?

HON. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, in terms of what the Ministry is doing with the current surge in HIV cases within the nation, allow me to first give a brief status of the current HIV status within the nation.

Sir, addressing the sharp rise in HIV cases in Fiji in recent years is, indeed, an uphill battle and will require our collective effort. Our latest Ministry statistics on HIV positive cases show a near doubling of new cases diagnosed each year from 2021 to 2023, and we anticipate that this trend will continue in 2024. However, the numbers recorded at the Ministry may only be a fraction of the real number of HIV cases in the community and this should be a concern for all of us in Parliament.

I had highlighted in Parliament in the last session that injecting drug users have been reported to the Ministry to be using a new method called “blue tooting”. Blue tooting, as what honourable Lal mentioned, is a means to share injectable drugs amongst users, which involves injecting drug users, plunging a syringe of diluted methamphetamine into the bloodstream, drawing first blood and sharing the syringe with a second person who can then pass it on to a third. This is a very high risk activity which poses a number of serious health issues for those involved, such as serious adverse effects from sharing unmatched blood that includes severe anaphylactic reactions and death; transmission of serious infections such as HIV, Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C; bacterial infections at the injection site; as well as passing bacteria into the blood stream that can cause severe infections from unhygienic injecting practices. I wish to advise all IV drug users to refrain from this activity as it can lead to more serious health outcomes immediately and in the long terms for users.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to touch on to what the Ministry is doing, the solution for the HIV situation in Fiji requires several actions and approaches involving critical stakeholders collaborating or working together to comprehensively address the many aspects of the issue. The Ministry is finalising the HIV Surge Strategy which will facilitate our collaboration with health partners across Government Ministries and our communities, to –

- strengthen prevention;
- increase national HIV testing by 3 percent for key population groups;

- improve access to diagnoses and treatment;
- reduce stigma and discrimination relating to HIV/AIDS; and
- strengthen the governance of our HIV Response Programme.

Our HIV Clinics across the country are working with stakeholders and community groups to increase awareness, understanding all the dangers relating to injecting drug usage and understanding the risks associated with the practice is important in curbing the practice amongst new and potential users.

The Ministry will facilitate the decentralisation of service delivery, testing, treatment and care with oversight provided by the specialist at Sexual Reproductive Health Clinics in Fiji's three largest Divisions, mainly Western, Central/Eastern and Northern. This will facilitate the collaboration that addresses universal access and inequity for service delivery to the public and private health sectors across the nation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to conclude by reminding everyone in Fiji that unsafe sexual practice and the use of injectable drugs are contributing to the rise of HIV in Fiji. Avoiding these risky behaviours can prevent you from getting HIV infection. I also want to reiterate that having HIV is not the end of the world and not a death sentence. With treatment, people living with HIV can lead a normal and productive life and have children who are HIV infections-free.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, on policy formulation and legislation, Public Health Officials need to advocate for a healthier law and policy targeting the stigmatisation of HIV and AIDS and also drug users. Stigma can discourage affected individuals from seeking necessary help. My question to the honourable Minister is, would he consider the formulation of a policy advocating non-criminal treatment of drug abuse or drug users, emphasising it as a public health concern rather than purely its legal issues and encourage the needle users or drug users to seek assistance in our public and private health facilities?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Ravunawa for his supplementary question. As I had mentioned, we have a HIV Surge Strategy that is currently in place and most likely will be implemented next month. That will incorporate all what the honourable Member has suggested and, again, it is cross-cutting across all Ministries and throughout the communities as well - from NGOs, CSOs, religious organisations, traditional leaders, et cetera. This is a task for all of us in Fiji.

HON. S. TUBUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, UNAIDS is a vital and essential institutional platform for the United Nations as the main advocate of accelerated and global action on stopping HIV/AIDS pandemic. However, it is noted there is a reduction in UNAIDS' presence in Fiji, which has resulted in less support of funds for technical support given to the Ministry of Health.

With the reduction in support, there is high rate of HIV incidence in this country. In 2017, there were approximately four staff based in Fiji, but this has been reduced to only one in 2023. For the same period, HIV cases has increased from 150 to 450. Honourable Minister, the question I wish to ask you, do you think that there is a high degree of correlation between the increase in the number of HIV and the decrease in funding from UNAIDS?

MR. SPEAKER.- That is a very technical kind of question - correlation between the number that we have and the decrease in the funding.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, with regards to UNAIDS here in Fiji, since taking office and when I first met with the Team from UNAIDS, they were also saying

after our meeting that they will be moving their office to another region. With that being said, there is only one staff currently, she is acting as an Advisor to the UN Residency Office. I had written to UNAIDS earlier in October last year requesting that they re-consider in terms of moving their office away from Fiji. I will, again, follow that up and hopefully, I will involve the honourable Prime Minister. They are very much needed, and I look forward to that.

MR. SPEAKER.- I was a bit lost on the intention of the question because it came from your Government side.

(Laughter)

Mining and Land Use Policies
(Question No. 23/2024)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources update Parliament on the Ministry's plan to balance economic development with environmental conservation in the context of Mining and Land Use policies?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for the question posed to Parliament this afternoon. It is almost given that when people talk about mining or when mining is mentioned, people often associate that word with environmental destruction and exploitation. However, as we understand the world over, mining has been around for many centuries.

Mining is a crucial and perhaps, a critical component of any national development and more so particularly for those countries that have a large deposit of mineral resources because it provides for the necessary raw materials that are used in today's developing world in construction, energy and in technology.

Minerals are fundamental and are also important to the ingredients that we have in our everyday consumables, from the toothpaste that we use on a daily basis, jeans that we wear, the latest technology that we enjoy such as our mobile phones, laptops, smart televisions, all those contain products that are extracted from mining activities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Mining Industry contributes to Fiji's economy through job creation and employment opportunities. This sector offer both, direct and indirect employment, positively impacting our local communities and, of course, our regional economies. Direct employment in mining involves jobs such as the miners, technicians, engineers, surveyors, administrative personnel and mine labourers, to name a few. These positions offer competitive wages and benefits, attracting skilled workers and contributing to local economy and its stability.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just by way of background, currently, three mining operations in Fiji employs about 2,000 people, while the exploration sector employs another 100. By the latest count, the recently opened Tuvatu Mine in Nadi has a total of 420 registered workers, plus eight expatriates, with an estimate of \$120,000 being their figure of fortnightly pay. The Vatukoula Gold Mine on the other hand, employs 1,058 workers, with 19 expatriates. Their pay bill hovers around \$800,000 every fortnight.

It is important to mention that during the COVID-19 pandemic, the mining sector continued operation, and continues to bring in the much needed employment income for our local people and boosting economic activities in their communities. These companies' employees were not laid off,

but further recruitment of new staff was made.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry always strives to strike a balance between development, and when I say development, any development for that matter, not just mining, and emerging issues about environmental protection and economic growth. There is always this hard task of managing what would development caused to our environment because we are always in need of economic expansion. For mining, it is enshrined in the Mining Act 1965 and is facilitated through mineral exploration and mining, using, of course, sustainable best practices that are practised worldwide.

The Ministry of Lands is mandated under the Mining Act 1965 to safeguard the environment and also the people who live around it. In addition, there are also requirements now under the Environment Management Act 2005 to which we are also aligned to. The main reason for doing that is to ensure environmental stability and protection, and when there is mining, environmental rehabilitation through a very comprehensive rehabilitation plan.

Mining development approval can only be permitted if the various authorities have given their relevant endorsements. For example, the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) by the Department of Environment and the surface lease from the iTaukei Lands Trust Board (iTTLTB) are a must before any mining lease is issued. Director Mines cannot approve any application if such endorsements from these authorities, within the mining approval process, is questioned or not granted.

It is also worth noting that responsibilities of environment conservation is not solely the responsibility of the Department of the Mineral Resources, but with the respective authorities of the law governing all these sectors that I have alluded to. The Department of Mineral Resources works within the premise of the legislation that regulates that resource sector in Fiji. They are the:

1. Mining Act 1965;
2. Quarries Act 1939;
3. Explosives Act 1937;
4. Petroleum (Exploration and Exploitation) Act 1978;
5. International Seabed Mineral Management Act 2013; and
6. Fair Share of Mineral Royalties Act 2018.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, some of the practices adopted by the Ministry to address the balance needed between development and conserving environment includes collaboration with other line Ministries such as the Ministry of Fisheries and Forestry, Department of Environment and Climate Change, Ministry of iTaukei Affairs and other agencies that I have referred to, such as, iTLTB, Water Authority of Fiji (WAF) and the Fiji Roads Authority (FRA).

While applications for mineral exploration and mining are being processed, these stakeholders are consulted to identify areas of ecological or cultural interests. If they are agreed upon, they would then be demarcated as exclusion or no-go zones in mining.

Secondly, the ERA and Environment Management Plans are integral components of the application process for mining and special prospecting licence. Also, monitoring of compliance is undertaken on a quarterly basis during the mineral exploration and during the mining phase.

Thirdly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is a requirement for active mines to submit monthly reports to the Director of Mines which requires updates on their environmental management strategies whereas for exploration, companies need to submit quarterly reports to the Director of Mines, which include updates on the environmental management measures that they have undertaken.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, finally, under section 16 of the Mining Act of 1965, a performance deposit is paid to the Department of Mineral Resources that is withheld as a guarantee of their company's performance. Part of the deposit calculation also includes and accounts for environmental rehabilitation.

It is a mandatory requirement for areas disturbed from exploration activities, such as drilling, trenching, et cetera, to undergo approved rehabilitation work. For example, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the planting of pines for the Nawailevu Bauxite Mines, 160,000 pine trees at Nawailevu site while another 5,000 trees replanted at the second location for the sole benefit of the landowners of Nawailevu. Mining rehabilitation is value adding, taking into account post-mining land use for the benefit of the landowners.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for any land use development, including mining, protection of the environment will remain to be a challenge, not just in Fiji as a developing nation, but elsewhere around the world where there are development needs on land and sea, be it at a global, regional or local here in Fiji. That is why, Mr. Speaker, it is important to maintain the right balance between land development, the need for economic extension of a country and the absolute need for environment conservation.

Section 21(1) of the State Lands Act 1945 states, and I quote:

“No lease of any State foreshore land or of any soil under the waters of Fiji shall be made without the express approval of the Minister and such approval shall not be granted unless the Minister declares that such lease does not create a substantial infringement of public rights.”

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources has the legislative mandate or authority to allocate and approve foreshore developments in our country. However, this is done and can only be done within the ambit of ensuring that decisions are made with consistency and accountability.

Together with obtaining approvals from relevant Government agencies, in addition to the Ministry's own checklist, requirements and lease conditions, all of these aim to identify the most sustainable action between land use in the case of foreshore land and social and economic development and, on the other hand, preservation of our environment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry have received complaints on the delay of obtaining ministerial approvals. This is, indeed, essential to ensure that thorough and careful considerations are made to preserve our natural landscapes, traditional values, heritage, whilst also embracing the modern opportunities that are available to develop our country and make it attractive.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry works in collaboration with the Department of Town and Country Planning in ensuring that its leases are in alignment with the Department's land zoning system. The Town Planning Act is a guide or a checking tool for sustainable development and further, the Ministry also consults with the Land Use Division of the Ministry of Agriculture regarding the highest and the best use of all of its agricultural leases.

Mr. Speaker, having to consult the Ministry of Agriculture, also allows the Ministry to issue the most suitable commodity for our agricultural leases, for example, identifying whether the land is good for grazing, rice, ginger farming, et cetera. However, for all leases issued, there are lease conditions which must be adhered to. If a lessee does not follow these lease conditions, there are penalties and implications and quite possibly, the last resort would be re-entry and cancellation of

lease.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry had been working in collaboration with the Department of Town and Country Planning on its State Land Use Master Plan along the Western corridor which should be finalised in this financial year.

Also, the Ministry is currently reviewing its Mining Act 1965 and the State Lands Act 1945, together with the recent Land Use Act 2010 where we anticipate integrating sustainable development on all State land, minerals and, of course, one of Fiji's best buys - groundwater resources. The review seeks to strengthen and improve on aspects of how best we could attempt environmental management.

Mr. Speaker, finally, there are discussions on the need to formulate a National Land Use Policy for Fiji, incorporating the three major land tenure - State, iTaukei and freehold land. We understand that this will be a very huge exercise where we will require the services and assistance of those other various relevant Government Ministries and institutions. But nothing is impossible if we combine our resources for a united course.

For the benefit of our future generation and to also leave this world better than how we found it, the Ministry is committed to have this policy in place. I borrowed that off from the motto of the Adi Cakobau School. This will ensure, Mr. Speaker, that we are developing holistically, and our strategy encompasses both, environmental protection as well as economic advancement of our beloved home.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I must thank the honourable Minister for his reply. It brought some glimmer of hope, particularly, in some of the projects that have been probably on the list for quite a while.

We fully understand the challenges, particularly, when you deal with extractive industries in trying to balance the environmental issues together with social and economic benefits. The simple question to the honourable Minister is, what is the progress on Namosi? It is in the interest of the country and, hopefully, if the issues are resolved, that this can proceed. What is the possibility of it being graduating from an exploration to a mining, should all the conditions are met?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Speaker, for Namosi, we are almost at the tail end of the decision-making process on the renewal. There is only one outstanding matter that we are going to be attending to the week after next and after that, a decision will be made by my office on the renewal of the Namosi Special Prospecting Licence.

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, a supplementary question, this is on mangroves, honourable Minister. There is a decreasing acreage in our mangroves, and I think there is a study to show that where there were mangroves, that has disappeared and the *i qoliqoli* adjacent to it becomes barren. I am just wondering whether we are slowing it down somehow, given the the biodiversity protection?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as far as mangroves and mangrove plans are concerned, in every foreshore development lease that is issued by the Ministry and if it affects mangroves on the foreshore, there is always a plan. If those mangroves are required for development to be removed, then the plan is that they will plant more than the equal number of mangroves that they remove either in the nearby area or in the area that is approved and agreed to by those traditional landowners or freehold landowners that are within the vicinity. So, there is always a concerted effort now, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that our acreage of mangroves are not lost.

With the development of the Mangrove Policy, I think in the future, we are going to have a very a cohesive and detailed plan that can be easily executed by all the Government Ministries. However, I can assure the Parliament that from the viewpoint of the Ministry as well as the Ministry of Fisheries and Forestry, we are working together to ensure that the standing mangroves of Fisheries and Forestry, we are working together to ensure that the standing mangroves of our country are not less than what it is now, and we will need to improve and increase that in the future.

HON. N.T. TUINACEVA.- Honourable Minister, going back to the question on the balancing of land use, the economic growth and the environmental protection right in the initial question, we see this in every areas - in mining, agriculture, forestry and even commercial activities. My question is, are you going to come up with this overarching policy that looks after all the areas?

I know that you mentioned something about ginger farmers maybe cutting down the forest and all those kind of work. Then we have on the other side, the environment was supposed to be coming in to give guide on how to protect our forest. That is the question that I want to ask, if you have or are planning to get this overarching policy that covers every area of land use to balance environmental protection and economic growth.

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we talked about it in the morning with honourable Tuinaceva. He spoke about his own experience of leasing a piece of land and that land is identified as agricultural. It has standing trees, so because his need is to plant ginger, they had to uproot everything that is on that piece of land.

What happened is after that, they have lost the birds that usually sing to them in the early mornings, but that is the price that I think is usually paid when such developments are undertaken without the consideration of what else would cost the local environment and how that can be sustained.

I think the important part that has been raised by the honourable Tuinaceva is for Government to find how we can provide for a coordinated inter-governmental environment preservation scheme that would, for example, permit our Ministry, Ministry for Climate Change and Environment, Ministry of Fisheries and Forestry, to better coordinate land use so that whilst we have land made available for economic advancement, we do not totally lose the environmental aspects of our own local villages and towns.

Plans to Improve Team Fiji in the Pacific Games
(Question No. 24/2024)

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

Given the dismal performance of Team Fiji in the last three Pacific Games, can the honourable Minister for Youth and Sports inform Parliament on the plans to improve and elevate Fiji's performance in the next Pacific Games?

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank honourable Naivalurua for his question.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, reference to the question raised by the honourable Member, the results at the Pacific Games very much depends on the performance of the individual sports competed. Government can only assist with funding allocated to each sport who applies for the development and travel to international events.

Sadly, Sir, the results at the last Pacific Games was considerably down, so as the previous

two Games as well. From the latest we had in the Solomons Islands in 2023, we had 21 Gold, 30 Silver and 40 Bronze. In 2019, in Samoa, there were 35 Gold, 38 Silver and 43 Bronze. In 2015 in Papua New Guinea, we had 33 Gold, 45 Silver and 37 Bronze.

In those same years, funding provided for the preparation and participation at the Games in 2023, the latest one we had in the Solomons, it was \$1.04 million. In 2019, we spent \$364,483 and in 2015, it was \$749,444. These funding figures do not include grants given for the development and preparation in the years leading up to the Pacific Games.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the funding provided for the last Games was substantially higher than that provided to the previous Games, so it indicates that funding is not the problem. We are working with Fiji National Sports Commission to identify how we can better develop and equip our athletes for international competition, but it still relies on the talents available to work with, and the National Sporting Organisation's (NSO) Development and Strategic Plans for athlete development.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, moving forward, in terms of elite athlete development, the Ministry of Youth and Sports, as part of its Strategic Plan, is to review the Fiji National Sports Commission to ensure that it is strengthened in terms of its role in NSO development and also establish the Fiji Institute of Sports for the management and development of elite athletes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, currently we are going through the budget submission process and with request from NSOs received, we are asking Government this year for an overall grant of \$17.6 million.

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Speaker, a supplementary question; given the importance of sports in a nation like Fiji, it not only adds value to the economy and likewise in international relationship as a foreign policy tool to bring about good relationship and we benefit from dividends through this relationship. Can we consider, as part of the strategies in improving our sports standards today, on a foreign policy relationship through sports diplomacy that we can have as co-operation to bring about more funding, explore more on those that are willing to help that can improve our standard and performance, not only at the national level, but over and beyond?

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister, before you reply to that question, I just want to add a bit more, especially on the interest here on how it affects the rural people. We had one good athlete from Tavua lately, he has been doing really well. Apart from that, we have two gold medallist here - the honourable Prime Minister and the honourable Leader of the Opposition, in athletics. So really that kind of question needs to be taken at a much more deeper level so we can get the best out of it. How have we not been doing well? That was the first question that was raised. Now, honourable Naivalurua is looking at the funding of this through international relations.

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we appreciate that supplementary question. Yes, sports is an investment, there is no doubt about that. We appreciate the input put in by the honourable Member and we would love to pursue that with other countries where we can establish partnership with them and how we can develop our local talents.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, sports has become a pathway for our youth, especially in the rural and outer islands, to be able to play in the international arena and earn a living for themselves. Sports has become a very crucial part of our economy with what our players in overseas have been sending to their relatives in Fiji through remittances. So, sports, in totality, is something that we cannot ignore. As I had mentioned in my submission, for the latest Pacific Games at the Solomon Islands, the Government did put in \$1.04 million, so we will continue to support sports from this side in whatever way possible to lift the standard of the games and to empower our athletes.

I have mentioned that we are looking at reviewing the role of Fiji National Sports Commission and the possibility of introducing a Fiji Institute of Sports where our elite players or athletes can go through, they are nurtured and developed for international competition. Our players become marketable overseas.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, according to the former Prime Minister, I switched sports once I got married from athletics to sumo. My simple question to the honourable Minister is participation in minor sports. There is so much focus on the main sports like rugby and football, but these minor sports are something that used to bring Fiji a lot of gold and particularly, when it comes to individual sports as well because it helps in building the character and personality of individuals. A best place to start with this is probably in our schools. In that plan, what is there between the Fiji Sports Council and the Ministry of Education in promoting these minor sports starting from school?

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I had mentioned about the Fiji Institute of Sports. It is one area where we can identify athletes at a very young age, when they are still in schools. The question we always ask every year is, where do our athletes go to when they finish from the Coca Cola Games? We are about to witness another Coca Cola Games this year, there is no pathway for them, a place where we can nurture these athletes and prepare them for international duties.

The Fiji Institute of Sports will be a better way where they can work with Fiji Secondary Schools and identify talents, while the athletes are still in school. We can develop those who have talents in sports and put them through the Fiji Institute of Sports. Yes, for minor sports, it may be a minor sport in Fiji but it is a major sport in other countries, for example, surfing. We are trying to introduce surfing in the Lau Group of Islands, and swimming.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Sumo.

(Laughter)

HON. J. SAUKURU.- We are also trying to revive boxing for those in the interior of Fiji, in Bukuya and Navosa. Those were places that were well known for boxing before. Yes, we are also looking at minor sports to be developed further.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Nabukalou Creek was used by the Government for some hilarious illustration yesterday, which in my view, is a disgrace to the MSMEs kiosk operators who are operating along that Creek and also Tui Suva and the *Vanua o Nadonumai*, the honourable Minister for Works who is a distinguished chief of Rewa and also the honourable Minister for Local Government, looking after the Suva City Council and the honourable Prime Minister himself as the Minister for Environment. It has been 16 months now.

My supplementary question is, the Government has spent \$1.9 million for the new running track at the HFC Stadium, which was officially re-launched by the honourable Prime Minister last month. We are now advised that the new track is already lifting and showing damage. Can the honourable Minister, please, advise Parliament what is happening here and when is the CEO going to be appointed to the Fiji Sports Council to ensure proper governance?

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I believe that is a new question.

(Laughter)

MR. SPEAKER.- The Minister is very good at this. He is a former Ratu Kadavulevu student. He is good in playing rugby, like he used to do in his village in Vitogo.

Just a housekeeping issue, honourable Members, and for the purpose of complying with Standing Orders with respect to sitting times, I now call upon the Leader of the Government in Parliament to move his motion.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

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

Under Standing Order 6, that so much of Standing Order 23(1) is suspended so as to allow 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.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have Questions to complete, especially from honourable Hem Chand, and a Written Question, as well as Motions for Debate in terms of the three Consolidated Review Reports.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I intend to adjourn Parliament for afternoon tea and we will resume when the bell is sounded.

The Parliament adjourned at 4.02 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 4.43 p.m.

QUESTIONS

New and Innovative Approaches for MSME Businesses (Question No. 25/2024)

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

Can the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-operatives, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications update Parliament on the new and innovative approaches to raise funds for MSME businesses?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I, obviously, launch into my response, I may be allowed just to comment on the word “wizardry” by honourable Ravunawa, who is a fellow clansman from Tailevu and from Tokatoka. So, we know how they manipulate words, Sir.

(Laughter)

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am somewhat surprised that the honourable Members on the other side are preoccupied with the imagery of Nabukalou Creek. It is about the second or third time they have mentioned it this week. I think sometimes in our lives, imagery hurts if it resonates and is telling the truth. Imagery hurts when it is signifying the truth. The truth hurts sometimes so I will use the words of honourable Tabuya, and I quote, “*ciqoma, jiloma.*”

(Laughter)

Mr. Speaker, Sir, may I be allowed to answer the question and I thank honourable Vocea for the question. Please, allow me to start with some obvious facts. I will start off by saying that for any business to grow, expand or diversify, it needs a capital injection. That can come in the form of an equity where you contribute your own funds or access to finance where you actually lend money from a bank or some sort of institution. I guess it is no secret that access to finance remains a major challenge for MSMEs, not only in Fiji but globally.

There are several ways that small or large businesses can raise funds from the formal or informal sector and, obviously, it involves using retirement funds or borrowing funds or cashing up on stocks and those kinds of ways of funding. To answer the question, Mr. Speaker, Sir, what the People’s Coalition has endeavoured to do is try and look at some innovative ways to raise funding or finance to particularly assist the small to medium enterprises in Fiji.

As we know, some of the most aspiring startups in our country do not have personal savings, Mr. Speaker, Sir, or a strong network of friends or relatives that can actually allow them to lend money and sometimes they do not qualify for grants. In Fiji, just as a matter of fact, it is recorded that MSMEs make up 95 percent of all businesses and less than 20 percent of them have access to credit from formal lending institutions.

The in-depth assessment of the MSME landscape, Mr. Speaker, Sir, reported that there is a funding gap of up to \$2.2 billion in Fiji. This demonstrates the excess demand there is for finance from the financial sector. In the last financial year within our Ministry alone, we had received excess demand for grant applications up to four times more than our budgetary allocation. So, even this year, there is already a funding gap we can see of about \$2.5 million.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one may ask, what are we doing about it? We must create the enabling environment that will unlock finance in a more seamless manner. We need to be innovative, forward looking, inclusive and entice private sector to increase their investments. We are working on developing the robust MSME ecosystem, as we have mentioned, that connects the dots better and fosters more innovation productivity and stimulates economic activity.

With the assistance of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Reserve Bank of Fiji (RBF), we are developing a law that will enable alternative sources of financing to be introduced into Fiji, apart from the traditional way of raising funds for businesses. The draft Bill was approved by Cabinet in November 2023 for public consultations. During the consultations, we have received positive responses and also important feedback from the business community. This will be the first in the South Pacific, while Australia and New Zealand already have similar legislation, that enabled them to undertake these forms of capital raising for businesses.

Just to explain the methods of financing, the first method of raising funds under the Bill is called Small Offers. Small Offers is basically where an equity based financial modality whereby a business will have the ability to seek limited capital injection of up to \$2 million into a business from a limited pool of investors (up to about 48 investors) that include family, friends and business networks.

The second method is Crowdfunding, and this will be undertaken through two structures either through equity or debt-based Crowdfunding. Essentially Crowdfunding provides a way of raising money on an approved online platform to fund businesses, including MSMEs. The RBF will be issuing licences to the online platform provider that acts as an intermediary between the business and the investor/lender. The Bill also details the disclosures or information that the businesses must provide before seeking request for funds. Mr. Speaker, Sir, in summary, these are alternative ways that the Government will try to introduce equity or financing for our small businesses.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, following the conclusion of the current consultations, the Bill is being vetted and will be presented at the next Cabinet sitting. Subsequently, the Bill will go through its own consultations and then make its way into this august Parliament. When the Bill is ready to be brought to Parliament, which I am eagerly looking forward to, we will definitely have more discussions and debates on the Bill.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is important that one has to look at the funding for the MSMEs. Currently, big businesses can get access to loans at a very cheap interest rate, sometimes 2 percent or 3 percent, but when it comes to small businesses, they struggle, despite the Government trying to get assistance or setting up some mechanism to assist MSMEs through Reserve Bank of Fiji (RBF) as well as Fiji Development Bank (FDB), but that is not sufficient.

We do have some loan sharks through which MSMEs try and raise loans or get some money to get on with their business. Also, we have other micro-financing agencies and they charge very exorbitant rate of interest. Sometimes it is 20 percent, and it is not even viable to borrow from them. We look forward to what the Bill is all about, and my question to the honourable Minister is, on that initial step of consultation on the Bill, which stakeholders were involved in the initial stages of discussion?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we consulted quite extensively and that involved Vanua Levu and Viti Levu both, in traditional settings as well as the normal business MSME consultation. I think it is the first round of consultations and I am sure if we take this Bill through the normal process, there will be another opportunity to do some more consultations.

For me, Mr. Speaker, this kind of new mechanisms are only successful if they are simple and workable. Uptil now, I am heartened by the fact that I have not heard any negative suggestions about the funding mechanisms, but I am keen to hear more because it is very important. Sometimes we think we know the answer, yet, we are totally missing the need, particularly for MSME. I look forward to the deliberations that will continue once the Bill gets through Cabinet and just to ensure that we put out something as practical and benefits what is potentially a very big sector for Fiji which is the MSME, Sir.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, would the honourable Minister, perhaps, clarify more on the difference between Small Offers and Crowd Funding because you did not mention any figures on both, Small Offers and Crowdfunding? That \$2 million that you were referring to, is that the MSME turnover or is that the debt ceiling that is available to them? What is available for Crowdfunding as well in terms of that?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, based on the guidelines provided by the RBF, I think they are comfortable with the limit of \$2 million on the total funding that can be provided under the Small Offers and Crowdfunding Scheme. I think it is a work in progress as well, but as we progress and get comfortable with the workings, perhaps the threshold might be increased. But it is really trying to target those who cannot really play in the wider spaces when it comes to financing.

Again, it is a learn and see as we go, and that is consultations is important and we are keen to continue that discussion as we go through the formalisation of the process because it is very important that we can get more often than not. We suggest things and then we get a shock when we realise it is not hitting the need of the audience or the people that we are trying to target. The \$2 million is actually a threshold, upper threshold you can ask for \$15 million or \$20 million or whatever, but the \$2 million is like a cap on the funding, just to create some prudential guidelines.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, while listening to the honourable Deputy Prime Minister Kamikamica, especially the proposal that he has placed forward, he was talking about equity and then funding that is going to be available to MSMEs to get from commercial banks and other institutions.

What is funny, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that when FijiFirst used to give grants, we were criticised and now *dinau* to MSMEs. How can the honourable Deputy Prime Minister justify by increasing the burden whereby MSMEs have to give equity and 80 percent funding will be *dinau*? They are already struggling, the economy is not doing good and then they will have to pay the loan. What kind of funding is this?

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Shame!

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, with this modality of funding, the investor decides what sort of level of return that they wish to impose. Because it is targeted specifically at the start up market, it is only venture capitalists who have the money that actually go in and play in those spaces. Again, we can all just rely on grants and leave it there, but we do have limited funds. Then if a ventured capitalist comes along and sells for zero cost, I will offer some businesses in Fiji up to a potential equity injection of \$100,000 to \$200,000. That will go a long way for an MSME. It is not a loan.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- You said about equity.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Equity can be a loan or it can be an actual injection from you own pocket. You are being semantic, unfortunately, honourable Maharaj.

The fact of the matter is that we are trying to create solutions.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- If you had listened to what we have been saying since this morning, this Government is committed to economic diversification. Stimulating the MSME market is a key pillar of the People's Coalition's strategy for economic diversification. Actually, you had zero economic diversification during your time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- I think honourable Maharaj did need the banks to support his business, even though he tried very hard, but the end result was not that good. But when his business was running well, the banks were writing to him, seeking how best they can offer. He has been through the mill.

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, a supplementary question; this women's bank that has been targeted by the honourable Minister for Women all along and may be an opportunity also, have you consulted with her and I did not hear you mentioning it in your answer. Is it one of those solutions also, or you have thrown it out, you did not consult it with her?

(Laughter)

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Thank you for the question, there is a bit of conspiracy going in there, Mr. Speaker. Again, it is a difference between that side of Parliament and this side. I have been privately having a discussion with honourable Tabuya on what we can do in that space. Really, once she forms the views of the Ministry, we will be there to help her, Sir.

There is already a women's bank out there, the SPBD that we know of, but it does not mean that it does not need to end there, there are other mechanisms that be used, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

I am not sure why they are so critical. They should be happy that we are trying to find more ways to fund MSMEs, or are they suggesting that we should not have any SMEs funding.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Very poor.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- I think that imagery of Nabukalou Creek is somewhat flooding their view of things. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Selection Criteria - Appointment of Special Administrators
(Question No. 26/2024)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Housing and Local Government inform Parliament on the selection criteria and tools employed in the appointment of Special Administrators for towns and cities?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I was hoping for another honourable Member to ask me the question before Parliament this afternoon.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I respond to the question by honourable Chand, first, I would like to join the previous speakers in wishing our Hindu brothers and sisters a Happy Rama Navami.

I think it is very important, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to understand why Special Administrators are appointed and the rationale behind the appointment of these Special Administrators. The concept of Special Administrators was introduced in 2009 by the previous Administration under section 9A of the Local Government Act 1972 going to suspend election of Councillors and reduce the independence of the Municipal Councils.

Firstly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there was a reorganisation of Municipalities done to bring two Councils together into clusters. That was done purely for the purpose of administration, sharing of resources and ease of management. However, this reorganisation created more problems than benefits. The Special Administrators working for two Councils had lost touch with the ratepayers and residents for some Municipalities. Why? Because they did not reside within those Municipalities.

The above has created issues like, lack of town rates collection initiatives, and even not attending to issues and complaints by ratepayers and residents in a timely manner. The needs and interests of the Councils differ, Mr. Speaker, Sir, therefore, the Special Administrators were not able to focus time and resources to both Councils, which was detrimental to the Councils.

However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, recognising the need for improvement and to ensure the Special Administrators in office supported the efforts of the Government and prepare the Councils for Local Government Elections, a review of the performance was approved by Cabinet in January 2023, leading to subsequent actions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Coalition Government's appointment of Special Administrators marks the beginning of a transformative phase for local governance - the phase of elections. This will pave way for a new era of accountable and transparent Local Government.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Answer the question!

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- I will come back to the question. Please, listen.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the review indicated that despite several discussions and consultations with former Special Administrators regarding the services of the Councils, mainly the Special Administrators were not active in attending to the matters of the Councils or the issues of interest of the residents.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there were several other major challenges noted in our review which included, supervision and monitoring of Municipal Council capital projects. Poor monitoring of basic essential services, like waste collection and management was a concern, and demands innovative and new approach.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, another fundamental concern was the Councils' internal governance and control measures, which were weak. Most of the Councils had outdated SOPs that needed urgent attention.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, a change of mindset was required, especially with regards to the reliance of the Central Government for funding of projects and other basic services due to income limitations. Now, we have empowered the new Special Administrators to think outside the box, to be innovative and initiate strategies that would bring about financial sustainability in their own Municipalities, irrespective of their size.

The reinstatement of market stall fees, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is an example of a revenue stream

that can assist Municipalities financially, especially in smaller Councils. These small Councils need cash flow so by collecting stall fees on a monthly basis, it supports the way they do their business.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I move to the criteria, I want to emphasise some of the remarkable achievements of these new Special Administrators. Within just three months of assuming office, these achievements are testament to our unwavering commitment to the people, the ratepayers and to the residents of our towns and cities. For example, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Nasinu Town Council, you must have heard in the news today.

HON. K.K. LAL.- All political appointment.

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- After undertaking an institutional review of the Council, they have successfully resolved a long outstanding issue by signing off a long outstanding union claims on Monday, 15th April, 2024. This is, indeed, a significant achievement.

For Nadi Town Council, the Council's recent agreement with the unions and workers in January 2024, ensuring staff receive their rightful dues. This achievement, Mr. Speaker, Sir, directly benefits our hardworking workers of our Municipal Councils.

Other key achievements, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is the Nadi Market bird nesting.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Selection criteria!

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- When I first toured Nadi Town, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that was the first complaint I received from the Nadi Market vendor - all the birds' wastes in most of the tables in the Nadi Market. So, the Nadi Town Council and the new Special Administrators have fixed this. I invite the honourable Members of Parliament to go and see the work that the new Special Administrators have done for the Nadi Town Council, as well as the newly appointed Nadi Special Administrators and even the approval of the acquisition of an essential vehicle which is like a working tool, to assist the Council in the delivery of some of the services that are provided by the Nadi Town Council.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Come to the point.

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Even the Sigatoka Town Council Mr. Speaker, Sir, the two Special Administrators have installed 50 new garbage bins and it is working on 50 smart bins, enhancing waste management.

Another important issue, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is on community engagement. When we appointed the new Special Administrators, they are connected to the ratepayers, as well as connected to the residents of their own Municipalities.

Within three months, they have conducted ratepayer consultations within their Municipalities. They have done consultations for Lautoka City, Labasa Town, Savusavu Town and Nasinu Town. Tomorrow, the new Special Administrators are going to conduct consultations for Nadi Town.

These achievements, Mr. Speaker, Sir, underscores the dedication of the Special Administrators and Local Government to serving the people with integrity, transparency and effective governance.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to outline the selection criteria for Special Administrators, which includes the following - competence with diverse experiences, people with business entrepreneurial

skills, former decorated civil servants, lawyers, architects and doctors, in their respective towns and cities. Most importantly Sir, is that they have the passion to serve their Municipalities.

Next is our commitment and availability, they are required to be committed to serving the residents of their respective towns and cities.

Another one on diversity and inclusivity. Most of the Special Administrators appointed, there is a good mix of gender in the appointment of the new Special Administrators. There is one female Special Administrator. One is currently the Chairperson of the Nausori Town Council.

HON. K.K. LAL.- What about the NFP appointment there?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Special Administrators are expected to prioritise the interests of the ratepayers first, then themselves later.

The other one, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is leadership and communication. They must have the potential and qualities to lead, while serving their Municipalities.

They must have the skills and competence to engage with their communities, so community engagement is very important.

They have to be strategic. They must have the skills to be strategically thinkers. When you are a strategic thinker, you should be able to solve problems more analytically. Preference is given to candidates who are residents of towns and cities where they ought to serve.

Following an expression of interest through an advertisement in the local newspapers, applicants meeting the criteria were shortlisted. The final Special Administrators were appointed in December 2023 by the Minister of Local Government with the endorsement of the honourable Prime Minister.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Very good.

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- For the larger Councils, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are four Special Administrators appointed - one for the medium and small Councils, three Special Administrators were appointed. The Ministry undertook due diligence to ensure compliance and some legal requirements were adhered to.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry has also developed various documents, including Appointment Letters, Code of Conduct, the duration of confidentiality and interest and resource manuals, all reviewed by legal authorities. The Special Administrators also signed the Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality Declarations and adhered to Code of Conduct to maintain integrity and public trust.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, since the Local Government elections is being prioritised by the Coalition Government, it is vital as Special Administrators are committed to the cause and will support the Government's efforts to reinstate the Councils.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, they are also guided by policies promoting governance, transparency and accountability. The Ministry also developed and reviewed policies and manuals to help them in undertaking their new roles as newly appointed Special Administrators.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Local Government is committed to establishing accountable, responsive and efficient Municipal Councils, ensuring good governance, practices and public

confidence in the Local Government System.

I thank you once again, Mr. Speaker, for giving me time to respond to the question before Parliament this afternoon.

HON. H. CHAND.- According to a media report and I have the report with me dated 3rd January, 2024, the General Secretaries from the three Political Parties - SODELPA, PAP and NFP had chosen and went through the list before it was sent to Cabinet for approval.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is in breach of the OMRS Guidelines. According to OMRS Guidelines, the recruitment process should be fair and transparent to eliminate any nepotism and discrimination.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, many meritorious applicants were not considered because according to concerned applicants, the due process was not followed. My question to the honourable Minister, can he inform the Parliament why the selection of Special Administrators was based on the three Political Parties' recommendation?

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, through you, I wish to respond to the question by honourable Chand. I will explain, Sir, the criteria on the selection of the Special Administrators, as well as the expression of interest that was advertised in the local dailies.

Sir, everyone was given the chance to apply. We received a total of 166 applications, so they were chosen. That was the prerogative of the Minister with the endorsement of the honourable Prime Minister, that has led to the confirmation of the appointment of the new Special Administrators.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the first time, I feel pity for the honourable Minister in trying to explain the mess that was created by the Coalition agreement to appoint the Special Administrators.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, according to the Ministry of Local Government Expression of Interest, criteria of expression of interest number one on residency, the applicant must be a resident in the municipality in which they seek to serve, demonstrate a deep connection and understanding of our community.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, first of all, I would like to know if Naitasiri is part of Nadi because someone from Naitasiri was appointed as a Special Administrator of Nadi Town, but he declined because he cannot travel from Naitasiri to Nadi. Secondly, Sir, because honourable Minister has actually spoken for almost 25 minutes now, the simple 'yes' or 'no' answer, can the honourable Minister confirm that the appointed Special Administrators had met the residential qualification of being a resident of that particular municipality, as outlined in the Expression of Interest?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- In 2013, there was someone living in Ba but was appointed as Special Administrator for Lautoka, as well as Special Administrator for Nadi.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- That is the simple answer to your question.

MR. SPEAKER.- It is hard for him to answer because all of you are talking.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- A Point of Order, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I just got a message from my General Secretary, who says that what honourable Chand was saying is false.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- What is your Point of Order?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- He needs to clarify whether he is just using a *Fiji Sun* report or whether he has got evidence to say that the three General Secretaries met to decide the appointment of Special Administrators.

MR. SPEAKER.- It is quite difficult to answer that Point of Order. Are you seeking clarification on that, based on the article that honourable Chand was reading?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Yes, Sir.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, what I said was, it is according to a media report dated 3rd January, 2024, and I have the article with me. It is a media report.

HON. L.D. TABUYA. – Article?

HON. H. CHAND.- Yes.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Fiji Sun?

HON. H. CHAND.- Fiji Sun.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Who's the source?

HON. H. CHAND.- It is a media report.

HON. RO. F.Q. TUISAWAU.- A Point of Order, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER.- Another Point of Order, honourable Chand.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Standing Order 44(15) and I quote: "A question must not be asked on whether statements in the press, or statements of private individuals or private concerns, are accurate." He is asking a question from the press. You should not ask questions from the press, that is what it states here.

The other one, Mr. Speaker, Sir, was on the Nadi Special Administrator. He lives in Votualevu, Nadi, so that is misleading.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Do not come and lie here.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Sharma, I now offer you the floor.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, breaking news for the Coalition Government. The General Secretary of Political Parties selecting candidates was quoted by one of the General Secretaries from the Coalition.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Who?

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- SODELPA, read the articles.

(Laughter)

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Honourable Minister for Local Government, it is a mess. How do you justify that these appointments are based on merit and not political appointments? Secondly, do you admit this is the practice of democratic values and governance under this Coalition Government? Yes or No answer.

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think I have already explained the criteria and the process the Ministry took prior to the appointment. I also want to mention here that they were stating that they were political appointees. I need to tell them that two of the newly appointed Administrators were part of the previous Administration.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- And one of them was NFP anyway.

Workers' Complaints and Labour Inspection Cases
(Question No. 27/2024)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations update Parliament on the investigations conducted by the Labour Standards and Compliance Services on workers' complaints and labour inspections cases lodged with the Ministry from 1st August 2023 to 31st March 2024?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, just before answering the question, I was listening to the honourable Hem Chand talking about the Open Merit and Recruitment System (OMRS). I was the General Secretary of the Fiji Teachers Union when he appointed Head Teachers (almost 600 of them), outside the OMRS and the Minister who questioned him was honourable Premila Kumar.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. H. CHAND.- A Point of Order, Sir.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Standing Order?

HON. H. CHAND.- 42.

(Laughter)

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Standing Order 60 on Relevance. I am asking the honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations to produce evidence.

MR. SPEAKER.- Did you say that because I have noticed this Standing Order moving across.

(Laughter)

You stood up on a Point of Order without being fully prepared. I think I will not allow that, honourable Hem Chand, please. Time is of the essence here and we are nearing the end of the day,

plus programmes that are still very much pending here, so I will ask that we continue.

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, hypocrisy is well practised in some places.

(Laughter)

Labour inspections, complaints and investigations are crucial roles in upholding labour standards and regulations set forth under the Employment Relations Act 2007. Sir, by conducting regular inspections, Labour Inspectors can identify and address violation of labour laws, such as non-payment of wages, overtime payment, holiday pay, leave entitlements and other dues in accordance with the Employment Relations Act 2007 and relevant Wages Regulations. Through these inspections, we can safeguard the rights of workers and hold non-compliant employers accountable for their actions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, compliance with labour laws is not just a legal obligation but a moral responsibility. When employers adhere to labour laws, they contribute to the wellbeing and dignity of employees. By providing fair wages, ensuring safe working conditions, and respecting workers' rights, employers create a positive work environment that fosters productivity, loyalty and mutual respect.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, furthermore, compliance with labour laws is essential for promoting social justice and equality in our society. By enforcing labour standards, we can combat exploitation, discrimination and unfair labour practices, that undermine the rights and dignity of workers. When we uphold labour laws, we uphold the values of justice, equality and human rights for all individuals.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Labour Standards and Compliance Section of my Ministry is responsible for the enforcement and compliance of the Employment Relations Act 2007 and Wages Regulations 2010, as well as the National Minimum Wage.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry has conducted 2,017 labour compliance inspections from 1st August, 2023 to 31st March, 2024, achieving 86 percent of the targets set for the eight months which was 2,336. Our annual target is 3,500, and we now intend to increase this to 4,500 or up to 5,000. We were not able to do this in the past year because there were 30-plus vacant positions that had not been filled for a number of years. We are almost on the verge of completing that exercise, so we can increase the number of inspections.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry has resolved 746 labour complaints out of a total of 999 cases received from 2022 to March 2024, achieving a settlement rate of 75 percent. These complaints were regarding the non-payment of wages due, annual leave, overtime, meal allowance and maternity leave.

The Ministry has over 600 cases before the Employment Relations Tribunal for adjudication, where employers have failed to pay dues to workers and comply with the minimum standards. The total recovery from 1st August, 2023 to March 2024, stands at \$660,000 which has been paid out to the workers through the efforts of the Ministry's Compliance Section.

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker, Sir; does the Ministry conduct training and awareness for employers and employees on compliance with the minimum standard?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry's proactive role is crucial in reducing the number of labour complaints received. Both employers and workers need to be made aware of the

Employment Relations Act 2007 and its subsidiary legislations for compliance purposes and avoid potential legal issues and disputes.

During the eight months from 1st August to 31st March 2024, the Ministry has conducted a total of 2,044 awareness trainings to employers. Out of those, 2,022 were conducted for awareness while 22 were structured training sessions which were conducted with employees. The list of 22 are the bigger employers –

1. Civil Aviation Authority of Fiji;
2. Natural Waters of Fiji;
3. Freebird Institute;
4. Makans Drugs & Pharmaceuticals;
5. Epic International Fiji;
6. Water Authority of Fiji;
7. Fiji Revenue and Customs Service;
8. Fiji Marriott Resort Momi Bay;
9. BSP Life;
10. Brijlal & Sons;
11. Sheraton Fiji;
12. Namale Resort and Spa;
13. Bank of Baroda;
14. Double Tree Resort;
15. Hilton Fiji Resort;
16. Radisson Blu;
17. Fijian Broadcasting Corporation;
18. National Fire Authority;
19. United Apparel; and a second one was done for
20. Namale Resort in Savusavu in November 2023.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, training in employment relations helps improve working relationships between workers and employers, leading to a more positive work environment, equips individuals with skills to effectively resolve conflicts and disputes that may arise in the workplace.

Similarly, by promoting a better understanding of employment rights and responsibilities, this would contribute to increase in productivity and efficiency at the workplace. It also enhances the spirit of good faith, which is the cornerstone of our employment relations in Fiji. We try to bring employers and workers together - bring about the awareness, so that they can work together and build their trust in each other which, of course, had been missing for quite some years now. We are in the process of rebuilding all that, which had been dismantled because of the amendment of the labour laws that disallowed that kind of interaction.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, just a quick question to the honourable Minister. Yesterday, I raised my concern about how our local workers are treated in Australia and New Zealand. I was not satisfied with the answer by the honourable Minister, talking about the role of Country Liaison Officers because there is a difference between liaison and arbitration, and that is my concern. You have talked about labour laws and workers' rights. My simple question is on employment relations, preparing our workers who are to leave for offshore employment. Is that part of the training package pre-departure?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, currently, we have four days of training and this training is provided not only by our team but we also have resource persons from Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and they do it together. They try to do their best

to familiarise themselves with what they can expect in terms of terms and conditions or labour laws in Australia. As I have stated earlier, four days is not enough, and we are now working with our counterparts in Australia to assist us, to extend the four-day training to, at least, two weeks where we will be able to do a better job.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the investigation conducted by Ministry of Employment is really effective in terms of helping our employees. What I wanted to ask was, for example, justice delayed is justice denied. We do understand that there is an Employment Tribunal which sits to deal with all the cases referred to the Tribunal and sometimes we do not have a sitting Magistrate looking after this Tribunal. Has there been any work done to have a full time Magistrate who can fast-track all these cases?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, what we have is what we had inherited. With my experience, Sir, being a trade unionist under that Administration, I waited for four years for the Employment Relations Tribunal to give a decision. There are cases that had been pending for four to seven years in the Employment Court and in the Employment Tribunal. so, it is nothing new from what we are doing now. I have spoken to the honourable Attorney-General, we are also requesting the honourable Chief Justice to appoint more tribunals and we are also now revising the labour laws. We are now going to straighten things so that we can expedite the whole process.

Written Question

Immigration Laws and Policy (Question No. 28/2024)

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

In light of the changes in our Immigration Law and policy as announced by the Minister, can the honourable Minister for Home Affairs and Immigration inform Parliament on the following –

- (a) how many that have come to Fiji as Business visitors are now employed and the general sector where they are employed;
- (b) how many of those non-citizens that are registered in the Vola ni Kawa Bula have entered Fiji through the permit exemption granted under the Immigration (Amendment) Act 2023; and
- (c) how many foreigners who are descendants of a Fiji Citizen on 10th October, 1970 have entered Fiji through the permit exemptions granted under the Immigration (Exemption by Descent) Order 2023?

HON. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Speaker, I will table my response at a later sitting date as permitted under Standing Order 45(3).

REVIEW REPORT - NATIONAL FIRE AUTHORITY 2016 ANNUAL REPORT

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

That Parliament debates the review of the National Fire Authority 2016 Annual Report for the seven months period ending 31st July, 2016.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- The National Fire Authority (NFA) provides firefighting, road accident rescue, urban search and rescue, HAZMAT, natural disaster management, flood and swift water rescue and emergency ambulance services to protect life, property and the environment. Its core strength is a service delivery model that ensures shared responsibility with various communities to minimise the likelihood and consequences of emergencies.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the pace of change in NFA's environment, both internal and external, is increasingly significant presenting both, challenges and opportunities. These changes will impact on Fiji's communities and will challenge the traditional way that NFA delivers programmes, products and services.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the period under review, NFA continued to achieve targets, as follows:

1. It was noted that as at 31st July, 2016, the total income for NFA increased to a totalling amount of \$8.1 million. This was attributed from the increased fire insurance levies, the water levies, structural fire safety compliance earnings and receipt of Government grant and ambulance operating grant.
2. The NFA's emergency incident response for the period, totalled up to 2,884. These emergency incident responses are from property fires, bush fires, malicious fires, vehicle fires, ship and boat fires, road accident rescue, private fire alarms, swift water rescue and emergency ambulance services.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee highlighted a few findings and recommendations:

1. The Committee notes the increased number of structural property fires and high level of grass, bush and cane fires, as this is still a growing concern and that response time to incident sites is still lacking as notification to NFA are delayed.
2. The Committee recommends that NFA continues to build on its community outreach programmes with rural and urban communities, agencies responsible for housing development, and other relevant stakeholders.
3. The Committee notes that NFA needs to establish a training academy to capitalise on capacity building, not only for Fiji but for the region as a whole.

On that note Mr. Speaker, Sir, I support the motion before Parliament.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion and before I offer the floor, I have a list of speakers that have been confirmed by the relevant Whips, as follows:

1. Honourable N.T. Tuinaceva;
2. Honourable Minister for Housing and Local Government;
3. Honourable K.K. Lal; and
4. Honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-operatives and Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications.

HON. N.T. TUINACEVA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to this debate on the Review Report of the National Fire Authority Annual Report for the seven months period ended 31st July, 2016, that is before Parliament. Firstly, I want to congratulate the Committee for putting the report together.

On the Committee's recommendation Item 4.2 it states that NFA to continue its community outreach programmes in both rural and urban areas. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the recommendation was for a report submitted seven years ago but to my view, it is valid and pertinent, and I do support the recommendations.

The reason, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji has been grappling with fire incidents. In a NFA Consolidated Report on Structural and Small Fires which damaged or destroyed buildings including homes, it proclaims that in 2016, there was a total of 330 fires. It was the same number in 2017; in 2018, there was a total of 337 fires; in 2019, there were 310 fires; in 2020, there were 278 fires; in 2021, 125 fires; in 2022, 323 fires; and in 2023, a total of 358 fires.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there was a media report stating that in the month of January and February 2024, there were 29 cases reported. At one point, a few months ago, 30 people were left homeless in nine fire incidents that occurred within 10 days. We have even reached a stage of having four fires in less than 24 hours and 10 home fires in seven days. In fact, according to the figures, 2023 was the worst in 10 years. For this year (2024) between January to March, we have a total of 62 fires.

Mr. Speaker, the pattern emerging is strongly suggesting that we will surpass the 2023 figure if NFA is not going to lift their campaign and awareness work. This is why I am saying that I strongly support the Committee's recommendation. Just like road safety when we say it is everyone's business, the same goes for fire safety, it is everyone's responsibility.

We need to educate people on the better understanding of fire, its destructive impacts and the preventative procedures needed. I understand that NFA has developed and delivers a range of community initiatives to educate people on the prevention of potential fire hazards and how to manage and control fires at the early stages. The whole purpose is to minimise damage and protect lives.

Mr. Speaker, according to NFA, around 40 percent structural fires are attributed to electric faults. It becomes the major cause of fire in Fiji, and that is alarming. This basically changes the whole fire incident dynamics and calls for a different level of awareness. Fiji is about 90 percent electricity access, therefore, increasing our vulnerability to fire on structures due to electric fault if standards are not met.

Mr. Speaker, NFA has to closely work with EFL and other agencies that are involved in structural wiring work on practices and procedures that strictly ensures fire safety.

Mr. Speaker, under the key findings, Item 3.2, the Committee commented on NFA's response time, asserting that it is still lacking as notification to NFA is a delay. That is unacceptable and we cannot afford that kind of retard in the NFA system.

Mr. Speaker, it can take 17 minutes for a fire to consume the entire structure of an average home built 10 years ago. That is remarkably a long time, compared to today's estimate time which is roughly about six minutes. That is basically how quick a fire can just destroy or kill.

The question is, how long does it take a fire to extinguish? Some reports are saying that, for example, a fully involved one-storey average framed structure can have a fire knockdown within 10 minutes. It all depends on how quickly the Fire Department can access the fire and has adequate water supply to put that out.

Mr. Speaker, the response time to incident sites is very important. I can only imagine the number of properties and lives saved if the response time was at its best. The good news is that,

between the period of 2013 to 2022 during the FijiFirst Government, NFA has expanded its operation. They built and commissioned new fire stations in Taveuni, Korovou, Korolevu, Lami, Nakasi, Seaqaqa, Savusavu and Nabouwalu.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, NFA also purchased several second-hand good quality vehicles from Country Fire Authority in Australia. In addition, they also purchased two ladder firefighting trucks and one powerful Scania firefighting truck to cover the increase in high-rise buildings in Suva-Nausori and Nadi-Lautoka corridor.

Mr. Speaker, I am also aware that NFA is in the process of purchasing land for new fire stations in Navua, Pacific Harbour, Korovisilou, Wainibuka, Natadola, Navosa, Navakai and Tavua. All these, Sir, will improve response time in a big way and uplift NFA firefighting capacity.

Mr. Speaker, NFA will need to expedite the latest fire software which can help them to prepare for emergencies much better. It is a critical tool that can assist in reducing response time by optimising response through managing resources smartly, communicating more effectively, checking response time and preparing for emergencies and can respond quickly and efficiently to response time and preparing for emergencies and can respond quickly and efficiently to emergencies. The importance of response time cannot be overstated. If fire can be kept small, lives and properties can be protected.

Mr. Speaker, before I take my seat, I want to say NFA needs funds to carry out the recommendations and address findings mentioned in the Report. Most of their services now is a bit slow down and low, and they are struggling to cope.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, NFA is a life and property saving organisation and to be at the top of their role, they must be well resourced. They need manpower who are well trained, specialised and are properly remunerated. They need the right tools which are at the best level of their service and technology to boost their performance.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to thank the leadership and the staff of NFA for the great work they have carried out over the years, despite the challenges faced – a broad and diversified role on their shoulders, but their commitment has been unwavering.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with that being said, I support the motion before Parliament.

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the motion that is before this august Parliament this afternoon.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Local Government takes note of the key findings and recommendations by the Standing Committee on Social Affairs and also takes this opportunity to thank the Committee for doing a wonderful job and doing a thorough investigation, even undertaking visits to some of the Fire Stations around the country.

One of the key issues identified by the Committee is the timely submission of annual reports. The Ministry had highlighted the importance of this, and the National Fire Authority (NFA) is currently working on annual accounts for 2018-2019. The Office of the Auditor-General has also completed auditing of 2017-2018 annual accounts.

The Authority is targeting to complete the pending accounts for the years 2019-2020, 2020-2021 and 2022-2023 by December 2024. There is also a need for the Authority to continue to build on its community outreach programmes with rural and urban communities, as well as the agency on

responsible for housing development and other relevant stakeholders.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the NFA is committed to enhancing and expanding its community outreach programmes, particularly with the rural and urban communities, housing development agencies and other relevant stakeholders. These programmes are designed to educate and empower communities to prevent fire hazards and minimise the devastating impact of fires, thereby, safeguarding their homes, basic necessities and human lives.

One of the core initiatives undertaken by the NFA is the development and delivery of community safety programmes and preventative initiatives. These efforts aim to educate individuals and communities on fire prevention measures and strategies to mitigate fire-related risks. Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the NFA conducts awareness campaigns in schools, delivering crucial messages on safety initiatives and the causes of fires, while also providing practical demonstrations on fire safety measures.

The NFA's Community Fire Warden Programme is a pivotal initiative scheduled for implementation across 1,193 villages and communities during the five-year training period from 2021 to 2026. The Programme entails the meticulous selection comprehensive training and certification of community Fire Wardens, ensuring that each community has capable individuals as Fire Wardens, trained to respond effectively to fire emergencies.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, progress has been made to-date with the completion of 11 community Fire Warden Trainings in the Western Division, nine in the Central Division and six in the Northern Division. I was so fortunate that one of the trainings was conducted in my own village about two weeks ago.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is also imperative to emphasise that fire safety is a collective responsibility. The NFA remains steadfast in its readiness to respond to fire incidents properly and offers invaluable service to homeowners and tenants on effective fire prevention measures and to safeguard their belongings and properties.

There is also a need for the Authority to engage in public-private partnership. The initiative to address housing needs for its officers in the three Divisions, I think, is one of the major challenges now for the Authority, which is the provision of accommodation for its officers and the Authority has been working in collaboration and consultation with the Ministry of Local Government to address housing needs for its officers.

There are projects that are currently underway, the Taveuni barracks for staff. Therefore, housing needs are prioritised based on the place where the Fire Station is situated.

There is also a need for the Authority to organise training for its officers locally and internationally for capacity building and specialised training and this area of NFA has programmes to train staff locally and internationally.

The training for Fire Fighters applied annually for the year 2023-2024 and in-house instructors undertake specialised training in Japan, Singapore, Jakarta and other agencies. The local training on core operational activities are conducted daily for the duty crew in all Fire Stations.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also wish to take this time to thank the staff and Management of the NFA for doing a wonderful job, fully dedicated to the call of the duty in ensuring that our properties are protected and also attending to some of the very important rescue operations around our country.

Thank you once again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for giving me the opportunity to respond to the motion and I fully support the motion before Parliament this afternoon.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is good to have you back and I hope you are feeling well.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I stand before you today to support the commendable efforts of the National Fire Authority (NFA) as highlighted in the recent review conducted by the Standing Committee on Social Affairs in its Annual Report for the seven month period ended 31st July, 2016.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this comprehensive review, not only celebrates the achievements of the NFA, but also presents constructive insights for further enhancement.

Mr. Speaker, NFA serves as a beacon of safety and security in our communities, tirelessly working to protect life, property and the environment. Throughout the period under review, the NFA demonstrated unwavering commitment and dedication, despite facing challenges such as increased structural property fires and delays in response times. The NFA remained steadfast in its mission, responding to emergencies with professionalism and efficiency.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the testament of the effectiveness of the NFA's service delivery model which ensures shared responsibility with various communities to minimise livelihood and consequences of emergencies. The NFA's ability to adapt to changing environment and evolving challenges is commendable, reflecting its commitment to continuous improvement and innovation.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the report highlights the NFA's proactive responses to emergencies, particularly during the devastating effect of *TC Winston*. Despite facing unprecedented challenges, the NFA continued to provide essential services, working alongside other service providers to increase its duties between agencies and taking the lead role during major disasters. Sir, this is the testament again to the NFA's resilience and dedication to serving our nation.

In addition, to its emergency response effort, the NFA also pursued capital projects aimed at enhancing its capabilities. The completion of the new Fire Stations in Korovou, Korolevu, Seaqaqa, Taveuni and Savusavu stands as a remarkable testament to the foresight and dedication of the former FijiFirst Government in ensuring equitable access to essential services across our nation's diverse landscapes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the visionary initiative, not only underscores the former Government's unwavering commitment to the safety and wellbeing of every Fijian, but also exemplifies its proactive approach to infrastructure development.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, through prudent investment, the former FijiFirst Government purchased and upgraded new equipment and facilities at these five Stations, allocating millions of dollars to modernise our firefighting capabilities. This strategic investment reflects the former Government's responsiveness to the needs of its citizens and its ability to deliver tangible results that directly impact the lives of Fijians.

By prioritising the establishment of new Fire Stations, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and the acquisition of the state-of-the-art equipment. The former FijiFirst Government demonstrated effective governance and leadership, fostering trust and confidence amongst Fijians.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this commitment to enhancing emergency response infrastructure, not only fulfils the Government's mandate, but also provides essential services and strengthens its reputation

as a proactive and forward-thinking administration.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, moreover, the establishment of new Fire Stations and the procurement of upgraded equipment and facilities carry significant economic implications for our nation.

By bolstering firefighting capabilities, the former FijiFirst Government has created job opportunities, stimulated local economies and attracted investments to communities in both, urban and rural areas. Additionally, by mitigating the risk of fire related losses and property damages, these initiatives help safeguard investment, promotes stability and foster resilience, thus contributing to sustainable economic growth and prosperity.

By investing in Fire Stations and equipment upgrades across various region, the former FijiFirst Government has demonstrated its commitment to leaving no one behind, regardless of geographic location. This inclusive approach strengthens the social fabric of our nation, fosters a sense of unity and security among all Fijians, and reinforces the Government's mandate.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, through capital grants and collaborative initiatives, the Government has demonstrated its commitment to ensuring that NFA remains at the forefront of emergency response and disaster management efforts. This support is essential, enabling the NFA to fulfil its vital mission. Furthermore, I also urge for increased emphasis on fire safety education in our schools and universities, recognising the paramount importance of safeguarding the lives of our young children and adults.

With the alarming number of fires occurring last year, as highlighted by honourable Tuinaceva, especially in our schools, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is imperative that we prioritise fire drills and safety trainings to ensure preparedness and awareness among our young youth and students. By instilling fire safety practices earlier on, we can empower our future generations to respond effectively in the event of an emergency, potentially saving lives.

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I encourage the NFA to explore modern techniques and technologies to enhance its firefighting capabilities. From advanced firefighting equipment to innovative fire suppression systems and adopting modern techniques significantly, improves the efficiency and effectiveness of emergency response efforts.

Mr. Speaker, by embracing technological advancement, the NFA can stay at the forefront of firefighting innovation and better serve our communities in times of need.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I urge all honourable Members of this august Chamber to acknowledge the commendable work of the NFA and support the Report that is before us.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to rise to provide my contributions on the debate of the Review of the National Fire Authority Annual Report for the seven months to July 2016. Admittedly, as mentioned by previous speakers, the Report is somewhat outdated. However, Sir, my remarks would be more in terms of looking forward rather than opining on what is in the distant past.

Firstly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, just to note some of the key findings and because I have had the pleasure and honour of interacting with the NFA of late, I, perhaps have an insight running in terms of some of the good things that are already happening at the NFA.

One of the key findings of the Committee, Mr. Speaker, was the concerns around the response time to an incident, which was found to be lacking, given notification delays. I report with some

pleasure to Parliament today that I had the honour of being in their National Operations Centre less than a month ago, and they do have now very modern equipment, which actually allows them to start notifying and deploying services to the needy as soon as the calls come in.

It is actually quite at an international standard, I do note, however, that there were some concerns raised just recently about the fire in Navuso but other than to say, Mr. Speaker, the systems that current NFA had that I saw in Suva, allows for oversight. When calls come in, they can actually issue instructions to the fire trucks on the ground, on situ to the fire, and they can call other parties on the way, like the Police, the medical ambulances, if need be, to actually provide comprehensive report. So, I thought that, that was a positive, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I thought just for the purposes of our discussions here today, that I highlight that as a positive for the NFA.

The other one, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is more an economic point of view and, that is, generally, when we create support services such as the NFA, I think those of us who lived in the 1970s can recall that in the 1970s, there was no such thing as the Fire Authority and it was a very small operation. Since then, it has grown into a very large operation with quite a few stations across the country and I think, as a Government going forward, we will probably need to look at how....

(Honourable Opposition Member interjects)

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- This is the thing with the other side of Parliament, Mr. Speaker. They set up big operations systems but do not think of the implications. Where will the funding come from?

What I am trying to say, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this side of the Parliament, we are trying to think about how we can deploy user-pay. For example, at the moment, the NFA goes around and now does search and rescue for accidents all over Fiji. In doing that, they get no direct funds from anywhere.

There are funds that are going towards Land Transport Authority. Perhaps, some of that can be deployed to assist with the NFA's good work in that area.

The other thing also, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is looking at the national fire levy. We have a lot of buildings around the country and the question we need to ask is, is the fire levy adequate enough and can we not increase it to allow us to service better the fire services that our people need.

So, those are some of the innovative things that this side of Parliament are thinking about, Mr. Speaker, rather than creating, sort of, kingdoms if you like, without thinking through the implications and what it means to the national coffers.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Very poor!

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- It is something like Nabukalou Creek again.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just looking at some of the futuristic things that the NFA, they now do have a strategic plan that incorporates Sustainable Development Goals and it is not worthy in terms of what they are trying to do in terms of integrated community approach which was alluded to by one of our fellow speakers, introducing community fire wardens in the communities to assist in the care of our people during fires. I congratulate the NFA for that as well.

Finally, I think the discussions around a training centre is an interesting one, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I think we all agree that should we find the right funding, maybe from some donor partners and institutes that serves our fire authority in terms of providing capacity building for what we will

become as the economy continues to grow on ever increasing demand and imposition on the country in terms of servicing fires, the need to have very skilled fire wardens and fire officers is a necessity and we hope that in time, something can be done on that.

Mr. Speaker, I do commend the Report by the Committee and I support the motion before Parliament.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank all the honourable Members who have contributed to the debate on the motion before Parliament. Sir, whilst we acknowledge the previous Administration for extending the services of NFA, it is the duty of any Government of the day to continuously improve such services for the benefit of its citizens.

On that note, Mr. Speaker, I have no further comments.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now intend to adjourn Parliament so we can have dinner and then when we return, we will try and look at the two pending motions before we complete the day.

The Parliament adjourned at 6.17 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 7.26 p.m.

**CONSOLIDATED REVIEW REPORT- FIJI FINANCIAL INTELLIGENCE UNIT
2021 AND 2022 ANNUAL REPORTS**

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

That Parliament debates the Consolidated Review Report on the Fiji Financial Intelligence Unit 2021 and 2022 Annual Reports which was tabled on 22nd November, 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 Consolidated Review Report on the Fiji Financial Intelligence Unit 2021 and 2022 Annual Reports in November 2023. While deliberating on the Report, the Committee noted the Fiji Financial Intelligence Unit (FFIU) contributions towards building a stronger, legal institutional, operational and regulatory environment on anti money laundering and combating the financing of terrorism in Fiji that addresses domestic risk of money laundering and complies with minimum international standards.

In its findings, the Committee noted that FFIU has Memorandum of Agreements (MOAs) in place with several local and international stakeholders which enables them to exchange information regarding suspicious transactions of possible money laundering activities, gain direct access to FFIU database, including seconding staff to FFIU.

It further noted that in addition to scams, tax evasion was found to be the other top possible underlying criminal activity identified in the suspicious transactions report. The FFIU investigated cases where businesses had not lodged their income tax returns since 2006 and cases where business owners had not registered their business with Fiji Revenue and Customs Service.

The Committee expressed its concern on the increasing online scams, pyramid schemes by using mobile money wallets and international debit cards to facilitate various online scams in 2021 and 2022. We would like to urge the public to be vigilant and ensure that they do not fall prey to malicious scams of such nature which would lead to losing their hard-earned money and savings.

Honourable Members felt that at present, there is no coordinated approach to deal with scams and money laundering and the law enforcement agencies need to act swiftly. A timely report to FFIU from financial institutions can assist in quick action. There is a lack of a single agency taking responsibility for ensuring that these scams are filtered out in their initial stages and exposed to the public.

On that note Mr. Speaker, Sir, I support the motion before Parliament.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion. I have a list of speakers provided by the two Whips, as follows:

1. Honourable P.D. Kumar;
2. Honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-operatives and Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications;
3. Honourable V. Naupoto; and
4. Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Justice.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you for the opportunity to speak on this motion that is before Parliament. Before I speak on the seven recommendations that was made by the Committee to enhance the performance of Fiji Financial Intelligence Unit (FFIU), I would like to express my appreciation to the Director and staff of FFIU for their commitment to maintaining a credible and stable financial system, despite the evolving challenges that come with the sophisticated financial crimes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, FFIU was established in 2006 to assist our law enforcement agencies to investigate and prosecute financial crimes by providing financial intelligence and evidence which is very crucial. The FFIU collects and analyses suspicious transactions and activity reports related to money laundering, terrorist financing and other serious crimes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, FFIU can only do its job if it receives quality and timely information from 344 domestic stakeholders and international organisations, as the Chairman of the Committee had mentioned earlier. In 2022, FFIU reported 16 breaches where financial institutions did not adhere to the five-day transaction reporting rule. Also, FFIU reported 19 data quality issues by financial institutions such as incomplete or incorrect information. The number may look small, but we cannot ignore the fact that every transaction matters to uphold the integrity of Fiji's financial system.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, FFIU has been verbally warning the institutions for non-compliance, although they have the powers to fine these institutions. It is for this reason that the Committee recommended FFIU to impose fines for breaching the reporting requirement.

Again in 2022, the estimated value of suspicious transactions that lead to criminal offence and tax evasion was around \$252 million and the top two possible criminal activities identified by FFIU were tax evasion and scams. It is important to highlight that 57 percent of the suspicious transaction cases were referred to the Fiji Revenue and Customs Service (FRCS) for possible violation of the Income Tax Act, Value Added Tax Act and Customs Act. The question is, how is FRCS protecting Government's revenue and creating a fair and transparent business environment? In this regard, the Committee recommended that FFIU collaborate with FRCS to develop strategies to improve compliance with tax and customs regulations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Minister of Finance needs money, he needs revenue to provide essential services to all Fijians. He has already fired the warning shot that the 2024-2025 Budget will be a tough one, so every effort must be made to plug any tax revenue leakages.

We are all aware of the study carried out by the Asian Development Bank on the black economy in Fiji and in this Parliament, we had discussed this report so many times. Though this report is old, it highlighted that Fiji lost \$2.8 billion as a result of informal economic activities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, considering the rise in drug and human trafficking, I believe this figure could be much higher. I think Fiji's financial crime is much bigger than what is being reported with the increase in the illicit drug trade. Drug peddling is a big business, people engage in drug sales, and they make a lot of money. The money trail needs to be detected to ensure our financial system is not used for cleaning dirty money, and I believe more needs to be done by the FFIU and the enforcement agencies.

In 2021, FFIU noted an increase in online and pyramid scams with the sudden surge in the use of digital platforms during COVID-19. We are aware of Fiji's biggest eBay pyramid scam. What we expect is timely intervention from FFIU and also from the enforcement agencies. The Committee made recommendations 1, 2, and 3 to ensure that FFIU uses other social media platforms to increase its online presence rather than just relying on press statements.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the Fiji Police M-PAiSA Taskforce for their prompt action against M-PAiSA scammers. Almost weekly, we hear someone being charged for scamming mobile phone users, so I thank the Fiji Police Force for that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee has proposed that FFIU establish a feedback mechanism either through legislation or a Memorandum of Agreement and I emphasise, Sir, that this is very, very crucial. In 2022, the FFIU forwarded 76 percent of suspicious transaction cases to FRCS for tax evasion and the Fiji Police Force for proceeds of crime and multinational crime. Unfortunately, FFIU receives no feedback - absolutely no feedback - from these enforcement agencies. The lack of oversight and accountability hampers the assessment of FFIU's performance on successful convictions or whether enforcement agencies are doing their job diligently.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a recent segment on the *60 Minutes* programme revealed that a former Chinese national, now a Fiji citizen, has been on the radar of FFIU for some time. I am not surprised with that information, given the absence of checks and balances that should be put in place. Sadly, the reputation of the Fiji Police Force has been tarnished because of a few corrupt officers, who have been involved in tampering with drug evidence or causing files to go missing.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to curb sophisticated financial crime, it is important to change regulations to ensure our financial system is credible and stable. In August 2022, the Financial Transactions Reporting Act and Regulations were amended to reduce the threshold transaction reporting from \$10,000 to \$5,000. With the increase in financial crimes like tax evasion, money laundering, human trafficking and drug peddling, it was imperative to amend the law.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, you will recall when this Bill was debated, we had honourable Members, like honourable Qereqeretabua, who was very worried that people would not be able to send money freely because of the new reporting requirement. We had honourable Gavoka who went to the extent of saying that it would affect the ease of doing business and, of course, we had honourable Ro Tuisawau, who was worried that this amendment was introduced to restrict money flow for the elections. We still have that law in place, remittance has increased, in fact, increased a lot, the election was held, and the legislation did not hinder PAP from receiving funds from overseas.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, law must evolve with time, and I hope the new CEO of FRCS, Fiji Police Force and FFIU will consider these recommendations to protect Government revenue, create a level playing field for businesses and, above all, protect the integrity of our financial system. I support the motion that is before Parliament.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to provide a brief contribution on the Consolidated Review Report on the Fiji Financial Intelligence Unit 2021 and 2022 Annual Reports as tabled in Parliament.

Firstly, may I congratulate the agency for submitting their reports in a timely manner. Currently, we are seeing this as a rarity to get reports here in a timely manner so that when we make contributions on these reports, they are actually relevant. For that, I would like to congratulate the former Manager of FFIU and his team for submitting the Report in a timely manner, which has allowed us to actually have some constructive discussions today.

In terms of the FFIU, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is without the question that it is one of the leading agencies in Fiji, responsible for the detection of money laundering and terrorist activities. Established under the Financial Transactions Reporting Act 2004, as alluded to by honourable Premila Kumar, notwithstanding the comments from the other side of Parliament then, it is a great initiative because it has allowed the country to create visibility in a very challenging area in terms of

money flows and business.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, according to the Report, the FFIU recorded \$1.9 million in Electronic Fund Transfer reports in 2021, as a result of increases in money remittance services from across all sectors. The FFIU analysed 752 suspicious transactions and provided 174 cases for dissemination to law enforcement and 27 cases to other agencies. What we have seen, as alluded to as well by honourable Kumar, is the rise in online scams and pyramid schemes, and the use of mobile money wallets and international debit cards to facilitate online scams.

On this side of Parliament, I am pleased to report that rather than just looking at this information when it first came to hand last year while we just started in Government, we decided to form an Anti-Scam Taskforce, which is already in existence. Through it, the M-PAiSA Police Taskforce came into creation and what that has done, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that for the first time, we have visibility over what is happening in terms of money laundering and scams in our country.

The idea, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that it is not going to be a long-term Taskforce. We are combining together across agencies merely to create visibility on issues regarding to scams and then create teeth in legislations. So, I hope, in the not too distant future, to return to Parliament to actually talk about, through the honourable Attorney-General and the honourable Minister of Finance, what we are going to do to ensure that there is teeth in the legislation to be able to prosecute on the scams.

One of the interesting things I discovered, Mr. Speaker, and this is information for both sides of Parliament was that, in the current legislative framework, you cannot actually stop a scam until it is actually reported. If the Reserve Bank of Fiji (RBF) sees a scheme and feels that it does not look right, nothing can be done until someone reports a loss on that scam. So, we are hoping that through this Taskforce, we can create a more proactive approach so that we clamp down on some of these schemes as they evolve rather than when the horse is bolted, we then are talking about a historical event.

That, I think, is a positive contribution from this side of Parliament, reacting to circumstances as they had happened over the last year, particularly, and we hope to come back to Parliament to actually make good on our intent to really tighten up the laws and ensure that the agencies involved have the powers to actually do what they should do when these types of schemes or scams emerge.

Another interesting fact from the Report alludes to cases where businesses had not lodged their tax returns since 2006, as well as business owners that had not registered their businesses with FRCS and perhaps, just as a comment I know this is something that the honourable Minister of Finance is looking into, is to see what can be done for the two agencies to collaborate a lot closer to ensure that this kind of leakages, if you like, in the tax system can be plugged so that the money owing to Government is rightfully collected Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are two other points, we are facing one of the major challenges of our generations right now in terms of the drug crisis in our country. So, it is important that Government and certainly we will make sure that the FFIU continues to be well resourced to address the scourge that is occurring in our country and ensure that the drug crisis that currently exists is thoroughly addressed in terms of the money flows in and out, and to ensure that we can crack down to this criminal activity.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in wrapping up, I would like to congratulate the FFIU for engaging with our Australian counterparts that do tracking. It is called the Australian Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre (AUSTRAC). I understand the engagement is to try and capacity build and strengthen the FFIU and from outside of Parliament, we will certainly ensure that we build on this

regional solidarity, as we try and remain united in our battle against money laundering, the drug problem and, of course, terrorist financing activities around the world.

With those few words, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I welcome the findings and recommendations made by the Committee and I thank the FFIU for all the good work they are doing.

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the motion that is before Parliament. I would like to thank the Committee for the Review Report, thank you for the findings and the recommendations that are in there and I hope the relevant agencies will read the Report and look at the very good recommendations and findings that you have.

I would like to pick up on your finding number eight and if I read it, it says, “FFIU analysed 752 suspicious transaction reports, provided 174 case dissemination reports to law enforcement agencies and 27 cases linked to other cases already disseminated but did not receive feedback on the outcome of these reports.” I hope that something can be done so that they can provide the feedback for those who work in the intelligence community. They know that information requirement or Request for Information (RFI), the loop needs to be closed before that information is turned into intelligence, then it is the intelligence that is useful.

This is an Intelligence Unit and if agencies do not close that loop and report back, as they found out in the Committee Report, then they are not giving the FFIU the tool for them to do their job - intelligence and it just remains as information and is never turned into intelligence.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I had raised this before, crime of this nature is transnational and what FIU is looking at, and I refer to the Budapest Convention. I had raised this before on when will we sign up to the Convention. I know that our Committee had looked at it and brought it back to Parliament and it is up to the Government to bring it back for it to be passed by Parliament because it is transnational. We need the cooperation; we need to link up with those that are at the front of this fight against cybercrime and that Convention provides a very good tool in that fight that we have. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I support the motion before Parliament.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are seven recommendations. First of all, may I also highlight how appreciative I am in terms of the Report. It is a very educational tool, neatly done, comprehensive and anyone can pick up this Report by the Standing Committee and follow what the FIU does. It is very elaborate and, again, I echo the same sentiments as expressed by honourable Kamikamica, it is a lesson for Government Departments.

On Monday, we were dealing with an Annual Report for after eight years, here we are dealing with 2021 and 2022 - more relevant, easier for planning and also, it is detailed and it is very informative for anyone, even for Parliamentarians and outsiders.

There are few issues, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that I just wish to highlight and one of which is Recommendation No. 2 in terms of how they reach out to members of the public. I hope that through the relevant Ministries that this information regarding the scam, reaches the *Tikina* level and also the *Bose ni Yasana*. Why? Because most of them, in my view, are the people in the rural areas who are not familiar with the kind of scam that are going on. They need to know how the game is played, otherwise, they will be easily cheated. Some are represented at the provincial level, others, I believe, should be more information at the *Tikina* level. Also, the issue that has been highlighted by honourable Premila Kumar and honourable Naupoto is the close interaction.

I reached out to one of the members of the Council in 2022 and this is the concern, she has never attended any meeting. I am told that there is no meeting of the council for the whole of last

year. There has been a meeting of the council this year. They are important people, very busy people, and this could also be one of the reasons that affects how often they do meet.

My concern, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that if an important entity wants information but that information has not been positively used. I reached out to a staff of the Ministry of Home Affairs and was advised way back in 2014. Honourable Naupoto would be aware as well as honourable Naivalurua, as he was the Commissioner of Police, honourable Vasu would be aware as he was the Commissioner of Prisons. The combined law enforcement agency is a very important agency that digest some of the information that comes from FIU.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the things that I found out last year was that it is non-existent. So, we wonder why the detection and the number of agencies have actually been lower in the past years than initially in 2018. I will take on board, as the Minister responsible, to ensure, first of all, that the Council meets. I am told there was a Terms of Reference that was supposed to be circulated and probably was not finalised.

The advertisement for the Director will soon be put in the papers so that a substantive post can be filled. I also wish to acknowledge the role played by the former Director for many years as the Director of FIU. It is a very small unit with two staff on secondment from Fiji Revenue and Customs Authority and one from the Fiji Police Force. Maybe, it is high tide from 2004 to really look at the legislation, review the members, and also make sure that they are more accountable at their work so that the intelligence collated are put into practical action.

I am pleased of the fact that there has been some successful prosecution, I have noted 32 in all. I also note in one of the press-release regarding the role played by FIU in terms of Musa. I echo what honourable Naivalurua said. Yes, there is a transnational crime being committed or practised here in Fiji and there are a lot of cases of unexplained wealth. It is so visible, but what we need is to use that information and with a close collaboration with the Police and FICAC so that it leads to a successful prosecution. Only then, then we can say that FIU is playing its key role in terms of combating the financial crimes that are being practised in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, I commend the Report to Parliament.

HON. S. TUBUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I noted the need to have more check and balances within the financial system, with the increase in drug trafficking, money laundering and human trafficking - the role of FIU is very critical. Money remittance is a critical source of revenue to the country and the use of mobile wallets need to be closely monitored.

Dissemination of information has been highlighted by most of the contributors and it is very critical so that information reaches the relevant institution and particularly, our communities in the outer islands. Inter-agency collaboration is very critical. It is quite important that the various agencies play the usual role and, of course, ensuring that they address the regulation that they are supposed to be policing.

I wish to thank all the honourable Members for their contribution.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

REVIEW REPORT - MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE 2018-2019 ANNUAL REPORT

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move:

That Parliament debates the Annual Review Report of the Ministry of Agriculture for the year 2018-2019 which was tabled on 22nd November, 2023.

HON. RATU I. TUIWAILEVU.- Mr. Speaker, I second the motion.

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, on behalf of the former and current honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources, I take this opportunity to speak on the motion in regards to the Committee's Review Report of the 2018-2019 Ministry of Agriculture which was tabled in Parliament by the former Chairperson of the Committee, honourable Inia Seruiratu, on Wednesday 22nd November, 2023.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Annual Report was initially referred to the former Members of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources in 2022, chaired by honourable Sanjay Kirpal. Nevertheless, the current Committee proceeded with its scrutiny as mandated to the Committee under Standing Order 110(1)(c) and made recommendations as a way forward for the Ministry of Agriculture.

During the period under review, the Committee noted that the Ministry had six Departments and had set out plans and implemented key policies and key activities to achieve high economic growth whilst ensuring sustainability of Fiji's agriculture sector.

The Ministry continued in partnership with relevant stakeholders to enable more land available for productive and social purposes, which encouraged farming, adequate production, and committed agriculture workforce.

The Ministry of Agriculture in 2018-2019 provided enabling environment for direct efficient delivery of services to stakeholders throughout Fiji. The adoption of the professional service delivery by the Ministry promoted maximum production through increased investment in the agriculture sector.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the 5 Year and 20 Year National Development Plan (NDP) highlighted the strategic goal of the Ministry of Agriculture, which aligned every Fijian to access adequate food for acceptable quality and nutritional value, and to achieve the overall goals of the Ministry of Agriculture.

Additionally, the other notable strategic goals was the competitive, sustainable and value adding non-sugar agriculture, promoting food self-sufficiency and the production of those agriculture products where Fiji has a competitive advantage.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the bipartisan Committee report not only examines, compares and analyses the performance of the Ministry of Agriculture but also took note of the Ministry's administration, legislation, organisational structure, financial management, functions and programmes.

The Committee was grateful to the Ministry of Agriculture Senior Management for their response to the questions which provided more references towards its final report to Parliament.

In summary, the Committee noted the following:

- The Ministry of Agriculture's total budgetary allocation for the fiscal year 2018-2019 amounted to \$96.8 million, which was an increase from the previous budget. However, the Committee noted that despite this significant increase, the Ministry only achieved 66 percent utilisation rate.
- The efforts of the Crop Extension and the Animal Health and Production Division in providing feeder food and nutrition security. Feeder food and nutrition security needs are well noted.
- While export figures are valuable, equally important is the domestic production and consumption figures in order to fairly represent the Ministry's contribution to the overall food and nutrition security needs, apart from the agriculture sector's economic share.
- The Report also needs to reflect the main challenges faced by the Ministry during the fiscal year. This will help in identifying critical issues that will need fixing in order to enhance performance efficiency and production levels as expected by the Ministry and the Government as a whole.
- Diversify and broaden Fiji's economic base, the agriculture sector both, sugar and non-sugar, needs special attention and relevant support in order to realise its untapped potential.

The Committee would like to see that improvements are made, and changes are undertaken by the Ministry of Agriculture, and that the Committee recommendations are considered for implementation.

With those words, I thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I support the motion before Parliament.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, floor is now open for debate on the motion. I have a list before me from the Whips and the batting order will be led by:

1. Honourable S. Nand;
2. Honourable Minister for Agriculture and Waterways;
3. Honourable Leader of the Opposition; and
4. Honourable Assistant Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister.

HON. S. NAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the motion before Parliament on the Annual Review Report of the Ministry of Agriculture's 2018-2019 Annual Report.

I would like to thank the honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources for reviewing the Ministry's Annual Report and coming up with recommendations. These recommendations will enable the Ministry to better its service delivery.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, agriculture is a crucial industry for Fiji's development and country's nutrients in several ways. Food security is one of the key responsibilities of the industry.

Agriculture is the primary source of food production. A strong agriculture sector will ensure Fiji can feed its population adequately and reduce dependence on imports.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on economic contribution, agriculture is a significant contributor to Fiji's economy. It provides employment to a significant number of people, especially in the rural sector.

The agriculture sector generates income for farmers and those involved in the agribusiness. The agriculture sector is the backbone of rural economy and not only rural economy, but it is also

the backbone of Fiji's economy. It generates significant foreign exchange in terms of exports like fresh vegetables, root crops, ginger, et cetera. These are some of the agriculture base exports.

The research and development done by the Ministry provides our farmers with new techniques, new seeds and better management practices, and how to best control pests and diseases. It also improves the social standing of our population.

Overall, Mr. Speaker, Sir, agriculture reduces the inequalities in our population and also helps in alleviating poverty. Fiji's agriculture sector is not only essential in making the basic human needs, but it also promotes, as I have said earlier, the economic growth.

The Ministry, not only in 2018-2019 but all these years until 2022, had achieved quite a lot under the FijiFirst Government. As the Report states, apart from the meat and dairy sector, pork and poultry industry had a very good performance and almost reaching self-sufficiency level.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the thousands or so employees or staff of the Ministry of Agriculture, who have dedicated their lives and their service to the agriculture sector. Their dedication to the sector cannot be stressed enough. I thank them.

Crop, Research and Extension has achieved a significant growth. Some commodities have reached self-sufficiency and also are being exported.

Rice production Mr. Speaker, Sir, some may not agree, was almost killed by the other Governments but the FijiFirst Government revived it and under their leadership, it achieved a record production.

For the other sector, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the FijiFirst Government had a multi-pronged approach to developing the industry. These were direct assistance to the farmers, programme management, improved extension services, access to quality inputs and tariff protection to grow the industry.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government needs to continue providing assistance to the agriculture sector. It is good to see that there is an increase in budgetary allocation to the Ministry. Thank you very much, but we are yet to see all the money being transferred there. You need to assist our farmers by reducing the cost of inputs...

HON. S. TUBUNA.- Talk about dairy money.

HON. S. NAND.- ... - fertilizer, seeds, transportation cost of raw materials, skilled labour is also an issue in our agriculture sector, the high cost of chemicals, and in the livestock sector - feed. I will talk about dairy on Friday. You wait and listen.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, when I say duty protection, it is to control the cost of production because Fiji is a small State, and we are competing with other countries where the economy of scale really drops us down. Removing duty protection in the agriculture sector could be counterproductive, like the way the Government removed fiscal duty on imported chicken portions.

When I talked about it, I was told the whole bird industry is protected, only the portions had no duty on imported chicken. However, one must remember that we do not swallow the whole bird, we cut it in portions and eat it. So, portions coming here, people will go for that and that will encourage dumping in our market because the other countries have a market for premium poultry meat, which is the best meat. The rest, they do not care, they can even dump it here at a very cheap price.

We need to protect our industry. We need to ensure that the cost of production in those industries are controlled, and we need to subsidise the cost of production. We cannot let our farmers out in the cold, we need to protect, encourage and assist them.

With those words, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I hope the Government will take heed and protect our agricultural commodities and not throw them under the bus, like they do to their Members.

HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the debate on the Review Report of the Ministry of Agriculture for the years 2018 and 2019, that was tabled in this august Parliament on 22nd November, 2023. Even though the Report is an old one, most of the challenges identified by the Committee on the Ministry's administration structure, budgetary allocation, programmes and activities undertaken throughout the functional Divisions are still relevant and the Ministry is working towards improving that. One of the weaknesses, in particular, is the failure of the Ministry to fully utilise its allocated budget, and the Ministry is working very hard to make sure that it utilises fully the budget that it is allocated.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry takes note of the findings indicated in the Report - failing to highlight linkages of the Ministry's programmes to the United Nations' SDGs 1, 2 5 and 15. These UN SDGs are relevant to the Ministry and the Ministry has recently developed a Strategic Development Plan for 2024-2028, and places emphasis on achieving those. The 11 recommendations put forward by the Standing Committee are noted and will be used as a guide for the Ministry, to align the development of its policies for the implementation of its programmes and activities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry ensures this august Parliament that the upskilling and recruitment of its officers and realignment of the organisational structure will happen. In addition, the Ministry is increasing the volume of production through mechanisation, assisting agro-processes, capacity building, improving research infrastructure and facilities and the use of new technologies to grow the sector.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to acknowledge the contribution of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources on the Review of the 2018-2019 Annual Report of the Ministry of Agriculture and on that note, I thank you for the opportunity and I support the motion before Parliament.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you for the time given to me to also contribute to the motion before Parliament as presented by the Chairman. This Report was presented during my term as Chairman of the Natural Resources Committee and I wish to first acknowledge the Committee and, of course, the Ministry of Agriculture and, most importantly, the stakeholders, particularly the farmers.

I will be brief as well, like the honourable Minister. The recommendations are there and as acknowledged by the honourable Minister, although the Report is old for the years 2018 and 2019, the challenges are still relevant, and I thank him for the commitment that he is making to ensure that they make improvements towards the recommendations.

However, for the sake of moving the sector forward, something that is not in the recommendation, but you will find in the Chairman's Foreword, is a recommendation for the establishment of the special committee because I, as Chairman, was unsure of section 101. So, that recommendation is for a special committee under section 129 of our Standing Orders, not only to look at non-sugar, but to look at the whole agriculture sector.

I did mention this during my contribution to His Excellency's Address on the Opening of Parliament last year, that there needs to be commitment by Government to have a special committee

to review the sugar sector. Perhaps, it is time that we look at the whole agriculture sector rather than demarcating between sugar and non-sugar agriculture. We have been communicating as well with the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and probably that is something to consider.

The potentials are still great, thank you, again, to the Ministry, the honourable Minister and the honourable Assistant Minister. I asked for their strategic plan just to have a look, and I note with interest and, again, this highlights that gradually, with the right focus and available data, when we link up to the market and look at the whole supply and value chain, the agriculture sector can contribute a lot.

What caught me yesterday, Mr. Speaker, Sir, when I read through this strategic plan, they mentioned about the contribution made by the agriculture sector during the 2021 period where agriculture contributed \$763.9 million to total GDP. If you subtract the sugar contribution from that figure, the total amount came to \$689.3 million and non-sugar agriculture, according to the strategic plan by the Ministry, grew a share of the national economy from 5.5 percent in 2010 to 8.2 percent in 2021.

It can be better and that is what the Government needs, Mr. Speaker, Sir. We look forward to the next Budget and, hopefully, with the continued provision of financing, particularly, in the three areas that are important to agriculture investment - public sector investment, private sector investment and investment at the farm level by farmers, and if they can probably link up to the MSMEs, they should be able to finance some of their expansion programmes and then graduate as well into semi-commercial and commercial level farming.

They still highlight the Report by IFC, honourable Minister, perhaps this is the low hanging fruit on what can be the focus, particularly, for the tourism sector.

May I conclude, the honourable Minister has talked about administrative issues. One of the key problems, honourable Prime Minister, Sir, with the agriculture sector, and I promised the team that I will raise this when we discuss this Report, is the high turnover. It is happening in almost all Government Ministries, but I think it is quite serious in the Ministry of Agriculture because in here, we have the Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific (CROP) agencies – Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) have established an office here, the Pacific Community (SPC), our universities, et cetera. The Government invests a lot in its human resources but then, as soon as they come back, we lose them because they are attracted by the offers provided by the other organisations.

Honourable Prime Minister, when we visited the Papua New Guinea (PNG) a few years back, I asked the same question to the honourable Minister at PNG and they stated that they also faced the same problem. But they came up with something and probably we can consider this, they always have a counter offer available in order to retain the staff because those particularly with Masters and PhDs have better chances of moving across very quickly, particularly, in the area of research, nutritionist, plant and animal breeders, et cetera, and the honourable Minister knows this.

That is probably something that we can consider, not a counteroffer that exceeds what we have been given but to match or is equivalent, perhaps with some terms and conditions that will help staff to reconsider the offers that they have been given because otherwise, we will keep investing in our people and we will keep losing them. However, we have so many potentials and this is very much dependent on the capacity within. We want to do a lot of value addition, et cetera, Mr. Speaker, Sir, but it is the capacity within. Unfortunately, we keep losing them and, perhaps, that is something that the Government can consider.

I wish the honourable Minister all the very best and, again, to the team in the Ministry of Agriculture - keep up the good work and we hope that we will get the necessary support as well, particularly on funding when it comes to the next Budget. I strongly am in favour of the Report before Parliament and support it, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you, honourable Leader of the Opposition. I think we will take note of that bright suggestion of getting the two Committees to come together, as you have suggested. We will take note of that and probably when we finalise the issue of scrutiny and oversight, then we should be able to get the two Committees together.

HON. S. TUBUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to speak on the motion that is before Parliament which is the Annual Review Report of the Ministry of Agriculture for the Year 2018 to 2019. I would like to thank the Committee for the formulation of this excellent Report.

As you are aware, Mr. Speaker, Sir, agriculture faces quite a lot of challenges, as have been highlighted in the Report. Of course, most of us are quite aware of these challenges which include climate change, market access constraints and the sluggish adoption of technology, access to finance, human capital, pests and diseases and, of course, inadequate infrastructure which has been highlighted by some of the honourable Members.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to, perhaps, raise a few issues with regards to some of the policies that the Ministry can, perhaps, adopt to improve the Ministry and, of course, the delivery of their services in the sector as a whole. The first one which I have put down here is the critical need to look at new ways of implementing any project that is being implemented by the Ministry.

From my experience in the Ministry, all the policies and everything is there, but I think the implementation is one of the problems. Of course, we need to come up with a new modality of trying to implement the projects. For example, we had this funding from the Indonesian Government to the Prime Minister's Office which we thought that, perhaps, we give the funds to the private sector, and they will be able to implement the project. We found that quite successful because the private sector is the one that needs funding and they will be reporting also to us about what they have achieved.

Of course, we need to have a look also into the consistency of our policies. One of the things that I have found out is the inconsistency in policies. After three years, we have a new policy and a few years, we have new policies again. The farmers are there, and they are always suffering because when they ask for funding for a new commodity, staff, of course, say that the funding has finished. I would suggest, maybe for projects to go more longer term, instead of four years, maybe for projects to be implemented on a 10-year phase.

At the same time, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we should be looking at how we can change the mindset of our people. I think the honourable Leader of the Opposition will know about this because he has been talking about that for the last five years. How do we change the mindset of our people in the communities?

It is quite important that there needs to be a more integrated approach towards changing the mindset of our people if we are going to have any success in the agriculture sector. The Coalition Government is thinking about these new ideas of working directly with the communities in trying to change their mindset and linking up the communities to the market. We have a few plans and I have discussed it with the Minister on how we can take this plan forward.

There are so many opportunities for people in the rural areas but, of course, they are waiting, and they need someone to come in and hold their hand and introduce them to new technologies,

finance and the markets that are there.

One of the things that I wish to highlight is the need to train more local people in the communities. I used to work on a project in Tonga where we trained local facilitators as Extension Officers, and I have already shared this with the honourable Leader of the Opposition. It was quite successful. Those are things that I have also shared with the honourable Minister, perhaps the need to train some of our people in the local communities to be Extension Officers because the cost will be much more or less, and they will be quite effective because they are in that community.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is all from my side and I wish to thank the Committee for the well-produced Report, and I support the motion before Parliament.

MR. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources to speak in reply. Perhaps, if you could take a leaf from what honourable Tubuna is suggesting on what he learnt from Tonga.

(Laughter)

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Members for their contributions and support the motion before Parliament. Sir, I have no further comments.

MR. SPEAKER.- 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 Sitting today. I thank you for all your contributions. Parliament is now adjourned until tomorrow at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 8.32 p.m.