

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

WEDNESDAY, 2ND OCTOBER, 2024

[CORRECTED COPY]

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WEDNESDAY, 2ND OCTOBER 2024

The Parliament met at 9.37 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

MR. SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Members were present, except the honourable Minister for Home Affairs and Immigration; honourable P.K. Bala; honourable J.N. Nand; honourable V. Nath; honourable A. Bia; and honourable S. Kumar.

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Tuesday, 1st October, 2024, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE SPEAKER

Welcome

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

Year 8 Students & Teachers - Yat Sen Primary School

Honourable Members, please, join me in welcoming the Year 8 students and Teachers of Yat Sen Primary School. I know you did your very best in your Eighth Year Exams last week, but it does not stop there, children. So, keep on doing your best in school, and welcome to Parliament.

You have some of your colleagues from that famous school of Yat Sen sitting here amongst us. I will not name them but, at least, they should be able to come around and meet and talk with you, just to encourage you. You stay on course in the studies that you are doing, and who knows, maybe one day you will end up like your former school mates who are here with us in Parliament. All the best!

PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

Review Report – Ministry of Health and Medical Services 2016 -2021 Annual Reports

HON. I.S. VANAWALU. –Mr. Speaker Sir, I am pleased to present the Committee's Review Report on the Ministry of Health and Medical Services 2016 to 2021 Annual Reports. The Committee acknowledges the contribution and support provided by its development partners and international

organisations and commends the overall performance and achievements of the Ministry with a few recommendations to be considered.

In accordance with Standing Order 109(2)(b), our Committee is tasked with scrutinising issues related to health, education, social services, labour, aviation, culture, and media.

Mr. Speaker Sir, through our comprehensive review, we have identified several key concerns and challenges affecting the health sector and have put forward a series of recommendations to address these issues.

We recognise and commend the Ministry of Health's ongoing efforts to enhance the health sector through its current policies and procedures.

Mr. Speaker Sir, as part of our duties under Standing Order 110, the Committee conducted site visits to hospitals across the Western Division. These visits highlighted several concerns, which we subsequently raised with Ministry of health Officials during their public submissions to the Committee. Our report details these concerns and offers actionable recommendations to address them.

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to the Permanent Secretary and his executive team for their valuable contributions to this review process.

I also wish to acknowledge the outstanding leadership and guidance of the former Chairperson of the Committee, honourable Alitia Bainivalu, and former Committee members - honourable P.K. Bala; honourable K.K. Lal (Alternate Member); and honourable P.K. Bala (Alternate Member), and the current Committee members for their dedicated efforts in finalising this Report.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, I commend this Report to Parliament and encourage all honourable Members of this esteemed House to review its findings and recommendations.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

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

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

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

Review Report - Fiji Financial Intelligence Unit 2023 Annual Report

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence hereby submit to Parliament this morning a Review Report on the Fiji Financial Intelligence Unit 2023 Annual Report that was presented in Parliament and referred to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence on 2nd September, 2024 in the last Sitting.

The Financial Intelligences Unit was established in 2006 under the Financial Transactions Reporting Act 2004. The Unit functions both, as an intelligence unit and as a regulator, as mandated by the Financial Transactions Reporting Act 2004. These two core functions are aimed at protecting Fiji's financial system from abuse by criminals who seek to use the financial services offered to launder the proceeds of crime or to facilitate other serious crimes.

The Unit is fully funded by the Reserve Bank of Fiji (RBF) and the Governor of RBF was delegated the responsibilities of the line Minister over the Unit in 2005 and has remained that way up to the reporting period.

This Review Report, Mr. Speaker, Sir, was compiled after the Committee perused the Annual Report and a face-to-face discussion with the Acting Director and her senior staff. The Committee extends its gratitude to them for their timely response to the Committee's request for information and their openness during our discussions.

The Fiji FIU must be commended for being up to date with their Annual Report and I must add that the professional way in which the Annual Report is structured and presented greatly enabled the Committee to compile and table this Review Report back to Parliament in a timely manner. The Review Report has five recommendations, two of which the Committee feels that the line Ministries should look at with some urgency.

I thank the Committee Members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence for the hard work involved in the compilation of this Review Report.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence I submit this Review Report to Parliament.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

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

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

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

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

- (1) Honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation;
- (2) Honourable Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport;
- (3) Honourable Minister for Youth and Sports; and
- (4) Honourable Minister for Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management.

The Ministers may speak for up to 20 minutes. After the Minister, I will then invite the Leader of the Opposition, or his designate, to speak on the Statement for no more than five minutes. There

will also be a response from the Leader of the G-9 Bloc, or his designate, to speak for five minutes. There will be no other debate.

Update on the World Surf League Corona Fiji Pro

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Deputy Prime Ministers, honourable Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Members of Parliament, and ladies and gentlemen listening through the radio or watching through television or livestream or from the gallery, I take great pleasure in providing an update on the recently held World Surf League Corona Fiji Pro. Fiji is known for many things. We are known for our hospitality, our culture, our beaches and our friendliness, and our goal is to add to that list, top-tier global events is, of course, one of them.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, through the support of Government and the private sector, we successfully brought back the World Surf League (WSL) Fiji Pro after seven years. This is a three-year partnership where the first event was held from 19th August to 23rd August at Cloudbreak, Tavarua. This event not only showcases our stunning natural landscapes, but also reinforced Fiji's standing as a premier sports tourism destination on the global stage.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, surfing is not a traditional spectator event, like rugby or football, where economic returns are largely measured based on how many seats we fill in a stadium. Instead, its economic value is measured by global brand exposure.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Cloudbreak has gained global fame for its powerful and flawless left-hand reef break, making it a top choice for surfers and a key reason for Fiji's celebrated to return to the World Surf League event. The 2024 Corona Fiji Pro presented by Bonsoy was Event 9, which is the final event for the 2024 Championship Tour before the finals.

Event 9 delivers a much higher audience, as it decides the final five men and women who then go into the finals. And next year, we will be the final stop. So, this will be a strategic advantage to Fiji.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the Fiji Pro has set a new benchmark for international events in Fiji, contributing significantly to various sectors of our economy. Allow me to detail the multiple benefits this event has brought to our nation.

We had the honour of having the President of Fiji His Excellency, Ratu Wiliame Katonivere officiate the opening of the Event. My colleague, the Shadow Minister for Tourism, honourable Koya, was also present.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the economic ripple effects of the Fiji Pro Event has been widespread, particularly in our tourism and hospitality sectors. In the Corona Fiji Pro Event, 36 athletes from 12 countries participated. The event also brought event organisers, support staff, media personnel, and passionate surf fans. Our hotels and resorts have seen a marked increase in occupancy.

In terms of direct economic returns, you are looking at airfare, accommodation, food and beverage, transport and taxes in the local economy. Preliminary assessments indicate that this singular event has generated millions of dollars in direct and indirect economic benefits. Local businesses, including restaurants tour operators and service providers have all experienced increased patronage. This, in turn, strengthens the very foundation of our tourism-based economy which has been steadily recovering since the global pandemic.

The financial impact of such international events extends far beyond the event itself, creating a sustainable flow of income that boosts local and national economies.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, hosting the Fiji Pro has elevated Fiji's profile globally. The extensive media coverage, including live broadcasts and media engagement has showcased not only the event, but Fiji's natural beauty and world-class surfing to millions of viewers worldwide.

Mr. Speaker Sir, our preliminary analysis shows over \$2.5 million in total brand media value of exposure for Tourism Fiji in social media. We are looking at 205 total branded social posts that produced over 45 million impressions and 29 million video views.

The event also delivered over \$255,000 in media plan value for Tourism Fiji and 2.3K global PR hits with over \$50.4 million in global advertising value equivalency across 36 countries.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the event was also supported by global brands, such as Corona, Red Bull, Yeti, Shiseido and Apple Watch. So, we strategically maximised the Fijian brand. The exposure is invaluable for our tourism sector.

Mr. Speaker Sir, I also wanted to share the impact the event had on our communities and our people. The WSL rebuild the Cloudbreak surf tower, which was destroyed during *TC Harold* in 2020, after being operational since the mid-1990s. This is now being gifted to Tabanivono-i-Wai as a legacy asset to monetise via renting the tower out for other events. I also acknowledge the cash contribution made to the Nabila and Momi Villages.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the event also saw support to the Fiji Surfing Association and local surfing community. The WSL delivered a three-day women's development programme and a water safety programme. A local surfer received a place in the Fiji Pro Event as a wildcard and donation of cash and items to the Fiji Surfing Association.

Mr. Speaker Sir, we also staged a 'live site' in Denarau, to allow locals and other guests who could not go out to Cloudbreak to also watch the event live. One of the other aspects of Fiji Pro Event has been its contribution to jobs and skill development, from event management, logistics and security to hospitality services and transportation; local talent was heavily involved in the planning and execution of this world-class event.

Importantly, these employment opportunities did not just provide temporary income. They also quipped many of our people with valuable skills and experience that can be leveraged in future events. This adds long-term value to our workforce and positions us favourably in the highly competitive tourism sector.

Mr. Speaker Sir, an event of this scale would not be complete without a firm commitment to environmental sustainability. I am pleased to report that the Fiji Pro Event upheld the highest standards of environmental stewardship. Initiatives, such as the ocean forest diversity, marine environment protection projects and no single-use plastics were also positive contributions.

Furthermore, one of the standout initiatives was the encouragement of participants and visitors to plant coral in nearby reefs – an act that directly contributes to the preservation of our marine ecosystems. We have long recognised that our natural environment is one of our greatest assets, and we must protect it for future generations.

The Fiji Pro has served as a platform to promote environmental conservation, particularly in safeguarding our oceans and coral reefs. This approach aligns with our broader national goals for

sustainable tourism development where we balance economic growth with environmental protection.

Mr. Speaker Sir, looking ahead, the success of the Fiji Pro positions us favourably to attract more international events. In line with our tourism diversification strategy, we are already exploring new partnerships and avenues to host a variety of international events. These opportunities will continue to deliver significant economic, social and environmental benefits. The ongoing collaboration with the WSL, in particular, is a cornerstone of our efforts to solidify Fiji's place on the international sports tourism map.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in conclusion, the Fiji Pro Event has been a success for our country. It has boosted our economy, created employment, showcased our culture and reinforced our commitment to environmental sustainability. Most importantly, it has demonstrated our capacity to host world class events and has positioned Fiji as a leading destination for sports tourism.

As we build on this success, I have every confidence that Fiji will continue to thrive as a global tourism and events destination, bringing long-term benefits to our people and our economy. We look forward to even greater achievements in the years to come.

MR. SPEAKER.- *Vinaka vakalevu*, and I now call on the honourable Leader of the Opposition or his designate.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Deputy Prime Ministers, honourable Ministers and honourable Members of Parliament, right at the outset, I want to say "congratulations" to the honourable Minister for Tourism for finally acknowledging the benefits of sports tourism.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one must understand that if we focus on our conservative traditional markets, that is just a norm for Fiji. We cannot really just rely on weddings and our return visitors, et cetera. It will become sluggish, and we will have stagnant growth. But we knew that before, in order to expand our tourism industry, we had to look at what were the other avenues. We knew that sports tourism was huge business around the world.

There was a lot of information being passed back and forth from the Opposition at that particular time about the golf tournament, et cetera. But I am so happy to see that now, the light is shining bright with respect sports tourism. Now, the honourable Minister understands the importance of global market visibility.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Let love shine.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- That is alright, it is not an issue, honourable Minister. At that time, you probably were not well versed with respect to how the benefits work but I am really happy too and fully supportive of what you are actually doing at the moment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is events like the World Surfing League, coming and running a competition in Fiji, is a great move in the right direction. Although it is coming back after a few years, there were some issues before that, but it has been resolved.

Fiji now is becoming an actual desirable destination with respect to sports tourism, Mr. Speaker Sir. It is becoming a major sports destination. We can also see now that we can even hold musical concerts that are bringing in substantial amounts of money.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, you may remember, that we had several sporting events that were sponsored

in part by Government at that time, but we needed to put ourselves on the market and we did.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just to put things into perspective, that direct expenditure (and I think I am talking about sports in general), in sports tourism roughly equates to about \$67.1million. We have roughly about 21,000 individuals employed in that particular sector, which equates to 520 full time jobs. This comes out of a survey that was done by Tourism Fiji with the assistance of the Market Development Facility through the Australian Government.

The average spend, Mr. Speaker, Sir, with respect to our visitors is about \$6,877 that is during their stay. So, the total expenditure is about \$40 million and if you break it down, that is about 40,000 visitor nights. So, you can see what sports tourism does for Fiji, Mr. Speaker Sir.

The benefits actually goes beyond just normal specific economic immediate gains; there are long term gains. Ninety percent of those people that were surveyed, Mr. Speaker, Sir, said, "Oh, we will be back." They find a new avenue. Just to put it into perspective, the gentleman surfer who is actually quite famous, you might have all seen it during the Olympics, he was on top of the wave with a symbol on his hand, basically just a single finger pointing upwards, and the picture was taken. That generated a lot of interest. That gentleman, Gabriel Medina, comes from Brazil, Sir.

When we did this surfing in the beginning, just the viewership alone, because he has such a huge following, put Fiji on the map with respect to sports tourism. And not just sports tourism, people are wanting to come in, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

So, all in all, Mr. Speaker, Sir, when you look at sports tourism, it is not just about surfing, it is about our Drua also that have created a huge interest in Fiji in terms of sports tourism - our rugby team, our Super Rugby team - the Drua and also our normal rugby team. We want to ensure also that maybe, one day we can actually start holding a HSBC 7s series here. Also, we do have the facilities, and I am sure the honourable Minister is actually working on seeing what can be done in conjunction with the Fiji Rugby Union, despite all the little difficulties that they currently face.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do hope that the Ministry of Tourism will look at actually growing surfing in Fiji. It is a big and lucrative sport. But as I have said earlier, with sports like this, in terms of golf, surfing and other sports that actually happen in Fiji, that is not just common sports, we have a large viewership. And if you put all of that into the equation in terms of the amount of dollars that we are looking at, we would not be able to spend that much in terms of marketing.

Sir, I take my hat off to the honourable Minister for hosting a great surfing tournament and we hope to see a whole more sporting activities in terms of our tourism industry happening in Fiji. And most of all, Mr. Speaker Sir, I take my hat to all the tourism operators that take part and all those who have assisted in it. I think they have done a fantastic job.

MR. SPEAKER.- *Vinaka!* I now call on the honourable leader of G-9 Bloc or his designate.

HON. N.T. TUINACEVA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to thank the honourable Deputy Prime Minister for his Ministerial Statement and, of course, the update on the World Surf Lead Corona Fiji Pro.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as rightly said by the honourable Deputy Prime Minister, we cannot over emphasise the importance of sports tourism in Fiji. You know that hosting this kind of international sporting event on our shores brings a lot of growth in our economy and also our social networks.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one important point about such an event is that they do bring large crowd

of fans with them, just like rugby. When you have world class surfers and a world champion like Kelly Slater, who participated in the Fiji Pro a number of times, these are world class athletes, worth \$40million, for this particular guy, and has more than 5 million followers competing in the Fiji Pro, they surely bring fortunes and fans with them. They stay in our hotels, like the honourable Deputy Prime Minister said, they eat in our restaurants, and they use our transport mediums. So, when they depart, they leave behind millions of dollars for our people and for our economy.

Just a point for the honourable Deputy Prime Minister, hosting more international events will mean investing on sporting infrastructure. We need to upgrade our facilities to comply with international standards if we are to get more competitions. I know Government is moving in that direction, and I want to thank the Ministry of Sports and the honourable Deputy Prime Minister for working on that part.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just a suggestion to the honourable Deputy Prime Minister, Australia will be hosting the 2026 Rugby League World Cup. It will be a boost to our sports tourism if we can have some of these competitions played in our sporting grounds. So, Deputy Prime Minister, we hope that you will work with the organisers on this particular event, if we can have some of those games in Fiji.

Once again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to thank the honourable Deputy Prime Minister for his Statement and the great work his Ministry is doing in promoting and coordinating more sporting tourism events in Fiji.

MR. SPEAKER.- You may note, honourable Tuinaceva that I laughed a bit because instead of pronouncing the Minister for Tourism, you mentioned the name of the Deputy Speaker. *Sa malo e!*

Update on Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Members of Parliament, fellow Fijians, ladies and gentlemen, and Students and Teachers who are with us today from Yat Sen Primary School, welcome. I thank you for the opportunity to address this House regarding the Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji (MSAF) and specifically some updates on incidents, remedial actions and also a brief on derelict abandoned ships on our shores and the work of MSAF.

Sir, MSAF plays a very critical role in enhancing safe shipping and cleaner seas throughout the 1.8 million square kilometres of Fiji's maritime space. So, MSAF is working towards being a dynamic and internationally respected, regulator provider and promoter of maritime safety and maritime environment protection.

Sir, in terms overview of incidents, a total of 94 incidents from the year 2021 to the present, have been recorded by MSAF. The trend shows that 31 incidents was recorded in 2021, 10 incidents in 2022, 34 incidents in 2023 and 19 incidents recorded so far in 2024.

These incidents include vessel groundings, collisions, equipment failures and non-compliance with maritime safety regulations. Out of this total, 80 percent were classified as major, 10 percent of the incidents resulted in fatalities and 1 percent resulted in serious injury. The remaining incidents were minor with no significant impact on life or property.

Some of the primary causes identified are human error, adverse weather conditions and insufficient and poor maintenance of vessels. Some of the examples Mr. Speaker, Sir, also include a

vessel on 21st December, 2033, which was drifting and towed back due to a power failure. Sir, MSAF insisted on the offloading of passengers for alternative routes, and this was implemented.

One of the issues regarding this was power backup. Again, this survey had been conducted and a list of defects identified and directed to this particular company. This vessel is still being detained in terms of lack of compliance and also the need to work on those defects.

There was one which was prevented from sailing due to air conditioning defects. This was, again, detained but eventually, that was addressed, and the vessel was allowed to be operational again. There was another regarding ramp malfunction, again, this was detained until that was rectified, then allowed to operate.

There was another incident which, on 9th March, 2024, lost power and had to be towed to Suva. Again, this had to do with the on-board power backup and this is still detained. So, MSAF is engaged in more investigation and compliance, and ensuring the safety of passengers as we move forward. Related to this is more investigation trainings and auditor trainings for seafarers and vessel operators and focusing on compliance with the national safety regulations and emergency procedures through the IMO International Safety Management Systems and the Local Ships Safety Management Systems.

Increased awareness campaigns are conducted through surveys and inspection of ships, and this is strengthened to build capacity for our officers. Further, increase port inspections of vessels have been implemented to ensure adherence to safety standards. These include frequent checks on safety equipment, effectiveness of the ships' planned maintenance systems and overall operational readiness.

In addition, MSAF is also in the process of recruiting more staff to strengthen its presence in the outer stations, and we will continue to expand our services in terms of coverage of Suva, Lautoka, Levuka and other local jetties and boat landing spots.

Revisions to existing maritime regulations have been initiated to address gaps identified during incident investigations. These includes stricter penalties for non-compliance and more rigorous safety checks for high risk vessels which have been evident with the recent reactivation of the infringement notices in June this year. This process, from 20th May to 24th May, involves informing all maritime stakeholders, including ship masters, seafarers and ship owners, mariners and marine service operators.

Effective from 1st June, 2024, MSAF will commence the issuance of maritime safety infringement notices pursuant to sections 262 and 263 of the Maritime Transport Act 2013. This involves the issuance of notices specifying infringement offences and notices which give operators specific timelines to address issues. So, the law must be enforced, and this is what this Coalition Government is about enforcing laws in terms of our maritime safety and shipping operators.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, MSAF is also actively conducting outreach programmes in remote areas to raise awareness about maritime safety practices. These programmes target local maritime communities, boat builders and small vessel operators. In addition, ongoing efforts to include closer collaboration with law enforcement agencies and maritime partners, such as Fiji Water Police, Fiji Ports Corporation Limited, Biosecurity Authority of Fiji, Ministry of Fisheries, Ministry of Environment and other relevant maritime stakeholders.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are also progressing towards digital transformation of processes and records to ensure that the identification of non-compliance, et cetera, is provided as per the real time

data for enforcement purposes. In terms of navigational aid, including beacons and buoys are in progress to improve guidance for vessels navigating through challenging routes. There is a five-year plan to improve navigation aids that have been damaged in the past years through the various weather events.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, MSAF continues to seek technical cooperation in the Ministry in this regard, and recently we had hosted Korean Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries together where visits were done to local lighthouses, beacons and other infrastructure which needed upgrading, and continued partnership in that regard, is being pursued. So, in terms of that, one of the issues, which we do not want to dwell on the past, but if the Marine Department of PWD was there, these issues would not have come up.

In terms of the deterioration of our navigational aids and beacons, the Marine Department used to work on time to address these issues efficiently and effectively so that there are no risks in terms of our navigational aids. As I have mentioned, I do not want to dwell on the past as some of the honourable Opposition Members have been doing. But, in reality, the Marine Department was like a Public Works Department. They were constantly moving around in the whole of the maritime islands to monitor, check and fix the navigational aids. But that was done away with and, again, taken up by the private sector which, as we have seen, has not been really effective and efficient in that regard. So, we are doing a catch up in terms of the damage done by the past Government.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in terms of planned future action, we plan to (in terms of MSAF) conduct a comprehensive audit of all commercial and passenger vehicles in this financial year, to ensure compliance and updated safety standards. This includes advanced training for incident management and adoption of new technologies for monitoring and enforcement.

This week two Australian Maritime Safety Authority senior staff are in Fiji to conduct port state and flex state surveys and enforcement training to all of the MSAF surveyors and enforcement officers. The training is made possible through MSAF membership of the Asia-Pacific Regional arrangement on Maritime Safety and Maritime Environment Protection as espoused in the Tokyo MOU Framework. It is building capacity in terms of our MOU local capacity.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I have mentioned, the proposal for legislative amendments are already underway, to tighten the regulations and introduce mandatory incident reporting for all maritime operators. The review entails mandatory marine spill vessel insurance, shipwreck insurance and assessing the compliance requirements and standards, including restricting the age of imported vessels.

We also include the possible lowering of the vessel deregistration age. The MSAF remains committed to enhancing maritime safety through continuous improvement, as I have mentioned specifically, also through regulatory framework, enforcement mechanisms and public awareness.

On the Pacific regional maritime scene, MSAF has commenced negotiations to establish bilateral MOUs with maritime safety administrations of the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea. This will enhance the cooperation within the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) and through the MSG Framework in partnership with other maritime nations.

The same arrangement will extend to other Pacific Island Forum Member Countries as we are progressing towards supporting the SPC initiative to a Pacific-One Maritime Framework, harmonisation and recognition of Maritime Safety Standards, protection of the maritime environment and capacity building of seafarers across the region. For the future, next year, MSAF will be looking at the same arrangement on MOUs with Australia, New Zealand and Singapore.

In terms of an ongoing issue on marine pollution and derelict ships, through partnership with other maritime partners and stakeholders, in this case the Fiji Ports Corporation Limited have together, derived working data on wrecks, derelicts and abandoned vessels, especially within Fiji's port boundaries.

Sir, a joint MSAF and FPCL Committee on removal of these vessels have been formed and convened on a weekly basis to fast-track the removal processes under the Seaport Management Act and Maritime Transport Act. Both legislations outlined provisions for the removal process to wrecks, derelicts and abandoned vessels. Unfortunately, nothing concrete had been done in the past and I do not want to dwell into the past.

Unfortunately, this has been an ongoing issue, and the Coalition Government is dealing with this ongoing problem of derelict vessels which honourable Ketan Lal had also raised, apart from the ongoing pothole issue he has raised. I am pleased to advise that the Joint Committee is working closely with the removal processes. In fact, a meeting has identified wrecks, derelicts and abandoned vehicles and through the FPCL Seaport Management Act processes, all these owners and agents were issued with the Letter of Vessel Concern at the meeting. The Letter of Vessel Concern is for the owner to upgrade the vessel to seaworthiness, or failure to do that within 30 days will result in a Removal Process Letter which they should act on within 21 days. So, failure to comply will result in vessel seizure, removal or auction if the vessel has any value.

For the MSAF process, all Fiji registered vessels under this category are to deregister, a full survey conducted to determine seaworthiness and viability, and if beyond economic repairs, then the vessel is seized for removal either through scuttling, scraping and sinking at identified diving areas of more than 30 metres, mostly for recreational diving purposes and fish spawning. Of course, with full consultation with the Department of Environment. With the timeframe in terms of what I have described, the first tangible removal of vessels should begin to happen from November 2024 onwards.

There have been issues raised with passenger movement in terms of the management of passengers during peak periods. This is an ongoing concern, not only from the members of the public, but in terms of MSAF as the regulator, MSAF has instructed shipowners.

One of the issues raised and identified is the mismatch between the tickets issued and the passengers, and the passengers allowable for that vessel. So, I urge ship operators and vessel operators to, please, put the safety of passengers as number one priority. So, whatever ticket you issue must be the one allowable for that passenger because the number of passengers on the boat is related to the capacity of that vessel and also the safety procedures and equipment in that vessel. For example, the number of life jackets must match the number of passengers. So, that is an issue which MSAF is emphasising right now and closely monitoring. The onus is on the operator to, please, ensure that number of tickets you sell does not exceed. Most of the overloading is in the peak season, for example, school holidays, Christmas and, again, this is an ongoing issue year in, year out.

Sir, I have insisted on MSAF to, please, do its role as the regulator and apply the law, because I believe in the last Government, I am not sure of the implications of the MSAF regulation because there was sort of a tendency to look at that very liberally. So, the shipowners are fully aware of the plan and in addition, there needs to be standby vessels if there is an excess of passengers. It is the responsibility of ship operators.

For connecting and preparing for unplanned mechanical breakdown, MSAF is stepping up the pace of routine and in-between surveys and spot checks of vessels and its machineries and onboard equipment.

In terms of some of the 2023-2024 activities of MSAF, the Boat Master Licences and Restricted Marine Engineer Class 6 training programmes have been conducted where in excess of 1,500 participants were trained and also certified.

In terms of the Survey and Registration programme, 629 registered vessels were surveyed and registered. These include small boats.

Seafarers training and registration programme where more than 3,500 seafarers have completed assessment and certification. This is important because in a recent incident in Lau where a boat capsized, the operator was not certified and when someone is not certified, he is not aware of the safety procedures and what to do and what not to do in emergencies.

Moving forward, Mr. Speaker, Sir, MSAF has launched a 5-year training plan to enhance staff competencies. Of course, the review of the Ship Management System and the Audit Framework and conducting maritime survey outreach programmes to remote locations. There is partnership between regional maritime authorities, digitalisation, and there is urgent work where there needs to be catch-up on repairing and upgrading the navigational aids and beacon across the country.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, those were the updates in terms of MSAF and maritime environment and work which continues in terms of compliance and, particularly, for adherence of safety regulations in terms of our maritime operations, and the safety of our people in moving between our maritime provinces and our main islands.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I intend to adjourn the House now for tea. Before doing so, I also invite the school children and those in the public gallery to join in and have some free time to discuss things with your, I do not know whether it is favourite Member of Parliament or most popular Member of Parliament since they will all be there having tea as well. We will resume when the bell is sounded.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.40 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.17 a.m.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, before we proceed, I would like to inform you that we have, amongst us, another batch of Year 8 Students and Teachers from Yat Sen Primary School.

(Acclamation)

We are humbled by your presence this morning, students and teachers. This is your Parliament, this is where we make laws, we change and amend laws, and we even repeal laws. This Chamber has been in existence for so many years now since we were in the colonial era and then we had elections and then today you are here with us. Welcome to our Parliament. I hope that the proceedings this morning will give you some idea of how your Parliament and how your Members of Parliament do carry out their work in this august House.

Honourable Members, we will continue, and I now invite the honourable Leader of the Opposition or his designate.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for his address on MSAF. Being maritime sailors 3,500 years ago, the sailors of the Pacific were the best in the world. We were the leading edge on this and when this country was settled by people that came down from Taiwan to Papua New Guinea, to Solomons, to Vanuatu and to Fiji around 3,500 years ago, at that time we were right at number one of the world. When the sailors came to Fiji, they realised how well our sailors did. It is one of the things to get back to that but maritime, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is very important for different areas such as tourism, shipping and fisheries.

One thing that strike me with the speech by the honourable Minister is that he kept talking about Public Works Department (PWD). He has got all this thinking about PWD running the ships. Let me remind him that PWD was never responsible for shipping in this country. It was the Marine Department, but the Marine Department had two roles. It was the referee and the player, so what Government did was took out the referee bit and put MSAF in.

The player bit was Government Shipping Services (GSS). That was what was done. I do not know what the honourable Minister is trying to say; keep the player and the referee the same. That was the development that was done to be able to improve. If you have the wrong the systems, you will get the wrong kind of results. Overtime, that regulatory bit went to MSAF, and it needs to be able to do that bit well.

He talked a bit about derelicts without really talking about the complexities of derelicts that we have. When you have derelicts, there are different parties that are responsible for different things. Fiji Ports Corporation Limited has jurisdiction over the ports from Nukulau all the way to Draunibota. They have that, and they control the movement of ships, et cetera.

Sir, MSAF is the one that declares the derelicts, but if you declare the derelict and you do not take into account all the other parties, then someone will have to pay all of these. All of those issues are things that need to be ironed out. You are trying to say that the Government in the past did not do it, you need to understand the complexities of it.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am glad to hear that the honourable Minister is talking about reviewing the law, all of these things have to be looked at. I would suggest, given the congestion that we have in the port here, we might need to have two different ports: one operational port in Suva where the boats that are actually doing work, unloading, loading cargo coming into Suva, the rest that are

waiting on operation should stay on the Laucala side. I think that has been the suggestion that has worked in the past and it will help us to control it, at the moment, everybody comes here.

Perhaps, we also need to look at one of the big things. There is no shipping company in Fiji that can afford to get rid of derelicts because of the cost. Maybe we need to look at insurance systems, insurance schemes and included in that insurance. Maybe the premium can also be a bit high and included in those insurance premiums are the cost of removing derelicts because when it comes to cutting up or sinking ships, or scuttling ships, it is very expensive. These are the kind of advice I am getting from some people on this side of the Parliament who are IMO auditors and are also certified to captain ships over 1,000 tonnes, so that was the advice that was given across to the honourable Minister today.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am glad to see all the work that has been done by MSAF in terms of swift shipping, cleaner seas, lot of good policies. One thing I am concerned about Mr. Speaker, Sir, I hope when you have all these policies, it is not the Government Ministers themselves who break the requirements for compliance. I hope it is not the Government Ministers and Government officials when they travel on these ships, they themselves break the requirements. Overloading! I hope as you go around the islands, you are not having overloaded boats and you just turned a blind eye to it because this is one thing, if you have great rules and policies.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. J. USAMATE.- I am not saying, I am just saying and I hope that you are not, so please do not do it! I am saying that people say, "oh, great policy! Hey, but the head honchos themselves are breaking the policies. Maybe it is alright for all of us to break the policies and to be non-compliant."

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we move on, one of the things that I notice a few years ago, MSAF has got ISO 9001 certified. That means they have benchmarked themselves against international standards. I think this is a good move, we talked it about on CAAF about two or three days ago, about how they had to lift the standard and now I suggest this is something that we can apply all across state owned enterprises and statutory bodies. We used to have a system in Fiji which we called the Service Excellence Programme that used the criteria of the Malcolm Balbridge Excellence Awards and apply that to all of our entities, and it allowed us Sir, to benchmark against international standards so that we can lift the whole performance.

As I said, our people in the islands, shipping is very important for them. We need to make sure that the quality of ships are good. I am wondering whether we are strictly enforcing the requirements by MSAF to kick off on those people that are allowed to make fibreglass boats because if those boats are not safe, if we are not making sure that they comply to the standards, then their ships break apart in the seas, that will cause loss of life.

So, I congratulate the honourable Minister, I know MSAF have got a good CEO now, good Board, a lot of good policies. I noticed also that in their budget, they had asked for, how much money did they ask for? The budget that they have asked for in their strategic planning, they are not getting that money, so honourable Minister for Finance, you might want to have a look if you really think about the maritime people there, please make sure that they get enough money to be able to do things, so we can keep them safe.

MR. SPEAKER.- I like the body language and everything that goes with it, a very inspiring way of making your presentation.

I now call on the honourable Leader of the G-9 Bloc or his designate.

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for his Statement on MSAF, an important organisation for a maritime nation like Fiji. Because of our geography, we are a flag State because we register vessels, and a port State also.

We are obliged under international conventions to do a lot of things that comes under MSAF – United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), International Convention for the Safety of Life At Sea (SOLAS) and International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL). They fall under this very important organisation, in addition to regulating the local shipping, making sure that they are safe.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have a lot of yachts that come in Fiji and as soon as they enter Fiji waters, the safety aspect, in some cases, it has to do with this very important organisation, MSAF. One aspect I think of monitoring and ensuring compliance that is a little bit lacking, is on our small boats that are crossing from island to island. They set a crossing from Vatulewa to Taveuni and other points in Vanua Levu, crossing across to Taveuni.

There was an incident lately of the small boat that ran aground, and kids were swimming. I think they wanted to lighten the load, and that was exactly the wrong thing to do, to get these kids into the water. I hope the investigation on that incident has been done and remedial action have been taken on small boats complying with safety regulations.

I think if you look at the statistics for search and rescue, most of the search and rescue is done because of the non-compliance of small boats that traverse our waters. For islands, that is the only way they travel between those islands.

You talked about navigational aids which is equally important. As we make sure the ships are safe, we ensure also that the route that they take is well marked and safe so that they do not run aground. We have a lot of beacons that the posts stand on. The posts only marks where the danger is, it is the part at the top that is missing, that tells the captain which side you should be travelling on. And with that part missing at the top, there is a chance that they might go on the wrong side and run aground. For beacons and lights, because we are so prone to cyclones, every time a cyclone passes through, most of the time the heads of these beacons will disappear. They need to be put back in place.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I agree totally with what was mentioned by honourable Usamate. MSAF has a good CEO, and we wish him well - Mr. Cawaki and his Board, the big role that he played for the maritime nation like Fiji. I have the feeling that you need to increase the number of MSAF enforcement officers. When we went from Vatulewa to Taveuni with the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, we went on two fibreglass boats to cross over. There was no MSAF officer on the Vatulewa side to check whether the boats that are crossing have life jackets and all the safety features. We had life jackets and there were two police boats that we crossed on. I think there is a need to increase enforcement officers so that they can be spread around these points where our small boats cross. I thank the honourable Minister for his Statement this morning.

Fiji Rugby Union Saga

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Members of Parliament, I acknowledge the presence of the students from Yat Sen in the public gallery, and viewers who are watching through television students from their comfort zones.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I move on to my Statement, allow me once more to congratulate our own Fiji school Boys Under 18 Team on their second victory against the Australian School Boys defeating them by 34 points to 25 yesterday afternoon.

Sir, I also take this opportunity to wish our Team that will be in Palau this week all the very best. The Team is being led by the Permanent Secretary, Ratu Meli Nacuva and FASANOC. They will be making our final presentations for our 2031 Pacific Games bid.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to address an ongoing matter that has drawn significant public attention, the situation involving the Fiji Rugby Union and the players. As a nation with deep-rooted pride in our rugby heritage, it is essential that we remain transparent and proactive in handling any challenges that may affect our national sport and its representatives.

On the World Cup preparation, Mr. Speaker, Sir, at the request of the honourable Minister of Justice, the Trustees voluntarily took responsibility of Fiji Rugby in May 2023, four months prior to the World Cup and at that time, their biggest priority was in finding the funding to get our Flying Fijians into camp, to train and then to play in the World Cup and return to their clubs.

The only funding in place at that time was from Government of a grant of \$2.5 million for the preparation and participation. After discussions with Fiji Water, through the Office of the Prime Minister, they arranged to assist with a sponsorship of \$3.8 million. The total budget was \$10 million.

Mr. Speaker, when the World Cup Team came together in Taveuni and discussed and negotiated their contracts for the World Cup campaign, the then Fiji Rugby Interim Administrator advised that it was agreed that each Flying Fijian squad member, 33 players in total, would receive a sign-on fee of \$30,000 and an allowance of \$500 per day from 1st July to 15th October, 2023. That is around 107 days. In fact, the players had asked for \$600 per day and a few players were in camp earlier from around 1st July.

With Government backing and after a visit from the honourable Prime Minister, bonuses were offered at that time of \$30,000 for winning the quarterfinal, \$40,000 for winning the semifinal and \$50,000 for winning the final. The bonuses were, therefore, based on the Team's achievements and promised for after the World Cup.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to the agreed payments, Fiji Rugby, Fiji Government and World Rugby paid all expenses for the Flying Fijians for preparation for and participation in the 2023 Rugby World Cup - all travel to, from and during camp; international air travel; all accommodation and meals; all playing and training gear; and incidentals also. These had also been budgetted for by Fiji Rugby, World Rugby and Government.

On the former captain's claims, Mr. Speaker, the difficulty, of course, is in the former captain's original statement where he stated that issues existed between Rugby House and the players going back 10 years. Questions have been raised on unpaid money as far back as 1987, 2007 and 2019. But the current trustees have only been there for a year and regrettably, it will be a challenge to investigate every claim if records are not available.

Mr. Speaker, there appears to have been a lot of frustration among the players and sadly, the Trustees currently at Rugby House are taking the brunt of it. They have reached out to the players, met with several of them and they have heeded.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on other players' comments, in various comments from the players, there has been a distinct theme of misinformation, and a lot of issues raised are simply not factual.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, players concerns raised on what happened to the £6,000 or FJ\$1.7million that World Rugby awarded for reaching the quarterfinals was very quickly answered by World Rugby in releases to the media, advising that there was no prizemoney awarded for reaching the quarterfinals of the World Cup.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, further questions on where the prizemoney for the Fiji Men's Sevens Team who competed at a tournament in Samoa last year, a reported \$25,000. It was noted that the coach of the Fiji Sevens Team had told the Samoa organisers that they could keep the prizemoney. It was also noted that all the players were advised of this.

Upon this coming to the notice of the Trustees, the Trustees requested the Samoa organisers to give the prizemoney to FRU. Internally, the Trustees had agreed that the prizemoney would be shared between the players and the Samoa organisers. Unfortunately, Samoa could not honour that payment, and the cheque received at the time was returned as there were no funds in the Samoans' bank account.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the coaches, statements that the 15s coach had not been paid and that even the current coach had not been paid for some months has been refuted by the coaches concerned, as the coaches have been paid by the Fiji National Sports Commission through Government grant for internationally qualified coaches.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, initially, the issue of corruption raised against FRU has not been proven factual as the Trustees requested evidence with a promise to pass it on to FICAC or to the police for investigation, and no team member has been able to provide any information on instances of corruption. In responding to the former captain's initial comments, the Trustees expressed concern on the player issues but took the accusation of corruption very seriously.

On issues prior to the quarterfinal, regrettably, three days before the quarterfinal, the Team Manager arranged a zoom meeting between the former captain, some team members and the Fiji Rugby Interim Administrator at that time. Mr. Speaker, Sir, in that meeting, the former captain and some players demanded payment of bonuses prior to the quarterfinal, and they threatened Fiji Rugby that they would not play the quarterfinal match unless the bonuses were paid first. This was the first time that the Trustees were made aware that the players differed with the Interim Administrator on the timing of the bonus payment.

The Trustees took this threat seriously because of the serious implications and consequences in Fiji. In addition, the pressure on Fiji Rugby was enormous, particularly as there would be serious implications on funding if Government did not agree to the bonus. We had no option, but to approach the honourable Prime Minister to seek his advice and concurrence on a course of action. Government would have to pay the bonus, much earlier than planned.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, an undertaking was given to the players by the Prime Minister's Office that they would be paid the quarter final bonus they demanded, immediately after the quarters. Because of Government's processes which was appreciated by Fiji Rugby and the risk that the bonus would not be paid when demanded, the Trustees had to seek an overdraft facility for the immediate payment. Government then reimbursed FRU later, well after the team returned.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji Rugby could not and will never risk a boycott of any match by a Fiji Rugby Team, team let alone a quarterfinal of the 2023 Rugby World Cup. The consequence of such a boycott would likely have been Fiji players and Fiji Rugby being expelled from participating in the World Rugby matches. The former captain and the senior players were aware of this but, unfortunately, still proceeded with their demands.

On the payments, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to highlight that the bonus was not only promised but was paid. The sign-on fee of \$30,000 has been paid. The \$500 daily allowance has been paid. Fiji Rugby has already stated that a few payments were late due to regulatory processes that had to be complied with.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, all payments due are part of the full review being undertaken as I speak. Only last week, the CEO of the Drua confirmed that all the Drua players were also receiving their full paid Drua salary as their time with the Flying Fijians was seen as national duty.

On available resources, the Flying Fijians are a nationally proud group, most of whom played for national pride when they are called up to do so for family and country. Fiji Rugby and the supporters also want the team to be fairly compensated for their efforts.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, sports has become very expensive, and Fiji does not have the resources of Australia, New Zealand, England, France or Japan, where a number of our players are on contracts.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, currently, Fiji Rugby's national teams, player development and welfare, as well as our domestic competition, cost Fiji Rugby approximately \$30 million per annum and that depends on a few generous sponsors, the Fiji Government and a grant from World Rugby.

On the Trustees and their progress, Mr. Speaker, Sir, when the Trustees were appointed last year, Fiji Rugby was in trouble, as reported earlier. It had substantial debts owing over \$6.8 million and assets of only \$3 million. In the Trustees report, they have cleared the majority of their debt.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Trustees have restructured the operations since and after meetings with every union, the new structure has been accepted and, yes, a new professional business model under a company limited by guarantee was approved by all the unions to take over the operations of rugby in Fiji. The company, its Articles of Association and Constitution were approved by all of the unions at the recent Special General meeting. These documents have been approved by World Rugby and FASANOC which represents the Olympic Committee in Fiji.

Last week, in the first round of voting by the unions, a Special Nominations Committee was elected. This professional Committee will now be responsible to vet and approve all nominations for the new Board of Directors to be elected at the AGM on 9th November, 2024.

The players have got their wish, thanks to the unions themselves electing to be a professional business. The Trustees and unions, by restructuring and approving the new Constitution and operations, have satisfied the concerns of World Rugby. We now have re-admitted Fiji Rugby to the World Rugby Council and only last week, the CEO of Fiji Rugby was in Dublin at World Rugby Headquarters, representing Fiji at meetings held there.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one change that was demanded by both, World Rugby and the International Olympic Organization was that all voting members of any board of national sports organisation had to be elected by the members of that sport and as such, this meant that the previous mandated position given to the Prime Minister's Board nominee could not be appointed to Fiji Rugby Board.

However, there is a course of action that can be taken by the directors to invite a government representative to sit on the Board. If any member of Parliament wishes to sit on the National Sports board, they can, but they must be elected. The honourable Minister for Women, Children and Social Protection is a current member of Fiji Rugby Union Board.

Accusations, Investigation and Audit: Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Trustees of Fiji Rugby have accepted that the issues and accusations made by the players must be addressed and as such, have written and been in contact with them. The Trustees have held meetings with players and coaches. They have promised to investigate the players' claims, and as such, engaged I. Naiveli & Co Chartered Accountants, to review each of the 43 players' contracts, payment disbursements, as well as the timing of payments. Sir, this exercise is currently in progress and the first report should be received later this week.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, regarding the 43 players engaged in 2023, all have been given a schedule of payments, that disclosed the funds disbursed to their respective bank account during the period 1st July, 2023 to 15th October, 2023, and the players have been requested to confirm and cross-check with their bank to confirm that the payments have been deposited into their respective accounts. Once these player disbursements have been addressed and the final report from I. Naiveli & Co. Chartered Accountants has been received, the Trustees will publicly release the findings of the review. Any shortfalls in payment to any player during the period mentioned, the Trustees are committed to settle them.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I must commend the Trustees of Fiji Rugby for the work they do. They were appointed due to their business and professional experience and involvement in rugby and sports. They should be thanked for all they have achieved. Not one of them has received any remuneration for the over 80 meetings they have held in the last 14 months, all in an effort to get rugby on the right track.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, rugby is more than just a sport in Fiji - it is a symbol of our national unity and strength. While challenges like this are unfortunate, I remain confident that with the collaborative efforts of all stakeholders, we will resolve these matters promptly and continue to build a strong, unified rugby community.

I look forward to meeting with the Trustees once they receive I. Naiveli & Co's report, so as we can answer and address everything with honesty and sincerity. The people of Fiji require this, and our rugby players deserve the truth which they shall get.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, earlier, the honourable Minister for Youth and Sports had made it clear that the Government is no longer involved in the recent saga between FRU and the Flying Fijian captain's claims. But now, he has been making statements on it because it is a matter to discuss, because it is about the future of our youth for career in rugby.

Very serious allegations have surfaced, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and it is on the verge of boycotting by the Flying Fijians at the quarter final clash against England in 2023. And just now, the honourable Minister highlighted that our players demanded bonuses and threatened FRU, and further states that all has been paid to the players. But it is quite interesting to note that FRU has responded saying that they ensure a thorough and impartial review. They have engaged in an external audit, and they are committed to transparency.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if I go a few months back, the Fiji Women's Sevens team slept on the benches outside the Sydney Airport while the Men's Sevens Team slept in a hostel, reported by *fijivillage* on Monday, 20th May, 2024. The honourable Minister for Youth and Sports then said that FRU did not realise that Sydney Airport closes at 11 p.m., which led to players sleeping outside. So, the question is, who was sleeping on the job that caused our players to sleep outside on the benches? Many people are asking, is this the way we are empowering the aspiring youths of Fiji for a career in rugby just so that they can sleep on benches at international airports? Mr. Speaker, Sir, when this

news gets circulated by international media, they make a mockery out of our players, management and the nation as a whole.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, coming back to this matter, when honourable Vocea asked the honourable Minister for Youth and Sports about the Fiji Secondary School Rugby Deans Competition, I saw this is an opportunity to ask a direct supplementary question regarding the claims by the former Flying Fijian captain. We are a very effective Opposition, and we bring current matters right to Parliament and definitely we will make a very good government in the next two years.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to agree with you on a matter of disconnect, which you stated yesterday. I would like to quote you from the Hansard Report, in fact, on Monday, that honourable Prime Minister offered to pay \$20,000, and this is what you responded to the honourable Minister for Youth and Sports. You mentioned here that you are not paying for the \$20,000 that will be given to the sevens aside team. And here there is a bit disconnection. I agree with you, there is a lot of disconnection, a lot of disconnection with this Government.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fijian people embraced rugby.

(Honourable Government Member interjects)

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- See a glass falls.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the Fijian people embrace rugby, making it part of their daily lives and culture. Today, rugby stands as a symbol of national pride and unity in Fiji. Our Fijian players have

MR. SPEAKER.- Point of Order!

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is a misleading statement. I just want to remind the honourable Member that award given to the Fiji Rugby Sevens Team it was my paper to Cabinet. How can I oppose that here?

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- You said it!

HON. J. SAUKURU.- I did not oppose it! It was my paper to Cabinet.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the level of disconnection is quite surprising. I would like to continue. Our Fijian players not only have excelled in the field, but also have become role models for the younger athletes because their claims now, like I highlighted on Monday, the younger ones are looking up to them and what they say. Their success stories highlight the opportunities that rugby can provide both locally and internationally, and rugby has become a pathway for social mobility, offering young Fijians the chance to improve their lives and support their families.

I understand, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the issues and challenges exist everywhere, and it will be an ongoing issue. But to the honourable Minister for Youth and Sports, you really need to fix this disconnect. This requires proper investigation and audit. Honourable Minister for Youth and Sports, budgeting is one thing and how you use the finances, is the other. We need to promote good governance, integrity, transparency and accountability, because at the end of the day, it is the Government that funds FRU through the Fijian National Sports Commission.

I understand there is an AGM that is planned for November, where unions can voice their concerns. There is also calls for a Player Association to set up to protect the players. Like honourable Premila Kumar said, the players need to be part of the decision-making process, especially the younger ones. The appointed personnel who cannot deliver need to wake up or go home. We, as a nation, have come too far with the success of rugby to mess it up now for our future generations.

MR. SPEAKER. – I now call upon the honourable Leader of G9-bloc, or their designate.

HON. T.R. MATASAWALEVU.– Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the honourable Minister for Youth and Sports for his ministerial statement regarding the current situation of the Fiji Rugby Union. Throughout the world, over many years, sports have unified people. They draw communities together in common purpose. They have people of different faith, different races and different walks of life who come together to support their local team or their national team.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, rugby holds this place in Fiji. It is truly our national sports, and we all experience how important it could be to us, as a people our sense of being one nation like in 2016. When we won the Olympic gold medal it was a time of pure pride and great joy for every Fijian around the world. Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji rugby which we are born with has come a long way. We are an international superpower in the sevens code and have been toppling tier one nations in fifteens.

Fiji Rugby Union is not an income generating institution but relies heavily on sponsorships and funding from companies and sponsors to support its operations and tournaments. Mr. Speaker, Sir, for instance, to host the Farebrother and Skipper Cup, all of the cost is an estimated expenditure of over 1 million dollars. The problem with the Fiji Rugby Union is due to the lack of visionary leaders in the past. They are relying heavily on grants and whenever there is a delay it will affect everyone in the Fiji Rugby Union.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, rugby in Fiji has not been effectively monetised to its full potential which could have financial benefits for the sport. For example, till to date there is no merchandise shop of the FRU in order to buy and bring back money to the union. I thank the current Fiji Rugby Union trustees on offering to focus on setting up alternative revenue streams and not to rely solely on sponsors and grants. I would like to thank:

- (1) Mr. Peter Mazey;
- (2) Mrs. Jenny Seeto;
- (3) Mr. Alipate Naiorosui;
- (4) Mr. Sikeli Tuinamuana; and
- (5) Mr. Mosese Naivalu.

who are all volunteers and Trustees but have rugby at heart.

They have committed to improving management practice, instilling a positive work environment and changing communication channels and promoting accountability and transparency with the rugby house to assist with efforts to advance rugby in the country. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am calling on the rugby unions in Fiji to learn from the past and continue to work hard to achieve continuous improvements and management towards the performance of our teams.

4th International Conference on SIDS

HON. S.R. DITOKA.– Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the earlier sitting, the honourable Leader of the Opposition had mentioned that he would like to get a report regarding the 4th SIDS Delegation that had gone. Just for your information, Sir, I had led that delegation and had already submitted my

report via Cabinet, but I also acknowledge that I also have a duty to do here in this august Parliament, so I apologise for that. I am presenting my Report now, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

I thank the Leader of the Opposition for raising this point and the opportunity to inform this august Parliament of the outcomes of the 4th Conference of the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) held from 27th May to 30th May in St. John's, Antigua and Barbuda. The unique vulnerabilities and challenges of SIDS were first recognised by the international community in 1992 at the Rio Earth Summit.

Since then, three major conferences in Barbados 1994, Mauritius 2005, and Samoa 2014, have progressively shaped our collective agenda to address these specific challenges. Building on the shared narratives established during these foundational conferences, the fourth conference in Antigua and Barbuda advanced our efforts to accelerate sustainable development outcomes for SIDS. They also identified shared priorities for achieving resilient, equitable and sustainable growth pathways for our small island nations.

At the outset, I wish to acknowledge the honourable Prime Minister's leadership in entrusting me with the responsibility of leading Fiji's delegation to the fourth SIDS Conference.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, SIDS is recognised as a distinct group of developing countries facing specific social, economic and environmental vulnerabilities at the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The SIDS grouping comprises 39 UN Member States from three geographical regions:

- (1) the Caribbean;
- (2) the Pacific;
- (3) the Atlantic, Indian Ocean and South China Sea (AIS).

Our challenges are well known, stemming from our small size, remoteness and geographic dispersion and scattered populations and its effect on our economies and development. SIDS require better support to enhance resilience to exogenous shocks, such as market fluctuations, climatic extremes, and frequent and intense disasters. Despite being the lowest emitters of greenhouse gases, more than 40 percent of SIDS have debt-to-GDP ratio above 40 percent, with some exceeding 100 percent.

At some stage, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji was in this group of nations and due to the hard work of this side of the Parliament and the honourable Minister of Finance that has been reduced to almost 70 percent at the moment. Our borrowing from global financial institutions is often at non-concessional rates. Between 2017 and 2021, no more than 1.55 percent of total global Official Development Assistance (ODA) was allocated to SIDS.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the fourth SIDS Conference, theme “Charting the Course Towards Resilient Prosperity,” brought together over 3000 delegates including 22 Heads of States and Government, highlighting the critical importance of unity and cooperation among SIDS in addressing shared challenges such as climate change, debt sustainability and economic vulnerability.

Fiji was represented by myself as the head of the delegation, supported by permanent representatives to the United Nations and the High Commissioner to United Kingdom, the Permanent Secretary for Environment and Climate Change, the Director of National Disaster Management Office, the Director of Multilateral Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and key Ministry Officials. Their participation in the general debate, side events and bilateral meetings highlighted

Fiji's commitment to the SIDS agenda and our leadership in the global discourse on sustainable development.

The Fiji delegation co-hosted and participated in 11 side events on a range of issues, including early warning systems, marine biodiversity protection, SDG localisation, enhancing the digital economy and leveraging data and technology to improve planning and decision making.

On key decisions and outcomes. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the SIDS global agenda has been shaped by the Programmes of Action adopted at previous SIDS Conferences, the;

- (1) 1994 Barbados Programme of Action;
- (2) 2005 Mauritius Strategy; and
- (3) 2014 the Samoa Pathway.

The 4th SIDS Conference in Antigua and Barbuda builds upon this legacy with the adoption of the “Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS (ABAS) - A Renewed Declaration for Resilient Prosperity.” ABAS outlines the sustainable development aspirations of SIDS over the next 10 years and calls for international support to strengthen health systems, build strong institutions, achieve gender equality, and empower youth. It also seeks support for conserving, restoring, and sustainably using oceans, marine resources, and biodiversity, while facilitating easier access to affordable and concessional finance.

Mr. Speaker Sir, ABAS identifies priority areas for SIDS, including building economic resilience, scaling-up climate and biodiversity action and support, conserving and sustainably using ocean resources, mainstreaming disaster risks, health, data and statistics, science and technology, populations, and partnerships. Partnerships are the cornerstone for implementing this agenda, requiring strategic collaborations with multilateral and bilateral development partners and through South-South and triangular cooperation.

Numerous initiatives were launched at the 4th SIDS Conference, including a Centre of Excellence for SIDS and a Debt Sustainability Support Service, both to be based in Antigua and Barbuda. Multilateral and bilateral development partners also announced commitments such as scaling up international climate finance and mobilising public and private investments for SIDS. Throughout the conference, significant discussions were held on revitalising SIDS economies for accelerated sustainable growth, enhancing financing and aid effectiveness, leveraging digital technologies, making climate finance work for SIDS, and investing in human capital.

The adoption of the Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS, a renewed declaration for resilient prosperity was welcomed as a robust outcome, encapsulating commitments across critical areas such as climate action, debt sustainability, digital transformation, and human capital development. Importantly, it seeks to usher in a new era of development for SIDS, focused on securing more equitable approaches and a better “fit for purpose” modalities for donor support.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the consensus established at SIDS4 on key financing priorities and reforms required from the global community and existing financing architecture, set a strong basis for SIDS positions at last month's Summit of the Future in New York held in September, from the 22nd to 23rd. A key element emphasised by all SIDS was the value of the Multidimensional Vulnerability Index, a methodology designed to provide a more comprehensive picture of national context.

Without a robust means to assess national circumstances beyond GDP alone, SIDS will continue to face challenges in accessing finance, managing debt levels, and stimulating private sector investment. Concessional financing for SIDS is essential to building structural resilience, growing

sustainable economies, protecting biodiversity, and advancing a sustainable and productive ocean-based sustainable economies. The conference saw the launch of several specific new initiatives, including the Centre of Excellence for SIDS and the SIDS Debt Sustainability Service Initiative, aimed at addressing unsustainable debt burdens faced by many small islands.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is crucial to emphasise that the priorities outlined in ABAS align with our national development plans and the region's 2050 Strategy for a Blue Pacific Continent. Integrating SIDS priorities into our policies and plans is imperative to achieving coherent and comprehensive progress towards the sustainable development agenda. ABAS has been adopted by the UN General Assembly in July, and the Summit of the Future offers world leaders another chance to forge a global consensus and support for the Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS.

Mr. Speaker Sir, I acknowledge the Fiji delegation who actively participated at the conference sessions, including at the general debate, the interactive dialogues, the high-level events convened by the UN Secretary-General, more than 20 technical side events, and more than 10 bilateral meetings. The UN Secretary-General has warned that we are confronting a climate crisis with the speed and urgency of a Formula 1 car, but we are responding with outdated and inadequate tools. The Government cannot tackle this challenge alone, we need the entire society to unite in developing innovative solutions to strengthen our resilience.

Despite being the lowest greenhouse gas emitters, we face the most severe climate impacts. We must demand debt reduction and cancellation and ensure easier access to climate financing. Investing in green and resilient infrastructure is essential for our survival and a sustainable future. Now is the time to be bold, take decisive action, and lead the way for our people and our planet. Thank you very much Mr. Speaker Sir for the opportunity.

MR. SPEAKER.— Thank you, honourable Minister for that very informative statement that you have just undertaken. And before we invite the Leader of Opposition to make his comments or response, honourable Members, we have two streams here, SIDS, Small Island Development States. One is being headed by the honourable Minister that have just attended the meeting in the West Indies and the other one is chaired by the honourable Leader of the Opposition here, comes under SIDS as well that falls under the International Parliamentary Union (IPU).

We, in the Pacific, I lost kind of pride in this whole process, some are attending that meeting, some are attending this meeting. We just come back from Palau, that is part of the SIDS that we are part of, and now we are going to be hosting another one in Nadi, in the hope that we can bring something together. Otherwise, I will find myself in a very terrible situation because I do not know, there is two SIDS here and we are both for Fiji.

I think it is better that we come to some understanding, someone has to pull out, we are already chairing this one here and we had several meetings in Natadola where people from the West Indies attended as well. And then, we have this one here, because we were wondering who was going to go there then all of a sudden, we saw your delegation honourable Minister attending this one here.

So, for the sake of trying to get some semblance here, what should we do? That is the question I would like to pose here before the Leader of Opposition makes his statement and the G9-bloc. We need to wind this out, otherwise there will be two groups attending the same meeting, and that meeting that occurs in the IPU, I lead that delegation all the time. So, it is a big waste of money and resources.

(Honourable Member interjects)

MR. SPEAKER. – Let us suspend the proceedings now and thrash this out, because we need to come up with a better alternative. Otherwise, the honourable Minister will be making submission down there. It is linked to the UN. That particular one is linked to the Forum Secretariat and this one here, is under IPU. So, this is where Parliamentarians have to decide and make submissions on issues like this on climate change and everything.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Yes, let us agree that we suspend proceedings, so we can tackle this one here. For the sake of just trying to find ourselves in a single vote all the time, we agree. So, we will suspend proceedings and let us thrash this one out.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD. – Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. First of all, let me say that you are making a very valid point about the issue and sometimes an overlap of issues being discussed in the same way in different forums. I think there is a difference, the International Parliamentary Union (IPU) is really an institution of legislators which includes both Government and Opposition. It is a separate international organisation designed to bring legislators together so that they have a different platform to address these global issues in a legislative framework and how the legislature can behave.

The SIDS is a UN platform and is a kind of a multilateral organisation, represented most of the time by governments, ministers, policymakers and officials. It is a different stream, and I think the reason why it is different is because the legislators have a different role in terms of supporting the UN system or the multilateral agencies.

I think what we are doing, Mr, Speaker, Sir, here is very good. Under your leadership and from the Government side as well, we are trying to involve the Opposition in a much bigger way. For example, when we go to COP, COP is really not a parliamentary delegation, but it is a government delegation. But it does not stop Government from taking the legislators from the Opposition side so that we build consensus in our own Parliament, in our own policies.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, then we have what we call Pacific SIDS, for example. Yesterday, the meeting that I opened for Pacific Climate Change Ministers was really about the Pacific SIDS coming together and working out their position on a number of issues like the new quantified goal, because we want to have a Pacific position. So, it is a separate PSIDS, it is a separate smaller grouping. But then the parliamentary PSIDS of the Pacific has a broader agenda.

However, your point is taken, I think we can connect and share information from the Government point of view, which our Members of Parliament and is good that the honourable Leader of the Opposition is chairing. So, he has the benefit of knowing and understanding the Government processes, but also contributing to a broader legislative framework beyond our Parliament.

So, I think there is a difference and that will continue. The IPU is really not a UN organisation, it is an international body to support legislators around the world because in some countries, their situation is really bad, and you come up with issues that others are able to share. So, I hope that clarifies Government allocation of resources for delegations and maybe the honourable Leader of the Opposition may want to add to it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think this is a learning for all of us. The honourable Prime Minister and I did mention this yesterday, when we talked about Fiji's Foreign Policy White Paper, he says that “oh our Foreign Policy White Paper says that regionalism and multilateralism are force multipliers for our foreign policy.” The Pacific Small Island Developing States (PSIDS) that is the regional body, same thing with the Caribbean, they have the CARICOM,

they are regional bodies. But when we go into multilateralism, that is where the geopolitics. The geopolitics are just divided into main regions, and you will be aware, Mr. Speaker, Sir, PSIDS when it goes into multilateral bodies, we connect to the Alliance of Small Island States.

For your information, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Chairmanship is going to change from Samoa to Palau, that is happening next year. An Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS). When we use the UN system links to G77+China, the biggest voting bloc in the United Nations. That includes Asia Pacific because we are the region and the African Union as well, of course the Caribbean, we are the biggest voting bloc.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, multilateralism has so many bodies. The first multilateral body was the IPU. It was formed in 1865 or 1868, the first multilateral body and then we have the United Nations (UN) that was formed in 1945. Under the UN there are so many other arms of the UN. One is the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), for the Paris Agreement, the Climate Change we have United Nations Framework and Conventions for Climate Change (UNFCCC).

I believe that the honourable Minister for Lands is going to another Conference of Parties (COP) very soon, I think it is the one on biodiversity, The Minister for Agriculture is our representative to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), that is another body. So, all these are multilateral bodies and for us, in terms of the way forward, we need both.

What is importance for us is the consistency in our messaging from regional into AOSIS, into G77 plus China, into the UNFCCC, into the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), which you will be heading next week. These are all multilateral bodies, we act locally, but we think globally. That is the main thing in all this, all Minister, all Members of Parliament must be aware of all this regional arrangements. That is why we insisted that a bus be brought into the house.

For consistency, I would recommend, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we have done in your IPU team, before a delegation leaves particularly when you attend a multilateral meeting, there is a Bureau for Multilateral in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and it is the best thing for us to seek advice because there are Fiji positions on most of these issues. You cannot just go and say your own! You must anchor on Fiji's position, and Fiji's position is best known in Foreign Affairs. You can be interviewed on what is Fiji's position and that is why it is advisable.

That is regionalism into multilateralism, and multilateralism has so many arms. One is the IPU, and we are chairing SIDS. We want to bring up SIDS as a recognised body within IPU. Seychelles initiated back to our special circumstances and needs, back to Bermuda. If we always anchor on this, this is all connected to our National Development Plan, our Foreign Policy White Paper, now we have a bus, our position on the Paris Agreement and, of course, the other issues.

I think we need both, Mr. Speaker, Sir, but we need work together so that the message from our bus is consistent with the UN Summit. The UN Summit for the future was headed by His Excellency last week and we participated. So, the messaging from this is what we will need to take to IPU, I have some documents for you, Sir, for our meeting next week, so that consistency is there. But we just need to work together on Fiji's position.

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you honourable Member. The honourable Prime Minister has led the way. Now, he is kind of withdrawing himself from the COP Meetings because he feels that the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance and other Deputy Prime Ministers and Ministers should be part of that delegation where we go in and bid as a Government. As a Government, we, in attending IPU, will only have to be riding on whatever policies you put in place but that is the confusion that it creates.

The confusion that it creates, I would like to share this, in the Pacific we have 13 countries and out of these 13, some are tied to another regional group which has Indonesia as a member and even Australia. The rest of us in the Pacific, we are kind of lost here but even though that SIDS meeting that you attended, honourable Minister, I find that there is a connection there, because then you have PIF and then it comes down. So whatever policies that are being raised by the Government to PIF and to the UN, that is the channel it goes through.

But here, when you are talking about the same thing, I am probably at a loss! I am sitting here in the meeting, and I think I have heard this already from the Government. Then all of a sudden you are sitting there, and Fiji is being pushed around. We made an attempt to ensure that we are properly advised from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs before we attend our meeting. We would like to see what is the position that we are going to take when going to IPU. Because over there it is a different story altogether, you have 180 countries in the IPU and UN is only 190 something.

In terms of membership, IPU is a fully fledged organisation, but in terms of financing that you just discussed in Antigua, Sir, that is interesting! Because that is lacking here, yet we are part of the Government. So which one do we take? Now the honourable Leader of the Opposition is suggesting both to continue, but I think we should make a fair decision here because IPU is for us, Parliamentarians. That is the body that is settled there for us and at the same time it is the UN as well for which we are a member of.

And the different bodies, different organisations that exist. For someone new like me coming in, I find it confusing, because Indonesia is there, and we have to sort things out with this West Papua. But by going to Indonesia, I have recently found out that they have done a lot, even West Papua and Papua New Guinea have close collaborations with them as well, and that is interesting. So, that is all I am asking honourable Minister.

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir. I would just like to share that there were indeed some learnings that we had during that SIDS Conference, and as the Leader of the Opposition has shared, the general positions of the nation should be made very well clear before we leave. And the coordinating function of the line ministry should be very well established and should be supported. That is something that we should continue to work on, to strengthen.

MR. SPEAKER.- What is the general consensus here, both to continue?

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Yes, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- But we talk some more. We are using Foreign Affairs before we attend, but at the same time at least we hear from them. So, there will be two going to SIDS. Thank you, that is a bit clearer now.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- May I respond to the Ministerial Statement Sir?

MR. SPEAKER.- Yes.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- I have shared a part of it.

MR. SPEAKER.- We will recommend and continue with the debate.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Probably just to add light to this, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Maybe I will start with the UN Summit of the Future. His Excellency the Head of the delegation and we welcome the honourable Assistant Minister from the Prime Minister's office back. He just landed this morning.

What is important, and the takeaway from here is, moving forward. So, strategically when we had the briefing with honourable Naivalurua at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, we strategically asked for sessions where we can bring back issues that will help us in terms of moving forward.

The first meeting that I attended, and as far as the subject matter is concerned is, the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS). The good thing is I will not repeat what the buzz is all about, but this is something that we will take in your IPU meeting. Of course, one interesting thing out of the AOSIS meeting is the Declaration Statehood and Sea-Level Rise. We can access this information, because we have a very strong positions on this, but perhaps with Fiji, honourable Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs and honourable Assistant Minister for the Office of the Prime Minister, we have agreed to Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) in September last year. The expectation from our prime office is for it to be ratified, but it has taken one year now for us to ratify the BBNJ. If Government can take that seriously, because everything about oceans, we the Pacific SIDS, must always champion it.

We were the authors of United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), and we hosted the First World Oceans Conference, again on biodiversity, and this is why it is so important, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The plea from our permanent representative in the UN, if we ratify, if we can work on the instruments and there is a World Oceans Conference in Nice in France next year. If we can ratify the BBNJ before that meeting, because it is important, it is strategic for Fiji.

Just the key takeaway, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for your information. The Climate Vulnerability Forum, that used to be chaired by Ghana, now it has been handed over to Barbados. It works well for us, and I would also plead with the Government.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Prime Minister of Barbados is the voice now of SIDS, Mia Mottley. She is from the Caribbean. But we need a Mia Mottley from the Pacific on our issues. That is why COP29 is very important because it is a finance COP they call it, because everyone is demanding now for a restructure of the Global Climate Finance Framework. I attended one with the Permanent Secretary for Environment and it was very interesting, Sir.

Fiji, to our surprise, some of our best practices were highlighted in that, on the innovative ways, rather than waiting for the Global Climate Fund and the Adaptation Fund. Some innovative ways in which we can just finance our own adaptation and mitigation to support our climate change initiatives. The Permanent Secretary for Environment has got that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, but I think what is of interest to your office is the handing over from Ghana now to Barbados. We have been trying Barbados in the IPU, they were missing from our previous two meetings. Now that they are chair of the Climate Vulnerability Forum, we have to get them this time, because this is all.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the most important messages for us is consistency in our messaging and the other one is application. We have committed the best, and the next thing now is for us to apply and put into action a buzz UNFCCC, Sendai Framework and so forth. This is where our National Development Plan all connects. Perhaps the last thing that I want to say, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is, I think the key takeaway that I took away as well was data, and monitoring and evaluation in terms of application. They are saying on AI, a predicted future is a future that we built, and we can only build that predicted future with data, and monitoring and evaluation is important. We have learnt a lot, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and we will sit with the Government side to share this so that we can move the country forward. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER.- Yes, honourable Leader of G9-Bloc.

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr, Speaker, Sir, firstly I would like to thank the honourable Minister for his update on the meeting in May that he attended. Much has been said about this report. I think it is all good. It is aligned to Fiji's ambitions. It is aligned to our 2050 strategy moving forward. It is aligned to the intent of Government and likewise this side for a better future for Fiji.

Membership of all these multilateral or bilateral organisations is a must for a Small Island State like Fiji. I support what the honourable Leader of the Opposition has said on his observation and the way forward and what must be done, and likewise what you have also stated, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

I have four points here that I just wanted to raise to support the report and aligned to Fijis ambition forward.

- (1) I believe in catapulting Fiji forward as not only a Small Island State but a nation state that has proven in its most difficult situation, it has been able to survive and prove to the world that we are a nation that could be used as a good model for the other island states. It calls for a closer collaboration, Sir and a very strong ambition that must be maintained wherever we are.
- (2) We must have very strong and very clear plans, and this is what they will ask us. We can make as much noise if we want to. We can talk as much as we want to. The honourable Leader of the Opposition is aware of his experience with the Chinese. We can talk so much, and they will simply ask, what are your plans? Where are your plans? And this is a very important point, and I am so happy that now we have the NDP and to hear that the key outcomes that the honourable Minister attended is really aligned to our NDP and that is a very good, Mr. Speaker, Sir.
- (3) Is really our ability to sniff where the opportunities are, and this comes about through good engagement, good network and building good relationships and that is very important. To do that, there is a call for closer coordination in our work here. Sometimes we go out in various meetings. We really do not know what the left and the right is doing. So, our discussions this morning, your guidance, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is very important. So, the way forward in our thinking from this side, I think the way forward is about a joint effort representing both sides in whatever meeting it is.
- (4) Last and not least, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the fourth point I wanted to add to our deliberations this morning, is in everything or whatever meeting we attend we must come back and deliver. There is evidence of the actions that we have, so that when we go back, we can tell them these are the evidence in what we have implemented.

So, once again, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I am calling for collaboration, strong ambition, good strong plans, the ability to sniff out opportunities and last and not least is really about delivering this evidence is in the actions we make.

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you very much, honourable Members and for that I am quite content now that the joint effort is to be led by the honourable Minister for Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management and the honourable Minister for Foreign Affairs. So, then we will be able to be guided well, in this other arm of Government going separately to IPU. So, we deliver the same message, because the other Pacific countries are looking towards us as well.

Tonga of late, and Palau have been pushing, supported by Tahiti that we were to have another new way of organising ourselves in the region and I said, no, we have met and I was advised by the

honourable Leader of Opposition with Mereseini Vuniwaqa the former Minister for Women, that it is best that we hold off for a while and just try and put off that supposed plan and have something organised in the meeting in Nadi. That was quickly sent across to the honourable Prime Minister in China which he endorsed and that is the meeting we are about to have. So, at least we will have the single communication meeting coming from one group rather than two.

These two as you have highlighted, honourable Members, is to help us to say our bit in whatever comes our way in terms of IPU or the Government. The Government, the honourable Minister for Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management is leading that area in attending that and perhaps, if we may continue, we will get ourselves organised and I will be seeking the honourable Prime Ministers advice as well on this as to see how best we can go forward with us saying the same message all the time instead of two or three.

That is all, Sir, and we will now adjourn for lunch since it is 12.30 p.m. We will resume when the bell is sounded.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.41 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.40 p.m.

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

Construction of Telecommunication Tower (Question No. 238/2024)

HON. T.R. MATASAWALEVU asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-operatives, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications inform Parliament if there are any plans to construct telecommunication towers in the Nasau District in Ra?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I answer the question by honourable Matasawalevu, I just thought to respond to honourable Rinesh Sharma's comments about the FRU and I thought I just make something very clear particularly to the public of Fiji. The trustees of the Fiji Rugby Union have been vilified unjustifiably. These men and women, we should call them "heroes" because they came in when FRU was on its knees. We had uncovered that the whole FRU structure was illegal. You talked about disconnected, there was one big disconnection, Sir, happening there. The trustees were asked to come in and fix the problem and it was made very clear to FRU at that time that if they did not fix it, we were going to be out of the World Cup.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Trustees did that. They not only ensured we stayed, and they played very well in the World Cup and also, they were on a pathway now to return power back to the board of FRU on 28th November. I just thought I would share that with the public of Fiji that criticisms are fair, but we need to be, sometimes research a bit before we make criticisms because sometimes maybe we are being a bit unfair particularly, in this case on the trustees who have not been paid a single cent to actually carry out the work they have carried out.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Point of Order – Standing 80 on Personal Explanation.

MR. SPEAKER.- It is a personal explanation. This is something that is in conjunction with what you have stated, honourable Sharma.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Sir, the honourable Minister has accused me of what you said in Parliament. So, it is directed to me and indirectly to you. It was just posted on their page by the honourable Minister for Youth and Sports.

MR. SPEAKER.- I am not reacting to it because I have stated what I wanted to state based on something I heard being mentioned by the honourable Minister for Sports and that is where it ends. I am not going to take it any further.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, now I will address honourable Matasawalevu's question. I think the simple answer to the question is, yes. The People's Coalition Government is very committed to ensuring that we reach the unconnected, Sir, and included in that is all provinces in Fiji.

Having said that, Sir, I would like to tell a story just to explain why it is taken a bit of a time to actually get to where we are getting to now. When I got into the Ministry of Communications, you could say there was a fair bit of dysfunctional in that Ministry:

- (1) They did not have a properly constituted telecommunications authority. The Board was actually just some civil servants that the Minister at that time had gathered together. What I knew, any regulatory body has to have the best of Fiji on this Board. So, one of the jobs was to actually reconstitute the Telecommunications Authority of Fiji (TAF) Board which we have done. It is chaired by a gentleman by the name of David Eyre, he is a well-known telecommunications expert in Fiji and also an engineer. There is the name such as Tomasi Vakatora (Junior) on the Board. He is a well-known Senior Executive in Fiji, was at one time the CEO of ATH. These are the types of people we brought on the Board. This is just like the Civil Aviation Board that I had mentioned yesterday.
- (2) There was no CEO in Telecommunications Authority of Fiji. I am not sure for how long and so once the Board settled in, their next job was to actually find a CEO, he has now been appointed. One of his main jobs, Sir, is to rollout the connecting the unconnected to the rest of Fiji.
- (3) When I got the declaration on universal areas, and we have to gazette the locations that we decide that we are going to rollout connectivity to. The latest Gazette from the Government at that time was 6th July, 2022 so it is fairly recent. There was no mention of the Province of Ra here – zero. Honourable Matasawalevu, you are not even officially on the list of the sites that are to be looked at.

Having said that, Sir, I asked the Telecommunications Authority to relook at the sites, at this stage, prioritising the maritime areas and then looking at other areas that have not been covered. At the moment there are about another 80 sites that have been identified which includes Ra. That will come on board and then we will try and prioritise the actual rollout of the sites.

The first deployment which is like, sort of a test deployment will happen towards the end of this year and that is a rollout to some of the maritime locations. Once that happens, that includes Lau, Kadavu and Lomaiviti, then we will start rolling out. There is a fund called the “Universal Service Fund” that actually sits in the Ministry of Communications, we are using that fund, but it is not enough, Sir. I will be reaching out to donor partners as well to try and accelerate the connecting the unconnected.

One of the positive things, Sir, that we all know about is, whilst we are trying to get this going, Starlink has arrived in town. Some of our people that can afford the connectivity, and some are doing it through their relatives overseas, I think, here are two in Nairai. That has already started so that is creating some positive assistance in terms to those who want connectivity more urgently.

Sir, in a nutshell, yes, we will look at Nasau District as part of the overall plan. Right now, we just have to make sure we plan out the initial phase like on a model launch, if you like, Sir. Once that is done, and then will have a firmer plan and hopefully by then, we have some donor partners so that we can then accelerate the process. Again, Sir, as you know, it needs a bit of a well-articulated plan before we actually go and see the donor partners as well. In essence, Sir, where we are at in terms of the planned rollout but be assured, we are very serious and doing our best to get this moving.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Honourable Minister, I understand stand what you are saying in terms of rolling out this particular programme, but in terms of the actual hardware that is going to be put on the ground, it is the Ministry that is paying for the hardware that is going in, but like you said, maybe

the donor partners will be involved. Will these towers also, wherever it is put, whether it is in Ra or in Vanua Levu, will you still be permitting Digicel, Vodafone, et cetera to share these towers and other institutions that are involved?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- That is a very good question. We are trying to be agnostic when it comes to operators that sit on a tower because it is just more efficient to operate that way. At the moment, in the lead up to the launch process, all the Telcos and the other satellite providers are providing offerings to the Ministry of Communications to assess the best option.

One of the other things as well, you kind of touched on it, how we actually make payments to the Telcos once they actually do the rollout. We are using the USAID through their expertise there to assist TAF to work out the payment modelling to ensure that when we roll out the towers and the CAPEX is spent by the Telcos, the compensation is sorted as well. As you correctly pointed out, what sort of mode of payment will happen? So those are being part and parcel of consideration of the first rollout, Sir.

Partnership Arrangement – NZMFAT and Ministry of Housing
(Question No. 239/2024)

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL asked the Government, upon notice.

Can the honourable Minister for Housing and Local Government update Parliament on the partnership arrangement between the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Ministry of Housing?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to respond to the question before the House and I thank the honourable Member for the question. This agreement started back in December 2019 after Cabinet approval albeit the Ministry of Housing and the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade for a period of three years until December 2022. The new Partnership Agreement was recently endorsed by Cabinet on 12th September, 2024 for a term until April 2029. From the day of the signing, it is expected to be done before the end of this month, October 2024.

The collaboration aimed to support Fiji's ambition to improve socio economic outcomes for low-income earners in Fiji through improved access to quality, affordable housing, support good governance between partners and to facilitate efficient management of resources for greater efficacy and impact.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the arrangement includes technical assistance through the provision of a housing policy advisor with the Ministry of Housing. This advisor will strengthen policy and planning efforts, support the Ministry's regulatory role and oversee the finalisation and implementation of the National Housing Policy Framework. Additionally, the advisor will facilitate Fiji's housing stakeholders' coordination platform to support this initiative. Sir, NZMFAT will cover recruitment and salary costs up to six months totalling NZ\$1.75 million (equivalent to FJ\$2.4 million).

Mr. Speaker, Sir, NZMFAT also co-funds the revitalisation of Informal Settlement and Environment (RISE) Programme. It aims to improve infrastructure and implement sustainable water and sanitation management systems in six vulnerable informal settlements within the greater Suva area. Sir, NZMFAT will provide funding close to NZ\$3.6 million (FJ\$5 million) and oversee governance for this initiative. The phase one site include Matata in Lami, which comprise of about 62 households, Wailea in Raiwaqa of 104 households, Muanivatu in Vatuwaqa, comprising of 96

households, Wanibua in Muanikoso of 43 households, Komave in Nabua of 47 households and Nauluvatu Reservoir Road which has about 91 families.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the overarching objective is to eliminate the risk of exposure to contamination and where we cannot eliminate, RISE aims to reduce the communities' risk to exposure to contamination by at least 80 percent. Sir, RISE through its programme, is also doing this by treating wastewater in these communities and reducing exposure by alleviating flooding and reducing interventions to disrupt pathway and pathogens from environment to humans. These interventions include are few key areas, drainage works, pathways, wet ponds, bathroom and toilet facilities, spot backfilling, pressure sewers, communal sewer tanks, treatment wetlands, as well as there is a demonstration now at Tamavua-i-wai which has about seven pressure tanks, one treatment wetland, 16 wet ponds, a spot backfilling and one communal sewer tank.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, through this agreement, NZMFAT is also co-funding the Model Town Charitable Trust (MTCT) known as Koroipita which offers subsidised climate resilient, housing and community support services to over 1,000 residents. Both NZMFAT and the Ministry of Housing are part of the MTCT governance group with NZMFAT responsible for providing co--funding support. The total funding allocated for this is around NZ\$6.1 million, and New Zealand has already provided funding of NZ\$3.2 million (FJ\$4.4 million) from 2019 to 2024.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, NZFAT will further assist through institutional strengthening providing support for a two-way planning concept to the Ministry of Housing to improve overall health, structure and functioning of the organisation. Sir, NZMFAT will provide funding support to the Ministry of Housing through a separate climate funding arrangement for the development of the Strategic Development Plan (SDP). This initiative is timely, coinciding with the current launching of the 2025-2030 National Development Plan envisioned in 2014. It will act effectively and guide the Ministry and the stakeholders in achieving strategic outcomes for the housing sector.

Sir, NZMFAT will also provide funding to support the establishment of the Ministry of Housing's National Housing Database which we currently do not have one at the moment. The database will be a comprehensive and centralised system to collect, maintain and analyse data related to the housing sector at a national level to inform targeted policy intervention. The total funding for the provision of analytical systems, institutional strengthening at the Ministry of Housing, as well as its SDP and the standard of National Housing Database is around NZ\$1.7 million equivalent FI\$2.3 million.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Coalition Government through the Ministry of Housing acknowledges and thanks the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade for its support. The outcome of this partnership will create opportunities for:

- (1) Increase access to affordable high quality social housing for Fijian communities;
- (2) Increase provision and coordination of basic services to informal settlements in the greater Suva area; and
- (3) Increase strategy and planning capacity in the public sector for long term development with the housing sector.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in terms of execution and monitoring, a Project Steering Committee will be established whose role is to govern and manage the delivery of the activities within the housing sector. This Committee is to meet every three months, and its membership comprises of the Permanent Secretary of Housing, NZMFAT representatives and the Ministry of Housing Advisor. The role of the Committee is to provide high level strategic guidance, receive and review workplans and progress reports as well as address any policy or strategy issues as they arise.

Of the RISE Programme, Mr. Speaker, Sir, a Technical Advisory Group comprising representatives of the Ministry of Housing and RISE Fiji will provide clinical advice to the Steering Committee and service providers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, through this arrangement, NZMFAT will provide an indicative funding amount of close to NZ\$11.5 million (FJ\$15.9 million) directly to the service providers for the technical assistance. The programme and the model town's trust subject to conditions that NZMFAT will enter into within the service provider for the delivery of the above-mentioned activities and the New Zealand Government policy and the appropriation by the New Zealand Parliament of sufficient funds to support the activities. The partnership, Mr. Speaker, Sir, with the Ministry of Housing will be reviewed every three years from the date of signing.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this partnership agreement should enhance the Ministry of Housing's Services by leveraging resources, expertise and best practices from both parties. It fosters collaboration to address housing challenges more effectively, ensures alignment with national and international goals enhancing funding opportunities. Ultimately, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this partnership is anticipated to lead to improve housing outcomes and greater community resilience.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, if I heard rightfully, the honourable Minister mentioned that they will be providing assistance to six informal settlements within the greater Suva area to cater for clean drinking water. My question to the honourable Minister is, we have done a \$300 million Viria Water Project. What went wrong with this particular project that we actually have to fork out more money to cater for clean drinking water, especially in the greater Suva area whereby we had invested \$300 million.

While it is imperative for us to actually assist informal settlements, my question to the honourable Minister, what about the formal settlements around these informal settlements that are actually facing this water disruption till to-date because of these informal settlements? The infrastructure was only done for the formal settlements, not to cater for informal settlements. One common example, I would actually give, in Vatuwaqa, there is a 4- inch pipe running for the formal settlements and then there is a 200 to 300 additional connections throughout the Wailea Informal Settlement and Nanuku. The formal settlements are also facing the same issue. So why is preference only given to informal settlements and not to include the formal settlements in this area?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, I thank the honourable Member for the question. I think the assistance that is fully supported by the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade is to support the vulnerable families. These are the poor of the poorest. These are people who do not have access to infrastructure that is supplied by the State. These are the people who live on the edges of the town and do not have access to the basic services or amenities. I think we should be thankful that this Government has come on board to support these families, not from our budget but it will be funded by the New Zealand Government with the support of the Monash University in Australia. I think this is a very good initiative and we should be supportive.

It is one area that is also going to support the government in the provision of these basic services to some of these settlements that have been there without the process of going through the respective agencies and ministries to support some of these settlements. In a way, the funding is to support the poor of the poorest, those that actually do not have access to basic services and amenities. The issue with some of these informal settlements that face the difficulty with the supply of water to formal settlements, that is something that the Ministry is looking at right now is how best we can identify some spaces where we can actually relocate some of these settlements and also provide them with the basic necessities, proper piping, proper infrastructure to assist some of these informal settlements.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as highlighted by the honourable Minister, this partnership arrangement started in 2019 and it is almost like six years now. Of course, the project was disrupted by COVID-19. My question to the honourable Minister is how long is the tenure of the Technical Advisor's role and what are the expected milestone or deliverables under his leadership?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the programme will go up to 2029 as I had also mentioned in my speech. Some of the key roles of the Technical Advisor is to assist the Ministry to providing technical support. Currently you must have also heard and seen in the news that the Ministry of Housing is doing a Review of the National Housing Policy. We have an advisor from the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade currently now with the team going around our areas where the consultations will be held, supporting the Ministry in the review and the Ministry has found it very positive on the contribution provided by the Technical Advisor and also going to help the Ministry in providing institutional support and capabilities in strengthening the systems within the Ministry of Housing. Like having a database in place, that is something the support officers will need an expertise to support the Ministry in providing these various core responsibilities

Based on my delivery, I have also mentioned that profiling will continue but depending on the Parliamentary support by the New Zealand Government. As long as we need assistance from them, they will continue to assist the Fijian Government as well as the Ministry of Housing.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I understand the consultation started in 2021 and 2022 because the work was substantially done. How much more time do you think it will take for us to finalise the National Housing Policy considering that in the last two budgets, we are not talking about finalising, we are talking about implementation when we have heard from you that one has to finalise the policy first?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the timeline for the Ministry is to complete and also forward to Cabinet for approval before the end of this year. Once we finish all our consultations, after completion of the report, we will have to report back to Cabinet for endorsement and confirmation of the review of the National Housing Policy.

MR. SPEAKER.- I wanted to add some more on these informal things and how it is kind of chewed in heavily into the coffers of Government, especially to do with formal and informal, water supply, electricity and roads. I think we covered this substantially in the last few years, but the policy of the Government has changed a lot. We never used to encourage this before but since it is a human rights issue.

Previous governments have kind of lent some ears to how the unfortunate and people who cannot afford could be helped. The outcome of that is chewed into the formal sector on the water supply, roading, electricity because people were looking for their votes both in the Local Government and in the National Elections, that has brought about the change. So, the formal sector will have to bear with the sharing of all these benefits so to speak, that has changed a lot.

I remember asking the honourable Premila Kumar when she was the Minister for Housing, can we not relax the town planning stringent conditions? Instead of curbed and tarsealed road, we go for gravel? Just some kind of subdivision where, at least, peg marks of the allotment are clearly demarcated, and we will be able to re-establish the boundaries again. But again, the reply that was provided was, what we give out to be the same; same for those that can afford and same for the housing to help the poor, to get the title. To get a proper title you need the proper infrastructure and that is highly expensive, very costly. The Government has to bear that.

Operational Procedures - Monitoring and Regulation
(Question No. 240/2024)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport inform Parliament on the operational procedures to monitor and regulate the movement of small boats travelling between islands?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for the question which have also been alluded to slightly this morning. There have been challenges and we do agree and as acknowledged in terms of the monitoring and regulations of small boats travelling between our coastal communities, between islands.

First and foremost, the safety of small boats and monitoring rests with the boat owners and boat masters. If they are certified, they do know what to do and they are trained in it. What MSAF is working on now is to establish, the current problem we have is the monitoring and implementation of the regulations down to village level.

There are MSAF officers based at various locations, but they cannot cover or monitor everything. Sir, MSAF is currently working on consultations on a MOU with the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs for the engagement and assistance of *Turaga ni Koro*, or *Mata ni Tikina* as a sort of Enforcement Officers or Compliance. This could involve:

- checks on registration of small boats to ensure that these small boats have been serviced and registered;
- have the right safety equipment;
- those who are operating it are qualified of the Certificate of Competency;
- able to provide advice to boat owners in terms of the weather situation, right advice on passenger loading capacity and in terms of communication channels available or in instances of emergencies;
- closely liaising with the stakeholders such as the local police; and
- able to submit some kind of monthly report as part of the monthly report that is required with the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs.

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Speaker, a supplementary question. I thank the honourable Minister for his response. The point here is on the enforcement aspects. I understand the big picture at the strategic level, the laws and regulations that has been in place. I just wanted to bring this to the attention of the honourable Minister. It is a tough job on the ground, and I am trying to use Taveuni as an example.

Yesterday, as a matter of just an exercise, I deployed a small team from Naselesele Village to monitor the boats that are coming from Taveuni to Matei Landing; 13 arrived at Matei Landing between 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. Out of the 13, only a few were wearing flak jackets, and the list went on. This morning, the team was deployed again. There were 14 boats that arrived from Qamea and not many were wearing those flak jackets or life jackets. When they were asked, they said, “we left it at home.” where they asked and they said, oh we left it at home.

My question to the honourable Minister, can we review the *modus operandi* at the operational level or tactical level? I know the resources are limited, but it can be done. There are many hands on the ground that could be used just to make sure that it does not result in any of these undue situations that may cost us more, moreso of a life.

MR. SPEAKER.- Before you reply to that, I recalled the statement shared by honourable Naupoto, the Standing Committee travelled from Vanua Levu to Taveuni on two open punts, very little was seen on the safety aspects of that travel. That included the Parliamentary Standing Committee. No life jackets were seen, but these were the ones that were always traversing these two islands.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Sir, as I mentioned, the regulations are there, it is just the monitoring, and I suppose the components of monitoring and enforcement. As I have already mentioned, the infrastructure of the Ministry of the iTaukei Affairs is there, and we are working with them in terms of some of their personnel on how best to do the enforcement and the monitoring. I suppose the other part is, what is the responsibility of the community themselves, and that is the wider awareness and respect in terms of observing safety protocols.

From what I have seen, even crossing rivers in my province, that is a requirement, but they do it once there is an Enforcement Officer there. Once they move away, then it goes back to the old practice. I suppose it is a general attitude in society in terms of safety. I suppose a lot are saying that they are *kai wai*, but no one is a *kai wai*, only the fish, I suppose. Yes, it would involve a community wide or nationwide change in attitude amongst our people. I mean not another taskforce, but just starting from us. I have been guilty of not wearing a life jacket crossing a river, so if the Members of the Standing Committee, I am not sure whether they wore it or not.

HON. MEMBER.- We did.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- You did, okay.

Even for us, Ministers of Members of Parliament can send out that message as we are travelling then that will be good. I am not perfect, I have not practiced it too, but it is something that we need to do. It is just an attitude change. Because Taveuni has been used as an example today, I would like to request the *Turaga Tui Cakau*....

MR. SPEAKER.- You only have one marine checker? We have only one marine checker.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Yes.

MR. SPEAKER.- On the island of Taveuni, yet we have so many *Turaga ni Koro*. How do we get the *Turaga ni Koro* or even the villagers?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- We will work on that with our various stakeholders and ministries, and I request you, Sir, as the paramount chief to also assist with Naselesele and the *tikina* in that regard. We all have to work together in this regard - maritime safety.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, a supplementary question. I thank the honourable Minister for his explanation. It gets a bit worrying to see the actual play that is going on the ground. There are people travelling from Vanuabalavu to Cicia, and they are travelling from Moala to Matuku and to Totoya. I just wanted to ask the question if the honourable Minister think that by, it is a financial return that forces the boat operators to continue? If a fine or some kind of responsibility is given to the boat drivers and the owners just to stop them, it is a huge responsibility of running in the middle of the ocean with a small fibre glass boat. Does the honourable Minister think in the same line as I am thinking?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Yes, that is the in regulations, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- No enforcement.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- the enforcement part is identifying the offender and imposing the fine. There needs to be people there who are identifying and enforcing. In addition to what I mentioned, with the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, we are also increasing the number of enforcement officers. I would like to thank the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance for his thoughts in also assisting us in terms of maritime safety.

MR. SPEAKER.- It is strange to see, even to hear these open boats travelling from Vanua Levu to Tuvalu. You would be surprised. They are frequent users of this passage, the open boat, the punts with no life jackets.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I just have a question for the honourable Minister given this rural area experience. As much as we want to enforce the law, one of the huge problems that people in the rural areas face is access to the items, life jackets, flares, et cetera. That is the usual feedback to us. Why do you make laws but not get these equipment readily accessible to us? It is not a new issue, honourable Minister but probably something that you need to consider or if you have already considered, what is the plan?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- From my understanding, at the beginning when the survey is done, they have it there. I think after that, I am not sure, they go and store it away or something. That is a good suggestion. These things are expensive too and we have to fork out the cost.

The honourable Minister for Finance might look at subsidizing some of these items to assist our rural and maritime operators. That is an option. He is shaking his head. We respond in a positive way to your suggestions and that is something that we will definitely look into. It is not only that, it is the flares and a few other items, the costs have gone up a bit which we need to assist the operators with as they do not earn a high income, they are mostly our rural and maritime community members who have subsistence income. I believe they should be assisted with some sort of subsidy. Thank you for the suggestion, honourable Leader of the Opposition.

MR. SPEAKER.- Life jackets are very expensive. The latest ones look just like a shirt. Not like the big thick ones that we used to have before. These are now in the market but as you said, honourable Minister, they are really expensive.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, just two suggestions to the honourable Minister:

- (1) The introduction for survival swimming, especially in our maritime areas. If your Ministry and MSAF can work with the Ministry of Education as one of the way forward as well as Fiji Navy.
- (2) A reduction of boat marshals' fees.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- We note that, we have received those requests and we are working on it.

Measures to Improve Nadi and Lautoka Water Supply
(Question No. 241/2024)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport update Parliament on what measures are being undertaken to improve the water

supply in the Nadi-Lautoka areas?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- I thank the honourable Sakiusa Tubuna for his question. Sir, with the rapid expansion of the Nadi-Lautoka urban areas, a population of approximately 220,000, the Government of the day sees it fit under the Water Sector Strategy 2050 to account for an investment of approximately \$397 million in the water sector and approximately \$1.22 billion in sanitation by 2050. The measures shall also address the increasing demand for water and wastewater services by the tourism sector.

For the two financial years, 2023-2024, 2024-2025, the Water Authority of Fiji through the funding support of the Fiji Government is investing approximately \$47 million into water and wastewater infrastructure upgrades in order that these projects are aligned to the Water Sector Strategy 2050 Plan against strategic outcomes:

- (1) Access to clean and efficient water services; and
- (2) Access to safe sanitation services which of course is aligned to Section 35 and 36 of the Fijian Constitution.

The significant investment is focussed on improving redundancy and capacity of both water and wastewater systems ensuring that they can cater for existing and future demand. Some of these ongoing projects, Varaqe to Saru Water Treatment Plant Pipeline Works.

Varaqa Dam and Saru Water Treatment Plant were first established in 1959 and the infrastructure, particularly the raw water trunk mains has age significantly over the past 64 years. These assets have not undergone substantial upgrades. Frequent operational issues, natural disasters and environmental wear have compromised the reliability of this system.

To address these challenges a robust design with improved pipe material is being implemented to enhance the resiliency and water conveyance capacity totalling project cost of \$9.7 million which should be completed by December 2024 and Nagado to Nadele trunk mains upgrading works. The Nadi-Lautoka water system faces a supply demand gap of 4.4 megalitres per day or 5.4 million litres per day due to outdated infrastructure and insufficient treatment and conveyance capacity. To address these gaps WAF is upgrading the trunk mains which will ensure a better hydraulic performance, improve redundancy and provide flexibility in operations between Nadi and Lautoka.

The project cost \$8.3 million, duration of 44 weeks, completion date approximately estimated to be December 2024. And of course, I had mentioned prior to the upgrading of the Nagado Water Treatment Plant capacity, the Nagado Water Treatment Plant was originally commissioned in 1982 with a capacity of 45 megalitres per day (MLD) and that has been incrementally upgraded to current capacity of 90 MLD.

However, the plant faces operational challenges. Frequently processing raw water exceeding its design capacity due to increased demand. In addition, fluctuating raw water quality from the Vaturu Dam has exacerbated production limitation and water quality compliance issues. To progressively address this, water authorities installed an additional 20 MLD package treatment plant to increase the treatment capacity, costing \$14.6 million and completion date first quarter of 2025.

Unfortunately, setbacks have been experienced due break-ins and thefts of key essential components and I am requesting to the public to please respect our assets in terms of our public assets supplying basic necessities such as water and even roads and other infrastructure. In addition to those, the planned upgrading of the Wastewater Pump Station and rising main from Denarau Island to the

Water Treatment Plant.

Again, I had already mentioned the current plant was established in the 1970s for the capacity for one or two hotels and not the number of hotels which are there now and planned. So, we need to expand that to accommodate the growing demand for further developments and the pump stations are now operating at the maximum capacity, costing about \$15 million and that has been tendered and we are looking at 24 to 36 months.

In addition, the upgrading of the existing Navakai Wastewater Treatment Plant, this has been there for quite some time and work needs to be done in terms of that to relieve the load and cater for additional wastewater connections which envisage up to 2040. For the Denarau Plant, collaboration has been established with Denarau Corporation Limited and Ministry of Tourism in terms of design and input and also the load. So, we are looking forward to that project, ensuring the future sustainability of water and wastewater services on Denarau.

A major contributor to Fiji's GDP through the tourism industry. So, this project represents major commitments from the Coalition Government and of course acknowledging the building on the work of the last government, which is of course to be commended, in which we prioritise long term development of water and sanitation services across the country in key economic areas such as Nadi and Lautoka. Again, that is the developments which we look forward to, to cater not only for the current challenges, but also the future demands as we move forward in the Nadi and Lautoka areas.

HON. S.S. KIRPAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, a supplementary question. I thank the honourable Minister for his explanation however, I hope he knows that Nadi has Akhil Sam in Nawaicoba. I hope you know that. Is the Coalition Government considering of utilising Akhil Dam to ease the water problem in Nadi because Akhil Mines has a huge volume of water and can ease majority of that problem. You can utilise that dam for the water problem.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Nawaicoba dam, which dam?

HON. S.S. KIRPAL.- Akhil mine dam. I hope you went to that site, Nawaicoba

MR. SPEAKER.- Akhil mines.

HON. S.S. KIRPAL.- Yes, in Rada, Nawaicoba. I think most of them do not know about it.

(Laughter)

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Thank you. We will definitely look into that suggestion.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, first of all, I would like to thank the honourable Minister for providing an update on the measures being undertaken to improve the water supply in the Nadi and Lautoka area. I believe every effort should be made to provide clean water to people. People who live close to Vuda Reservoir, in Lautoka, have raised some concerns and that is regarding fencing and security at the reservoir.

According to them, the reservoir area should be properly fenced, and it should be protected by security, especially at night time, so that the youths do not consume alcohol in the area. That is current practice in that area and my question to the honourable Minister. Are there plans to have the reservoir area, especially this Vuda reservoir area secured so that the reservoir water is not contaminated and safe for consumption?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Yes, in terms of the specific location, we will definitely look into that, but normally there is a facility or asset you secure that and ensure that it is secured, that is my understanding from what I know have security or those who are caretakers there, but that is something I have to check in terms of what you have mentioned.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Nadi and Lautoka are heavily populated areas and of course we need to support the tourism sector. I know the previous government has done direct lines to some of these facilities, but our ability to respond when it comes to times of emergency, the previous government has purchased package plants. So, what is there in your plan about building upon this capability so that we can respond to this request particularly that water is a basic need?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I had mentioned we have the Fiji Water Strategy 2050 which is an assessment of water resources and needs in Fiji and the strategy to address those. So, it is all there in the strategy and that is the plan which we are working on implementing. And it also includes package plants and extending pipelines in addressing areas where the needs for water in terms of not only the urban but rural needs.

Also, we the Government has budgeted \$5 million, close to \$6 million in terms of expanding water sources which will cover the boreholes and that is something which the Ministry of Lands and Water Authority of Fiji and our ministries is working on in terms of implementation and ensuring that those come online to the various committees who are in need of that.

MR. SPEAKER.- Yes, honourable Koya.

HON. F. S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I understand your very comprehensive response, you spoke about waste water treatment plants now, with respect to Nadi and Lautoka both waste water treatment plants sit right at the entrance of the City and the town. Are there plans, or do you have any immediate plans, or in the future to move those wastewater plants outside of the City limits or actually putting it somewhere you do not actually get the smell wafting through the cities in the towns and closer to Denarau, Nadi. I know it is in-between the towns, centre and going towards Denarau, and Lautoka is right at the entrance of the town at Natabua. Have you got plans to move entirely the wastewater treatment plants into an area where it is not going to affect the general public?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU – Yes, there are. Wastewater is an area which we have not developed satisfactorily, in terms of stances and needs, in order to serve up the population so, that is an ongoing assessment. I know that some of the landowners do not want this water treatment near their areas so, there is a current assessment of some of the locations in terms of the viability of them being here and there.

Also, alternative locations, and of course we have to do a cost benefit analysis in terms of moving that. And if there are plans for further developing or moving then we need to have a financing models to support that. So that is something, it is an ongoing work in terms of what the Ministry and the Water Authority of Fiji is doing.

Piped Water Supply to Vunitaqala Settlement
(Question No. 242/2024)

HON. S. NAND asked the Government, upon notice.

Can the honourable Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport update Parliament on when it is likely to have piped water supply for Vunitaqala Settlement in Navua to enable the community to have access to clean drinking

water?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.— Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir. I think that the Parliament has seen enough of me today. Oh no, you still have some more! You are a very popular Minister, Sir.

(Laughter)

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.— So, I am referring to Standing Order 42(1), where the maximum number of questions to be asked of a Minister is two. But I think the interpretation of that might need to be looked at the Business Committee.

Anyway, I thank the honourable Member for the question. So, in the Water Sector 2050 Strategy, if we could all read that so in the next one and a half years, I do not get asked any more questions. But, anyway, jokes aside, it is quite critical and important document. There is a plan for a 10 mega litre reservoir in Wainadoi and network extension at a cost of \$25 billion by 2030, plus a 3 mega litre Navua Water Treatment Plant and power extension at \$8 million by 2030.

In terms of this specific question on Vunitaqala Settlement. In 2022, Rotary Water Pacific undertook some upgrading work in the neighbouring of Maqumaqua Village where new pipes were laid to connect Vunitaqala Settlement. Unfortunately, due to funding constraints, this was not completed to Vunitaqala but Water Authority of Fiji (WAF) has initiated discussions with Rotary Pacific in order to relook at the scope and plan engagement with this settlement, to ensure that there is no overlap in project responsibilities moving forward.

That is still in that stage, relooking at the full scope and we will liaise with the community for another submission to be made, but with required mandatory documents to be made with their submission including the normal land access or access before any work is done. Once these are provided, WAF will be in a position to conduct a feasibility study of the water source and work with the Department of Water and Sewage in terms of the water supply management plan, and we could consider it moving forward in the next budget.

Update – National HIV Surge Strategy 2024-2027
(Question No. 243/2024)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services update Parliament on the National HIV Surge Strategy 2024-2027?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for his question.

In terms of the National HIV Surge Strategy for 2024 – 2027, that has been developed as a response to this sharp and persistence rise in the new cases of HIV in Fiji. As I have mentioned, a number of time UNAIDS - Global AIDS Monitoring Report of 2022 reported that since 2010, the estimated number of new infections in Fiji has risen by 260 percent and unfortunately, we are the second fastest growing epidemic in the Asia Pacific, only behind Philippines (I believe) and we have surpassed Papua New Guinea as well.

Since 2021, just to show some context in terms of the data, the Ministry recorded a new HIV cases in the hundreds for the first time since we reported our first case some 35 years ago in 1989. There were 121 new HIV cases in 2021, 245 new cases in 2022, 450 new cases in 2023 and for this

year in the first six months, we have recorded 552 new cases. Out of those, for this year alone from January till June, 552 new cases, 97 percent were diagnosed in adults and 3 percent, or 12 cases were diagnosed in children less than ten years old.

Divisionally, Sir, the Central and Eastern Divisions recorded 69 percent or 380 new HIV cases. The Western Division recorded 27 percent or 151 new cases. The Northern Division recorded 3 percent of 19 new HIV cases. The male gender is the most affected with 69 percent or 381 new HIV cases.

In terms of mother-to-child transmission of HIV, this has also increased with 14 infections who were diagnosed in newborn babies in 2022, eight in 2023 and so far, in 2024, six from the period of January to June this year. Also, on the same period, 15 percent of more than 552 new cases who were amongst those with injectable illicit drugs. AIDS related deaths has also increased over the years, with 25 deaths in 2021; 46 in 2022; 82 in 2023; and currently we have 13 deaths in 2024.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in terms of the strategy, that was developed following a wider consultation between the stakeholders within the Government and then the community as well. Consultation forums on the strategy organised by the Family Health Division of the Ministry, were attended by the representatives from the faith-based organisations, community support, advocacy groups, partner government agencies, civil society organisations and non-governmental organisations and their contributions and insights have been captured in the strategy.

Input from the Permanent Secretary Sub-Committee on HIV and Illicit Drugs and the HIV Board have been incorporated both senior level bodies have endorsed the Strategy. So, through these consultations, the Surge Strategy has been harmonised with the National Counter-Narcotics Strategy of 2023-2028, which Cabinet had endorsed and is now being implemented. We are not alone in terms of assistance from our international technical organisations such as World Health Organisation (WHO), Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and the Kirby Institute of the University of New South Wales in Australia, who have actively participated in the formulation of the Strategy.

Sir, the HIV Board through its mandated pro under the HIV Act of 2011, have also endorsed the setting up of two multi-sectoral taskforces to facilitate the implementation and roll out of the Strategy. Cabinet on 12th September, 2024 has also endorsed the National HIV Strategy Implementation. Over the months ahead, the Ministry through the taskforces and with the support of our technical and community partners will roll out the strategy to the whole of Fiji.

People may ask what does the Strategy comprise? There are five priority areas that addresses the need to increase public awareness and understanding of HIV infections. Reduce HIV transmissions and expedite public health response, treatment, care, human rights and social justice for people living with HIV. The goal of the strategy is to enhance early diagnosis, ensure effective treatment, achieve sustain vile suppression and foster a supportive environment free of stigma, discrimination, to improve quality of life for individuals living with HIV and reduce transmission rates.

I want to be on the record to say to members of the Parliament and to those that are listening in, that before we see a reduction in the number of cases, Fiji will see a rise in the number of cases. Simply for the fact, that our programmes are increasing testing, so numbers will increase before we start to see the numbers decrease, due to the effectiveness of this strategy, Sir.

Another important point to note as well, being diagnosed with HIV now, is no longer a death sentence. With appropriate treatment, people living with HIV can live a productive, fulfilling life,

contributing effectively to their families, their communities and to Fiji as a whole. I thank the honourable Speaker for the opportunity to share briefly on the National HIV Surge Strategy.

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for his reply. It was quite shocking to hear that we have surpassed Papua New Guinea. We used to have a regional response to HIV, but at the moment, we are talking about the biggest cause being the “blue-toothing.” There have also been in some quarters saying that one of the reasons for the rise is the lack of money that is going into preventative health and research. If that is true for this, how does the Ministry make sure that it does not happen in other areas?

I think there used to be a 2013 regional response where they had some funding, but once that stopped it had an impact on this. I am just wondering how the honourable Minister is looking at how to make sure that preventative funding is coming and the research, so we do not have these kind things happening in the future, not only HIV, but in other areas too.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Since taking office, I have been briefed on UNAIDS and its role on HIV in Fiji, even though the numbers have decreased, but they have maintained a staff at the UN office. In terms of the funding, yes, to note there was a decrease when coming in, but there has been some renewed assistance since taking office, and since announcing the numbers and that has been very much forthcoming within our development partners, mainly DFAT that have put in funding through WHO.

I was privy to that handing over ceremony back in Geneva and other development partners are stepping up and assisting us in this space. Yes, I do agree the, the funding for research, the preventative side of it. That is why the Surge Strategy will capture those issues especially on the prevention side.

In terms of a budgetary allocation, there have been an increasing budgetary on consumables, especially with testing the capabilities and that is why not only that, together we have used the UN agencies platform in terms of purchasing that has been endorsed by Cabinet. So, we are using that platform to allow them to buy for us the drugs, consumables testing things to enable us to do more. As I have said, we will see a rise in the numbers before we see a fall, and the strategy we will direct us in the way should go forward based on evidence and mostly based on data.

MR. SPEAKER.- I think there should be more awareness done here, because we need to take in mind the new cases that we have enough of HIV, it is 500 just for the first six months of this year. That is quite alarming! Perhaps if the honourable Members would be able to come up with some ideas as to how best you can inform the members of the public of the seriousness of the case that we have. We have drugs that has already been highlighted well, but no HIV. It is kind of lingering around us all the time and now there is a sudden increase. I think the concern is very much there.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the things that help the advocating, we used to have champions. Ratu Epeli Nailatikau, the former President and former Speaker was a very visible champion of this issue. So, I think those sorts of things, people in prominent positions, he used to actually take things out of his pocket at events. I think that was getting something like that from a person of that stature really helped to get that message across.

MR. SPEAKER.- Perhaps you may be able choose one amongst yourselves as to be the new champion. You put the condoms and everything in your pocket and we should not be ashamed of it. Ratu Nailatikau did hell of a work there, “put it on bring it on” that is what he usually says.

Honourable Members, at this juncture for the purposes of complying with the Standing Orders with respect to the sitting times, I now call upon the honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament to move a suspension motion.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

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

That under Standing Order 6, that so much of Standing Order 23(1) is suspended so as to allow the House to sit beyond 4.30 p.m. today to complete the remaining items listed 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 have four Questions and Schedule 2 - Motions for Debate regarding the Review Reports on Tavua Town Council and Asian Development Bank and Consideration of Bills, the Audit Bill, of course, before the motions.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion, if any. I now call upon the Leader of the Government in Parliament to speak in reply.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

QUESTIONS

Relocation – Sigatoka Rubbish Dump
(Question No. 244/2024)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Housing and Local Government inform Parliament if the Ministry has plans for the relocation of the Sigatoka rubbish dump, which is next to our heritage site and at the entrance to Sigatoka town?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to address an issue of both the environmental and cultural significance. The relocation of the Sigatoka rubbish dump and the broader agenda of sustainable waste management in Sigatoka Town. The current location of the Sigatoka dump poses serious concerns. The current location has been the dumpsite since 1949, about 75 years ago. No concrete steps have been taken to address or even change the site.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the site's position is near to the most very precious assets, which is the Sigatoka sand dunes, UNESCO World Heritage site and the entrance to Sigatoka Town from the Nadi way. The dump threatens the environment and the public health, the image of the Town as a gateway for tourism and economic development. So, the Coalition Government recognises the environmental degradation caused by the proximity of the dump to the sand dunes which jeopardises

not only the ecosystem, but also our cultural heritage. The frequent fires at the site release toxic fumes that endanger health of nearby communities and tourists. Moreover, as a getaway to Sigatoka Town, the dump creates a bad first impression, potentially discouraging investments and tourism which are key to the region's economic growth.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I assure Parliament of the Ministry in collaboration with United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), is committed to a long-term solution for waste management in Sigatoka. It has taken 75 years to come this far, and the Coalition Government is committed to addressing and resolving this issue. It is also part of the new National Development Plan on solid waste management as articulated in sub chapter 8.4, and one of the KPI's is one landfill in the Western Division, as well as one recycling plant for the next three years.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry is actively working with the Council and UNDP under the Investing in Coral Reefs and Blue Economy Project to establish a modern sanitary landfill in the Western Division while transforming existing dump sites into efficient collection and sorting centres. This initiative was endorsed by Cabinet in June 2024, which includes the rehabilitations of four dumpsites, which also includes Sigatoka.

The facilitation of an open competitive bidding process for Public Private Partnership (PPP) that will modernise waste management infrastructure. This includes proper containment. It is a collection and environmental monitoring systems which are so crucial to preventing the ecological damage associated with open dumping.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, ban infrastructure, the Ministry is exploring the establishment of a waste management authority which will centralise resources and expertise from all municipal councils to enhance waste management and recycling efforts. This centralised body once established will ensure improve governance, transparency and consistency in waste management policies across Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the implementation of this comprehensive Waste Management Plan will yield numerous benefits for our nation such as significantly reducing environmental pollution and preserving our cultural heritage. The Sigatoka sand dunes will be safeguarded and will maintain its status as UNESCO's World Heritage Site.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, modern sorting and recycling facilities will also allow us to recover valuable resources from our waste stream contributing to a circular economy. Current practice as it is, Mr. Speaker, Sir, 100 percent of the waste collection goes direct to the landfill or dumpsite. So the improved waste management practices will reduce greenhouse emissions from decomposing waste and dump fires, contributing to our national climate change mitigation efforts. The entrance of Sigatoka Town will be transformed, creating a more appealing gateway for tourists enhancing overall visitor experience.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to assure this honourable Parliament that the Coalition Government is committed to addressing the issue. Throughout this process we commit to maintaining transparency, engaging with local communities, ensuring their voices are heard and their concerns addressed.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the task before us is significant but not to other potential rewards. The implementation of a modern waste management system represents more than just an infrastructure project but symbolises our commitment to sustainable development, environmental stewardship and the preservation of our cultural heritage.

The location of the Sigatoka dump is not just a warning sadness, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it presents

our commitment to cleaner, greener and a more prosperous future. This modern waste management system will safeguard our natural and cultural heritage, right from Sigatoka into a more appealing destination and contribute to climate change mitigation efforts by reducing harmful emissions from waste.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government's actions that were set up and dedicated to sustainable development by engaging the community and stakeholders will ensure that Sigatoka Town as well as the entire Sigatoka community and Western Division will benefit with a more efficient and environmentally friendly waste management system. This comprehensive approach to waste management will turn a significant challenge and opportunity for innovation, job creation and sustainable growth.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I acknowledge the honourable Minister's passion with what he wants done, and I acknowledge that it may take some time to actually get it done especially in light of the fact that we are looking at a PPP to get it done. But waste management is big business but in the interim, because it is such a huge problem, especially because it is a tourism-based area, does the Sigatoka Town Council actually have a management regime to manage that particular site?

I specifically asked this, honourable Minister, because in light of the fact that if there is an application by Government to turn that into a World Heritage Site, there is a buffer zone that needs to happen, and that would fall within the buffer zone. It is actually quite difficult if you do not comply with those requirements for it to become a World Heritage Site. So, is there a proper management regime on it at the moment?

I think we can only use a live example that we have here in Lami which was moved very quickly, and that site is now dead. Nothing can grow in there for quite a number of years, and I think that came through with the assistance of the European Union. So, it has to be something that is addressed very quickly but the management regime, is it in place or is there a management regime with the Sigatoka Town Council?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for raising that issue. I think about 21 months ago when I visited the site, it was really in a very bad condition and they were waste being dumped all around the site. That is something that we have discussed with the Management, as well as the newly appointed Administrators on how best we can contain and manage the current site. There is a system in place on how to better manage the current site, so that is something that the Management, as well as the newly appointed Administrators are seriously working on it right now, to ensure that we continue and preserve that site because it is a declared UNESCO Heritage site as it is something that the Council is seriously considering in maintaining the dump site.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, a question to the honourable Minister, since it is next to the Sand Dunes, the last thing we would want is tourists come and visit those places and say that the place is smelling bad. One is physical waste, and the other one is the odour that is released from the dump site because it is waste, it decays. Are there any mitigation plans in terms of smell and odour from the place, that would be grateful?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the site has been there for the past 75 years and you would not want to go closer to the site. It is a really serious concern not only to the nearby residents of Sigatoka, but a big challenge as well for tourists who visit Sigatoka Town. As I have said, it is something challenging and have insisted that the current Administrators and the Council contain the odour that comes out from the dump site. Now, there is hardly any fires around the dump site due to the plan that has been put in place by the Executive Management and the Council in addressing the problem at the Sigatoka Dump Site.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.-Honourable Minister, this may not necessarily be only for Sigatoka but maybe all the Councils in Fiji. Has there been any consideration or technical scoping done to see the potential for the conversion of waste into energy, as has been done in some countries? Also, do we have the volume?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker Sir, when I was in China in June, I visited one of the Waste and Incineration Facility. It is very good facility and the honourable Prime Minister, in his last visit, also visited one of those facilities. It is something we are also exploring at the moment as part of our review of the waste management system that we currently have in Fiji.

If you go to all the dump sites around the country, all have reached their capacity, so it is a really serious issue right now that needs to be addressed immediately. We have also been receiving presentation by some of the agencies and companies on some of the very effective and sustainable waste manage systems that are happening right now around the world, as well as some that may be effective in Fiji. But we are currently reviewing that and, hopefully, we should come up with a system that will be sustainable for our future generation.

Increase of Requests for Co-operative Registration
(Question No. 245/2024)

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE asked the Government, upon notice.

Can the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-operatives, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications inform Parliament on how the Ministry is handling the increase in requests for co-operative registration?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank honourable Vakalalabure for the question. Sir, it is no secret that since coming into office, we have really tried to push the agenda of MSMEs and also for co-operatives, not only by making them an actual Department within the Ministry, but also encouraging a lot of our Fijians to join and form co-operatives. We believe, Sir, that one of the pathways out of poverty lies within the co-operative movement, as well as the MSMEs.

In terms of activity, yes, we have seen a resurgence in activity, Sir, since 2022. In the year 2022, just in terms of awareness, we conducted 182 sessions in awareness. By 2023, the number had grown by 109 percent to 484 sessions. Registrations have also steadily increased whereby 61 co-operatives were registered in 2022, which has gone up to 73 percent, to 134 co-operatives in 2023. So, clearly, Sir, that question is quite intuitive, and a good observation is that we will have some resourcing challenges very soon.

We have a grant in place, Sir, of about \$0.5 million. For the first time, we have created a grants specifically for co-operatives so that will add more momentum to the co-operative surge and the co-operative movement.

What are we doing about it, Sir? Right now, we have decided to try and digitise the database for co-operatives and MSMEs. What that will do is actually allow us to track the registrations and track how that process is happening, including applications for grants and, hopefully, that will create some efficiencies in terms of how work is being done.

Beyond that, Sir, I am sure the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics will probably be expecting some knock on the door for some additional resources next year because certainly, Sir, there is some serious investment going into the movement.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thought I will just share two stories of two co-operatives established recently and the first one is the co-operative in Togabula. At the moment, they plant cassava, and they supply to the Suva Market. When we presented the assistance, they actually got very emotional because they had been waiting for four years for their tractor. That tractor will actually double their production, so right now they are doing about 70 bags a week at round about \$100 a bag, and that will grow to about 140 bags. So, that is the type of thing we are seeing.

Another co-operative that we saw was just next door in Natadola. A group of cane farmers got together. They were interested, Sir. They did the IHRDP loan, so their one-third was actually loaned from Fiji Development Bank (FDB), and their leader insisted that I go and see the farm itself. When we stood on their farm, he pointed out to me the seven lines of tobacco and seven lines of *suki* already planted there. In three months, they will harvest it, and they will pay back their one-third deposit to FDB. So, that is the type of innovation, Sir, that is happening amongst our farmers and the co-operative movement, and it is quite exciting to see the level of interest.

There are a lot more stories, Sir, and I plan to share one or two very soon, but there is a lot of interest in the co-operative movement. They are seeing a lot of benefits in grouping together, particularly, when it comes to capital expenditure investment, and we will certainly continue to encourage it because we certainly can see a way of creating another pathway for poverty which is high on the People's Coalition Government's agenda.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, just a quick question to the honourable Minister with respect to co-operatives, are we from the Ministry actually encouraging some of the older co-operatives to enter the export market because of the amount of things that are in demand offshore, especially local products that we know are in demand in Australia and New Zealand and we have created a pathways for it but we are not actually exporting? Are they being put onto it, that this is a particular product that is required, and they can actually get more out of the Ministry with respect to getting that done?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are encouraging co-operatives where there are farmers particularly, to look at various markets. I know for a fact, Sir, that at the moment, there is shortage of dalo and cassava in New Zealand and also in Australia, so those are markets that are readily available.

Two years ago, before I joined politics, I encouraged a group in Lomaiviti to start selling through an exporter here to Sydney and they do *tausala*, and it is very successful. Traditionally, they used to only sell their *dalo* to Suva. So, there are a lot of opportunities like that, and we will continue to push them along and encourage our farmers to use co-operatives.

On a sidenote, Sir, we work very closely with the Ministry of Youth, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Women and Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, in terms of pushing the co-operative agenda. Sometimes, because of the shortage, we leverage off their resource as well to get the awareness out. So, as honourable Koya correctly pointed out, there are some low hanging fruits that we flag now and again. Right now, Food Processors is looking for *rourou* suppliers for *palusami*, so we are encouraging farmers to supply *rourou*, if they can.

MR. SPEAKER.- We will move on to the ninth Oral Question for today. Since honourable Shalen Kumar is not present, his question has now lapsed, so we will move straight on to the tenth Oral Question.

Planned Water Pipeline Extension – Northern Division
(Question No. 247/2024)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport update on the current and planned water pipeline extension projects in the North?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- I thank the honourable Tuiwailevu for that question. Sir, the WAF projects, as I have explained, are aligned with the Water Sector Strategy 2050 Plan which is now the national commitment to SDG6 - Water and Sanitation.

The Coalition Government has not forgotten the Northern Division. Understanding the ongoing development in the North, the Government is committed to ensuring that the needs of all rural grassroot communities on the mainland and also those in smaller neighbouring maritime islands are catered for, including the upcoming planned business developments, residents and visitors to the North all have access to reliable water supply.

It has been identified that an investment of approximately \$218 million is required for the next three decades to upgrade and build new water projects to meet the growing demand and improve the reliability of water supply in the Northern Division.

As part of this commitment, the Coalition Government has already begun executing several key water extension projects, some ongoing from the last Government as the Government re-continue. The major extension projects, Dagau Main Extension Project, Seaqaqa - \$0.56 million. This extension project covers 3.4 kilometres pipeline that shall benefit close to 50 households.

On the Nabekavu to Dogoru Mains Extension Project, Labasa, costs \$0.8 million to cover 2.6 kilometre pipeline that will benefit approximately 30 households.

Rural Water Supply Projects, include Kubulau Combined Scheme Project - \$2.4 million. This rural extension project covers 26 kilometres pipeline, which is nearing completion. It will benefit close to 220 households.

Delavuna Combined Scheme in Taveuni - \$0.9 million, is now in the initial stage and will involve 7 kilometres pipeline to benefit close to 480 households.

The major upgrading projects that will eventually lead to new water connections, include Benau to Volanao Bulk Mains Upgrading Project - \$16 million. This project is in line with the plan 30 Mega Litres per Day (MLD) Water Treatment Plant and the new Matagi Water Source Intake which will increase the storage capacity at the Volanao Reservoir. This upgrading will allow for future network extensions towards the outskirts of Labasa, including Boubale and Malau. The project is currently in its initial stages with procurement, grant mobilisation and environmental compliance to be fully completed. Close to 600 households are envisaged to benefit.

The Benau to Rara Reservoir Bulk Main Upgrading Project - \$6.14 million. It forms the first phase of the Tabia Mains Extension Project, aimed at providing a feed supply from the Rara Reservoir. Procurement, grant mobilisation and environmental compliance have commenced, and it is part of a packaged project that includes the Benau to Volanao Bulk Mains Upgrading Project, to benefit close to 300 households.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these ongoing projects collectively represent a significant investment of \$27 million in the Northern Division. This will benefit thousands of households, improve water quality, reliability and address the challenges of ageing infrastructure and water scarcity in the Northern Region.

Sir, in terms of future projects, the Tabia Mains Extension Project Phase II will continue the first phase currently underway, extending the water supply to the Tabia community. The project involves laying 25 kilometres of new pipelines, construction of a pump station and installing a 2 MLD reservoir.

Nabouwalu Water Supply System Expansion, the 2 MLD packaged plant 1 MLD reservoir has been completed and will extend the water supply network to the outskirts of Nabouwalu.

Navaqiqi Water Supply System Extension, a new 5MLD Storage Reservoir will be installed at an improved elevation at Navaqiqi to support further network extension, following the commission of the new 5 MLD Water Treatment Plant.

Seaqqa Water Supply System Expansion, a new water treatment plant and upgraded 2 MLD Storage Reservoir will be constructed to support network extension along the Naduri Road and Nanivuda Village, once the new Naililiyaga Water Source is secured.

On Nasasa Water Source Development, WAF is securing a new water source at Nasasa to supplement the water supply for Taganikula and Wainikoro Systems, which will also support future extension.

On Wainivasa Water Source Development in Taveuni, that is currently being explored in terms of the potential of the Wainivasa Source to facilitate network extension in South Taveuni.

Through these investments in new infrastructure and the expansion of the water supply network, Sir, the Ministry, through WAF, aims to meet the growing needs of the Northern Division's population and support sustainable development in the region.

It is the Coalition Government's policy commitment that Fiji's water resources are managed, maintained and protected to provide equitable and secure access to water for beneficial users for all sectors of the Fijian economy, and support sustainable development uplift of the rural and grassroots communities. Of course, also extending sanitation services where these are viable and for reliability and affordability for all Fijians.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for talking about the issues in the South of Taveuni, which has been an area of water shortage over time and lot of water carting. I am just thinking about the Delaivuna Project and the Wainivasa. The extension of Delaivuna one, is that from the new source in Wainivasa or from the existing sources?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the information I have been provided with is from the Wainivasa source.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, through you, honourable Minister, the plea of farmers in Seaqqa. I know that most of the land leases in Nanivuda were not renewed, but there was a plan for the extension from Buavou. Is that still under consideration because of the so many farmers in Tadravula and the other sectors in Seaqqa?

It is a very, very important project because our farmers are important, and this has been their

request from so many years. The previous Government has made efforts to move it to Buavou, but then the extension from Buavou, and now you are considering Nanivuda.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are looking into that, and as I have also mentioned, in terms of the boreholes, the budget has been provided and we are currently looking into that as a matter of urgency, given the needs in the Seaqaqa area.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the information of Government, perhaps to save money, there are already boreholes in place. I have asked the honourable Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources, if we can get the data from his Ministry because Government has eight reserved boreholes in Seaqaqa itself, and if we can utilise that. Perhaps, it can save us from making new boreholes.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the last time I visited was with WAF and they were working on those boreholes and the infrastructure to connect them to the communities.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the source that you have mentioned about Nasasa, I assume this is Nasasa Nadogo. If that is correct, is that just for Nasasa Village or the whole of that area feeding into Wainikoro?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I cannot answer that offhand, I will need to check on that.

AUDIT BILL 2024

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 85, I move:

That the Audit Bill 2024 (Bill No. 17 of 2024) be read a second time.

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

MR. SPEAKER.- Before I call upon the mover of the motion, I remind honourable Members that pursuant to Standing Order 85(1), the debate will be on the principle and the merits of the Bill. I hope I am clear on that.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have said quite rightly, focussing on the principles and the merits of the Audit Bill 2024. The establishment of the Office of the Auditor-General (OAG) is legally mandated under Sections 151 and 152 of the Constitution.

The Audit Act of 1969 provides the legal framework for the duties and powers of the Auditor-General. The principal objective of the Act, Sir, is to provide for the salary, duties and powers of the Auditor-General, the auditing of public accounts and for other purposes connected with it. So, pursuant to Legal Notice No. 3 of 2023, dated 5th January, 2023, the Act is one of the written laws that is assigned under the responsibility of the Minister for Finance.

The review of the Audit Act 1969, Sir, entails a thorough consultation, so the Ministry through the OAG, undertook a comprehensive review of the Act with a focus to amend the Act to modernise it so that it is able carry out its functions in line with some of the international standards and best practices. So, given that the Act was last reviewed in 2006, it does not really capture the developments that have taken place over the last so many years, in particular, in the public sector accounting practices and new standards that have been adopted in many other countries.

Sir, the main objectives of the review, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is to:

- (1) Strengthen the independence of the OAG. I think that is the most important thing, consistent with the independence guaranteed in the Constitution. I think it does not matter who is in Government and who is in Opposition, that principle of the independence of the OAG, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is very, very important and critical.
- (2) To clarify the auditing mandate and include specific mandate to carry out compliance with new developments in IT and also in the context of environmental auditing. So, in the whole area of climate change and environmental accounting, there are standards which need to be put in place to empower the Auditor-General to take that into account.
- (3) To ensure that all audits are conducted in accordance with applicable international standards on auditing, namely the international standards on auditing and the International Standards of Supreme Audit Institutions (ISSAIs). I know, Sir, that in forums, like the International Parliamentary Union (IPU), these things have always featured and there are countries where governments do not do this, and it has always been an issue.
- (4) To protect the delivery of roles and responsibilities by the Auditor-General and officers of the OAG from personal institutional perspective and how audit findings are reported. I think that is also a very important principle.
- (5) To recognise that the OAG, its budget, staffing, revenue streams are consistent with other provisions of the Audit Act and also as provided in the Constitution itself.
- (6) To provide for the review of audits for entities that are not subject to audit by the Auditor-General in accordance with the Constitution as well.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is important because we know there was a change, for example, in section 72 of the Finance Instructions and two independent institutions, the Elections Office and the Human Rights Commission. There was a new paragraph stated there that the Permanent Secretary for Finance, for example, could not order or authorise an independent audit without the agreement of the Supervisor of Election or the Human Rights Commission. I do not know why it was done. So, it is very important that, that kind of restriction is not placed on the OAG.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to enhance the powers of the Auditor-General to access data, including more increasingly now data held in an electronic form, and I think FRCS Act that we amended, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in terms revenue, has also been changed because a lot of the records are now electronic and the OAG ought to be empowered to be able to access those electronic records if the OAG is to be empowered to do a thorough auditing.

The Audit Bill 2024, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the consultation, as I have said, was facilitated by the Ministry of Finance with the OAG and Office of the Solicitor-General, and it commenced in June 2023. The OAG conducted an extensive consultation and received technical assistance from the Pacific Association of Supreme Audit Institutions (PASAI) for which the outcome is presented before the House.

The call for written submissions was published on the OAG's website on 14th July, 2023, and in the daily newspapers on 15th July, 2023. Direct invitations, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to attend the consultation meeting were issued to 49 key stakeholders. A total of 36 responded to the invitations and through written or oral submissions, and consultation meetings were held in Suva and the Western Division from 24th July, 2023 to 15th August, 2023.

While there was generally overwhelming support to the amendments proposed, stakeholders consulted sought clarifications on specific matters relating to different sections of the existing legislation, and the proposed new sections. The reason, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are not bringing this as an amendment Bill because there were a lot of changes and we felt that it is better to bring a complete new Bill which also includes some of the original provisions in that Bill so that we could go Clause by Clause and Parliament would have a very clear view as to what the new Audit Bill and we wanted to take a little bit of time so that we are able to do this in a much more effective way.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our development partners have recognised this effort to strengthen external scrutiny in the OAG and this was one of the policy points that we had foreshadowed as part of our budget support with the various international organisations, our development partners, World Bank, DFAT, DFATNZ, and this has been a key focus since we came into Government in terms of looking at the overall Public Financial Management Reforms, which also included the strengthening of the Public Financial Management Legislative Framework, the Finance Management Act, Procurement Regulations, Finance Instructions, et cetera, and, of course, the new FMIS system that I had talked about in Parliament which has come into force from 1st August, 2024.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there were few teething problems, but I think all these reforms will support and strengthen the implementation of the new legislation and also strengthen the Office of the Auditor-General.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I have said in Parliament, the recent appointment of Ms. Finau Seru Nagera by His Excellency the President on the recommendation of the Constitutional Offices Commission, as the new Auditor-General of Fiji - the first woman ever to hold this position, obviously, this new legislation, amendments and improvements will significantly strengthen the Office of the Auditor-General.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I commend the Bill for second reading.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now for debate on the motion. Also, I have a list of speakers flagged by the Whips. Leading the batting would be:

- (1) Honourable P.D. Kumar;
- (2) Honourable F.S. Koya;
- (3) Honourable Ratu J.B. Niudamu; and
- (4) Honourable M.D. Bulitavu.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics for presenting the merits and principle of the Audit Bill 2024. In my view, Audit Bill sets the legal framework to protect the interest of our citizens, who are actually the taxpayers of this country. They want their money to be utilised effectively and ethically, and this particular Bill precisely does that.

Mr. Speaker. Sir, I also acknowledge the provisions in the Audit Bill 2024 that aligns with international best practices. For example, section 13 includes (as the honourable Minister has mentioned) environmental audit. Environmental audit is an important component of the Audit Bill 2024, and given the increasing importance of climate change, modern audit frameworks now include environmental audits. This provision assesses how public funds are used to meet climate goals, reduce carbon emissions and promote sustainable resource management. However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I suggest a slight change to the title, if we can call this “Environmental and Climate Audits”, because climate change is very visible, so that is the change that I am proposing.

The second provision in the Bill which is very appealing is the audit of information technology system and the use of international auditing standards. The Audit Bill 2024 empowers auditors to assess the security and resilience of the Government IT System, focussing on protecting public data and ensuring continuity of Government services in the face of cyber threats. So that is really, really important when we are talking about money.

I suggest, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the inclusion of two more areas, and that would be gender responsive auditing, because the Government has moved into gender-based budgeting. So, if it is gender-based budgeting, it would be interesting or important to include gender responsive auditing. Modern Audit Bills increasingly include provisions of gender audits, focussing on whether public funds are being used in a way that promotes gender equity and addresses specific gender-based issues in public policy.

The other one that I would like to suggest is the Debt Audit. This is the national debt. It is always important to get a view of the Auditor-General as to how the borrowing took place, how it was utilised and whether the borrowing was at a concessional rate that we hear, or how was it done and how was it utilised?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think at this point, I would like to share my experience considering that I was involved along with Housing Authority Board to undertake a special investigation conducted by the Auditor General's office and this relates very well to Section 12 of the current Audit Bill.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, during this special investigation we faced 3 issues, I do not know whether I can speak about this now or not. Maybe later?

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Alright, so at this point, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have said what I wanted to say and I will stop here.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Deputy Prime Minister for putting this before the Parliament for its second reading. I am going to be very brief, with just a couple of points on the actual Bill. Obviously, Section 151 of the Constitution is the operative provision with respect to Auditor Generals, but just for clarity's sake Sir, I think it is important that we all know this in terms of the functions of the Auditor General.

Section 1521 (a) basically says, that at least once in every year, the Auditor General shall inspect, audit and report to Parliament on the public accounts of the state, the control of public money and public property of the state and all transactions with or concerning public money or public property of the state. Now, I am not sure but, this might be an issue that needs to be checked with the Attorney General's office with one of the provisions that is in there, in terms of audit. And I think that it is specifically to do with performance audits and also to do with institutions that may be receiving grants et cetera, Sir.

If I read it correctly, it says that it "may", the Auditor General "may", if he wants to audit it, it does not say "must." It needs to be looked at and put in line with what is in the Constitution and doubled checked with the honourable Attorney General's office, would know better. So, just that one, and in terms of the performance audit itself, I think in today's day and age, what is actually transpiring, again, because it says the Auditor General "may" at any time, it is at his or her discretion, I think it needs to be synclinal. It needs to be put into a timeframe, that the Auditor General must honour the two-year cycle, do these performance audit, especially Sir, so that we are, the general

public is quite aware that a particular institution is making sure that they are actually performing in terms of public funds et cetera.

Just one or two more issues, Sir. In the definition section, honourable Attorney-General this is addressed to you, I think it is (e) it says that a local authority within in the meaning of the Local Government Act 1972, expect a local authority in respect to which the Minister is responsible for Local Government has directed that the auditor general is not the audit under section 51 (1) of that Act. It is actually a bit of double Dutch, I am not sure what is being referred to, maybe it needs some clarity or somebody needs to get the English right so it is easier for people to understand.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just a couple of other things. Again, this has to do with the powers of the Auditor General. In Section 6 (1) the powers of the Auditor General, in section 6 (1) (a) it says in the performance of his or her functions under Section 152 of the Constitution, and of his or her functions and duties under this Act, the Auditor General “may” call on any officer, member, employee or contractor or a public entity for any explanation or information that may be required.

In light of the recent reports that have come out of the Committee, Sir, and the enquiry that has been instigated by you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, maybe we should include former employees in that particular portion also. Otherwise, we are restricting ourselves to those that are currently employed and officers. I am not sure if former employees is permitted within that, but that may be a provision that we need to put in, in light of the fact that we know we have a report before the Parliament and an investigation current. So, that is just an addition that may need to be put in.

In terms of the same, Section 6, we look at (f) it talks about obtaining legal advice and it says from the private practice. I do not know whose private practice is being referred to or should it say from private practitioners in circumstances considered appropriate by the Auditor-General. I think it is just the English that needs to be corrected, Sir.

The other thing also is the subsection 3 talks about an offence. I think that is also something that needs to be properly spelt out, but otherwise in general, Sir, the one very glaring thing in there and I am not sure if everyone will agree to this, there is an audited section 8 speaks about the Auditor-General that may delegate to any employee or contractor. So, it goes out, any function due to your power of the Auditor-General, other than the function of certifying reporting accounts that comes to Parliament. In case of handing out unfettered power like that to someone who is a private contractor Sir, there needs to be a bit of a check and balance. I am not sure honourable Minister of Finance, how it should be dealt with, or maybe we need to put some provision in there that it is not an unfettered power, that the Auditor-General has, with respect to that.

Just those things, Mr. Speaker, Sir, otherwise in a nutshell itself, it brings us in line with international best practices and standards, and I think it is a timely Bill that has actually come before the Parliament, and I think the Committee will have a thorough inspection of this once it gets to the Committee.

MR. SPEAKER.- We just had another change in the listing and the last speaker would be the honourable Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources.

HON. RATU J.B. NIUDAMU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, first of all, I would like to thank the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance for the second reading of Audit Bill 2024.

First of all, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to commend the drafters for this particular Bill, I think it is one of the best Bills I have ever seen particularly on auditing laws. It has come into line

with the international standards and best practices of what we are supposed to do, particularly the appealing section which has now come into this new Bill, Sir. We have seen that the old Act had only had 13 provisions. Now it has extended to 27 provisions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have seen that as the honourable Deputy Prime Minister had alluded to earlier, the laws goes with the time and we need to change laws, particularly the old common laws which we had relied on. We change with what we are facing nearly every day, and I have seen from section 1 right up to section 27, I have seen that it is in line with the international best practices. I have no further comments to say.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to give a brief contribution to the Bill, which is for the second reading and just to respond to honourable Koya, given it has been the last eight years in Parliament or even more, we are much used to Standing Orders 51. When Bills come for the short cut provision, we go into debate and we tend to go into the substantive matter and I thank the Government for exhausting the normal procedure to go through first reading and into second reading, where we can only comment on the principle and merits of the Bill and after this, through Standing Order 85(4). Then the honourable Speaker will refer it to the Standing Committee for consultation and other deliberations where the suggestions and the clauses has been referred to by honourable Koya and also honourable Premila Kumar can be part of the individual submissions to the Committee to look into the Bills. We will then have discussions with the drafters at the Attorney-General's office in terms of the final forming of the Bill. They will come back to the Parliament after the Committee reports back, and before we go into the third reading of the Bill and before enactment. That was the procedure given, that we were so used to, the shortcut provision. Sometimes when we go back to the original work of a legislature, we are quite confused at times.

But just on the merits of the Bill, I agree with the honourable Minister for Finance and Deputy Prime Minister, in terms of clause 6. But all these come under Section 152 (3) of the Constitution, where a written law can be made in order to add further provisions to see the functions and powers of the Office of the Auditor-General. In clause 6, as alluded to by the honourable Deputy Prime Minister, the mover of the motion, it gives more power to the Auditor-General, especially in searches of property and to compel getting of passwords in order to get evidence, if they are doing an auditing or an investigation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the more important provision would be clause 12 of the Bill, whether its merits and principles, which is aligned to your ruling on Monday. The understanding of the Business Committee, where subcommittees through its terms of reference can make investigation if the Standing Committee on Public Accounts' report comes to the Parliament, and whether from the debate there are some unresolved issues that Parliament may think to revisit in terms of wastage of Government resources or taxpayers' fund.

Where you have the discretion to allow a subcommittee to relook into that. This particular Bill has brought your decision, Sir, on Monday and the Business Committee, where it now allows in clause 12, where Parliament can also instruct through this particular Bill, the Office of the Attorney-General to do a special investigation in terms of any findings that Parliament might see that is not sufficient that has been given. That ruling is now consistent if the Bill comes into an Act, that will cover the Parliament's role in also instructing the Office of the Attorney-General to do further audits or investigation.

On clause 19, it also allows the honourable Speaker of Parliament to now appoint a natural person to audit the Office of the Auditor-General. That is a new provision that is in this particular Bill, where the honourable Speaker of Parliament will now appoint a natural person, the wording that is in the current Bill, to audit the Office of the Auditor-General. Given in the past, there have been many allegations in terms of the independency of this particular organisation. The honourable Deputy

Prime Minister will well remember a few years ago, when the former Auditor-General was accused of drinking grog with some politicians and was more aligned to some political parties. The independence of that organisation was questioned by the former Minister for Economy at that time. But the merits of the Bill brings it into international standards and best practices.

The last clause, I would like to comment on is clause 21, which has principle and merits too. That will outline the matters with the Auditor-General, must report to Parliament including any matter that the Auditor-General may wish to bring to the attention of Parliament arising from any audit, special investigation and review of audits in the preceding calendar year or financial year. It provides a pathway after the Auditor-General makes those special investigations instructed by Parliament through the Standing Committee or through your subcommittee to the terms of reference that you had ruled out the other day.

It provides the pathway for the Auditor-General to bring back a second report, probably on any findings that Parliament might want to ensure on whether the state resources or taxpayers money needs to be accounted for. With those words, I commend and support the Bill for the second reading, and look forward for it to come to the Standing Committee where we will then do our consultation plus deliberation in conjunction with the drafters from the Office of the Attorney-General and come back to the Parliament, if needed to be instructed through your decision, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.– Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the opportunity to speak on the second reading of the Audit Bill of 2024. I suppose, reiterating the merits and the principals that have been spoken about by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, the mover of the Bill in the Parliament this afternoon.

One of the points that I think is important to note Mr. Speaker, Sir and I am sure all of us here at in Parliament can agree to, is the point raised by the honourable Premila Kumar. These laws are going to ensure that there is confidence in how public funds are going to be spent. Everyone in this country pays taxes, everyone contributes to the treasury, and everyone contributes to the money that is ultimately going to be shared or given to ministries of government and government departments in order for them to be able to work the responsibilities that are given to them.

This is one of the ways and I suppose the only way in which this Parliament is able to convince those that are actually contribute to the treasury that their money, money that they spend, taxes that they pay is actually going to the right place and has been spent on the right occasion. It is through the audits that are conducted that we get the public confidence that we so desire to have here in this Parliament. So I thank all those that have been involved behind the scenes, the Auditor General's Office, the Ministry of Finance staff who have been instrumental in the early revising the Act of 1969.

The honourable Deputy Prime Minister had stated it correctly, the last revision of this amendment that was brought to this Act was in 2006. That is a long time ago and as we know, laws need to be revised so that it continues to remain relevant and efficient in addressing current challenges and concerns as we go year by year. This is a good time, and I see the Honourable Deputy Prime Minister has resoundingly stated that in the Parliament this afternoon Mr. Speaker sir, this is a good time in which the Act needs to be replenished completely.

Of course, there are provisions in the old Act that will be maintained in the new one but there are additional ones that provides for the safeguards, provides for the guardrails that attends to the present challenges, the economic challenges that we have at the moment, as well as the business challenges that we also will have to attest to as we move forward.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the principals that I think is important for Parliament to note that this Bill brings, is that it is going to promote effective governance. So, we can see that in the additional provisions that are going to be added on to last 17 provisions that were there before. So these provisions are of course are designed to ensure that governance is one of the main hallmarks of the laws that we are going to see spanning through, hopefully in the next session.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, having to address this Parliament on the relevancy and efficacy of the laws and how responsive it needs to be in our present-day society, is that, once we have these audit laws brought to be passed by Parliament, we are actually going to be inducing a more investment trade and economic growth environment in the country.

That is what we ultimately intend to encourage, is that people from within and people from outside looking in, know that we are a very accountable government, accountable to the people and accountable for all the money that is collected to be spent on our government. With those few words, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I support the second reading by the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance.

MR. SPEAKER.— Honourable Members, I now call upon the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance to speak in reply.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.— Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to thank the honourable Members for their contribution and support for the second reading of the Bill.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to also thank honourable Bulitavu for laying out the process. I think that was very clear. The honourable Members will have the opportunity to make their presentations and I am hoping that the Standing Committee will look at each clause and also look at the drafting and the language as well. You know as we normally do in any Bill that goes to the Committee.

But just to quickly pick on some of the points, Mr. Speaker, Sir, raised by the honourable Members. The honourable Minister for Lands is absolutely correct. I mean, the history of auditing, whether you talk about mid-18th century or whether about industrial revolution, it all started with the view to ensuring that there is value for money, that there is accountability of public money.

Over the years all these things have changed with a lot more sophistication in the way public funds are raised and in the way it is being used. On the issue that, honourable Premila Kumar raised about debt auditing, it is already part of the work of the Auditor-General. The Auditor-General's Office looks at financing, looks at debt, interest rates, the whole financial situation of the Government and obviously all that come into play.

On the gender auditing, I think that is already or can be done and there is no restriction on gender auditing and it can be done as part of the performance and compliance audits. So the compliance audit can show, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as a matter of principle that gender audits, there is no restriction. The issue of environmental audits, that is part of the relevant international language and that is why we have kept it as environmental audit and of course, you know, climate change and everything else would fall into that.

The points raised by honourable Koya, were all very relevant Mr. Speaker, Sir, but I guess, you know, those were more the content of what is in the clause and I am sure honourable Koya will have an opportunity to speak about that through the Standing Committees.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, another point that probably was raised, that people must be wondering, the audit of the Auditor-General's Office itself, you have powers as the honourable Speaker of the House.

You appoint the auditor to audit the Office of the Auditor-General. And again, you know it is an important principle, because it puts every institution in a situation where they are accountable, and of course as a Parliamentary process, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the role of the Public Accounts Standing Committee is very important and more Public Accounts Committees around the world take more interest in the work of the Office of the Auditor-General.

But the important principle, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that we are including in this important principle in this Bill, if I can add few more. One, is of course protection from liability, performance audits and compliance audits. Timing and publication of reports as honourable, Koya raised. Procedural fairness in relation to reports, notification of serious irregularities, review of audits and of course the principle of independence. So, a lot of the strengthening of the Audit Act, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is strengthening that principle of independence and we are looking at all the key pillars of independence or key pillars of supreme audit institutions whether it is a Lima Declaration, whether it is the Mexican or Mexico Declaration of 2007. These are all principles that have been enunciated very well by international institutions, including the UN resolutions on independence and existence of the Auditor-General's Office, the powers, et cetera.

So, what we have done, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is bring all these international principles together, look at what they are and how they are going to strengthen the independence of the Auditor-General's Office and support the governance.

One last point before I conclude, Mr. Speaker, Sir, which is quite a misconception that some people have about government grants. There are people out there for example, let us say the Attorney-General's Office is holding a conference in Nadi and spending about \$300,000 or \$400,000. And people look at the Attorney-General and say, we want the audit report. How much you are spending? That is not the way it is done.

These are part of government expenditure. So, when a grant is given, there is a grant agreement, there are certain requirements that abetted by the Auditor-General's Office, the Solicitor-General's Office, and the requirements are that the audited reports will come to the ministries and the Ministry of Finance. And then, the Auditor-General, as part of its audit process and will look at all that. So, I just wanted to clarify that, I think honourable Koya raised that about grants. Otherwise, the Auditor-General's Office will be auditing 150 grants and spend all the time. That is not the principle about auditing grants.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to once again thank all the honourable Members for their comments. I think they are very useful. I wish all the members of the Standing Committee who are going to look at this report, all the best and we look forward to the report.

MR. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed.

[Audit Bill 2024 (Bill No. 17/2024) read a second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts for deliberation, and to report back to Parliament in the December Sitting.]

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members. I think we will take a break for tea, because I have been disturbed twice from this side by someone switching on their cell phone, maybe they want a tea

break because I have been getting some signals that someone wants a tea break. Honourable Members, we will now adjourn for tea and resume when the bell is sounded.

The Parliament adjourned at 5.19 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 5.56 p.m.

**CONSOLIDATED REVIEW REPORT –
TAVUA TOWN COUNCIL 2016-2018 ANNUAL REPORTS**

HON. I. S. VANAWALU. – Mr Speaker, I move:

That Parliament debates the Consolidated Review Report of Tavua Town Council Annual Reports for the Year 2016-2018, which was tabled on 5th September 2024.

HON. V. PILLAY.– Honourable Speaker Sir, I second the motion.

HON. I. S. VANAWALU. – Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to leave on the Consolidated Review Reports of Tavua Town Council Annual Reports for the year 2016-2018. The Standing Committee on Social Affairs was referred the Tavua Town Council Annual Report for the year 2016, on the 20th of November 2023. And the Tavua Town Council Annual Reports for the year ended 2017 and 2018, on the 15th April, 2024.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the Standing Committee through its mandatory role stipulated under Standing Orders 110, undertook a site visit to the government grants project administered by the Council such as the Tavualevu Village Public Convenience Project and the Multipurpose Sports Court Change Room.

The Council raised concerns on the challenges they have faced over the last few years. The Standing Committee noted various issues raised by the Council and suggested possible recommendations as well. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Standing Committee noted the importance of small municipalities like Tavua in engaging with stakeholders to expedite various planned projects that will be undertaken by the Council to enable them to provide a better service to its people. The Standing Committee commends the Council for having a good rate collection compared to other Councils around Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as part of the Standing Committee's deliberations, the following recommendations, were highlighted:

- (1) Tavua Town Council to seek assistance from the Ministry of Environment to carry out an Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) for the proposed dump site.
- (2) A MOU be put in place between Tavua Council and Tavualevu Village Committee regarding the operation and the maintenance of the public convenience.
- (3) That the Council expedite discussions on the land for the construction of a new market and provision for a carpark and a bus station.
- (4) The Government to provide funding to the Ministry of Waterways for regular dredging of Nasivi river and to reinstate the annual grant for a regular maintenance of the storm drains within its municipalities.
- (5) The Ministry of Local Government to assist with the funding for the installation of a solar flood light at the multipurpose court.
- (6) The Council to improve its rate collection.

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

the list that I have with me supplied by the honourable Whips, as follows:

- (1) Honourable V. Pillay;
- (2) Honourable Minister for Housing and Local Government; and
- (3) Honourable A.N. Tuicolo.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to express my gratitude for the opportunity to contribute to this important debate regarding the Consolidated Review Report of Tavua Town Council Annual Report for the year 2016 -2018, which was tabled by the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs on 5th September, 2024. This Report is crucial as it sheds light on the operations and challenges faced by the Tavua Town Council during the specified years and it provides us with a road map for improvement.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we dwell into the findings of the Standing Committee, it is essential to note the weaknesses identified within the Tavua Town Council's operations. The Standing Committee's review highlighted several eight years that require immediate attention and rectification. One of the primary concerns was the lack of transparency and accountability in financial reporting.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Standing Committee noted that the Council's engagement with the community was insufficient. There were limited opportunities for residents to voice their concerns or participate in decision making processes. This disconnect between the Council and the community is detrimental to fostering a collaborative environment where citizens feel valued and heard.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the response to these weaknesses, the Standing Committee proposed several solutions aimed at enhancing the Council's operations. Firstly, it recommended the implementation of a robust financial management system that ensures transparency and accountability in all financial dealings. This system should include regular audits and public disclosures of financial reports to keep the community informed and engaged. By recommending these measures, the Tavua Town Council can rebuild trust with its constituents.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Standing Committee emphasised the importance of community engagement. It suggested that the Council establish regular forums and outreach programmes to facilitate dialogue between council members and residents. These initiatives would not only empower citizens but also provide the Council with valuable insights into the needs and priorities of the community. By fostering a culture of inclusivity, Tavua Town Council can enhance its decision-making process and ensure that they align with the aspirations of the people.

Mr. Speakers, Sir, one of the major challenge for the Council and the people of Tavua is flooding. We all know about the situation, and it was also mentioned by the Special Administrator during the presentation, and I quote:

“As far as dredging is concerned, it is a concern. It has been raised on so many occasions, almost in every meeting with the ministries. We are raising this issue for the dredging of Nasivi River. This is a matter of urgency. Although the whole of Tavua Town is not flooded, but the entrance after the bridge and before the bridge - the whole area gets flooded. The whole of Yaladro, Nabuna gets flooded, and before Shop N Save right up to the bus stand, the road is blocked. Villages that also get flooded are Nabuna, Tavualevu, Vanuakula and Rukuruku. We have always been raising this issue, but the promises were made and so far nothing has eventuated.”

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I hope the honourable Minister for Local Government with the honourable Minister for Agriculture and Waterways will address on the challenges faced by Tavua Town Council.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Standing Committee highlighted the need for capacity building within the Council. With recommended training programmes for Council's staff to improve their skills in areas such as project management, financial planning and community engagement. By investing in the professional development of its workforce, the Tavua Town Council can enhance its overall effectiveness and better serve the needs of its constituents.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Consolidated Review Report of Tavua Town Council Annual Reports for the year 2016 to 2018, serves as a critical tool for identifying weaknesses and proposing actionable solutions. It is imperative that we as Members of Parliament support the recommendations put forward by the Standing Committee to ensure that the Tavua Town Council operates with transparency, engages meaningfully with the community and builds the capacity of its staff. With those words Mr. Speaker, Sir, I fully support the motion.

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the motion for debate that is before the Parliament. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Local Government acknowledges the recommendations of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, we respect the reviews of the 2016 to 2018 Annual Report for Tavua Town Council, and I wish to thank the Standing Committee for the review they have carried out as well as very useful and practical recommendations they have included in their report.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Tavua Town is one of the smallest towns in Fiji, with only 311 rate payers and a revenue of around \$400,000 annually. Despite its size, Tavua Council has demonstrated remarkable efficiency in revenue collection, achieving 77 percent of current rates in the last financial year and collecting of arrears stood at 11 percent. Total outstanding amount for rates was only around \$51,000.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am proud to note that Tavua is ranked one of the top five Councils in terms of current rate collections from all the municipalities in our country. Furthermore, special administrators of Tavua are committed to completing all pending financial reports by November 2024, ensuring timely submissions to the Officer of the Auditor General.

The financial reports for 2019, 2020 and 2021 are already with the Auditor General's Office for review. This demonstrates that even our small Councils are setting a benchmark for accountability and transparency in local government leading by example, managing their finances and upholding public trust.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the new appointed special administrators, also very ambitious in developing business ideas for new revenue streams. The Council is working on a concepts to develop a new market, bus stand as well as a car park.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just to quickly respond to the six recommendations that were provided by the Standing Committee. One is on the Council to seek assistance from the Ministry of Environment regarding the carrying out of environmental impact assessment (EIA) reports for the new proposed dumpsite. I think I have also shared in one of my presentations this afternoon, currently, the Coalition Government is working on the review of the Waste Management System around the country and one of the projects that we have now is the proposed Western Landfill in the Western Division. Hopefully, once that is completed, we will be able to rope in Councils from Tavua right down to Sigatoka.

Next is on the MOU in place between Tavualevu Village and Tavua Town Council regarding the public conveniences. Mr. Speaker, Sir, Ministry of Local Government is consistently encouraging our municipal councils to maintain public convenience to high standards. It is something that we have been insisting with all the Councils, we must make sure that all the public conveniences are properly upgraded for better use by the public.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, Sir, financial sustainability is the key. While Tavualevu Village has taken the initiative to set up these facilities, the Town Council's first challenge is maintaining them without a sustainable revenue stream. The Council nevertheless, will work on options that are suitable for both the Council and the Tavualevu Village. We compare the needs of the village and users of the public convenience.

On the construction of a new market site as well as provision for a car park and bus stand. That is something that the new administrators are working on right now. They have been talking to the landowners on one of the new sites that they have identified, and one of the challenges right now for Tavua Town is, they do not have a bus station. The bus just stops and parks along the main highway and this is one of the reasons why we have a lot of traffic issues along the main street of Tavua Town. This is something that the Council as well as the newly appointed administrators are seriously looking at right now, reviewing it to ensure they find a place where they can also relocate the market. At the same time too, have a bus stand and also maybe create more parking spaces around Tavua Town.

A very important issue is the flooding issue in Tavua Town, which is normally brought about by the overflow of the Nasivi River. Something that we have also been liaising closely with the Ministry of Waterways to find out a long term solution for it. As it is for the past so many years, this place has been flooded, especially with what I was told, with the construction of the new bridge which has really deteriorated due the flooding issue in Tavua Town. It is something that the Council has to seriously consider now, to come up with a long term solution that is in collaboration with the Ministry of Waterways. The dredging of Nasivi River and other models or options that will be assisting and also resolve this long-standing issue.

One of the issues raised is, the Ministry of Local Government to assist with the funding of installation of solar floodlights at the Multipurpose Court. Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is one of the very important aspect of town and city management in all the municipalities in Fiji, where the lighting in public spaces, it is really important to ensure public safety when communities or the public come and use these spaces.

The Ministry, with the support from the Government of the People's Republic of China has provided 16 solar lights to the Tavua Town Council. This is from the 200 solar lights donated by the Guangdong province, and these lights are installed in the market, children's park, bus stand and the rear lane which is Mobil Service Station, and ANZ to name a few.

The Council also requested for some more additional solar lights, and we are also thankful to the Embassy for giving us some more solar lights and we are hopeful that we will allocate some of the solar lights to Tavua Town.

A very important issue is one of the last recommendations, the improvement of the town rate collection. I think I have also alluded earlier Mr. Speaker, Sir, Tavua Town is one of the best in terms of the collection of rates. Currently they have collected about 77 percent of the town rates, and it speaks volumes of the effort, as well as the strategies that are put in place by the management as well as the newly appointed administrators in managing the rate collection in Tavua Town.

The Ministry also assisted the Council to explore some of the rate collection strategies to assist the Councils in the collection of their rates. Like those that are working to actually pay directly from their wages and salaries, and also exploring better options like paying from other payment modes, like M-PAiSA and other online payment platforms. The Ministry will continue to support Tavua Town Council and its executives, ensuring that whatever challenges that they have, the Ministry is there to support these smaller town councils.

HON. A.N. TUICOLO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to make a short contribution on the motion moved by the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, honourable Iliesa Vanawalu, on the Consolidated Review Report of Tavua Town Council Annual Reports for the Years 2016 to 2018.

Before I go any further, I take this opportunity to thank the Chairperson and the Members of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs on the work they do in scrutinising the Annual Reports of the years in review and compiling the Consolidated Review Report which highlighted the Standing Committee's findings and recommendations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to speak on Recommendation 4.4. I noted that, in Recommendation 4.4, the Standing Committee recommends, that the Government to provide funding to the Ministry of Waterways for regular dredging of Nasivi River and to reinstate the annual grant for regular maintenance of the storm or V drains within the municipalities. According to a press release by the Ministry of Waterways in June 2020, the desilting works of six kilometres of the Nasivi River was completed by the Ministry in 2020. The issue of constantly losing crops, livestock, and infrastructure due to flooding for communities living along the Nasivi River, has been addressed by this project.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I understand that this is an expensive exercise for the Government, however, the recommendation by the Standing Committee, in the dredging and desilting works, will not only address flooding for the communities in Tavua, but will also boost the business activities in Tavua Town and will further support farmers along the Nasivi River to venture into commercial farming. The change in weather is beyond our control, therefore, the Tavua Town Council and nearby communities must also consider other alternative measures to address this issue, like controlling upstream activities, such as clear-cut logging, poor agriculture practices and other developments that would hinder the water flow of the river by reducing its discharge capacity.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I once again commend the Tavua Town Council with the work that they do in providing services and resources that enhances the quality of life of the Tavua community, and I request that the Municipal Council considers all recommendations put forward by the Standing Committee. I support the motion before the Parliament.

HON. I. S. VANAWALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I believe there is a lot that has been discussed in this august Parliament on recommendation from the honourable Members and the onus on the Ministry for Local Government for the implementation of the recommendations by the Standing Committee. On that note, in the review of the Report, the Standing Committee highlighted the various areas that need to be strengthened by the Council and the relevant recommendation formulated for a solution. Once again the Standing Committee would like to thank the Ministry of Local Government

for providing a timely response to the Standing Committee's recommendations. On that note, Sir, I have no other comments on this motion.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

**SPECIAL INVESTIGATION REVIEW REPORT –
PROCUREMENT OF GOODS AND SERVICES FOR ADB MEETING**

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

That Parliament debates the Review of the Special Investigation Report on Procurement of Goods and Services in relation to the 52nd Asian Development Bank Annual Meeting which was tabled on 5th September, 2024.

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

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, the honourable Deputy Prime Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Assistant Ministers and honourable Members of Parliament.

As the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, to move the motion, I take this opportunity to speak on the motion for the Review of the Special Investigation Report on Procurement of Goods and Services in relation to the 52nd Asian Development Bank Annual General Meeting.

Mr. Speaker, I will not go into the background in much detail but basically it is an investigation of plausible material mismanagement in the Ministry of Public Service focussing on funds used for the hosting of the 52nd Asian Development Bank Annual General Meeting in Nadi in 2019 where we spent a total of \$10.9 million VAT inclusive price.

Apart from going through the Report of the Office of the Auditor-General, the Committee on 22nd November, invited the Ministry of Public Service for a written response as well as a presentation on the issues raised. The Ministry of Finance was also invited to clarify issues, as well as the Ministry of Finance Internal Audit team which carried out the preliminary audit with the discussion or written response from Ms. Susan Kiran, the former Permanent Secretary. Unfortunately, due to the lapse of time, some of those responsible had left and could not be able to include them including the then Permanent Secretary.

The summary of findings, Mr. Speaker, Sir, based on the three objectives to ascertain if a fraud exists in payments. The Office of the Auditor-General found that there was sufficient audit evidence to determine if there was an existence of fraud. The second is to ascertain if payments were made in accordance with the applicable rules and regulations.

We found that generally there was non-compliance or there were anomalies on payments and the inability to manage the conflict of interest arising from the appointment of the Events Transport Provider. Then there was the issue of non-compliance on payments due to the lack of capacity, lack

of segregation of duties and timely planning. There is also significant delays in the processing of ADB meeting events major contracts.

Objective 3 is on the limitation of the FMIS system over the processing of payments or other transactions to provide avenues for the misappropriation of Government funds. The Office of the Auditor-General noted that limitation existed in the FMIS. The FMIS at that time allowed reopening of prior year's open account payables and there was no document, policy and guideline in place to assist the user on FMIS.

What the Committee found in addition to the findings by the Office of the Auditor-General was that the main cause of weakness was the setup of a project team by the Ministry of Civil Service. This consisted of contractors and civil servants with poor coordination amongst the civil servants leading to the low level of accountability. We found that there were issues with the Ministry of Civil Service that they were not able to manage the level of funding of around \$10 million. They did not have an Accounts Department to manage the payments process. There was no Standard Operation Procedure (SOP) or even a Finance Manual for that matter.

An important issue, the report itself was late even when it was completed in December 2020, it came to Parliament on 27th March, 2023. That was around three years later.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is good that the investigation was not conducted as subsequent to the Report, improvements were done by the Ministry of Civil Service and the current Permanent Secretary who managed to forward the cases and the report to FICAC.

With those words Mr. Speaker, Sir, I submit this Report to the Parliament.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion and I have a list with me provided by the Whips. Before I go into that, please be reminded honourable Members this is another case, \$10 million is involved here of taxpayers' funds which and it needs close scrutiny and oversight as well.

The batting will be as follows:

- (1) Honourable A.A. Maharaj;
- (2) Honourable Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for External Trade, Cooperatives, Small & Medium Enterprises;
- (3) Honourable P.K. Ravunawa;
- (4) Honourable Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Finance, Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you for allowing me to contribute briefly on this Special Investigations Report on the 52nd Asian Development Bank Annual Meeting which was held in Denarau. More than 3,582 attendees from both public and private sectors, visitors from around 76 countries and over 30 side meetings, seminars and debates took place during that particular Annual General Meeting. Nevertheless, the initial budget for this particular event was \$19 million and was then revised to \$10 million but the actual amount used was \$10.9 million.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this event gave us a good economic advantage and prosperous to Fiji because if we recall, soon after this particular Annual General Meeting, we went into COVID-19. It was through the negotiations that took place in this particular Convention that we were able to secure some interest-free loan during COVID-19. There were also certain loans that were approved during

COVID-19 which resulted from the negotiations in this meeting whereby we did not have to pay for quite a number of years and after that, then we had to pay the sum amount and not the interest because it was given to us at zero percent interest. If we look at it in entirety, some of these amounts would have been in a way, 50 percent was supposed to be paid by the government and 50 percent was issued to the Government in terms of grants. These were some of the advantages that came through after having an event of this magnitude. Never ever before we actually had an event in Fiji with this magnitude, mostly what we would actually have overseas.

But nevertheless, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the findings were quite interesting when we started investigating into this Report because whether it was \$10, \$100 or in this case \$10 million, if there is a mismanagement of funds, it needs to be investigated. If there is any kind of fraudulent act that has been performed, it should be referred to the appropriate authorities. In this case, what was actually surprising was that after this event, someone went into FMIS and voiding all the payments, not just for this year but going back to 2015. What also was surprising was the Chief Accounting Officer not doing anything about this particular case.

These were some of the things that raised the eyebrows of the Office of the Auditor-General because then there was also an investigation conducted by Internal Audit from the Ministry of Finance and these two reports were assessed by the Office of the Auditor-General before they carried out this independent investigation into ADB.

If we look at the amount of money that was mis-appropriated, it was close to around \$10,000. If we look at the ratio around \$10 million to \$10,000, it comes to around 0.1 percent. But as I have said, a mismanagement is a mismanagement. In this case, what we have seen when the Ministry of Civil Service was created, they had a budget of close to around \$1.5 million to \$3 million only. But then when there was a reform in the Ministry of Health, the doctor's salary was transferred from Ministry of Health to Ministry of Civil Service.

The Chief Accounting Officer at that point in time, who was the Permanent Secretary should have developed a fully-fledged Accounts Department in the Ministry of Civil Service. What was happening, they were relying on the Accounts Department from the Ministry of Employment. Basically, the staff were loaned from the Ministry of Employment to the Ministry of Civil Service to look after close to around \$40 million which was the salary of the doctors. Then when we actually had the event of this magnitude of around \$10 million which was precedence in the sense that we never had this kind of event prior to this, the Ministry of Civil Service opted to take it on board and without realising that they do not have a formal Accounts Department within the Civil Service. When they actually started negotiating, going in, preparing for this particular event, that was the time all these mismanagement, misappropriation and data actually started to go missing. What we actually expected back then was for the Permanent Secretary who was the Chief Accounting Officer to take action but the report was handed to the Permanent Secretary back then from the Events Coordinator and nothing was done.

One good thing that came out, that it came to Parliament and then to the Public Accounts Committee. Unfortunately, the Public Accounts Committee at that point in time did not have the powers to initiate that kind of investigation but through the Ministry of Civil Service and the Permanent Secretary, the case had been referred to FICAC.

In a nutshell, Mr. Speaker, Sir, from the Committee's findings there was no fully fledged Accounts section. No action was taken against the alleged officers. It was stated in the report that according to the Ministry of Civil Service, our preparation was not up to the expectation of ADB but still they went ahead with that.

Sir, there were shortfalls which led to mismanagement of funds but again I reiterate, we need to look at the nominal value as well and not generalise that there was fraud, for example, \$1 million or \$2 million but there was a certain amount for which accountability was missing. But the events after that led to it, going into FEMIS and removing the payment system, all that raised eyebrows.

With those words, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to commend the work of the Public Accounts Committee and its Members. The recommendations are practical. Most of them are now being actioned especially with the Ministry of Civil Service. One good thing is, in future if we have to organise an event of this magnitude, at least, now we have a SOP as to how we should go about conducting and facilitating such an event in Fiji, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you for the opportunity to talk very briefly on the Report before us, because it makes for very embarrassing reading actually. Nice try, honourable Maharaj.

Sir, when we look at this Report, you will recall that I used the analogy of the Nabukalou Creek. During high tide everything looks lovely and rosy but at low tide is a mess. This Report actually precisely demonstrates what I have said before. Again, of course, all of us looked in admiration when the 52nd ADB Meeting took place. A lot of positives actually happened, but, at the end of the day, what does ADB think of us in terms of the money we spent? That to me is probably the most concerning thing from this Report because, yes, we have gone ahead and done a few deals to help us through COVID-19 but again there will be a niggling feeling about accountability and things like that.

We can talk about transparency and all these kinds of things, but this Report just says and I hope, even our side of the House will learn from this, that things need to be done properly. We need to resource projects properly, we need to have the right people in the right place, we need to have the right ministries doing the work that is expected and finally, always get advice from your accountants or your bean counters, in this instance, the Ministry of Finance. It appears from the Report there was little, if any, guidance from the Ministry of Finance.

Some of the things that I thought I would highlight, Sir, as the Office of the Auditor-General noted and also the Committee that there is sufficient evidence to suggest that there is fraud. I hope that FICAC does follow through with the investigation whether it is \$10,000 or \$1 million, it should be investigated. There were instances when payments were made on inflated invoice amounts or invoices were used as a quotation to support payments. There were instances where unjustified payment of variations of contract, competitive quotes were not obtained, goods and services were not procured without issuance of Local Purchase Orders and there was no evidence to substantiate the receipt of goods. In addition, there was an inability to manage the conflict of interest arising from the appointment of the Event Transport Provider who was also the contracted Professional Conference Organiser (PCO). It was noted that the PCO did not act in the best interest of the Government when its own transport fleet was engaged to provide transport services without following open and transparent procurement procedures.

I will use the word that the honourable Usamate says a lot in this House, “flabbergasted” or as we say in *iTaukei* sometimes, “*sa vakamadua sara ga.*” When we have these kinds of opportunities to showcase ourselves internationally, we need to ensure that our ducks are in a row and with things in order because otherwise, we start being looked at as the laughingstock, sadly.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have to say with the Report in front of us and I thank the Committee for coming up with this Report, that this suggests a major breakdown in processes and procedures;

everything that you think could go wrong with a piece of project work is right here in this report. I know that as mentioned by honourable Maharaj and also the honourable Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, the Civil Service has since implemented a lot of the recommendations that were proposed and that is a positive, of course. But, for all of us in this august Chamber, I think there are some lessons from this Report that we need to take to heart as we plot our way forward in the new Fiji.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Prime Minister and Members of Parliament, thank you for this opportunity to contribute to the debate on the Special Investigation on the Report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts that was tabled on 5th September, 2024 and the Review Report by the Committee in the outcome of their scrutiny of the accounting process followed on the Procurement of Goods and Services during the 52nd ADB Meeting held in Nadi from 1st to 5th May, 2019.

The finding of the audit, Mr. Speaker presented to us today revealed indeed a disturbing and essential reality by the Ministry of Civil Service. There is a significant degree of non-compliance as alluded to by the previous speaker; non-compliance with rules and regulations pertinent to the procurement of goods and services which include the mismanagement of the Financial Management Act 2004, Finance Instructions 2010, Procurement Regulation and the amended Regulation in 2012, Ministry of Labour and Industrial Relations, Employment Finance Manual 2013, FMIS Access and Password Policy, ADB 2019 Green Book and the General Best Practices.

Mr. Speaker, the Office of the Auditor-General confirmed to the Committee that the criteria tested in each of the investigations were sufficient to conclude on the objectives set out on this audit. It was revealed in their professional findings the discrepancy as were noted, has also been alluded to by the previous speakers. It was also noted that there was an absence of disciplinary action on those who are implicated in this default and embezzlement of the taxpayer funds, and this is very serious, Mr. Speaker.

Upon deeper analysis of this finding, it seems that the issue stems out from lack of capacity, inadequate segregation of duty, untimely planning by the Ministry of Civil Service for Procurement of Goods and Services, poor handling or processing of quotations and the non-issuance of LPO and the controlled weaknesses of the settlement of invoice are the manifestations of these deficiencies.

To resolve this concern. Mr. Speaker, I support the Committee's recommendation to establish a fully-fledged professional accounting team to oversee and monitor the accounting system and the processes whenever we have events of such magnitude. An entity dedicated to upholding the sanctity of our procurement process would deter future instances of non-compliance and reflect our commitment to transparency, accountability and practice of good governance.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, it is critical for us to consider this finding and commit to a part of progressive reform within ministries and departments. I extend my heartfelt thanks to the Standing Committee of Public Accounts for presenting this comprehensive Review Report with its recommendations to Parliament, despite the multiple challenges they faced. Their endeavour aid us in our effort to improve, and their recommendations, Mr. Speaker, brings light to the path ahead of us towards an efficient, transparent and accountable procurement system, also we can learn and take on lessons learned from this Report. Let us come together and, navigate this path of transformation towards a transparent, efficient and a robust procurement process.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Members who have spoken before me. This Report is important because it does shed light on the critical importance of

integrity in Government procurement and I must say that having been in Government the last 20 months, there is an area where we have experienced serious issues with respect to having the right and qualified people in place for Government procurement projects, and that ensuring our processes are up to-date. I could go on and on of what happened in the past. We had issues such as procurement waivers for \$4.6 million during COP23, but what I want to do today is, not dwell on what happened in the past. When we were in Opposition, we used to raise this very strongly. Some of the lessons that we have learnt being in Opposition and looking at reports of that nature, I think, all we can do is to move forward and improve the various processes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the supply chain disruptions caused by COVID-19, and I know the point raised by the honourable Deputy Prime Minister Kamikamica are important points that we should all remember as a Government, as Members of Parliament, and I think more importantly for our civil servants, particularly those who are responsible for procurement. All these events of the past whether it is COVID-19, whether it is holding big conferences, we hold conferences on a daily basis, there are requests that come to me on a daily basis on waiver of tender for procurement, and there are some valid cases and events, for example, booking hotels. You cannot call for tender, it is impractical because the price keeps changing. When a particular Ministry, for example, Office of the Attorney-General is holding the Attorney-General's Conference, then what we get is a request for tender waiver for procurement of the services for a hotel. They make sense, they need to be done. But, a more strategic, forward looking procurement approach is essential to ensure that Government processes are executed with the utmost integrity and efficiency.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to assure the House, that the Ministry of Finance is taking a very proactive comprehensive approach to address these issues. We have reviewed the procurement regulations, and we have obtained Cabinet approval. For that, we are currently reviewing the financial instructions to complement the implementation of the new FMIS system thereby bolstering the integrity and the efficiency of our procurement and payment system. Sometimes it is the efficiency of the system that puts officials, officers, and different Ministries, there is urgency, things need to be done, and things do not go right. Sometimes it is not deliberate. It is just that the systems are not working. So, we are focusing on issues such as the processes and the systems.

In fact, the Ministry of Civil Service, the reforms that happened in the past, when the Public Service Commission, roles were taken by Ministry of Public Service; things happen. Even now the Ministry of Public Service (Public Service Commission) the clarification on payment of allowances, appointments, acting appointments, we find that there is lack of clarity. So, the staff cannot be blamed all the time in some of those cases.

The new FMIS system, Mr. Speaker, Sir is going to improve a lot of the data, systems and records and that will help. For example, honourable Maharaj talked about the void payments and how can we avoid all the wide range of risks that are involved in something like that. Unauthorised modifications, so the system that we have got now, Mr. Speaker, Sir, has got enhanced controls and they will serve as a safeguard against financial irregularities, and thereby protecting those who are involved in doing it as well as making sure that taxpayers funds are not wasted.

The recently approved Cabinet Procurement Regulations 24, Mr. Speaker, Sir, represent a significant step forward. In addition to value for money, integrity, accountability and fair competition, we have incorporated risk management and sustainability as new principles of government procurement. All Ministries are undertaking procurement projects or who are undertaking procurement projects must ensure that these principles are followed.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are working currently on comprehensive procurement guidelines to

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are working currently on comprehensive procurement guidelines to complement the new procurement regulations, and these guidelines will provide clear, unambiguous guidance to ministry personnel involved in procurement. We plan to implement the regulations and guidelines by March 2025 on top of the improvement, Sir, that have been made.

So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in conclusion, all want to say is that there are lot of issues from the past. We have to acknowledge that. It is there. Some of them have not been resolved. Some of them have never been investigated, whether it is to do with the issues within the Public Service or within Public Enterprises, Public Cooperations, but these are issues that are there. However, we have as Ministry of Finance and as a government focussed on improving some of those processes and systems. And I am confident, Mr. Speaker, that this will help the whole of Government.

Let me just repeat this very important point, that for procurement, that is a very critical area for Government in terms of the use of taxpayers' funds because everything that the Ministries do, every project that they do, services they provide, a lot of it is dependent on how quickly, how efficiently the Ministry staff, for example the Ministry of Health.

The honourable Minister for Health has all the good policies. There is a lot of advocacy. But what we find is when medicine does not reach Savusavu, it is nothing to do with doctors, nurses and those who are responsible for providing those services is Savusavu or Labasa. It is the procurement. It is the ability of the ministries procurement sections to be able to do that, plan that ahead, if you do not planned it, you can get the drugs on time and those who have worked in the Ministry of Health will understand this.

All I want to say is that this is a very, very important area. I am happy that the investigation report or investigation by the Auditor-General, interrogation by the Public Accounts Committee and the public enunciation of these issues, Mr. Speaker, Sir. In Parliament is an important signal to those who are involved in procurement. We look forward to more improvements as I said in terms of the reviews that we have done.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now call on the honourable Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts to speak in reply.

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to thank all the Members who have contributed to the debate this afternoon on the Report. I think we all agree there is a need for accountability in everything we do and also for future events, we need to have specific SOP for all events set up before we carried out such events of that magnitude.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to the Ministry of Civil Service as well as the other Government Ministries and Departments to learn from this experience so that it does not occur in the future. The Ministry of Civil Service to continue to follow up follow up with FICAC on those other cases apart from the \$10,000 loss that is stated in the Report.

MR. SPEAKER.- Before Parliament is asked to vote, honourable Members with due respect to the honourable Prime Minister and the honourable Leader of the Opposition, I will be invoking Standing Order 20 to refer the matter to the Subcommittee on Public Accounts to investigate further. This will be an addition to the matter that I had referred on yesterday, and I will await the report from the Standing Committee once more from your Subcommittee.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, that brings us to the end of the sitting today. There is another disturbance on my right, probably signalling that we have been here for too long, but I thank you for all your contributions. Parliament is now adjourned until tomorrow at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 6.56 p.m.