

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

THURSDAY, 16TH JULY, 2026

[CORRECTED COPY]

C O N T E N T S

	<u>Pages</u>
Minutes	1373
Communications from the Speaker	1373
Debate on the 2026-2027 Appropriation Bill 2026	1373-1483
<u>Committee of Supply</u>	
Head 12 – Ministry of Immigration	(Pages 1374-1375)
Head 16 – Ministry of Policing and Communications	(Pages 1375-1379)
Head 17 – Ministry of Civil Service	(Pages 1379-1382)
Head 18 – Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management	(Pages 1382-1393)
Head 19 – Republic of Fiji Military Forces	(Pages 1393-1394)
Head 20 – Fiji Police Force	(Pages 1394-1399)
Head 21 – Ministry of Education	(Pages 1399-1412)
Head 22 – Ministry of Health and Medical Services	(Pages 1412-1426)
Head 23 – Ministry of Housing	(Pages 1426-1429)
Head 24 – Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection	(Pages 1429-1435)
Head 28 – Ministry of Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics	(Pages 1435-1436)
Head 30 – Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways and Sugar Industry	(Pages 1436-1450)
Head 31 – Ministry of Fisheries	(Pages 1450-1453)
Head 32 – Ministry of Forestry	(Pages 1453-1456)
Head 33 – Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources	(Pages 1456-1457)
Head 34 – Ministry of Commerce and Business Development	(Pages 1458-1459)
Head 35 – Ministry of Multi-Ethnic Affairs, Culture, Heritage and Arts	(Pages 1459-1468)
Head 36 – Ministry of Public Enterprises	(Pages 1468-1469)
Head 37 – Ministry of Local Government	(Pages 1469-1472)
Head 40 – Ministry of Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport	(Pages 1472-1480)
Head 50 – Miscellaneous Services	(Pages 1480-1481)

THURSDAY, 16TH JULY, 2026

The Parliament met at 9.47 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

MR. SPEAKER took the Chair and read the prayer.

PRESENT

All Members were present, except the honourable Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade; the honourable Minister for Youth and Sports; and honourable S.S. Kirpal.

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Wednesday, 15th July, 2026, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE SPEAKER

Welcome

I welcome all honourable Members to the final sitting of this week. I hope you have had a good rest last night. I also welcome all those joining us in the gallery and those watching the live proceedings on television and the internet. Thank you for your continued interest in the workings of your Parliament.

United Kingdom Government Services Officers

Honourable Members, can you, please, join me in welcoming the two Officers from the United Kingdom (UK) Government Services, Mr. Jonathan Gifford and Mr. Benjamin Durston, who have been training the Media Communication Officers from the Ministry of Information.

(Acclamation)

They are accompanied by the Permanent Secretary. You are also welcome, Mrs. Nadakuitavuki.

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON THE 2026-2027 APPROPRIATION BILL 2026

(The House resolved into Committee of Supply)

In Committee:Head 12 – Ministry of Immigration

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We welcome back the honourable Minister. Hope you are well enough to answer queries on your portfolio. The floor is now open for any comments.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- On Programme 1-1(8) – Upgrade and Enhancement – Labasa Floating Pontoon; can the honourable Minister explain what this floating pontoon is?

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- Mr .Chairman, this is a pontoon that we have to build to allow our Officers that go and board vessels get onto the small boat. If you know Malau Wharf, on the left, the boarding officers just climb down the big boulders that protect the road and then jump onto the road. So, the pontoon is really just to make it safer for the boarding officers to get onto a small boat and then go and board the bigger vessels. That is the small floating pontoon that we need to build over there.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I am clear on that.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Programme 1-1(9) – Upgrade Security Capabilities (\$112,500). My question is related to this upgrade of security capabilities. I understand that a similar amount of money was given last year in the 2025-2026 Budget. If the honourable Minister can explain what work has been done and what was left, that he needs another \$112,000.

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- Mr. Chairman, through you, \$112,500, is the baseline that we were given from the Ministry of Finance for this. The upgrade of the security capabilities was carried forward from last year which include security cameras, et cetera, where we go in and work, in our ports and at the airport – the entry and exit points. We are asking for the same item, but we were given a baseline of \$112,500. Thank you, Sir.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- I have a supplementary question on that. We understand the importance of upgrading the security capabilities, particularly, at the airport, considering how one of the persons left the country, despite a stop order issued against him, and he exited through the airport. In my personal view, the Ministry of Finance needs to increase this budget because it is definitely very important that we safeguard our airport so that we do not have a mishap like that. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- Can I just provide clarification? That has nothing to do with this budget item.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Yes, I assume it was just a comment that she said as a follow up to her question, but you are most entitled to dispute that.

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- Yes, that is not involved in this budget item, but that has to do with IBMS, which is a totally different system.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- On the same SEG 9, I think in last year's Budget, the Advanced Passenger Information (API) and Passenger Name Record (PNR), \$978,261 was allocated. If the honourable Minister can advise Parliament on how that money was used.

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- Mr. Chairman, through you, that money was returned to the Ministry of Finance. The API-PNR gateway that we are pursuing is built on a self-funding model. We thought

that we were going to procure, but the vendors are building this on a self-funding model that is being successfully used in other countries where they provide API-PNR. Mr. Chairman, SITA is the vendor, and that is why you do not see it in this budget item. We did not use the money that was allocated last year because it is under a self-funding model. Thank you.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Chairman, thank you for giving me an opportunity. In SEG 9 of last year's Budget, it shows Disaster Recovery Support of \$1,467,000. Can the honourable Minister update Parliament on this?

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- Sir, can I ask him whether it is this year's Budget or last year's Budget?

HON. V. NATH.- Sir, it was in last year's Budget.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Are you referring to last year's Budget?

HON. V. NATH.- Because it does not appear in here.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- No, I am just seeking clarification for him. Is it a figure that appears in last year's Budget and you are comparing it to this year's SEG-9?

HON. V. NATH.- Yes, Sir.

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- I apologise, I do not have last year's budget with me. What figure are you asking about?

HON. V. NATH.- It was for disaster recovery support. It is a huge amount, Mr. Chairman, of \$1,467,000.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- No, I will not allow you to go back to last year's budget. We are looking at SEG 9 as it is now, and the item that you are quoting does not appear on SEG 9.

HON. V. NATH.- That is the reason, Sir. It is a huge amount given of this financial year and it does not appear in this year's Budget. How was the money utilised so that we can ask for more here?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- No, I will not allow that - it is out of order. We are looking at this budget as it is now. You cannot ask how last year's budget was utilised. We are just talking about this year's allocation.

We will move on. Parliament will now vote on Head 12.

Question put.

Head 12 – Ministry of Information, agreed to.

Head 16 - Ministry of Policing and Communications

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, Programme 1-1(7) - Narcotics Operation. I see that the budget has been reduced from \$1.95 million from last year to \$1.6 million this year. Considering that we have a lot of issues with drugs in the country, the honourable Minister has to tell us on how he used the \$1.95 million and now that the budget has been reduced, how will he try and deliver?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Are you with honourable Kumar, honourable Naivalurua?

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- I am, Sir. She is asking an item on SEG7.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Yes, can you respond?

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Chairman, this is an ongoing process in line with Government plans. There is a reduction of \$356,522 this year. This year's allocation of \$1.6 million is sufficient to support all the plans in the establishment and the initial operation or the functioning of the Counter Narcotics Bureau.

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Chairman, just a comment on that, last year it included some equipment that were purchased for the Bureau.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- So, I understand that \$1.6 million is only given for the Counter Narcotics Bureau's operation.

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Yes.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- That is for the office to operate.

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Yes. This Unit here is housed within my Ministry.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- So, where is the money for all these joint works that is being undertaken by the Police and the RFMF together to combat?

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Chairman, it is under operations. As you would know and if we had been following the developments on the establishment of the Counter Narcotics Bureau, most of the work now is being done at the Police level, whilst we are trying to establish the Counter Narcotics Bureau. There will be a gradual shift towards the Counter Narcotics Bureau taking full ownership on its function and the operations of drugs.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Honourable Minister, in SEG 7 - Police Act Review with a sum of \$56,250. The current status of the Police Act is that it is in Parliament with the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights. Why is it that it still says review?

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Chairman, this particular amount is intended also for the implementation of the Act. It should be noted, Mr. Chairman, that the process moves very quickly and I thank the honourable Attorney-General and his team. It is now in Parliament with the Standing Committee and it is also intended, not only for the review but also the implementation when it comes out.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, not particularly on SEG 7 but on the Aid-in-Kind that follows - Improving Cybersecurity Capability in the Pacific Island Countries (JICA) for \$1.1 million. If the Minister might elaborate a bit on that.

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Chairman, during my contribution to the Budget debate on Tuesday, I had clearly specified that this particular Aid in Kind from the Japanese Government is to commence in September this year for training and capacity building on the critical infrastructure operators for Fiji and the Pacific Island countries. It is more a regional programme, and the total sum is held by the honourable Minister of Finance.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, can I just ask a question on the same issue to the honourable Minister? Is this going to the Communications Unit within your Ministry, or is it to the Police? I think the honourable Minister would know that there were discussions previously about this (cybersecurity) being taken to be with the Police. I just wanted to know where we stand now.

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- It is held with us, but there is close coordination. The utilisation of these funds is here with the Police, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Programme 2-1(5).

HON. V. LAL.- Mr. Chairman, can the honourable Minister explain about this Hosting and Online Subscription? I can see there is a \$900,000 allocated to that.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Minister, did you hear that?

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Would you repeat that question again?

HON. V. LAL.- On SEG 5 – there is an allocation of \$900,000 towards hosting an online subscription. Can the honourable Minister explain what is it, please?

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Chairman, a figure of \$900,000, a critical allocation which ensures the infrastructure and hosting services are maintained for key applications such as the Register of Companies, these are ongoing programmes, the Digital Fiji Stack, Government Chatbot, this ensures that key online services offered by Government continue to be available for the public.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Programme 2-1(7)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Honourable Minister, under SEG 7 – Ease of Doing Business. It has been given \$4 million. What activities are being undertaken for that \$4 million with respect to Ease of Doing Business?

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Again, Mr. Chairman, this was clearly articulated in my address the other day. But the allocation will be utilised for the ongoing implementation of the Business Now Project. The allocation will support the completion and deployment of the building permits and approvals subsystem across six agencies and 13 Councils, continuous improvement of the starting a business subsystem and infrastructure provision. This is a major digitalisation project for government as it increases transparency, accountability, and support the growth of Fiji's economy. If we had taken time to read the key national documents, on the digitalisation transformation, the cybersecurity, and the relevant Asia contingencies. This brings meaning to this particular funding.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, the question that I wanted to ask has been asked by honourable Koya.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- It is a follow-up question on the same subject, Ease of Doing Business. Last year, \$4.3 million was given. Was all the sum used, or you need more money for the full completion of this work?

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Ideally, we would have needed more money, but we are mindful of the other government priorities. We can live and survive with the amount that is allocated to us this year.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- So by when do you think this project will end? Because it has been

going on for almost five years, I think.

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- The intended timeline is in the next two to three years, but full appraisal of this particular, Sir, is in 2030.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- So another few years. What is the projected total cost of this project?

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- I would not have that figure in my hands

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- That is all right

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, just a request to the honourable Minister is the last bit on SEG 7 - DigitalFIJI (\$400,000), if you might just elaborate a bit.

HON. I. NAIVALURUA. – Mr. Chairman, this is together connected to our transformation strategy for Government, and it is all linked to that which I clearly articulated the other day, so this is part of it. I could give a separate briefing again to the honourable Member, a more detail on this later.

HON. P.D. KUMAR. – Programme 2-2(5) -Telecentres, \$202,500 is given, it has been reduced by \$23,000. I wanted to know how effective are these centres and if any other centre has been closed.

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- This was well briefed in my contribution to the Budget debate.

HON. P. D. KUMAR. – Mr. Chairman, I apologise, I was not there.

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- There are existing numbers, there are three new ones that are under our plan for this year. These funds that are allocated are sufficient to do that. Thank you.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- I have one question on Programme 2-2(6), honourable Minister, about Walesi because I know that the former Deputy Prime Minister wanted Walesi to be investigated. What is the progress in that? We are still continuing to pump millions of dollars into Walesi but it would be good to know what has been done about allegations against

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Chairman, I could give a separate briefing to the honourable Leader of the Opposition later. I can say at this point in time that this fund is allocated to replace the infrastructure and keep the body functional and operational to serve our people out there. It is quite useful, but there are other relevant parts that are moving, and I can do a separate briefing for the honourable Leader of the Opposition later.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman. I insist that we just get an update whether that investigation is ongoing or it has been shelved, because we are talking about taxpayers' money going into Walesi operations.

HON. I. NAIVALURUA – Mr. Chairman, if it satisfies the honourable Leader of the Opposition, the investigation is still with FICAC.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, Programme 2-2(7) – Feasibility Study – Shore Based Facilities. I just wanted to ask the honourable Minister what is meant by that?

HON. I. NAIVALURUA - Mr. Chairman, this amount has been a reduction of \$81,250 for

this year, but in brief, it is the allocation to be used to support the MSAF and Fiji Navy. They undertake the study for the upgrade of the Maritime Vessel Radio Communication, Suva Radio 3DP, which supports communication with seafarers and also can contribute to supporting maritime security work being done by the Fiji Police.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Honourable Minister, Programme 2-3(9) - Purchase - IT Infrastructure. From lessons from the past, our vulnerability when it comes to communication systems and I will use *TC Winston*, for example, we have to ask the International Telecommunications Union to provide us with satellite phones, which was flown all the way from Geneva because all our systems were down. What sort of consideration is there in terms of contingency plans when it comes to disasters in terms of our IT infrastructure, to support the system that we have, given the vulnerability and our over-reliance on the current system?

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Chairman, I do not think that question is related to this particular item on SEG 9. However, just to say that SEG 9 is an important part of the ITC. The purchase of IT infrastructure for \$1 million and likewise, storage server capacity. Those are all related to the transformation and maintenance of service provided by ITC. The first one is for the network infrastructure, and the second one is for the hosting environment. This is an ongoing yearly part of the work that needs to be done with ITC, Mr. Chairman.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, can I just, perhaps, plead with Government if this can be considered because of the difficulties that we face when it comes to communications. The current Government has not gone through one that has taken us to that extent because it is good to have these capabilities. Even during *TC Pam* in 2015, we deployed the only few satellite phones that the Ministry of Rural Development and Disaster Management had to help our Ni-Vanuatu brothers and sisters. I just urge Government if this can be considered.

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- May I respond to that, Mr. Chairman? For the information of the honourable Leader of the Opposition, we have a parallel plan that is running at the moment, which we call Starlink. Phase 1 of the Starlink right now is 117 sites, 50 has been completed, which I clearly articulated in my last brief in Parliament, and Phase 2 commences in August this year.

In addition to that, Mr. Chairman, I sit as the Chairman of the ITC Steering Committee. We monitor very closely now all this equipment that are now required by the various Ministries to keep track of what is required and part of it is what exactly the honourable Leader of the Opposition said.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We will now move on. Parliament will now vote on Head 16.

Question put.

Head 16 – Ministry of Policing, agreed to.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- I will just remind the honourable Minister for Immigration that he is at liberty to leave, if he so wishes.

Head 17 - Ministry of Civil Service

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, Programme 1-1(5) - Review of Civil Service Guidelines. From last year, the budget has allocated \$56,250 and this year \$50,625. Can the honourable Minister explain why it is taking so long to complete the review of the Civil Service Guidelines?

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Chairman, it is an ongoing review and has been undertaken by the Permanent Secretary and the Public Service Institute that is in Laucala and it is ongoing.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, Programme 1-1(6) – Fiji Learning Institute of Public Service (FLIPS). I take it that in the Civil Service, the salary for people that will be in FLIPS is covered in SEG 1 and SEG 2. Can the honourable Prime Minister explain the allocation of \$316,980. Is this to cover the programme costs for the programs that will be covered completely or just limited to this? Will the Government also get funds from elsewhere to help fund the programmes that will be undertaken at FLIPS?

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- The assumption is correct, Mr. Chairman. The other funds coming in would be through the grants that will go to the Ministry of Finance and they are also part of the ongoing requests that come from the Institute to the Permanent Secretary, and then forwarded to the Ministry of Finance, also by the ongoing discussions right through the year.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Is this the core funding?

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Yes, that is the core funding.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Additional funding will come from Ministry of Finance?

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Yes.

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- FLIPS will also receive that 0.1 percent of the NTPC levy, so that is additional \$3 million.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Honourable Prime Minister, with respect to the Fiji Learning Institute for Public Services Bill, that was brought to Parliament and was later withdrawn. Will this sum cover the work that is being done to possibly bring back the newer legislation?

Earlier on, there was a Fiji Learning Institute for Public Services Bill that was brought to Parliament and was withdrawn. I am just asking whether this sum will cover the work that is ongoing with respect to the review of that particular issue to be brought back to Parliament?

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- That is correct.

HON. J. USAMATE.- SEG7 – Functional Review of Civil Service (\$400,000). If the honourable Prime Minister can explain exactly what that will cover?

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Chairman, this is particularly in response to the various comments and observations made by the honourable Members of the Opposition. We continue to listen to you and to try and adjust the Civil Service to the budget and to the evolution of Civil Service around the world. We are using also our institute to put that into practice and make recommendations.

HON. J. USAMATE.- So, that might include suggestions of right-sizing the Civil Service.

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- That is the objective.

HON. H. CHAND.- This is on the Functional Review of Civil Service – SEG 7. There is an allocation of \$400,000 and last year, there was a similar allocation. My question to the honourable Prime Minister is, by when will this review conclude and if there will be a need for further funding?

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Chairman, the term review is the wrong term to be using because Civil Service is evolving. We are bringing in technology and some of those civil servants will be replaced by machines and computers.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Again, as the honourable Prime Minister said, that technology will be used. My question to you, Sir, is whether you have looked at Artificial Intelligence (AI) policy that you would be adopting in your Ministry or have you decided as the Prime Minister of this country that we need an AI policy so that each and every Ministry will be affected? Do we have anything like that?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- It is part of the Ministry of Communication's strategy - AI. It is included in there.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, while still on the same subject, the honourable Prime Minister already made a Ministerial Statement about Australia's involvement in this functional review. Is that still part of this programme or are we doing a separate one and then we will submit it to the experts or whatever? It was also mentioned in the previous budget by the former Minister that the functional review of the Civil Service will be assisted by the Australian Government.

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Chairman, we continue to be assisted by the Australian Government, and they self-fund, but we continue to cooperate.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Chairman, just a clarification on the procedures on the estimates through Committee of Supply, in terms of focussing on the budget, the amount and the variations. However, here we are moving into questions on the programmes moving forward, moving backward. Just seeking a clarification on the demarcation or the limits of this debate.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The only reason I will allow it, because it has to be done in the context. I understand where you are coming from. However, I will allow also going back only to give context to the present allocation. I will take that on board.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Chairman, just a clarification from the honourable Prime Minister with regards to the Functional Review of the Civil Service. He must have heard that I raised this issue about Medical Interns being on contract. Is this fund also going to be used to ensure that they start and the review is done so that they can move from contract to permanent establishment, because the Medical Interns are given only two-and-a-half-year contract at the moment?

The policy comes from the Ministry of Civil Service, that is why I am asking the honourable Prime Minister under Civil Service, and it will be just endorsed by the Ministry of Health. If this funding is going to be utilised to review, moving from contract to permanent establishment for the Medical Interns?

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Chairman, as you understand, the Permanent Secretaries and the level of Civil Service come under some provisions of the Constitution, and we have to work and harmonise what we do to change that with the requirements of the Constitution.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, please, take note that Programme 2 has been transferred to Head 40, and Programme 3 has been transferred to Head 36. The Parliament will now vote on Head 17.

Question put.

Head 17 - Ministry of Civil Service, agreed to.

Head 18 – Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management

HON. V. NATH.- I have a general clarification, Mr. Chairman. From page 104, SEG 8, it appears that there is a reduction of \$3,663,000. Could I get a clarification on that?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We will get there. We will go SEG by SEG, and when we get to SEG 8, you can raise that issue.

HON. V. NATH.- I understand, Sir. Can I get a clarification, Sir?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you for your indulgence.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Chairman, Programme 1-1(8), there is a huge reduction of \$3,663,000 which appears in the book on page 104, and it is not SEG 8. There are a few capital projects being moved, and I need a clarification on that. What projects have been moved from there?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We are talking about SEG 8 - it has certain items. Are you referring to something that is not there?

SEG 8 - Capital Construction and a reduction of \$3 million. Is that correct - \$3 million? Perhaps, the honourable Minister can explain that.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Chairman, I do not know what the question is, or what he is referring to. I know it is in SEG 8, but I do not know what particular item there that needs to be explained.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Alright, we will get honourable Usamate to explain that to us.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, the overall for the Ministry on page 104, and if you look at SEG 8, you can see that there has been a reduction of \$3,663,000, so he is asking for that. However, our process is that we go to the Programmes and Activities, then look at SEG 8 in each of the Programme and Activity. He is asking for the overall, but it will be addressed when we go through SEG 8 in each of the Programme and each of the Activity.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- It is a general question.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Usamate has clarified that. We go to SEG 8, and we will deal with each of those programmes, and then it will come to his concern.

Now, we are in SEG 8, so what activities are we referring to which is of concern to the honourable Member?

HON. V. NATH.- Again, the same question, Mr. Chairman, when you look at SEG 8, there is a huge reduction. That is what I am asking. Why is there a reduction there? What are the projects that have been removed from there?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Chairman, I will provide the details. The \$3.6 million is the net reduction. There were some increases - Construction and Retrofitting - Evacuation Centres (\$1 million); Retention Payments - Construction Works (\$342,000); Community Access Roads, Footpaths and Footbridges (\$750,000); Upgrade of Government Buildings in Lautoka (about three

were done); Upgrade and Enhancement of Building Quarters (\$636,000); Cabling Suspension Bridges in a few places (\$978,000); Sawanikula-Tubarua Road which has already started (\$102,000); Coastal Erosion - Nasilai Village; as well as the Construction of New Office and Quarters (\$500,000). So that is the net decrease of around \$3.73 million.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- He is happy, so thank you honourable Minister for your clarification. Honourable Kumar?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Sir, the construction of Sawanikula-Tubarua Road, I see that \$600,000 has been allocated this year. Last year, \$782,609 was allocated. If the honourable Minister can explain whether that fund was fully utilised, or it is going to be carried forward this year. How are you working on this particular project and what is the progress?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Chairman, the project is progressing very well, and the project will facilitate the improved accessibility and mobility to six Villages, including Tubarua, Matawailevu, Nasava, Nasauvere, Narokorokoyawa and Korovou. The road will provide improved access and connectivity to the communities, allowing them to travel easily to nearby towns for work, education, healthcare and other essential services. This increased mobility will enhance the quality of life for the residents and open up economic opportunities for the people of Naitasiri.

They are so thankful that this Government is hearing them - the previous government did not listen to them. The money that was allocated last year had been utilised, and now we are moving into Phase 2, and we thank the current contractors who are currently working on that. We assure the people of the community that this road will be completed in this financial year.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, I wanted to declare my interest here. Last year, when we had the Committee of Supply, I had asked the honourable Minister of Rural Development now, that there is a bridge that was requested to be built between my village and the school, which at the moment they are using a *bilibili* with two ropes at both sides of the river and the students are actually pulling it to go across. The honourable Prime Minister had promised through honourable Bulitavu that he will follow it up and it will be financed through the Prime Minister's Office. I just wanted to ask the Minister if that is going to be done this year?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- No worries, Mr. Chairman, that can be done as long as he supports the Budget.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Sir, just to clarify that this particular road was actually started when I was still Minister.

(Honourable Member interjected)

HON. J. USAMATE.- Listen! Listen! Hold your horse! Hold it tight! This is one of the issues that we have when we make roads. You make roads. The route is agreed. When you start cutting, then the landowners do not like the route, then it stops. Well, that needs to be very clear! That is why it stops. I have actually walked that route. Before roads are cut, I walked the routes. So, I know what I am talking about. I do not sit in offices; I walk the routes!

My question, Mr. Chairman, I just need to clarify because he said the previous government did not do anything. That is a lie! So, with this amount will this now complete the project with \$600,000 or, are there still a few more stages left?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- We still have another few phases to do - like Tubarua. It is still in

Matawailevu at the moment and surely, we will reach to the end of the project right in Tubarua.

HON. F.S KOYA.- Honourable Minister, you have got listed here construction which says new office and quarters for \$0.5 million. It does not say where and it does not say who for. Can you please explain, Sir?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Chairman, this is a new expenditure, and it was not in last year's estimate. It is to enhance and improve the accessibility of rural communities to Government Services Centres especially accessing the Government Services Programmes advice as well as initiative for rural development and efficiency and effectively.

The 2026-2027 Budget, the Ministry will prioritise commencement of construction work, as you asked, for new quarters in Seaqaqa. I hope you have been to Seaqaqa. Wainua that is in Wainimala. In Naitasiri, Korolevu office, Vanuabalavu quarters and plus other quarters.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, I was going to ask a question on the upgrade and enhancement of quarters in Vunisea and there is another allocation as well just on quarters in general. The question that I want to ask is, because I understand that the office and accommodation responsibility is now with the Minister for Public Works. So, I just want to clarify with the Minister whether this allocation is just with them and then they will have the work undertaken by Ministry of Public Works, or will they be entirely responsible for the implementation, given the capacity limitations that they have. I understand that they have the rural housing people, but that is the question that I want to ask the honourable Minister.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Chairman, just to assure the honourable Leader of the Opposition, as a former Minister for Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management, this will be carried out by the Ministry either through our team in Rural Housing, where we have carpenters who can do this. We will put it up to tender to other contractors outside, which are listed in the Ministry.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Programme 1-1(8) – Construction and Retrofitting – Evacuation Centre. A request if the honourable Minister might tell us, what those evacuation centres are?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Come again?

HON. J. USAMATE.- Construction and Retrofitting – Evacuation Centre (\$2,200,000). I would just like to know which evacuation centres?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Again, Mr. Chairman, this aims to enhance community resilience and safety for rural populace by establishing and improving designated spaces that serve as effective evacuation centres during emergency or disasters. This includes construction and retrofitting of evacuation centres to meet established safety standards such as the Fiji National Building Code, ensuring the provisions of secure and accessible spaces during emergency and disaster, and can also be used for other social and economic activities in good times.

The Government contributes two-thirds to the project cost, up to \$100,000, that is the limit. You cannot go above that, honourable Usamate. The initiative does not include constructions of churches and temples, unless they are able to sign a form which is in the Ministry, that they want to hand over the ownership to be a registered evacuation centre. It is quite rare to have that given the ownership of the property.

Out of the revised budget of \$1.8 million, a sum of \$1.4 million, which is 76 percent has been

utilised for implementation of 40 projects. Nine in the Central Division, seven in the Eastern Division, 12 in the Northern Division, and 12 in the Western Division. In the 2026-2027 Budget, a total of 50 projects is earmarked for implementation over the four divisions.

HON. J. USAMATE.- So we could get a list of those earmarked projects from him later?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Unless you have some specific areas that you want?

HON. J. USAMATE.- No, no, no, I just want to see which ones are targeted.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Well, again, when the Budget is passed, Mr. Chairman, we have got the list in our master system that we will relook, and we will see by priority which ones that needs to come first.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Chairman, Programme 1-1(8) – Upgrade and Enhancement – Building Warehouse (West) (\$168,750). Is this just upgrade and enhancement or you are building a new warehouse? It is not clearly defined. The \$168,000 to build a warehouse does not seem to be a correct amount.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- It is an enhancement, Mr. Chairman, so we are going to improve that.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- So it is not a building?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- We are building one in the North. If you go up past the Army Barracks in Labasa, Sukanaivalu, and go up to Vaturekuka to the Correction Services, on the right, we held a groundbreaking ceremony two weeks ago, where we are doing one for the North that will benefit a lot of people in Bulileka, honourable Maharaj.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, I will ask the honourable Minister a specific evacuation centre because he asked for it. About the nine in the Central Division. Matacula Village was one of the four villages that were to be funded under KOICA and IOM. This was raised in the Town Hall *talanoa* in Korovou by the Turaga ni Koro of Matacula. The honourable Minister of Foreign Affairs has assured the Turaga ni Koro of Matacula that it will now be funded by Government and not from IOM and KOICA. So, is Matacula Village, one of the nine evacuation centres earmarked for the Central Division?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- SEG 9, honourable Koya? Your question has not been answered.

Assistant Minister you have the floor.

HON. J.R. VOCEA.- For Matacula, the delay was due to some misunderstanding and the place where the community of the evacuation center was supposed to be built, there were differences amongst the landowners.

Now, if it is sorted out, we will really look at it in this current financial year, because it has been a long-dragging issue. We were supposed to have built it a few years back, but due to some misunderstanding and the landowners were in disagreement with the place that we were supposed to build it. But surely if it is all cleared, then this financial year we will undertake it.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Just a quick question honourable Minister on SEG 9, it says Procurement of NDRMO Operational Mobility Vessel. Meaning one - what kind of vessel is this? Is this for sea,

land, air? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU. - The intention is to procure a work boat, which is a 20-seater boat for disaster response to provide mobility in inaccessible areas, enabling transport of emergency personnel, evacuation of affected population and delivery of essential supplies. The boat will act out of roving emergency boat, honourable Koya, targeting rural and maritime natural hazard and future events response, especially in Lomaiviti, Kadavu, Beqa and Yanuca.

The aim is to ensure rapid deployment and effective operation in disaster response, enhance emergency response capabilities by enabling the transport of personnel, as I have alluded to, equipment and relief supply. So, the allocation here, the tender been awarded to the supplier in the fourth quarter, that was in 2025-2026, in the current budget year we have, and the tender process required technical external expertise for the full assessment, scoping and design of the project. For the completion of the project, the tender has been awarded to the vendor - Integrated Welding Industries, for completion in 42 weeks upon mobilisation.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, that was SEG 9. We are done with Programme 1-1, but before we do, if I can just ask the honourable Members to join me in welcoming Mr. Joshua Kemp, Counsellor, from the British High Commission, who has joined us this morning. You are most welcome.

(Acclamation)

We will have a short break now and suspend our proceedings for our morning tea. Parliament will resume in half an hour.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.48 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.23 a.m.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Programme 2-2(4)?

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Chairman, on Programme 2-2(4), the upkeep of the burial grounds appears in all the Divisions. I would request the honourable Minister to just clarify who are the people that can apply for this? Is it for designated burial grounds or it is when application comes in? It appears in all four Divisions.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Chairman, the purpose for the allocation is for the upkeep and maintenance of burial grounds. Given that we are still in Programme 2-2(4). That is for burial grounds in Enamanu cemetery in Nadi, Vatukoula, Tavua and Sigatoka Cemeteries. And you will see this, Mr. Chairman, in all the Divisions, given that it will go to other Northern Division, Eastern Division, Central Division, there will be something common appearing, and it is for the same. These are listed burial grounds.

HON. V. NATH.- Just a request. There few *mataqali* that have their own burial grounds. Do they qualify to apply for this one as well, or it is all through the Commissioners or it is designated for certain areas?

HON. J.R. VOCEA.- Mr. Chairman, yes, we are now in Programme 2-2 is for Commissioner Western Division. Is that question directed has got anything to do with burial ground in the Western Division?

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Chairman, I think the honourable Assistant Minister is not listening. I did say that it appears in all four divisions. I am asking my simple question, is it for designated burial grounds or anyone can apply? Because a *mataqali* was asking me, they want to upkeep their burial grounds. Can they apply if they can?

HON. J.R. VOCEA.- Do they want to give their land for burial grounds, honourable member?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- I think what the honourable Member is trying to say whether, in fact, this is a fund that is available for people to use if they need to.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, can I clarify as a former Minister? No. These are burial grounds that are not looked after by Fiji Correction Services, but it is accessible to the public. Those private burial grounds, do not qualify. Each of the divisions, like the honourable Minister said, like Enamanu. Civil servants that died are buried there, the late Manasa Vaniqi was buried there. In the divisions, they know the burial grounds that the commissioners look after.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, on Programme 2-4(5), I just wanted to ask, for Commissioner Eastern, there is a subject on transportation of building materials. I just want to ask the honourable Minister, as it appears only for Commissioner Eastern, is this the transportation by sea that the allocation has been given?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Chairman, the provision facilitates for cartage and freight costs for project materials. To date, the utilisation stands at \$162,883, which is equivalent to 97 percent. That is the purpose, honourable Koroilavesau.

HON. V. NATH.- Programme 3-1(7) on Emergency Water Supply, can the honourable Minister elaborate on that, please?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Chairman, I thank honourable Nath. As former Assistant Minister for Rural and Maritime Development, the objective is to provide adequate water supply during periods of dry weather to drought-stricken areas and where water sources have dried up. This initiative complements the Water Authority of Fiji's interventions in the rural areas. This will ensure that the communities affected by dry spells are provided with safe drinking water in a timely manner.

These communities include those that are in the maritime remote areas and most of the communities do not have any source of drinking water and are heavily dependent on rainwater harvesting. The system covered under the programme includes but not limited to - carting off water to affected communities and procurement of water tanks and fittings to vulnerable communities. So, in the 2025-2026 Budget, a sum of \$331,460.24 was allocated and that was 100 percent utilised for the purchase of water tanks from Rota Tank Fiji, for the Central, Western, Northern and Eastern Division; carting emergency water to schools, health centres, nursing stations, et cetera.

HON. V. NATH.- Just a follow-up question on that. Often, we have seen this money gets exhausted, and currently, in the Central even, we are facing this drought and we can feel it. I have started seeing that water is being delivered to a number of places where honourable Professor Prasad normally visits Taoi and Nakadi. As I mentioned in my speech, the *El Nino* effect is there, and it is a warning which was given by the weatherman, knowing that we are top six in the world. We cannot see any contingency fund for the dry spell. Can the honourable Minister explain how will we face it and how will we act on that?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Chairman, last year, as I had alluded to, \$337,500 was allocated, and in this Estimate in the 2026-2027 Budget, it is increased by \$300,000. So, that should cater for other things that we have done from experience. That will be sufficient enough for that particular activity, Sir.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Chairman, just a clarification to the honourable Minister with regards to SEG 8 – Community Access Road, Footpaths and Footbridges (\$3,000,000). Are these designated roads only in the rural division or does it also cover peri-urban areas? I will just give a typical example, and the honourable Minister would be in a better position to understand. For example, Golf Link Road in Labasa falls under peri-urban areas, but there are a lot of branches going out of Golf Link Road which are in a very bad condition. Do they qualify to apply for this grant to have those branches fixed within the peri-urban areas where there are heavily populated areas?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Chairman, this is purely for the rural areas and maritime.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, my question is on SEG10 – High-Risk Water Sanitation Project where \$684,783 is allocated. Can the honourable Minister inform us, which ones are these high-risk water sanitation projects and the details of the sites?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Chairman, let me give a brief background, honourable Premila Kumar, on this project. This project aims to ensure every Fijian has access to clean and safe water in adequate qualities.

In addition, this is also to ensure every Fijian has access to adequate sanitation facilities. In the current 2025-2026 Budget, we had \$626,000 and about 91 percent had been utilised to construct 34 ecological purification systems, reticulation systems and sanitation projects, which includes toilet facilities. Our toilet facilities are not considered safe or proper in terms of quality and usage, risking exposure to disease and to human health. However, once this Budget is approved, there is a list in the office that we will priorities and identify. We have been giving out these in areas, especially in Udu Point, in the Western Division in Nadi, in Rakiraki, and other places where they need water

sanitation projects.

HON. V. NATH.- On the Grant for Self-Help Project (\$1,300,000), could the honourable Minister elaborate on that, please, Sir?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- The programme aims to empower local communities by enabling them to take the lead in identifying and implementing projects that directly address the unique development needs.

The funding provided for this Self-Help programme is shared amongst the four Division Commissioners. Government makes two-thirds of the total project cost, while the applicant contributes one-third for the projects which includes honourable Nath, a bakery, tailoring, brush cutter, community rural-based eateries, fishponds, solar freezers, small-scale tourist, piggery, and other fishponds, et cetera.

HON. V. NATH.- I thank the honourable Minister for saying that solar freezers are included. The reason being, Mr. Chairman, is some of my friends from Vatoa Island, who I hope are listening to me now, they requested to me. They are suppliers of fish, and often we have seen that when they send fish to the mainland here, the fish gets bad. Therefore, they have made a request for a solar freezer, and I hope the applications are with you. I have noted that you mentioned that the solar freezer will definitely be in the project. I appreciate that.

(Honourable Member interjected)

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you, I will decide that.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Thank you, honourable Chair. I think this Committee of Suppliers is turning into a “*kerekere*” session. Honourable member, you can come to the office at Knolly Street and ask the Turaga-ni-Koro in Vatoa as there is a process in place. Once they put in an application, we look into the need. If you would like to go and handover, I can also give you permission.

(Laughter)

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am getting a bit worried that there are some people trying to take over your Chairpersonship's role. Another no squad here. If the Minister might care to elaborate a bit on the Programme 3-1(10) - Seafaring Entrepreneur Assistance Subsidy.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Chairman, the funding is allocated to subsidise the purchase of fully equipped and operational fibreglass boats for Fijians living in isolated coastal areas in Viti Levu, Vanua Levu, and Maritime Islands, that also includes Kadavu and Lakeba, honourable Usamate. The initiative known as the Seafaring Entrepreneur Assistance (SEAC) Subsidy, it is a longstanding commitment so we can help the maritime communities. In the current financial year, our utilisation was at 90 percent given the number of requests that has been coming from the maritime areas, especially Kadavu, Lomaiviti, Lau, and Rotuma.

Once we hand over these boats, we also get MSAF to tell those recipients that all the criteria that they have to follow, especially the number of passengers that they have to carry, and also their life jackets and everything. And something that we always emphasise, that all the boats in Fiji, they are all *Vola ni kawa Bula Suva*, as you will see *Vou Suva* is written in all the boats around Fiji. So, they have to be registered and also comply - given that we are carrying passengers so that we do not have any sea ordeal that we currently sometimes have around maritime areas.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- I have honourable Alvick Maharaj to move an amendment.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Chairman, I move:

That Programme 3-2(10) – Rural and Outer Island Programme, be increased by \$3 million.

HON. J.N. NAND.- Mr. Chairman, I second the motion.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Chairman, this increase is with regards to Cogeia Village in Bua, where a lot of discussion has actually happened. I have also spoken to the honourable Minister as well. I believe the Public Accounts Committee has done a thorough scrutiny on this particular relocation of the village. There are close to around 34 households that were supposed to be relocated, and the frequency of the flooding has increased.

I think, in past 40 years there was one, but in four years there has been another one. There was \$3 million allocated from FCOSS. Bread of Life is an NGO that has actually given the money for them, and this was all the way from 2020 and we are in 2026 now. So, FCOSS, as an NGO, is facing a lot of difficulties in doing all 34 houses. So, what they have actually confirmed to us in Public Accounts Committee, they can complete 16 only. But currently they have exhausted \$3 million, they have completed two houses, and I think they are working on another four or five structures only. So, they have confirmed that they will not be able to relocate all of them. So, this is an issue that is there with the village of Cogeia.

We have visited the villages almost twice now and I think other government agencies have moved. There was some miscommunication between Ministry of Rural Development and FCOSS as well. So, we are actually requesting that if this programme can be funded and the fund can definitely come from the Trust that is there with Ministry of Climate Change. If they can allocate funding to Ministry of Rural Development so that the 14 or 16 houses that are left to be relocated, we can actually work on them and everybody from Cogeia Village can move to the higher grounds and their livelihoods can be much safer, at a place where they are being relocated. So, that is why I am requesting for this \$3 million increase in this particular SEG, Mr. Chairman

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you. Honourable Tabuya?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman, through you, I acknowledge honourable Bulitavu, who is also the former Minister, and has knowledge on this as well.

Mr. Chairman and honourable Member, the issue is not Government. It is a private relocation project that is still currently under FCOSS. I believe the funders have pulled out, so FCOSS is doing this on their own. I have visited the site as well and listened to the villagers. There is still no clear communication to Government, whether it is the Ministry of Rural Development or Ministry of Environment and Climate Change to be able to assist FCOSS on this project. So, until and unless FCOSS engages with Government, we cannot move. Government is able to help and we have offered assistance. As you have rightly stated, it has been from 2020 and six years later, we do hear the cries of our people, but we need FCOSS to engage with Government so that Government can assist.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Bulitavu, do you wish to add?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Chairman, I just want to inform my good friend, the mover of the motion, the honourable Maharaj, as alluded to by the honourable Minister for Environment and Climate Change, given the funds are with the relocation trust fund. It is true, it is a private-led

project by FCOSS, but the good news is that on Monday, next week, the Ministry for Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster will be meeting with FCOSS so that we can see a way forward in regard to the completion of that project relocation, which has taken too long since 2020.

There is a taskforce in place called the Fiji Taskforce on the Relocation and Displacement and it involves inter-agency committee involving Government and non-government actors and partners. They will be charting a way forward on how to address and complete it. So, I ask my honourable colleague, given that his motion comes out of a recommendation from the Public Accounts Committee Report, which we have considered, and we are now working into that recommendation. So, I seek my good friend to withdraw his motion.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Maharaj - are you satisfied with the progress?

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Chairman, I would just like to give a comment.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- It is your right to reply.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Yes, definitely. It is good to know that Government is finally engaging with FCOSS. I would just like to reiterate that this was a pilot project whereby, for example, Bread of Life would not have directly funded Government. They do not provide funds to Government but if we actually have one successful programme with the help of Government, then it can definitely be a public-private partnership, moving forward in trying to relocate.

The money can come through NGOs, deviated to the Ministry of Rural Development, and I think Rural Development, with the expertise and everything, can do a much better job in relocating the villagers. My concern is just that the villagers are suffering at the moment. Therefore, I withdraw my amendment motion.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you, honourable Maharaj. Hopefully, the discussions next week will be fruitful. We will move on to Programme 4.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Honourable Minister, with respect to SEG 10 - the figure for it is quite exact, so, it is \$2,934,783. So, I am assuming that this is already dedicated to programmes. My question relates to, and I have to kind of declare my interest also. My question relates to - how much of this is dedicated in terms of the outer islands to Lau?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Again, it comes through application, through the Rural Outer Island Programmes. We do rural help in resource-based sectors including agriculture, fisheries, and other areas we can improve telecommunication, black spot and other things. For Lau, as long as the application comes in, then we will equally distribute amongst the four divisions. The amount of money that is there, some are ongoing.

Ongoing works for Phase 2 and Phase 3 projects that are coming in this financial year to the next, but for Lau, I do not have specifically the amount which is allocated for Lau. Do not worry about Lau. We will allocate and given the head of this particular unit is from Matuku in Lau, do not worry about Lau, honourable Koya.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- With that assurance, Honourable Koya?

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Thank you, Sir. I can go home peacefully.

HON. V. NATH.- SEG 4 - National Coordination Centre. Can the honourable Minister

elaborate on that, please?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- The National Coordinating Centre caters for C3 system data billing in any OC. To date, the utilisation stands at \$21,812, which is equivalent to 79 percent.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Can the honourable Minister just elaborate a bit on this Programme 4-1(8) -Disaster Risk Reduction Support of \$225,000 and I also note there is a Aid-in-Kind risk reduction advisor. If he can he elaborate on what it is pertaining to do.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Chairman, the funding is to enable the NDMO to assist the vulnerable communities during undeclared disasters in line with the Government's Disaster Reduction Programmes. These include landslides, flooding, and tsunami events. In the current 2025-2026 financial year, a sum of \$221,361 was given to us, and the utilisation was around 98 percent. That has been utilised to assist eight projects, which five have been completed, and three are still in progress. The remaining fund is committed, and the project is expected to be completed by the end of the financial year.

HON. J. USAMATE.- So, just to check with this fund - is it already committed and does it also include the victims of landslides? Would they also be able to apply?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Chairman, it also includes victims of landslides, and currently we are working on one and that is on Bau Island, for the Chiefly residence of Naisogolaca. The residence of the late President and the late Speaker of Parliament. It suffered a landslide a few months ago. So, we are working with the RFMF Engineers to build a retaining wall. The funds will be taken out from that.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Programme 5-1(10) – Rural Housing Assistance. For the Rural Housing Assistance. Can the honourable Minister inform us how many houses were built last year with the similar amount of funds, and how many houses he intends to build for the coming financial year?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- So, we have lost count of the number of houses that we have built last year and this year. We will look into the application that will come, Mr. Chairman. Sometimes, it is around 30 houses across Fiji, and it depends on the contributions they can give. It is one-third, and we have got four schemes. One scheme is where Government will pay for the carting fees and freight fees, and the applicant pays for all the materials.

The second scheme is when the applicant provides the timber and Government provides the hardware and materials. That is on a one-third, two-thirds. But it should be equivalent to \$8,000 because the cost of the house is around \$24,000, and \$16,000 is Government's contribution. That one for the expansion of a home, or to renovate and repair - that also falls under one-third, two-thirds. One is for poverty alleviation, for social welfare recipients, especially women and widows. We also give that on a case-assessment basis, where we are able to build homes for those that need it under the rural housing scheme.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Just on the utilisation of the funds, so for last year - how much money was left? Like, you were not able to use, because the applications did not come through?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- It was all used, and we hope to get more in this financial year. But what we have given now, honourable Premila Kumar, is sufficient enough.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- So, is the demand high or low for that request?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- The demand is always high. The honourable Leader of the Opposition will tell you, given as a former Minister, the number of applications that is in our master system. We can only cut our code according to the depth of that.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Parliament will now vote on Head 18.

Question put.

Head 18 - Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management, agreed to.

Head 19 – Republic of Fiji Military Forces

HON. J. USAMATE.- Programme 1-1(8) – New Joint Logistics Command Warehouse (\$2,500,000). Just request the honourable Minister to give us a brief on this new Joint Logistics Command Warehouse of \$2.5 million.

HON. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Chairman, the aim of this is to build a new RFMF Warehouse at the RFMF-owned piece of land at Bayview Heights in Suva, in order to centralise procurement and distribution of core RFMF operations, and also for Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) activities for Central/Eastern Division.

The total estimate cost for the project is \$41 million, which will be implemented in phases. So, \$2.5 million is what we have been allocated to start.

HON. J. USAMATE.- So, this is just the first phase?

HON. P. TIKODUADUA.- That is correct, yes.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Programme 1-5(7) – Maritime Essential Services Centre Operations (\$1,500,000). Is the total cost of this exercise being met by RFMF, even though other agencies will be participating in it?

HON. P. TIKODUADUA .- Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This allocation caters for the operational expense of the Maritime Surveillance Centre. The office was commissioned in 2017 and is an upgrade from the search and rescue information centre down at Walu Bay, to now the vessel monitoring system (VMS), the automated information system, a flood radar monitoring system, disaster monitoring system and the search and rescue management planning system. This has significantly improved the planning and monitoring of natural disaster search and rescue operations, illegal fishing monitoring, border security and looking at security threats including transnational organised crime.

So, this is coming from RFMF. The other agencies for security - Prisons, Police, Customs and others, pay for their own people who are represented within the Office. So, this \$1.5 million is from RFMF for the operations of the Maritime Essential Services Centre (MESC).

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- I just wanted to ask the honourable Minister on the Territorial Force, which is under Programme 1-6.

HON. P. TIKODUADUA.- Yes, which SEG are you referring to?

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU. – I am asking a general question, honourable Minister. The

naval reserve comes under the territorial force. Unfortunately, in the last three years, they have not been funded to actually do their training and exercises that are normally carried out. Is it somehow embedded in this heading that is here, or there have been questions asked by them?

HON. P. TIKODUADUA.- I assume by the general definition for territorial services, yes. I would have to enquire with RFMF in terms of how much of it is actually spent by the territorial navy for that matter. I will have to come back to you.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Programme 2-3(5).

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, on Programme 2-3(5) – Vaccination and Reagent, if the honourable Minister can explain this item because this also appears in other Activities and SEGs. I know vaccination but I do not understand what reagent is.

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- I know what it is but, perhaps, the honourable Minister for Health can give us an explanation.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- It is the reagents for the lab. It is a lab equipment.

HON. P. TIKODUADUA.- I apologise, Mr. Chairman, honourable Kumar wanted an explanation on reagent.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Yes, I agree. For the general knowledge of the Members, what is reagent?

HON. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Chairman, you buy this kind of chemical or substance that is used for testing, for example, blood testing. Your blood is simply taken and is mixed with some chemicals which are reagents to determine whether you become positive or negative on something. That is generally the definition for it. I think I am right there.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- I think the proper pronunciation is reagent.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, I think that creates confusion. Perhaps, the next time when budget documents are written, you can just say ‘vaccination and testing’, because you are saying reagents. Well, if we want to go in that direction about materials, then let me just speak on one simple issue here. In the past, when we talked about personal emoluments, everything was listed, for example, FNPF, overtime, PAYE - everything was listed. Now, those are no longer listed, it just says ‘personal emoluments’, that is it. That is why I am suggesting that for better understanding, because these budget documents are not only for you and me, so it you just put down ‘reagents’, it does not give you that clarity. If these soldiers are going for vaccination or some kind of blood test, et cetera, then it needs to be spelt out clearly. That is all I am saying.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you. I think that you, being a teacher, is showing up, honourable Kumar. The Parliament will now vote on Head 19.

Question put.

Head 19 – Republic of Fiji Military Forces, agreed to.

Head 20 – Fiji Police Force

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The floor is now open for comments on Head 20.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, I have a motion for Programme 1-1(1) and (2), but I am happy to withdraw the motion if the honourable Minister or the honourable Minister for Finance can give some assurance, because I see that under Head 50, we also have an allocation there for adjustments in salaries, which is about \$5 million. I had raised the issue yesterday with the honourable Minister for Defence because of the situation that our civil servants in the Disciplined Services are facing.

As I have said yesterday, they fall through the cracks. When there is a salary increase for Service personnel, they are left out. Unfortunately, in the recent 3 percent salary increase as well for the civil servants, they were also excluded. I know that there were some exchanges between the Ministry and the Ministry of Finance, but I am happy to withdraw the motion if there can be some assurances by Government through the respective Ministers if this can be considered.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Can we go through this procedurally? Can you move the motion and then you can then explain the details if it is seconded.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, I move:

That Head 20-1-1(1) be increased by \$838,185.27 with respect to Personal Emoluments.

HON. J. USAMATE.- I second the motion, Sir.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Perhaps, may I add that I had a short discussion with the honourable Minister on our way out yesterday. If our numbers may not be the same, but this is for the 184 civilians in the Fiji Police Force (FPF).

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Chairman, just an explanation on the differences, the civilian staff within the FPF are remunerated at comparatively high salary bands and steps within the wider Civil Service. For instance, those civilian staff within the Force and Civil Service may fall under the same salary band, different progression rules apply. Civil servants are typically limited to a maximum of Step 4 within the same band, whereas civilian staff within the Force may progress to Step 7. That is the anomaly that currently exists. Consequently, civilian staff receive remuneration at higher Steps within the same Salary Band than those only available to civil servants.

The same applies for RFMF. Civilian staff are tagged under the same salary band as the Military personnel. For FPF, they have a salary band as compared to the civilian staff. Civilian staff follow the Civil Service Salary Band. That is an area that we have not adjusted for this financial year, and we will relook at that in the next financial year, even looking at job evaluation as a firm solution.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Usamate, is your question related to the motion?

HON. J. USAMATE.- Yes, related to this motion. Since it is a motion, I suppose I can speak to it here.

I think the issue that has been raised by the honourable Minister for Finance does not adequately address this particular situation because if it had, it would mean that if someone in the Civil Service is then assigned at a particular level across to a security level, and the people in that band level go up, would that not automatically mean that this person also goes up? He is in the scale within the Civil Service where that Civil Service band has gone up. If it applies equally to everyone in the Civil Service, then why should it not automatically apply to the person who is in that same scale, but operating in the security service? I do not get that bit, and I do not think a job evaluation

would address it because job evaluation looks at the whole framework for wages. I do not think the explanation adequately explains that bit of it.

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Yes, the difference is there – being a civilian at the Civil Service and when you get to be an Officer in the Military. Whether you move to the different step, the salary or the remuneration differences, I can say, is a bit abnormal for our civil servants. So, the solution that we are looking at is job evaluation, whether they can have the same job steps and then the salary level will align with whether you are in the Military or still in the Civil Service.

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Chairman, I agree with the honourable Minister of Finance, we can resolve this amicably in the process that we should follow as suggested by the honourable Minister.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, I think the issue is that people have been left out from the past. The solution that you come up with might take place from the point you come up with a solution, moving forward, but it would not compensate them for the things they have lost in the past. So, my suggestion would be that if we do that, then to some extent where it applies, we also compensate them for any losses they might have accrued in the past.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, I have heard the two honourable Ministers, however, just as honourable Usamate has stated, these people have been denied their entitlement in terms of pay. The other motion is on wage earners as well. Let us ensure that no one is left behind. If we wait for another Job Evaluation Exercise (JEE), then that does not solve this problem.

Therefore, I am urging Government, if there are any savings or whatever somewhere, and I have looked at Head 50(1-1), under Salary Contingency where we have \$5 million. This needs to be addressed, Sir, and I urge Government to find it this year under this budget. Let us also look at what they miss out on in terms of the salary adjustment that was made last year, if this can also be considered.

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Chairman, looking at the current status now in terms of civilian staffing at both institutions, they are not losing anything. In fact, they are getting more, compared to when they were in the Civil Service. If we are going to top it up again, the difference will be even more as compared to the current civil servants, even though they are doing the same kind of work.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- May I use these words, 'I respectfully disagree'. They are losing out because that three percent is across all civil servants and they are entitled to this 3 percent increase. May I know what that Salary Contingency under Head 50(1-1) is meant for?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- We can discuss that when we come to that Head and SEG.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, I would like to go ahead with my motion, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We will proceed to vote on the amendment that has been moved by the Leader of the Opposition, that Head 20 be increased by \$838,185.27 in Programme 1-1(1) with respect to personal emoluments.

Question on amendment put.

Motion lost.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We will proceed to SEG 2. I give the floor back to the Leader of the Opposition.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, I have a motion on SEG 2 as well. This is concerning the 106 wage earners in the FPF.

Mr. Chairman, Sir, I move:

That there be an increase of \$51,720.13 in Programme 1-1(2), with respect to wages.

HON. J. USAMATE.- I second the motion.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- I think I have said enough in the last motion. I will just leave it on the floor and, perhaps, go straight ahead to vote.

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Chairman, this is noted in our submission. We will find a way forward to resolve this issue in consultation with the honourable Minister of Finance.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- I am satisfied with that, Mr. Chairman, Sir, and I would appreciate if I can be updated on the issue once it has been resolved. I hope that it will be this year.

Mr. Chairman, I withdraw my motion, but I will work on that gentlemen agreement.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Subject to the Leader of the Opposition being updated in the course of the year; he has withdrawn the amendment. Thank you, honourable Leader of the Opposition.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, Programme 1-1(8) – Upgrade and Enhancement – Operational Building. If the honourable Minister can clarify this item - where is it and what building is this?

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Chairman, I have a list of buildings in various Divisions here with me. I could share it with the honourable Member later, but this is an annual upgrade or improvements in all our buildings. This is an ongoing project, and this allocation is for this financial year.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- That is clear now because it is not only one building but the overall buildings in the FPF.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, Programme 1-1(9) – Purchase - CCTV Camera (\$400,000). Similar funds were given last year, but my question is more in terms of having a plan and a policy on CCTV camera installation. I would like to ask the honourable Minister whether we have a plan for CCTV installation.

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Chairman, indeed, we have a plan because without a plan, we would not be buying this equipment. I had also said in my contribution to the Budget debate that we have just completed this side, the Suva to Nausori corridor, and the next one will be in the Western side. Those equipment, especially TV, et cetera, are now being considered by the ITC Steering Committee at this moment.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- I thank the honourable Minister for his response. The reason why I asked that question is because we often hear that Municipal Councils are buying CCTV cameras,

other agencies are buying CCTV cameras, even households are buying CCTV cameras, for security purposes. The rest of the world is also moving in the same direction, to keep our cities and towns safe. However, they do have a national policy on CCTV camera so that the privacy matter is addressed and anyone who installs a CCTV camera is monitored by a central agency, not like everyone monitoring their own CCTV cameras.

Even for the residential house, if you put a camera and it is capturing the outside bit, it goes into the central monitoring system. That is the reason why I asked that question whether we have a national plan for the CCTV camera so that everything is done in a coordinated fashion rather than on a piecemeal basis like Police doing their own, town councils doing their own and even communities or the households are doing their own.

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Chairman, we have a well-coordinated plan, just to mention one or two - with Municipal Councils, we work closely with them. Within the community, we work with the community. If there are initiatives by the community to install their own monitoring devices, we work with them to be able to connect to our central monitoring devices. However, there is a well-coordinated plan for those, honourable Member.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- But there is no national policy on it which addresses the privacy issue. That is all I am asking.

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- No, there is none, and we have to see that, but at the operational level, I think that is a way forward, which we will definitely work on.

HON. V. NATH.- Programme 1-1(9) - Quality Assurance Systems - Forensic Bio and DNA Lab. Mr. Chairman, I am looking at it from one angle that often, we have seen in the Central Division the number of fires there. We know that DNA samples are sent overseas. A process takes place that takes a lot of time. When it comes back, it is almost about 24 to 25 days. Actually, for Hindus, the ritual and ritual termination take a further 13 days from there. Is there any plan, Honourable Minister, to have this test done locally?

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Chairman, we do that here, but in some sophisticated cases, for instance, we work closely with our regional partners - New Zealand and Australia. We have arrangements that we can refer some of these cases to them. It is a lengthy exercise, it is not an overnight thing, and it takes time. They have their own priorities in their own countries, but there is an arrangement we have with our regional partners.

HON. V. NATH.- Yes, thank you for the update, honourable Minister. You just mentioned that your counterparts are assisting you with that to have it done in Australia and New Zealand. What I am asking is, are there any plans to have it done here in Fiji?

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- We have our own capability here, Mr. Chairman, and as I have said, if we are not able to handle that, we need professional and other support, and we refer them abroad.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Programme 1-9(5) - Purchase - Container for Exhibit Storage. We have heard a number of cases where exhibits have disappeared from the exhibit storages. So, will this new type of container, make sure, honourable Minister, that the exhibits never disappear again from the exhibit storages?

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Chairman, let me respond to the honourable Member. There is a plan for warehouses to be built in all the Divisions, and that is an ongoing project. These

containers are basically just a temporary way of holding all the exhibits in the absence of big warehouses. When we have an exhibit, we have all the necessary eyes and ears, register, et cetera. If you would like to see a model one, honourable Member, you can go to Nakasi. There is a model exhibit room there and a renovated one at Nausori Police Station. However, I take note of your comment. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

HON. J. USAMATE. – Sir, I will take the honourable Minister's offer to go to Nakasi.

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- There is also an empty room at the Station too, honourable Member.

(Laughter)

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Parliament will now vote on Head 20.

Question put.

Head 20 – Fiji Police Force, agreed to.

Head 21 - Ministry of Education

HON. H. CHAND.- Programme 1-1(6) – School Management Association of Fiji (\$50,000). Last year it was half million, \$500,000. Honourable Minister, it is important to measure and evaluate success in achieving its core objectives. How was that done?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Chairman, I would like to mention that the evaluation of the successful utilisation of the fund will be done at the end of the financial year. The School Management Committee will have to provide an analysis of the works that they have done. I think I have also addressed in one of my parliamentary speeches about respective targets that they have and the respective programmes that they wish to utilise their funds on.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Chairman, a follow up on KPI, if there is a KPI.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Chairman, I just mentioned that they have set respective programmes which will be analysed once the full utilisation of the funds.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Chairman, I have another question. On Programme 1-1(6) - Colombo Plan Staff College for Technician Education. I think this is a new item. Can the honourable Minister provide a brief on this?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Chairman, this allocation of funds is to support the Ministry of Education's partnership with the Colombo Plan Staff College to strategically strengthen the TVET sector in Fiji. This partnership provides access to internationally recognised expertise, capacity building programmes and policy advisory services in TVET.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Chairman, I have one other question on the same SEG. I can see that almost all the Associations, such as the Fiji Principals Association and Fiji Head Teachers Association, there is allocation, but I cannot see any allocation for Fiji Council of Special and Inclusive Educators Association. Why is that?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Chairman, the allocations are based on the submissions received. If we do not receive any submission from that organisation, that is not forwarded for

consideration in the budget.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- I have a motion to move on Programme 1-1(7).

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Kumar has a motion. I will ask her to explain her motion. Can I just briefly say that \$50,000 be left out of Head 21 in respect of Program 1 Activity 1, SEG 7?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, I move that:

The allocation of \$50,000 under Head 21-1-1(7) - Review of Education Act, be removed from the 2026-2027 Budget.

HON. J. USAMATE. - I second the motion.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- The justification is straightforward - the review of the Education Act was completed, it was passed in Parliament in May, and that work was done. For sound public financial management, it requires that Parliament should not be funding for things that were already done. For that reason, I am moving the motion that the money should be left out because the review and the passing of the Bill had been done, it has been enacted into law.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Chairman, I think the honourable Member has jumped the gun again. In terms of the implementation of the new Act, we need awareness to be conducted in respective Divisions and District to allow stakeholders of the Ministry - the management, school heads, parents and guardians, to understand the framework of the new Education Act, which the honourable Member was also a part of.

A lot of misinformation was also given out when the Bill was passed in terms of the levy that was not mandatory. This is what this allocation is for, to go out there and fully and clearly explain in the different languages the new Education Act.

HON. P.D. KUMAR. - Mr. Chairman, the Minister for Education needs education here, because the word we are using is 'review'. Review is different from implementation, so let us not confuse the public. It is their money; they should know very clearly what it will be used for.

Is it the review of the Act? Is it to raise awareness on the legislation, or is it to implement the Act? These are three different words and it should be clearly specified.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Chairman, whatever the word means, it is to do that exercise of awareness to the education stakeholders.

HON. P.D. KUMAR. - Yes, so that is what should be stated, not review.

MR. CHAIRMAN. - Yes, I do apologise, I forgot that myself. We go back to the motion, and the motion is that the \$50,000 be left out of Head 21, which is in respect of Programme 1-1(7). That is specifically on the review of Education Act, and this should be deleted or left out of SEG 7.

Question put.

Motion lost.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Chand, do you have SEG 7 also in mind?

HON. H. CHAND. - Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Under the same SEG - Viti Trade Skills Fair Show, can the honourable Minister provide a brief on this new item?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Chairman, this is a new allocation. It is for the Technical and Vocational Education and Training Unit (TVET), encouraging students to showcase their talents and skills, and the organising of the National Skills Trade Fair at the end of every school year. We have started last year, this year will be the second year where students will be encouraged to come and showcase their respective skills and talents in TVET at the organised venue, maybe in Suva, in the Central Division, this year.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, Programme 1-1(7) - National Research Council. Last year, this allocation was \$1.1 million and this year, it is \$300,000, so I think this research continues. We would be interested to know from the honourable Minister what was that \$1.1 million used for last year and what the \$ 300,000 would be used for this year?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Chairman, as I mentioned, implementation of the Work of the National Research Council was conducted this year, so the work will continue in terms of setting up the office and the operational aspects of having the office in place.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, what particular outputs did they produce other than building an office? Did they do any research?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Chairman, like I said, the National Research Council was established towards the end of June-July this year, so they have just started the operation.

HON. J. USAMATE.- The results in the new year.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Not only that, but they also have to first establish their office so that they can look after their own operations and their own funding.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Chairman, on Programme 2-2(6) my question is on the grant. Last year, the grant which was allocated to non-government primary schools was \$33.75 million and this financial year will be \$30 million. I can see there is a reduction. What is the reason for the reduction?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Chairman, can the honourable Member just direct me again. What is the name of the item?

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Chairman, it is boarding grants for primary schools. I am talking about the free education grant, non-government primary schools - \$30 million. I can see that there is a reduction from \$33.75 million to \$30 million. What is the reason for the reduction?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Chairman, the allocation is based on the demands that are provided in the current financial year.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Chairman, as far as demand is concerned, I think that is not a good answer because the number of students will be almost the same. My question is, why the reduction? Is there any change in the grant formula?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Chairman, I think the honourable Member is fully aware. The utilisation rate and disbursement rate given on free education grant to schools is based on their compliance. One of the major aspects of our challenges in schools is complying with the Ministry of Education rules and criteria and handbook, as he is fully aware. The disbursement is based on per

capita and the compliance of schools. That is why the utilisation rate for this year has also reduced because of the compliance of schools with the criteria of Free Education Grant.

HON. H. CHAND.- I am not happy with the response that has come from the honourable Minister. I am fully aware, that is why I am asking why a reduction of \$3.75 million. That is a huge amount.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Chairman, I think I do not know how to explain it much better. The disbursement is based on compliance, whatever is being complied by the number of schools. You may have an allocation as per the total number of schools, but the disbursement is based on the compliance from respective schools. If we do not have compliance, for example, 30 percent of the schools will not be disbursed with those free education grants until and unless they comply, for example, providing financial statements and having the annual general meetings. We cannot just give as a request or as probably what the honourable Member is alluding to, that it has to be disbursed fully. There are certain aspects in terms of compliance that every school needs to successfully meet to allow the grants to be paid out.

HON. H. CHAND.- I am still not happy with the response.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Member, I can well understand. It is a use of discretion. If you meet those requirements and the fund is allocated, that is how I read it. However, I will hear you out.

HON. H. CHAND.- My argument is that the honourable Minister is pre-empting, because this is for 2026-2027. What I am saying is, why is there a reduction of \$3.75 million?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- All the students in school are not deprived of free education grant. They are entitled to free education grant, but every school has to meet the criteria that have been set. In our previous experience, most schools did not comply; most schools did not submit their information on time in terms of audited financial statements, annual general meeting, and proper acquittals that need to be supplied on a regular basis.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, Programme 3-1(1). I just wanted to make a very general observation. When we talk about Personal Emoluments, previously, there used to be a budget kept separately for location allowances and salary upgrade. Anyone who will pick up the budget book will know that there is a certain amount of money allocated for teachers when they upgrade their qualification, and they can put in their applications. I have gone through the whole Head 21, there is nowhere I could see that these two allocations are stated. Perhaps, the honourable Minister for Finance can clarify this.

I cannot see salary upgrade and location allowances, because teachers work in very harsh conditions when they are asked to share quarters and work in very remote rural areas, and for that reason, location allowances are there. However, if you do not budget for that, then how are you going to pay these teachers? That explains the reasons why the teachers have been knocking on almost every door when it comes to salary upgrades, as well as location allowances. It is not paid on time, because there is no allocation for that. Then you have to look for the money within the budget to pay them. However, there should be a very clear allocation for these two things.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Chairman, probably, the honourable Member is not looking at the correct book. Location allowance is there. In previous years, the qualification upgrade was part of Personal Emoluments.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Can the honourable Minister tell me under which particular

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Personal Emoluments is one.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Yes, you are saying that it is in Personal Emoluments. What I am arguing about is that if you look at all the personal emoluments from the past budgets, it is basically the same. However, in the past, we always had a separate allocation for salary upgrade and for location allowances. You cannot just point your finger and say, that is personal emoluments, because personal emoluments is basically the salaries, FNPF, et cetera, that is paid.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Chairman, even in 2022-2023, budget book was never there, and we are talking about 2026-2027.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- I can challenge you on that. It was there.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- We have the book here.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- I also have the book.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- You have the wrong book.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Minister, honourable Kumar has made a point which I can only ask that you take on board, if necessary.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Sir.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, I would like to move a motion.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- A motion from honourable Premila Kumar.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, I move:

That the allocation under Head 21-3-1(5) - Menstrual Hygiene Management be increased by \$300,000 to restore the substantial reduction in funding and to ensure the programme achieves its intended objectives and a timely delivery of this project.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, I second the motion.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- I am disappointed that the Government has chosen to reduce funding for this programme, and they cannot ride on the demand because there is no demand. Someone did not put in an application. I am just tired of listening to that. When you talk to the public, the people and the students, they have been saying that they have been waiting for this menstrual hygiene vouchers to be given and it is not given in a timely manner. So, the explanation here is that if we have sufficient money already allocated, then only we can do timely distribution of these sanitary products. However, if the funding is not sufficient then, of course, the Permanent Secretary or the staff have to look for the money within the different SEGs.

When a programme experiences delays in implementation, the solution should be to improve the planning and procurement and distribution system, and not to reduce the funding available for the programme. Mr. Chairman, we all know that the Menstrual Hygiene Management Programme was established to ensure that no girl misses school because she cannot afford basic menstrual hygiene products. It is also intended to promote dignity, improve school attendance, reduce stigma

surrounding menstruation and create a more inclusive learning environment for girls throughout Fiji.

By reducing the allocation sends the wrong message, as it suggests that because the ministry has struggled to deliver the Programme efficiently, the response is to provide fewer resources rather than improve delivery. We hear that since there is no demand for it, we had to reduce the amount; however, that approach undermines the very purpose of this Programme.

Mr. Chairman, in Fiji, many students, particularly those in low-income households and rural communities and maritime areas, continue to face challenges in accessing affordable sanitary products, and it was for this reason that this particular Programme was introduced. Now, with rising living costs, additional pressure is on the family budgets, so Government support for women and particularly girls in school is very much acknowledged, but we would like to see that there is enough funding, and you need to work on the other logistics in terms of getting these products into the hands of the children, or just giving them the vouchers, so that they can buy the pads as and when needed.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, I would like to re-state that every young girl should not have difficulty in accessing this product. With the allocation that has been given now, we will make sure that the same provision is given to all the young girls in the nine education districts.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, I thank the honourable Minister for his assurance. Perhaps he needs to go and work with his team, for the timely delivery of these vouchers, because when you look at the menstrual cycle, it is every month, and when you do not provide these vouchers in a timely manner, the girls are affected and they are not in school. So, it is a humble request, please, improve that.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Yes, we are working with the Ministry of Finance in terms of the accessibility of the vouchers to be accessible to all the outlets instead of the limited number that we have right now.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Minister for Finance, do you wish to comment on that?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Again it is the process to have those funds utilised. As we understand, it is unutilised for this financial year. We will work together with the Ministry, on how we can improve on the usage.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Just the last word, Mr. Chairman, I get what the honourable Minister for Finance is saying. He is saying it is unutilized. It is unutilized because of the way it is delivered. It is not delivered in a timely manner; so, it is unutilized.

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- That is why I will look at the process; much better process.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Thank you. On that note, I will withdraw my motion.

MR. CHAIRMAN. Thank you, honourable Kumar. The motion is withdrawn and thank you for the honourable Minister's assurances.

HON. H. CHAND.- Programme 3-1(7) – Expanding Matua Programme. Can the honourable Minister provide a brief on this Programme?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Chairman, I think the honourable Member is fully aware of the Nabua Matua Programme. It currently supports and monitoring by the Ministry of Education. This exercise of regular monitoring and visits will be done by the district officers, for a major need

to establish also expanding the Matua Programme throughout some education districts in Fiji.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Usamate, does that answers your query or not?

HON. J. USAMATE.- I think that will be welcomed news, we will be very interested to know once you come up with particular schools where this will be setup, because whenever we go around the country, there is a lot of interest in getting access to the kind of facilities that were piloted at Nabua. So, the expansion means not expanding Nabua but moving to other areas?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Yes. It will be an exercise done on reviewing what is currently in Nabua and also see how best we can extend to other education districts.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Programme 3-3(6). Sir, I would like to seek clarification from the honourable Minister, before I move a motion, it is on per capita grant for boarding schools, if the honourable Minister can explain, what is this per capita grant for boarding schools? What does it cover?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Chairman, I think this is a similar question that was raised by the honourable Member in past Committees of Supply; she is fully aware. She is fully aware. The boarding per capita grant is provided to assist students in 40 operational registered non-government boarding secondary schools.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- So, on that basis, Sir, I will move a motion.

Mr. Chairman, I move:

That Head 21 be increased by \$1 million in Programme 3-3(6) – Per Capita Grant
- Boarding Schools for non-government secondary schools.

HON. J. USAMATE.- I second the motion, Sir.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- This amendment is about one fundamental principle and that is equity. A child should not receive less government support simply because he or she attends a non-government boarding school. Every child deserves equal access to education regardless of who manages the school.

Mr. Chairman, many of Fiji's non-government boarding schools, including institutions like Ballantine Memorial School where mainly girls are boarding and they come from the country's most disadvantaged communities, from really remote rural areas, just because they cannot get a space at Adi Cakobau School and other boarding schools, so they end up in Ballantine Memorial School. Many boarders, I have met some of them and spoken to them, they come from these remote villages in maritime areas as I said - low-income household and because there is no secondary school close to where they live. Despite the financial circumstances, these families are required to make substantially high contribution towards boarding schools, boarding costs than families whose children attend government boarding schools.

I will just give you an example, Sir. When children are at Adi Cakobau School, I am sure most of the Ministers seated here, your children have gone through ACS, QVS or some other boarding schools, there at ACS they pay only \$50 a term; that is it, because the Government provides them with almost \$4 million in food. They are Government schools, yes, and they are given \$4 million for food. Nothing is coming out of the parents' pockets, and these are the parents who are well-to-do, unlike children who are going to Ballantine Memorial School. What are they given? This per capita

grant of \$349,000. Why should a child be denied that same level of assistance immaterial which school they attend? That is the question I am asking, even if they are going to a boarding school in Ballantine or ACS, it should be same.

(Honourable A. Bia interjected)

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- I will speak to you later, honourable Bia.

As I have said, for boarding schools, like Ballantine Memorial School, they pay \$145 as compared to \$50. Some of these girls have to cook their food in a very difficult situation and we had a similar story when we were in Levuka with St. John's College where girls had to cook on firewood because their stoves were not working. However, I am not going there because FEG should be used to buy those products. My simple argument is that we should increase the ration for non-government schools so these children can get food, Sir.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Chairman, can I just request the honourable Member to advise increase by how much?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- I have already said.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The increase is \$1 million on the present amount of \$349,239.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Before I make my comments, Mr. Chairman, can I just request the honourable Member, how many students is she insisting to assist on that \$1 million? Any given number of students?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, what I propose, taking into consideration that \$4 million is allocated to non-government schools, and you have a number of non-government schools, whereas I do know that there are just 40 boarding schools in many places like Levuka and other places. I propose just one-third of \$4 million being given.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- It will help, Mr. Chairman, if the honourable Member also gives the number of students that will be assisted.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- No. If you are asking for the exact number of students in each boarding school, I can come with that figure. I do not have it right now, but I do have that figure.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Chairman, this allocation is based on number of students in non-government schools from the previous year. So next year's allocation will be based on current number of students in school, that is the basis of the allocation. You can just move an increase or decrease without any supporting student numbers.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Sir, as I said, I do have that information; the number. It may not be the latest information as of today, but I do have a rough number that normally can be catered by these 40 boarding schools. Based on that, I did my calculation. It is up to the honourable Minister whether you want to increase it further or decrease it; it is up to you. What I am proposing is this, I have used the number, it may be old because we do not have access to all the information. So based on the old number, I have calculated and I propose \$1 million.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Sir, just adding on to the per capita grant, these boarding schools as proposed using the Term 3 roll of the previous year's boarders. This grant is paid annually to non-government boarding secondary schools, where a boarder is allocated a certain amount per year. So,

it has to be based on previous year's number for this year's allocation. This request is based on Term 3 of 2025, with total boarders of over 2,300 from the 40 schools across Fiji.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- So if we take \$349,000 (or we can call it \$350,000) and we divide it by 40 boarding schools, so you can see the number is very little. I am not saying that we have to give the same amount, but at least it should be a little higher so that they can be fed well.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- They are already.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Sir, I have lost my case with the honourable Minister, but I will move ahead with my motion.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- You will move ahead with your motion, so we will move to a vote on this motion. A motion by honourable Premila Kumar that Head 21be increased by \$1 million in Programme 3-3(6) with respect to per capita grant for non-government boarding schools.

Question on amendment put.

Motion lost.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Programme 4-1(5). Mr. Chairman, before I ask my question, just a brief opening question to the honourable Minister. Under the new Education Act, it sets up a National Curriculum and Assessment Authority. Is this the budget for that Authority or has that Act not kicked-in yet and those curriculum activities will be just taken within the Ministry for the time being?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- What is the amount?

HON. J. USAMATE.- For this whole section here is for Curriculum Development. The Education Act that has been passed has set up the National Curriculum and Assessment Authority that is supposed to be like a stand-alone. Is this to fund that National Curriculum and Assessment Authority or is this for the functions to continue to be done by the Ministry?

HON. A. M. RADRODRO.- Yes, this is the continuous funding of the Curriculum Development Unit within the Ministry of Education.

HON. J. USAMATE.- So not for the new Curriculum and Assessment Authority setup by the new Education Act?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Not yet.

HON. J. USAMATE.- That has not been implemented yet?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- No.

HON. J. USAMATE.- So, on that ground I ask this question on Programme 4-1(5) - National Curriculum Framework Review and Consultation of \$30,375. The question is twofold. If this is to be done by the Ministry, knowing that you will set up another National Curriculum and Assessment Authority in the future, what would this \$30,000 entail in terms of what it will do?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- This is for the review of the Fiji National Curriculum Framework and the auditing of the existing curriculum and framework, identification of gaps, outdated content and alignment with the National Development Plan, Sustainable Development Goals and labour

market needs, global trends in education, and also analysing student performance data and learning outcomes.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Programme 5-1(7), there is an allocation there for Learning Management System - Moodle. I thought a lot of this was done in schools and in institutions. I am interested in how this will be used, or what the purpose for this allocation of a million dollars is?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Chairman, the allocation is the piloting of the moodle programme in 11 secondary schools that was done in 2025-2026. The project is intended for full rollout as Year 13 flexi-schools. This is for schools like, Queen Victoria School, Adi Cakobau School, Sila Central High School, Suva Grammar School, Nasinu Secondary School and curriculum pilot schools as Natabua High School, Ratu Kadavulevu School, St. Joseph's Secondary School, Lelean Memorial School, Rishikul School and Ratu Sukuna Memorial School.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Just one comment, Sir. I would like to thank the honourable Minister for including Lelean Memorial School.

HON. A. M. RADRODRO.- We are trying to review it.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, at this point, I think the hour is late. We will break for lunch, and we will suspend our proceedings. Parliament will resume where we have left off now, in one-and-a-half hours.

The Parliament adjourned at 1.09 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.49 p.m.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Good afternoon, honourable Members. Before we resume, I would like to invite you to join me in extending a warm and heartfelt welcome to a group of theological students from Avondale University in Australia, who are currently in Fiji on a two-week missionary programme in collaboration with the Seventh-day Adventist Church. We are honoured to have you join us in the Fijian Parliament today and thank you for joining us this afternoon and I wish you well in your mission work.

Honourable Members, we will continue from where we left off and we are now at Head Number 21.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, on Programme 6-1(8). Can the honourable Minister disclose which schools will be receiving this grant for Upgrade and Enhancement?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- The Upgrade and Enhancement of \$800,000?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Yes \$800,000 as well as \$900,000.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- For the Upgrade and Enhancement of government schools (\$800,000). This financial year, the upgrade and maintenance will be facilitated to the respective government schools. -RKS, Labasa College, Natabua High School, QVS and ACS.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- All of them?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Yes.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- And there is \$900,000 for the non-government schools.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Upgrade and enhancement of non-government secondary schools, allocation of \$900,000. Schools that will be assisted in this financial year include:

- (1) Lelean Memorial School;
- (2) Vanuakula Catholic School;
- (3) Naria Primary School;
- (4) Ratu Simione Matanitobua College;
- (5) Magodro Secondary School;
- (6) Nasesevia Secondary School;
- (7) Sacred Heart Primary School;
- (8) Wainimala Secondary School;
- (9) Totoya Junior Secondary School;
- (10) Matuku Secondary School; and
- (11) Wainikeli Junior Secondary School.

A total of 11 schools that will be prioritized.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Is this on application or how are the schools selected?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Yes, they applied in the current financial year, and they have been earmarked for assistance in the next financial year.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Chairman, Programme 6-1(10). Can the honourable Minister provide

clarification why there is no building grant for special schools?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Is it not in the budget?

HON. H. CHAND.- No.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- That is all part of the grant assistance in the respective mainstream schools.

HON. H. CHAND.- No. The building grant is for non-government secondary, non-government primary schools, early childhood education, but I cannot see special schools; that is my question.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- All the schools are mainstream schools. In terms of special inclusive schools, there is funding available for special inclusive students available in addition to the grants in schools.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Chairman on Programme 8-1(6). I believe that we should not forgo any education programme. I have seen Pacific Polytech grant being decreased, why has it been decreased?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Chairman, the allocation for the Higher Education Institute under Programme 8, these are all based on grant formula used by the Higher Education Commission. The grant formula is based on the information that is provided by individual institutions based on the enrolment number, graduate number, and the employable students after graduation number. That is just generally how the allocations have been determined.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Chairman, my question is on the funding of tertiary institutions. I can see there is one very important institution, the name is missing, that is Corpus Christi College. What is the reason, honourable Minister?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Chairman, as I mentioned, the allocation is based on the grant formula. If the institution does not provide the necessary information, they will not be considered for the grant formula. That means, they are not requiring assistance from the Government.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Mr. Chairman, a question to the honourable Minister on Keshals Business Education Institute. Is this a new private institute?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- That is the last item on SEG 6, honourable Minister.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Chairman, this is part of the allocation given for those higher education institutions that apply for grant from the Higher Education Commission. Yes, Keshals is a new institution is being provided for this year.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Can the honourable Minister briefly explain what aspect of this institution explore or provide skills to students? Is that similar to the grant you provide to Fiji National University in terms of business?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Chairman, I have information here, it is too small. I can give the necessary information to the honourable Member for him to get the information that he is requiring.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- If you can provide that information to honourable Ketan Lal, honourable Minister, we will be grateful for that.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, my question is on Fiji National University. For the next financial year, they will be receiving almost \$37 million, an increase by \$1.3 million. My question is to the honourable Prime Minister whether he has appointed the Council to oversee such a large amount of money being allocated to FNU from the governance point of view?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Budget question?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- I will ask the question. The question is, FNU has been given \$37 million to use that money, of course, there has to be an oversight. Normally the oversight is provided by FNU Council. I am just asking whether FNU Council has been appointed or not?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Chairman, the allocation that has been given here is based on the request that was submitted from the Fiji National University to the Higher Education Commission. In terms of good governance, that is the operational responsibility of the University in terms of oversight that is covered in the Fiji National University Act on the mandate and the responsibilities of the whole University structure.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Yes, and for that, you need a Council - FNU Council. My question is whether that oversight body is appointed or not.

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Done.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- That is all I wanted to know; do not go round and round.

One more question, Sir. Another question is on the grant formula. Now, we are giving the tuition fees to the various universities. We are also giving them grant to operate. Is there any possibility of reviewing this grant, taking into consideration that the tuition fees are also given because this grant formula has been pretty old and may not take into consideration some of the changes that has taken place.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Chairman, these are some of the things that we will have to take into consideration to include in the formula going forward. We also understand that there is some kind of, hopefully, not double-dipping in terms of the grant that is being given through Higher Education Commission and the tuition that is levied to students, especially those in the TSLS programme. So, TSLS is also making discussions with the respective training institutions to see how best they can maximise in terms of the allocation they have been given to ensure that they get the maximum mileage, maximum output from every student that they fund through training institutions. We will consider the inclusion of provision of grant to student fees and also in the current grant formula.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, since the honourable Minister mentioned about the tuition fee, another concern that I would like to raise is, who sets the tuition fee? If the universities set their own tuition fee, they can increase whenever they like and then the government has no choice but to pay that tuition fee. I think when you do review this particular issue, it has to be reviewed in totality, because on one hand we are forking out quite a large sum of money, but are we getting the returns, particularly now when we hear from the honourable Minister for Finance that financially we are a bit tight. How do we make all other institutions who are relying on government funding to be more responsible as well?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Chairman, we will take into consideration the concerns raised, and we will see how best we can manage or try to limit or whatever we can impose in terms of the fees that has been imposed by universities. At the moment, universities do levy and impose increasing fees without consideration by the Higher Education Commission. This is something that we are also looking at to see if it is universally acceptable to impose fees or limit fees that are charged by universities on their programmes.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- That concludes discussion on Head 21.

Question put.

Head 21 – Ministry of Education, agreed to.

Head 22 - Ministry of Health and Medical Services

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Chairman, a clarification on Personal Emoluments. This is something that I spoke about as well yesterday. Can the honourable Minister elaborate on Programme 1-1, we have a total budget of \$162 million, out of which we are just paying \$114 million in emoluments, and we are left with only \$48 million. If we look at grants and other construction which will be given out as a contract, we are just left with around \$20 million to \$30 million. How do we justify this kind of emoluments given to staff, especially when the outcome of Ministry of Health is at hospital end? If we look at the emoluments of, for example, CWM, it is only close to around \$43 million. Is it basically saying that the Ministry of Health Headquarters is overstaffed that we are paying this kind of hefty amount

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Let me get clarification, please? We know that there is a problem, let us admit that there is a problem in the health sector. How come this kind pay structure is justified when we are paying close to around \$114 million for headquarters staff and around \$53 million to all the doctors and medical staff at CWM who are supposed to be looking after our health sector?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- For this allocation, the Personal Emoluments is for, while it is situation at Headquarters, it is for 557 staff, that is, 133 staff in HQ; 424 nurses and 41 project officers at HIV/AIDS Unit; 1,450 doctors which includes salary allowances. There are currently 1,160 field positions - 169 vacant, and we will be filling 121 doctors.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Honourable Minister, Policy and Administration, page 167, Programme 1-1 on General Administration, emoluments for the doctors is under CWM. If we look at CWM, Labasa Hospital, they have personal emoluments for which the doctors who are present at CWM are paid. This is just for emoluments of staff at headquarters.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- All doctors are paid from headquarters.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Chairman, if you will allow me, if we look at page 171 under CWM, there is Personal Emoluments of \$43 million. That is for who?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- That is for staff nurses, allied health workers, radiologists, and other cadre, apart from medical officers.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- This does not include doctors, under all other Divisions?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- The pay of doctors used to be with Finance, and once it was shifted from there, it is stuck with headquarters.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Thank you.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Mr. Chairman, Programme 1-1(5), clarification needed on Minor Improvements – Buildings of \$900,000.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- This allocation caters for the minor repairs and maintenance of health infrastructure to a usable standard. The increase is to support minor building improvement, work across all health facilities, including repairs, refurbishment and upgrades to maintain a safe, functional, and efficient working environment to enhance service delivery.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Do you have a follow-up question, honourable Ketan Lal?

HON. K.K. LAL.- Yes, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, honourable Minister, for briefly explaining what minor improvements of that building is. That \$900,000 is allocated for head office or administrative block only?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- If you go through all the Divisions, they all have allocations for minor works. This is minor works that we keep at headquarters, because most of the time they usually run out of minor works allocation from the divisions, and that is why we vire from here. That is something we have seen in the last two to three years.

HON. K.K. LAL.- So this budget is basically only for head office (administration), not for any other health centre inclusive or anything?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- It is for all.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Noted, Mr. Chairman.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Chairman, get we get clarity on Doctors Specialisation (\$658,125) – is it about in-house training?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The last item?

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Last item on SEG 5.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- To cater for medical officer training that occurred during the financial year.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, while still on SEG 5 on HIV Board and Outbreak Plan. Honourable Minister, I did raise this question about HIV and their allocations yesterday. Are there plans in the Ministry to have the HIV Unit as a separate cost centre rather than being bulked up under the general administration?

The reason why I am raising this, honourable Minister, according to the brief that they gave to Members of Parliament that was organised by Parliament, some of their funding in the current year were redeployed. The decision was taken by headquarters without them having an input into it and their preference is to be a cost centre on its own in the future? Is that going to happen?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- That is probably something we can look forward

to in the future, but in the meantime, it is currently a standalone unit that is totally taken off from family health and they are all situated within headquarters close to my office, so that they can function much better in terms of the work that they do, in terms of utilization of funds, access to all the support that they need in terms of finances, legal aspects and support in terms of procurement, et cetera. Overall, they currently have a total allocation of \$12 million.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Under SEG 5 - Outsourcing of Emergency Clinical Health Services (\$3,037,500), it was there in the past. Can the honourable Minister update us on what exactly is covered under that?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- That is to support the response operation of health emergencies, including Fiji Emergency Medical Assistance Team (FEMAT) which includes travel, communication, consumable training. So, Emergency and Disaster Management Fund is utilized as an immediate response to viral outbreaks or natural disasters.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Of course, it is part of Government service. What is it that you are outsourcing? FEMAT is not outside of government, it is part of government. It is their mobile hospital that they have. Who are we outsourcing to?

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- Mr. Chairman, if I may, the fund is directed to the sole purpose of blood bank services. The funds are used for the operational activities such as salary for 10 project officers, minor renovation, vehicle maintenance and vehicle repairs. This is for blood service that goes to the community to collect blood for patients.

HON. J. USAMATE.- I get that. That is blood but this is talking about the Outsourcing of Emergency Clinical Health Services of \$3 million. So, what is being outsourced to who?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Outsourcing of various surgical, radiological and laboratory services only in the scenario where equipment downtime is affecting efficient medical service delivery, like when the theatres are inundated with work and then we tend to outsource that to the private sector.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Operation theatres, x-rays, laboratories - that sort of stuff being outsourced.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.-Yes.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- How many theatres are currently in operation?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Currently in operation are about five.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- How many are still being fixed?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Four.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Chairman, Programme 1-1(6) if the honourable Minister can explain Grants to NGOs, this was a new programme that was actually added last year. If budget was utilised and the policy developed around it, how can NGOs go about if they want to access this particular grant?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- It is done through an EOI process, whereby they write to the Ministry and request if they can have an allocation of this grant. Basically, for those that

do utilise this grant, they serve a purpose for the Ministry, and that is to come in and serve more of a support and a complementary nature. So far, a total of 14 applications were received, 13 met the eligibility requirements, again, further assessments. Some of these have been continuous for the last financial year, and like Ministry of Education, they are also required to satisfy mandatory grant requirements and also submission of audited financial statements before they are issued the grant.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Chairman, on the same SEG, with regards to Sai Prema Foundation Fiji, any justification as to why the budget has been reduced by \$500,000?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Currently the budget has been hovering around between \$3.5 million to \$4 million. For this one, we are also aligning ourselves with the current utilisation and also to do with the reduction in operations. While they play an important role, we have discussed with them, we will continue to support them in this endeavour, even though there is a reduction and we will work with them.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, my question is on Sai Prema Foundation as well, because they have made announcements. We acknowledge the great work that they are doing, and I join you in thanking them, honourable Minister. They have made announcements that they will also go into adults being considered for their operations as well, rather than just children. Will that be a separate allocation or everything that comes under Sai Prema Foundation is included in this allocation?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- This is mainly for the cardiac surgical allocation.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- On the same SEG, and still with Sai Prema Foundation, with what honourable Leader of the Opposition has suggested, and what the honourable Minister has explained, knowing what Sai Prema Foundation is doing, not just for Fiji but the whole of South Pacific, especially for our children, if they require more fund, would that be accommodated?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- That is something worth discussing with the Ministry of Finance of the future.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Mr. Chairman, Programme 1-1(8) – Upgrade and Enhancement of Labasa Hospital (Interior) (\$300,000). Does this include the EFL issues that were faced by the Labasa Hospital where x-ray machines were not able to work properly?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- This is for the interior upgrade works at Labasa Hospital.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Chairman, on the same SEG and on the same topic about Labasa Hospital, we do not see any budget for the installation of three-phase power supply to operate the CT scan in Labasa.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- That is completed and at the moment we are awaiting the commissioning from the supplier of the new CT scan machine, they will be coming in August to do the commissioning.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Thank you.

HON. J. USAMATE. – Programme 1-1(8) – Construction of the New Tamavua Rehabilitation Hospital. It had \$562,000 last year and \$1 million this year. So, I assume that last year was the first phase which was accomplished and this \$1 million would be to complete the whole exercise

this year.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Yes.

HON. A. A. MAHARAJ. – Programme 1-1(9), Mr. Chairman, if the honourable Minister can inform the House about what these Specialised Medical Equipment are for Urban Hospitals?

HON. DR. RATU A. R. LALABALAVU.– It is the allocation to cater for the purchase of equipment to ensure subdivisional hospitals, health centers, nursing stations have the necessary equipment to support their health service delivery.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Programme 2-2(5), I want to move a motion, Sir.

Mr. Chairman, Sir, I move:

That Head 22 is increased by \$500,000 in Programme 2-2(5) with respect to Non-Communicable Diseases.

HON. J. USAMATE.- I second the motion, Sir.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.– Mr. Chairman, this amendment is necessary because Fiji continues to face one of the most serious Non-Communicable Diseases in the Pacific. If there is one area where government should increase investment rather than reduce or maintain funding for the prevention of NCDs, it should not be this particular SEG.

Mr. Chairman, NCDs remain the leading cause of death in Fiji. It is estimated that more than 80 percent of all deaths in Fiji are caused by NCDs. Every year, thousands of Fijians die prematurely from diseases that are largely preventable through early intervention, healthier lifestyles, and regular screening. Fiji also has one of the highest rates of diabetes and obesity. Prevention is far more effective and far less expensive than treatment. So, every patient who develops kidney failure, and we have just seen in the budget, there is around \$4.1 million allocated to the kidney dialysis center. We can actually try and work more towards prevention rather than cure or comfort.

In that regard, I am asking if we can invest an additional \$500,000 in prevention to save millions of dollars on treatment at a later stage. Mr. Chairman, every dollar invested in prevention produces long-term benefits by reducing the hospital admissions, lowering the healthcare costs, improving productivity, and enhancing the quality of life of our people. So, the growing burden of NCDs is also affecting Fiji's economy. Many people develop chronic illnesses during their most productive working years, reducing workforce participation, increasing their absenteeism at work, and placing additional financial strain on families through very expensive medical expenses and sometimes even loss of income.

It is purely in that regard that I am asking for an additional \$500,000, a very modest investment, and this money can be used so that we can reach out to the community, as well as carrying out a lot more awareness campaigns, mainly on dangers of tobacco, alcohol and unhealthy diets, plus screening programmes.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Chairman, through you, I acknowledge honourable Kumar's reasoning. While it is noble, I just want to bring to your attention that this cost centre wellness is Head of Wellness, and it is through this allocation that she looks after the programmes, human resources, governance, leadership, et cetera. If that was the case, then all the medicines and everything that has to do with NCD should be here, but it is with FPBS.

If you go by Divisions, that is where all the implementations will be done, even CWM. There is allocation for that as well throughout the Ministry. This is specifically for staffing and coordination on the various programmes, policies that will be developed, and the work in collaboration with their implementers, which are the people who are doing the work on the ground, and that is in the other programmes.

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Chairman, in addition, NCD is also supported by JICA; \$751,000 is there in aid-in-kind.

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Mr. Chairman, can I also contribute to that? After a lot of consultations, that had also been part of the Ministry of Agriculture's role to address healthy food and production of locally produced food to reduce our over-reliance on imported foods. That, I had really elaborated well in my presentation yesterday and how we factor the food as part of addressing the whole issues with health that we have been having in the past.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, NCD is, I think, the big killer in our midst that we tend to overlook a lot, and I think the honourable Minister has explained that there are other funds around various parts of the Ministry. The important thing for us is also, in considering the fight against NCDs and whether there is a, probably outside the purview of what we are discussing here, but the attempt to curb it because most of NCDs problem is about intake, at making the cost of good food cheaper than the cost of bad food, because that is a problem that we have in Fiji right now.

Bad food is cheaper than good food. That is not something that this Ministry can address, but it is a serious question that needs to be undertaken on how we can address that to make bad food more expensive and cheaper food or good food cheaper. That will be something outside of the Ministry, but it has to be a key component of that approach.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Chairman, I would like to give a small contribution; very rightfully said that prevention is always better than cure, and the cost of cure is always very high when we are talking about prevention. It is good to see the honourable Minister for Agriculture getting involved in this because the major issue with regards to NCD is also the pesticide used in our vegetables and cash crops these days. We need to look into that because previously, if you look at 80s and 90s, little did we know about kidney dialysis and cancer. Now, almost every week or everyday, we hear that someone is either dying because of kidney failure or suffering from cancer. That is also one of the major aspects that we need to look into when we dealing with NCDs is about pesticides and how we can curb it and try to move towards organic farming.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Are there anymore contributions to the motion?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- I thank everyone for their contribution. I think it is important that we discuss this issue as and when we get an opportunity to talk about it, because it is in a way to indicate that as Members of Parliament, we are also concerned about that issue, and perhaps, the messages that came out from various honourable Members will be taken heed of. Based on that, Sir, I withdraw my motion.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, SEG 5 - National Food and Nutrition Security Programme. I have been asking about the National Food and Nutrition Security Policy. Even since our days in government, this is a commitment that we made to the Food and Agriculture Organization way back in 2016. In 2017, we had started the work. The Ministry of Health officials and the Ministry of Agriculture had a taskforce, where is the Food and Nutrition Security Policy?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Chairman, the Food and National Security

Policy, we had the handing over done with the Ministry of Agriculture to the Ministry of Health late last year. Right now, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Agriculture, the Food Unit and the respective department at the Ministry of Agriculture are looking at the technical details on the completion of the handing over of the policy as well as the implementation aspect of it.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Chairman, can the honourable Minister can explain what is Friendly Hospital Initiatives in Programme 2-2(7)?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Chairman, through you, it supports baby-friendly hospitals programmes accreditations through trainings.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Programme 2-2(7) – Mental Health Awareness. I just wanted to know who runs this and who is involved in it – basically on the premise that there are more mental health patients or people on our streets, and that has increased significantly in the last two years. I wonder if this amount of money on the programme that have been carried out is sufficient to address the issue.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- As I had mentioned before, similar to NCD, the allocation caters for the awareness about mental health continuum in all aspects – reduces stigma associated with mental illness and promotes healthy seeking behaviour. These are programmes and they will look forward to collaboration with some of the NGOs that will be applying for the grant, as implementers, St. Giles, et cetera.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Chairman, my question and clarity is with regards to Programme 2-3(5) – Food Unit (\$202,500). This Unit has always created a lot of issues with businesspeople. What I am asking, if this budget includes the training for Food Unit, so that they also inspect the business entities and how the business is run? Most of the time, we have seen that at the very last moment when the food is imported into the country, they tend to go, stop the container and you are not allowed to do anything without any urgency. Sometimes the container is sitting there, the products are expired products are expired because some of the products coming in, they have around three to six months expiry. So, they do not understand how business is done in the private sector.

My personal belief is that people sitting in food unit, though it is important, I am not saying that this unit is not important, but they do need to understand how to work with urgency in a timely manner so that products are approved to be on the shelf. Recently we had a lot of discussions about this. For example, just because products did not have the unsaturated fat content written on it, and most of our products come from Australia and New Zealand, they do not have it over there. We cannot manufacture it as a batch; we just get the brands that are available. But Food Unit went in and said, “no, you cannot put it on the shelf.” The products got expired. Someone is at a loss because these people do not work with that urgency that is needed to cope with the private sector. If the budget does incorporate that kind of training, for them to actually understand the business setting.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Chairman, point is taken and currently our Food Unit, through what you mentioned, we work in close collaboration with the Ministry of Trade to see that the process of doing things in a smooth manner is done well. It is a very important unit, which looks after the implementation of the Quarantine Act and the port as well as the international health regulations related to food. With what you have mentioned, currently our Food Unit works with the team from the Ministry of Trade.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, SEG 5 - Tobacco Control Enforcement (\$182,250), I think in terms of the medical emergencies that we face in Fiji, NCDs is right up there. There is a lot

of talk about HIV/AIDS, but I believe that tobacco probably has an effect that exceeds that of HIV/AIDS, taking nothing away from HIV/AIDS. You walk around shops all over Fiji now, they all sell rolls, people that shine shoes sell rolls and even in villages and communities, they sell rolls.

Smoking in public places, which used to be not allowed, is done all over the place. So, the actual enforcement of tobacco usage and when you sell rolls to children, that graduates them to move on to *marijuana* and to other things – this habit of selling rolls. I am not too sure if this \$182,000 is just for the Unit itself, and there might be other money available to enforce the use and control of how tobacco is used in this country. Right now, it is very poor. I have not made a motion on this, but I think if this is the total amount of money to be used for enforcing control of tobacco, it is far too little, because the abuse of the tobacco laws is rampant throughout the country.

There was a time that the former speaker used to go out and do smoke-free community halls. You go to these halls now, people smoke left, right and centre. People are taking in second-hand smoke. It is a disease, it is an epidemic, it is right in our face, and we are not controlling it enough. That is why I have a concern with this figure. Maybe the honourable Minister might like to address some of those concerns.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- This is for the Tobacco Control Enforcement Unit located at Namosi House. They play a coordinating role with this allocation within terms of the programmes, policies, et cetera. As you are aware, the environmental health officers are the ones doing the detection, screening awareness, and looking after the programme in all the divisions. They are within their respective divisions and also with the allocations they can get from there.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, my question is in relation to Programme 1-3(4) on Power Supply of \$1.8 million for CWM Hospital. I went through other Programmes as well. Between CWM Hospital and Lautoka Hospital, the electricity bill is somewhere around \$4.3 million. You have just mentioned earlier on, honourable Minister that Labasa Hospital is planning to put some solar panels or I heard you somewhere.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- No, it is the transformer.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Oh, transformer – sorry. Is there any plan to move in that direction, so that we can reduce the electricity bill - renewable energy?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- That is something the Ministry fully supports, in terms of renewable energy use. For now, we are implementing that through the other facilities because CWM Hospital and Lautoka Hospital, as you know, they have equipment that do need a lot of energy to operate. Probably that is something we can plan with some of our development partners in the region.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Chairman, can the honourable Minister can clarify Overseas Laboratory Test Referrals. We made a visit to the Laboratory Department at CWM Hospital, and we were informed that if the infrastructure is supported, they can start having this test at CWM Hospital. And CWM Hospital being one of our biggest referral centres, are there plans to start this test in CWM Hospital?

HON. DR. RATU. A.R. LALABALAVU.- Yes, there are plans to eventually have this test in place. But in the meantime, the tests that are not available, we need to them to overseas and that is why the allocation is there.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Mr. Chairman, I have questions on Emergency Ambulance Service, I

understand other programmes also have some allocations around that. Can the honourable Minister clarify what proportion of the ambulance budget is allocated to emergency responses in the community, as opposed to transfers between hospital and health facilities?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- For the facilities that do have ambulances, that is meant for transfer of patients within facilities; from facility to facility. If they do not have it, then we use funding to cater for that. But in terms of getting patients from home or in other vicinities, that is through utilisation of our partner ambulance service that do this work for us.

HON. K.K. LAL.- My follow-up question, despite budgets given to your partner organisations with regards to ambulance service, there continues to be complaints from members of the public that ambulances either do not arrive or arrive after sufficient delays. What measure is the Ministry taking to address this?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- That is a process issue that the ambulance service that we outsource to, because they have procedures in place before they can go out and fetch those patients. But nevertheless, it is something that the Ministry through our dedicated team that looks after ambulance service are in close collaboration with them, to ensure that the efficiency of their services are being brought up to par.

HON. K.K. LAL.- I do acknowledge the Assistant Minister, during his response to the Budget Address, he acknowledged that we have an ambulance shortage problem. How many operational ambulances are currently in-service nationwide, and how many are out of service due to maintenance or shortage?

HON. DR. RATU. A.R. LALABALAVU.- I do not have that information at the top of my mind, but I can furnish you with that information later on.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Can you also advise, since the public is also hearing our debate or our clarification

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. K.K. LAL.- Can you just listen?

Does the public have to pay for ambulance service between NFA and citizens or ambulance from private institutions, like for example, private companies, despite being subsidised by your hospital or your Ministry?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- For the ones that are brought to our attention, because we have an ongoing MOU with the respective ambulance services, those are the ones that are covered by the Ministry.

HON. K.K. LAL.- So if a person at home calls NFA for ambulance and they transfer the patient from home to the hospital, do they have to pay a fee?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Deal with NFA.

HON. K.K. LAL.- So they pay a fee to NFA?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- You are done. What did you say?

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. K.K. LAL.- Can I just listen to Speaker?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Are you finished?

HON. K.K. LAL.- Sir, the question is still not answered by the honourable Minister.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- I believe I have answered the question.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The payment of the ambulances that are provided by outside of government, is that what you are after?

HON. K.K. LAL.- Can I say my question again?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Yes.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman. If a person is at home, he calls NFA who has ambulances, and he wants to go to hospital, does that patient have to pay NFA for that ambulance service - yes or no?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- That, you should ask NFA that. I am answering to you what we budgeted for and what we are entitled to pay with regards to our MOU with the ambulance services that we do partner with.

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Let me just answer that question posed by honourable Lal, yes, any ambulance service that is serviced by National Fire Authority, every run has a price to it. At the moment it is about \$30 depending on the distance.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- My question is on Cleaning Services, almost \$2.7 million is allocated to CWM Hospital. Normally when we visit CWM Hospital to see patients, we find that the CWM Hospital is not very clean despite \$2.7 million allocated for cleaning services and I understand it is all outsourced. So, there must be a contract between CWM Hospital and the service provider. How do you penalise the service provider for not keeping the CWM Hospital clean?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- I think that is something within the contract. If they are not performing their work to the standards that we expect, then it is something we penalize them for.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- So, any action ever taken against the cleaning services because this question keeps rising through social media posts where they show the filth within CWM Hospital. Have you ever come across a situation where you had to discontinue with the contract, let the contractor go?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- I will have to come back to you with that, but as I said, it is whatever is stipulated in the contract, if they do not adhere to that in terms of the standard that they are supposed to keep, then that is something we can penalise them on.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Chairman, this is a general question. Although we know that Aspen has taken over Lautoka Hospital, but what is very significant there in Programme 3-2(4) –is \$2.58 million of Power Supply. What is it that Aspen utilizes because I think this is the payment of the whole hospital (full building)? Why is the Ministry still paying for the power supply when we

have handed over the building to Aspen?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- This allocation caters for the utility bills to EFL for the power supply cost of Lautoka and Ba Hospitals under the contractual agreement.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Programme 3-2(5). Can the honourable Minister explain why ration is not shown in SEG 5 for Lautoka Hospital whereas rations are shown for Labasa Hospital, CWM Hospital and others?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Aspen took over the budget.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- I am glad you clarified. It is not that because there was a question from honourable Maharaj where you have clarified that EFL is part of the contract. Am I right? Electricity payment; electricity, power supply is part of the contract. So, ration is also part of the contract?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Aspen took over this budget item.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Thank you.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Chairman, Programme 4-1(5) - Minor Improvements - Building. Can the honourable Minister explain what are the components of those?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- These are the minor works that looks after the health facilities within the Central Division.

HON. V. NATH.- Which hospital are you talking about, honourable Minister?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Health facilities within the Central Division is from Navua up to Korovou subdivision. All the facilities within that are under Central Division, including Beqa and Nausori as well.

HON. V. NATH.- No, Nausori will come under Eastern Division, honourable Minister.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- No, under the Ministry of Health, that is Central Division.

HON. V. NATH.- I will follow-up later.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, Programme 4-1(7) – Outreach Programme. I just wanted to ask the honourable Minister for clarification. The Outreach Programme is outlined in all four divisions. Can you simply tell us what is involved in the Outreach Programme?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Chairman, the Outreach Programme attempts to bring medical and health services closer to rural communities. Medical staff at subdivisional level visit rural communities. At certain times, even specialist services are taken together during these outreach programmes. They do activities from oral school health, conduct population screening, maternal and child health, and defaulter tracing; perform nutritional assessment in schools and communities, family planning, cervical cancer screening, detect and diagnose high-risk NCDs, provide mental health counselling, collect water sampling and larva sampling, and establish wellness settings and tobacco-free settings. That is why it is within all the divisions. They have their allocations to take the service out to the community as close as possible.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, Programme 4-2(5) – Leptospirosis, Typhoid, Dengue and Diarrhoea (LTDD) Control Programme. I see that the allocation in the Eastern Division is the highest and then followed by the North. What is the status of LTDD in the four divisions in which this allocation can be justified, honourable Minister? Maybe I have a follow-up question as well.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- So within all the four Divisions, there is ongoing effort to control and combat LTDD diseases. Within those four divisions, there are hotspot areas that continuously have cases on a regular basis based on probably the heavy rain, drinking water. This is just a programme budget for the activity that they can do detection and screening, awareness. It is for the normal programme. Anything other than an emergency aspect of this LTDD, that is something that is within headquarters and they can source it from there. But this is during normal times where they continuously do their programmes of monitoring and also screening and awareness.

HON. I. B. SERUIRATU.- I will just make a comment on the information of Government. Your hotspots are tied to the implementation from the Ministry of Rural Development as well. That is why we have honourable Minister for Rural Development, the programme on water and sanitation allocation because you identify the hotspots, particularly as well, when it is post-disaster, you always identify the hotspots. You know the situation in Vanua Levu back then when the schoolteacher died in Wailevu, that was the reason why we asked for the hygiene and sanitation allocation that is with the Ministry of Rural Development.

HON. DR. RATU. A. R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Chairman, to reply to that, thank you. Yes, the Ministry also has its WASH programme and as you can see from this budget allocation, it has increased because of the utilization and our head of WASH you may know is Mr. Toga, someone who does his work passionately. This work is done to complement the work of Rural Development and WAF.

HON. V. NATH.- –Mr. Chairman, same question to the honourable Minister - Minor Improvements – Building. Previously we had given \$450,000, and again you have got \$450,000, which hospitals are these allocated to?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Eastern Division, not including Nausori.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Chairman, Nausori is a health center, one of the oldest and it is serving three provinces - Naitasiri, Tailevu and Rewa which is in the heart of Nausori.

HON. DR. RATU A. R. LALABALAVU.- Wainibokasi is the hospital.

HON. V. NATH.- What major work will be carried out there because often we have seen

HON. DR. RATU A. R. LALABALAVU.- Pacific Healthy Islands Transformation (PHIT) and DFAT project will also look after.

HON. V. NATH.- Is there any plan?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Are you talking about Nausori?

HON. V. NATH.- Yes, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- I thought Nausori is not in Eastern Division, correct? Central Division.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Eastern Division, Sir.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Programme 5-1(5). Mr. Chairman, with regards to the expansion in Drugs and Medical Supplies worth \$80,000. Clarity, if we are looking at modernizing our essential drug list and bringing in drugs that are of newer generation, is this funding going towards the National Medicine and Therapeutics Committee (NMTC) or is this funding for something else?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Chairman, this allocation caters for the drug regulatory activities, inspection of retail pharmacists, registration exams of new pharmacists and supplemented by fees from the Fiji Medicinal Products Board and Fiji Pharmacy and Professional Board.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Where does NMTC sit in this? Is it part of FPBS? I have not seen anywhere where NMTC has been allocated any kind of funding to review the essential drug list, even Essential Medicine Regulatory (EMR) is not there.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- There is an allocation, I believe, in SEG 1 for the review of laws. Those are included in that one – review of laws and regulation.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Chairman, with regards to Consumables and Medicine, we have now seen it has been bulked up. Before consumables used to be separate, medicine used to be separate, and there used to be another one - Free Medication Scheme. Now, collectively all added into one, the budget has decreased significantly. Is Free Medication Scheme also part of Consumables and Medicine?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Yes.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Because free medication used to be for private pharmacies and medicine used to be for public hospitals.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Combination of drugs, consumables and free medicines.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- So free medication still exists.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Yes.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Because as it appears, it seems that that programme has been shelved.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- It is included in this one.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Thank you.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, on Medical Appliances and Non-Technical Equipment. The question is on the capacities that we have. I am particularly referring to, maybe it is related to SEG 9 as well on purchase of specialized medical biomedicals - biomedical engineers, and the two recent Town Hall *Talanoa*, the issue about technicians for x-ray in Levuka. The honourable Attorney-General is aware of both, and of course, Fiji's third city, Korovou, Tailevu, there is no x-ray technician too. I am just asking about capacities while we are buying equipment and appliances - our biomedical capability and technicians.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Chairman, our biomedical technicians' capabilities are currently being supported and have increased in numbers and now decentralized through all the divisions, right down to even some of the subdivisional hospitals. We value the work that they do and that they will be part and parcel of health from now into the future as most of the equipment becomes digital and where their expertise will also be part of the Ministry of Health and Biomedical Engineers.

As to the Medical Imaging Technologist, there is currently an ongoing shortage in terms of the numbers putting their hands up to join the Ministry, even though the recruitment was done. But nevertheless, we continuously will have in some new numbers of Medical Imaging technologists for this financial year.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, my question is on the Consumables and Medicine. Honourable Minister, we often hear that the hospitals run out of medications, and the patients are given a list to go and buy, despite \$31.8 million being allocated for that. Can you explain why such situation arises, where medication runs out and people have to buy out of their pockets?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- It is due to a number of reasons. One, there can be just mainly shortage in that medicine. Sometimes it is just an operational issue, whereby the staff within the facility failed to update the numbers of availability, even though we have that here at Fiji Pharmaceutical and Biomedical Services (FPBS). Now, with mSupply, it is all connected online 100 percent throughout all the facilities in Fiji, so they have this tablet and they will have to update the stocks that they have.

We found instances whereby it is just the officer who is responsible for that. In the last budget, we had some reinforcement within this department and when they do the delivery, they also go and do the check for themselves and teach the nurses and doctors who serve within the nursing stations, health centres, subdivisional hospitals on updating their stocks. Those are the two main issues.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, Programme 5-1(9) – Bio-Medical Equipment - Urban and Sub-Divisional Hospitals. Honourable Minister, there was a vessel that was provided that had specialised equipment on board the ship. I just wanted to know if that vessel and that equipment on board had assisted and had an impact on the provision of these vessels to the subdivisional hospitals, especially the maritime islands?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Thank you for that question. We used that vessel to do our outreach programmes, especially in the maritime islands.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, just as an aside, every time you ask for a SEG, we have this chorus of noes. It reminds me of the team for Norway saying, “row, row.”

(Laughter)

On SEG 9, I think across the board in a lot of these SEGs across all ministries, we can see the marked focus on the 10 percent reduction in expenditure that has been talked about. But, particularly for the Dental Equipment and the Bio-Medical Equipment, there has been significant increases. Maybe the honourable Minister can explain the increase given, the general decrease across all other sectors?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- We are currently doing a replacement programme. These are bio-medical equipment for urban and subdivisional hospitals on digital x-ray machine,

dental chairs, ultrasonic, scaler, portable headlamps to support 33 dental clinic services at the divisions and rural areas, additional support to prosthetic clinic service at Vunidawa, Taveuni, Keiyasi and Rakiraki are also currently in the next phase of these prosthetic future services. All in all, it caters for radiology equipment, bio-safety cabinet, neurosurgical equipment, autoclaves, laboratory equipment, radiology equipment and equipment for Keiyasi and Rotuma Hospitals, echo machine and NICU endoscopy.

HON. J. USAMATE.- With the increase, given that there has been reduction in a lot of other areas because that has been the focus of the Ministry to try to make sure that this equipment is available.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- As I mentioned, we have started our replacement programme for most of the equipment and that is why this has to continue.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, we will now put Head 22 to vote.

Question put.

Head 22 – Ministry of Health and Medical Services, agreed to.

Head 23 – Ministry of Housing.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman, my question is in relation to Programme 2- 1 (6) – Housing Assistance for Fire Victims. If my memory serves me right, I have raised this quite a number of times here in this House because this programme was launched in 2015. I requested the honourable Minister, and he assured me that he would consider increasing the amount. At the moment, it is \$5,000 and this amount has not changed from 2015. It is a policy matter. The amount can be \$200,000 because the material prices have gone up.

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Chairman, the allocation is \$200,000. This can also be considered within this \$200,000, along with the cost of materials because it has also increased.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Chairman, my question is in relation to Programme 2-1(8) - Relocation and Resettlement of Informal Settlements; the allocation is \$1,310,534. With the three settlements that you are resettling, the Veidogo, Nabua Muslim and Kilikali, is it likely to be all resettled this year?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Chairman, our plan is to resettle them this year, in the next financial year. So far, we have acquired one land at Lokia, and we are also trying to secure another piece of land at Cevaceva around Tacirua. With the land at Lokia it is only around 30 acres, we will be able to move between 400 and 500 families and for the land in Cevaceva, there will not be much civil works that to be done on that particular land, so we will be able to relocate a few there.

In addition to that, we have also reached out to agencies like the Housing Authority. There is a quota that we have directed Housing Authority to allow those who are living in informal settlements 10 per cent of all the new developments, and this will look after those who are living in informal settlements. Additionally, there are a few others that we are also going to relocate to the Housing Authority's subdivision in Makosoi, in Deuba. That is part of the plan for the next financial year.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman, just to add on to what honourable Koya has said, there is a new issue that has come. I think it was just two weeks ago, the Nanuku Settlement. They have been given 30 days to relocate. I do not think that has been factored, however, the statement given is that

they will be relocated this year. Where are you going to get that funding from? Additionally, the Public Rental Board (PRB) flats as well; it is not mentioned here, so if the Minister can elaborate.

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Chairman, the sitting residents living in Nanuku in Vatuwaqa, that come under the Bhindi subdivision, are residing on the Bhindi Brothers' land. We had consultations with Bhindi, and they have also allowed the Ministry or the Government time to relocate them. I am thankful to Mr. Bhindi and his team for their understanding. They will also be listing them, and it is also part of our relocation programme by relocating this settlement. There are also other strategies that we are looking at. I am also having discussions with the iTaukei Affairs Board. Some are willing to be moved back to the villages. There are a few that have already given us the intention to be resettled. So these are some of the stages that we are also looking at.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- SEG 10, Honourable Kumar?

HON. F.S. KOYA.- I was on SEG 8, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Oh, you were on SEG 8, honourable Koya?

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Yes, just on the formalisation of informal settlements, I think \$10 million has been assigned to that. Can you just tell us which informal settlements are actually being formalised within this financial year?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- So far, we have 10 ongoing projects. I am sorry, 8 ongoing projects. The new ones are: Lovu Seaside and Caubati. These are the new ones that will be undertaken in the next financial year. The ongoing ones are Taveli in Nadi, already been commissioned. We also have Tori in Lautoka, which is about to be completed. Then we have Sakoca, also near completion. Field 4 in Lautoka. The second one is Valewaquwaquyaya in Ba. Vunika is also a new project that we have started in this financial year. It will take another one and a half years to be completed. Then we have one Nabari in Lautoka, and then there is a new one to Caubati which is in Suva.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- SEG 10 - honourable Leader of the Opposition?

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Yes, Mr. Chairman. Honourable Minister, Public Rental Board, Capital Grant. I am just concerned about the tenants of Nabua Housing. Can you give a definite answer to what will happen to the tenants, and is this next financial year's grant going to be part of the solution to the issues that they have? Nabua Housing Tenants, Honourable Minister.

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Chairman, the tenants, I think there is about 144 of them, some have been relocated to other vacant flats around the PRB estates around Suva, and there are also a few that have been applying with Housing Authority in their upcoming projects, a few of them. The rest are still, part of this, part of our relocation programme, \$1.3 million.

It is really an urgent issue now for the Ministry as well as for the rental board due to the structural nature of those blocks within PRBs, it is an urgent need now to relocate, to move them, so it is part of our strategy now to also relocate them, under those vacant lots, if they are vacant lots, within the PRB estates, as well as also considered in this relocation plan. There also is around \$200,000, that the public rental board is also securing to assist in the relocation of those that are living as sitting tenants at the PRB Mead Road estate.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Sir, my question is on the Housing Authority capital grant of \$2 million. Can the Minister explain why capital grants are given to the Housing Authority when the

Government guarantees loans to the Housing Authority? Why they were not able to raise loans?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- This \$2 million to assist Housing Authority in clearing some of the lots at Davuilevu - the Davuilevu development subdivision, as well as Tavakubu in Lautoka. They have been left for, I think, since 2019, through IFC programme. They have been left there with overgrown grass, and some of the lots have also deformed in size, sorry, in terms of the lots that were initially designed.

So, this is to help Housing Authority get back some of those lots into better shape, so that they can be developed by the Housing Authority. They have got some model houses they will be developing this year under the coming financial year, as well as those that can be sold, because they have been left there for quite some time.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Bala?

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman, SEG 10, there are two items - Koroipita Model Town, \$2 million. It is not written there whether it is capital grant or what, so if the Minister can explain on the allocation. Then Programme 2-1(10) - Greenfield Pilot Project (\$500,000).

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- For Koroipita Model Town, \$2 million will be spent on the construction of 23 houses for the K4 as well as K5 areas. This will also meet the development cost as well the civil works for the design the construction of those houses.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, just to go back to that issue, Programme 2-1-(10) - Capital Grant \$2,000,000. It has been expressed by the institution that normally Government guarantees its loans, and this is a clear departure from the way that relationship of statutory authority to Government is, to start giving it a capital grant when it is expected Government guarantees the loans and they carry out those activities. To my mind if this happens now, for me, that does not appear right, but if it is going to happen is it going to continue happening? If it happens again to Housing Authority, is Government going to do this to other entities or would it normally just guarantee their loans rather than give them that capital grant, because this is quite a new move away from the way things were. So, maybe the honourable Minister can just react to my thoughts on that.

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Chairman, I think I have just shared why the Housing Authority is requesting for these \$2 million. There were about five projects the Housing Authority were given to IFC in 2019 for them to manage, as well as come up with a model that will make housing affordable to the people of Fiji.

We found out later after a few discussions with International Finance Corporation (IFC), Ministry of Finance, we made the decision to revert the projects to the Housing Authority. Throughout these years, Housing Authority has been meeting a slight incidental cost, holding cost of around \$1 million a year to look after all five sites. So, maybe that justifies why there is a need to also assist Housing Authority to finalise or even bring back to shape those civil works that are yet to be done and also completed because they have been left there for quite some time. If these developments or subdivisions were sold, then I do not think they will come back with this request of an additional \$2 million.

HON. J.USAMATE.- If it was against the normal way because Housing Authority is supposed to operate.

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Yes.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Parliament will now vote on Head 23.

Question put.

Head 23 – Ministry of Housing, agreed to.

Head 24 - Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection

MR. CHAIRMAN.- SEG 6, honourable Premila Kumar.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, I would like to raise a motion on Programme 1-1-(6) - Grant to Organisation for Older Persons.

Mr. Chairman, Sir, I move:

That Head 24-1-1(6) increased by \$300,000 with respect to the National Council for Older Persons.

HON. J. USAMATE.- I second the motion, Sir.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, this increase is necessary for this organisation. If you look at the amount given, it is not even sufficient for them to carry out the policies that has been developed recently. The Government itself has acknowledged that Fiji is undergoing a significant demographic transition. Our population is ageing, while migration of working-age people continues. As a result, the number of old persons requiring care and support is rising steadily.

The honourable Minister, has also highlighted in this august House the serious challenges facing older people, including elder neglect, social isolation, abuse, and even suicide. These are serious social issues that require practical intervention and not just policy recognition. The honourable Minister had also informed Parliament that the National Council for Older Persons is the key coordinating body responsible for aging policy, inter-agency coordination, and monitoring the implementation of national programmes for older persons.

Mr. Chairman, it has a vital statutory responsibility, this particular body has a vital statutory responsibility to advise Government on issues affecting older persons, they coordinate national responses to ageing, they promote the rights and well-being of our senior citizens and oversee the implementation of Fiji's National Aging Policy. So, it is the Government's lead institution on ageing, bringing together ministries, civil society, faith-based organisations and development partners to ensure older persons can live with dignity, security and independence.

While I welcome the review of the National Aging Policy, a policy document itself will not improve the lives of older persons. The Budget is largely silent on how that policy will be implemented, where is the implementation plan, et cetera, et cetera, because the Council will only receive \$98,000.

Mr. Chairman, if this Government is genuinely committed to preparing Fiji for an ageing society, it must invest in the institution responsible for leading that work. Unfortunately, the Budget before us does not reflect the importance of this mandate. Despite its significant responsibility, the National Council of Older Persons continues to operate with limited institutional capacity. I have heard it has no dedicated office facilities and lacks the specialist staff needed to undertake research or develop or coordinate programmes or monitor implementation effectively with other stakeholders across the country.

Mr. Chairman, this gap is concerning, given Fiji's ageing population, as I mentioned earlier, and it is projected to reach around 15 percent of the population by 2050. This will significantly increase demand for healthcare, pensions, long-term care, and social protection services. Based on that, I am seeking an increase in the budget by \$300,000. As an organisation, they can function in a normal way with staff, with an office space, and they can deliver the policy that has been developed for the elder people.

HON. S. KIRAN.- Thank you, Chair. That is a different grant that the Honourable Member is referring to. That is a grant to an organisation for older persons. The National Council of Older Persons is in in Programme 2-2.

This one, Mr. Chairman, is the organizations who look after older persons, and it is based on usage. So, organisations that apply for funding to look after older people. So largely the aged care facilities that are there, when they provide their compliance and acquittals, this money is for that in particular.

Now the other one that Madam is talking about, Activity 2, Field Services, National Council for Older Persons, that is \$98,000. We have money for policy already under that. If I may say, they play an advisory role.

They are not an implementing agency. There is a different funding altogether, under NAP through the facility, DFAT facility, where we have 2.5 million Australian dollars for disability in particular. So that is where most of the resources will come from. So, we do not need this increment.

HON. P. D. KUMAR.- I thank the Minister for her explanation, but she said that the DFAT funding, a majority of it is for the disability.

HON. S. KIRAN. - So that is older persons and disability, two platforms, that is what we are.

HON. P. D. KUMAR. - This National Council for Older Persons is an institution that will be advising. So, in this institution, do they have a place where older people can go? Is it only for the government?

HON. S. KIRAN.- No, so this is an organisation that was set up by ACT. Since this Government has come in, it has given it some teeth. This is what the policy and the ACT review will give it some teeth. At the moment, it is more of an advisory role only.

We are funding now the CEO, and the policy that is being developed right now is working through our admin offices. It is not where older persons come. Older persons now have a line they can call us on for any resourcing, 1561, or they work through our social protection if they need assistance.

This body is more for guiding on policy, so the policy is just being revised. When it is done, the implementation of the policy can be done through the other budget that I mentioned. They do want a separate office. We do not have it in this budget. We will look into it in the next financial year to establish the office, but currently they use our facilities.

HON. P. D. KUMAR.- So, Mr. Chairman, if I may, how many advisors are there and is it paid? It's important, \$98,000, we are talking about elderly people.

HON. S. KIRAN. - We have an advisory council and these are largely made up of older persons and they are paid an allowance for meeting and guiding the process. We had a consultant

who actually was paid by DFAT to do the consultation and develop the policy, draft the policy. And we have a CEO that is fully paid.

HON. P. D. KUMAR.- I want to thank the Minister, at least, for clarifying all these things. It is important that we talk about these issues in this House. They are elderly people who are concerned that they are not looked after, as Minister has said earlier on. At least the Minister has given some comfort to say that as we progress, there will be an office with staff, the legislation will be developed and that will take care of elderly people. So, I would like to thank the Minister for her direction. I will withdraw the motion.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We go to SEG 7.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, I just wanted to ask the Minister on SEG 6. There are two headings that cover disabled persons. One is Fiji National Council for Disabled Persons and two organisations for persons with disability, both budgeted here. This honourable Minister, is an issue with people that had been treated, amputated, and then they travel around in wheelchairs but do not have the proper access to go into their homes, like to disembark from vehicles and enter into their homes. They have asked for assistance.

I know that the Minister for Housing also has an allocation for it under SEG 6 -Housing Authority assistance for persons living with disability. The issue for both ministers is that when they tried to access this funding, they were told that they need to go to an NGO that can provide assistance in the building of their access from their driveway to their homes. Can some clarification be made about that?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Chairman, there is assistance that the Ministry of Housing gives out to those who are living with disabilities. This is to help them to maybe make the dwellings better for ease of mobility around the house. The maximum that we are giving is around \$8,000. Before, we used to get these applicants to forward us the quotation, and we pay based on whatever is given. Now we have engaged the People Living with Disabilities, that organisation, where we forward them the form and their responsibility is to pay out to the deserving applicants.

HON. S. KIRAN- Mr. Chairman, if I can just add to that. Two issues were raised. The Fiji National Council for Disabled Persons is an advisory body and now they are strengthened and we have activated various subcommittees like housing and employment, and I am looking into some of those things in detail.

The other that you talked about grant to organisations for persons with disabilities, specific OPDs we call them, like for deaf, for blind, so Fiji United Persons for Blind, Deaf Association, so that is for those organisations, but again, they have to apply and make sure they are compliant.

You talked about mobility aid, so mobility aid, wheelchairs and things, are available through the NCPD, through the Spinal Injuries Association; they keep it. Ministry of Health has some of that, and we also provide for mobility aid. But housing retrofit, like Minister for Housing has explained, is under the Ministry of Housing.

HON. V. LAL.- Mr. Chairman, on SEG 7, I can see there is an allocation of \$10,000 for Emergency Assistance Fund. I would like to know who all get assisted through this fund and who all can apply to get assistance.

HON. S. KIRAN.- Mr. Chairman, this is a new fund that we have applied for, and this is the first time this money has been allocated. Normally, when someone is in distress and needs funding,

they have to apply and go through our necessary verification process, which takes time. But we find a lot of people in distress, whether they may suffer violence or a house fire or any other distress that our welfare officers do not have immediate support for. This is a new fund for emergencies; when our welfare officers will be able to see emergencies, they will be able to mobilise faster than going through the process to get them on social protection.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We have a motion by honourable Ketan Lal.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Mr. Chairman, I move:

That the allocation for the Assistance to Fire Victims be increased to \$1 million.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Chairman, I second the motion.

HON. K.K. LAL.- As per the *FBC News*, 51 fire incidents were recorded in Fiji from January to April 2026, compared with 49 during the same period in 2025. Every year, families across Fiji lose everything in devastating fires. Within a matter of minutes, they lose their homes, clothing, schools, school supplies, personal documents, and the savings of their lifetime. They are left with nothing but hope that the Government will stand beside them. The current allocation of \$75,000 is simply inadequate. It will not go very far when one major fire can affect several families at once.

With the increasing cost of building materials and basic household necessities, this amount is unlikely to provide meaningful relief throughout the financial year. This is not an area where Government should be cutting corners. Fire victims do not choose their circumstances. When tragedy strikes, they deserve immediate and adequate fire assistance to help them rebuild their lives with dignity. I, therefore, urge the honourable Members of this House and Committee to support an increase in this allocation so that no Fijian family is left without support, simply because the budget has run out.

HON. S. KIRAN.- Last year, this fire assistance was not fully utilised. Fire assistance is only paid out when there is a confirmation of fire and all of that and there is a specific amount we can give. You heard earlier that the honourable Minister for Housing also has an allocation. We cannot allocate large amounts per each house because then you risk deliberate fires for this kind of thing. What we do is, provide immediate support as and when people need it for fire victims. They apply to us and to the Ministry of Housing. That is why this amount is very little because in the whole of last year, this was not fully utilised.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Mr. Chairman, what the honourable Minister has stated is relevant to the questions I wanted to ask, which I believe I am too late to ask those questions with regard to that.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Is it a question to the honourable Minister in respect of your motion?

HON. K.K. LAL.- Yes.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Ask the question and see how relevant it is.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Mr. Chairman, what is the maximum amount a single family can receive following a fire and what specific costs will this assistance cover?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Minister, would you care to answer that? I thought you just responded somewhat to it.

HON. S. KIRAN.- Mr. Chairman, our Ministry gives \$1,000 per claim. That is for the immediate need, and the honourable Minister for Housing has just explained they give \$5,000 per claim.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We go back to your motion, honourable Ketan Lal.

HON. S. KIRAN.- Last year, we had 65 requests so \$65,000 was utilised.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Mr. Chairman, I withdraw my motion.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Chairman, this year in SEG 8 with respect to the construction of the new Lautoka Aged Care Facility, there is a budget of \$360,809, in comparison to what was budgeted last year, it was more. Last year you budgeted some \$281,250. I have two questions: One, how far has this project gone with respect to completion, and there is an increase in this year's budget, and I am assuming that the facility was not big enough or something and who is actually doing the construction?

HON. S. KIRAN.- Last year we did not fully utilise the budget. It was to demolish the old facility, design and plan for a new facility. However, this is still in the initial stages, as we have not received approval yet to start building, and this is for the preliminary work. There are 13 acres of land. We will demolish and build a fully designed facility. Our older persons have been moved to a fully renovated facility until this is fully built.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Chairman, a follow-up question. The amount of \$360,809 means that there will be a completed space at the end of this financial year?

HON. S. KIRAN.- No. We are working with the Public Works Department (PWD) to finish the scoping and the design and get all the approvals done for the building.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- That is the end of Activity 1. Honourable Members, we will take a short break, stretch your legs, and we will come back for more.

The Parliament adjourned at 4.47 pm.

The Parliament resumed at 5.30 p.m.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, we will continue with Head 24-1-2.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Head 24-2-1(7) - Community-Based Corrections Programme (\$100,000). Mr. Chairman, Sir, can the honourable Minister give an explanation on this?

HON. S. KIRAN.- Yes, so Community-Based Corrections Officers actually make sure that we are not putting people behind bars; for the younger people in particular, this is for community rehabilitation.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Programme 2-3(6). Honourable Kumar?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- SEG 6 - Welfare Graduation Programme, if the Honourable Minister can give us an update on how this programme is progressing and how many people have graduated from this programme.

HON. S. KIRAN.- Welfare Graduation Programme, we revived last year. I do not have the numbers here, but we are monitoring this round right now. We have assisted people who are on social welfare protection to try and get them off social welfare assistance, if needed, or also some people who need to be on welfare assistance but are trying to get income generation to improve their lot. That is also being done right now.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Programme 2-3, honourable Kumar?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Programme 2-3(5), a general question to the honourable Minister. In terms of the number of senior citizens living in how many homes? Because that question will help me make the decision on my next motion.

HON. S. KIRAN.- So, we have three Golden Age Homes. Each has an average of 50 to 60. You know, depending on the number of deaths or exits. And we also have private facilities. And some of them also get assistance from us - it could vary. We could have 38 women and roughly 30 men in each of the facilities, but I can get you the exact figures later.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- That is fine, Mr. Chairman. I was just looking at the amount given for the rations, plus the funeral expenses, plus the recreation and entertainment. Because these are the three key areas that will benefit these people. You know, people who are living in the homes. Whereas the rest of the calculation, if you do, the total calculation is about \$1.87 million against about 200,000. Those are generally associated with this ration, funeral expenses and recreation and entertainment. It is not even 200,000, it is about 118,000. So, there is an imbalance in the funding.

HON. S. KIRAN.- So many of our people in all three of our facilities are not very mobile. While we try and have creative activities, for example, in Labasa – there is gym, we try and create opportunities; many of them are very, very bedridden. So that is why there is not a lot of budget for that sort of activity.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- The ration that is given, \$112,500?

HON. S. KIRAN.- That ration, based on the past so far, that has been covered. I mean, it is based on the requests. So, each year, we monitor how much has been utilised, underutilised, overutilised. So that is really based on the utilisation on average.

HON. V. LAL.- Mr. Chairman, Programme 3-1-(6)- Grant to Women Institutions \$440,300. I would like to know which women's organisations received this grant and how much they received.

HON. S. KIRAN.- So, that depends on the applications. When organisations apply, they get that assistance but largely these are organisations that work with women in the communities. I can give you the list later, but we have a list of women's organisations who have benefited in the past. Each year we open the grant, and we call for applications. So, there are some community-based organisations and some bigger organisations who apply, and if they fulfil the requirements and they are getting the assistance, depending on their need, from \$5,000 to \$20,000.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Parliament will now vote on Head 24.

Question put.

Head 24 – Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection, agreed to.

Head 28, Ministry of Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics

HON. F.S. KOYA- Mr. Chairman Programme 1-1-(6) - Termite Control Assistance Programme \$2,934,783. Is this for the new applications, or is this taking care of the applications that had not been serviced with respect to people who had applied for the assistance because there are quite a number in the Lautoka centric, honourable Prime Minister, there is a few people that still have not gotten their assistance with respect to the programme.

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- So, the Termite Control Assistance Programme is carried out with the various agencies and ministries that are involved in the areas that have been infested by the Asian subterranean termites, particularly in the West and Labasa, and hopefully we will not get to our main centres of Suva. It involves the use of substances to eliminate them and also to restrict them to the areas where they are, while overall trying to eliminate them from those invested areas.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Chairman, just a follow-up question. Apart from the programme, is the financial assistance given to those who have been affected?

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- That is correct, Sir.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Just curious in terms of knowing why this Termite Control Assistance Programme is under this Ministry and not under the Ministry of Agriculture.

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Why is it not?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- It is under Strategic Planning National Development, but my question is why it is not under Ministry of Agriculture when biosecurity is there and termite control and in the farms, et cetera, so homes can be added on. Why is it here?

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Chairman, we can take that on board, because we would rather use the Ministry of Strategic Planning, is a forward-looking ministry, rather than fixing the problems that we already have. The other point: I would like to thank you, honourable Member, for raising the population figures earlier on in one of our discussions, because that is going to be a very important subject for the Ministry of Strategic Planning. It will go into next year's census and answering the "so what" questions. We are getting a smaller young population and a growing and increasing elderly population. What do we do with housing, with education, with health and so on?

In addition, on education and looking at developing economies, about 40 percent of the population would end up in the formal sector, in the employment sector, while 60 percent end up in the informal sector. How do we distribute our resources to make sure we are prepared for that? Mr. Chairman and I are probably the last of our generation that were brought up on village food and not processed food, and we will most probably age gracefully and not have all the problems of those who, unfortunately, have been brought up with a lot of processed food. That will also be reflected in the health programmes, the housing programmes and all those other things.

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Mr. Chairman, can I add on to the question with regards to termites. As I mentioned in my speech, there is also allocation in the Ministry of Agriculture to support the honourable Prime Minister's allocation on termites. A lot of fiscal work and surveillance are done by both Biosecurity and Ministry staff, who are also temporary Biosecurity officers in nature.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Programme 1-1.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Programme 1-1(8) – Ongoing Rehabilitation and Construction of Schools and Public Buildings. We see this appearing under Ministry of Strategic Planning, and we also see this appearing under Ministry of Education. It is creating confusion. Why cannot it be at one place?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Prime Minister, do you wish to answer that?

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Chairman, the honourable Member is correcting her observation. We are now coming to the age where all those original independent buildings are coming to the age where they need all the rehabilitation and repairs and even demolition and the construction of new ones. There is going to be an ongoing programme of the replacement, refurbishment and repair of the original buildings that we inherited as an independent nation, as a republic.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Parliament will now vote on Head 28 – Ministry of Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics.

Question put.

Head 28 – Ministry of Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics, agreed to.

Head 30 – Ministry of Agriculture, Waterways and Sugar Industry

HON. F.S. KOYA. – Mr. Chairman, Sir, before we commence with the Activity, I have a general question to the honourable Minister. I have gone through the whole Head, but it would seem that there is absolutely no allocation with respect to organic branding and organic certification, aside from organic fertilizers, et cetera. Is there something in there that I have missed with respect to the Ministry being able to do the organic certification, or are we leaving that completely to Pacific Organic and Ethical Trade Community POETCom?

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA. - A lot of the programs that we have are aligned to organic, and they are coming in different allocations depending on the divisions, and we have the different policies that are covered in the different allocations for different divisions in terms of the commodities that they have. For the policies that have not been completed, now we are on to how we execute our organic policy. This has also been mentioned in this house in a lot of the questions that have been posed to me, but they are part of the different commodities that we have. It also includes the reduction on subsidies for fertilizers. Those are part of the whole organic move that we are having. But as I

mentioned, they are factored in the different allocations to the technical work that they do.

HON. F.S. KOYA. - If I may, Sir, are we to take it that the Ministry is not going to do any work with respect to it being a certifying authority acceptable to the rest of the world for our organic goods?

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA. - No, we had just launched a policy, and it includes the certifying body for organic, local certifying body that was presented here on this house. The progress in which we are going to progress into certifying organic for the different communities and even for the stations that we have. One of our research stations will be fully organic and that process is now being taken forward by the Ministry under the Ministry's allocation

HON. F.S. KOYA. - We will have a Ministry of Agriculture certified organic stamping. The labelling is what I am talking about because we have an organic, Fijian organic label and that Fijian organic label only gets certification from PoetCom. The idea was honourable, the former Minister of Agriculture will understand because we had actually done this.

The idea was that we as a Ministry of Agriculture would have the stamp that said certified Fijian organic and that would be acceptable around the world in terms of our neighbours and this is a big bearing on our exports. That's why I asked the question. That issue of just certified organic Fijian organic certification, how far are we before we get that Ministry certification rather than relying on PoetCom because I do not see it in the head completely?

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA. - As I have mentioned, the organic update this financial year the only dedicated programme the crop research division on promotion of production of organic fertilisers programme which is part of whole organic work. We have \$300 allocation that is similar for that project, and we had 100 percent utilisation. We have productions of liquid fertiliser that was distributed.

That is again part of the work that we will be continuing this year and a lot of activities which affected as I have mentioned in terms of other works such as familiarisation of the National Organic Policy which is part of our Food Multi-Sector Programme with our policy team that was launched back in June as I just had mentioned and the whole works of organic.

We are also part of this year's programme but they are factored in the different individual programs that we have. Including the certification, not from PoetCom but progressing to the certification that we are going to have for Fijian. Thank you. ...

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, for SEG 6, I just noticed that for all the assistance given to Tutu and Navuso, there has been a substantive increase in the operating grants. If you go to SEG 10, there is a decrease in all the capital grants. Can the Honourable Minister just give some background on that decision.

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Mr. Chairman, for Navuso, we have a decrease in the capital, and this is because we have achieved part of the work that was required to rebuild the burnt-down building in Navuso. The leftover funding is the one that is now been allocated in this Budget. Tutu, as I mentioned in my response, we are trying to capacitate in terms of informal training and vocational courses of our young farmers to go into commercial farming.

HON. J. USAMATE.- For both the institutes for Tutu and Navuso, the operating grants have gone up, and both their capital grants have gone down. What was the reasoning behind that?

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Mr. Chairman, for Navuso - as I have said, for the capital. That is based on the completed portion of the year. For Tutu, justification for the decline in budget is also most of the construction work for the dormitory have been completed, and therefore minimum work will be required to be done this year for Tutu. For Navuso, it will be the school block.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, SEG 10, for the Agriculture Marketing Authority (AMA). There has been a very significant increase in the capital grant from around \$980,000 to \$2.5 million. Can the honourable Minister just explain the rationale.

HON. N.T. TUNABUNA.- Mr. Chairman, the new establishment of the additional collection center in Dreketi and in Legalega in Nadi, which will improve procurement coverage and reduce logistic bottlenecks and enhance operational efficiency across the division of operation. It is working on the four blast freezers and chiller with freezer containers, and also a new storage facility here in Nausori. That is the capital project we have with AMA.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, Programme 1-2(5) – Fiji Agriculture and Rural Statistics, can you just provide the details? Since we have just covered the Ministry of Strategic Planning and National Development and Statistics, I am aware that Fiji Bureau of Statistics (FBOS) is also conducting the Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) next year.

As you are aware, in most surveys undertaken by FBOS, we can just add our questions, specific areas where we want data to be added to their surveys. I am just interested in what are you actually targeting in terms of these Fiji Agriculture and Rural Statistics, and is it possible just to give this again to Fiji Bureau of Statistics as part of their HIES survey?

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- I think that is one of the things that the Ministry is now currently working together with the Bureau of Statistics but this year that is part of their highest survey.

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- I think that is one of the things that the Ministry is now currently working together with the Bureau of Statistics. However, this year's allocation even though there is a decrease, we have some decrease in utilisation this year. However, the Unit is responsible for compilation, processing, and reporting of the agriculture statistics to the Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways and Sugar Industry.

The new budget will cover 12 market surveys. It will include:

- some agricultural production surveys;
- commodity surveys for some of the high value crops that we have;
- preparing a livestock census, which we believe is due;
- update our national farmers database, known as the Viti Agri Data Hub; and
- compilation of trade figures, which is very much what we normally use to forward plan the work that we do for this sector.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- I have one on Programme 1-2(7) – Review of Agriculture Laws (\$130,000). Can you list in order of priority, honourable Minister? I know there are so many laws pending for review, and this has been an issue. In order of priority, which ones are covered under this \$130,000 allocation, please?

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- There is quite a number of laws, but the one that I am currently working on to present in Parliament here is the Fiji Kava Bill, which had been finding its way from 2026. The programme will support a Cabinet decision on some of the laws that we have – the review of 26 agricultural legislations. The budget will cover the cost for public consultation for six

of 26 agricultural legislations. The budget will cover the cost of public consultation for the six legislations, prioritised for 2026 -2027 from 2025-2026. These include:

- (1) Brand Act 1928;
- (2) Pound Act 1877;
- (3) Trespass of Animals Act 1955;
- (4) Drainage Act 1961;
- (5) Establishment of Agricultural Research Institute Bill;
- (6) Land Conservation Improvement Act 1953;
- (7) Pesticide Act 1971; and
- (8) Veterinary Surgeons Act 1956.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Partly undertaken up by the Fiji Law Reform.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Does that cover Kava Bill?

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- No, it is separate. These are the old laws.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- I wanted to know which ones are coming as well.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- We have missed out.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Yes, unfortunately, this seating arrangement is most unsuitable for me. I think when we have Committees, those in the back of you should have a raised platform so that I can see them up, thus, instead of hiding behind other people there.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Chairman, I have a question on Programme 1-2 (8) – Agro-Tourism Programme (\$200,000). Can the honourable Minister provide a brief on this programme?

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Mr. Chairman, the objective of the Agro-Tourism Programme is to create:

- a sustainable tourism sector that promotes the support for local farmers and rural communities;
- provide visitors with an immersive and educational experience about Fiji's agricultural heritage;
- encourage environmental sustainability and responsible tourism practises; and
- generate economic opportunities for the rural areas while preserving cultural tradition.

The new budget will pilot the improvement of farm-to-folk linkage through infrastructure support on agro-processes that collect cultural produce from farmers to hotel suppliers and the programme will also establish three commercial protected agriculture models for farmers that supplies to re-identify agro-processes. The programme will also cover development of database that allows chefs to identify available produce on the market with reasonable prices.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, my question is in relation to Programme 1-4 (7): Establishment of e-Agriculture Station. Can the Minister specify where the programme will be established and in which station in Fiji?

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Through you, Mr. Chairman, the budget will establish three fully pledged e-agriculture stations in Vunisea, Rotuma, and Seaqaqa.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, my question is in relation to Programme 2-2(8) - National Fruit Orchard Programme with an allocation of \$150,000, honourable Minister, can you elaborate on this, please? Take your time, Minister.

(Laughter)

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Yes, the National Fruit Orchard Programme. The budget for this coming year will be targeting 15 large-scale fruit trees orchard farms in Fiji, and this is to expand and scale up existing fruit trees orchard farms, as main priority for the programme. Large-scale in four acres and more, the package assistance includes, clearing, land preparation, procurement of agri-inputs, seedling, planting material, monitoring and supervision.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- SEG 8, honourable Kumar?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Just a clarification, it says here home gardening initiative, \$200,000. How do you roll this out? Because you are talking about home gardening. Yess, we know you are not the Minister for Agriculture, my question is to him.

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Yes, we have, so how do we roll that out? We normally advertise for expression of interest for those who normally want to be assisted with home gardening. There is a process where they go and verify where you normally can have your gardens before they screen applicants and then...

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- So do you just give the seeds, or you give the implements as well?

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- We give mostly for home gardening because we give seeds and seedlings. In some cases, we have given green sating cloth, those that can be used around our homes.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Thank you, honourable Minister.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Koya, are you still on the home garden bit?

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Yes. Already started, Sir. No, mine is related to the yaqona farming development programme, farming programme, which is \$2 million. We all know that I think the honourable Minister for Policing will support this. There's a lot of theft that goes on with respect to yaqona. So, when you're looking at this \$2 million for this particular programme, is that inclusive of fencing, et cetera, security programmes, and which areas of Fiji have been dedicated specifically, if at all, for this particular yaqona farming programme?

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Can you just repeat that last part?

HON. F.S. KOYA.- All the time in the world today. With respect to SEG 8, the yaqona farming programme is dedicated to \$2 million, if you can find that in your little booklet, Sir. My question relates to two things. Does the programme also include taking care of fencing, et cetera., security issues for those current farmers who face real issues, especially in Taveuni? I think the honourable Minister for Policing can certify to that, where there's a lot of grog theft and secondly, is this farming programme already dedicated to particular areas, or is it in general to anybody who applies?

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Thank you. Yaqona is traditionally grown in only some places in Fiji because of the requirement of climatic conditions and soil conditions so, those will be our focus areas. Some of the maritime islands and the two main islands, and Taveuni, are the main yaqona-

producing farms where we normally have a lot of yaqona produced. However, in terms of requirement for fencing, a part of the assistance that is given from the Ministry is supply of fencing material to those who do livestock farming.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Chairman, question to honourable Minister on bilateral quarantine agreement. Can honourable Minister elaborate on that, and we will have a follow-up question, Sir?

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Which one was that?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Last item on SEG 8.

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- The programme incorporates initiatives from the programme implemented in 2012 to 2021 and 2022 of financial year, provisionally known as the BQA, which is the Bilateral Quarantine Agreement Programme and the concentration of this programme will be in Nadroga, Ra, and the Ba Provinces, where the environment is cooler and conducive to production of vegetables, and is closer to the point of entry in High Temperature Forced Air (HTFA) Treatment Facility in Nadi. These are for those that are normally sent to our export markets.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Chairman, I have one question on the Bilateral Quarantine Agreement, often when we travel overseas, our honourable Minister, to Australia and New Zealand, we do take a few things from Fiji. It is a delicacy like *kai* (freshwater mussel) and *duruka* (Fijian asparagus) especially. At times we have found they are available on the shelf out there, but when you take through quarantine and you pass through quarantine of these countries, we encounter a lot of challenges. Will that agreement also be discussed in here?

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Bilateral Quarantine Agreement (BQA) commodities had already had the agreements signed and agreed between countries and Fiji. For those who do not have BQA protocols, they do not fall into this BQA Programme. It is mainly for vegetables, fruits and some rootcrops.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Chairman, this may interest many people. With respect to the Programme 2-1(8) - Highland Farming Programme \$520,000, I know there was some work that had gone on with respect to strawberries in Nadarivatu. Is this particular programme going to include strawberry farming that may get undertaken in Nadarivatu especially, in light of climate change and the cold climates that we are experiencing?

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- For the Highland Farming Programme, this programme will support 300 farmers in targeted areas for 2026-2027 and assistance will also prioritise for those farmers that are already supplying agro-process that are linked to major markets and hotels. This allocation caters for production and supplies of planting material, infrastructure development, procurement and supply of small machines, procurement of crates capacity building and support services.

Now, for the particular crop that you identified, a lot has still got to be done with real feasibility study on how we could provide a continuous supply to market so to speak, so that we can maintain the supply to the demand that we have. The studies are normally continuous, and it also involves selection of the different varieties that we can have but it is not the only one that we are looking at. We have other high-priced fruits and vegetables that we are also looking at.

HON. J.N. NAND.- Mr. Chairman, Programme 2-2(9) - Purchase of Small Farming Machines (\$500,000). These machines are for agriculture research stations or for the farmers who can access on a two-third, one-third basis?

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- These are for the farmers.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Just before I ask for the Minister's clarification on Programme 2-2-(9) I just want to tell, Mr. Chairman, that there is a conductor on the other side, the honourable Charan Jeet Singh. He actually conducts when he says, "No, he is actually doing that", so it is happening.

My question to the honourable Minister, Mr. Chairman, is basically on Programme 2-2(9) – Farm Mechanisation; and Purchase - Small Farming Machines. I would consider that this allocation is for machines, and maybe the farm mechanisation consists of the big machinery for farming, and the small farming machine is for small farming machines.

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- That is correct.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- I think you have answered your own questions. Just an observation, Programme 2-2(8), I see that we, the *uvi* (yam) planters, are excluded from here so it is planting material.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, Programme 3-2(10) – Fiji Meats Industry Board (FMIB) – Capital Grant. We have now decided to give capital grant to FMIB. What would that...

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Can you repeat your question on that?

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- FMIB was one of the entities that was never assisted by Government. Now we are assisting FMIB. So, can you please elaborate on this, this allocation?

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- We have been assisting FMIB for a number of years now, and today our Assistant Minister also attended FMIB for the handing of the Certificate of Recognition for the Health Certified Enrolment Protocol (HCEP) Standard that FMIB has just achieved, the first ever we have had for the two main slaughterhouses. That sets a standard for the slaughter facilities that we have, which means we can also venture into exporting meats that are slaughtered from the slaughterhouse. That has had been the programme from the past - upgrading of the slaughterhouse.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Do you mean both the facility in Vuda and the facility in both the slaughterhouses. They are abattoirs, not slaughterhouses.

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Yes, slaughterhouses equals abattoirs.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- No, no, but in the Head they are different. There is a difference between a slaughterhouse. Slaughterhouses are in rural areas. There are only two abattoirs in Fiji.

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Rural slaughterhouses are rural slaughterhouses, but for the main abattoirs, we have two abattoirs which are the main slaughterhouses for urban. By definition, yes, rural slaughterhouses are the ones that are in the rural that are not covered by FMIB assistance.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Chairman, just to add to the information. Ministry of Public Enterprise also takes care of the Fiji Meat Board and the slaughter. We are bringing in high-tech people to rejuvenate this because for 16 years, you were sleeping on the job.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ. - Just a clarification to Minister about commercial livestock development programme. Is the Yaqara Pastoral going to be assisted with this particular funding that is available here because they have also been requesting for funding for some time with regards to livestock development programme. Is it for Yaqara pastoral or some other project? This allocation is targeted at them, large scale and medium scale, operating as commercial farms.

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA. - Now yaqara comes under the public enterprise, but we also provide them with assistance through the normal Ministry of Agriculture including advisory work, the use of our machines and even with exchange of genetic material that we have. They also benefit but this allocation is particularly for commercial farms. Thank you.

HON. F.S. KOYA. Honorable Minister, there's a beef breeding programme which you got there \$900 odd thousand dollars I understand there were three breeds that were brought into the country, one included Wagyu four actually one was also specifically designated for milk purposes. This particular programme was commenced a while ago. How far have we gone with respect to the breeding of those three?

I think it might have been at the time that honourable Leader of the Opposition was the Minister of Agriculture. I'm talking about Wagyu and there were two other beef breeding programs that were undertaken. Has that gone out to the farms yet? Are we still in the process of breeding to get enough for them and for the milking cows?

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA. - Now for the benefit of those who really want to know about these breeds. When we were not able to import live animal breeders from both Australia and New Zealand, we introduced these pure bred breeds through embryo transfer and that was 10 years ago.

Therefore, what happened was that we started breeding pure breed animal and then we have gone into different breeding programs and we have started distributing those breeds to multiplication farms. From the multiplication farms, a lot of our farms have been receiving the F2 and the F3; those who have some Fijian blood in them.

We further extended that programme into having a breeding programme where we were to collect our own semen apart from just distributing the breeds. Both male and female. We started collecting semen and we have also gone into harvesting embryos.

We now have semen from our local breeds that have been inseminated into our local cattle population and that is part of the development that we have. We are currently reviewing the whole breeding programme where we will find ways in which we can perfect improving the breed breeding programme that we have. But we have sold a lot of our breeds, pure breeds and the crossbreeds to our farming communities.

HON. F.S. KOYA Just a follow-up Sir, if I may honorable Minister, just a quick question. How far off are we in producing our own Fijian Wagyu?

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA. - We already have our breeds and those that can be distributed to farms. Currently we have 17 bulls that can be bought from Koronivia Research Station under their breeding programme and I am quite sure some will be Wagyu. Thank you.

HON. J. USAMATE – Still on beef farming, is there any development at Yalavou?

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Yes, I must thank honourable Ro Filipe for regrading the road up to Yalavou. We now have full road access up to Yalavou after it had been neglected for far too

long. But we started breeding again from that station. We now have the breeders that were brought in as pure breeds from Australia which are now in Yalavou and now we are going back into restocking the Yalavou Beef Scheme in the not-too-distant future.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Chairman, Programme 4-1(8) just on maintenance of rice irrigation scheme. Can the honourable Minister elaborate which schemes we are looking under this particular funding?

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Mr. Chairman, the rice schemes that will be assisted with this irrigation, general maintenance for the Northern Division, Navua, maintenance and upgrading of eight irrigation schemes, one in Navua and in the North, we have Dreketi, Nasarowaqa, Korokadi, Boca, Bua, Vunivau and Naruwai.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Chairman, just a follow up. Last year there was a funding of close to around \$1.1 million for Dreketi and it does not appear, but you have just mentioned Dreketi so that allocation has been utilised and there will be some additional work for Dreketi?

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Yes. Maintenance are annual operations, so they are done annually. They will continue to be done.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, I wanted to ask the honourable Minister, which major rivers are earmarked for dredging with that \$5.5 million?

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Mr. Chairman, this will cater for the drainage work at Labasa River to reduce flood risks and enhance water capacity protection and resilience of the Labasa Town, Denarau River in the West to also improve navigation and water flow facilitating access to large tourist vessels that will support the increased activity enhancing tourism in Nadi.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman, I can see there is a lot of allocation for drainage. Before, the Ministry of Waterways used to give or provide fundings for the municipal drainage. But I cannot see anywhere unless they are affected in some other areas?

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Mr. Chairman, the programs focus on construction of drains in rural residential areas, covering major concern sites in Fiji to enhance the protection and resilience of the rural communities.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman, my question is that before Ministry of Waterways used to provide funds for the drainage within the municipality. I can see here that there is a lot of money allocated for drainage but not mentioned anywhere on the municipal. I am asking the Minister whether there are any funds allocated here?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Chairman, there are some basic services that have been reverted to Municipal Councils. These have to do with services within the municipal boundaries. One of them is the clearing of drains in all the municipalities, and the repairs to the solar streetlights.

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- However, we still provide them with assistance in terms of our engineers, working closely with them when we do the scoping work. We still provide that service to them.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- In addition to that, it is also in the Maintenance Budget of FRA. When there is a road flooding, or as part of the regular maintenance of roadside, or drains directly impacting on the road.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman, it is very interesting to note that now all the Ministries are saying that there are technical people and funds are available. However, when we invite Municipal Councils for a Committee meeting, everyone is complaining about funding. That is why I raised this.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Chairman, just a clarification on what the honourable Bala has just questioned. There are a number of times, for example, a unique one, in the 9 Miles area - you will find there is a creek which goes from GMR along Rups Mega at the back and goes right to the River Road. All the time, it is flooded and we invited all the Ministries. I think the honourable Minister for Disaster Management was also there, but all of all the Ministers are pushing here and there, saying the money is not allocated and they do not refund, it belongs to the Ministry of Local Government, and the CEO from Nausori say it is not theirs and will be Drainage. How are you going to fix this honourable Minister?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Minister, do you wish to respond to that?

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- The drain that has now been raised here, had been addressed. I think there were some procedural works were not really carried out well, and that was when we had that problem. However, that had been addressed.

HON. V. NATH.- None of these honourable Ministers can deny, because I have personally Viber messaged them, and only the honourable Minister for Rural and Maritime Development went to the site. Even the honourable Minister for Environment failed to visit this reclamation of land as she was busy overseas. I request these Ministries to please look into it, so that this problem can be solved.

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Our team went in and carried out the required work that enabled all the other activities to be done for your information.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Programme 5-1(6) – Committee on the Better Utilisation of Land (\$6,900,00). Honourable Minister, could you give us a quick update on the uptake on the programme and how far has it been or what is actually happening with it at the moment? This benefits the landowners, because it is a top-up by the Government.

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- I will not have the latest payment, which was probably done very recently, but we had been processing payment for the Committee on the Better Utilisation of Land (CBUL). Our team went around also visiting areas. We have a report on the work that they had just done, but we have started paying out CBUL right towards the end of this year. We had some concern with the procedures and actually having to really see the best use of those lands and who are using those lands.

HON. J. USAMATE.- A question to the civil minister, what has been the progress in terms of the renewal of leases for dairy farms?

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- They normally follow the proceeds for lease renewal through i-TLTB.

HON. J. USAMATE.- So, it has nothing to do with this.

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- No, we have 70 percent of those that are paid from CBUL which goes to those who are occupying lands that are under sugarcane, the rest are under normal non-sugar agriculture.

HON. J. USAMATE.- I am talking about dairy.

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Including dairy.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- SEG 8. This is my favorite - the Agro-Voltaic Project in Ovalau, another \$500,000. Are we progressing with this or not?

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- One of the sustainable water source for APV site and research station established irrigation system and conducting of the research. The fund will complete the first phase of the project, which was 80 percent completed in the last two years.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- I suggest if we can follow up, as the first phase has failed. A part of that area, even the machines cannot go there, so they have to relocate. Also, following the town hall meeting in Levuka, I was asked by one of the school principals, that there has been some discussions now, and I do not know who is responsible to move it to somewhere in St. John, Cawaci.

So, this is why I am asking. I would suggest that we follow up on this, before we look at the continuation of the programme, as there is conflicting information that are coming in about the project. We cannot continue with the initial phase next to the airport. Definitely, no.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Can I ask Honourable Bala, I think you are raising the same issues, correct?

HON. P.K. BALA.- No.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Well, if you are not on this, then you should not be here. We are talking about the Ovalau Agro-Voltaic Project.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman, I raised my hand before the Leader of the Opposition.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Yes, but we are talking about SEG 8, which is only one item. I will come back to you, all right?

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- There was an initial site which did not work however, they have started work on the site of the road, and engineers have actually engaged.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Last year there was \$1.46 million that was used according to the budget. Was that on the Bureta site or was that on the new site? So, if it was on the Bureta site, is that money wasted?

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- There is no new site. What came out in Levuka from the Principal of St. John Cawaci Secondary School, whereby there was a visit by an official of an organisation to the school without any of Government officials. The honourable Minister can provide updates.

HON. RO. F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Chairman, the update from within our Ministry, the Department of Energy said the site near Bureta is unsuitable. So, after they started, then it was deemed unsuitable. So, there is feasibility work going-on, on the new site, which is on the hillside, also near the Bureta airport. So, that is the work currently. Once that is done, then from that feasibility technical report, then they intend to continue with the project.

HON. J. USAMATE.- This budget for this Head, last year it was \$1.46 million in agriculture. So, was that for that feasibility report? I think this is the other side of the road, up the hill, right? So,

that \$1.46 million, was it for that old site or for the feasibility report for the new site? I am talking about your budget last year which was \$1.46 million.

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- This is for the extra work that has to be done on the new site.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Now we will come back to SEG 7 and to honourable Bala?

HON. P.K. BALA.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We have talked about home garden, backyard garden. Now we come to school gardens and farms. Allocation is \$200,000. We have got so many schools. So, if the honourable Minister can explain how this money is given, \$200,000. That is what worries me.

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- The project will target 194 schools in Fiji for the next five years. Ensuring that school children will have better nutrition and improve their quality of life. Priority! We will be giving to 39 boarding schools first - for their nurseries, and to grow fruits and vegetables, poultry, piggery and dairy shed.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you. Last Programme 6-1. SEG 5? Yes, I will go back to SEG 5.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Yes, thank you, Mr. Chairman, Programme 6-1(5) – Manual Harvesting Support (\$3,400,000). Can the honourable Minister provide some information? I think there is an increase from \$3 to \$5 per tonne. I just want the honourable Minister to inform whether this will be provided in every pay week, or it will be provided towards the end of harvesting, because the rates differ on the ground. Some manual harvesting rates are \$30, \$32, \$35, and the rate goes up.

Why am I raising this? If it is given in every pay week, this will really help. Because some of the gangs, some of the harvesting groups, who want to harvest, who are not part of the boycott from Chaudhry, who want to really harvest, but they are not able to meet the delivery costs. So that is why I am saying this.

Why I actually took his name is because in one of the videos yesterday, he is still trying to say, “The farmers should be united. I have broken their unity.”, et cetera, which I will respond to him later. However, what I am trying to say is that if that money is given within the pay weeks, that will really help with the delivery costs and if we can also consider increasing the delivery costs, because most who want to harvest are not able to meet the delivery costs.

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Thank you, honourable Pillay. If I am referring to the fuel subsidy money that is going to mechanical harvesters, as mentioned, this will go through to FSC, so that they can pay during the normal pay week, harvesting period. So, the FSC should be working that out with the payment.

However, in terms of your next question, as mentioned in the consultations that we have had in the West, that we maintain the \$85 guarantee price. On how we are going to help the delivery payment and all other forms of assistance, that will have to be decided by the Committee and I think that will be done very soon because we have collected a lot of information from that trip, and the Committee is already working on how we can address those.

We have heard the farmers' needs and requests in terms of how we can increase the delivery price, as you have mentioned. That is part of the recommendations that is going through to the Committee and the Committee will soon be meeting and making those announcements very soon. Unfortunately, I cannot make that announcement.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank the honourable Minister and the Select Committee. I am hopeful that these decisions are made soon, because we all know about the dry weather coming in and later on the wet season, so it will be very difficult to harvest. We are all hopeful that the sugar price will increase and the farmers will get more money out of that, but only when we will harvest and make sugar, then we will be able to sell. So, these decisions are very important.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, on SEG 6, my question is related to the commitment made in this Parliament, where the former Minister said that we will build a new mill in Penang and people are still asking when we go out for our consultation.

(Hon. C.J. Singh interjected)

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- I am asking the Minister for Agriculture and Sugar Industry now.

Honourable Minister, is that plan still on, or no more?

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- As I have mentioned also in my previous response in Parliament with regards to the mills and other programmes, we now have the European Union actually carrying out a full feasibility study on how we are going to take the sugar industry forward.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Thank you, honourable Minister, for your clarity. I am sure the farmers have heard you now and they know what the plan is. So, I appreciate that.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Yes, honourable Minister?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- You are attacking me. Listen to me! I will tell you what, we promised a mill. You destroyed the first sugar mill in Rakiraki worth \$300,000. Now, it will cost the Fiji Government \$250 million to set up a new mill.

(Honourable Members interjected)

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Order, order!

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Alright, so where is the money? Will it come out from your father's account? No way! The ADB....

(Honourable Members interjected)

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Nand?

HON. J.N. NAND.- Mr. Chairman, Programme 6-1(6) – Farm Incentive Programme (\$978,200). My question to the honourable Minister is, what are the sort of incentives and how farmers can access this?

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Very briefly on that project, the Farm Incentive Programme provides a performance-based payment of \$5 per tonne to farmers who increase their sugarcane production compared to the previous decision. The programme targets approximately 3,000 tonnes of additional cane supply and is designed to reward productive farmers including those already operating at optimum capacity, who may not benefit from the other grants.

It encourages improved farming practices, expansion of cultivated land and the use of

approved cane varieties to boost overall production. Now, last year, we had a similar allocation, and the utilisation was 100 percent, and the programme continued with strong farmer participation. Sir 1.45 million tonnes was harvested, an increase of 144,000 tonnes from the previous year. The FSC had requested million tonnes was harvested, an increase of 144,000 tonnes from the previous year. FSC had requested funding also to facilitate the payment of the 2025 Farm Incentive Grant to 5,715 farmers who qualified under the scheme based on the supply of 296,000 tonnes. Incentive payment of \$5 per tonne for 3,000 tonnes, and that should cover the allocated amount that we have.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Programme 6-1.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman, Programme 6-1(10) – Cane Access Road (\$2,000,000). What we have heard during our visit is that the Government does it part. That is for the allocation of funds to do the cane access road. But when the money is given, the contractors that are engaged are not doing the job. So, who is monitoring? Are we going to allocate \$2 million, \$3 million year in, year out, when the job is not done? So, the monitoring system - who does that?

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- We have received a lot of concerns with the monitoring of the programmes that have been funded by the Government. It is not only in the agriculture sector but also in the sugar sector. We are going to tighten up this coming year. We will employ both our Ministry staff - the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Sugar, together with our sugar stakeholders.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Parliament will now vote on Head 30 – Ministry of Agriculture, Waterways and Sugar Industry.

Question put.

Head 30 - Ministry of Agriculture, Waterways and Sugar Industry, agreed to.

Head 31 - Ministry of Fisheries

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Programme 1-1.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, Programme 1-1(10) – Tuna Development Fund (\$5,000,000). Can the honourable Minister elaborate on how this \$5 million will be utilised?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Chairman, through you. This is a new allocation, and it is to cater for the development of offshore fisheries in Fiji and includes all long-line fishing vessels, processing facilities, and all the stakeholders in the offshore fisheries sector.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, I have a follow-up question. Honourable Minister, you are saying that this is a new allocation. This is not part of the tuna funding from the United States of America (US)?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- No, Sir. The tuna funding from the US is the US Treaty Fund. As I have stated, this is a new funding altogether.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- By Government?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Yes, by Government.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Chairman, just on the same SEG 10 - Tuna Development Fund, so

you are saying this is accessible to longline fishermen?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Yes, honourable Member, and through you, Mr. Chairman, this is accessible to those stakeholders of the offshore fisheries sector.

HON. J. USAMATE.- So, we have a lot of local companies whose boats have been tied up because they cannot find the funding to get out into the high seas. Is this the sort of funding that they can access to help pay for their operational costs so that they can recruit people in to go fishing, or is it some funding for something else? When you are saying, “for the stakeholders,” I do not understand exactly what it will fund.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Chairman, through you, yes, this funding is available for them. Like you mentioned, some have tied up their vessels because of the fuel crisis, so this is an opportunity to use this fund to assist them in whatever way they can be assisted, whether it is for fuel or for modernising their fleet or for buying new vessels, this is the allocation for it.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVEISAU.- Mr. Chairman, Aid-in-Kind - Technical Cooperation for Pacific Islands Coastal Blue Economy Project (JICA) (\$1,094,700). I just wanted to ask the Honourable Minister, under the Aid-in-Kind, is this amount specifically for Fiji, or does Fiji manage this amount for the Pacific Islands?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Thank you, honourable Member, and through you, Mr. Chairman. Yes, this amount is for Fiji, and the allocation is for promoting coastal blue economy through SDG 14, and this funding will be managed by JICA, and they will assist fisheries activities that promote sustainable use of marine resources and conservation of marine ecosystems.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Honourable Minister, can I ask just a general question here? This concerns our commitments in terms of the 30-30, and of course on the BBNJ as well, because the aid-in-kind talks about the coastal blue economy, and the honourable Prime Minister has made commitments again to take our 30-30 to 15 percent in the recent Melanesian Ocean Corridor.

So, we are quite slow in our implementation of the 30-30, and there are some issues which you are well aware, particularly from Ministry of Fisheries, about those commitments. So, where does this fit in, in the whole fisheries programmes? I just wanted to raise this question here, before we continue. If you may answer that, honourable Minister.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Thank you, honourable Member, and through you, Mr. Chairman. The 30-30 commitment, fisheries and other stakeholders met last week at the Offshore Fisheries Advisory Council meeting and that was one of the agenda that was discussed, 30-30, and the other was the marine spatial planning.

The Ministry of Fisheries and with the other partner agencies that they are currently working with, Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, Ministry of Lands, what was discussed in the meeting was that the identification or the demarcation of areas that would identify the 30 percent protected areas, would be based on science and data. So, we have already formed a data working group which was established early this year, and they have been working closely with the information that is available to demarcate areas that will make up 30 percent.

As per the honourable Prime Minister's commitment for 15 percent by the end of this year, the discussions and the plans of identifying the areas that will cover 15 percent is well underway, and the aid-in-kind from JICA will just assist the activities in the Ministry to align with the areas that will be demarcated under 15 percent this year. I hope I have answered your question, honourable

Member.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU. – We will leave it there now, Mr. Chairman, and maybe we can discuss further outside.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Programme 2-2.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, Programme 2-2(7) - Offshore Exploratory Fishing Development (\$80,000). We have secured a \$60 million under the US Tuna Treaty. I would like to understand and if you can just tell us how much is the Fiji share for the USD60 million per year, and if that fund will be contributing to explorative fishing development?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Chairman through you, I am not too sure the exact amount that Fiji will get in this financial year. I can get back to you on the exact amount, but I can confirm that the US Treaty Fund is not funding this activity.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Chairman, through you, honourable Minister, Programme 2-3(8) - Makogai Research and Development Programme (\$350,000). Correct me if I am wrong, this is the programme that is for the giant clam breeding that exists, most of it was done in Bua, I think. Does this also entitle some of the resorts that were involved around the country who were actually doing the breeding? Can they access this or is the funding is part of this? And how well has the programme gone so far?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Thank you, honourable Member, through you, Mr. Chairman. Yes, this funding also assists the hotel and resorts. We assist resorts, like Tavarua, with restocking of giant clams in the marine protected area. We also restock reefs around the country, mainly areas that are also protected and locally managed by communities, so we restock those areas and hotels as well.

I think the programme has been going very well. We are currently upgrading the facilities in Makogai, and this is assisted through the Ministry of Fisheries and Oceans of Korea, and we hope to expand our facility so, that we can also expand our scope of work in other communities around Fiji.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Chairman, just a follow-up, if I may. Have we had losses because of theft? Because I know that was an issue. Have we had losses because of theft of that giant clam?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Yes, honourable Member, and through your Mr. Chairman, we have incurred some losses. I think apart from theft, also through *TC Winston* in 2016, that destroyed and completely wiped away the broodstock that was out at sea. So, we had to restock again and start our hatchery and breeding processes all over again.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, while we are still on the same programme, Makogai Research and Development. What are the plans for taking it to the next level? Unfortunately, honourable Minister, I am sure you are aware, one of our private sector players went into commercial production on giant clam. But it was simply because of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) that the Ministry of Environment decided to destroy all those clams. There is a difference between farmed and wild harvests. It was unfortunate. Huge potential in here. So, what is the plan to revive that again and take it to the next level?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Chairman, we are in discussion with the Ministry of Environment because for CITES it is the natural stocks that cannot be exported. I think Mr. Claude

had F1 and F2 generation that was farmed, the offsprings of the original broodstock or the original giant clams. I think the Ministry of Environment could not ascertain if that was cultured or not, so he was told either to destroy it or put it back into the sea because there was no way that he was going to export, even though he had mentioned that those were F1 and F2 offspring.

HON. J.N. NAND.- Mr. Chairman, Programme 2-3(8) - Pearl Oyster Research and Development Programme (\$300,000). A simple question to honourable Minister, where will this programme be based?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Chairman, this is an ongoing activity of the Ministry. The allocation of \$300,000 is to continue the support of the development of pearl farming throughout the identified sites and also offer technical training and advisory support to communities who are engaged in the Pearl Oyster Development Project.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, on Programme 2-6(8) – Construction of Multi-Species Hatchery - Ra (\$250,791), is that still in Caboni or is it somewhere else?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Chairman, it is still in Caboni.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, one question on Programme 2-6(8) – Seaweed Development Programme (\$494,712). I have seen an increase, which is good, but how is the seaweed programme? This is a short-term commodity with huge potential as well. I want to get an update on where are we with this, because huge potential is in here and the money is in the scale?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- At one stage, the Seaweed Development Programme in the Ministry had slowed down. Now a lot of communities are showing interest, that is why there is an increase in the allocation. We are helping as many communities and villages as possible because the seaweed grows up to eight weeks and then it is harvested. Because of its quick turnaround it is a quicker money earner for the communities and the villages that are currently interested and also those whom we are assisting at the moment.

HON. J. USAMATE.- I understand it was widely used. I am just wondering, as we go into this next phase, have we taken time to understand why it went down, and then put in measures to make sure those things do not re-occur?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- I think the reason was that, when they harvested, there was no buyer that was readily available to buy their dried seaweed and there was no market as well. However, that has been explored, and they have been assisted by the Ministry, so that they go through the whole chain until the buyer comes to buy their product. There is a lot of enthusiasm from the communities and the villages who want to engage in the seaweed programme.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, I would like to ask the honourable Minister on Programme 2-6(8) - Commercial Aquaculture Development Grant (\$750,000). In the previous budget, \$750,000 was provided and then another \$750,000 that is allocated in this budget. This programme is quite important to try and take commercial aquaculture development into the next stage. How is the uptake since you had allocated \$750,000 before, and then \$750, 000 again for this year? Is the uptake not enough to initiate an increase in the budget allocation?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Honourable Member, we initially requested more, however, we were advised by the Ministry of Finance to reduce our requests, hence the \$750,000 allocation again. We had initially requested for an increase because of the demand from our semi-commercial farmers and our commercial aquaculture farmers.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, a follow-up question to that. Can you confirm that the uptake is pretty good with the people that are interested in doing commercial agriculture?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Yes, Sir.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- I just want to ask a further question on that. One of the key success requirements is nutrition, honourable Minister. I know that we have been doing research at Naduruloulou about aquaculture feed. What is the progress and what is the likelihood of us having locally produced aquaculture feed as opposed to what is provided by Pacific Feeds and Crest Chicken, which specialise in livestock feed rather than aquaculture feed?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Through you, Chair, honourable member, we are still progressing with the feed formula that we are currently working on, and we are hoping that soon we will use the local ingredients to source the feed for both the tilapia and the prawns as well.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, that brings us to the end of discussions and Parliament will now vote on Head 31.

Question put.

Head 31 – Ministry of Fisheries, agreed to.

Head 32 – Ministry of Forestry

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Programme 2-2.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Programme 2-2(8) – Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD Plus) (\$500,000). Can the honourable Minister provide an update on REDD Plus, and what is the progress from the initial allocation that was given?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Thank you honourable Member. The allocation that is provided under SEG 8 for REDD PLUS, in the next financial year the funds will be used to complete the development of the National Forest Inventory Report, and also to develop a strategic and implementation plan for transitioning Fiji's Forest Emission Reduction Programme framework for trade with future carbon markets.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you, that was SEG 8. We move on to Programme 2-3.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, I have one on Programme 2-3(8) – Upgrade and Enhancement - Forestry Training Centre (\$782,600).

I apologise, honourable Minister, if I am not getting it right, but the Forestry Training Centre is the one up in Colo-i-Suva or the one in Nasinu?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- In Colo-i-Suva.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- In Colo-i-Suva?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Yes.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Where does the one in Nasinu fit in? I know that was meant for

mahogany landowners to come and train their children, so that they can be involved in value addition.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Sir, if you look at Programme 5-5.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Sorry, are you referring to Programme 2, yes?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Sir, no, because the honourable Member had asked about the mahogany landowners, where they are trained, if they are trained in Colo-i-Suva or in Nasinu. So, that would come under Programme 2-5.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- That is what I am asking, because we have the facility too in Nasinu. That was specifically funded by Germany for the Mahogany landowners.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Thank you, honourable Member, currently, the facility in Nasinu, the forestry facility in Nasinu, is being shared by some of our cottage industries that are currently in Nasinu at the moment. So, this allocation is to upgrade the training centre in Colo-i-Suva, so that all training is undertaken at the Colo-i-Suva Forestry Training Centre.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you. We move on to Programme 2-4. Programme 2-5. Programme 2-6. We have SEG 8? Honourable Koroilavesau.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman. I wanted to ask the honourable Minister on the Programme 2-6(8) - Reforestation of Degraded Forests with Indigenous Species (\$2,000,000) and if this programme also covers the replanting of pine in the various areas that have been harvested.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Thank you, honourable Member, Mr. Chairman, through you, yes. This project covers the replanting that has been done on the areas where pine forests have been harvested.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you. A follow-up question honourable Usamate?

HON. J. USAMATE.- On the replanting of indigenous forests, the reforestation, which comes under that particular SEG. In terms of the survival rates of indigenous, is that something that is comparable to plantation or plantation-type things? Or is it going up? Or how well does it rate next to the reforestation of other species?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Thank you, honourable Member. Through you, Mr. Chairman, the survival rate for native tree species that are planted on degraded forests is very low at 24 percent as compared to plantation species planted on degraded land.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Part of this, would this also include ways in increasing that survival rate for indigenous species in particular to make sure that they do survive better?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Yes, honourable Member, currently I think our Research Division is working on ways on how they can make the soil on degraded areas more fertile so that it is suitable for the native species.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, I wanted to ask the Minister on Programme 2-7-(10) - Maritime Pine Development and the Commercial Maritime Pine Subsidy. This is the subsidy that is given for shipping of pine logs from the maritime islands. Is that what the subsidy

constitutes?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Yes, honourable Member, that allocation is for subsidising the barge that transports the pine logs from maritime areas to Tropik Woods in Lautoka.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, the Maritime Pine Development this is not limited, I mean, if any village decide to plant pine would they be able to access this or is this only reserved for certain types of organisations or arrangements about Maritime Pine Development. I just want to clear that up.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Through you, Mr. Chairman, under this programme the Ministry works with the Fiji Pine Trust and Pine Woodlot Owners to develop communities through rehabilitation works which includes the ripping and treating of timber for building and maintenance of homes. So, the project focus for the next financial year is to continue the support for the rehabilitation of construction in Kadavu, Moce, Moala, Levuka and Lakeba. So, that is what the allocation will be used for in the new financial year.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, when still on Maritime Pine Development, I know that we are harvesting from Lovu in Gau, Lakeba and Kadavu, which islands are next in this programme because I know that Moturiki, the Ratu mai Moturiki usually seeks assistance. I know that Cicia was also under consideration. So, probably just if you can give which ones and sort of timelines as well.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Through you, Mr. Chairman, apart from the maritime communities that you have mentioned, a lot of maritime islands have shown a lot of interest with regards to harvesting their pine. Matuku, Nairai and a few others. In the next financial year, the Ministry will work on which maritime islands we will move to next. We will decide that in the next financial year.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, I have one last question on this because honourable Minister appreciate the fact that these are the issues that they raise when we come. Talking about maritime pine stakeholders it is their representation in the Trust and the Board as well. I know that the big players have a big voice, but they always cry for representation as well in this, so how is this being handled in your Ministry?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Chairman, through you. As we speak, the Fiji Pine Trust is currently undergoing a restructure. Restructuring of the organisation as a whole and also of the trustees that represent the various landowners in the different pine stations. I can assure you that that is progressing very well and the landowners can be assured that their interests and their needs will be well looked after by the current administration of the Fiji Pine Trust.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote on Head 32.

Question put.

Head 32 - Ministry of Forestry, agreed to.

Honourable Members, I think at this point, we will suspend our proceedings for a quick dinner. We have nine more Heads to go, so that is why I am calling for us to have a quick dinner and come back.

The Parliament adjourned at 7.27 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 8.23 p.m.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, we will proceed with Head 33.

Head 33 - Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU. - Aid in Kind, Mr. Chairman. Honourable Minister, can you please elaborate more on the Aid in Kind assistance by JICA.

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO . - Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Is this in relation to the \$393,000?

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU. - Yes.

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO . - It is done to upgrade the tsunami warning centre that is located up at Delainabua. Every year, there is a systemic upgrade, but also we do expansion of that notification procedure throughout Fiji. It started with Central Eastern. I think a couple of years ago we took the service to the West and probably, I am not quite sure, but this fund is probably going to be the extension of the service up to the North.

HON. J. USAMATE. - Programme 2-2(7) on the review of the mining law, I am glad to see that it has continued, something that has continued over many years. I remember the process was happening when I was there. Just to check with the Minister whether this is the final phase of this? Are we likely to see the Bill coming out shortly?

HON. F.W. R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Chairman, through you, the Mining Law Review Committee has done widespread consultation throughout the country. They finished their nationwide consultation last week.

Two weeks has been allocated for the committee to do a tour in Australia and in Papua New Guinea, just to understand the contrasts of our mining experience here and in those two jurisdictions. When we come back, they will produce a report that I will take to Cabinet in and around August, September, and thereafter be brought to Parliament.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Programme 3-4(7), it says \$70,000 is for the review of legislation. Is there any other legislation that you are reviewing besides the Mining Act?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- The State Lands Act and the Land Use Act 2010.

MR CHAIRMAN.- Mining Act, according to the Prime Minister?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO. - The Mining Act and the Quarries Act are under review. They are being consulted with together, but the State Lands Act and the Land Use Act are also under review committee.

HON. P.D. KUMAR . – SEG 8, if the honourable Minister can tell us which subdivision is earmarked for upgrade and enhancement of subdivisions?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Looking at this figure, I would have to say that the one in Lagalega is probably first and utmost that needs to be approved. It has been approved, but there are some remedial works that needs to be done at the riverbank before WAF gives us the approval. That will then certify the entire work process. There is a bit of work that needs to be done there because the land keeps slipping, and so they proposed something that for us needs to do, but there are two

other locations. I cannot quite remember their names off the top of my head right now, but three that I could think of, yes.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, on development of State land. There is \$100,000 set aside for that. If you can elaborate on it.

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- There are State lands that we have identified that could provide some relief in commercial and industrial zone requirements. But we need this to ensure that at least the basic infrastructure is organised and done. Roads is mostly going to be used for most part of the allocation, but that is essentially it.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, Programme 3-5 (6), for the Freehold Land Buy Back Scheme, I think, the budget last year was about \$4 million, which really dropped this year. Is there a reason for the drop in that programme?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- We have had to take a dip on this one because we wanted to prioritise more funding into our groundwater programme. When we were given the choice, given the budget ceiling that we were given by the Ministry of Finance, we chose that. For this year, we can allocate less for this, and we allocate more for that because that is more social services.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Under Freehand Land Buyback?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- I did not quite get his question.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Is there a repayment on this buyback? That is the issue.

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- You are following up on the repayments of the past buybacks.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Oh, sorry, my mistake. The progress of the payment, because it was an issue that held up with a lot of the cases in the past. Has that improved over the recent past?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- It has improved a little. We continue to remind those that have entered into agreement with the State to ensure that they hold up their end of the bargain.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, may I just add one last one. It is not here, but there used to be a land back investment under this Head. Is that now completely gone?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Completely gone.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, Programme 3-9(1), the increase in emoluments and the wages, is this just the people that were on project positions being absorbed.

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Chairman, through you, yes, that is correct.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Parliament will now vote on Head 33.

Question put.

Head 33 – Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources, agreed to.

Head 34 – Ministry of Commerce and Business Development

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, on Programme 2-1(6) – Grant to Professional Bodies (\$1,000,000). Can the Honourable Minister elaborate where \$1 million is set aside?

HON. S. NAND.- Mr. Chairman, the grant to professional bodies is to Business Process Outsourcing \$500,000 and Business Assistance Fiji \$500,000. These are the two bodies that get \$1 million.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- SEG10 – Fiji Investment Corporation Limited (\$1,000,000) and even last year \$1 million was given. If the Honourable Minister can elaborate on how these funds were utilised or how this will be utilised?

HON. S. NAND.- The fund will enable the Ministry to accelerate the deployment of capital into high-impact individual investment projects that align with the Government's strategic priorities and contribute to the overall economic prosperity of Fiji.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Just a follow-up question, Sir. What was achieved last year with that \$1 million?

HON. S. NAND.- In 2025-2026, we invested in the Board and appointed staff, recruited and established an office. Those were the things that were established during that time.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, on Programme 4-1(7) – Review of Co-operative Act (\$30,000). Can we have an update on this, please?

HON. S. NAND.- The Ministry has decided to complete the review of the Act by late 2026 as the key priorities in the area for the Ministry in making the United Nations International Year of Cooperatives. We are reviewing the Act to make it to that.

HON. J. USAMATE.- On Programme 5-1(10). If you can just give an update on what the Integrated Human Resources Development Programme, will be doing with the \$2 million that is budgeted.?

HON. S. NAND.- Mr. Chairman, the HRDP is a grant assistance programme that is based on a one-third, two-third funding mechanism. The two-third funding comes from Government, where one-third is contributed by the recipient. The programme provides funding for a wide range of income generating projects across urban, peri-urban and rural communities and across all sectors. Eligible assistance include:

- Purchase of farming equipment;
- Fishing equipment;
- Fiberglass boats;
- Freezers;
- Solar power system; and
- Other capital assets directly related to the implementation and sustainability of approved income-generating ventures.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, I have a question on Programme 5-1(10) - Northern Development Programme with an allocation of \$800,000. I know that this has been an ongoing programme since 2008, if I remember correctly. I just want to ask the Assistant Minister whether this

\$800,000 allocation will concentrate on a specific geographic area within Vanua Levu or a particular sector, given the previous assistance from the past.

HON. S. NAND.- Mr. Chairman, the Northern Development Programme has been a long-running programme. Previously it used to be a stand-alone programme, now it is with Ministry of Commerce and Business Development. The programme will be for all projects throughout Vanu Levu.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Chairman, on the Northern Development Programme, is the funding 100 percent or still on one-third and two-thirds basis?

HON. S. NAND.- Mr. Chairman, it is on one-third, two-thirds basis.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, kindly note that Programme 6 has been transferred to Head 16. The Parliament will now vote on Head 34.

Question put.

Head 34 – Ministry of Commerce and Business Development, agreed to.

Head 35 – Ministry of Multi-Ethnic Affairs, Culture, Heritage and Arts

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, please note that Programme 1 has been transferred to Head 30.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- My question is Programme 2-1(6) - Multi-Ethnic Grant to Community Based Organisations where \$2 million was allocated last year as well as this year. Can the honourable Minister tell us how this money was utilised and how he intends to use the current \$2 million that is allocated under SEG 6?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Chairman, first of all, let me tell this honourable Member that you had disbanded multi-ethnic and we have created that.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- That is not my question.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Listen to me.!

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, this is not acceptable.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- I will tell you what. We have utilised...

HON. J. USAMATE.- This is not acceptable.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- I am sorry. When I get agitated, I do not like all this rubbish.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Oh boy, this is Privileges Committee.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Minister, can you please respond civilly?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Chairman, we were given \$1.5 million in the first year, second year we were given \$2 million and this year, we are also given \$2 million. The criteria are very clear. All organisations have to apply online. They are vetted through a proper system; no favouritism. It

does not go to any particular person. It goes to the whole community, that project. That is how this money will be utilised.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Just a follow-up question, Mr. Chairman. As you know, when we go out for community work, et cetera, the concerns were raised with last year's \$2 million allocation. The communities were asked to put in their application. They had to revise their quotes several times and then, ultimately, they barely got enough money. Whatever the quote was given initially, that had to be revised for the second time, then it had to be revised for the third time because the money was not enough. I am just wondering whether any of this money was used in the crematorium project.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Chairman, money was there. People did not submit proper quotations - three tenders. We asked them to revise and bring proper quotations and if they have missed out, the opportunity is here in this budget.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for his effort in answering this question. The last question was whether any of this \$2 million allocated or \$1.5 million as you said for last year was used in the crematorium project; any crematorium project?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Absolutely not, Mr. Chairman. Whatever was allocated to any other project was all given to the right positions and right place. We are not a government that shovels around.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Chairman, my question to the honourable Minister is on Community Engagement and Mapping. Last financial year, \$113,000 was given, and this financial year, it is \$100,000. What is the purpose of this \$100,000?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- It is that simple language, Mr. Chairman. It is called mapping. If you do not understand a simple language, it is mapping - fullstop.

HON. H. CHAND.- My question is, what is this community engagement?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Have you not committed with an engagement yourself in life? Please, come on, do not come and ask petty questions in Parliament.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Minister, can you perhaps, for those of us who are unfamiliar with it, what does community engagement actually mean on the ground?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- On the ground, Mr. Chairman, it is to go and study the community people and then map them out, where they stand and their positions.

HON. H. CHAND.- Thank you. It is clear now.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- I will just go back. I am terribly sorry, I apologise to honourable Maharaj, if I missed, his name was already on my list Programme 2-1(6) correct?

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Yes, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Can we just go back to SEG 6, honourable Members?

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Chairman, I would just like to get a clarification from this honourable Minister. This was what we were told, that there was an advertisement for \$15,000, then it came down to \$5,000, and then some community-based programme, they were only given \$2,000.

Is there a clear-cut criteria as to the maximum or minimum amount the organisation would be awarded if they applied for this particular programme, or is it on a case-by case basis? And if it is a case by case basis, how is the amount decided because if an expression of interest goes, there needs to be a maximum cap that you can apply for a grant for that amount.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- I will ask my Assistant Minister to answer.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Can I ask honourable Shalen Kumar if he can respond, please?

HON. S. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, starting from the beginning, the question on where the \$2 million grant was used, I would like to provide clarification. This year, compared to the initial year, in the last financial year the amount of application was \$1,200 or so. In the first year, only 300 applications were received. That is why the \$2 million was utilised and that is why we had to revise the quotation. For the first round, we anticipated quotations up to \$15,000. Then we asked them to revise it to \$7,500, and then later for the third time, it was \$2,000, because of the number of applications and the popularity of this grant.

Secondly, what is community engagement and where the grants are used? Through grant application, we encouraged community-based organisations to make applications for certain assistance such as musical instruments, shared materials, accessibility, borehole, et cetera. However, but when we go into the community, there are certain things we see that no one is applying but there is a need, such as the community footpath, a solar light in the community for the safety of our women and girls at night who live in the squatter and informal settlements. That is a community engagement where we go ourselves and we see the need. We hear from the people and they request, so based on their request, we are there to see for ourselves, we come back to the office and then we go and mount the project. So, that is community engagement and that is where the grants are used.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Chairman, a follow-up question on the criteria and I would like to give an example, for the first home buyers where there is an excessive number of applications, we do not cut the budget. We actually go and seek additional budget to cater for all. We do not cut the amount just to cater for everyone. It seems like this particular amount is given out just for the sake of making everyone happy that you are, at least, getting something and not as per the initial criteria of \$15,000. If it was required, they could have asked Ministry of Finance to provide additional finance or roll it over to next year. How did this particular decision was made that all of a sudden from \$15,000, it came down to \$5,000 and then to \$2,000? If the honourable Assistant Minister can clarify that, please.

HON. KUMAR.- Thank you, honourable Member, for that question. Mr. Chairman, through you, as I have explained because of the influx in the number of applicants, our \$2 million was exhausted and we had to honor everyone by giving them at least something so that they are able to have something for their community. This grant has been absent for about 20 years, so we were compassionate because it takes a lot of time, effort and energy to fill the grant, take the quotation and submit to our office and wait for the long process. We did not want to upset any community.

On the same note, we always encouraged them that they could always reapply for the remaining in this financial year and we are going to consider. We have some applications which we have not processed because the funds were exhausted. Those applications will be processed in this financial year. We will just be doing a simple vetting of the information, and they are not required to reapply, but we will try to facilitate the information they have provided.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Chairman, another follow-up question. If the interest is so much and the full \$2 million was exhausted, why did they not request an increase in budget for this

particular SEG? Why are we sticking to the \$2 million, knowing that there is a huge interest and a lot of communities are applying for this? Having finished and exhausted the budget in the last financial year, we are still requesting the same amount.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Let me first get clarification on that, please. If you do not want to waste more time debating the motion, I can.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Shalen Kumar?

HON. S. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, the very simple answer to this is that we tried to remain within the ambit of our budget that was initially allocated. Because looking at the global crisis, we did not want to ask for more money. Well, I admit that \$2 million is not enough, because we are looking at 16 diverse communities. We are not only looking at one particular community, but we are open to 16 different ethnic groups that fall under Multi-Ethnic Affairs. So, I think we need \$16 million - \$1 million per ethnic group. I know we cannot afford that much. Therefore, we tried to give part of the grants in the last financial year and part of it we will fulfill in years to come, because this grant is going to continue.

(Laughter)

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, my question is really on the procedure and the process, and how transparent you are in terms of putting out an application, clearly stating this is what it is, and then you change again. You expect the people to go back and get another three quotations, and this is why public - the taxpayers get frustrated, because that is when they say they are given a runaround. If you have \$2 million, whatever number of projects comes to you, you must have a criterion to assess, and then you just fund those. The rest can wait for the next year. Now, if you are going by number, say for example, this year we get 2,000 applications and 800 are good ones, are you going to say that you are going to reduce the money even lower? It just does not make sense in terms of the argument here.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We are moving on, honourable Members. Programme 2-1(8).

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, Programme 2-1(8) – Construction of Shraad Ghaat (\$450,000). If the honourable Minister can tell us at which places the Shraad Ghaat was constructed, and for this \$450,000, how will this be used, in which area will it be constructed?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Chairman, Shraad Ghaat is all about putting in your last rites of burials. We had issues. Do you understand, honourable Premila Kumar?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- I am not asking that.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- I want to tell you straight that we had to facilitate and get leases where the Shraad Ghaat to be put.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Fine.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- We have now managed to get the leases. That money that we did not use last year has been transferred to this year's budget.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- That is a good answer. That means...

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Listen *yaar*!

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Oh my goodness! Mr. Chairman, I take that as an offence.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- What did he say? I did not

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, he should be taken to task. It is not good this kind of

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Just give me a minute. I apologise, I was in a deep conversation here and I did not hear that.

Honourable Minister, can I ask you to apologise, even if I did not hear it. Obviously, it was offensive. Can you apologise?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- I will apologise.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Do you apologise?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- I apologise, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- One moment, I am still trying to get my House in order here. Under this SEG, we have a motion. Were you on SEG 8?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- It is all right, Sir, I can move on.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Maharaj is moving a motion that Head 35-2-1(8) – Upgrade and Enhancement – Crematoriums, be increased by \$200,000.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Chairman, I second the motion.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Chairman, I had spoken about this at length and as per your guidance yesterday, I stopped and I did say that I am going to definitely raise this when actually come to this particular stage. I will keep it very simple, Mr. Chairman. It is the public plea to rectify the wrong that has been done and re-align the furnace at Tuatua Cemetery. I am requesting for this particular funding so that we do not play with people's feelings and provide this funding to re-align the furnace so that people can perform their final rites of their loved ones as their religions dictate. As simple as that, and I will keep to that, Mr. Chairman.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Chairman, in our Sikhism, we had Guru Nanak as our first master. We had 10 masters. When Guru Nanak went to Mecca, his leg was towards the mosque and the Moulanas complained, "Why have you put your leg towards the mosque?" He said, "Tell us where is not the god, which side is not the god in this world."

The entire mosque turned when the 10 Guru Nanaks legs turned, the entire mosque turned. So, in this country and the world, where is not the god; god is everywhere within you. You have to just believe in it. I will tell you one thing, Mr. Chairman, we are trying to split the hair in this country, so the social cohesion, the Ministry is trying to promote and that is the very man, sitting that side, trying to split the hair of Sanatan Dharam, Muslim Dharam, every dharam. Please do not do this politics.

(Honourable A.A. Maharaj interjected)

HON. C.J. SINGH.- You, I will tell you one thing. You have been trying to promote this, I will tell you one thing, please do not bring politics in this religion. I will tell you one thing, whatever the honourable Minister has promoted, we have brought in all these crematoriums. During the 16 years of your government, you have not brought anything. Please, leave us to go forward and we will make sure, we will not only support one, because Tuatua Cemetery is not Hindu cemetery, it is a public cemetery.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, can I raise a Point of Order?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Point of Order.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Practice of Parliament. The kind of language being used by this Member accusing people of all sorts of things, inviting racial and religious vilification should not be allowed. He must be taken to task for those kinds of comments that he has made at the honourable Member. The honourable Member here did not mention anything about religion, different religions - he asked a question. He chose to answer that question in that particular way that is totally unacceptable at all. He needs to be taken to Privilege for that sort of comment made in this House.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you, honourable Usamate. I take some issue with the shouting. The decorum of this House is first and foremost and that has not been shown from both sides in this matter. So, I will take on board the Point of Order which you had made honourable Usamate and I will make my ruling tomorrow.

HON. V. NATH.- When the project was undertaken by the FijiFirst Government, the shraad ghaat, in fact that was initiated by me and I was heavily committed and that was the very first time in history of Fiji that all the religious groups owned a group to run or govern this shraad ghaat. I must officially thank Pundit Dinesh Sharma who was called to the site to ask the direction in which the final rituals were to be done. If one goes and visits this *Shraad Ghaat* at Vatuwaqa, you will definitely find, Mr. Sher, that it is really done nicely. It is a state of art project.

Of course, we believe in sunrise and sunset, and when you perform the ritual after the funeral - the person performing should be facing the sunset side and that is exactly what has been done at *Shraad Ghaat*. I fully agree with honourable Maharaj that in our religion and every religion, whether you talk about South Indian or Hindu, which I believe in, we have that rituals, which side we should be facing and that is deeply correct.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Chairman, I selected my words very carefully when I moved this particular motion. It was not about hating anyone's sentiments, not questioning anyone else's religion, or so forth. I placed this motion in what I believe and my religion believes. That is why I was very careful not to pinpoint to anyone, not even the Minister, for doing something wrong.

All I am saying is, with the consideration, of one particular organisation which is heavily involved in using fairness all around Fiji. It is an issue, and if we can rectify it. It is not that we are going to waste millions of dollars rectifying, but if we are talking about social cohesion, unity, it is a simple request. Let us just re-align the furnace. As simple as that.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Parliament will now vote on the motion by honourable Alvick Maharaj.

Question put.

Motion lost.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Mr. Chairman, can the honourable Minister explain Programme 2-1(8) - Preparatory Cost - State of the Art Museum (\$150,000)?

HON. S. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, I thank the honourable Member for seeking clarification. The \$150,000 fund for Preparatory Cost for State-of-the-Art Museum, is to support the administrative, logistical, and operational requirements necessary for the preparation of the concept, design, detailed costing, architectural planning, and technical documentation for the proposed State of the Art Museum at the Lautoka Girit Centre.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Mr. Chairman, a follow up question. The cost that is associated - \$150,000, do you think that is enough?

HON. S. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, through you, I can get what you are trying to say. No Girit Museum can be made in \$150,000. It is difficult to build a house for that money, but as I have alluded, this is just the preparatory costs for logistical, the design, concept, engineering, and all those things. Our design is ready and we are now at the community consultation stage. We are presenting it to the stakeholders. We have presented in Labasa, Lautoka, yesterday it was presented to Suva. Once we get the approval from the relevant stakeholders that they are happy with the design, then we will move to the building stage. This \$150,000 was just for preparatory planning, engineering and the architectural design.

HON. H. CHAND.- On Programme 2-1(8) – Upgrade and Enhancement - Crematoriums (\$555,000). My question to the honourable Minister, are there plans to upgrade the crematoriums in the Lautoka area?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- We are putting a gas crematorium in Varoka, one in Lautoka, one in Nadi, one in Sigatoka and one in Savusavu.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- It is again on Upgrade and Enhancement of Crematoriums. In the last budget, \$563,000 was given specifically to make the driveway for Tuatua Crematorium. I would like to understand from the honourable Minister, whether that activity is complete, the driveway is complete, or you need more funds from this allocation where it says crematorium, \$555,000?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Chairman, I do not know why they attack Labasa. The point is, look, Labasa is a sacred place, it is a holy city of Fiji.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, that is not my question.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- That is beside the point! No, the driveway has not been completed, and the funds were not allocated because of the crisis. The funds were reversed to the Government.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- The fund was not used?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Absolutely not!

HON. V. NATH.- Programme 2-1(8) – Construction of Shraad Ghaat (\$450,000). Could the honourable Minister elaborate which part of Fiji are we intending or wish to make, or wanting to make this *shraad ghaat*?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- I thought, honourable Kumar, you had touched on that a bit.

HON. S. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, I can elaborate on this and make it clear. Last year, the

amount that was allocated, \$450,000, that has been utilised in the planning and design work for the two *shraad ghaat* – one in Lautoka and one in Labasa. This year, we will be making those two *shraad ghaat* at these two places. So, all the work has been achieved in the \$450,000. This year, we will get into completing the two *shraad ghaat*. One *shraad ghaat* roughly costs \$250,000, but we will try to complete both for \$450,000.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Programme 2-1(8) – Upgrade and Enhancement - Crematoriums (\$555,000). If the honourable Minister can tell us which crematoriums and in which area?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- That has already been responded to.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Programme 3-1(7) – Implementation of Levuka Management Plan (\$70,000). If that can be elaborated further?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Shalen Kumar, the last item in SEG 7.

HON. S. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, as we all know that just in the very last months of this financial year, the Culture, Heritage and Arts have been merged with the Ministry of Multi-Ethnic Affairs and I am not in a very clear position to provide any clarification on this matter. However, we can always get a written explanation of this and submit it to the Member upon consulting the Director, Culture, Heritage and Arts.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- That is acceptable to honourable Premila Kumar. Honourable Koya?

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Could the Minister please explain what is entailed in Programme 3-1(7) - Creativity Support Scheme (\$150,000). How can someone access it and what is it?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- I will address that, Mr. Chairman. Look, these initiatives all have been now encompassed through the National Heritage Organisation and through the World Heritage. We will make sure that these monies are not wasted. It will come out right, and we will give you a very balanced report in the next few months as we go along.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Sir, if I may, I am not quite sure if that answers the question. The actual scheme, what is that scheme for and how can you access it?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Chairman, as I said, in the next two months, we will bring you a whole work of scheme, to show how we are going to progress. Full stop!

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Shalen Kumar, can you explain a bit more for Honourable Koya?

HON. S. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, the whole of SEG 7 has come to our Ministry and it is new for us. However, we are looking at the questions that has been raised. I think the idea behind this is to create a business out of culture and arts and very soon the Expression of Interest (EOI) will be called for which the workshop was already conducted. When we talk about SEG 7, the implementation of the World Heritage Convention, a workshop was conducted, and the idea is to create a business out of culture and arts and soon we will be opening the expression of interest.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Can I just ask Honourable Kamikamica to intervene?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Just to add on to what honourable Kumar said, in the agenda

of economic diversification, this Government's actually identified the arts as a major opportunity for this country and from its initial discussions, the Minister responsible for Heritage and Arts or the Department has actually decided to create a strategic plan that actually tries to work out how we are going to scale up. In America, it is a trillion-dollar industry, so that is the context behind it.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- With regards to Programme 3-1(10) - Rehabilitation of Levuka World Heritage Structure (\$1,200,000) we all understand the UNESCO status of it because it is a World Heritage Site. Is this specifically one structure, many structures or the whole of Levuka? What is it for?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Though you, Mr. Chairman, I do not have a specific figure as to how much is going to be spent in particular buildings, however, we will make sure that Levuka heritage structures are now given the first priority from A to Z.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you. I think you have the answer in between there, because he did say for buildings in plural. For buildings.

HON. J. USAMATE.- I will tell you later.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Now, which of the buildings?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- It is a small town.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Shalen Kumar, can you elaborate on your honourable Minister's statement.

HON. S. KUMAR.- There are 16 structures in total.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Right, there you are.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- For the rehabilitation of the Levuka World Heritage Structure – I am still on that, \$1.2 million. For the last two years, \$3.7 million was allocated, and in the past budget, there are just a few structures that have been listed for rehabilitation. St. John's Church, the community hall, and I am not sure whether this \$3.7 million was used or not, because we were in Ovalau and nothing is moving on the ground. Whatever was done, it is still the same. So, that is what it is, and perhaps later on, somebody can clarify.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Just ask honourable Vasu. Please, can you enlighten us on this, because there is a bit of history in it, which you probably know.

HON. I. VASU.- From the last year's budget, they were supposed to improve 10 buildings. But before they could move in, there was a study from Japan who needs to look at it properly before they move into those buildings. So, in the last budget that you mentioned now, it was supposed to improve 10 of the buildings, within Levuka Town.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Koya, I recognise honourable Koya first, thank you.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman. On the other part of SEG 10, it says Rehabilitation of National Trust of Fiji (\$100,000). I understand that the National Trust of Fiji is an organisation. Is that money designated for the rehabilitation of the organisation or a particular building?

HON. S. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, I request if we can come back to the members on this, because as alluded earlier, this SEG has been passed on to our Ministry not long ago, and we really need to understand, especially myself as an Assistant Minister. I am having some challenges in understanding how things are working in my Ministry. So, please, if I could be allowed some time, so that I can get all the clarifications back to the Parliament on all the queries that have been raised.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Chairman, just on the rehabilitation of Levuka, a follow-up question to honourable Vasu. I think, I brought a motion to increase or to introduce \$1 million, which the honourable Prime Minister promised then, that they will try to source it from somewhere for the infrastructure of buildings within the town, because they were deteriorating. So, if this \$1.2 million is for those commercial buildings within the towns, if they can actually access, if they want to refurbish their building, and retain the heritage structure itself, if it is that money.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- I think it is a comment you are making, not addressing the issue of rehabilitation of Levuka. Honourable Prime Minister, do you wish to?

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Chairman, the honourable Maharaj is saying the right thing. We had mentioned this - bringing back or restoring the world heritage site features of Levuka, as well as our national trust. This is all part of the bigger programme of achieving what we have been set to achieve in the Millennium Challenge. And the Millennium Challenge Corporation has come forward to ask us, to prepare the project that will achieve for us our objectives. And I made that also in our ministerial statement here. So, that is where this fund will be going.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you. Parliament will now vote on Head 35.

Question put.

Head 35 – Ministry of Multi-Ethnic Affairs, Culture, Heritage and Arts, agreed to.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, I have just received a request from the Assistant Minister for Commerce and Business Development, honourable Sachida Nand, that he wishes to go back on his response to Head 34. He may have provided some incorrect information, and I will allow him two minutes to do so.

HON. S. NAND.- Mr. Chairman, through you, apologies, I mixed two grants. The Northern Development Programme is a grant funding which involves 10 percent equity from the recipient, 45 percent contribution from the Ministry and 45 percent loan from a financial institution which the Ministry helps to secure. So, the grant funding is 10 percent, 45 percent from the Ministry, 45 percent from the financial institution. That is the grant funding arrangements for the Northern Development Programme. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to clarify.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- That is recorded and thank you.

Head 36 - Ministry of Public Enterprises

HON. J. USAMATE.- Just to identify what the Programme 1-1(6) - Higher Salaries Commission (\$324,918).

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Chairman, it is really for the operations of the High Salaries Commission Division.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Can I just clarify again, Sir? It is for the operations of the High Service

Commission? Does that mean that the High Service Commission's budget comes from the Ministry of Public Enterprises?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- You are correct.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, Programme 1-1(10) - Fiji Rice Limited (\$1,400,000). If the honourable Minister can clarify what this allocation will specifically target in terms of the implementation for Fiji rice?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- As the former Minister for Agriculture, he knows and he has been there for the last 10 years. Fiji Rice Limited and other organisations have been supported by Government despite them losing money. We have given this particular dollar in this budget just to keep them afloat, and we will consolidate the three companies that you have been seeing there to make sure to become a one operatable company and to start making money.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Head 36 – Ministry of Public Enterprises, agreed to.

Head 37 - Ministry of Local Government

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Programme 1-2(6), Sir, it is to do with the Waste Collection Subsidy to Municipal Councils - \$5.2 million. If the honourable Minister can tell us which municipal councils will be receiving how much?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- The waste collection has increased from \$3 million last year to \$5 million this year. From this \$5 million, \$3 million will be given out to those municipalities to help them in the collection of their waste, while \$2 million will be diverted towards the western dumpsite remediation works, and that also includes the remediation work at the Sigatoka Town Dumpsite. That is the dumpsite that we are piloting this year, where we have also initiated the two-bin concept to assist the municipal councils and working towards a Western Landfill. So that is part of the activities that are included in the \$5 million Waste Collection Grant.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, there is some confusion here. Under SEG 10, there is also Western Division Dumpsite Remediation, which is \$3 million. And last year, for that work, \$2.5 million was given, but you are saying that this amount is part of that \$5.2 million, because \$5.2 million, the title says Waste Collection Subsidy.

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- A correction to that, Mr. Chairman. We have increased subsidies for medium-sized municipalities like Nasinu where we have increased the subsidy close to \$3 million, while the rest are given out to other municipalities across the country.

HON. F.S.KOYA.- Programme 1-2(10). Honourable Minister, with respect to what you mentioned earlier about the Western Division Dumpsite remediation. The dumpsite at Lautoka, the fumes that come out of there are quite toxic, and they can get very toxic, similar to Sigatoka. My question really is, I understand what you are saying, that you will eventually look for a different site altogether in the West, just like Naboro. But for immediate relief, is there a dedication to Lautoka to ensure that those toxic fumes do not filter down to the city on a daily basis, sometimes when it rains and when it starts burning?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Chairman, the remediation work is going to start with the Sigatoka Town Dumpsite. There is also some assistance we are receiving through the Japanese Government where some of the municipalities will be receiving the equipment and machinery to help them in the maintenance of the dump site. For example, Vunato Dump Site in Lautoka. Through that grant, they will be receiving a bulldozer. This bulldozer will assist them in maintaining the dump site at the moment while we do the remediation work at Sigatoka. It is part of our strategy to try and contain the waste that are currently being dumped at the Vunato Dump Site in Lautoka.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Follow-up question, Sir, if I may. One of the reasons, honourable Minister why I said about the toxicity, it is actually debilitating and harmful to your health. The part of the programme that you are saying that may come from Japan, will it take care of that toxicity issue? Because I think if you went and measured it from a health perspective, it really is not good. Will that be included in the part that you are actually going to take care of through the Japanese help - the toxicity?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Chairman, we currently engage experts through the Asian Development Bank who are assisting us in designing these dump site remediation plans. We also have assistance from UNDP, who are now helping the Ministry in carrying out this plan. We are also thankful to the Japanese Government for giving our Government and to the Ministry financial assistance to secure the acquisition of those machines and equipment to assist municipal councils in maintaining or executing the responsibility of collecting solid waste from all the municipalities.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, still on Programme 1-2(10) – Navua Township. Can the honourable Minister explain how the \$300,000 will be used towards Navua Township?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Chairman, we are looking forward to having Navua declared as a town. We have been given a funding close to \$300,000 to assist the Ministry in appointing those Special Administrators who are going to assist the Navua Town Council in administering the Council, as well as looking after operational administration costs for the new Navua Town Council.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, just a follow-up question. When you declare Navua as a town, and I understand that is what the honourable Minister intends to do, that means the ratepayers of Navua will be paying rates, not a bad idea. However, what are the services that you are going to provide because one of the challenges we had was that you cannot just charge rates unless and until you provide those services like the market, bus stand, taxis, roads, electricity, et cetera?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Chairman, at the moment, the team is now amending the scheme plan for Navua Town, where there will be some relocation of some of these major facilities like the market. There are plans to relocate the current Thompson Park, and we are also having discussions with the team, together with the Ministry of Lands, who are also going to assist us in the identification of some more land towards the Navua Back Road. It is going to assist us in the identification of some more land towards the Navua Back Road, where we can transfer some of these facilities, while we broaden the CBD for the new Navua Township.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, just a clarification. The order is not compatible, that is what I see. That means you will be having a town with special administrators to manage the town, and you expect the people to pay rates, but the services are not ready yet.

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Chairman, currently the Government is subsidising the collection of waste right now in Navua, currently being looked after by Lami Town Council. So, we will continue with that service. There is also provision for that in the budget on waste collection subsidy, so we will continue with it. The FRA is also doing some work upgrades around the area.

Some roads will be sealed, as well as other core services that will be undertaken by the new administrators for the Navua Town Council.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Chairman, on the same subject with regards to the Navua Town, can the honourable Minister confirm that until all the services will be provided, there will be exemption towards the rate of the residents within the town vicinity? Because we are going to declare it a town, as you are stating, so rates will be applied to residents once all the services are proper?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Chairman, that is part of the transition where we worked out an action plan to assist us first. When we declare Navua as a town, there will be other government services that will come with that declaration.

We are going to have another consultation with people of Navua and the areas that will be part of the new Navua Town. They will also be advised on what we are going to do as well as the type of valuation of the properties for residential property owners, as well as commercial industrial property owners, before we actually confirm on the new rates to apply to the new Navua Town.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, Programme 2-1(5) - If the honourable Minister can give us an update on the Town Planning Law Review, plus the Urban Policy Action Plan?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Chairman, the Ministry is working on modernising our legislation on the Town Planning Law Review, as well as the Urban Policy Action Plan implementation. There is a Bill that we are currently reviewing at the moment, which is termed as “Urban and Regional Planning Bill”. The Ministry is undertaking to complete this review in the next three months. It is a bit of a lengthy one where we are trying to merge two Bills into one, or two Acts into one. That is a very important activity that we are doing at the moment and hopefully we will complete that in the next three months.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Yes, Mr. Chairman. Just a clarification on Programme 2-1(5) – Urban Master Plan (\$900,000). Is this the same Singaporean company carrying out?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Yes.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Chairman, one question, please allow me. I want to know the component of the drainage within the town boundary?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Where is this? What SEG?

HON. V. NATH.- I am generally asking, Sir. I must have missed it. I have not seen the allocation anywhere.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Keep it short.

HON. V. NATH.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for giving me the opportunity. We know the issue of drainage is a big question in the Central Division and even in the Western Division. I have not seen the component embedded with the Ministry of Local Government. Would the honourable Minister be able to tell me if there is any component in there which will look after the drainage? I remember in the morning, the honourable Minister for Public Works mentioned that beside the road is theirs, what about the natural flow springs which goes through your boundary? Who looks after that?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- I think you might as well wait for two more Heads, then we will come

to the Ministry of Public Works which will cover a bit of that.

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Maybe I will just say a few things, Mr. Chairman. Clearance of drainage around the municipal boundaries is one of the challenges that are faced by most municipalities across Fiji. We are thankful that now we are having more collaboration with the two ministries. We have been having discussions with Fiji Roads Authority as well Ministry of Agriculture through the Drainage Board, who is also going to assist the councils in the maintenance of such drains that fall within. We have strengthened that missing portion where we are now engaging our stakeholders in assisting the councils in the clearance of drains within the municipal boundaries.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Parliament will now vote on Head 37.

Question put.

Head 37 – Ministry of Local Government, agreed to.

Head 40 – Ministry of Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, on Direct Payment – Healthy Oceans and Water Security Improvement Project: (ADB funded). Could you elaborate more on this? I like the use of the term “healthy oceans” as your Oceans Envoy. I would like to know more about this Healthy Oceans initiative.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- This was approximately a \$291 million project involving the upgrade of the canal wastewater plant. Also, in terms of renewable of main lines, water lines, those which have aged, et cetera, and the construction or setup of the Regional Accredited Training Hub in Lautoka for water and wastewater.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, Programme 2-2(8), there is only one item there, Construction of the Meteorological and Disaster Awareness Regional Centre for a million dollars. There was some money awarded here last year. Does that mean that it will be completed out of this budget? It was \$125,000 last year. I suppose that was for preparatory works. Will this now complete it – this \$1 million?

(Honourable Member interjected)

HON. J. USAMATE.- Oh, it is Aid-in-Kind; sorry, I am wrong.

Sir, SEG 8 was \$1 million last year, it is a decrease of \$125,000. Will that complete that exercise this year together with the money that is being given by JICA of another \$10.7 million in the Aid-in-Kind?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Part of that is the responsibility of Fiji Government, which is the VAT component, and the other is funded by the Japanese Government. We have done the groundbreaking, and it should be completed towards the first quarter of next year and it is progressing according to the plan.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, for all of Programme 3, because the whole budget structure has changed in all of Programme 3. I assume if the Minister might explain how its worked because things that used to be in the Department of Building & Government Architects (DBGAs), which is Activity One, have they been farmed out and broken down into other SEGs or how has it

worked? I find it difficult to follow the flow from the last budget to this budget.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We are still in Programme 2, correct?

HON. J. USAMATE.- Sir, I am sorry. I think the hour is getting to me.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- I also jumped to Programme 3.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- That is alright.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Sir. I apologize. I think it has been a long day.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Yes.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Just the way the budget has been restructured from the way it was in Programme 3 last year to this year. I have not been able to follow how the changes took place. Can you explain that for Programme 3? How has it changed in general, or maybe can I reserve that for a personal discussion?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Yes, please.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Perhaps.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- In general, before personal emoluments used to be in one column, but now under Buildings and Government Architects for all of the centres. But now it is redistributed under the divisional engineers. If you go to the next pages, it is there under Divisional Engineer Central, Eastern, Northern and Western under Programme 3 and the various activities following.

HON. J. USAMATE.- From DBGA to the Divisions.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- The budget which was under the divisional engineers is now redistributed to the divisional engineers in terms of the personal emoluments, et cetera?

HON. J. USAMATE.- *Vinaka*.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, I have a question relating to Programme 3-2(8). I raised a similar question to the honourable Minister for Rural Development and Disaster Management under the Head 18-1-1(8) about the Repair, Upgrade and Enhancement of Government Quarters. Honourable Minister it is there in Programme 3-2 under Divisional Engineer Central Eastern, it is there again in Divisional Engineer Western, same thing under SEG 8 under the Divisional Engineer Northern and even with Office and Accommodation in Programme 3-5(8). A lot of money.

The question that I raised with the Minister for Rural Development in the morning is the demarcation and the responsibilities. I asked whether everything will be undertaken by Public Works Department or whether the repairs will be done by the Ministry of Rural Development as well. So, I just want a clarification from you on the allocations that you are given whether this will be with the Public Works Department or, as in the past as well, some were outsourced to private sectors. I just need further clarification on this honourable Minister because of the importance of this in terms of our proper facilities for our people, particularly outside Suva.

HON. RO. F.W. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Chairman, as I alluded to, it is now decentralised to the Divisional Engineers. For example, Programme 3-2-(8) - Upgrade and Enhancement of Government Quarters, for that specifically the funds are to cater for maintenance, upgrade, refurbishment of public structures and water and sewage lines for approved projects, and we have allocated that specifically for specific locations. For example, for the Divisional Engineer Central/Eastern, Kadavu, it is a total of \$1.63 million; Kadavu Phase 2 works they are currently working on some of the Government quarters there \$450,000; Levuka \$800,000; water and sewer relining Levuka \$120,000; water and sewer relining Naboro \$100,000; upkeep of Government Buildings \$100,000 and electrical works \$30,000. So, the works are specifically allocated for specific work.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, through you again mentioned Kadavu because under Head 18, Vunisea Headquarters is also allocated to the Minister for Rural Development. If I may refer you to that allocation, it is Head 18, Programme 1-1-(8) - Vunisea Government Station (\$1.687 million). So, this is why I asked the question as to the demarcation of responsibilities and who is going to undertake the construction itself whether it is the Public Works Department, Rural Housing or whether it is going to be outsourced.

HON. RO. F.Q. TUISAWAU.- So, basically, our Ministry is coordinating closely with the Ministry of Rural Development in terms of the allocation of the work and the majority is conducted by our Public Works Department staff who are located in that specific division. Most of the work is done by them. We, up to now, in terms of recruitment, for example, Divisional Engineer Central/Eastern, we are reaching that optimum capacity in terms of human resources, but of course it is still a challenge. We are reaching there in terms of the need for PWD to be responsible for this Government Buildings and works or quarters maintenance and upkeep.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, I thank the Honourable Minister for his clarification. I think one of the issues that we have had recently in quarters in Kadavu and other places that it has been outsourced, but there has been no quality assurance by Government on the quality of the work. Public Works Department had a reputation in the past for good quality work, but when it is outsourced, and it is done perhaps by the Ministry of Rural Development it there an arrangement to quality-assure a Clerk of Works type function being carried out by Building and Government Architects or by the Divisional Engineers to relook at the quality of work being done by the company that they give. Sometimes they quote something, and when they build the timber and all that is off. I have been to places in Yasawa; it is completely off. So, even if it is being outsourced to maintain that will DBGA have a sort of a Clerk of Works or quality assurance thing oversight over outsourced projects?

HON. RO. F.Q. TUISAWAU.- So, this all goes back to the dismantling of PWD under the last Government. In the reinstatement of PWD, it is not a simple process because you will need the resources and also the skills. So, this does not take 12 months to rebuild. It takes maybe two to three years to bring it up to full complement, but of course you have pointed out one of the weaknesses, which is the oversight and monitoring. Normally, DBGA does that, the Clerk of Works as you mentioned, and that is an evolving process which we are coordinating closely with all the ministries, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Rural Development, et cetera, to move towards a centralised point of quality control. So, when we come back as a Government the whole thing will be perfect.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Yes, because in that case a lot of ministries do their own. They use their own handyman to do this, so there is no quality oversight. So, when we come back in Government, we will improve that further.

HON. RO. F.Q. TUISAWAU.- I am sorry, you or me?

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, Programme 3-3-(8) - Upgrade and Enhancement of Rural Roads (\$1,000,000). Which specific area are we targeting honourable Minister? I have raised on a few occasions in the past about road projects in Kadavu that still have not been completed. So, give us more about this allocation in the rural areas and the Western Division as well.

HON. RO F.Q. TUSAWAU.- Mr. Chairman, Programme 3-3-8 - Upgrade and Enhancement of Rural Roads (\$1,000,000). So, this is for the Divisional Engineer Western proposed track concreting Road to Rama Village \$210,000, proposed new permanent Creek Crossing Waisavasava Creek in Ra \$250,000, stockpiling of precast concrete pipe and head wall \$112,000, maintenance of Natoka Village Access Road, Navosa \$118,000, new Iris Crossing Nakorovou Village, Ra \$309,000.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Mr. Chairman, can the honourable Minister explain Programme 3-4(8) - Upgrade and Enhancement – Rural Roads (\$600,000)? Where is this Rural Road Enhancement located?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Chairman, funds for \$600,000 – Wasa Natokalau Road and Sesevua Road in Bua (\$290,000), Navai Village Road in Bua - \$150,000, Naevuevu Road in Macuata - \$159,000.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Mr. Chairman, a follow-up question? Taveuni also falls under the Northern Division, and I understand in my recent visit to Qarawalu area is affected by bad road conditions. Is there plans for your PWD to extend their works to these areas as well, if they do not fall under the FRA roads?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Sir, in the FRA, we have the Maintenance and Emergency for 2026-2027 \$9 million. Some of those roads are also covered there.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- It is a follow-up question on rural roads in Labasa, is that what it is?

HON. K.K. LAL.- Northern Division, Sir. So, you are meaning that there is an overlap between the FRA and the PWD roads, the rural roads?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- No, no. The PWD is covering specific roads, and the FRA covers the main trunk routes plus roads which are not covered by PWD.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Yes, because I hope you realise that there were a few times I have emailed you with regards to road maintenance, which has not been done for the past four years now in Nakama in Savusavu. Your Assistant Minister is well aware, so if you can also look into that.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Sure. Do send an email regarding that just to remind us.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Can I give a time for your Assistant Minister?

HON. J.R. VOCEA.- Sir, these allocations given to PWD for maintenance and upgrading of rural roads. For the time being, we are working together with PWD and the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development. We have some allocations for rural roads. They have allocations, as you have seen. Sometimes we work together. We have meetings, and we co-share some of the roads that are to be built in the divisions. I am sorry to share that if they are saying that PWD does not have enough budget for it, we work together for our CAFF Project, ROI Project, and together with PWD. Most of the successful projects we have undertaken over the previous years are the outcome of the joint effort by PWD and the Ministry of Rural and Maritime.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Just to elaborate more on that, we have already signed an agreement with the Government of Japan for \$12 million worth of road equipment, and that is under procurement right now. Hopefully we will be receiving that by the first quarter of next year.

In terms of infrastructure, you need to plan, do feasibility studies, and acquire equipment. When you say, “Four years you have not done anything,” you know we have done a lot. If you look at the report of what has been achieved, you need to read that, instead of generalising to the public and campaigning on that basis. So, in addition to that, we are upgrading the depots, including Taveuni, Labasa, et cetera, for this equipment to be relocated to these rural depots.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Chairman, whenever we are going to commission a rural road, community access road, or farm road, the new practice now is just to clarify the issue of maintenance. Previously, during the previous Government, when they handed over the road during commissioning, the community would have to upgrade the road and enhance the road. Some of the roads we have to redo, so now, we take FRA too with us during commission, and the landowners, they sign the consent form. So they are able to hand over the road to, whenever we open a rural road, it is handed over to FRA.

Sir, FRA will now maintain that road and continue that community access, so communities are not affected. Just opened a few now, one in Navosa, another one in Ra, and a few in Vanua Levu, Honourable Ketan Lal. And a few will come into the new budget, that is in Wailevu West in Savusavu. Those are the new ones. You are talking about those already having access. Communities out there still have no access, so we are prioritising them first

MR. CHAIRMAN. -Thank you, we'll move on to Programme 3,

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Minister. Programme 4-1(7). We have the review of Fiji's Petroleum Act 1938. Can you just advise how far this is progressing, and when it is likely to be completed?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Just to update in 2024-2025 financial year, the department, through the consultants, managed to complete a comprehensive and legislative regulatory gap analysis study of the current petroleum legislation.

Phase 2 of the project aims to review and modernise Fiji's Petroleum Act 1938 along with its subsidiary regulations to align with international standards and strengthen the governance of the petroleum sector.

Qualified legal draftsman supported by petroleum engineering and economics experts will assess the current condition and compliance of petroleum infrastructure across Fiji, including storage facilities and retail stations. Key deliverables include the development of the legislative and regulatory reform paper, drafting the new petroleum Bill and regulations. So, this is currently ongoing. I do not have the timeline, but I can update our honourable Member.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU. – Under SEG 8, I want to ask a question about the replacement of Muana Hydro Turbine Generator and automated control systems, allocation of \$200,000. With this project, honourable Minister, does it mean that we will be able to supply other villages within Natewa that were not covered initially, within the area?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- This request is to cater for phase two, including upgrading works to increase the efficiency of the hydro operations, \$25,000 to cater for the 5 percent retention and \$195,000, changing of 290 rotten cross-arms and refurbishment works.

This is the grid from this hydro and I do not have the specific detail here but, yes, in terms of the villages to be covered, I do not have it with me, but I can update you. But I assume that it will cover the – I think three villages or four.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Probably, Mr. Chairman, if I can just make a further comment on that, because in the area, we also have the Buca Hydro that was funded by Turkey. And there are – according to the technical expertise who did the installation there, that there are possibilities to increase the capacity if we use – change the turbine and – so probably within the area, because it will mean a lot to the Natewa area. I think the honourable Minister for Defense will be interested in that.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Just to add to that, the milestone is the completion of the Moana Hydro Scheme rehabilitation, which restored renewable electricity services to five villages of approximately 1,000 residents. That is the update I have.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, following on the point that was made by the Leader of the Opposition that there was money which was set aside for Buca last year. It is on the other side of the peninsula, but there is no follow-up this year. I am just wondering, is Buca Bay being addressed in another way? It is not there, I am just saying, because it was there last year for the hydro in Buca, it is still inactive.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- It was in last year. Update on that, with the support from the ADB work commence on the rehabilitation and expansion of the Buca Hydro Project, which will increase hydro power generation. This is continuing work. It is ADB-funded, Buca with Tiliva in Kadavu. The specific details in terms of the progress, I can update you. I do not have that with me. Yes, joint funding between Government and ADB. Those two are in that one project, one ADB project

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, Programme 5-1(8) - Aid in Kind. My question honourable Minister is, are the projects for Navunimono and Ucunivanua separate as well? Because there are two villages, and I know the situation in Ucunivanua is worse than Navunimono. When we talked about the emergency water allocation. If you look at the records in rural development, *Tikina o Namara*, *Tikina o Verata*, otherwise they would utilise most of the funding. Are these two separate projects - one for Navunimono and one for Ucunivanua?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Yes, both are included in the project funded by the French government through its fund for studies and aid for the private sector and implemented by CDE, a French government development agency located in New Caledonia. It involves a solar-powered drinking water production unit to be designed, supplied and commissioned for the two villages.

The project has an estimated value of \$886,000. An allocation of \$100,000 which is there has been provided under phase one to undertake an upgrade and rehabilitation of the existing raw water source transmission pipelines and reticulation systems starting at Navunimono.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- No, the rest of the corridor is relying on your statement. You mentioned Veinuqa and Kasavu.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- That is for the extension in the Water Authority plans.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Programme 6-1(6), in addition to the Shipping Franchise Scheme (\$3,300,000), there is another Roving Franchise Scheme of \$100,000. Can you explain what that is for?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- That is to fund the Roving Franchise Vessels, such as those who do not have franchise like *Yavirau* and other vessel operators, which are not assigned to fixed routes, and can be deployed to uneconomical, non-profitable maritime routes. It will provide temporary coverage when needed.

HON. J. USAMATE.- If someone is already given a franchise route and he cannot do it, would that cover it?

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

HON. V. NATH.- SEG6 – Operating Grant: Land Transport Authority (\$3,300,00). Can the honourable Minister elaborate on that one, please? What I am interested in, is the National Road Safety Council's funding. Look at the accidents; last year it stood at 83, highest in the last 15 years.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Let us just clarify this. We are still on SEG 6, correct. On the Land Transport Authority, Operating Grants, (\$30 million).

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

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Is that what you are looking at?

HON. V. NATH.- That is right, Sir.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- I will ask the honourable Assistant Minister to comment on the Road Safety Council and the progress on that matter.

HON. N.T. TUINACEVA.- Mr. Chairman, the National Road Safety Council legislation is still up with the Office of Solicitor-General. I think we are coming to the last part of it. We also have done the structure of how we want to run the National Road Safety Council. Once that part of the legislation is cleared by the Office of Solicitor-General, we will bring back the NRSC under a new legislation and new structure. A bit different from the way they used to run a few years back.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Chairman, may I ask a further question? Why is there a need to bring the National Road Safety Council under new legislation?

HON. N.T. TUINACEVA.- Mr. Chairman, NRSC is a road safety watchdog. The previous government removed that and merged both of the road safety watchdog together with the Land Transport Authority. Now, over the years, what came to the minds of those who have been working on road safety is that you need to bring back that watchdog role. That was the reason why we are bringing back the National Road Safety Council. We cannot put it together with the same Land Transport Authority because they are already a regulator and an enforcer, and we cannot be a referee and a player at the same time. You need someone up there who will be watching and checking on the compliance part, as far as road safety goes.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- In the meantime, road safety is not ignored because it is in the LTA budget – Road Safety and Enforcement, \$300,000. It will cater for road safety awareness campaigns and enforcement. Enforcement expenses include cones, traffic wards, et cetera, road safety education, community awareness, public outreach, advertising road safety managers, et cetera. It is an ongoing exercise. However, the current reform is to strengthen road safety. Another option we look at is the return of the Road Safety Council.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Just based on the statement made by the honourable Assistant

Minister, you cannot be a referee and a player at the same time. That is why the energy transition is not at the expected rate that we want. Sir, EFL is still a referee and a player, and what are we going to do about it?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- I already mentioned the diagnostic study on energy, which includes the review of the Petroleum Act, Electricity Act, and the roles of the different entities like Energy Fiji Limited (EFL) and the Department of Energy, from the generation, transmission and distribution. This also includes the private sector power providers and how they can be incorporated. This is all a part of the review of the Electricity Act and the related FCCC Act. It is a complicated situation; however, it is one of the impediments to renewable energy, and we are working hard on trying to ensure that that reform is done at least before the end of the term of the Government. Since you are confident of coming back, we will hand that over to you to complete.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Sir, regarding SEG 8, on the completion of the Government Shipping Services (GSS) retaining wall in Walu Bay. There is \$450,000 budgeted for the upcoming financial year, as compared to \$1.8 million last year, and over the years there have been budgets made for this retaining wall. Is it likely that this will now be completed with this last \$450,000 retaining wall for GSS?

HON. RO. F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Yes, this has a history of complications in terms of the contractor, so we are looking forward that this task will be completed.

HON. J. USAMATE.- My second question is on the next one. The upgrade and enhancement of Government shipping vessels. Last year it was \$2.25 million, and this year it is down to \$800,000. While this Government has not bought any new boats. Our government bought boats. I think one of the issues that came to light was when that company refused to give its boat out, and people living in places like Taveuni could not get boats. I am just wondering if Government is looking to enhance its fleet. In case that sort of thing happens again, at least our Government boats can go out. That is why it was a bit worrisome for me that the repair and maintenance, given, I do not even know how many of the GSS fleet are sailing at the moment. Can you explain that, given that scenario and the decrease in the money made available for the upgrade and enhancement to the GSS vessels?

HON. RO. F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Yes, we are currently discussing that as a Government. Even though it is not in the budget, there are two ongoing projects with the Government of Japan through the Ministry of Rural Development and also with the GSS where vessels are under procurement. Apart from that, we are also looking at quickly procuring a new second-hand vessel which would involve a special paper to the Ministry of Finance.

HON. J. USAMATE.- New or second-hand?

HON. RO. F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Yes, there are old secondhand, and there are new secondhand.

(Laughter)

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, through you, you mentioned aid in kind. I am very interested in this. The procurement of a disaster response multi-purpose vessel worth \$27 million. Can you talk more about the capability of this vessel?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- It is basically multipurpose roll-on roll-off. We are also in discussions with the Japanese and to be used also for emergency when the emergency is declared with NDMO. So, it will be a joint, but while there is no disaster, it will be under the GSS. So, roll on, roll off and sort of multi-purpose type of capabilities.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- I wish to acknowledge the honourable Minister and Government for this. I think this is something that is missing in our capability. Learning from the past, in *TC Harold* and *TC Winston*, we have to put officials in the book because there's hardly any space on them to – so this roll on, roll off capability for disaster responses, and I wish to acknowledge the Government for this.

HON. RO. F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Yes, so fully acknowledge the Government of Japan in assisting us in this time.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Members, we will proceed to vote on Head 40.

Question put.

Head 40 - Ministry of Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport, agreed to.

Head 50 – Miscellaneous Services

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The floor is now open for any comments on the Miscellaneous Services. Let us begin with SEG-1.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, I raised this question earlier, and the honourable Minister for Finance and response said that we can discuss this when we come to Head 50, because I was asking if it was possible to pay the civilians who work in the security forces from this Head. So honourable Minister, what is basically the salary contingency funding meant to meet?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- It is set aside to meet any budgeted salary commitments that may arise during the year as a result of shortfalls in the year. It needs to be corrected or adjusted by the ministry and department.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- On the same subject matter, last year, I mean, every year, almost every year, \$5 million is allocated. Were you able to use this contingency salary last year? The \$3 million that was allocated. Was it fully utilised 100 percent?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Last year or the year before?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- The current one that is running is about to finish.

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- No, no. We did not fully utilise it.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Kumar, which one is yours?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- SEG 5-4 Complying with court orders and settlements, for that I have a motion.

Mr. Chairman, I move:

That Head 50 be decreased by \$4 million in SEG 5, and that is with respect to Comply with Court Orders and Settlement.

HON. J. USAMATE.- I second the motion.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, this amendment is based on the principle that taxpayers

should not be made to bear the cost of poor governance and poor decision-making. The allocation for this item has increased quite a bit without any proper explanation. In 2024-2025, the budget provided for this was just \$200,000 and in the current year, it was \$281,000 and for the 2026-2027, the budget allocated is \$4.5 million - an increase of more than 1,500 percent. This House deserves to know why such a massive increase is necessary. Is the Government anticipating a flood of court order payments? Is it expecting to lose significant legal court cases, or is this simply an admission that poor administrative decisions are becoming increasingly costly?

Mr. Chairman, Governments are elected to govern responsibly, to make lawful and sound decisions and to improve the lives of the people. They are not elected to expose taxpayers to millions of dollars in legal liabilities arising from poor governance. Every dollar spent paying court settlements is a dollar that cannot be spent on improving public services. The \$4 million proposed to be deleted would instead be redirected to an area where it would make a real difference in people's lives. I just want to share that when I am talking about making difference in people's lives.

You know, it could be used to repair and replace critical medical equipment in our hospital. I just heard from a patient suffering from painful gallstones, waiting for months for surgery because essential equipment at Labasa Hospital was not functioning and CWM could not conduct the surgery. They were given a stent. They were in painful situation. Such money can be used for that purpose. It is for this reason, Mr. Chairman, I am moving my motion.

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Chairman, it broken down into three and two of those cases are old cases from your time. So, we are settling it now. One is Sultan Mohammed Khan. The decision was just made, I think, last month or last week, and the other case is the Water Authority of Fiji, that happened during our time around \$2 million as well, and we have \$200,000 contingency costs. So, we are catering for some of the mess that was there.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, even if it was during my time or your time, the point is the person who made the decision, whoever that person was, that person needs to pay for it and not the State, not the taxpayers. That is the point.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- It is the obligation of the Government to pay and some of those matters are more than \$3 million we are currently negotiating the settlement. Those decisions were made by your government. There are more than others.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, the only point I am making here is that we should hold those people to account, whoever they are, because you know, if we just continue to pay court cases with the taxpayers' money it will mean that anyone who holds that responsible position is making the decision anyhow and it is costing the taxpayers, so that is my argument.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- So, we will proceed to a vote on the motion by honourable Premila Kumar that Head 50 be decreased by \$4 million in SEG 5.

Question put.

Motion lost.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Parliament will now vote on Head 50.

Question put.

Head 50 – Miscellaneous Services, agreed to.

Honourable Members, please, take note that Heads 51 and 52 are standing appropriations or below the line appropriations. Head 51 lists all the pensions that are payable. These are a charge on the Government finances. Head 52 is the charges on account of public debt. These numerous pages list all the information on interest and loans. Neither Head is voted upon because they must be paid and are therefore already catered for.

Honourable Members, that brings us to the end of the Estimates. We shall now proceed to consider the Schedules and Clauses of the 2026-2027 Appropriation Bill 2026, Bill No. 13 of 2026, as required by Standing Order 101. I advise, honourable Members, that as we have not amended the Estimates, Standing Order 101 prevents any amendments from being moved and made at this stage. Standing Order 101(3) also prevents any debate on these questions.

Schedule 1

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

Question put.

Schedule 1 agreed to.

Schedule 2

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

Question put.

Schedule 2 agreed to.

Clause 1

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

Question put.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clause 2

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

Question put.

Clause 2 agreed to.

Clause 2 stands part of the Bill.

Clause 3

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

Question put.

Clause 3 agreed to.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, that brings us to the end of the Committee of Supply. We have now concluded voting on Heads 1 to 50, as well as the Schedules and Clauses of the 2026-2027 Appropriation Bill 2026 (Bill No. 13 of 2026). At this juncture, I will now resume the Speaker's Chair.

The House resumed:

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the Committee of Supply has agreed to the 2026-2027 Appropriation Bill 2026 without amendment.

I now call upon the Minister for Finance, Commerce and Business Development to move the Third Reading of the Appropriation Bill.

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

That the 2026-2027 Appropriation Bill 2026, Bill No. 13 of 2026, be read the third time and be passed.

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

Question put.

Votes cast:

Ayes	-	35
Nays	-	10
Did not vote	-	10

Motion agreed to.

[A Bill of an Act to appropriate a sum of Four Billion, Two Hundred thirty-seven Million, Seventy-three Thousand, Two Hundred and Fifty-two Dollars for the ordinary services of Government for the year ending 31st July, 2027 (Bill No. 13 of 2026), enacted by the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji. (Act No. of 2026)]

(Acclamation)

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Parliament has officially passed the 2026-2027 National Budget. As I previously highlighted, this week-long deliberation stands as a cornerstone of our constitutional duty, ensuring transparency, accountability and sound national planning.

I extend my sincere appreciation to all the honourable Members for your thoughtful engagement throughout this important process. Your contributions have been invaluable.

Let me also warmly congratulate the Minister for Finance, Commerce and Business Development on the successful adoption of the National Budget.

Honourable Members, that brings us to the end of the sitting today. I wish you a restful night, and Parliament will now adjourn until tomorrow at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.50 p.m.