



Rear-Admiral (Ret'd) Hon. J.V. Bainimarama, CF(Mil), OSt.J, MSD, jssc, psc

Prime Minister of Fiji and Minister for iTaukei Affairs, and Sugar Industry

OPENING OF DR. KRISHNAMURTHI TISSUE CULTURE LABORATORY

Sugar Research Institute of Fiji
Drasa, LAUTOKA

Mon. 21 Oct., 2019
1530 Hours

The Assistant Minister for Sugar, Hon. George Vegnathan;

The Head of Delegation of the European Union for the
Pacific, Ambassador Sujiro Seam;

Chairman of the Sugar Research Institute of Fiji,

Professor Rajesh Chandra;

Board of Directors of Sugar Research Institute of Fiji;

Heads and Representatives of all Sugar Industry Bodies;

Distinguished Guests;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

Farmers and Friends.

I am pleased to be here today with two purposes in
mind.

The first is to mark another important milestone in the continuing development of the Sugar Industry with the dedication of this tissue culture laboratory. The second is to recall the many contributions Fiji has made to the science of sugar cultivation over more than 125 years.

The late Dr. Krishnamurthi was responsible for many of these developments. His work was a great gift to sugarcane farmers in Fiji and contributed mightily to the refinement and evolution of the sugar crop around the world. So it is very fitting that this Tissue Culture Laboratory now bears his name. Dr. Krishnamurthi brought honour and recognition to Fiji in a very important scientific field. We like to say that we Fijians punch above our weight. Well, in the science of sugar cultivation, Dr. Krishnamurthi was one of the world's true heavyweights.

My Government is committed to seeing that the many people who depend on sugar for all or part of their livelihoods can count on an Industry that competes well in global markets, promotes efficiency, and produces strong incomes across the sector. While you'll hear members of the Opposition cling to a Sugar Industry of yesterday, the reality is that the world — from market demand to mechanization to the climate — is rapidly changing, and that's why my Government has focused on taking bold steps forward, not looking back.

We are working hard to lift up the Industry by increasing cane production and yield and investing in mechanization and modern transportation. Research and development, or R&D, is the other critical piece. It is through serious scientific research that we will produce sugar varieties that yield more sugar for a longer period, that can adapt to climate change, and that are resistant to pests, diseases, drought or flooding.

At a minimum, our R&D must keep pace with R&D at a global level. But we in Fiji aren't known for striving for the minimum; we are a nation of maximum ambition. That is why we have named this laboratory for Dr. Krishnamurthi — a man whose legacy will inspire us to push further. It means that we want to lead, as he did, and be a centre for innovation in global sugar production.

We are not new at this, by any means: Fiji began researching sugar in 1903, and we can rightfully claim ownership of the third-oldest sugar research programme in the world. To date, we have developed 19 commercial varieties to meet the special needs of Fiji farmers and sugar mills, and all but one of these varieties have been developed using the conventional breeding method in Fiji. Dr. Krishnamurthi developed the *Ono* cane variety using the Plant Tissue Culture Technology, and it was released as the first commercial variety for planting in the world in 1966.

This laboratory will specialize in Tissue Culture Technology, which is used in many countries, such as India, to produce large volumes of pure and disease-free sugarcane plantlets that can multiply quickly in a smaller space. It doesn't take an agricultural scientist to know that this will produce higher yields and the ability to farm small plots more profitably. The establishment of the lab will ensure that pure cane seeds are provided to farmers so they can get those higher yields.

We are grateful for the support of the European Union, which has provided **65,000 Euros** to procure the equipment we will need.

Before we officially dedicate this fine laboratory, I would like to say a few more words about its namesake, Dr. Krishnamurthi, because we owe him so much.

He was well-known and universally respected among the international sugarcane breeders and scientists and a true reflection of the hard-working individual in the glory days of the Fijian Sugar Industry.

In 1959, Dr Krishnamurthi was a newly-minted chemist when he became the first Fijian to join the Colonial Sugar Refining Company. With limited staff, he steered the small Agricultural Experiment Station that became one of the leading sugarcane breeding stations in the world.

Dr. Krishnamurthi went on to become a famous Fijian sugarcane scientist and is best remembered for his work in sugarcane breeding and Tissue Culture. Under his leadership, Fiji was recognized globally for its unique and innovative sugarcane breeding and selection program. His innovative research in sugarcane breeding and tissue quickly elevated him to the status of one of the world's leading authorities in sugarcane breeding.

After his retirement in Fiji, he moved abroad to continue contributing to sugarcane research. His open attitude of sharing research information with his peers enabled him to become adviser to several research institutions.

During 1980's, when Cuba's sugar crop was devastated by rust, Dr Krishnamurti helped to develop resistant varieties through tissue culture with varieties taken from Fiji to Cuba. He worked as a consultant to the FAO at the Sugarcane Research Institute in Sri Lanka and India, he published more than fifty research papers and numerous technical reports.

So we thank Dr Krishna for his work and for the inspiration he gives us to honour him with the kind of research that will once again propel Fiji to leadership in the global sugar industry and to serve the sugar growers of Fiji, who do the hard work and take all the risks that are a fact of life in agriculture.

I now formally open the tissue culture laboratory.

Thank you very much, Dhanavad and Vinaka
Vakalevu.
