

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

MONDAY, 20TH MAY, 2024

[CORRECTED COPY]

CONTENTS

	<u>Pages</u>
Minutes	612
Communications from the Speaker	612-614
(1) Welcome	
(2) Medical Check and Wellness Assessment	
(3) Women in Leadership	
(4) Formal Attire – Members of Parliament	
(5) Provision of Lunch During Parliamentary Sitings	
(6) Committee Review Report – Time Allocation	
(7) SODELPA Whip	
(8) Tabling of Report - Emoluments Committee	
Presentation of Papers & Certain Documents	614
Ministerial Statements	614-635
(1) Elevated Vuvale Partnership – Hon. S.L. Rabuka	
(2) iTaukei Institutions Forum Trip to New Zealand - Hon. I. Vasu	
(3) Vanua Levu Tourism Development Programme - Hon. V.R. Gavoka	
(4) 11 th Asia Pacific Co-operative Ministers Conference 2024- Hon. M.S.N. Kamikamica	
(5) Conditions and Status of Government Schools - Hon. A.M. Radrodoro	
Questions	635-648
<u>Oral Questions</u>	
(1) Cane Farmers Study Tour to India	(Q/No. 46/2024)
(2) Prevention of Future Problems – Fijiana Sevens Players	(Q/No. 48/2024)
(3) Operational Partners Agreement for Global Environment Facility	(Q/No. 49/2024)
(4) Re-Introduction of School Counselling Services	(Q/No. 51/2024)
(5) Supply of Tuna in Fiji	(Q/No. 52/2024)
<u>Written Questions</u>	
(1) Names and Selection Criteria – Board Members	(Q/No. 53/2024)
(2) Revenue and VAT Collection	(Q/No. 54/2024)
Corrections Service (Amendment) Bill 2024	648-651
Anti-Doping Bill 2024	652-655
Review Report –FICAC 2017-2018 Annual Report	656-664
Suspension of Standing Orders	657
Review Report – Audits of Municipal Councils 2021-2022	664-674
Consolidated Review Report – FNSC 2020-2022 Annual Report	674-678

MONDAY, 20TH MAY, 2024

The Parliament met at 9.36 a.m. pursuant to notice.

MR. SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

Hon. Sitiveni Ligamamada Rabuka, Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Climate Change, Environment, Civil Service, Information, Public Enterprises and Veteran Affairs
Hon. Siromi Dokonivalu Turaga, Attorney-General and Minister for Justice
Hon. Prof. Biman Chand Prasad, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics
Hon. Manoa Seru Nakausabaria Kamikamica, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-operatives and Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications
Hon. Viliame Rogoibulu Gavoka, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation
Hon. Ro Filipe Qaraniqio Tuisawau, Minister for Public Works and Meteorological Services and Transport
Hon. Aseri Masivou Radrodro, Minister for Education
Hon. Charan Jeath Singh, Minister for Multi-Ethnic Affairs and Sugar Industry
Hon. Filimoni Wainiqolo Rasokisoki Vosarogo, Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources
Hon. Lynda Diseru Tabuya, Minister for Women, Children and Social Protection
Hon. Dr. Ratu Atonio Rabici Lalabalavu, Minister for Health and Medical Services
Hon. Pio Tikoduadua, Minister for Home Affairs and Immigration
Hon. Sakiasi Raisevu Ditoka, Minister for Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management
Hon. Ifereimi Vasu, Minister for iTaukei Affairs and Culture, Heritage and Arts
Hon. Jese Saukuru, Minister for Youth and Sports
Hon. Maciu Katamotu Nalumisa, Minister for Housing and Local Government
Hon. Agni Deo Singh, Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations
Hon. Vatimi Tidara Tuinasakea Kaunitawake Rayalu, Minister for Agriculture and Waterways
Hon. Kalaveti Vodo Ravu, Minister for Fisheries and Forestry
Hon. Lenora Salusalu Qereqeretabua, Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs
Hon. Ratu Isikeli Tuiwailevu, Assistant Minister for iTaukei Affairs
Hon. Iliesa Sovui Vanawalu, Assistant Minister for Education
Hon. Alitia Vakatai Bavou Cirikiyasawa Bainivalu, Assistant Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation
Hon. Ratu Rakuita Solesole Sauramaeva Vakalalabure, Assistant Minister for Home Affairs
Hon. Sakiusa Tubuna, Assistant Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister
Hon. Sashi Kiran, Assistant Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation
Hon. Esrom Yosef Immanuel, Assistant Minister for Finance
Hon. Jovesa Rokuta Vocea, Assistant Minister for Rural, Maritime Development and Disaster Management
Hon. Tomasi Niuvotu Tunabuna, Assistant Minister for Agriculture and Waterways
Hon. Inia Batikoto Seruiratu
Hon. Jone Usamate
Hon. Faiyaz Siddiq Koya
Hon. Viliame Naupoto
Hon. Ioane Naivalurua
Hon. Mosese Drecala Bultavu

Hon. Hem Chand
Hon. Parveen Kumar Bala
Hon. Penioni Koliniwai Ravunawa
Hon. Semi Tuleca Koroilavesau
Hon. Vijay Nath
Hon. Sanjay Salend Kirpal
Hon. Ratu Josaia Bulavakarua Niudamu
Hon. Ketan Kirit Lal
Hon. Alvick Avhikrit Maharaj
Hon. Rinesh Ritesh Sharma
Hon. Naisa Tatau Tuinaceva
Hon. Viam Pillay
Hon. Shalen Kumar
Hon. Alipate Nagata Tuicolo
Hon. Virendra Lal
Hon. Taito Rokomatu Matasawalevu
Hon. Joseph Nitya Nand
Hon. Sachida Nand

Absent

Hon. Premila Devi Kumar
Hon. Aliko Bia

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sittings of Parliament held on Friday, 19th April, 2024, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE SPEAKER

Welcome

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

Honourable Members, please, join me in also welcoming the Ambassador of Japan, His Excellency Mr. Rokuichiro Michii. Thank you for joining us today, Your Excellency.

Medical Check and Wellness Assessment

Honourable Members, a Medical Team will be stationed at the Level 2 foyer from Tuesday through Thursday this week, to conduct medical checks and wellness assessments. I encourage all

honourable Members to make use of this service.

Women in Leadership

For the information of all honourable Members, Parliament will host a Women's Mock Parliament, focussing on the theme, "Women in Leadership". The necessary preparations are underway, and we hope to have this event at the end of July this year. The Secretariat is working closing with UNDP - Fiji Parliament Support Project, to ensure the successful implementation of this initiative.

Formal Attire – Members of Parliament

Honourable Members, the House Committee has duly met to discuss issues pertaining to the welfare of honourable Members and, at this juncture, please, allow me to convey the decision of the House Committee, which has also been endorsed Business Committee.

Honourable Members, you may remove your coat only after the Prayers each day, that is, your jacket. Safari wear is deemed a formal attire, and this can be worn during Parliamentary Sittings, as well as Committee meetings.

Provision of Lunch During Parliamentary Sitting

Honourable Members, the provision of lunch during Parliament sitting week will resume from this week. Quite a lot of requests have been coming from both sides and you must understand, honourable Members, that I have also requested Medical Teams to be brought in for medical checkups to be conducted here. It is not that I want to scare you, but as has happened in the past, some honourable Members become unconscious during sittings, probably due to heavy food intake during parliamentary sittings. But, again, lunch has been provided, honourable Ketan.

Committee Review Report – Time Allocation

Honourable Members, the Business Committee has agreed to uphold the practice in the April Sitting with respect to the speaking times in the debate in the Committee Review Reports, as follows:

1. the mover will move the motion for up to five minutes; and
2. up to minutes for the right of reply.
3. There will only be two speakers from each side of Parliament and each of the two speakers will have up to 10 minutes to speak.

The key issue here is the Committee Reports. Please, do not confuse this when we will be having Treaties being brought before us and you might think this applies too, no, we will rely on the Whips to provide the list of speakers.

For the information of honourable Members, I have also received the response to Written Question No. 09/2024 from the honourable Prime Minister and this will be conveyed to the honourable Premila Kumar and a copy will be uploaded on the Parliament website.

SODELPA Whip

Honourable Members, I have also received confirmation from the SODELPA Party Leader, honourable Aseri Radrodro, that honourable Ifereimi Vasu is now the SODELPA Whip. I wish the honourable Minister the best in his tenure as Whip.

Tabling of Report - Emoluments Committee

Honourable Members, we have been informed by the Chairperson of the Emoluments Committee that the Committee Report will be tabled at a later sitting date, as it has not completed its deliberations.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND CERTAIN DOCUMENTS

The following Reports were tabled by honourable Ministers responsible in accordance with Standing Order 38(1), and referred to the relevant Standing Committee for deliberation in accordance with Standing Order 38(2):

Standing Committee on Economic Affairs

1. Fiji Meat Industry Board – 2021 Annual Report (*Parliamentary Paper No. 105 of 2023*)
2. Fiji Meat Industry Board – 2022 Annual Report (*Parliamentary Paper No. 106 of 2023*)

Standing Committee on Social Affairs

Consumer Council of Fiji – Annual Report 2021-2022 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 154 of 2023*)

Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights

1. Ministry of Justice – Annual Report 2018-2019 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 36 of 2024*)
2. Ministry of Justice – Annual Report 2019-2020 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 37 of 2024*)
3. Ministry of Justice – Annual Report 2020-2021 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 38 of 2022*)
4. Ministry of Justice – Annual Report 2021-2022 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 39 of 2022*)

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

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

1. Honourable Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Climate Change, Environment, Civil Service, Information, Public Enterprises and Veteran Affairs;
2. Honourable Minister for iTaukei Affairs and Culture, Heritage and Arts;
3. Honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation
4. Honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-operatives and Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications; and
5. Honourable Minister for Education.

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

Elevated Vuvale Partnership

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Deputy Prime Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Ministers and Assistant Ministers, honourable Members of Parliament and ladies and gentlemen; a very good morning to you all. Please, allow me

to also greet our citizens watching the proceedings in this august Parliament via television or live streaming or listening via radio or the *Walesi* app.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to deliver my Ministerial Statement on recent developments relating to the elevated and renewed Vuvale Partnership between Fiji and Australia. On 20th October, 2023, the Prime Minister of Australia, honourable Anthony Albanese, and I, agreed and signed a renewed and elevated Vuvale Partnership, reflecting the growing maturity of the bilateral relationship.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, please, allow me to acknowledge the previous Government and my predecessor, for the Vuvale Partnership which was first signed in 2019. The latest development on that was the commissioning of the RFNS patrol boat/ship *Puamau* on Saturday. Before going to the commissioning, I asked the Commissioner of Fiji Corrections Service if I could go and pay a courtesy visit to the former Prime Minister, Mr. Voreqe Bainimarama, and I did tell him that I was doing the commissioning the following morning, acknowledging the great work that he had done in restoring and furthering this Vuvale Partnership during his time.

For Vuvale, our longstanding relationship has not always been smooth sailing. It started in 1987 when there was a jolt, and we spent the following years repairing and trying to re-establish the relationships we had. In 2000 and 2006, there were further disturbances to our relationship. So what we are doing now is to just continue to improve on whatever we have had and also introduce new elements.

In September 2023, a review of the Vuvale Partnership was carried out by senior officials of the two Governments. The objective of the review was to realign the approach, the contents and the desired outcomes of the Fiji and Australia relationship by reflecting on the vision, goals and priorities of the new Governments of both nations.

“*Vuvale*”, we all know, means “family” in *Vosa Vakaviti*, so the partnership recognises our respect for each other. The Prime Minister of Australia, honourable Albanese, and I, then signed the renewed and updated Vuvale Partnership on 20th October, 2023. On the day of signing the new Vuvale Partnership, Australia granted Fiji FJ\$100 million in budget support. This is in addition to the earlier budget support of FJ\$81 million for the 2023-2024 Fiji National Budget in June 2023.

There is, Mr. Speaker, Sir, an existing Fiji Programme Support Facility for 2016-2025 to the amount of \$154.4 million, for supporting Australia’s delivery of education, health, governance and scholarship programmes in Fiji.

The renewed Vuvale Partnership, Mr. Speaker, Sir, elevates our shared commitment to tackling climate change and strengthening our economic and trade partnership. These were the elements and the question would be asked today and probably be ruled out now because of this Ministerial Statement. It also has an increased focus on human development, First Nation’s people and culture, skills development and cyber security.

The following five pillars provide the bedrock for our commitment to pass down to the next generation a partnership they will be proud to inherit. The five pillars are:

- strengthening our people-to-people links, which is what makes us *Vuvale* or family;
- deepening our economic relationship to achieve greater prosperity for our people;
- enhancing our security cooperation to meet common challenges and maintain a peaceful, prosperous and resilient region;
- building our cooperation on international and regional issues, as we safeguard our region as a zone of peace against a changing climate and geostrategic contest,

- representing the Pacific and its interests on the world stage; and
- partnering to enable sustainable human development in areas such as healthcare, education, gender equality, social inclusion and poverty reduction.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, right now, we are looking at the possibility of evacuating Fiji's citizens from New Caledonia with the cooperation of Australia and New Zealand.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Vuvale Partnership Agreement is online for those who wish to read that in detail. Under each pillar, there are detailed priority areas of engagement. However, these are not exhaustive, and the partnership will continue to be responsive to emerging priorities and issues.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on Pillar One - strengthening our people-to-people links, we have committed to frequent high-level consultations between our Government and Parliaments, as well as annual ministerial consultations between our Foreign and Defence Ministers and senior officials' meetings. We are also committed to facilitating easier two-way travel through the Pacific Engagement Visa Program and to foster engagement between First Nations' people, recognising the shared culture and kinship of the Pacific.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, under the Vuvale Partnership, ongoing sports diplomacy initiatives are continuing, including assistance to the Fijian Drua who, I once again, congratulate for their fantastic nail-biting win over the Queensland Reds in the weekend.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the sports diplomacy assistance is truly fantastic, I have seen the gyms and facilities for men and women as they train there in Sydney. The Aus-Pacific Sports Programme is a boost not only for rugby, but also for netball, hockey and other sports.

Under Pillar Two, Mr. Speaker, Sir, on deepening our economic relationship, the Partnership will expand opportunities for two-way investments and support for private sector growth. Further, the Labour Mobility Scheme continues to expand with the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) Visa.

Under the Partnership, the Australian Infrastructure Financing Facility for the Pacific (AIFFP) will continue to support financing for quality, sustainable and transformative infrastructure development. In addition, Sir, under Pillar Two, support for agriculture and fisheries sectors continues.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Pillar Three on security cooperation, it reaffirms our joint commitment to closer defense, border security, policing, cybersecurity, maritime security, law and justice and intelligence cooperation.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, Sir, our defense relationships had been enduring but in stops and starts. Training at Military Staff Colleges is a key and essential component for the RFMF Officers cadre, and the suspension of this and other defence assistance due to political disruptions has been a challenge for the RFMF. I have been glad to see the reopening of this opportunity in recent years and the recent appointment of a senior RFMF Officer to a command position in one of their Brigades was a big move. Unfortunately, that had to be revised.

After we signed the elevated Vuvale Partnership in last October, Sir, I visited the 8th/9th Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment (9/9 RAR) in Gallipoli Barracks in Brisbane. We were given a guided tour of the facility and had the opportunity to experience an operational demonstration in the field inside bushmasters. The Australian Government has donated 14 additional Protected Mobility Vehicles (Bushmasters) to support Fiji's international peacekeeping operations.

On Pillar Four, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we will continue to cooperate on regional and international issues. Both Fiji and Australia agree on the need to tackling the challenges facing the Blue Pacific Continent and commit to work together to ensure a zone of peace and to maximise the benefits of Pacific led solutions to Pacific issues.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, both countries commit to implement the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent and the *Boe Declaration* on regional security. We reaffirm our joint commitment to bilateral, regional and global action on climate change and building climate resilient societies in both, Australia and Fiji. Our partnership will see joint training, knowledge sharing and technical assistance, particularly in relation to energy transition, carbon markets, access to climate finance, sustainable agri-food systems and marine resources. Under the Partnership, we agree to support each other following significant disasters.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have also been committed to work together to uphold international law and principles.

Last but not least, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is Pillar Five which is a joint commitment to sustainable human development. The first commitment in Pillar Five is to strengthen health systems. We have seen this recently with the signing of the agreement for direct funding of \$14.7 million to fund a comprehensive infrastructure masterplan for the Colonial War Memorial Hospital. The master plan means Australia and Fiji will work in partnership to comprehensively chart the course towards Fiji's new hospital. The master plan is the critical first step in planning out what a new hospital for Fiji will look like. While the new hospital will take time, much is being done to ensure the continuity of care at CWM Hospital.

Under Pillar Five, Sir, we will strengthen cooperation between our education systems. In addition, to promote the participation of women in political, economic and social life, as well as implement national action plans to end violence against women and girls. Another important component of Pillar Five is strengthening our social protection programmes to improve the wellbeing of the most vulnerable.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, please, allow me to now elaborate on the two MOUs recently signed under the elevated Vuvale Partnership. These are the MOU on Port Development and the MOU on Cyber Security Cooperation signed three weeks ago on 30th April, 2024 in Lautoka. The MOU on Port Infrastructure and Services provides the framework for cooperation on future investments to support Fiji's current and future maritime needs.

As you are aware, Mr. Speaker, Sir, our ports play an essential role in our economy, where 95 percent of Fiji's trade is exchanged through the Ports of Suva and Lautoka. Bringing immediate effect to the MOU, a grant agreement was then signed with His Excellency Ewen McDonald, the Australian High Commissioner, for the development of a master plan for the Lautoka Port. This will upgrade Lautoka Port and enhance its international and domestic port operations, to meet ongoing and changing customer needs.

Australia will also support Fiji's ambitions to revitalize our shipbuilding and ship repair facilities through the MOU. There is even word that we may have the facility to be able to provide maintenance support for the new patrol boat programmes. This is in line with the "Ocean of Peace Concept" proposed as a vision for the Pacific region.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, please, allow me to acknowledge the tremendous support provided by the AIFFP to help Fiji revitalize its shipbuilding industry. The assistance from the AIFFP will help us to realise the vision for Fiji to become the hub of the Pacific as a major port of entry and

transshipment, with the potential for increased job opportunities, specialised skillsets and ultimately stimulation of investment and economic activities.

Additionally, the impact of Australia's assistance will advance shipping services for Fiji as a major port of entry and, thereby, enhance overall regional shipping services. The MOU on Port Infrastructure and Services is valued at AU\$380,000 (FJ\$556,000), to initiate the preparatory work for the redevelopment of the Lautoka foreshore and AU\$115,000 (FJ\$167,000) to support the Lautoka Master Plan. The total amount is FJ\$723,000 as at April 2024.

Further, at the signing, Australia announced its agreement for the servicing and maintenance of all patrol boats under the Pacific Patrol Boat Programme and honourable Naupoto will be very happy with that to be carried out in Fiji. This is a welcome boost for our economy. This is not only to serve Fiji's priorities but also our responsibility as the regional hub, a regional port of entry and trans-shipment centre for the region.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the second MOU signed between honourable Pat Conroy and I, relates to Cyber Security Cooperation. Fiji and Australia share a commitment to a rules-based cyberspace and strong cyber standards. These rules and standards provide stability for our countries to protect our sovereignty, whilst harnessing the economic benefits to be derived from the digital economy.

Our increased connectedness and the introduction of critical technology present opportunities and challenges that require us to work more closely together than ever. Both countries have experienced a series of significant cyber incidents in recent times, which impact our Governments, our economies and our communities.

The areas of cooperation identified in the MOU include:

- Support for Fiji's computer emergency response team capability;
- Support for combatting cyber incidents;
- Workforce upskilling; and
- Strengthening governance arrangements.

The MOU also affirms our joint commitment to promote international law and norms of responsible state behavior in cyberspace.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the MOU establishes a critical framework of cooperation on existing cybersecurity and critical technologies. In addition, Sir, the MOU will facilitate the identification and protection of critical infrastructure and information infrastructure. It is a critical steppingstone for protecting Fiji's information systems.

I thank you, Sir, for the opportunity to deliver this Ministerial Statement on the Elevated Vuvale Partnership and recent developments. *Vinaka saka vakalevu.*

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me acknowledge the honourable Prime Minister for the Ministerial Statement this morning on the Elevated Vuvale Partnership. We all know how important this agreement is, in as far as Fiji and Australia's relations is concerned.

Thank you, honourable Prime Minister, for acknowledging the previous Government, particularly the leadership of the former Prime Minister, Mr. Voreqe Bainimarama, for the work undertaken previously that led to the signing in 2019, as you have correctly stated. The review is timely and, of course, we acknowledge the Government as well for the signing that took place in October 2023.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have noted from the honourable Prime Minister's statement that in terms of the pillars, probably it is just the wording in Pillar 5 of the previous document was on fostering closer institutional linkages in support of strong and inclusive societies. I have noted and I look forward to the one that is available online, honourable Prime Minister, that Pillar 5 is now the joint commitment to sustainable human development, whether it is just the changing of the wordings, et cetera, but of course human development is so important.

Thank you for the MOUs. They are both critical and I will talk a bit on the assistance under the Australian Infrastructure Financing Facility for the Pacific (AIFFP) which was part of the recommendation on a joint economic and trade studies that was also undertaken previously. That was part of the recommendation in the economic partnership.

I just wish to touch on a few issues, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as alluded to by the honourable Prime Minister and given the limited time that I have in order to respond.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have listened to the statement by the honourable Prime Minister. I hope that security co-operation has not been dropped, particularly the provision of strategic lift by Australia to the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) when it goes to peace keeping missions. We all know the limitation when it comes to commercial airlines, honourable Prime Minister, and you are well aware of that in terms of the extra supplies that we can take. But we are thankful that under this Vuvale Partnership, Australia has also committed to providing strategic lifts for us as we go to the peace keeping missions. I hope that, that continues because that is very, very important for us.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, very quickly, we are not new to three issues which is still important that I wish to raise again as part of the partnership, and we need to continue to raise this with the Australians, particularly when it comes to a few principles under the Vuvale Partnership, we will -

- engage with each other with trust, respect and understanding;
- share responsibility;
- listen and speak carefully to understand our respective points of view when differences arise;
- share our prosperity to improve economic and wellbeing;
- help each other to grow; and
- work on a considered and sustainable manner.

The three issues, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that I wish to, again, raise this morning to Government is, firstly, on the labour rights of our workers in Australia. We appreciate the labour scheme, I have provided a copy of a document that I have undertaken by an institution in Australia, honourable Prime Minister, Sir. I have passed it to the honourable Minister responsible.

There are key issues highlighted in there, particularly in the agriculture sector, because it is not even attractive domestically in Australia and we hope that our workers will not be exploited, particularly on working conditions and equity. They need to be treated with respect, particularly with the labour laws, including medicare. We hope that our workers do not lose out.

Secondly, on economic partnership, honourable Prime Minister, Sir, under Pillar 2, the deepening economic relationship on fisheries and forestry, I, again, raise the issue of our fresh ginger, that was raised by the honourable Minister for Agriculture and Waterways in one of his first Ministerial Statements, and that is important for our farmers, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Thirdly, on climate change, it is very, very important. We know that Australia is a very big contributor to fossil fuel exports. That cannot be denied, but we are benefiting from the partnership with Australia, at the same time, as true friends, speaking not only on behalf of Fiji but for the Pacific. We need to tell them that they need to slow down on fossil fuel. That is key to our survival, and that is very, very important not only for Fiji, but for every Pacific Islander and, of course, in terms of our collective action towards the implementation and achievement of the Paris Agreement. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I would like to acknowledge at this point the presence of Wani Cawaru from the Hidden Paradise of Savusavu in the gallery, a colleague of honourable Ketan Lal and honourable Naisa Tuinaceva.

iTaukei Institutions Forum Trip to New Zealand

HON. I. VASU.- Mr. Speaker, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Deputy Prime Ministers, honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Members of this august Parliament, ladies and gentlemen, those here at the gallery and those listening from their homes, *ni sa bula vinaka*.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you for this opportunity to provide a Ministerial Statement to this august Parliament today on the recent trip by the members of the iTaukei Institutions Forum to New Zealand.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, *au kerea meu tauca na noqu vakaniuinui vinaka ki na Vanua Vakaturaga o Nabukebuke kei na kena veiwekani ena kena vakarautaki na nodra vagunuvi na turaga na Tui Levuka ena siga ni mataka*.

[Mr. Speaker, Sir, please, allow me to say a few words of commendation and respect to the Vanua of Nabukebuke and its kinship, in the organisation and preparation done towards the ceremony of traditional installation of the Tui Levuka yesterday]

Mr. Speaker, I led a delegation from the iTaukei Institutions to New Zealand on 11th February to 18th February this year. The delegation comprised of the Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, the CEO of the iTaukei Trust Fund, CEO for iTaukei Land Trust Board, Chairman of iTaukei Lands and Fisheries Commission, Director for Appropriate Technology and Development, DCEO for iTaukei Affairs Board and a VKB team from the iTaukei Land Commission (*Veitarogi Vanua*) was also part of the visit.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the travel expenses for the delegation members were sponsored by their respective institutions. The purpose for the visit was to explore the opportunities that would complement the work of the iTaukei Executive Forum as mandated by the GCC, particularly, on economic empowerment of the *iTaukei*. The visit was also an opportunity for the *Veitarogi Vanua* to raise awareness on the Immigration (Amendment) Act 2023 which allowed those registered in the VKB to enter Fiji without a visa or permit. The VKB Team also took the opportunity to register names of *iTaukei* living in those areas visited.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the delegation had a meeting with the Pacific Trade and Investment Board, Fiji's Trade Commissioner and the New Zealand-Fiji Business Council. The purpose of the meeting was to identify market opportunities in New Zealand for the iTaukei entrepreneurs. We also conducted *talanoa* sessions with the Fijian communities in Auckland, Hamilton, Wellington and Christchurch. A range of diverse topics were discussed, mostly about land and VKB issues. The Heads of *iTaukei* Institutions provided clarification on issues under their respective mandates.

The delegation met with the Maori King and had a constructive discussion about partnership for the mutual benefits of the Maori and *iTaukei*. The Maori King shared about successful commercial undertaking by Iwi Trusts. The Iwi Trusts prioritised investment over distributing monies to their members. The members only received benefits such as education scholarships, housing and health insurance. This model enabled their trust to grow. Their Trusts operate as a wealth fund with a major portion invested.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, an outcome of the meeting was an agreement for the signing of an MOU between the GCC and King Tanga. The delegation also visited the Waikato Tainui Tribal Parliament. The delegation learned about the framework, strategies and business plans implemented by the Tainui for their tribes. The delegation then travelled to Rotorua and visited the Puke-Roa Oru-a-Wata Trust and was briefed on the history of the Trust and how they grew their commercial arm. Later, the delegation toured the properties owned by the Trust in Rotorua, which included their latest investment venture, the Wai-Ariki Spa. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Chair of the Trust has been invited to visit Fiji later this year for the *iTaukei* Resource Owners Forum.

The delegation also visited the Te Wananga-o-Aotearoa Institute which is one of the most successful training institutions for the indigenous of Aotearoa the Maori. The delegation visited the institution to learn more about course delivery that would be relevant for Nadave. The Institute operates a hybrid delivery model that could be useful for Nadave in the future. We also visited the Toi-Oho-Mai Institute of Technology, the delegation visited the institution to learn about its forestry programme. This was due to the increased interest of our resource owners in the forestry sector and their need for capacity building.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the *iTaukei* Land Trust Board, under its Wealth Fund Initiative will dedicate a certain percentage for scholarships for this purpose. The delegation also visited the Maori Arts and Crafts Centre to explore how it could help the Ministry in further developing the Fiji National Art Gallery, especially on how to generate its own funding through tourism revenue. Commitment to the numerous artists of Fiji, this year, for the first time, the Ministry of *iTaukei* Affairs allocated a space, specifically for them within the newly opened National Art Gallery.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the delegation also held a bilateral meeting with the Minister for Maori Development to discuss potential areas of collaboration, particularly in commerce. I had raised with my NZ counterpart the issue of visa for forestry workers. We had requested if their visa conditions could also include allowing them to further their education. Honourable Potaka has agreed to raise the request with the NZ Immigration Minister.

We also held bilateral meetings with honourable Shane Jones, the Minister for Oceans and Fisheries. After being shared the purpose of our visit, Minister Jones stated that he would encourage Turner and Growers to visit Fiji with a view to connecting with some farmers on export. Minister Jones agreed with our request for collaboration in fish farming, particularly to help *iTaukei* fish farmers. He stated that he would advise the Under-Secretary for Fisheries to visit Fiji for *iTaukei* Resource Owners Forum and visit some potential fish farming spots.

We had also met with Chief Judge Caren Fox and Judge Sarah Reeves of the Maori Land Court and members of the Waitangi Tribunal. The delegation learned about the legislative structure that supported and complemented the Land Courts. A Maori Framework for hearing has worked best for the Maori Land Courts and has been very successful and we will explore the possibility of adopting lesson learned onto Fiji's context. The formal court system recognises the Maori Land Courts. We had also met with the Te Arawhiti-O-Aotearoa Office of the Maori Crown relations. The delegation learned about the Department's crucial role as mediator between the Crown and

various Maori claimants. After the discussions, the Department is open to receiving officials from the Office of the Solicitor-General and the iTaukei Affairs institutions for attachments.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to conclude, the delegation was impressed with the consistency in understanding laws and resources available by all related stakeholders that we met. These includes the Iwis, Iwi Trusts, accounting firms, government and subsidiaries. Education was the key component of the strategies implemented by the Iwi Trusts. Those who benefitted from scholarships went back to help their Iwis, the programme of work by most Trusts was guided by their own indigenous frameworks that incorporated their values and practices.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the visit was a success. On my return, I have directed the *iTaukei* institutions to follow-up on the undertaking in New Zealand and learnings from the visit. The institutions have taken significant steps in the commercial space since our return from New Zealand. Please allow me to express our deep appreciation to the New Zealand High Commission in Fiji, the Fiji High Commissioner in New Zealand, the NZ Government and the Maori institutions for their support in making the trip a success.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to deliver my response to the honourable Minister for iTaukei, *Turaga na i Talai*'s Ministerial Statement this morning. From the brief given to Parliament this morning, I think we have no issues because it was an educational trip and also a trip that was economic based where there were lessons learnt from the Maori institutions and how to implement it.

There is one thing that I would like to respond to is the priority that is needed to make our *iTaukei* institutions be self-sufficient through funding. I think if you study those Maori institutions right from the Treaty of Waitangi plus the Maori Land Court, and we still have issues in Fiji where members of landowning units still have some claims, I think these are all that needs to be facilitated and we look forward for those facilities to come through.

Given that there are two things that have been announced through the Coalition Government probably after that visit, one is the *iTaukei* Development Facility which gives us loan right up to \$40,000 for any landowning unit or landowner. Honourable Minister, through the implementation, people in Vanua Levu especially in Labasa are still looking for those forms to apply for those assistance that could mirror the things that you have learnt from the trip to New Zealand.

The other thing is the wealth fund that you have talked about and the need for certain percentage to cater for things that are of interest to the *iTaukei*. I think the biggest achievement that needs to be achieved in your term is how the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs plus the Great Council of Chiefs to have self-funding. It could be achieved through a certain percentage of lease money to be agreed from the various landowning units to help in building that Trust Fund or that Fund that will enable the development of *iTaukei* economically.

The other thing too that I would like to raise, Mr. Speaker, is in terms of Climate Change and the need, probably it also started in New Zealand where the Maori Land Commission too has moved into carbon trading and buying carbon credits. We passed a Climate Change Act two years ago and we still have a registry that needs to be established that could also allow landowning units to own these carbon credits, for them to then do business with carbon traders that come overseas. I think in the last sitting the honourable Speaker talked about *volitaki cagi* and this is where it comes in and the need for the iTaukei Affairs Ministry to facilitate this so that landowning units can own those carbon credits and have that particular value of the amount of carbon that is in their forests and also on the shoreline. These are some of the things that we look forward to.

From what we have seen, we all agree, *sa dede na noda dravudravua na i Taukei, Turaga na Minisita. Sa da vinakati me da sa toso i liu, vakaukauwataki vakabisinisi kei na veivakatorocaketaki. Au kila ni sa kena matanisiga eda sa tiko kina 'go, eda sa vakanuinui tiko ni na rawa.* We all support from this side on how we empower *iTaukei* in business and development and how we are going to move this forward. Again, there are some recommendations that have come out from their report, there are many things that can be explored to, to empower *iTaukei* people. We, from this side of Parliament also support the empowerment of *iTaukei* people in business so that we elevate them from poverty and also for them to raise money and funding in order to support their *solu vakavanua, lotu* and also the development in their villages.

The other policy that you have announced, Sir, the village beautification. There are still some villages around still looking for assistance through halls and churches that needs to take that on board too. Just before I take my seat, the Permanent Secretary for *iTaukei* Affairs is very helpful. He has been very helpful through the communities in setting up the current co-operatives in Vanua Levu. I hope his contract is renewed moving forward given that he has got the vision for *iTaukei* and also developing Vanua Levu and the rest of the landowning members in Fiji.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Bulitavu, just a correction, it is not *volitaki cagi*, it is *sau ni cagi*. That is the translation that is down there in villages.

Honourable Members, that final punch from honourable Bulitavu, I hope we will disregard that because it has nothing to do with our Parliamentary role, the renewing of contracts or something of a civil servant. Honourable Members, I intend to adjourn Parliament now for tea.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.35 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.07 a.m.

Vanua Levu Tourism Development Programme

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Ministers, honourable Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Members of Parliament and the people of Fiji. Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you for the opportunity to make a Ministerial Statement on the Vanua Levu Tourism Development Programme.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for years we have spoken about diversifying and spreading the tourism dollar but in the past decade we have made very limited progress. If we look at visitation by area, Nadi, Denarau, Yasawa and Mamanuca right up to the Coral Coast accounts for about 80 percent of all visitors, a trend that was there pre-COVID-19 and is here today. That means, where the visitors go, the tourism dollar also goes and where the tourism dollar goes, the socio-economic benefits go.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in June last year, the World Bank approved financing of US\$200 million or FJ\$447 million for a 10-Year multi-face pragmatic approach to tourism development in Vanua Levu. This is on a highly concessional terms through the International Development Association or known as IDA. I am glad to share that this is the World Bank's first multi-faced programmatic approach for the Pacific and the first ever for tourism. So, here we have an opportunity to carefully design and deliver this for the people of Vanua Levu. What is important to realise is that the US\$200 million while earmarked for a tourism programme will greatly benefit other sectors. That is the power of tourism. The crux of the programme is to mobilise investments and resilient infrastructure in essential services, create a more enabling business environment and enhance institutional coordination.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, overall, we are looking at a total funding of US\$200 million spread over 10 years, this broken down in three phases. Very briefly on the three phases. Phase 1 is valued at US\$61.5million and runs from year 1 to year 6 to set the foundation for sustainable tourism in Vanua Levu. This is where we are starting, it will tackle major barriers to growth like insufficient transport infrastructure and essential services, uncoordinated plans and limited private sector and community engagement in the tourism sector. This phase involves activities such as tourism master planning, supporting MSMEs through a pilot programme, Waisali Reserve Upgrade, improving Savusavu and Labasa airports, upgrade on the road connect to Labasa and Savusavu, a landfill for Savusavu, cityscape enhancement, Locally Managed Marine Protected Area (LMMA), pilot wastewater treatment plan and renewable energy investment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, concerning the airports, there was a study carried out last year that highlighted that an international airport in Vanua Levu is not feasible in the immediate future. However, what this project will support to ensure sustainable tourism growth are various investments in both Savusavu and Labasa airports to improve current facilities, enhance passenger experience and meet ICAO safety and security regulations. At this juncture, let me just assure my colleagues from Taveuni that there is also a plan for them. Essentially, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Taveuni should see the ATR landing in Matei, that is important for the growth in Taveuni as it has some wonderful resorts and of course the beauty of

(Laughter)

We need to extend the runway at Matei. The concept design has been developed for the extension of Matei and land acquisition around the airport is required for this, and as I speak, dialogue is happening with the Fiji Airports Limited and the landowners, and co-ordinated by Lands Department to make this happen, Mr. Speaker, Sir. So, my colleagues from Taveuni, you are also

part of the equation in a significant way.

Phase 2 is valued at \$70 million and will tentatively run from year 3 to year 8. It will put physical and social infrastructure in place. The phase will build a lesson from phase 1 and it will continue to improve essential services and infrastructure for people and tourism businesses and further enhance the environmental, social and cultural sustainability of tourism assets. As we speak, a lot of people in Vanua Levu are coming forth with what they need we should do. That will be accommodated in Phase 2 and Phase 3. Phase 1 will put the stage in place, and what we do in Phase 2 and Phase 3 is learn from Phase 1. So, for those who are there, please do not despair, your views will be heard and will be factored in Phase 2 and Phase 3.

Investments will capitalise on the findings from the feasibility studies conducted in Phase 1 including those for a greenfield airport, wastewater management infrastructure and system in Savusavu, renewable energy development options in Vanua Levu. Mr. Speaker, Sir, Phase 3, which is valued at \$68.5 million, will tentatively run from year 6 to year 10. Building on the previous two phases, the final phase will see long term outcomes such as improved infrastructure connectivity, increase tourism revenue and tourism-related jobs and increase community benefits from integrated tourism development in Vanua Levu.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we will measure the success of the programme not by how many more tourists Vanua Levu gets but how we the people benefit. As such, the result indicators will include tourism related jobs created by gender, number of people with improved resilient essential services, number of people with access to improved resilient infrastructure connectivity to tourism destination in Vanua Levu, percentage of coastal areas with Locally Managed Marine Area and Other Effective Area--based Conservation Measures (OECM) established in Vanua Levu.

Mr. Speaker Sir, in terms of how we are managing the programme, the financial allocation would be overseen by the Ministry of Finance as the borrower. The Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation is the leading implementing agency and will play a coordination role with the other implementing agencies. Under our Ministry, a Central Project Management Unit is in place to manage the day to day project activities. This Unit includes a Project Manager and three personnel who have been appointed and are responsible for the daily operation of the project. Two specialised project implementing agencies who will be responsible for procurement and project implementation for the projects are the Fiji Roads Authority and Fiji Airports Limited as they are significantly infrastructure related organisations.

The project will support, continued intra-governmental coordination through a Project Steering Committee that has been established and consist of key government and private sector representatives oversee project management. This is an extremely important programme and we are excited to see it unfold over the next few years. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank you again for this opportunity to deliver my Ministerial Statement on this subject.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it seems like nowadays, whenever there is something to do with Vanua Levu, I had to be there.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a very good statement by the honourable Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation but it is always good to reflect back and put a mirror on the face of some people. You might recall, Sir, that during the honourable Member's time as an Opposition Member, when we were doing the 30 kilometre tarsealing of the Buca Bay Road, the former Leader of the Opposition, Ro Teimumu Kepa, once suggested that we were going to build a road leading to nowhere and that was published quite a lot. But it is good now that as Minister for Tourism, he actually understands why we need to do that and build infrastructure in such areas because as you know, if we are talking about

Cakaudrove, the road leading from Savusavu Airport all the way to Napuka has some great views where new tourist destination, hotels even seven star hotels and resorts can be developed – very appropriate place.

Such irresponsible statements coming back then was not appropriate. This is what we call, Mr. Speaker, something that a visionary leader sees for the future. So, we have actually done 30 kilometres so, please, further develop that road right up to Napuka.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, while we are still dealing with infrastructure, we know that Savusavu is the hidden paradise, but Hibiscus Highway is about to be turned from tarsealed road to gravel. The number of potholes is huge. I ask the Government that before doing the infrastructure, please, maintain what was done by the FijiFirst Government.

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

MR. SPEAKER.- What is your Point of Order, honourable Minister?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- He is misleading Parliament because work is being done to address that.

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

HON. RO. F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Your point is irrelevant then. It is already in the past.

MR. SPEAKER.- Carry on, honourable Member.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have been requesting the honourable Minister for Public Works, Metereological Services and Transport for the past one year to fix the open trench at Kaunitoni Road. It is one year and two months now, honourable Minister, that open trench still remains on the tarsealed road. Please, get it fixed before you talk about Hibiscus Highway.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, whether this money has been approved or not, it is another question. How many boxes do we have to tick before we access this \$200 million? In today's world, \$200 million means nothing, and the way the honourable Minister is trying to explain that is as if we are getting \$200 billion to fix the whole tourism sector in Vanua Levu.

The Vanua Levu economy does not depend on tourism, and this was proved during the COVID-19 pandemic. The economy at Vanua Levu was not affected because we do not rely on tourism. There are more important sectors, such as agriculture whereby we have Fiji Rice Limited sitting at Dreketi, we have Food Processors sitting at Batiri where the sweet oranges come from, we have the Saqani Kava which is a potential to be a billion dollar market, as explained by the honourable Minister sometimes back, we have the sugar industry and we need to fix these industries if we want to build the economy.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, if we are talking about business, we have a very healthy business community in Labasa. But the issue is the transportation cost from Viti Levu to Vanua Levu. Bringing materials all the way from China and India to Fiji is much cheaper compared to taking the same materials from Suva to Vanua Levu. We need to work on subsidising the freight.

Mr. Speaker, if we are talking about tourism, there is a development that is supposed to take place near the Labasa River – the Vualiku Hotel. The Special Administrator, having a conflict of interest, is not allowing this project to go through.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there have been issues. The landowners who have given their 60 percent consent for the development to take place are requesting for the resignation of the Special Administrator, who has a conflict of interest and is objecting to the development.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the same note, if he cannot do a new international airport, what is this Government doing with regards to the air fares from Nausori to Labasa? I have been saying this all the time. It is cheaper to go to Auckland and come back to Suva, than to visit Taveuni.

The only local airline that is providing competition to Fiji Link is now downgrading its service. According to the owner, he is not getting what was promised to him by this Government in terms of support. We need to work on these fundamental issues before we can actually talk about the \$200 million that is being provided to fix the tourism industry in Vanua Levu.

11th Asia Pacific Co-operative Ministers Conference 2024

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, *Na Turaga Bale Na Tui Cakau*, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Deputy Prime Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Cabinet Ministers and Assistant Ministers, honourable Members of Parliament, those of you at the gallery and people of Fiji who maybe listening to this broadcast through *Walesi* or livestreaming, or simply listening on the radio; I rise to provide a Ministerial Statement on my recent trip on the 11th International Co-operative Alliance Asia Pacific Ministerial Conference. But before I do, Sir, allow me to offer some remarks.

Firstly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Parliament is a bit poorer today in the passing of Mr. Lemeki Senibale, who passed away while we were away and I take this opportunity, on behalf of Parliament, to extend our condolences, recognising his significant contribution to the smooth running of this august body, and also share our condolences with his family, Sir.

I would also like to congratulate the Fijian Drua on their magnificent win against the Queensland Reds and maintaining our top eighth position and, hopefully, Sir, put them on a sure footing to qualify for the Quarter Final.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Statement, I thought I would bring to our attention because it is in-keeping with the desire of the People's Coalition and this Government, to continue to rebuild the country and look at avenues to really leverage or activate more economic activity in the country. Certainly, after being at this Conference, our focus on co-operatives is certainly an area that we need to focus on.

It is a well-known fact, Sir, that we have prioritised the development of co-operatives as one of the key vehicles for economic development and rural transformation across the country. We have done this, Sir, for many reasons, such as it actually suits our way of life, our communal spirit and the way we conduct ourselves in Fiji and the Pacific. It is quite interesting, Sir, when I was listening to the international governments, they did share the same parallels in terms of community spirit and the way they conducted themselves.

Cooperatives, Sir, if governed properly from a policy level at an implementation angle, has the ability to unlock the productive use of idle resources, pool resources together and derive economic returns for the communities. They are, of course, a source of employment and poverty alleviation and they contribute to achieving Sustainable Development Goals.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I suppose it is fair to say that our work in the co-operative development space has begun to get international recognition, leading to the Government receiving an invite to the

Ministerial Conference. I must also mention that this is the first time that the Minister responsible for Co-operatives has attended this Conference which happens every four years since the 1990s.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministerial Conference was held in Jordan from 28th April to 30th April, 2024. Actually, there were two Pacific Island Countries that were invited, ourselves and the government of Papua New Guinea. My colleague could not make it, so I was the only representative from the South Pacific and I can say that I tried my best to do justice to our presence at that Conference.

In the Conference, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the theme was “Partnerships Between Government and Co-operatives for Cooperative Resilience, Sustainable Development, and Inclusive Growth in the Asia Pacific, Middle East and North Africa”.

Some of the objectives of the Ministerial Conference, Sir, which were, but not limited to -

1. examine the current state of cooperatives in the Asia Pacific and their potential for contributing to resilience, sustainable development and growth.
2. analyse existing partnerships between governments and cooperatives in the region and identify successful models that have yielded positive outcomes.
3. highlight the benefits of collaborative initiatives between government and co-operatives, including improved access to resources, enhanced regulatory frameworks and social inclusion.
4. identify challenges and obstacles in building effective partnerships and proposed strategies to overcome them.
5. provide recommendations to policymakers and cooperative stakeholders, to strengthen and expand government co-operative partnerships for sustainable and inclusive development.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Conference provided an excellent platform to share experience, understand the global developments and reiterate our position on co-operative development.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Conference covered the following topics and sessions which included the -

1. study on Assessment of Partnerships Between the Government and Co-operatives;
2. statement by Government representatives; and
3. acceleration of a cooperative identity.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the United Nations General Assembly, adopted a new resolution on co-operatives in social development on 3rd November, 2023, calling for the proclamation of 2025 as an International Year of Co-operatives (IYC). The resolution encourages Member States of the United Nations and other relevant stakeholders to take advantage of this proclamation to promote co-operatives and raise awareness of their contribution to the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and their overall social and economic potential. This is, indeed, a wonderful outcome, Sir, and we intend, as a Government, to optimise on this opportunity.

There was also a discussion around adapting to the changing environment and building resiliency, particularly when it comes to climate change. And one of things that really struck me, Sir, or the governments that were in the meeting was the direct connection between the advancement of the Sustainable Development Goals and what happens in their co-operative environment. SDGs such as SDG 1– No poverty; SDG 5 - Gender Equality; SDG 8 and SDG 13, have been linked quite closely to the co-operatives and it is something that we certainly as Government will endeavour to do and

also the importance of the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) in all these countries.

In terms of our contribution at the Conference, Sir, the importance of co-operatives has been recognised across countries and in some countries, Sir, is actually reflected in their National Constitution - strategy documents to enhance contribution to GDP, the creation of new ministries that we have in Fiji, and the implementation of SDGs.

I wish to shed some light on Fiji's contribution at the Conference. During the discussions, I elaborated on the following issues. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I had provided an overview of the co-operative movement in Fiji. Some highlights provided included that there are 590 operating cooperatives that exist across 15 sectors. Collectively, they hold around \$151 million worth of assets, earning around \$26 million and generating \$2.5 million in profits.

I also spoke about the collaboration across Government on how the Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Fisheries and Forestry, Ministry of Youth and Sports, Ministry of Rural Development and the Ministry of Women have adopted a "pro-cooperative" approach in their work. In fact, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Minister for Youth and Sports has insisted for every youth club, that they seriously contemplate developing a co-operative. This can only be a positive development in this country.

A proud moment also was when I reported on the increased interest in women-led co-operatives, Mr. Speaker, Sir, over the past few years. From having 46 women led cooperatives in 2022, we now have 58 in 2024. This number continues to grow as well and, in fact, in terms of women leadership, this has increased by over 236 percent over the same period as well. These statistics were used to demonstrate internationally that the co-operative movement is vibrant and is very much alive in Fiji and the South Pacific.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, during the sessions, I also took the opportunity to put forward our request to the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA). It was actually a long list, but we prioritised three areas.

Firstly, we made a call that the ICA establish an office in the South Pacific and seriously consider Fiji being the regional hub. Although we fall under Asia Pacific as a grouping by region, all their offices are in Asia and have really advanced their co-operative movements in those areas and we feel that it is time to have a base in Fiji.

We also made a request with the ICA regarding the review of our Co-operatives Act. This is quite important, Sir, because it not only encapsulates the Act, but also how we can really boost the co-operative movement and I will share an example. In Jordan, they have a National Co-operative for each agricultural sector. For instance, for dates, they have a National Co-operative that manages the date production and then each member co-operative hinges into that, Mr. Speaker, Sir. That is somewhere that I would like us to head, Sir. Just imagine, having a National Co-operative for kava, it means better control on our kava, better pricing for our farmers and these are the kind of benefits that this forward thinking will bring.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we also sought advice on the National Co-operative Federation which is a body that is already in the Act. As with other countries, it is proven that where a strong functioning apex body for co-operatives exist, they do very well in their development.

As I have said, we already have a National Co-operative Federation body that was established in 2018. I think the former Chairman is sitting in this Parliament, honourable Agni Deo Singh, but for obvious reasons, their progress was curtailed and Honorable Minister, you will be pleased to note

that we intend to rejuvenate that body.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am also happy to report that our requests were well received with the ICA and they have affirmed their commitment in working with us on the issues we have mentioned.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would also like to place on record that the Ministerial Conference was, indeed, a very invaluable platform for Fiji to be present at the table, otherwise, we miss our opportunity to be heard at international levels. Some countries, particularly countries in the Asia and Middle Eastern regions, have developed their Co-operative Strategic Plan. Fiji does not have one but is earmarked to be part of the MSME Strategic Plan which we are currently developing. We may even have a dedicated Strategic Plan for co-operative development going forward. The Australian Association for Co-operatives has expressed an interest in working in that area.

One of the other things that is of benefit to the country is the level of desired co-operation that is now forthcoming, apart from Australia, India, Indonesia, Malaysia and even Jordan, in terms of trying to help our co-operative movement moving forward, which is probably missed about in some respect, Sir, over the last few years.

We need to strengthen our education around co-operatives. We did have that facility down in Draunibota, Lami. In Malaysia, Sir, they have two universities for co-operatives. So, these are the types of things that, as a country and as an august body, we should be looking at, to ensure that in going forward, we truly maximise the benefit that we can derive from pushing co-operatives.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as a way forward, I assure this august Parliament that we will continue the discussions with respective agencies, such as the ICA, Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat and the Australian High Commission, to implement these items and also look to the other partners such as India, Indonesia, Malaysia and Jordan, in terms of some of the areas that we can collaborate on. Incidentally, Sir, in Jordan, I was quite surprised that they are exporting banana from Jordan through a cooperative, Sir. This is the type of potential that exists in their beautiful country.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in conclusion, I can say that our participation was worthwhile and a success, and where Fiji is reevaluating its position as regional leader to the ICA. It also demonstrated that Fiji is committed to the development of co-operatives, and I look forward to continuing to work, to ensure that the co-operatives movement moves to bigger and greater heights.

Thank you for this opportunity, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, since I only have five minutes I will try to fill in as much as I can. I thank the honourable Minister for his Ministerial Statement and I also want to tell him how much we appreciate the engagement with the International Cooperative Alliance because this is one area in Fiji which has actually remained a very apolitical part of our landscape. In Fiji, all previous Governments have dealt with co-operatives in a manner that it should, because it is something that provides us with an area where we can actually empower people, we can safeguard our future generations, and we still have a long way to go with respect to how much we can actually do for Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with respect to Fiji alone, I think we have about 379 cooperatives that operate throughout Fiji. Just for everyone's perspective, it actually holds about US\$58 million worth of assets. This is just our cooperatives in Fiji and we do business in co-operatives. These are the figures that came out in 2020 - we do business with our cooperatives close to about FJ\$22 million dollars on a yearly basis. It actually comes from quite a few different sectors. They operate within the consumer sector, the sugar sector, the thrift sector, the agriculture sector, the land sector, service

sector, the livestock sector, so you can see a vast array of activities that happen in these cooperative sectors.

The Ministry has done a great job with nurturing the cooperative part of our economy. It forms a part of our SMEs also. In terms of geography, Sir, they are spread well across Fiji. We have about 76 cooperatives around the Northern Division, 152 cooperatives around the Western Division and in the Eastern Division, we have about 50 cooperatives, and there are many great examples of our cooperatives that have succeeded.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is an area in which we have been recognised. From about 2000, I remember when the Fijian Trade Policy Framework was being done, that also made cooperatives and how the role of cooperatives in the economic, social and cultural and human capacity spheres recognised. It promoted the education in terms of cooperatives.

At that time, it also encouraged the formation of the National Cooperatives Federation (NCF). Our 5-Year and 20-Year National Development Plan which came out in 2017 promoted those policies to strengthen the cooperatives and install the institutional capacity of cooperatives.

We had a Target 100 initiative also that came out in January 2018. This was to assist and guide 100 odd cooperatives across Fiji to be fully compliant with the Act. It also marked the celebration of our cooperative movement in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have a law which probably also needs to be looked at to bring it up to speed with today's activities that are happening. It is an area that we can seriously look at, especially in light of the fact that we want to diversify. As the honourable Minister spelt out, there are many areas that you can look at and see how cooperatives can actually assist Fiji, whether it is sustainable aviation fuel, whether it is farming things that we used to farm before, and he just mentioned about bananas, we do not even see that anymore, for commercial purposes.

There are many avenues that have been created by the Ministry for things to go into countries which we still have not utilised. Biosecurity has opened up many pathways which we still do not utilise. So, the education part of it is so important that with so much land that is available, it is the education part of it that is probably lacking that needs to be done so that we can get more and more cooperatives, helping the Fijian economy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I have said, the Act would need to be amended, et cetera, or brought up to speed. We have some great stories with respect to the examples of cooperatives in Fiji that have been successful.

Just a quick word about the SDGs that the honourable Minister spoke about, we also need to be careful because if you remember, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the last session we had at the Intercontinental, we were reminded kindly by the UNDP that we have not even got close to try and achieve the agenda that we want to by 2030, and now it has been put forward by 2065.

Again, I think the honourable Minister is correct. We need to make sure that we are compliant with the SDGs, so that we are environmentally compliant with all the cooperatives that actually come in the future.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we also see there are very worthy cooperatives around, like the Nasinu Land Purchase Cooperative that have faced numerous problems. So, it is a problem that the Ministry has been dealing with and I think it is a forward step by making sure that we actively participate in the International Cooperative Alliance. I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the floor.

Conditions and Status of Government School

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, good morning. The honourable Prime Minister, honourable Deputy Prime Ministers, fellow Cabinet Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition and Members of Parliament; my Ministerial Statement today in this Parliament focuses on the update of current conditions and status of Government schools facilities and infrastructure in Viti Levu.

Before I deliberate on the issue in detail, Sir, please, allow me to acknowledge the Government Ministries, organisations and individuals who contributed to the Ratu Latianara School's Flood Rehabilitation. Mr. Speaker, Sir, due to the extensive damage faced by the school, some of them have experienced it for the first time, they have been allowed an additional two weeks school holiday upon their request and the assessment made by the Ministry of Education team to allow them to clean up the school compound including their staff quarters. This flood has unfortunately impacted 30 kindergarten students, 428 primary school students and 293 secondary school students with a total of 751 students. In addition, Sir, out of the 27 staff quarters, 13 secondary teachers and four primary teachers quarters were severely affected and most if not all, the household items were also damaged.

On this note, Mr. Speaker, Sir, due to the extent of the damage to the school, the Ministry is urgently working in organising the support from the local authorities, Government agencies, NGOs and community organisations to facilitate the recovery process. The Ministry of Education will supply textbooks, water tanks, library books and school stationeries to the school to be ready to open for Term 2. The Ministry will also be providing psychological support (counselling) through the Substance Abuse and Advisory Council to the students, teachers and the stakeholders of the school.

Sir, we acknowledge the hard work of the Head of School and his team, school management committee to have the school ready by 3rd June to resume in Term 2. We also acknowledge the involvement of the RFMF, Fiji Police Force and the National Fire Authority in joining the community with the cleanup and restoration activities to foster a sense of ownership and resilience.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, allow me to continue highlight in Parliament the current status of facilities in Government-owned schools. Sir, as you are aware, most of the Government schools' facilities visited are in dire need of repairs, renovations and maintenance. Some of them will be celebrating 100 years of its existence this year (2024). The Government through its 2023/2024 Budget allocated \$1.8 million for upgrade and maintenance of Government schools facilities and \$1 million towards the upgrade and maintenance of Government schools quarters.

Repairs and maintenance of Government schools were unfortunately carried out in a more *ad hoc* way as opposed to the periodic maintenance that used to be undertaken by the Public Works Department in the past. During the PWD days, school infrastructures were well kept. There was a standard color code of all Government school infrastructure because there was a standard maintenance plan in place. This is something that the Coalition Government values and embarks on to bring back, so the standard of education facilities in all Government schools are restored.

The Ministry of Education in collaboration with the Ministry of Public Works, Transport and Meteorological Services has conducted an assessment of all Government school facilities. The scope of work has been prepared for all Government school infrastructure and we intend to overhaul all the ailing facilities. We, as Government must provide an environment conducive to learning and living.

The Ministry of Education is also grateful to the assistance of the Ministry of Finance for granting us with a Waiver of Tender so the works be given to the Ministry of Public Works,

Meteorological Services and Transport or to other capable contractors. However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, approval came too late and we have missed the timeline given by the Ministry of Public Works. In that case, I have instructed that we procure materials so that we can utilize the budget.

The team have been requested to incur expenditures and we expect to start with the procurement and upgrading works soon. The Ministry has arranged to have the school management maintenance teamwork with the Ministry of Public Works to carry out and monitor all the upgrading works. In the meantime, some of the upgrade and maintenance works have been done as witnessed in some of our schools.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the programmes offered in all the Government schools and it is critical that all Government schools must offer some standard form of academic and extra-curricular activities. I have encouraged the Heads of Schools to provide the opportunity to expose their students to a variety of activities and not be restricted to the same traditional sports, like rugby, netball and athletics. We also want to bring back those academic competitions that once were done during earlier times like Shakespearian dramas, quizzes and debates. These joint platforms are opportunities to share best practices, teaching methodologies in STEM subjects and networking amongst the Heads of Government schools, teachers and students.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our Government schools lack digital facilities and equipment which has drastic impacts on teaching and learning. For the boarding Government schools, the students accessing internet for research to do English and technical projects in the upper secondary schools are always hindered. Accessing the latest science and engineering journals for pleasure reading in the library and improving internet connectivity. RKS has limited connectivity and so unfortunately that QVS is at a blind spot. The Board of Governors, Head of Schools and teachers are encouraged to work together and collectively improve digitisation and at least have smart boards installed like we find in certain communities and faith-based schools today.

Currently, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the school chaplains in Government schools are being paid by the students through the *vakamisinari* or PTA funding support. Without counsellors in some of the Government schools, the chaplains provide an important role in providing pastoral care and a listening ear with spiritual advice much needed by our students today to curb the escalating in disciplinary cases and this is an area for which we still need Government funding.

It has become public knowledge, Mr. Speaker, that agriculture is the backbone of any developing economy and this was an avenue to discuss with the Heads of Schools to be thinking outside the box on the utilization of the land. The Heads of Schools were reminded that they were just being given brand new farming tractors and are encouraged to toil the land, not only for consumption for the boarders but also to consider expansion for business ventures. Through this expansion, all Government schools will earn money and the students will also learn financial literacy skills through this venture.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will soon continue with due diligence visits to other Government schools outside Viti Levu including faith-based and local community-owned schools on Taveuni Island, Lau Group, Yasawa and the other remote rural schools in the interior of Viti Levu and Vanua Levu for the sole purpose of capacity building for teachers, heads of schools and the school management committees to improve facilities, share practices to empower students for their future and to have education facilities conducive to teaching and learning.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform Parliament that the Coalition Government has already reset the wheel for the upgrading and maintenance works of all our Government schools so they restore the status of our Government schools and the pride of our nation. The schools that every child in this

country continue to compete to get enrolled in will churn out the best scholars for leadership positions, empower students for their future and to have education facilities conducive to learning.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the above stated information on the current status of our Government schools should be improved as our schools are the haven for our students to learn, remain in schools and be marketable in all walks of life when they leave the school gates at the end of their secondary and primary school journey.

During my visit, Sir, a constant concern raised by teachers was on the salary level and bands that many states were depressing and demoralizing given the hard work of teaching and managing students. Factors that were raised included new teachers joining the profession sharing the same salary level as those who have served for more than 15 years at the very least. Many have raised that the poor salary levels of teachers compared to the workload and stress they have to endure is leading many to resign and opt for lucrative job markets abroad especially those in New Zealand, Australia and Dubai where teachers are being scouted for job opportunities.

The Ministry is urgently addressing these concerns raised and policies are being looked at as we speak to allow for proper right sizing and right fitting into salary scales and grades to support and reward a progressive career assertion plan. The major teacher unions will also continue to be engaged to ensure we capture the proper details and structures that will ensure a sustainable retention and management of teachers not only now but also into the future.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, providing a conducive teacher work environment to manage and provide a safe enjoyable learning experience for our students is crucial and a happy and well looked after teacher means a productive and highly dedicated teacher. With the high level of stress and challenges teachers today face in a growing environment of aggressive, misbehaving and sometimes violent students, our teachers must have the proper incentives to remain teaching and thus, we accept the urgency of these issue that grapple us must be addressed.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker Sir, I would like to thank the honourable Minister for Education for his Ministerial Statement. A nation is judged by how it prepares its citizens, especially its young people for success. Education is not a privilege for a few but a right for the many. Government has an obligation to create opportunities to make sure that all young children benefit from early childhood to primary and to secondary education so that young adults can build their skills and chase their dreams through advance education in ECE, primary, secondary and university.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the FijiFirst Government has always fought to bring education into each home and put opportunities at the fingertip of each child, to empower young people to realize their ambitions. For effective teaching and learning, good teaching and learning resources and conducive learning environment is very important.

The FijiFirst Government gave priority to education and introduced Free Education Grant in 2014 and made sure that all schools in Fiji, regardless of the location of the school and regardless of the controlling authority of the schools benefited from the Free Education Grant. The Grant is allocated in six different areas:

1. Administration - 30 percent;
2. Building and Compound Maintenance - 20 percent;
3. IT and Computer - 15 percent;
4. Library and Textbook - 10 percent;
5. PEMAC and Science - 10 percent; and
6. Teaching and Learning Material - 15 percent.

All schools, including Government Schools, can use this allocation of 15 percent to upgrade their computer laboratories.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the school management and the school heads were provided training on how to utilize the Free Education Grant and this training was also provided to the Government School Heads and this training is provided every year to ensure that all school managements and school heads were up to date and well-versed with the school management handbook.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the current financial year, around \$6 million was given to Government Schools for infrastructure against \$344,000 given to Non-Government Schools. For the information of Parliament, there are only 13 Government schools out of 900 primary and secondary schools that we have and about 10,000 students are in these Government schools out of 250,000 students altogether.

(Honourable Members interject)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. H. CHAND.- After *TC Winston*, FijiFirst spent more than \$300 million to construct schools. We do not discriminate between Government and Non-Government Schools. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the children who stay in Government hostel schools pay less than \$100 per term. Children from poor families and outer islands send their children to Non-Government Schools and these children pay around \$400 per term as hostel fees. Why so much emphasis on Government schools? All schools whether Government or Non-Government are given the same amount of Free Education Grant. If Non-Government Schools can build or maintain schools, then why not Government schools?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, good governance in the education system promotes effective delivery of education citizens. If Free Education Grant is well-managed by the school management and the school heads, I am sure all the schools in Fiji regardless of the controlling authority will have good facilities, teaching and learning resources and conducive teaching learning environment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, all schools whether Government or Non-Government should be treated fairly when it comes to allocation of resources. Taxpayers can see how this Government is giving preference to Government schools over Non-Government Schools.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Government fails to appreciate that religious bodies and communities have taken the burden away from the Government by providing schools. The least you can do is to treat all schools in the same manner when it comes to funding.

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

Cane Farmers' Study Tour to India
(Question No. 46/2024)

HON. R.R. SHARMA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Multi-Ethnic Affairs and Sugar Industry inform Parliament on the lessons learnt from the study tour of cane farmers to India?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I respond to the honourable Member's question, I would like to respond to the earlier comment made by honourable Maharaj in regards to the resignation of the Special Administrator because he has a conflict of interest as he tried to object to the development of the hotel. All I am saying, Mr. Speaker, there is definitely a huge disparity. There is no issue about the Special Administrator. The issue is about the land which was illegally transferred to....

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Point of Order, Sir - Standing Order 74(1). The practice of Parliament, Sir, if he be asked a question, he simply answer the question. This is a completely different matter that he is talking about. If he wants to, he can answer it at a later stage, Sir. This is not the forum for him because he does not have the right to respond to it. Please let him stick to the question, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- You may continue, honourable Minister. Would you mind sticking to the issue that is being raised rather than that hotel which was raised by honourable Maharaj.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, I would like to respond to honourable Rinesh Sharma's question and I must thank him for his pertinent question. I am aware that honourable Sharma, being a graduate from India, is well acquainted with the quality of training and education taught in India.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I must say that the first-of-its-kind educational trip for our cane farmers to India was, indeed, a great success and a fruitful one for all the participants. Firstly, I want to convey my deepest gratitude to the Government of India for sponsoring the two-weeks training for all the 18 participants, including 14 cane farmers and four officials from the Sugar Cane Growers Council (SCGC). These 14 farmers included four female and ten male farmers that are actively growing and supplying cane to the mills.

My sincerest appreciation also goes to the National Sugar Institute of Kanpur for hosting our participants and arranging all logistics for our delegates. For the information of this august Parliament, the Fiji Sugar Corporation (FSC) has just recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the National Sugar Institute, Kanpur, to acquire the benefit from their training for FSC mills and staff.

The comprehensive two-week training, Mr. Speaker, Sir, was made possible by the SCGC with the exceptional support of the Indian High Commission in Fiji. The discussions began in 2023 with a submission of a proposal by the SCGC to the Indian High Commission which was well received and considered to be fully funded by the Government of India under the Indian Technical and Economic Co-operation (ITEC) programme.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, upon receiving the approval from the Government of India, the SCGC management identified participants based on selection criteria approved by the Council. The criteria included the need to a balanced gender, ethnic mix and the need for representation of farmers across the cane production areas. The 14 farmers selected are progressive farmers, and influential in their farming communities as a lead farmer.

Mr. Speaker, the SCGC have been continuously provided with the various training by FSC and the Sugar Research Institute of Fiji (SRIF) through the Farmer Field Schools and Demonstration Trials. However, there is a need to provide exposure to these farmers to other cane producing countries, especially, India, as one of the largest producers of sugarcane. As we say, seeing is believing; therefore, such international exposure provided an opportunity for our farmers to attain modern cane farming practices and technologies available for improving yields.

The two-week training, Mr. Speaker, Sir, was tailor-made to fulfil the needs and capacity requirements of our farmers. The participants visited various sites including sugar research institutes, sugar factories, attended field-days, had interaction sessions with successful farmers and visited their farms in the State of

Uttar Pradesh.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as highlighted, the objective of the programme was to provide an international exposure to our farmers. Uttar Pradesh was a preferred choice as they have the same language as a medium of exchange that eased communication, similar farming practices, and is the largest sugar producing state in India.

During the research and mill visits, the participants were able to learn about the adaptation of the new improved cane varieties, effective crop management practices, crop diversification opportunities, practice of crop rotation and intercropping, pest and weed management practices, soil health, plant nutrition and farm mechanization. In principle, the participants gained insights on methods to enhance cane productivity, model farm set-up, fertiliser applications, disease control, weed management and integrated approaches combining traditional knowledge with modern technologies for sustainable cane production.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the key attributes of learning were:

- Hands-on learning for farmers to experience both, sugar mill operations and farm practices that will provide deeper understanding of how farmers actions on farms affect the quality and quantity of cane subsequently sugar made at the mills.
- Holistic approach, the farmers learnt how integrating mills and farm visits encourage them to adopt a holistic approach to sugar cane cultivation and to optimise yield including learning about the preparation and different planting methods. The importance of planting quality cane, adoption of good crops, husbandry practices and the importance of soil analysis and plant nutrients.
- Visitations to farms allowed farmers to identify and tailor solutions to address specific solutions or opportunities unique on their farms.
- Exposure to a range of practices encouraged farmers to innovate and adapt approach in response to changing market trends, technological advancements and environmental considerations.
- Mr. Speaker, Sir, is essential for long-term sustainability in strengthening growers' commitment to remain competitive in the sugar industry. The learnings from models of crop diversification, intercropping and crop rotation have certainly broadened our farmers understanding on the possibilities of improving revenue, profits and enhance farm sustainability.
- Understanding the importance of selective harvesting of matured cane and green cane harvesting to improve sugar recovery.
- Revenue Diversification by mills – visits to mills allowed farmers to understand the importance of diversification into cogeneration, ethanol production, refined sugar production and value addition into speciality sugar, something that I have planned for our sugar industry.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, having acquired the necessary knowledge, our 14 farmers are now required to practice and share their learnings with fellow farmers under a prudent monitoring structure set by SCGC. The four officials of SCGC were part of the tour team to learn all the ways and practices whereby they learnt ways to improve service delivery and support to farmers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we must note that sugarcane is a permanent crop and requires 14 months to 16 months to mature, therefore, we must not expect miracles to happen by tomorrow on the farms of these 14 farmers. The new planting season begins this month and I expect these farmers to plant new cane and begin applying their knowledge on their farms which they learnt from India. Therefore, we can expect positive results from the 2025 harvesting season.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as mentioned, the SCGC staff will work very closely with the Sugar Research Institute of Fiji and FSC to monitor the progress of these 14 farmers including those in the nearby communities to assess the efficiency in capacity building. I am informed that these farmers have already outlined their plans and will showcase it to fellow farmers in their communities through field days with the support of the

Sugar Research Institute of Fiji.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, Sir, such an educational trip was the first of its kind but not the last one. We will continue to have dialogue with the Government of India to make this programme an ongoing event for our cane producers.

MR. SPEAKER.- Supplementary question.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I expressed in the last Parliament session that I had a couple of youths who had approached me and asked how could they go on this trip as well. Can the honourable Minister for Sugar Industry elaborate on his selection criteria of the 14 farmers and how has his Ministry ensured that there was a balance of youth representation?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I already outlined that selection was done by SCGC and I will not be able to elaborate as to what was the criteria like.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will skip the question that was supposed to have been raised by honourable Vocea, Question No. 47/2024, since the honourable Prime Minister has made a very thorough statement, and have taken care of the issues that he wanted to raise.

(Question No. 47/2024 withdrawn)

Prevention of Future Problems - Fijiana Sevens Players
(Question No. 48/2024)

HON. F.S. KOYA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Youth and Sports inform Parliament as to what measures have been put in place to prevent the repetition of future incidents, like the Fijiana Sevens players sleeping on airport benches outside Sydney Airport?

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, first of all, I wish to congratulate the Fijian Drua for the win in the weekend and also to congratulate the Lautoka Maroons for successfully defending the Farebrother Sullivan Trophy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise in response to the question raised by the honourable Member. Before I do that, Sir, please allow me to make the following remarks:

1. Regarding a similar comment you have made, Sir, in the last sitting, I did receive a letter from the Office of the Prime Minister, seeking clarification on the issue.

A report from Rugby House was received and forwarded to the Office of the Prime Minister which confirmed that the allegation was false, and we had discussed the same during our Parliament Workshop at Natadola.

2. Let me categorically state in this august Parliament that your Coalition Government, through the Ministry of Youth and Sports, is committed to the development of sports in Fiji. The honourable Prime Minister shared the values of our Vuvale Partnership and sports diplomacy in his Ministerial Statement this morning. Sports has provided pathways for our youth to live their dreams. Sports have been the catalyst of change for our youth to move away from criminal activities. Sports is the cornerstone of a healthy and vibrant nation. Sir, players welfare and safety has always been the core of our development.

In response to the Oral Question, Sir, your Coalition Government with the Ministry of Youth and Sports and Fiji Rugby is deeply concerned about the recent reports regarding the situation faced by our Fiji Airways Fijiana Sevens Team at Sydney Airport on December 2023, as they transited to Dubai. The welfare and comfort of our athletes are of utmost importance to us, and we sincerely apologise for any inconvenience or discomfort caused to the Team.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in response to this incident, we want to assure our stakeholders, fans and, most importantly, our players, that we are implementing immediate measures to prevent such occurrences in the future.

Firstly, I would like to highlight that a new Team Manager has been on board since January 2024, following a transparent and merit-based recruitment process. This change aims to enhance the overall management and logistical support provided to our teams.

Furthermore, we have established a central database for series and teams' documentation which is meticulously maintained by the Team Manager. This ensures that all necessary information and plans are easily accessible and organised, contributing to smoother operations during travel.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, regular management meetings are now held with both, the men's and women's team managers prior to any trip, enabling thorough discussion of travel plans and ensuring that appropriate arrangements are in place, particularly during long transit periods. This collaborative approach fosters efficiency and coordination between Team Managers, ultimately, benefiting the entire programme.

Additionally, schedules are shared and coordinated between both teams. The Sevens Programme Manager oversees travel schedules and activities to avoid any overlaps or conflicts. After each series leg, comprehensive reports are prepared by the Coach and Manager, highlighting any areas that require attention or improvement.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji Rugby remains committed to providing the highest level of support and care for our athletes and we will continue to review and enhance processes to uphold these standards. We appreciate the understanding and patience of our supporters, as we look towards ensuring the wellbeing and success of our Teams. Thank you, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- Just before I offer the floor to honourable Koya for his supplementary question, I stand to be corrected, honourable Minister, on your opening reply that my report to Cabinet was false regarding the men's team before the issue on the question which has now been raised is regarding the women's team.

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Sir, the allegations that were forwarded to you....

MR. SPEAKER.- No, it was not forwarded to me. I forwarded it to the honourable Prime Minister.

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Yes, Sir, we received that report from the Fiji Rugby Union and they fully explained their position on that allegation, which we have forwarded to the Office of the Prime Minister and it was confirmed that it was false.

MR. SPEAKER.- My report to the honourable Prime Minister was false?

HON. J. SAUKURU.- No, Sir, the person that had advised....

MR. SPEAKER.- I was not advised. In fact, I was delegated in this duty by the honourable Prime Minister to go. All we are talking about here is the welfare of our players. As a former rugby player for our Lautoka Team, that is where we are now, as champions of the Farebrother Sullivan Trophy. But, again, the person that complained was the Coach. I did not go there to go and listen to complaints, I went there to hand out the jerseys as asked of me by the honourable Prime Minister because he was busy.

When that issue came up, I raised it by way of a report simply on that basis. So, if we are going to continue with this pointing of fingers, that someone is lying, this is false, then heaven knows what else may come through.

The second team was the Fijiana Sevens Team. They were shown pictures of them sleeping on the benches and that is where the question is coming from. All I am raising is, now that my complaint has been labelled as false by the Fiji Rugby Union because honourable Ro Filipe Tuisawau was unhappy with the question now being posed in the Business Committee. I said, “No, let us hear it”. The good thing about hearing it is because now, mine is being labelled as “false”. I would like to implore upon you, honourable Minister, please, have your fingers on the pulse. That is all I would like to say.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, if I may, this has become a very sore topic and I may offer some advice, honourable Minister, this requires a thorough investigation, especially now in light of the fact that you are saying that the complaint put forward by Mr. Speaker, has turned out to be a lie. I think it requires a thorough investigation as to what is actually going on in FRU and someone responsible needs to go home.

My question was, is this the only occasion that this happened? I think it has just been answered, there are other occasions that this has happened. Have there been other occasions where our rugby team - our pride and joy, whether it be the female or the male team or any sporting organisations, has this ever happened before, especially in light of the fact that the answer that was given, Mr. Speaker, was, “oh, it was FRU’s fault”, and they started a big finger-pointing exercise. Everyone knows in the whole wide world that Sydney Airport shuts at 12 o’clock. Where and who was responsible for doing the logistics for our rugby team?

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, yes, unfortunately, this is not the first time that has happened. It has happened in the past as well, from the report received from the Fiji Rugby Union. This is what we are trying to address now, particularly the administration and the logistical support for the teams before they leave our shores.

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you, honourable Minister, for that reply.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, given the fact that we have already won two Gold Medals in Sevens, we have won a Bronze Medal for the women and we understand the psychological nature or the impact to the players can be very, very important for our possibility of winning a third Gold and a medal for the women. Can the honourable Minister assure us that all measures have been put in place to make sure that the team members will be in full condition, the best possible conditions – mentally, psychologically and emotionally, to make sure that they bring those Gold Medals back to this country? We want to hear from you.

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for his comments. We are taking that on board. For this particular incident, I never elaborated on the cause of the incident that happened. It was a misunderstanding between World Rugby and Fiji Rugby Union.

The World Rugby was supposed to provide the transportation part of it but they never realised that Sydney Airport will close at 11 o'clock. Based on that, that is why it was never taken into account. The girls had to sleep outside and there was no prior arrangement from Fiji Rugby Union. Of course, we are taking that on board, I want to assure this august Parliament and members of the public listening and watching television that we are prepared for the Olympics.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Government seems to talk a lot but we have seen our sports women and men are affected and as the honourable Minister has said, this is not the first time, it is the second time. The question to the honourable Minister is, was any action taken against the person or particular staff responsible behind this debacle?

You have stated that it was World Rugby's fault but at the end of the day, when Ministers and our sports people are travelling, there is someone managing these things. Was any action taken against the staff?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- I think I will not allow that because the honourable Minister has fully explained. There was some kind of communication problem between the World Rugby Union of which FRU is an affiliated member of. So, they organised these things, that did not happen, so people slept on the benches. We leave it at that, honourable Lal.

I think we will adjourn Parliament for lunch now. We will return at 2.30 p.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.33 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.40 p.m.

Operational Partners Agreement for Global Environment Facility
(Question No. 49/2024)

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU asked the Government, upon notice.

Can the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics update Parliament on the Operational Partners Agreement for Global Environment Facility (GEF) for Community Based Integrated Natural Resource Management (CBINRM)?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, on 26th March, 2024, Cabinet approved the Operational Partners Agreement for the Global Environment Facility Six-Cycle (GEF-6) Project with the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), the Ministry of Finance and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics and the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs.

The Community Based Integrated Natural Resource Management (CBINRM) Project, Mr. Speaker, Sir, centres on two Provinces - in Ra and in Tailevu. The specific focus of the Project is to address the rate of deforestation across the Nakauvadra and Tomaniivi-Wabu Forest Reserves towards the lowlands of Tailevu Province, including mangrove zones.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Project is essentially to promote CBINRM) at landscape level to reduce land degradation, enhance carbon stocks and strengthen local livelihoods in Ra and Tailevu Provinces. Through the Project implementation, it aims to address the negative development impacts of unsustainable forest management, while addressing the poverty and livelihood demands of local communities.

The Project, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is expected to benefit approximately 3,500 individuals from 17 villages, or 21 landowning units in the district of Dawasamu and Namena in the Tailevu Province, and Nakorotubu in the Ra Province, through the implementation of the three components of the Project which involves strengthening local capacities, community based integrated natural resource management and monitoring and evaluating the lessons of dissemination to replicate it elsewhere.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Project will oversee the implementation of the following activities:

1. 47,719 hectares of land under Improved Land Use Plan Integrated Natural Resource Management at district level, through the development of appropriate land use plans, community integrated development plans and implementation of appropriate restoration programmes.
2. Appropriate training and support provided towards income generating activities, the introduction and supply of resilient crops, as well as revitalisation of traditional knowledge and practices for food and nutrition security and build communities' resilience.
3. Empowerment of community members, especially the inclusion and engagement of women and youth in sustainable development.

The Project implementation, Mr. Speaker, Sir, requires a total of US\$2,119,425 million, which is equivalent to FJ\$4.8 million, the amount approved by the GEF Secretariat. Of the total allocation for the Ministry - \$3.7 million, the remaining balance of FJ\$1 million will remain with FAO to cover the cost relating to the Project's monitoring and evaluation, including mid-term and final project review. Of course, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is also subject to change as the Project progresses.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Operational Partners Agreement for the Global Environment Facility Six-Cycle Project on Community Based Integrated Resource Management has been signed. The Ministry of Finance is in the process of releasing the first funding and, therefore, the project is almost ready to go.

The FAO is GEF's implementing agency in this particular case and has an overall responsibility not only in Fiji, but for similar projects elsewhere. The Ministry of iTaukei Affairs is the main Government counterpart and will have the overall executing and technical responsibility of the Project, with FAO providing technical oversight as the agency chosen by the GEF, Sir.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there will be a Project Steering Committee, as is the case with most funded grant and loan funded projects, which will include the Ministry of Fisheries and Forestry, Ministry of Agriculture, Department of Climate Change and the Ministry of Finance and Officials from FAO. Basically, the idea of the Project Steering Committee is to ensure that all the preparations and different aspects of implementing the Project on the ground is fully done and that the benefits eventually flow to the people whom the project is intended to.

In some cases, and sometimes more often than not, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for these kinds of projects, a lot of funding does not necessarily end up to helping the very people the project is intended (02:39:23) to do. So, the Project Steering Committee, obviously, will have its own standards to ensure that it is done. For example, the six-monthly project progress, financial reports, looking at the annual workplan and making sure that the budget is implemented carefully. So, that is update on the project.

MR. SPEAKER.- There are no supplementary questions.

Honourable Members, we will skip Question No. 50/2024 because that has been taken care of. The Minister for Multiethnic Affairs has made his reply to the question that was raised earlier on. We will go right to the sixth Oral Question for today.

(Question No. 50/2024 withdrawn)

Re-Introduction of School Counselling Services
(Question No. 51/2024)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Education update Parliament on the re-introduction of the School Counselling Services?

HON. A. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, please, allow me to provide some background into the School Counselling Services that has been given in schools. In 2001, more than 10 large secondary school counselling positions were established within the Ministry of Education and in 2014, these positions were removed and the Counsellors that were appointed were given the teaching positions in the respective school.

The Ministry, since 2014, has strengthened the Substance Abuse Advisory Council (SAAC). The SAAC, a statutory Unit with qualified counsellors provided counselling support to students referred from schools and the Unit is also mandated to provide basic counselling training to teachers. Therefore, 35 teacher counsellors were trained and certified with a Diploma in Counselling by APTC.

In 2015, Divisional Counsellor positions were established in the four Education Divisions. However, due to the previous Government's reform of the Civil Service, the Divisional Counsellor positions at the Ministry of Education were neutralised and, even worse, Chaplains' post was also removed in 2019. All these mechanisms, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to support health, well-being, safety of teachers and students, were dismantled and, unfortunately, could have led to the increase in disciplinary cases in our education system.

The Ministry of Education acknowledges that due to the increasing number of in-discipline cases referred to the SAAC over the years from the schools is quiet alarming, with recent media report of 3,742, an urgent need to decentralise the School Counselling Services to the four Education Divisions, Districts and in large schools.

With all the changes that have impacted our social fabric, the Ministry of Education in collaboration with the Australian Government under the Vuvale Partnership, have established counselling hubs in all the four Education Divisions and these hubs are in the selected Government schools. However, counselling support is provided to all students in their respective education divisions. The counselling hubs were opened in 2023 at Natabua High School, Nasinu Secondary School, Labasa College and Levuka Public School in 2024.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, all disciplinary cases that are reported to the School Heads, for example, for drug use, drug peddling, sex related offences which require counselling services intervention are registered at the District and Divisional Education Offices. These cases are then referred to the SAAC Office, as they are classified as high risk, and SAAC contacts the various Heads of Schools in the Divisions to release the trained counsellors from respective schools - the 35 trained counsellors, to attend to the students. As always, parental consent is obtained by the Head of School prior to registration of the cases with the District Offices and parents are present during all counselling sessions.

The SAAC, in collaboration with District and Divisional Education Offices, monitor and evaluate the work of the counselling services, reports and follow ups of the cases are submitted to SAAC, and depending on the seriousness of the cases, these are referred to the relevant authorities, such as the Department of Social Welfare, Medical Services Pacific, Ministry of Health and the Fiji Police Force for their necessary support and actions. Sir, SAAC is also expected to provide a monthly report to the Minister of Education's Office on the work carried out by the organisation.

The Ministry of Education acknowledges that there are limitations in our effort to attend to all cases that are happening in schools as the counselling hubs are located in town areas and SAAC has limited powers also as their work with rural school cases greatly depend on the availability of support, the availability of transport and the availability of finances from District and Divisional Education Offices. The counsellors are then expected to travel to rural schools, subject to availability of transportation and the release of the counsellor from the respective Head of School. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Supply of Tuna in Fiji
(Question No. 52/2024)

HON. M.D. BULITAVU asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Fisheries and Forestry inform Parliament whether Fiji has sufficient supply of tuna to support the Government's recent announcement of its intention to sell more tuna internationally?

HON. K.V. RAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, to answer the question of Fiji tuna supply, we first need to understand the different categories of fishing fleets that Fiji use to source its tuna. These categories are differentiated under the following fleet:

1. Fiji Fish fleet;
2. Foreign fishing fleet based in Fiji; and
3. Foreign fleet based in foreign ports.

Apart from these three categories, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to understand Fiji's tuna supply, it is imperative that we learn the nature of tuna and that it is a highly migratory species. In layman's term, this means that tuna knows no boundaries and they move around a lot. Tuna that we catch in our waters today is likely to be in Tonga on high seas tomorrow. Therefore, they will be targeted by fishing vessels in Tonga and those in high seas.

This means Mr. Speaker, Sir, that fishing vessels and fishing nations such as Fiji compete for the same school of tuna that migrate and feed across our different EEZ. That is why there is always a shortage in raw materials to support Fiji's aspiration to increasing our market for export size.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in highlighting this, the Government's recent announcement to underpin the need to ensure that we have enough raw materials feeding our processing facilities. The processing facilities that handle and process fresh and frozen products line including canaries. Currently, we have seen a steady increase in raw materials which relate to the increase in catch sourced from our Fiji fleet and foreign fleet calling into Fiji ports.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we all know that change do not happen overnight and there needs to be policies, legislation, partnership agreement and investment on infrastructure that need to be directed to the tuna sector, if we are to see drastic increases on our volume of export and market shares. In light, Mr. Speaker, Sir, with great emphasis on future export needs, the current Government is working towards policies and legislation that supports and increase the number of vessels calling into Fiji ports to land its catch for our processing facilities. While we are currently seeing a constant on steady supply of tuna, we are also mindful that due to the complexity of the tuna sector, some of these developments takes time. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are optimistic that this is the right approach, and the right people will increase our market and export shares.

MR. SPEAKER.- Tuna knows no boundaries. I did not know they were that knowledgeable about boundaries.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I thank the honourable Minister for his detailed explanation. In 2019, PAFCO at Levuka was only generating about 18 tonnes per day, in 2020 it was producing 120 tonnes a day. What I wanted to emphasise, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is not the result of the fishing vessels that comes into Fiji. Fong Chun Formosa Company (FCF) Taiwan bought Bumble Bee and when Bumble Bee was bought by FCF, they are the biggest supplier of tuna around the world. Basically, they had been feeding PAFCO to ensure that the workers there are employed for the seven days. My question to the honourable Minister, does he think that there is surplus demand now for the Government to go around the world and try and sell tuna to other countries mainly in Europe and USA?

HON. K.V. RAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as he alluded to earlier regarding FCF being the major supplier to PAFCO but as mentioned that PAFCO is producing only 13 tonnes on a daily basis. We cannot supply and sell tuna around the world unless we have the capacity in our industry to supply, so we are signing an Agreement with PAFCO and FCF to give us 250 tonnes of tuna per month of tuna so we can access into other countries in the supply of tuna and canneries.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Minister from a trade perspective, I know the honourable Minister has been out looking for people to invest in the industry, is the focus on the supply of tuna to only PAFCO or is the focus on developing the industry so that we have more suppliers of the product that is actually going out from Fiji in terms of trade?

HON. K.V. RAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are trying to do both at the same time. First, we try to get the stock and we try to move in this tuna hub into the Pacific to attract fishers and fishing companies to come to Fiji.

HON. RATU J.B. NIUDAMU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, just a supplementary question. I wish to thank the honourable Minister for his answer. Can the honourable Minister advice Parliament on the recent innovative technology and e-platform development currently underway to improve service delivery and operation of the tuna sector?

HON. K.V. RAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the use of advance innovation technology and e-platform is critical and imperative in this day and age. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the work to advance innovation and e-platform was initiated by me last year during my study visit to Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) in Solomon Islands.

During this visit, I was able to secure the support of the FFA to help us realise the aspiration in technology and e-systems. Throughout last year, we have worked closely with FFA to conduct the needed scope of work and secure external funding to finance this work. This led to a trial conducted on:

1. Fiji electronic post grade massive platform;
2. Fiji electronic catch document scheme; and
3. Fiji boarding and inspection electronic platform.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am also honoured to confirm that the trial phase has been completed with the launch date scheduled for next month. The milestone achievement, Mr. Speaker, Sir, will indeed strengthen our ability to address a daily operation and needs to provide a more streamlined platform to assist our tuna stakeholders.

MR. SPEAKER.- He was really prepared for that supplementary question.

(Laughter)

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the answers from the honourable Minister is sort of confusing me. He is talking about migratory species and then we know that this is an extractive industry, the tuna stocks are depleting. My question is on the licenses that we issue because there has been efforts in the past to reduce the number of licences, yet the honourable Minister is talking about getting more tuna stocks. This is why I am confused, Mr. Speaker, Sir and I want the honourable Minister to state the direction that the Ministry is taking in order to address all these issues.

MR. SPEAKER.- Have you got that, honourable Minister? You want to reply?

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

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I mentioned earlier, we have limited licence here in Fiji for our EEZ but what we are trying to do now is to get this tuna hub in the Pacific to get those foreign fishing boats to come and land their fish in Fiji. That is the reason why we are limiting our licences and try to get

the foreign fishing boats to lend and supply our fish.

MR. SPEAKER.- The tuna hub comes from where?

HON. K.V. RAVU.- From other Pacific Island countries and the other neighbouring countries like Japan and Taiwan

HON. J. USAMATE.- Supplementary question is in relation to what the honourable Minister has just said about the focus of the Ministry to bring in tuna from other countries into Fiji. We have had a shipping fleet in this country for a number of years and a lot of those ships are berthed in the Suva Harbour, they cannot fish, the fisherman are not fishing. There are families that depend upon them, they cannot go to sea because of the high costs, et cetera. The Ministry is focused on bringing fish, what is it doing about our local fishing fleet that is sitting out in the harbours that are not sailing at all?

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister, we would not want you to elaborate on that hub you are trying to bring here, maybe sleeping there now.

HON. K.V. RAVU.- Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir, we will look into that issue. I think that is a new question coming up and we will try to sort that in the Ministry, our institution.

(Laughter)

Written Questions

Names and Selection Criteria – Board Members (Question No. 53/2024)

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

Can the honourable Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Climate Change, Environment, Civil Service, Information, Public Enterprises and Veteran Affairs inform Parliament on:

- (a) the names of Chairpersons and Board Members of all statutory organisations and Government-owned commercial entities;
- (b) the names of expatriate CEO, Chairpersons and Board Members of all statutory organisations and Government-owned commercial entities; and
- (c) the selection criteria used to appoint these members.

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will table my response at a later sitting date as allowed for in Standing Order 45(3).

Revenue and VAT Collection (Question No. 54/2024)

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

Can the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics inform Parliament on:

- (a) the total monthly revenue collection from August 2023 to April 2024; and
- (b) the total monthly VAT collection from August 2023 to April 2024.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will table my response at a later sitting date as permitted under Standing Order 45(3). Just for the information on the honourable Member, Mr. Speaker, Sir, these sort of data are publicly available in the supplements, but I will be providing these as well.

CORRECTIONS SERVICE (AMENDMENT) BILL 2024

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

That the:

- (a) Corrections Service (Amendment) Bill 2024 (Bill No. 02/2024) be considered by Parliament without delay;
- (b) Bill must pass through one stage at a single sitting of Parliament;
- (c) Bill must not be referred to a Standing Committee or other committee of Parliament;
- (d) Bill must be debated, voted upon by Parliament on Thursday, 23rd May, 2024, but that one hour be given to debate the Bill with the Right of Reply given to me as the Member moving this motion.

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

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Corrections Service Act 2006 provides for the establishment of the Fiji Corrections Service (FCS), the administration of prisons in Fiji, the treatment of the prisoners including the remission of their sentences, early release schemes and the discharge of prisoners.

The Act was enacted in 2006 and commenced on 27th June, 2008. The Corrections Service has since identified areas in the Act which necessitates the need for the amendment to the Act. Therefore, the Corrections Service (Amendment) Bill 2024 seeks to amend the Act to –

- (a) extend the list of international standards and instruments that the Corrections Service may be guided by regarding the treatment of prisoners;
- (b) allow the Commissioner of the Corrections Service to appoint medical officers to the Corrections Service for the care of prisoners;
- (c) provide for the mandatory medical examination of prisoners upon their admission and discharge;
- (d) introduce the provisions to establish a Central Allocation Classification Board within the Corrections Service; and
- (e) correct inconsistency terminology throughout the Act.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Bill is urgent for the Government as it incorporates changes to align with the current practice of the Corrections Service, which will improve the administration of the Corrections Service. There has been wider consultation with the Office of the Solicitor-General and with the Fiji Corrections Service.

There may be questions asked by the Opposition as to why the need for Standing Order 51. The reason, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is just to put some clarity into some of the gaps from the Act in 2004. Later on, there will be a holistic review of the Act, so this is necessary.

Clause 1 of the Bill which provides for the short title and commencement. If passed by Parliament, the amending legislation will come into force on a date appointed by the Minister that is set.

Clause 2 of the Bill amends section 2 of the Act to provide for the definitions of terms used in the Bill.

Clause 3 of the Bill amends section 3 to extend the list of international standards that the Corrections Service must be guided by.

Clause 4 of the Bill amends section 5 of the Act to allow the Commissioner, for the purpose of an investigation, to direct any officer of the Corrections Service to answer questions under oath or affirmation and produce a record or item in the officer's possession. The amendment also limits the delegation of the Commissioner's powers to a senior officer only, so it is basically to address the abuse of power.

Clause 5 of the Bill amends section 8 of the Act by deleting any reference to certain terms for clarification purposes.

Clause 6 of the Bill amends section 10 of the Act to provide that any officer of the Corrections Service who is absent without leave for more than seven days will be deemed to have resigned from the Corrections Service. This is one of the problems that is faced by the Fiji Corrections Service where people go over seven days and in some case 10 or even 21 and there is no definite solution as to in terms of the HR how we deal with these problems.

Clause 7 of the Bill amends section 15 of the Act to allow the Commissioner to appoint medical officers to the Corrections Service. Under the Act, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the appointment of medical officers are done by the Permanent Secretary, now the power is vested with the Commissioner.

Clause 8 of the Bill amends section 18 of the Act to include a Judge as the visiting justice. Under the Act, the visiting justice refers to a senior magistrate. Now we enlarge the provision to also include judges.

Clause 9 of the Bill amends section 26 of the Act by mandating that upon admission and immediately before discharge, a prisoner must be medically examined. Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the issues raised constantly over time and time again is the issue of violence against prisoners or the allegations so it is apparent that there must be a medical report upon admission and also before discharge.

Clause 11 of the Bill amends section 33(3) of the Act so that Assistant Commissioner of Operations and the Commissioner are informed about the medical condition of any prisoner.

Clause 12 of the Bill amends the Act by inserting a new section 36A which establish the Central Allocation and Classification Board. These boards are basically to tabulate the records of those who come in as inmates as to the date of their release of other rehabilitation services which should be afforded to them during their period catered for by Fiji Corrections Service.

Clause 13 of the Bill amends section 41(1) of the Act so that arms may only be issued to Correction Officers upon the order of the Commissioner. I think this is straightforward.

Clause 14 of the Bill amends section 43(3) of the Act by deleting reference to "fair wages"

and substituting “income” for consistency purposes. This is the income from activities performed by inmates so upon release, they will be paid that income.

Clause 15 of the Bill amends section 46(2) of the Act by inserting an additional eligibility requirement that would allow prisoners to be released under the Early Release Programme.

Clause 16 of the Bill amends section 51(3) of the Act by substituting “firearm” with “arms” for consistency purposes. Arms and ammunitions are defined as “arms”.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I recommend that Parliament considers the Bill without delay to give clarity in terms of administration enforcement that will be debated on Thursday.

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

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to start off by saying at the outset that this Government has never brought a Bill to Parliament that is not using Standing Order 51. The honourable Attorney-General needs to know that because the gentleman sitting on his right, gentleman sitting on his left and those two who are sitting behind him, and a few others in this Parliament have always been against Standing Order 51. So, I will say it again, when you say something and you do that exact opposite, you are a hypocrite; that is what it is.

This Bill needs to be taken to Committees. I give you one example of very poor drafting that I, a non-lawyer, have already seen. Clause 2.9 states and I quote: “Clause 10 of the Bill amends section 26 of the Act by mandating upon admission and immediately before discharge, a person must be medically examined.” What does that mean? It means nothing.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. J. USAMATE.- The other one that I am talking about is clause 2.14 is the removal of words “fair wages” to talk about income. What does that mean? That we want to treat prisoners differently from other people that are employed?

I think with some of these reasons, Mr. Speaker, Sir, these types of Bills must be taken to Committees so it can be scrutinised in detail so that we, the Members of Parliament, the representatives of the voters of this country, have an opportunity to look at it in detail. On that ground, I do not support the motion that it be taken through Standing Order 51.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I agree with my fellow Opposition Member of Parliament’s comments, but I just have a question with respect to the Board that the honourable Minister spoke about and this is contained in Clause 12 of the Bill. This is section 36A which actually establishes the Central Allocation and Classification Board. My question is with respect to this classification.

I am not sure of the explanation that was given by the honourable Attorney-General, but the purpose of this Board is to make recommendations to the Commissioner in relation to the classification and allocation of prisoners to suitable Corrections Centres. When doing this, we are talking about Corrections Centres all around Fiji, Sir, and prisoners request for early release or short-term release.

I see the composition of the Board as being the Deputy Commissioner of Corrections Service as the Chairperson, the Assistant Commissioner Operations, the Director Rehabilitation, Supervisor

of Central/Eastern Division (fair enough), Supervisor of Southern Division (fair enough) and a Senior Operations Officer. What about the other Corrections Centres? Where is the Supervisor for the Western Division? Because there are prisoners who are all around Fiji, should it not be that we include the Western Division also - Supervisor for the Western Division? Why are we Suva-centric or why are we Central/Eastern Division-centric and leaving out probably a very important category that ought to be in there?

That would be something that the honourable Attorney-General might want to look at. Is there a particular purpose? I am not sure, I do not know the reasoning behind it but most certainly, Sir, I think that would help in terms of getting the classification done for prisoners. If there are reoffenders, et cetera, you would have had someone in the Western Division who is known to the Supervisor in the Western Division, et cetera. My suggestion is that the honourable Attorney-General amend it to include Western Division supervisory officers.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, just to give the data back to honourable Usamate, there were 318 Bills and out of those, 290 Bills came under Standing Order 51. That is your record, 93.7 percent. It is only the first Bill.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have already explained that the Bill is necessary so that this implementation can be carried forward. There will be a holistic review later on.

(Hon. J. Usamate interjects)

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- The honourable Member mentioned 2.9, that is the Explanatory Note, which is not part of the Bill. In any case for any drafting, Mr. Speaker, Sir, if there is a spelling error, that can be corrected later on. I endorse the Bill.

Question put.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, there being opposition, Parliament will now vote on the motion.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is the first time, so Members made a mistake between minus and x, so instead of putting in minus, we placed x as exchange.

MR. SPEAKER.- For the sake of transparency, we will do that. Please, let us reopen the vote once more. The problem is this, you want to vote, and you also want to do the talking.

(Laughter)

Votes Cast

Ayes - 28

Noes - 23

Motion agreed to.

ANTI-DOPING BILL 2024

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 51, I move:

That the –

- (a) Anti-Doping Bill 2024 (Bill No. 01/2024) be considered by Parliament without delay;
- (b) Bill must pass through one stage at a single sitting of Parliament;
- (c) Bill must be immediately referred to the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights;
- (d) Standing Committee must report on the Bill at a later sitting of Parliament; and
- (e) Upon presentation of the Report on the Bill by the Standing Committee, the Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament, but that one hour be given to debate the Bill, with the right of reply given to me as the Member moving this motion.

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

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Deputy Prime Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition and honourable Members of Parliament; I rise today to address this esteemed assembly on a matter of utmost importance to the integrity and fairness of our nation's sports landscape – the national Anti-Doping Bill 2024.

As we gather here, it is imperative that we re-affirm our commitment to upholding the principles of fair play, integrity and athlete welfare in sports. Doping not only undermines these principles but also poses serious health risks to athletes and tarnishes the reputation of sporting competitions.

The issue of doping in sports has plagued the integrity of competitions globally. Recognising the importance of fair play and safeguarding the health of athletes, our nation has long been committed to combating doping in sports. However, the existing legislative framework, such as the National Anti-Doping Policy requires enhancement to address emerging challenges and align with international standards.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the national Anti-Doping Bill which we are proposing is a pivotal step towards strengthening our nation's anti-doping efforts, which seeks to consolidate and enhance our existing legislative framework to effectively combat doping practices in sports. By aligning with international standards set forth by organisations like the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA), we demonstrate our commitment to being at the forefront of the global fight against doping.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, after Fiji's success at the Olympics, WADA changed our status from a Tier 3 nation to a Tier 2. While this is good news, it does represent some immediate challenges as a Tier 2 country is required to be much more independent than Tier 3. And Fiji cannot continue to rely upon support of Oceania Regional Anti-Doping Organisations (ORADO) as much. Hence, the Bill proposes the need and guidelines to establish the National Anti-Doping Organisation (NADO).

Given the above, Fiji will need to be compliant with the World Anti-Doping Code and to that end, the Ministry of Youth and Sports, the Office of the Solicitor-General and Drug Free Sport Fiji (DFSF) has been working on a corrective action report since 4th November, 2022, to ensure that compliance and noting the establishment of NADO is a critical component of the report.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, should Fiji fail to address the non-conformities, WADA's compliance taskforce will further report our case for potential non-compliance to the WADA Executive

Committee and, perhaps, result in a non-participation of Fiji in all international sporting events.

The enactment of this Bill is crucial for several reasons, as follows:

1. It reaffirms our commitment to upholding the integrity of sports and promoting clean competition.
2. It establishes a National Anti-Doping Agency, tasked with coordinating and implementing Anti-Doping Programmes, adopts stringent testing protocol, and introduces strict penalties for offenders. By deterring doping through stringent regulations and penalties, we aim to provide a level playing field and fair competition, while protecting the rights of athletes.
3. It addresses the evolving landscape of doping practices, including the misuse of emerging substances and technologies. By empowering regulatory authorities with the necessary tools and powers to investigate and prosecute offenders.

Additionally, by aligning our legislation with international standards, we strengthen our position in the global fight against doping and enhance our credibility as a responsible member of the international sports community.

Mr. Speaker, this is an unprecedented development, not only for Fiji but for the Pacific. Without a centralised specialised organisation to support law enforcement and regulatory agencies in Fiji, the sports sector will remain vulnerable to the use of performance enhancing drugs. With Fiji taking the lead in sports development in the Pacific region, establishing the National Anti-Doping Platform will enhance our position and reach to the Pacific region.

Mr. Speaker, in supporting this Bill, we not only safeguard the integrity of sports, but also uphold the rights of clean athletes who compete with honour and integrity. It is our collective responsibility to ensure that our sporting competitions are fair, transparent and free from the scouts of doping. Therefore, I urge all honourable Members of this august Parliament to lend their full support to the National Anti-Doping Bill 2024. Let us stand united in our commitment to preserving the integrity of sports and promoting a level playing field for all athletes. Thank you ,Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, first, I just want to reiterate, Sir, that from this side of Parliament, we will be supporting the Bill. There are a couple of questions that may also just need to be answered and I am happy to note that it is actually coming before the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights so that we can thoroughly vet it.

However, just a quick question on it that perhaps, would be food for thought for the honourable Attorney-General, I see there is a component in here with respect to the Drug Free Sport Fiji (DFSF), whereby in Clause 5, it actually talks about the functions of DFSF and in Clause 5(1)(f), to coordinate with the Fiji Police Force.

If this component that is actually being put in there with respect to the Fiji Police Force, are there going to be consequential legislation amendments or is it for purposes of assistance only, or is it going to be a criminal offence, which will mean that some part of it maybe a criminal offence, that will mean that we will have to change some of the laws in our criminal law? That is currently the only question, Sir, but you will get the support from this side of Parliament for it. I think it is a good thing, especially in light of the fact that we are internationally well recognised as a sport loving nation

and we must make sure that we are always clean.

At the end of the day, I think it is also good for our children who will partake in sports as that also needs to be addressed from the educational perspective, because sports is big business, as you know, Sir. Many have lost contracts worth hundreds of millions of dollars, especially because they were not drug free. Gold medals in the Olympics have been lost because of it, and in light of the fact that we have a drug epidemic in Fiji already, that is something that is important. This is important, and it is important for the future of our sports in Fiji.

We have got quite a few speakers, not for today but later on, maybe in support of it. It is just that one question, honourable Attorney-General. If it is, I am not sure what the purpose is for the Fiji Police Force or in terms of the coordination with the Fiji Police Force. The Fiji Revenue and Customs Service, I can understand, local sports and entities, et cetera, and how it comes in but is there a criminal component if you get busted? Is there a criminal component to it that will be added to our criminal law act?

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister, when you make your reply, then you answer the question that has been raised.

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, firstly, I would like to thank the honourable Minister for Youth and Sports for a well presented and articulated presentation this afternoon. Fiji is a sports nation and for someone that has been involved in sports, not only at the national level but also at the regional level.

I think this is long outstanding, Mr. Speaker, Sir. It is something that we have always wanted to have something like this, that not only is in compliance with the international norm, but is also in line with the development and progress of sports here in Fiji.

I fully support this Mr. Speaker, Sir, and it is good news to athletes and sporting federation and bodies that are listening out there. Thank you, Sir.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as alluded to by honourable Koya and honourable Naivalurua, we support the Bill as it is going to the Committee.

Thank you very much, honourable Minister for Sports. You have done well than the honourable Attorney-General in moving Bills through Standing Order 51. Just two things I would like to request from the honourable Minister, given they have done the executive consultation on the Bill, if it comes through with the various consultations that has been done because it will help the Committee in doing its Parliamentary oversight in terms of moving around with the various consultations that are done.

Secondly, the Bill was done by a Consultant from UNESCO, probably that assisted the Ministry with drafting. Could that be made available too when it comes to the Committee where we are able to sit with the Consultant and also the leading drafter at the Office of the Solicitor-General, given that there should be cooperation, plus the Terms of Reference of the Bill, which would be helpful to the Committee? Thank you.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to congratulate the honourable Minister for Youth and Sports for being the first person to bring a Bill that is not under Standing Order 51. Congratulations, Mr. Attorney-General!

MR. SPEAKER.- That is a good one.

HON. J. USAMATE.- At one point in time, honourable Members, Parliament had been loaded with questions relating to drugs, et cetera. The very important role that the Minister plays in sports is to ensure that we are free from doping. He has brought this, and we are grateful that the response is positive, even though questions have been raised. But I leave that to you, honourable Minister, if you want to speak in reply, especially to the questions raised by honourable Koya.

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to thank all those Members who have contributed to the Bill so far. Yes, we will be assisting the Committee with all that they need regarding the Bill. We will be supporting you on that. I have nothing further to add, Sir.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

[Anti-Doping Bill 2024 (Bill No. 01/2024), referred to the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights]

**REVIEW REPORT - FIJI INDEPENDENT COMMISSION AGAINST
CORRUPTION 1ST AUGUST, 2017 TO 31ST JULY, 2018 ANNUAL REPORT**

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move:

That Parliament debates the review of the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption 1st August, 2017 to 31st July, 2018 Annual Report which was tabled on 16th April, 2024.

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

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition and honourable Members of Parliament; as the Member moving this motion, I rise to make a short contribution on the Review Report of the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption Annual Report 1st August, 2017 to 31st July, 2018.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Committee Report was tabled in February 2023, and I wish to proceed directly into reiterating some of the main areas of discussion that are captured in this Report. To begin with, Sir, there are few pertinent issues identified which the Committee had noted, the:

1. rationale of filing *nolle prosequi* on the matter of certain disposed cases.
2. Ministry of Health officials involved in corruption related offences.
3. selection of communities by FICAC to conduct training sessions on corruption prevention.
4. effectiveness of awareness training programme undertaken by FICAC on selected communities.
5. education level of the National Anti-Corruption curriculum taught in schools.
6. monitoring and reporting mechanisms of FICAC in achieving the targets set out in Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
7. unclear terms derived on certain expenditures by the Commission as listed under the financial statement of the FICAC Annual Report.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these issues were addressed and clarified by FICAC and any information on this can be retrieved from the Committee's Report. In doing so, Sir, I will dive straight into the recommendation as put forth by the Committee.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee recommends that the Commission provides timely submission of its Annual Reports to Parliament, and this has always been an issue with a lot of entities that are late with their Annual Reports.

The Committee also recommends that the Commission ensures that there is formal SDG compliant component in all future reports. Further, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee recommended that the Annual Peer Review Report be also in the schedule of all future reports that are compiled by the Commission.

The Committee further recommends that communities such as Rotuma, Rabi, Kioa and Melanesian communities be also visited annually to conduct such trainings. These communities are confined recipients of project development funds from the Office of the Prime Minister.

The Committee also recommends that training information be translated into vernacular languages in Fiji and not limited to any. Lastly, Sir, the Committee recommends that the anti-corruption education be emphasised at all education levels for primary to tertiary and be part of the

compulsory curriculum.

With those few words, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank you for the opportunity and I urge honourable Members of this august Parliament to take note of the content of the Committee's Report and show support for the motion before Parliament.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion. Before, I offer the floor, the honourable Whips both for Government and the Opposition, have provided me with a list of speakers, as follows:

1. Honourable F.S. Koya;
2. Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Justice;
3. Honourable M.D. Bulitavu; and
4. Honourable Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources.

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 in 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 still have items on the Agenda, the schedule, the motion we are currently discussing and another two Reports by the Standing Committee on Public Accounts – the Audit of Municipal Councils and also the Consolidated Review Report of the Fiji National Sports Commission.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion, if any. If not, now I call on the Leader of the Government in Parliament to speak in reply.

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Thank you, Sir, I do not have any further comments.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER.- Before I allow the debate to continue, at this juncture, I wish to adjourn Parliament for afternoon tea.

The Parliament adjourned at 3.53 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 4.30 p.m.

**REVIEW REPORT - FIJI INDEPENDENT COMMISSION AGAINST
CORRUPTION 1ST AUGUST, 2017 TO 31ST JULY, 2018 ANNUAL REPORT**

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank Mr. Chairman for the presentation of the Report. I just wanted to add a few comments to what he has already suggested. Some of the issues that we raised in the recommendations, even in the Report were relatively, firstly, to SDGs. What we had deliberated upon and this is on the back of what you had suggested to us, Mr. Speaker, Sir, many moons ago now, about ensuring that we were always SDG compliant.

What we found also post, even actually writing the recommendations, as a matter of fact, and this is coming on at the back of UNDP Report that came out on SDGs is that we are way, way behind in terms of compliance and in terms of us being ready by 2030. As a matter of fact, the date that has been given by UNDP, we are nowhere near that and we will only be achieving our obligations in terms of the SDGs by 2065. Many of us may not be part of this Parliament then, but that is what the target is now for achieving the SDG goals.

What we thought as a Committee was, “Alright, this is actually something good” and we included it in our recommendations and I hope Parliament will gladly and willingly accept this, is that for all Committees, not just this particular Committee, not just the report on FICAC, that the SDG component must be a part as a compulsion for all future reports so that we can keep a track, Parliament can keep a track of how much compliance there is in terms of all SDGs.

One of the other things also we discussed, Sir, and this is something that concerns our smaller communities, the recommendations that also came, that we do ensure that communities such as Rotuma, Rabi, Kioa and the Melanesian communities also be visited annually to conduct trainings. This is one shortfall that we found that there were other communities that were not touched and the questions that were asked in this particular recommendation, I will address in a few minutes.

The translation also with respect to the vernacular languages in Fiji but not limited to any, is also a must and necessary in light of today. One of the other things that is a compulsion and will require concerted effort on the part of many other Ministries was the education portion. Education on corruption is very important to us, but it has to be at all levels, not just the senior level, not just in the workforce, but also in terms of high school and primary schools, and we need to ensure that it is actually in the curriculum so that everyone is aware of how rotten an issue it is in terms of corruption.

One of the things that I wanted to highlight, Sir, is the UNDP Report where it actually spoke about gender inequality, et cetera, which as way, way behind. So, we, in the Pacific, are not by any means, any close to where we should be in terms of making sure that there is compliance.

As I have said, there should be some compulsion in terms of the reports that are being made to Parliament. One of the complaints that came out of it was the lack of equality in the law, inconsistent gaps in terms of many issues, gender-based violence, et cetera, and all of these issues were there and these things need to be addressed in our Report.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, FICAC is an institution that must now be looked at as one of our major institutions and it forms an integral part of our legal landscape. We must ensure that it is resourced very well and there is a reason why. It is a constitutional requirement, and it is also important in terms of the whole legal structure. But more importantly, we are signatories to many things that requires FICAC, basically a regular check on FICAC and see how we deal with corruption.

It does not just relate to the law, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-operatives and Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications will know that he is about to sign off on Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF). That also has a component in it with respect to corruption, and it comes out of them having a look at what our status is in terms of FICAC. So, it becomes an institution that is actively engaged in many things. In terms of reporting, when these institutions report back to Parliament to scrutinise, all of these things must be part of the Report and it is very important.

As I have said, it forms an integral part of the whole legal framework. When we look at it, we must ensure that we resource FICAC very well and make sure that it is an independent institution, that it is not interfered with in any way whatsoever, and basically looked after so that we are making sure that all those things that we sign and become a party to, we are actually being compliant.

One of the last things, Sir, that I wanted to talk about, there is a particular provision in our Standing Orders with respect to presentation of reports. Once a Standing Committee has actually done its report and I am referring to Standing Order 121(b) in relation to any other matter apart from Bills, once it is referred to or initiated by the Committee, as soon as it has completed its consideration and deliberations, it must table one or more interim reports. The tabling has been done.

There is a provision there, Sir, which says that ‘once the motion is adopted’, so if this particular motion is adopted, then the report of the Standing Committee shall be delivered to the relevant Government Department by the Secretary-General within 14 days. So, today, once we adopt it, then it is being given to the relevant Government Department and that would be Attorney-General’s Chambers. Then the Minister responsible for the relevant Government Department must table a substantive response to the Standing Committee’s report within 21 days of receiving the report.

Honourable Attorney-General, I know in your fervour to get this done, before it is even adopted, we have received a letter back from your office with respect to the recommendations that actually had been passed on. In those recommendations, it has been duly acknowledged, et cetera, and currently it is in its confidential status that was sent to us, we acknowledge that. But, please, remember this needs to be sent to us post the actual motion going through Parliament.

There are certain things in terms of the issues that have been raised by FICAC, and as the Minister responsible, he has responded to it but just a quick check on that. In conclusion, the recommendations before Parliament were thoroughly deliberated on. The FICAC was very compliant in terms of making sure that they had answered all the questions. It is a very bipartisan report by the Committee and I think probably the most bipartisan Committee that sits in terms of getting these recommendations. I fully commend the motion to Parliament.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I make my comments, allow me to formally acknowledge and pass my congratulations to the *Turaga na Tui Levuka* who will be installed tomorrow by the 12 Districts of Lomaiviti. I pray that God’s Blessings will be on his installation and his leadership of the *Vanua of Levuka*.

MR. SPEAKER.- *Vinaka*.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- The first recommendation deals with the timely submission of this Annual Report to Parliament. Section 17 of the Fiji Independent Against Corruption Act 2017 provides that the Commissioner of FICAC must submit an Annual Report to His Excellency the President and the responsible Minister must submit within three months of the end of the financial year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are dealing here with the Report of 2017 and 2018. It is really not a good reflection of the then Minister for Justice and Attorney-General. There has to be timely submission of the Annual Report whether it is important oversight and accountability mechanism to a normal Parliamentary process.

As a democratic nation, the tabling of the Annual Report allows for scrutiny at the highest level for inspection of the statutory institution's performance, financial management and in compliance with laws governing it. It also enforces public trust by highlighting dedication to responsible resource management and sound governance. It is useful for planning purpose.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is no explanation as to why a report was not tabled all these years. Unfortunately, the former Commissioner has left. We have the Acting Deputy Commissioner who is currently out of the country and no one from FICAC can provide a feasible explanation to Parliament.

However, I must commend the Acting Commissioner of FICAC who was appointed late last year, in her short stint, has devised a strategic plan for 2024 to 2029, including its Annual Corporate Plan for 2024 and 2025, which captures the very key indicator of submission to be timely, which is inclusive of Annual Reports.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, what I want to stress here is at the end of the day, it is the issue of leadership. Leadership from the Minister, leadership from whoever is in charge of FICAC, and then it strickles down to the Managers so that they comply with their statutory obligations.

With the revised structure in place, the FICAC Management is aware of what is required of the institution under the laws and regulations, to provide timely submission of its Annual Reports, henceforth.

More importantly, is Recommendation 2 in terms of compliance with the SDGs. I am proud to say that the FICAC observes the importance of incorporating formal sustainable development goals complied in FICAC's Annual Report. It clearly outlines the organisation's efforts and progress towards achieving sustainable development targets. The inclusion of a formal SDG compliance component in the Annual Report will not only enhance the credibility and relevance of reporting, but also drives positive changes towards a more sustainable and equitable future.

The FICAC Anti-Corruption Plan and work is aligned with SDG 16 in relation to the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies, providing access to justice for all and building an effective, accountable and inclusive institution at all levels.

Since the submission of the FICAC Report, FICAC has expanded its work in its effort to reducing corruption, bribery, and strengthening the very institution in Fiji which is inclusive of the private sectors.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to highlight that the FICAC of yesterday has gone. Under the leadership of the Coalition Government, it has the new image of FICAC where they are given full independence to operate. There is no political interference. Staff are encouraged to do due diligence in terms of their investigation.

However, one troubling factor that came up recently, while in discussion with the Acting Director, was that some of the files from previous years were only found when the previous Commissioner left. Most recently, one of the senior officers who was part of the Administration from day one, when she was asked questions about a particular complaint, she could not provide any explanation. She was asked to go on leave only, so after she was sent on leave that they found another

bundle of investigation files. This is the clean-up that the Coalition Government promised to do in this nation, and we will continue to do so.

One of the recommendations is in terms of reaching out to members of the community, particularly reaching out to Rotuma, Rabi and Kioa. We observed the important role of FICAC of being at the forefront of Government's anticorruption efforts.

In combating corruption, section 12 sets out that FICAC must educate the public against the evil of corruption. It is a key component of FICAC's Strategic Plan 2024-2029 and also for the 2024-2025 Annual Corporate Plan.

There is a Corruption Prevention Department at FICAC, and its main focus is to deliver anti-corruption programmes and training to interior areas.

In one of the awareness that I have been to, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is heartening to listen to the officer advising the members of public that one can get into trouble if they do not manage the projects whether at the village level and district level in terms of being caught by FICAC. They are very comprehensive, very clear and at the end of the day, both sides of Parliament should support the work of FICAC.

Our nation is at a crossroad where the very fabric of our society has been attacked. Drug has been the subject of last week's discussion, but corruptions has always been there. Any responsible government like the Coalition Government will take it upon itself to ensure that any preventative measures in terms of awareness reach out to every community out there, whether it is in Vanua Levu, Lau or Kadavu and we must try to ensure that people are fully abreast with preventative measures and that they do not get into trouble.

There are planned visits to the island of Rabi, Kioa, Rotuma, as well as Kadavu and the Lau Group at the end of the year. These visits will be conducted annually and will also be reflected in the Annual Reports.

Today, there have been positive feedback from various sectors and communities. There is also notable rise in complaints received by FICAC, which indicates the effectiveness and succession of such trainings and workshops. Another area of the recommendation noted by the Committee is for training information to be translated into vernacular languages in Fiji and it is not to be limited to one. This is only very basic and to conduct a successful training, vernacular language is important, and staff are currently working on this project.

Another recommendation is that the Committee recommends that anti-corruption education be emphasised at all education levels from primary to tertiary and need to be part of the curriculum. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am happy to note that there is a consultation with the Ministry of Education. Also, the teams go out to schools, so in future, we will see that most of these are reflected in the education curriculum. I am aware that there are curriculum reviews so we should be seeing some changes next year or the year after.

A total of 16 primary schools and 60 secondary schools from the three major Divisions were recipients of the NACC during the piloting phase. It is imperative to note that the NACC is not a standalone one, rather it is an indicative approach based on selected subjects to be integrated into the current national education forum.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I fully endorse the recommendations by the Committee.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to give my short contribution to the motion that is before Parliament and it is on the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption 2018 Annual Report.

Most of the issues that was recommended by the Committee has been addressed by the honourable Minister responsible for FICAC - the honourable Attorney-General, and the point that was raised by honourable Koya earlier in terms of Standing Order 121(6) where in this case we are fortunate that the reply to our recommendation has come before this particular debate. In most cases, once the Committee Report is adopted, then that 14 days that is in Standing Order 121(6) comes in where the Secretary-General will refer the recommendation of the Committee to the line Ministry before they are given 21 days to submit but, in this case, the honourable Minister responsible for FICAC has provided the response to the recommendation before this debate. I actually read the whole response that was tabled to the Committee last week and we thank him for that punctuality. We look forward to him being consistent every time with other reports that will be coming.

Still on that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, he had referred to some cases and some bundle of files that were there when he came that he found those files. So, make sure that when you leave, your successor too does not find any files too around there, so we need to set the standard and if it is a promise, you have to keep that while moving forward. This particular organisation needs more funding in terms of training its investigators and we hope that the honourable Minister of Finance will give more funding to this independent institution established under the 2013 Constitution, so that they would be able to conduct further awareness and also advocacy.

The honourable Attorney-General has alluded to the National Anti-Corruption Curriculum (NACC) which is also part of the Ministry of Education's budgetary submission. Sir, FICAC is going to roll out this programme in the new financial year. We we hope that this curriculum will be adopted by all schools, that necessary funding will be approved for the Ministry of Education, which will help them implement this programme for students and that it will be compulsory to have this anti-corruption classes in the school curriculum.

The other thing that was recommended by the Committee to FICAC which they did not respond to was the peer reporting under the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC). I think there was a two cycle periodic review - one was done in 2009 to 2015 and Fiji had complied to that. We are awaiting the second periodic cycle review that is due in June 2024, and we look forward, honourable Attorney-General and Minister responsible for FICAC, to our status on UNCAC and how this particular institution is complying with international standards. Also, now, that Fiji is combatting corruption, given that FICAC has been there since 2008 and before the establishment of the 2013 Constitution.

Those are a few things that I would like to raise. I am also suggesting, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that probably the Standing Orders Committee of which you are the Chair, could also take on board an amendment to the Standing Orders in terms of Standing Order 121. If there is an extra clause to be included so that when we give recommendation in a Committee's Review Report, that a timeline probably in the Standing Orders, be given to those Ministries so that they can back on time and allow standing Committee to review those recommendations. That will give an opportunity for the Standing Committees to amend and respond to a recommendation during the debate. That is something I would like to put forward in Parliament.

We can also include a clause to empower the Committee to also follow up a particular Ministry because some of the Ministries, after their report has been tabled and debated, they do not come back to the Committee, like the way the honourable Attorney-General has done when he came back to our Committee. There has to be a standard adopted by all the Ministries. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you, honourable Bulitavu. We have taken note of your comments on the timeline to be set.

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, firstly, I take this opportunity to thank the Standing Committee who have gone through this Report, although it is an outdated Report. They have done their job. Some recommendations that have come up from the Committee Report is, I suppose, useful gauge for the onward operation of the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption (FICAC).

This morning, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have been given some figures from the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance from its inception in 2007 up until this year. The Fiji Government has supported the operations and capital expense of FICAC to the tune of \$120 million in 17 years. That is how much public purse has gone to the operation and the capital expenses of FICAC. It goes towards what people's expectation will be, because while spending the public purse so the confidence level that the people and this Parliament, obviously, will have to give to this organisation is going to be dependent on the level of independence that it is able to exude and show to the people of Fiji.

We say that, Sir, because as has been noted by the honourable Attorney-General, the level of independence that this Government has now shown and given to FICAC to do, to provide the latitude and provide the environment for FICAC to do, especially for the FICAC Deputy Commissioner to do her job and do her job very well and not to be placed in a position where she feels that the role that she plays and the work that she does is going to face any form of repercussions if she decides on cases. That is entirely the work that is allocated to her, and we were assured by the honourable Attorney-General this morning that her work is going to be independently operated by her and her alone.

We are grateful also to note from the Report, Mr. Speaker, that the guidelines that standardises the organisation derived out of the UN Convention Against Corruption which is, of course, the key treaty that Fiji had signed up to. Honourable Bulitavu had spoken about the review and, of course, we have been peer reviewed by Samoa in the last cycle and the next cycle, of course, is going to be due very shortly.

Apart from the other observations that have been spoken about in this Parliament by the three previous speakers, perhaps I will pick up on the one that I feel is the most important. That is when cases are being "nollied" or when the process of investigation and prosecution gets to a point where the FICAC Deputy Commissioner or Commissioner or whoever the officer may be, makes a decision that it is no longer worthy to be prosecuted. I say that because I think it is very important that we understand that when cases ultimately gets "nollied", behind it is a whole host of expenses being incurred. So there are expenses that are incurred out of public purse, of course, from investigation, from the laying of charges, right throughout the cases on mentions and up until when it is decided to go on trial and then ultimately, we get decisions that say, "Well, we no longer have witnesses available because they are no longer alive" or "that document has been misplaced or are no longer found". Those decisions, and I am not talking about decisions where there is no evidence at all. I think those cases quite rightly should be nollied. But this is where cases exist and it really have been nollied because of time delay and the ones that have been highlighted in this Report, unfortunately, involves huge amount of money. Unfortunately, we have lost witnesses and documents can no longer be spoken to or about.

It is important that we also understand that one of the measures, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that this Government has brought into force recently to ensure the cases do not take too long, is we have removed the specialised corruption courts which was introduced by the previous Government. Now, when cases are brought in from FICAC, it is equally shared amongst all of the Magistrates and all of

the Criminal Judges. So, there is no opportunity where cases just keep getting lagged on because Magistrates in specialised courts are taking too long to deal with one or two particular cases. I say that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, because I think it is time that when people are funding for these organisations, they also see that cases which are important and public life are brought to trial within a reasonable time.

With reporting, Mr. Speaker, it is encouraging to note that now, with the Acting Deputy Commissioner being appointed to the role, she will see the importance of timely reporting back to Parliament. I have known the Acting Deputy Commissioner for a long time and I know that she is a very competent lawyer and she will be a very competent administrator in the role that she now plays. I am in support of the Report that has been placed in this Parliament by the Committee.

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, firstly, I would like to thank all the speakers who have spoken on the motion before Parliament. On behalf of the Committee, I thank the honourable Attorney-General for taking note of the recommendations that was put forward by the Committee.

On that note, I also echo the sentiments from the two honourable Committee Members on the other side on the amendment to the Standing Orders. Mr. Speaker, Sir, on that note, Sir, I have no further comments.

Questions put.

Motion agreed to.

REVIEW REPORT – AUDITS OF MUNICIPAL COUNCILS 2021-2022

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move:

That Parliament debates the Report of the Public Accounts Committee on the Audits of Municipal Councils for the year ended 2021–2022 which was tabled on 16th April, 2024.

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

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Ministers and honourable Members of Parliament, I as Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts move a motion, and I take this opportunity to speak on the motion on the Report of the Public Accounts Committee on the Audits of the Municipal Councils for the year ended 2021-2022.

Sir, the Report covers the audit of 13 Financial Statements for the 10 Municipalities. Those were as follows:

Municipal Council	Financial Year
1. Nadi	2017
2. Sigatoka	2020
3. Tavua	2016
4. Rakiraki	2020-2021
5. Levuka	2014-2015
6. Labasa	2018
7. Lami	2015
8. Nausori	2015
9. Savusavu	2011
10. Nasinu	2011-2012

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee, during its review, had also cross-checked with the previous Public Accounts Committee Reports to gauge the Municipal Councils and the Ministry of Local Government's response on the audit issues that were raised over the years. Sir, it is sad to say that the Public Accounts Committee's recommendations that were tabled in Parliament in the past were not seriously taken by these Municipalities under the past Administrators and Management, as well as the Ministry of Local Government under its Director, Permanent Secretary and past Ministers. With this new Committee, under this new Government, we are not going to accept that, Sir, we are going to improve the situation for the betterment of the Municipalities and for the country.

Sir, section 57(1) and (3) of the Local Government Act 1972 establishes the financial accountability and legislative timeframe for Municipal Councils to produce and publish its audited financial statements. It is sad to say that most of them failed to meet their legislative requirements.

At the outset, Mr Speaker, Sir, I will highlight some of the common findings that were prevalent in those Municipalities. The delays and backlog, there was lack of compliance with the Financial Reporting Framework, lack of compliance with the International Accounting Standards, lack of compliance with the Local Government Act and the limitation of scope or quality of the audit due to insufficient supporting documents.

Mr. Speaker, this lack of compliance is reflected in the audit opinion issued by the Office of the Auditor-General in the report who issued Modified (Qualified) audit opinions on six financial statements that were audited while seven financial statements were issued with modified, which is with a Disclaimer of Opinion.

Sir, the Committee identified a number of common issues across municipalities and necessary action is required to address the following and I am happy that the Minister and the current Permanent Secretary are working hand in hand to try and address those issues. I wish to advise that currently there is a good level of management cohorts as well as Administrators in most of the Councils as well as the current Permanent Secretary and Minister and would like to acknowledge the hard work they are doing to clean their books and put in place internal control processes and update the account for timelines and quality. Minister, PS, Management and Administrators of Rakiraki, Tavua, Nadi, Levuka, Nausori, Labasa, Savusavu, Lami, Nasinu and Sigatoka, please continue the hard work to meet our 2025 target.

Mr. Speaker Sir, we are targeting with the assistance of the Office of the Auditor-General to update all accounts in the 2025 Financial Year. Some are outsourcing, some are putting in place systems apart from recruiting the right personnel. I will not go into all the recommendations, Sir, but I will just highlight one which we discussed with all the municipalities. We have given them July 2024 to submit an Action Plan to the Committee as well as to Parliament an update of the financial accounts and clearance of all unsubstantiated balances and identifying and resolving all audit issues raised from 2013-2018.

The Action Plan should include recommendations and implementations of verifications and finally any write-offs. We have given them another six months (January 2025), all those actions to be implemented with the assistance of the Ministry of Finance for possible write-off. Sir, given the issues identified, the Committee strongly recommends that immediate action is required by the respective municipalities and working closely with the Ministry of Local Government to improve financial accountability.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the Committee will continue to highlight issues in this august Parliament until these municipalities improve their audit status and strengthen their systems and processes for public funds accountability purposes. With those few words, Mr. Speaker Sir, I as the Member

moving the motion thank you for this opportunity.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I concur with the Committee's recommendations. The Report is very comprehensive with very good recommendations. The Committee has also come up with many good findings. I will be deliberating on the findings, recommendations of the Committee and the current issues faced by the ratepayers.

I have noted from the Report that audits of some Councils' accounts are on hold and this is due to some vacancies of senior staff in the Finance Department of the Councils. I hope this will be addressed by the authorities at the earliest and these positions will be filled, following due process.

Firstly, on the monitoring functions of the Councils, I am from Lautoka and I always drive past Nadi Airport and noticed overgrown bougainvillea. This issue was also brought to my attention by ratepayers. On one side, we have a beautiful International Airport, thanks to the FijiFirst Government, which is rated highly, and just a few metres away from the Airport, the people including tourists are met by overgrown bougainvillea. Sometimes I wonder if this is the latest decorative design or failure of the custodians. The idea of planting bougainvillea is very good, but regular maintenance and trimming is important.

Another recommendation by the Committee was on planning and action plan. One of the key functions of the Council is to provide quality service to the ratepayers. Recently, some residents of Nasinu have raised concerns about poor service provided by the Nasinu Town Council, as many have faced drainage and issues of solid waste collection and nothing has been done. It has been a health issue to many and a breeding site for mosquitoes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, another issue raised was on uncollected garbage across Nasinu that has become an eye sore and has caused blocked drains for the residents of Tovata, Nepani, Makoi, Narere, Nadera, Valelevu, Caubati, Kinoya and Nadawa. This reflects poor planning. The lack of services from the Council can lead to the spread of serious diseases, such as dengue and leptospirosis.

During our visit to Labasa, it was mentioned that more investments need to be done in Labasa for a resilient economy. While on one side a lot of talks are done in Parliament about development in the North, there are certain people interfering with the Council, even if it does not fall under their portfolio to stop investment. I had been informed by a concerned ratepayer that one such investment is Hotel Development, whereby, the land was transferred to the iTLTB in 2003, and then iTLTB gave proper lease to the developer in 2011, after 60 percent consent was obtained from the landowning unit.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have been informed by the ratepayer that the landowning unit are partners in this \$10 million development. In Parliament, we speak about empowering the landowners and here we are, just because some people have vested interest, objecting the empowerment on the ground. That is a sad reality at the moment in this case. My question is, why is Labasa Town Council not approving the development? The second question, is there someone who has vested interest and trying to block the \$10 million development?

I urge the honourable Prime Minister and the honourable Attorney-General to intervene. The Government should honour the ruling of the courts and let the \$10 million development to flourish. The Government has been preaching about development in the North before and after the election. Now, it is time for action, time to support development in the North, not to block development. I support the motion before Parliament.

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I respond to the motion before

Parliament, firstly, I would like to express my very best wishes to the *Vanua o Nabukebuke*, Levuka on behalf of the *Vanua o Nabukebuke*, Namosi, on the installation of the Tui Levuka tomorrow.

MR. SPEAKER.- *Vinaka*.

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, firstly, before I share some insights into some of the recommendations and findings by the Committee, I would like to respond to some of the issues that were highlighted by honourable Chand.

I was waiting for him to, at least, share some of those issues with me before discussing it openly in Parliament but I thank him for that. First is on the overgrown bougainvillea hedge at Namaka Road near Nadi Town. I think he failed to understand that there is a working process in place where the Councils, as well as Fiji Roads Authority (FRA) do their work according to the work schedule.

We have to understand that there is a lot of rain in the West. It has also caused overgrown vegetation, as well as some of the overgrown areas in some of the spots. He only mentioned that spot but there are some spots and places that have been looked after by the Nadi Town Council. We must also appreciate the work done by the Nadi Town Council.

On the solid waste around Nasinu, we should be thankful to the newly appointed Special Administrator for Nasinu Town Council for coming forward with some new strategies and policies to manage some of the illegal dumping of rubbish around the Nasinu area. Nasinu is one of the biggest municipalities in Fiji in terms of population. The challenge right now is to how best the Council can address the issue of illegal dumping of rubbish. I was sharing this with honourable Pillay, he was also complaining about the same thing.

The issue right now in most Municipalities is that the garbage truck come and collect rubbish and as soon as they turn away from those sectors, the very next second, people come and dump their rubbish on the road. These are some of the areas that I have also instructed the new Special Administrators to focus on. These are some of the basic services that we are trying to improve right now. So, in most of the Municipalities, these are some of the challenges that we are trying to address.

On the Labasa Town development, I want to reassure him that none of these newly appointed Special Administrators were appointed to hinder any type of progress in any of the municipalities. They are there to support the projects but if there are any issues regarding the projects, they have the right to investigate and find out the issues relating to some of these projects. That is the issue with the Labasa project.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will now try and respond to the motion before Parliament. First, I thank the Standing Committee and its Chairperson for doing a great job in conducting a detailed and thorough review, as well as coming up with very constructive recommendations. I think there are about 15 of them.

Going forward, it is a good lesson that the Ministry of Local Government has taken. We have been working with them to try and improve on some of these areas which are recurring issues. There is a need for us to take this on board and come up with new ways and strategies on how we can improve on some of the recurring issues.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Local Government Act 1972 has provisions for the manning of the Councils and how they must conduct themselves. However, in 2009, an intervention by the then Government led to disarray in the manner in which the Councils was supposed to conduct themselves.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the above situations led to complacency, lack of accountability and transparency. Most of the issues that have been highlighted by the Committee are legacy issues and common in all the Municipalities.

As the Minister responsible for the Council or the 13 Municipalities in Fiji, I have, since taking office, ensured that there will be clear guidance, advice and monitoring of the Councils. Our focus is on proactive solutions and positive transformation for the Municipalities, residents and ratepayers' benefits.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the team at the Ministry, specifically the Department of Local Government, have been working on various strategies, policies and plans to ensure that before the Local Government Elections, the Municipal Councils are able to get rid of the current recurring audit issues.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform this august Parliament that the Ministry has been actively undertaking the following to ensure that Municipal Council's teams - from Special Administrators to the Chief Executive Officers and

all the Finance Teams are fully aware of their roles and responsibilities. These are the things that we have undertaken:

1. Revision of the Finance Manual in 2023; and
2. Budget training - the Special Administrators, Chief Executive Officers and Finance Manager of the Councils have been undergoing training.

Even though the Ministry does not have resources to train each and every member of the Finance Team of each Council, SMART strategies have been implemented and put in place to train the team leaders who are required to train their teams. These additional training include; Human Resource Training, Customer Service Training, Finance Training for CEOs, Finance Team in all the Municipalities, OMRS Training, as well as Project Management Training.

For those who have also been working in consultation and collaboration with the Office of the Auditor-General, we have partnered with them and recently in March 2024, they have conducted training on the following -

- audit processes;
- financial reporting processes;
- internal control;
- reconciliations;
- accounting records and asset management; and
- effective policies and procedures.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to acknowledge the team at the Office of the Auditor-General for the intensive yet very focused training. One of the vital issues highlighted in the Report is the need to standardize the accounting system that are to be used by all the Municipalities.

As we speak, different Municipalities have different accounting systems. Lautoka City Council and Suva City Council have their own systems. Levuka Town Council are still doing things manually. So, these are some of the things the Ministry is trying to do, to ensure that we have a new system in place and the Council is now the driving force behind this.

We are also trying to put in place a process to strengthen the compliance and monitoring of all Municipal Councils. I wish to also acknowledge that out of all the 13 Municipalities, only one Municipality, Rakiraki Town Council, has completed its audits and is up to date. I must thank the

CEO and the Special Administrator for organising the financials of the Council.

Also very important, Mr. Speaker, is the issue of some of the monitoring within the Ministry. We will also be recruiting two officers that will be part of the audit team in the next financial year. We are also requesting the Ministry of Finance for us to hire more auditors so that we can have one audit pool within the Ministry, who will be able to go around and conduct auditing of all the Municipalities.

Hopefully, when we do that, we are going to ensure that all the Municipalities are up to-date with their Financial Statements so that it can be audited by the Office of the Auditor-General before they present to Parliament for discussion. We are working very hard on that. There will be some additional issues in terms of improvements that have been done and implemented in all the 13 Municipalities in Fiji. Mr. Speaker, thank you for this opportunity and I fully support the motion before Parliament.

HON. V. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to contribute to the debate on the Audit Report on Municipal Councils. The Committee reviewed 10 Municipal Audits from 2021 to 2022 and the Committee has carefully examined all the available evidence, considered various perspectives and arrived at a set of recommendations that are practical and feasible. These recommendations are aimed at addressing the root causes of the problem and not just its symptoms.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to express my appreciation to the Committee for their diligent work in conducting the review and for making these important recommendations. The recommendations made are crucial for the effective functioning of our municipalities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a number of recommendations has been made and I would like to speak on some of them. Sir, in one of the recommendations, the Committee is calling on the Ministry of Local Government to place priority in getting all the Municipalities' accounts audited up to date. This will provide accurate and up to date financial information that is necessary for effective decision-making. It is important that the Ministry takes the necessary steps to ensure that this recommendation is implemented without delay.

In another recommendation, Sir, the Committee is calling for the inclusion of special criteria in the Special Administrators and Chief Executive Officers terms of engagement contracts, such as bringing the audited accounts up to date during their tenure. According to the Ministry of Local Government policy, this is a commendable recommendation that will ensure that there is accountability for the financial management of the Municipalities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, another recommendation is calling for all Municipalities to explore with the Ministry of Local Government on the use of a standard accounting software for uniformity purposes. This is a very important recommendation that will help to ensure that there is consistency in the accounting practices of all Municipalities. It will also make it easier for the Ministry to monitor the financial performance of the Municipalities.

In another recommendation, Sir, it concurs with the Office of the Auditor-General's recommendation and further recommends that Municipal Councils should utilise Government grants only for the intended purpose. This is an important recommendation that will ensure that the funds allocated for specific purposes are used for those purposes only.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, another recommendation is calling for the Ministry of Local Government to conduct regular monitoring of qualification issues for all Municipalities so that discrepancies identified are addressed in a timely manner. This is a commendable recommendation that will help

to ensure that Municipalities are staffed by qualified personnel, who are people who can effectively manage the financial resources of the Municipalities.

We do recognise that some of the recommendations may require significant resources, time and effort to implement, however, we believe that they are necessary if we want to create a society just an equivocal for all.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I fully support the recommendations made by the Committee and call upon the Ministry of Local Government to take the necessary steps to implement them. The effective implementation of these recommendations will help to improve the financial management capacity of our Municipalities and ensure that they are able to provide quality services to their ratepayers. I urge all honourable Members of this Parliament to carefully consider the recommendations presented in the Report and to support its recommendations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, my colleague has raised some very important issues in regard to the garbage collection in Nasinu. Sir, Nasinu being the largest Municipality, garbage collection is an issue there. We have noted that the kitchen garbage which is supposed to be collected in the morning is collected late in the afternoon and the stray dogs scatter the rubbish all around. In the afternoon when you reach home, it is an eyesore.

Also, the monthly green garbage, Sir, is supposed to be collected in my area in Valelevu every first Tuesday of the month. As alluded to by the honourable Minister, I have discussed this with him a number of times and even this morning, we spoke about it.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our purpose here is not to criticise, but we would like to improve the services of all the Municipalities and the whole of Nasinu, as alluded to by my colleague. Yesterday, I went to pick my cousin from Ibo Place in Nadawa and right in front of his house is a huge pile of rubbish. Upon inquiry, he told me that the Council promised to collect the rubbish and everyone has dumped there but the Council did not turn up.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the rubbish there is an obstruction to the vehicle, I had to wait for another car to go across. It is the whole of Nasinu which is suffering. I do not know, I just do not understand why this is happening because when FijiFirst was in Government, everything was done on time, and I have raised this with the honourable Minister. Everything was done on time. There were no rubbish issues.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. V. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I understand because during FijiFirst time, there was some agreement with the Suva City Council and Nasinu Town Council in terms of exchanging or using the rubbish collection trucks. This agreement was there but I do not know what has changed or I do not know if the policies have changed that this has happened. I have raised this with the honourable Minister that this is only happening since your Government has come into place. The reason why I am raising all these, Sir, is we want all these services to be provided at Nasinu being the largest municipality.

The honourable Minister has just raised the issue of the town council elections. Sir, I know it has been said in this Parliament that the town council elections will take place but to date, we have not seen any legislation or policy to regulate the municipal council elections.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, time is running and as we know, May has already gone. In June and July, we will be talking about the Budget and we are left with August. The honourable Minister has given

a timeframe saying that towards the end of this year, so end of this year could mean November or December but remember, Sir, there are certain processes which cannot be fast-tracked, so we need to follow the processes.

I am urging the honourable Minister in consultation with the Elections Office, plus with the Office of the Attorney-General to bring in these legislations because we need to have the registrations done and there is also the objection period. We also would like to know if the political parties would be allowed to fill candidates.

So, if that is to be done and we all know that a lot of preparation needs to be done in an election or any election for that matter, so in that case, we need time, and political parties need to prepare for all those things. For that reason, we have heard this, and we do not want things to be rushed so proper preparations could be done. For that reason also, we would like to see that the legislation comes up in time and we are all prepared towards it so that we have a successful election.

With those words, I once again thank the Committee and I support the motion before the Parliament.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I speak on the Report, let me congratulate the new Auditor-General, Ms. Finau Nagera. She is very highly accomplished and a qualified professional, and a first woman ever to occupy the position of the Auditor-General of Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is quite interesting to hear people like honourable Hem Chand and honourable Virendra Lal. I consider them to be Johnny-come-lately to FijiFirst Party and politics. Perhaps, they do not understand and they have no idea what this Government and this Minister has been landed with in terms of dealing with Municipal Councils and Cities.

In the report of the Committee, the Auditor-General's Report, Mr. Speaker, Sir, very clearly lays down the fundamental problem with respect to the management and delivery of services in towns and city councils in this country. And the blame for what is there today, squarely rest on the previous Government and some of them are sitting there and pontificating about governance, of how city councils should be managed and honourable Virendra Lal went all over the place about elections, without even acknowledging that for 15 years or so, they had suppressed democracy of the ratepayers in this country.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, at least, they should have a little bit of decency.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Practice what you preach!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- It is coming, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Government has announced that the election will be held. There is work already being done, there are reviews, the process is in place and they will know in good time when the election will be, because I know they want to go and lie very quickly about what is going on.

Honourable Hem Chand, again, a Johnny-come-lately I would say, he talked about overgrown bougainvillea in Nadi.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- A Point of Order Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- Yes, honourable Koya.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Point of Order on 74(1) reads and let me read it to you

for the 151st time:

“Any member may only raise a point of order if –

(a) There is an alleged breach of the Standing Orders or practices of Parliament.”

The breach, Sir, is this gentleman should, by now, after so many years, learned the language of Parliament. Do not be offensive! He is a Member of Parliament and whether it is six months or six years, Sir, be a little respectful. What is this Johnny-come-lately garbage, Sir. I think he ought to be sanctioned, he needs to stop insulting the young Members of Parliament who have just joined us. They have their opinion; you have your opinion but there is no reason for him to denigrate themselves. He should be experienced enough to know that.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Very poor!

MR. SPEAKER.- Please, continue, honourable Minister.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. All I was referring to in the context is that he is new in FijiFirst, new in Parliament and he has not looked at what had happened in the last 10 or 15 years in the city and town councils. He talked about the overgrown bougainvillea. Let me tell him – overpaid, long grown bougainvillea and the responsibility of that falls directly on the FijiFirst Government.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, Sir, those bougainvillea and the way it was put in place, should have been investigated by FICAC long ago, the contract that they owe after the cost of doing that. That is the context I said that they do not know.

Let me talk about the rubbish collection that they talked about. I was in Nasinu the other day, Mr. Speaker, Sir, with the Nasinu Town Council Administrators at the launch of the new Nasinu Chamber of Commerce.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- They do not like that because they talk about rubbish.

Basically, they said to me was that the Nasinu Town Council had their own trucks. Someone decided that those trucks would be transferred to Suva, a new contract would be given to people here and this is the problem why it is not working. The new Administrators have decided that as soon as the contract ends in the next month or this month, Nasinu Town Council will have its own trucks, its own processes and will have its own system of collecting rubbish and that will be done.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, when the honourable Members of Parliament from the Opposition come into this Parliament and pontificate about what is going wrong, they actually forget what has happened.

Let me also add, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that now we are grappling with the collection of rates. Town and City Councils are struggling to even put fans in the market. I went to Nausori Market one day and all the vendors were complaining about the heat and there were no fans. The vendors themselves were saying, “We do not mind paying stall fees, but we need fans”, because they built the market, they tried to be populist, they did not want to collect rates, they did not want to charge anyone and they left everything, including the services, undelivered.

Suva City Council, Mr. Speaker, Sir, with 11,400 ratepayers, is being owed \$33 million in arrears. Nasinu Town Council - \$14 million. Sir, what we are now saying is that we want to make sure that ratepayers pay that and Town and City Council Administrators appointed by this Government are now working on it.

(Honourable Member interjects)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- You can talk about the legality and illegality my friend.

But let me say, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we will be considering not only legislative changes for effective rate collecting mechanisms, we want to use other tools that is there, whether it is Garnishee Order on bank accounts, whether it is legal penalties and interest, whether it is revamping revenue collection systems, setting up convenient collection centres, public awareness campaigns or proper debt collection strategies. These are all the activities and strategies that need to be put in place, because if you do not collect rates, if town and city councils are not empowered to have this, Nasinu Town Council Administrators were left high and dry when they got in there, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

They know, they understand the problem and the ratepayers also understand, Mr. Speaker, Sir. When you talk to them, they tell you quite directly what the problem is. But that is the point that the Opposition and those who raised those issues do not understand. They would do better. Honourable Virendra Lal would do better if he goes and tells the ratepayers. If he joins the Administrators and help them to collect rates, then the town and city councils can deliver their services.

If you look at the statement by the Chairperson, honourable Assistant Minister and Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, he is absolutely right when he points out that there is a legacy, there is a system collapse of the past that we are now trying to revive and put in place so that there is a system that works on a regular basis, a system that allows the ratepayers to be part of it. When they abolished the elected councils, that was the end of it, Mr. Speaker, because in the previous systems, you had elected councilors, so if the rubbish was not collected in a ward, if there was a problem with the drain or overgrown grass, the councilors knew that. They knew that the council would do something, but when they took over, decisions were centralized, administrators were appointed, they had no interest in going to the ratepayers and making sure.

This Government as soon as it came, we made that decision, the Cabinet has approved that, the processes are in place, then once you have that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, all these things will be in place and the ratepayers of this country can expect better services throughout the municipal boundaries of this country.

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank all honourable Members who have contributed to the debate. I look forward to this Municipal Council to improve their overall performance and, most importantly, the implementation of the audit and the Committee’s recommendations.

With those final comments, I thank you, Sir.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

**CONSOLIDATED REVIEW REPORT –
FIJI NATIONAL SPORTS COMMISSION 2020-2022 ANNUAL REPORTS**

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

That Parliament debates the Consolidated Review Report of the Fiji National Sports Commission Annual Report 2020–2021 and 2021–2022 which was tabled on 16th April, 2024.

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

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Ministers and Assistant Ministers, and honourable Members of Parliament; the Fiji National Sports Commission (FNSC) was established under the Fiji National Sports Commission Act 2013, with the aim to enrich and empower the lives and health of all Fijians through physical activity and sports at all levels. The years under review are 2020 to 2021 and 2021 to 2022. These reporting years were faced by the continued effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, with its ongoing impacts on sports and recreational activities in Fiji. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this did not affect the works of the FNSC, as it had to rely on its available resources to mitigate the ever-recurring challenges of the pandemic.

The FNSC continues to work closely with the Ministry of Youth and Sports and the Ministry of Health and Medical Services in safeguarding the safety of all stakeholders in the sporting and recreational activities sector, which has resulted in the establishment of safe sport protocols of the highest standards.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee had identified seven recommendations and hopes that the Commission takes these recommendations into account.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on that note, I urge honourable Members to take note of the recommendations, and I support the motion before Parliament. *Vinaka saka.*

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion. Similar to the last two Motions, I also have a list of speakers with me, and the batting is as follows:

1. Hon. V. Pillay;
2. Honourable Minister for Youth and Sports;
3. Hon. V. Naupoto; and
4. Honourable Assistant Minister for Education.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the motion on the Fiji National Sports Commission Annual Report 2020 to 2021 and 2021 to 2022.

The Committee commends the Fiji National Sports Commission (FNSC) on its achievements during those challenging times marked by the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite these hurdles, the

FNSC displayed continued commitment to promoting sports participation and healthy lifestyles across Fiji.

Initiatives such as kits in community sports and wellness, deserve recognition for their positive impacts. Additionally, the increased funding allocated to disability sports programmes reflects FNSC's dedication to inclusivity. However, the Committee also identified areas for improvement.

We recognise the need to further strengthen the FNSC's operations. We encourage the continuing efforts to improve national sporting organisations, capacity for grant applications through workshops and capacity building programmes.

The Committee strongly supports the finalisation of the safety in sports policy and the drug free sports and urges collaboration with relevant stakeholders to achieve these goals. Furthermore, we believe fostering strong partnerships is crucial.

The Committee applauds FNSC's commitment to working alongside the Ministry of Youth and Sports, Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education to address Physical Education Teacher shortages and integrate sports effectively into the national curriculum.

The Committee also commends FNSC's interest in aligning its programme with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. We believe incorporating all the 17 SDGs into the reporting framework, is a valuable step.

The Committee encourages FNSC to explore ways to integrate these goals into programme design, monitoring and evaluation, maximising sports and positive impacts on areas, such as health and wellbeing, and gender equality. The FNSC plays a pivotal role in enriching Fijians lives and empowering the communities through sports.

The Committee is confident that by addressing the identified challenges, fostering strong partnerships and aligning efforts with the SDGs, the FNSC can make even greater contribution to Fiji's social and economic development.

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Mr. Speaker, I thank the Chairperson and the Committee for deliberating on the Consolidated Review Report of the Fiji National Sports Commission Annual Report 2020-2021 and 2021-2022. My response will be very short, Sir.

In response to the Consolidated Review Report of the Fiji National Sports Commission (FNSC) 2020-2021 and 2021-2022, we acknowledge and support the recommendations of the Standing Committee' and wishes to express the need for additional funding to meet our recommendations and for the sustainability to continue sports for all Fijians.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the request for grants in the past five years against grants given, a total of \$88,409,444 was requested and the grant given was \$35,925,424 million with a shortfall of \$52 million that could have gone to support many programmes and grants for national sporting organisations. However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, with the aspiration of leaving no one behind and maximising the contribution of sports, it has made Fiji's economy for a better Fiji.

Sports will continue to advance development as a powerful enabler in areas of recommendations for the United Nations SDGs.

Recommendation 4.1 - Capacity building exercises for national sporting organisations and

clubs to improve their level of compliance for grants. We need more programmes and having a closer relationship with national sporting organisations.

Recommendation 4.2 – increase in grants given to disability sports programme. This, again, is dependant on grant funding.

Recommendation 4.3 - review current sponsorship for sports equipment and corporate sponsorship. We have concerns from smaller sponsorship based as to if the Commission receives this sponsorship, it will mean less for smaller NSOs.

Recommendation 4.4 - when working with sporting organisations on their recruitment of best available coaches to maximise performance of athletes, Mr. Speaker, Sir, all NSOs have the opportunity to apply for grants for international qualified coaches. The Sports Commission cannot be seen to be nominating coaches but can only facilitate funding.

Recommendation 4.5 - addressing the shortage of Physical Education teachers, consulting through the Ministry of Youth and Sports with the Ministry of Education. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is being actively pursued.

Recommendation 4.6 - working with the sports facilities for ease of payment. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is ongoing but the cost of maintaining facilities is getting higher. Owners require a return on investment.

Recommendation 4.7 - all our reporting has been made against relevant SDGs as identified sports and in line with the recommendation given, we endeavour to include all SDGs in our future reporting.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, once again, we thank the Committee for their due diligence and a good report that has been forwarded to the Government and I wish them well in the future.

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, at the outset, let me thank the Committee for the Report that they have presented today and I would also like to register my appreciation to the Board and staff of the Fiji National Sports Commission (FNSC) for the work that they do.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Commission has been in operation now for a little over a decade, I think they are going into their eleventh year now. Before the Commission was set up, the Government funded two sporting federations, mainly channeled through the Ministry of Youth and Sports. Now, it is channeled through the FNSC and I think in the process, a lot more funding is made available there for our sporting organisations, sporting bodies and sporting federations.

One of the benefits of having the Sports Commission is to buffer Government from being blamed on interfering with sporting federations. This is, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the third principle of the overall Olympic movement and the third working principle is autonomy and good governance. Sometimes, there is this contentious issue of Government interfering with sporting bodies that violate this working principle. So, now we have the Sports Commission in between to do that job.

The Commission has bore fruit, in my view. One of the initiatives that was started off by the last Government and is continuing now is the provision of that funding that allows Fiji to recruit international expatriate coaches, if we do not have local coaches, and that has resulted in our first gold medal in 2016. I think the second one in 2020, again, through that funding and getting those coaches.

It has even progressed well into paying our local coaches for our national teams. I know that when I was Chairman of the Rugby League, we applied, and the Sports Commission paid for our local coach when we went to the World Cup a few years ago. I know that the coach for the Women's Sevens Team, a local, was also paid for from there and they also got a bronze medal in 2020.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if I can just add on to what the honourable Minister had said on recommendation 4.5, which is this recommendation to get more PE teachers for our schools, I hope that the Ministries that are mentioned in the recommendation take heed of this by the Committee but I think equally important is not only getting PE teachers but also to resource them properly with the right training equipment that they will need to make sure that our PE teachers cater for the different levels of students in primary school and secondary school. Not only a whistle and a ball, but they get to be resourced well so that PE becomes fun for our children. Fun is the point that tickles their mind into a lot more physical activity and as we know, it is also a 'big weapon', if I may use those words, to tackle NCDs also.

That Mr. Speaker, Sir, is my contribution to the debate and I support the motion that is before Parliament.

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the Chairperson and Members of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs for their Report. We note the issues and recommendations highlighted in the Review Report, hence I would like to make some comments.

The Fiji National Sports Commission (FNSC) was established in Fiji under the National Sports Commission Act 2013. The primary goal of the Commission is to improve the lives and health of all Fijians through the promotion of physical activity and sports at all levels.

The Sports Commission is responsible for guiding and enhancing the delivery of sports outreach programme across Fiji through a coordinated approach in partnership with stakeholders, such as the Government, statutory bodies and community.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it also has a major role to play in establishing a high standard of excellence in all phases of sports delivery and in physical activities throughout the nation.

The Government supports the Commission through an annual budgetary provision. This includes funding as allocated to assist the Commission to actively advance the development of freedom sports at all levels, from the beginner to elite level, by supporting national supporting bodies.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the period 2014 to 2023, the 2024 fiscal years, Government had provided a total annual grant of over \$9.9 million to the Commission to carry out its core activities in the field of sports. The actual utilisation of this budget was \$9.4 million, and the rate of utilisation was 96 percent.

As a statutory body, the Commission is granted full discretion under the Financial Management Act to exercise its power to spend its annual grant effectively.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Financial Management Budget (Amendment) Act 2017 governs the financial operation of the Commission and in ensuring the effective, efficient and economic management of its finance, and the maintenance of effective systems to internal control of money and its prerogative.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Commission has made a significant stride in promoting sports participation across all demographic areas from grassroot to elite levels, which includes community

engagement, successful implementing the programme that endanger the community and engage all, particularly in the rural and underserved areas.

On talent development, to identify and nurturing young talent, preparing them for national and international competition. The international achievements supporting athletes' participation in global events which has brought pride and recognition to Fiji in the challenges and future direction for all our athletes across Fiji.

The impact of COVID-19 pandemic has disturbed the sports activities, affecting schedules and revenue. The Commission has taken adaptive measures but continued support is essential for its recovery. Strategic planning for new and improved facility is vital for maintaining high standards and hosting international events.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in conclusion, the Fiji National Sports Commission has shown commendable efforts and achievements, despite facing challenges. The Government continues to support strategic investments and collaborative approach that will be essential to build on the successes and ensuring the growth and sustainable of sports in Fiji.

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

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank all honourable Members who spoke on the recommendations of the Committee Report.

I would also like to thank Mr. Mazey and his team at the Fiji National Sports Commission for all the work that they did during these reporting years.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have no further comments, *vinaka*.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, that bring us to the end of our sitting today. I thank you all for your contributions. Parliament is now adjourned until tomorrow at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 6.09 p.m.