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Nauru celebrates 52 years of independence

President Aingimea delivers first Independence day national address

This year Nauru celebrates its 52nd Independence Day anniversary with the traditional flag raising ceremony, Nauru Police guard of honour parade and a march-past involving government departments, state owned entities and community groups, 31 January.

The official event was held in front of the government office complex.

In his first Independence Day national address, His Excellency President Lionel Aingimea quoted scripture committing the nation to God's will and underscored a list of desperate imaginations to take Nauru forward in diversifying the economy.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways submit to him and he will make your paths straight; was the scripture President Aingimea quoted from the book of Proverbs 3:5-6.

Speaking in the vernacular, President Aingimea stressed that if in truth Nauru holds the motto God's Will First, then to let the anchor of Nauru and its people, by



His Excellency President Lionel Rouwen Aingimea inspects the Police guard of honour in his first Independence Day as Head of State

their trust in the Lord, commit Nauru to Him in prayer.

President Aingimea urged Nauruans to look to the future and prepare for the positive and negative things ahead using the example of the reduction in operations at the Regional Processing Centre (RPC).

But while the President cautioned the scaling down of the RPC, he reassured there is a win-win situation in that the Government of Australia will

continue its support and with the Nauru Government work together to minimise the impact on Nauru's economy and people.

In the recent heads of mission conference under the theme *Desperate Imagination*, the President stressed the theme is not about hopelessness but rather "thinking outside the box", referencing its roots in scripture: *Where there is no vision, the people perish* – Proverbs 29:18.

The conference brought together ministers, state owned enterprise, and the private sector to discuss other forms of businesses and industries available for Nauru. The President is referring to opportunities to diversify Nauru's economy stressing that Nauru cannot continue to depend on phosphate and fisheries as the main resources and revenue streams.

The President was firm in his words when he stated he wants to see Nauru as the hub of business, and the hub of industries including for education and the health sector, for the region, highlighting

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First parliament 2020

The Nauru Parliament convened the first sitting on 28 January with the usual presentation of ministerial statements, bills and the supplementary appropriation of \$17.1 million in expenditure leaving a surplus of \$59,800.

After the opening prayer, President Lionel Aingimea addressed the House, first, on the down scaling of the Regional Processing Centre (RPC).

The President also stressed the importance of road safety with a reminder that the police will continue their road blitz throughout the Independence Day period, and cautioned against drunk driving underscoring that the two road accidents over the Christmas period involved alcohol and no helmets.

Speaker Marcus Stephen called for petitions and notices of motions, of which there were none.

The first question raised in Question Without Notice time was asked by deputy minister Pyon Deiye on plans for labour mobility in light of the reduction to the RPC.

The question was directed at President Aingimea as minister in charge, to which the President confirmed that as one of the counter measures is labour mobility. An increase in staff for the division will support the extra workload associated with the Nauru Pacific Labour Mobility scheme.

The President also confirmed that 25 Nauruans have been identified through the selection process to take up employment with labour mobility Australia and said the government will look at the group of newly trained Nauruans in hospitality for employment opportunities as well.

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Nauru's use of TVET and Queensland certificate of education (QCE) as two qualifications recognised by Australia, suggesting that Nauru can offer regional students these standards of higher education.

“As a nation we have to plan ahead,” the President said highlighting some of the activities ahead that the government is pursuing and nurturing.

Finance and the Intergenerational Trust Fund (ITF) was expected to reach \$125 million by the end of January, and the Bendigo Agency expected to introduce EFTPOS payments, effectively reducing cash handling at check outs.

The national airline is expected to replace two older planes with Boeing 737-700 aircrafts in June and October, as well as expand a charter service with Real Tonga Airlines to new destinations. New routes for Nauru Airlines will include Taiwan.

President Aingimea also announced changes to the colours and features of the national carrier where the blue waves will be replaced by black and red breasted frigate birds to reflect Nauru's connection with the bird which is also featured on the national crest. The changes are all part of the vision to diversify the economy, the President reaffirmed.

The frigate bird is a sacred bird and is held in high esteem in Nauru's culture and tradition. The gentleman's sport of frigate bird catching and taming is reserved only for older men.



A frigate bird glides majestically, with clipped wings as an indication of belonging to a perch below

His Excellency described the development of the new port at Aiwo as the catalyst for development. Its expected completion in the first quarter of 2021 will see an increase in efficiency in turnaround times, as well as increased safety standards and possible reduction in freight costs of goods to Nauru.

In transport and civil aviation, an air services agreement is planned for a Palau route and resealing of the runway to commence soon.

In justice and border control, the relocation of the jail is the first phase of the higher ground initiative to address overcrowding in the low coastal residential lands and take advantage of the unused topside area doubling as precautionary measures to address climate change events.

In utilities, while all power poles are being replaced around the island, President Aingimea confirms solar power installations have now reached 50 per cent in energy efficiency, and thanked the New Zealand government and the European Union for their assistance in that regard.



Nauru weightlifting in the Independence Day march-past

President Aingimea announced movements of the Nauru Rehabilitation Corporation in providing aggregate and boulders for the port project, and in consultation with landowners and stakeholders land development at topside for the installation of the six megawatt solar power plant.

The President outlined the expansion of services by Nauru Post as a logistics provider to support Nauruans through affordable freight rates and procuring products from Asian countries directly.

The President also indicated the possibility of exploring a packaging industry for consumers and the industrial market, hence the potential for revenue generation.

The infrastructure department is importing fresh water tanks and repairing roads with current works being done on the hospital road leading up to the NPC settlement.

The government is also working on reducing fuel cost, while in telecommunications a new provider is expected to set up operations, effectively introducing competition to phone and internet rates.

President Aingimea stated that Ronphos is going to revamp and renegeise the phosphate industry.

In conclusion His Excellency offered his sincere thanks to the Government of Australia for its assistance, underscoring that Australia has long stood with Nauru in areas of education, the hospital rebuild, maintenance programs, capacity building, education and job opportunities through seasonal work and the labour mobility scheme.

President Aingimea also thanked the Republic of China (Taiwan) for always standing with Nauru, noting Taiwan's assistance in acquiring a plane when Nauru was rebuilding its fleet. The President continued to thank the Taiwan government for their assistance in educating Nauruans through scholarships and supplying food for Nauru schools, capacity building and assistance given to the Nauru Police Force.

President Aingimea highlighted the numerous other assistance Nauru receives, including from the US, EU, and India.

The President interprets the assistance Nauru receives as an indication of the confidence placed on Nauru as a nation and as a people; that Nauruans can better their lives and the economy through this assistance.

President Aingimea concluded by wishing everyone a happy Independence Day and thanked his cabinet, deputy ministers and the people of Nauru, urging everyone to put Nauru in their daily prayers •

Coronavirus queries were raised to which the justice and health ministers warned of its seriousness underscoring the measures taken to protect Nauru. The public and travellers are also advised of the restrictions of travelling back to Nauru after visiting China or other countries similarly affected by the coronavirus.

Finance Minister Martin Hunt answered a question about a \$1 million amount that was set aside for payments to former Bank of Nauru account holders. The minister confirms that while the department is still receiving claims, 90 per cent of that amount has been distributed with a maximum payment of \$2500 for each beneficiary.

Minister for Fisheries Wawani Dowiyogo clarified a query on boats, trailers and accessories for fishermen that to receive the items, fishermen are asked to submit their names with the fisheries office in order to be considered for any of the items, which will be distributed once they are received on island.



Fishermen winch their boats and trailers after a days' fishing

President Aingimea then confirmed the government will move forward on salary adjustments after it receives the report from salary review consultants PricewaterhouseCoopers.

On a positive note for the teaching community, the President said the funds saved from the discontinued outsourcing of toilet cleaning for schools will be diverted towards teachers' salaries, noting nurse salaries will also be considered.

Member for Ubenide David Adeang sought clarification on why deputy ministers, who effectively make up Cabinet, should they be sitting on the Public Accounts Committee. President Aingimea confirmed it was a valid question and deferred it to legal advice.

Ministerial Statements

NPRT update

President Aingimea presented the first of 15 ministerial statements reporting on the movements of the Nauru Phosphate Royalties Trust (NPRT) since the Ronwan devaluation of 2001 as well as the information of capital residual since being returned by the liquidators.

“As members are aware, NPRT has had a long history of neglect and mismanagement of investments which contributed to the significant devaluation of the Nauruan beneficiaries' Ronwan capital in the early 2000s,” President Aingimea said in his opening statement.

In the year 2000, prior to the devaluation, the Ronwan database

for Fund 2, that is the landowner's fund, provided for a total valuation of \$389.9 million. This was also a period when a number of NPRT assets were used as security for government loans, placing significant revaluation of the true capital position of the Fund 2 investment assets. These included assets in Australia - the Nauru House and Savoy Hotel in Melbourne and the Mercure Hotel in Sydney.

A review in 2001 resulted in a significant reduction in beneficiaries' Ronwan capital from \$389.9 million to \$230 million (or 59 per cent).

In the following years, Ronwan balances were further reduced by another \$45 million over three years, totalling \$115 million by the end of 2004, reflecting a combined total devaluation of \$275 million (or 71 per cent) in the Ronwan capital since the year 2000.

The President then moved on to the details of the accounting of Ronwan capital residual funds since it was released from the liquidators, which, based on actual bank account records at NPRT, the residual funds after the liquidation at January 2014, totalled \$83 million.

From the \$83M residual funds, an interest payment of \$18M and capital redistribution of \$60M were made in 2014, leaving an estimated balance of \$5M.

“With the estimated remaining residual funds of \$5 million in 2014, and with the expectation that the remaining property, Jacobs Technology Building will be able to support further redistribution upon its planned sale, the (NPRT) administration then proceeded to announce a further Ronwan capital redistribution of \$20 million (or 17.3 per cent) from August 2015. The 17.3 per cent capital redistribution began with Ronwan payments for the elderly beneficiaries of 70 years and over, then progressed further payout for the age group of 60 plus closer to the end of 2015. This exhausted close to \$5 million of the funds,” President Aingimea said.

NPRT also took out a loan of \$10M to pay \$9.7M Ronwan to the age groups between 30 and 59 years between January to June 2015.

A balance of \$5.3M remain at the end of 2016 following payouts of Ronwan capital; and at the end of 2019 NPRT progressed the remainder of the 17.3 per cent capital redistribution completing the \$20M distribution that was announced in 2015.

“Since progressing the first capital redistribution in 2014, the NPRT has maintained the starting Ronwan capital of \$115.2M, ensuring no further loss to the valuation of peoples Ronwan capital. Successive governments since have progressed to return beneficiaries their Ronwan capital.

“Given the completed payout of \$60 million in 2014 and a further payout of \$20 million between 2015 and 2019, there now remains a balance of \$35 million or 30.4 per cent in Ronwan capital which remains outstanding.

“Looking ahead, this Government will find avenues to support the repayments of the remaining balance of the Ronwan capital,” President Aingimea said.

Coronavirus and health board update

Health Minister Isabella Dageago updated the House about the outbreak of the coronavirus, which at the time of the parliament sitting, had infected more than 200 people, in 14 countries, and caused 56 deaths.

That figure has since risen in excess of 34,000 in 24 countries when this edition of the *Nauru Bulletin* was published.



Health officials with relevant stakeholders at a meeting to discuss preventative measures on coronavirus

[File photo]

The Minister reported that four confirmed cases were reported [at the time] in New South Wales, Australia.

“Therefore, our nation Nauru is now on high alert stance,” Minister Dageago said, calling on the government and strategic partners to support the ministry’s efforts in imposing travel restrictions, screening and quarantine, strengthening health care workers, surveillance of outbreaks, and allay unnecessary public anxiety through effective risk communication.

The Minister also reported that the health practitioners’ registration board has reconstituted its members to improve the current process for registering health practitioners.

“Additionally, this process will not only include the netting of credentials locally (as currently practiced) but actually seek affiliations with health practitioners’ registration boards internationally,” Minister Dageago said.

In her presentation to the Heads of Mission meeting, themed *Desperate Imagination*, early January, Minister Dageago explained that her ministry is progressing well with its Pacific health model of excellence concept; firstly to be an exemplar for the Pacific; and second, to reverse overseas medical referrals and eventually attract Nauru’s neighbours in the Pacific to use Nauru as their preferred tertiary facility.

Other updates included Nauru’s own facial dental surgeon; the acquisition of highly qualified medical specialists on long term contracts; and general medical officers; as well as ongoing visiting medical teams from Taiwan and Cuba.

The minister also highlighted facilities expansion in paediatrics, mobile clinics in Yaren and Anibare; roll-out of the health information system; and work commenced in engaging telemedicine consultations with international consulting specialist clinic.

“A lot has happened in the past six months since we came in office and we still need to push on further to better and improve the care for our people. A lot of changes occurred in many places



Mobile health clinic in Yaren District

that needed to change to advance outputs and show progress. I would like to inform the house that our vision in health is ‘A healthy and peaceful nation’.

“We continue to strive for the betterment of the nation’s health,” Minister Dageago said.

Infrastructure development

Minister for Infrastructure Rennier Gadabu reported that the tropical storm in December damaged housing for several families resulting in the department’s assistance to accommodate the eight families in ten rooms at the Meneñ Hotel until their homes were repaired and safe for re-occupation.

The last family group were able to return home on 22 January.

The Minister also reported that the department also saw an increase in requests under the tree lopping initiative following the tropical storm and advised that the department endeavours to meet its obligations to keep homes safe from falling trees.

In other projects, infrastructure is progressing the NPC road project; demolition of derelict building, cars and scrap metals, removal of asbestos from residential areas and removal of cars and scrap metals, and maintenance of road drains and soak pits.

In staff travels, the Director of Infrastructure Mike Dagiario attended a water and supply network management course in Singapore in mid-January and while the course was considered too advanced for Nauru, Minister Gadabu said it “provided some valuable insight and learning platform on how Singapore has overcome its water challenges by designing an integrated water planning system that ensures the sustainability of water supply capable of supporting a growing population.”

JBC increases positions for locals

Minister for Justice Maverick Eoe outlined his department’s role in justice matters and in keeping Nauru’s borders through the immigration, passport and quarantine sections, and reported on the recent creation of five pleader positions as well as positions for local lawyers.

“This is to allow the progressive reduction of the expatriate legal professionals.

“I acknowledge the work of the expatriate staff who have helped us build up the department,” Minister Eoe said.

In a bid to promote tourism, new visa lodgement centres are being

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considered beginning with the Brisbane Consulate office, and in complying with international requirements, is the improved management and disposal of passports.

“During this term of the Government, it is my intention to improve the security features of the passport. This includes moving towards e-passports,” Minister Eoe said.

The Minister expressed his appreciation to the Nauru Parliament and cabinet for providing assistance on the law revision consolidation project that will see an update of the laws as required by the Law Revision and Consolidation Act 2018.

Heads of Mission discuss Desperate Imaginations

President Aingimea reported on the recent heads of mission meeting held for the first time on 7-8 January which provided the platform for participants to collaborate and exchange ideas on how best to maximise economic opportunities for Nauru under the theme *Desperate Imagination*.

Nearly 90 participants representing Nauru’s overseas missions including Nauru’s honorary consuls from the UK, India, Malaysia and Indonesia, as well as the resident missions of Australia and the Republic of China (Taiwan), the private sector and Taiwan companies.



Nauru’s Honorary Consuls making their presentations on Day 2 of the Heads of Mission conference, 8 January

The outcome document which reflects the government’s guiding vision was signed by ministers and deputy ministers, with focus on sports tourism, health tourism, the higher ground project, fishing cannery, and cardboard and paper bag manufacturing.

Following this conference, the President will commission a Task Force whose main objective is to attract foreign businesses and investors to Nauru with the theme *Desperate Imagination*. It will manage, coordinate and execute the guiding vision document.

“The Foreign Trade and Investment Task Force will rebrand Nauru as a destination for investment by developing an actionable investment and marketing strategy on how best Nauru could capitalise on our strengths but also identify critical areas impeding our potential to attract foreign investors,” President Aingimea.

CIE overall update

Minister Gadabu presented his second statement on the movements of the Department of Commerce, Industry and Environment which includes the procurement of 50 household water tanks and construction of 50 rubbish stands to pilot the waste management project.

“Ensuring water security through effective water management contributes to achieving our NSDS goals, climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction, both now and into the future,” Minister Gadabu said.

The Minister also informed the House that Ms Evalyne Detenamo was nominated to participate in the AOSIS Climate Change Fellowship Program in New York.

Current activities of the department included the energy division and work on the Nauru Energy Efficiency on the Demand Side Initiative supported by New Zealand’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, which aims to support Nauru’s target of achieving 30 per cent energy efficiency.

The energy division is also compiling a business case to be submitted to New Zealand for approval in April.

“Once approval has been granted, NZ MFAT will support the identified activities up to a budget of approximately NZ\$1 million per year, for the next five years,” Minister Gadabu said.

The department is also exploring ocean energy (ocean thermal, wave energy) with the assistance from the Pacific Community (SPC), as part of its efforts to increase Nauru’s renewable energy percentage. Work is already underway with partners to support Nauru in accessing the Green Climate Fund to enable Nauru to conduct feasibility studies on ocean energy.

Under the R2R project, work is progressing to establish 75 kitchen gardens and five compost toilets in five pilot districts, as well as work with Nauru Fisheries to develop a clam culture industry.

In travel, Minister Gadabu reported on his trip attending the IRENA Assembly and Abu Dhabi Sustainable week (ADSW) accompanied by Minister Reagan Aliklik, CIE staff and personal advisers. The ADSW is a platform to potentially accelerate sustainable development through the adoption of innovative technologies and the development of new skills.

Minister Gadabu also met with the Director General of the Abu Dhabi Fund for Development (ADFD), Mohammed Saif Al Suwaidi in which a proposal for cooperation on infrastructure projects was put forward, in particular housing for a smart village, which the Minister confirmed an invitation was extended for Nauru to submit a 3-4 project proposals that the ADFD would consider.

Both Ministers Gadabu and Aliklik also met with Morocco’s minister of energy, mining and sustainable development and discussed assistance in mining as well as explore bilateral cooperation on logistics and shipping, energy, economic diversification and fishing.

Ronphos revamp headed by locals

Minister for Ronphos Reagan Aliklik, first extended his personal and sincere condolences to the family of the late Rene Namaduk, a senior and experienced employee, who sadly lost his life while carrying out his duties.

“You have lost a good man and I am deeply saddened and sorry for your loss.

“It is my duty to ensure that Ronphos is a safe place to work and have directed management to conduct a thorough review of all aspects of their work and functions to ensure OHS standards are met and maintained,” Minister Aliklik said and highlighted

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another incident of a phosphate ship colliding into the cantilever destroying the control chute but fortunately no-one was injured.



Phosphate ship MV Magpie collided into the cantilever damaging the control chute

The Minister then informed the House of significant changes to the company's leadership which is now led by a Nauruan CEO, financial controller, supervisors and managers.

The change meant savings in salaries of approximately \$2 million annually but focus will be on training and capacity building of its local staff.

Minister Aliklik reports that mining production rates have increased to almost cater for monthly exports.

"We are aiming for a production level of over 200,000 metric tonnes of exports a year which would be the highest Nauru has exported over the last three or four years."

The Minister acknowledged the difficulties of secondary mining over primary but hopes the company is able to increase its capacity and efficiencies.

The Minister also sought an advanced request for public and landowner support for possible minor adjustments to current practices to enable Ronphos to be able to conduct secondary mining successfully and profitably so it will be sustainable and advantageous to all Nauruans.

Minister Aliklik reported on savings on fuel that is used for its kilns which currently cost Ronphos a minimum of \$8 million a year. The company will be introducing a new furnace for its kiln burning that will use a combination of diesel and waste oil, envisaging minimum savings of 30 per cent or \$2.4 million annually.

Minister Aliklik advised the House that his recent trip to Abu Dhabi, and meeting with Morocco's minister for phosphate was fruitful with positive plans to be discussed in the future.

Rehab powers on with port assistance

Minister Aliklik continues his statements with an update on the works of Nauru Rehabilitation Corporation who maintains its work to prepare and supply crushed rock and aggregate for the port project, while acknowledging that sales of aggregate to the public is limited for this reason.

"NRC is still in the process of launching its corporate plan which is an important milestone to achieve and will be a gateway to accessing potential donors for Nauru's future land rehabilitation and development," the Minister said.

Japan donates fire trucks

President Aingimea announced the receipt of two recommissioned fire trucks by the Society for Promotion of Japanese Diplomacy. The donation is part of the Japan-Pacific Partnership that comes under the PALM8 Japan grassroots grant.

Japan also provided two specialist trainers to conduct four days training for the fire personnel on the use of the trucks. The trucks bring the fire emergency fleet to four.



The Nauru fire service received training in their new fire trucks donated by the Society for Promotion of Japanese Diplomacy

Audit update

President Aingimea then presented a statement on the audit office for the last six months for its work in promoting good governance and in doing so advised all state owned entities to update their annual financials up to June 2019.

The department functions are based on a revised strategic plan for the years 2019-2023; and the amendment of the Audit Act 1973 is in the final stages of scrutiny by the justice department.

NRPCC upskills

Deputy Minister Asterio Appi reported that 50 Nauruan staff at the Nauru Regional Processing Centre Corporation (NRPCC) underwent certificate training. Thirty of them are training in the areas of health, safety, leadership, management, civil plants and equipment; while 20 will be issued with a statement of attainment in the units of competency in the areas of catering and hospitality, community service, house keeping, ICT, mechanical/fitter, trades, and vector control.

The training will conclude in June.

Additionally, NRPCC has concluded discussions with Wilson Security for a certified security course to be rolled out in March.

Port authority works

Deputy Minister Russ Kun delivered an update on the activities of the Port Authority, first on the delayed shipping operations due to bad weather and sea conditions.

The berthing of the phosphate ship MV Magpie had to be abandoned as a result of it colliding with the cantilever on 21 January; and the China Harbour Engineering Company (CHEC) eventually discharged most of its machinery cargo after 14 days adrift due to bad weather.

"Work is ongoing with the drilling of the reef for the installation of concrete piles for the new harbour basin and trenching the reef for the new location of the desalination sea water intake pipeline, as well as the demolition of the old marine building," DM Kun said.

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Education reports on 2019 academic year

Deputy Minister Richard-Hyde Menke delivered an update on education, firstly with the student awards on 5 January and the year 12 school leavers that completed their studies in Queensland, Australia.

DM Menke also noted achievements by students studying in Fiji coming first in their class with highest marks in the sciences, maths, English, agriculture, as well as a top year 12 academic achiever award.

On the Nauru Education Assistance Trust Scheme (NEATS), a total of \$128,725 was paid to 65 students that completed their Nauru secondary schooling. This number of students doubles that of 2018 with a payout to 37 students.

While this is a positive incentive for graduating students, DM Menke said the department recognises the available data lacks the qualitative process of identifying the effectiveness of the scheme and therefore plans for its review.

“The sustainability and impact of the program and the issue of school attendance it purports to address will be better understood once this is complete,” DM Menke said.

The deputy minister also reported that the 23 government sponsored students have settled into their new host homes in Brisbane; and the Pacific Secondary Scholarship program sealed through an MOU with the Government of Australia will see four 2019 year 9 scholarship awardees take up the scholarship from June 2020.

The selection process will look at academic capacity of the student as well as other qualities such as leadership, resilience and contributions to the community; gender balance is also a priority.

A director of language has been identified and given past issues on the written authoritative text, will focus on the oral use of the Nauruan language.

Thirteen former teachers have been recruited to address teacher shortages for the year; and a staff development program is underway offering courses at the USP’s Nauru campus.

The Inclusive Education Project continues into its fifth phase with advisor input and eventual submission of the fourth report.

DFAT talks high seas treaty

Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs & Trade Asterio Appi presented a report on the high seas treaty dialogue on marine genetic resources and benefit sharing in Norway, and reported that the dialogue is important for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity beyond national jurisdictions (BBNJ) and the work on the new legally binding agreement under the UN Convention of the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

DM Appi said having heard “many contentious issues that remain open during the dialogue, the task ahead is daunting.”

“I expressed the need to prioritise the health, resilience and productivity of the ocean, close the gaps in the negotiations and ensure we have an ambitious and implementable treaty,” DM Appi said.

At a bilateral meeting with Norway Nauru sought support in accessing international development assistance funds from the

World Bank, while Norway sought support for one of two non-permanent seats at the UN Security Council.

Airline celebrates 50th anniversary

DM Appi then provided updates on Nauru Airlines’ 50th anniversary on 14 February and highlighted the achievements and downfall of the national airline since establishment on 17 September 1969.

The airline commenced operations on 14 February 1970 with a service between Nauru and Brisbane using a chartered Dassault Falcon 20 business jet with President Hammer DeRoburt and Minister Buraro Detudamo on the inaugural flight.

The airline went from operating Boeing 737s to the lowest point of losing them in 2005 upon repossession by the US Exim Bank, but only to resume air services with the assistance of the Republic of China (Taiwan) through the purchase of a Boeing 737-300 aircraft in 2006.

To mark the occasion of the anniversary, DM Appi said the airline will celebrate with a “modest and reflective program” to include an anniversary dinner, a cross-fit competition, introduction of a leisure fare offering low airfares for Nauruans, a scholarship and training program for Nauruan pilots and aircraft engineers.



One of the earlier planes of Air Nauru

The Government will also embark on a program to upgrade the fleet with two new generation Boeing 737-700 aircrafts to replace two of the current 737-300 passenger planes.

DM Appi also announced new operations with Real Tongan Airlines by mid-2020 that will see Nauru Airlines providing operational support for Tonga through a long term charter arrangement.

Supplementary Appropriation Bill (No. 5) 2019-20

The Supplementary Appropriation Bill (No. 5) 2019-20 was commended to the House by Finance Minister Martin Hunt.

To 31 December 2019, Minister Hunt provided the outcomes of the mid-year review of budget estimates.

“In total, to 31 December 2019, Government has received \$163.9 million in revenue, 71 per cent of the budgeted annual total, and has spent \$100.4 million, 43 per cent of the budgeted annual total” with additional Government revenue of \$17.13 million and expenditures of \$17.07 million leaving a surplus of \$59,800.

Sources of revenue include purse seine fishing licences, fishing days and support vessel charges of \$12.4 million and RPC fees and visa payments, including resettlement fees, reflecting reimbursement of historical charges of \$7 million.

Minister Hunt reports that Government of Taiwan general budget support is reduced by \$2.3 million; redirected, in part, to cover

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loan repayments to Exim Bank on behalf of Ronphos.

Expenditure includes \$15.6 million to Finance for other payments, including \$5.1 million to Nauru Airlines to support the purchase of new aircrafts; \$2.5 million to Nauru Rehabilitation Corporation to commence a pilot rehabilitation project for residential housing on Government leased land; \$3 million to cover unexpected Government of Nauru 'in kind' port project costs; \$3.2 million for the fiscal cash buffer; \$1.7 million for the Nauru Trust Fund; and \$100,000 for Cenpac to support its new role as internet service provider at the Regional Processing Centre.

In addition, \$440,000 will allow Lands and Survey to cover land rental arrears and costs associated with preparing new land rental agreements, while \$414,000 is provided to Infrastructure for repairs to the road to Cliff Lodge, arboreal services, addressing storm damage to private houses, including the provision of temporary accommodation during the repair phase. Office rental and utility costs at the Meneñ Hotel, valued at \$42,480 and \$11,325 respectively, are also covered.

Further expenditure of \$328,000 covers additional staff (\$144,858) and vehicle costs (\$182,756) at the Nauru Regional Processing Centre Corporation while \$196,000 allows Transport to pay civil aviation overtime costs (\$98,100 designated as 'local') associated with the new Nauru Airlines schedule, plus other expenses, which include membership fees and subscriptions, expat salaries, director and consultant fees, repair and maintenance and plant and equipment.

Finally, the Department of Commerce, Industry and Environment requires a boost in business travel expenses of \$70,000.

The passing of the Bill means the approved 2019-20 budget will see revenue of \$249.6 million, expenditure at \$248.8 million with a surplus balance of \$833,000.

As an Act, the expiry date on Supplementary Appropriation #5 is 30 June 2020.

Bills

His Excellency President Lionel Aingimea introduced two bills to the House, with Finance Minister Martin Hunt tabling the Nauru Superannuation (Amendment) Bill 2020.

First was the Supreme Court (Amendment) Bill 2020, increasing the prescribed retirement age for Chief Justices and Judges of the Supreme Court by five years to 70 years of age.

"This will allow senior judicial officers of proven judicial quality to be retained or engaged from other jurisdictions.

"Retention of judges for a longer period will assist in the development of common law of the Republic," President Aingimea said.

Next, the President introduced the Electoral (Amendment) Bill 2020 to address serious concerns emerging from the Electoral Commission's Parliament Election Report 2019 around the issue of voter transfers.

The Electoral Commission reports that 1,889 transfers occurred in the six months prior to the last election, representing 22 per cent of the voter population.

Furthermore, "more than 2,000 voters are not living in the district in which they reside [on the roll]. This ability to move



The Supreme Court (Amendment) Bill 2020 seeks to increase the prescribed retirement age for chief justices and judges of the Supreme Court to 70 years of age

to any district is a severe concern to the integrity of the electoral roll and the ability for the roll to be manipulated," the report claimed. The 'cultural criteria' was cited as creating the loophole for abuses of the transfer option.

The authors of the report were even moved to question "whether the current constituencies really work for modern Nauru" given that not only do many voters not reside where they vote, but many MPs do not reside within the constituencies they have been elected to represent.

To correct a district-based electoral system that, due to excessive voter transfers, results in uneven wealth and service distribution with districts with the least voters penalised the most, this bill uses economic levers to alter behaviour, upping voter transfer fees from \$150 to \$1,000 to "ensure that only genuine transfers are made" in the future.

"It is time the Republic took steps to rectify this. The community itself must have pride in the district in which they live in. As such, they should be voting in that district," the President said.

In the run-up to Election 2019, 1,620 paid transfers were made, netting \$243,000 in revenue.

Next, Minister for Finance Martin Hunt delivered the Nauru Superannuation (Amendment) Bill 2020, amended to release employers from the mandatory obligation to contribute five per cent of employees' wages to the Nauru Super Fund.

It has become evident that many local businesses operate on low profit margins, meaning that employers will have to shed staff or increase prices to cover their statutory obligations or face fines of \$10,000 and/or two years imprisonment.

However, this is not intended as a means for employers to renege on their obligations.

"It is intended that given time and financial planning the employers will have sufficient income to contribute to the superannuation... in order to contribute to the welfare and future of dedicated employees on retirement."

Therefore, this bill provides in Schedule 2 an exemption for employers from mandatory super contributions while still permitting both employers and employees to make voluntary contributions.

Schedule 2, Exempt employers, reads, "Employers, including a Corporation with all shareholders or a Partnership with all partners or beneficial owners of such shares or interest, who are Nauruan citizens." •

Israel helps Nauru fight diabetes

Honorary Consul of Israel to Nauru Sean Oppenheimer presented RoN hospital's Acting Health Secretary Chanda Garabwan with diabetes monitoring equipment and consumables, 6 February.

Mr Oppenheimer, who is assuming the Honorary Consul role again after a break of three years while serving as a member of parliament, made the presentation in the hospital's conference room in the presence of key hospital and public health staff.

“Over many years, Insulin for Life Australia has donated blood glucose meters and test tubes to Pacific Island nations,” Mr Oppenheimer said.

“Diabetes is at epidemic levels in most Pacific Island nations, with preventable complications including blindness, kidney disease, amputations, heart disease, stroke and others.

“Blood glucose levels need to be monitored often and on an ongoing basis to help ensure optimal diabetes control,” Mr Oppenheimer said, adding that the monitor's use in identifying possible gestational (during pregnancy) diabetes will be of great benefit to mothers and babies.

The donation of four True Metrix self-monitoring blood glucose meters and 20,000 accompanying test tubes is courtesy of Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Jerusalem and facilitated by the Embassy of Israel, Canberra Pacific Islands Advisor, Sara Sofer.

Equipment and supplies were donated by Insulin for Life Australia and manufacturer Trividia Health, with Diabetes Australia covering transport costs, demonstrating Israel's and their partners' ongoing commitment to supporting Nauru's non-communicable disease (NCD) program.

Each meter has Bluetooth smart connectivity wirelessly transmitting glucose results to patients' and health care providers'



Honorary Consul of Israel to Nauru Sean Oppenheimer (3rd from L) donated diabetes monitoring kits to the hospital

mobile devices, thus providing results tracking and averaging over time allowing patients to take more control of their health status and healthcare providers to make faster and more accurately informed decisions for healthier lifestyle choices for their patients. The devices also provide testing reminders and lifestyle management event tagging.

In accepting the donation, Acting Health Secretary Garabwan, speaking on behalf of Health Minister Isabella Dageago, said that the donation will allow health services to screen and manage more people across the nation.

“We all know that diabetes is a growing problem in Nauru – it has been for many years.

“The health department is an organisation that is faced with very low resources, so this is one of the things we welcome from donors, from our partners, in helping us achieve our organisational goals,” Ms Garabwan said.

Learn more at <https://www.insulinforlife.org.au/> and <https://www.diabetesaustralia.com.au/> •

Labour mobility; over 40 Nauruans seek overseas employment

The Nauru government Labour Mobility Unit (LMU) will deploy four employment units to overseas localtions in the first quarter of 2020.

To date, 19 Nauruans have begun contracts in Queensland and Victoria, Australia under the Pacific Labour Scheme. A further six are soon to follow, and it is expected that in March, an addition 16 employees will depart for New Zealand under the Recognised Seasonal Employer program.

In late 2019, four employers visited Nauru and contracted 41 local employees across the hospitality and agri-labour sectors.

Employment contracts can range from six months to three years, with in-country mandatory leave and minimum wage entitlements as standard elements of remuneration packages •



The first selection of Nauruans to secure employment opportunities under the Australian Pacific Labour Scheme

Aroi presents credentials

Former Nauru DFAT Secretary Mike Aroi presented his credentials to become Resident High Commissioner of the Republic of Nauru to Fiji in a ceremony on 6 February.

He was received by Fiji's President Major General (Ret'd) Jioji Konrote at the State House, in the presence of family members and others •



US presents credentials

His Excellency President Lionel Aingimea accepted the credentials of United States of America Ambassador to Nauru Joseph Cella at a ceremony in the Office of the President, 29 January.

Camilla Solomon, as Acting Foreign Affairs and Trade Secretary, met with the Ambassador-designate prior to the formal ceremony, which includes the playing of the national anthems and the inspection of the Nauru Police Force guard of honour, accompanied by Acting Police Commissioner Iven Notte.

In President Aingimea's offices, Ambassador-designate Cella presented his credentials to His Excellency, after which gifts were exchanged.

President Aingimea welcomed Ambassador Cella to Nauru, congratulating him on his appointment and conveying his greetings to US President Donald Trump before highlighting the relationship between the two countries and acknowledging where differences of opinion lay.

"My Government is looking forward to continuing the good work your predecessors have started and I am confident we will be able to work together in the spirit of cooperation and trust to further strengthen the strong ties we have with the US and its people.

"While we understand that our foreign policies may not always align, we do believe however that our shared values and common goals unite us on many fronts."

The President thanked the US for support with maritime security needs, moving to Nauru's port project and ways the US can support Nauru's access to funding.

"We recognize the US is a primary contributor to relevant international and regional organisations which Nauru benefits from.

"The Asian Development Bank is supporting Nauru with a modern new port which will be completed by 2021. This will be a transformational project improving Nauru's connectivity with the rest of the world.

"On the other hand, the World Bank does not allow Nauru to gain access to IDA (International Development Association) funding. We hope that the US will support Nauru in its quest to access much needed IDA funding critical for its development agenda," President Aingimea said.

Ambassador Cella spoke with the Government Information Office (GIO), and made courtesy calls on Government ministers, department secretaries and officials on either side of the lunch hour.

When asked about his broader intentions for US-Nauru relations, he replied that "the aim is to build on the good, long-standing relationship we've had and expand upon it, building bridges: peace and prosperity, stability, security, well into the future."

In terms of US assistance to Nauru, Ambassador Cella mentioned the ship-rider agreement with the US Navy and Coast Guard, as well as the new port project, which will increase commerce and expand fisheries opportunities.

Officially, US Aid is currently suspended due to Nauru's recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as sovereign nations, a stance effectively backing Russia.



President Aingimea receives US Ambassador to Nauru Joseph Cella, 29 January

On this, Ambassador Cella responded, saying "I'm here. I'm a bridge-builder by nature.

"We have more in common than we have differences.

"We look to convert, wherever challenges are, to convert them to opportunities."

Of course, the burning question about the US position on climate change elicited a response outlining the positive contribution the US has made globally in terms of lowered emissions.

"Since 1995, our emissions have decreased while our economic output has increased.

"So that is a good reflection of our record as an ethic of environmental stewardship.

"While we are affirmatively engaged, there are other countries in this part of the world who have doubled our output," Ambassador Cella said.

Late afternoon, Ambassador Cella and his delegation took time to visit the Naoero Museum and hike to Command Ridge before attending a dinner in the Parliament's Bagobagan Lounge, hosted in his honour by President Aingimea.

Ambassador Cella is based in Suva, Fiji, and serves as ambassador to Fiji, Kiribati, Tonga, Tuvalu and now, Nauru. He has 25 years of experience across a range of sectors and roles, including advising members of the United States Senate and House of Representatives, serving on the boards of several non-profit organisations, and as a confidential advisor to various public officials, religious and business leaders.

He is founder and principal of the Pontifex Group, which consults on public policy, public relations, crisis management and institutional launching and growth.

Ambassador Cella founded the National Catholic Prayer Breakfast Group and has served with various Catholic organisations, as well as in the capacity as the Catholic Liaison for the Donald J. Trump for President campaign.

The US first established diplomatic relations with Nauru in 1976•

RoC Taiwan embassy celebrate Chinese new year

His Excellency President Lionel Aingimea and Madam Ingrid Aingimea, with cabinet and caucus members, celebrated Chinese New Year with Republic of China (Taiwan) Ambassador Dean Wang and the Taiwan mission team, for dinner, 27 January.

Ambassador Wang welcomed guests as family and gave some background to the 12 year Chinese zodiac cycle.

“You know that 2020 is the Year of the Rat.

“In the Chinese traditional custom, the rat is small, but smart.

“We can learn from the rat to work smart, manage smart, study smart and do something in a different way.

“It doesn’t matter what kind of difficulties and circumstances, the rat always survives,” Ambassador Wang said.

In response, President Aingimea thanked Taiwan’s ambassador, acknowledging the work of the staff of the Taiwan mission and wishing them a Happy New Year as the Nauru-Taiwan partnership grows stronger, and, in the Year of the Rat, more industrious and prosperous.

Guests were invited by Ambassador Wang to enjoy the feast, which included the traditional New Year rice cake and dumplings, along with an abundance of organic produce from the Taiwan farm at Anabar •



Taiwan Ambassador Dean Wang hosts Chinese New Year with President Lionel Aingimea, Cabinet and caucus members and the Taiwan mission team

[photo: Taiwan Embassy]

Mormons check in on Nauru

His Excellency President Lionel Aingimea received a visit from mission representatives of the Mormon church and its humanitarian arm on 23 January.

Mission President Boyd Foster, his wife and humanitarian charities missionaries Elder and Sister Brock, representing the church, formally known as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS), met with President Aingimea, as well as representatives from the ministries of health, and commerce, industry and environment (CIE).

In addition, they visited the hospital, public health, the women’s health centre and the Taiwan farm at Anabar, with a view to propose humanitarian assistance through the Latter-Day Saints Charities.

There are around 130 Mormons on Nauru, and the visit helped to raise awareness and seek support for the congregation here.

In 2018, LDS Charities provided \$2.2 billion in assistance across 195 countries. Signature programs include food, clean water, emergency response, immunisation, maternal and newborn care, refugee response, vision care and mobility aids.



President Aingimea received a courtesy visit by representatives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints

The church representatives hail from the United States and are currently based in the region, serving the Marshall Islands and Kiribati.

For more information, visit <https://www.latterdaysaintcharities.org/> •

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Republic of Nauru

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