

TUESDAY, 12TH MAY, 2015

The Parliament resumed at 9.35 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

MADAM SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Members were present, except the Honourable Commander J.R. Cawaki, the Honourable O. Naiqamu, the Honourable N. Nawaikula, the Honourable V. Pillay and the Honourable Colonel I.B. Seruiratu.

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of the Parliament held on Monday, 11th May, 2015, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

HON. CDR S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Madam Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

POINT OF ORDER

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI.- Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order, referring to the discussion that transpired yesterday in this House, which is recorded in the *Uncorrected Copy of the Daily Hansard*.

I rise, Madam Speaker, for a matter of clarification from yourself that in the last page of the *Hansard Report*, page 1073, the statement made by Madam Speaker, by yourself, towards the end, just before the heading “Ministerial Statements”, Madam Speaker as I quote:

“I have made my ruling and my ruling is not just the Speaker’s but the ruling of the House. I will not entertain any more comments on that particular question.”

I rise, Madam Speaker, for clarification because the inference that comes from this, it appears that Madam Speaker is the House also. As I understand from the reading of the Constitution Madam Speaker and the Standing Order, that Madam Speaker is the Speaker of the House and before Madam Speaker’s appointment under Section 77 of the Constitution, the House already existed – the Parliament and Madam Speaker is a part of Parliament.

I raise this, Madam Speaker, because under Standing Order 18 also, it is the requirement under the Standing Order and the Constitution that Madam Speaker should, in the exercise of your powers observe the Constitution and the Standing Order, and your power Madam Speaker is not an unfettered power. It is a power that is given with responsibility to be guided by the Constitution and the Standing Order.

Your clarification, Madam Speaker, is why I rise this morning, is for clarification on that, because it appears that Madam Speaker has overstepped your jurisdiction or your powers under the Constitution and the Standing Order. And also, the House can be guided in future in Madam Speaker’s decision because if it is recorded it is given as a schedule to the Standing Order, it will be cleared for us and those who will

come in future to be a Member of this august House. That is my reason of rising up on the Standing Order, Madam Speaker. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER.- I thank you very much for that point of order. I will prepare a response to that point of order and will be delivered to you after morning tea.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CHAIR

New Zealand Parliament Delegation

MADAM SPEAKER.- I welcome back today the Right Honourable David Carter, the Speaker of the New Zealand Parliament and his delegation, who joined us for the second and final day of their reciprocal visit to the Fiji Parliament.

We wish them well as they return tomorrow and convey our greetings and warm regards to the New Zealand Parliament. We hope that you enjoyed your brief visit to our shores and take fond memories of Fiji with you.

Acknowledgment of Visitors

I also acknowledge members of the *Soqosoqo Vakamarama* or Women's Club from the village of Verata, Wailevu in Tailevu and the Women's Group from the *Tabacakacaka* Naitasiri. I am delighted that they showed interest to visit and observe our proceedings today.

I welcome also students from the University of the South Pacific who are observing the Parliamentary sitting as part of their Politics Unit. We had students from the same class attending the March Sitting and I trust that the proceedings today will prove useful. I wish you all the best in your studies.

I warmly welcome all of you joining us in the public gallery and those watching proceedings on television, internet and listening to the radio. I thank you for taking interest in our Parliament.

Population Message

Our population message for this morning: Life expectancy at birth is the average number of years a new born can expect to live, possibly the most important development indicator as it measures the overall health status of the population.

In Fiji, life expectancy at birth is 65 for males and 70 for females. Generally speaking, women live longer than men globally and in Fiji as well. Honourable Members, implicit in this statement is the critical importance of ensuring reproductive health and rights for all citizens. Thank you.

POINT OF ORDER

HON. RATU I.D. TIKOCA.- I rise on a point of order under Standing Order 43, as per Order 43 a matter of public importance.

The question we raised for this morning was to ask the Honourable Prime Minister to answer to our urgent question on why does he not want New Zealand and Australia to be part of the Pacific Islands Forum.

We are denied this urgent oral question. We submit our oral question in time, we meet other criteria. This is an urgent matter; it affects the economy, it affects the foreign relations and national security. So, why?

MADAM SPEAKER.- I take urgent questions as a life and death issue, matter of security and not on the economy and the foreign relationships with these countries. This is why the question, particularly when the question has been addressed for almost one or two weeks in the media, very lengthy, explaining that, and this is why we thought that this was not an urgent question. However, if you wish to still put this question through, then we can consider it as a question, not an urgent question, to be presented in the next sitting.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam Speaker, we feel our rights to be heard are being severely curtailed in this House, Madam Speaker. We protest this. We should be given these rights, Madam Speaker, I think it is too often we are being denied this right and this is not the first time.

(Honourable Opposition Members stood up, followed by chorus of interjections)

MADAM SPEAKER.- Order!

(Madam Speaker also rose from her Chair)

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you very much. You will be heard, the issue will be heard but definitely it is not an urgent question.

(Hear, hear)

And that again is the Speaker's ruling on that matter. Thank you very much, we take note of that question.

QUESTIONS AND REPLIES

Oral Questions

Outcome of Investigations – Death of New-Born Baby (Question No. 76/2015)

HON. P. SINGH asked the Government, upon notice:

Would the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services inform Parliament of the outcome of investigations into the death of the new-born baby of Pritika and Jasveer Lal at the Lautoka Hospital on Sunday 30th November, 2014, in accordance with his statement in Parliament on 12th December, 2014?

HON. J. USAMATE (Minister for Health and Medical Services). - Madam Speaker, I rise to answer that question. I think at the outset, the loss of any child is something that none of us wants to see and it is unfortunate that this has happened, and within the Ministry, it is something that we are looking at very seriously to try to address.

The investigation has been undertaken by people who are professionals in this area and the investigation has found that the baby in question passed away because of (the technical term is prolonged hypoxia) due to severe shoulder dystocia. That is the technical cause of the problem that happened to this particular baby.

In the findings of the team that carried out the investigation, the team was not critical of the technical skills of those who were involved, but they have identified a few areas that we in the Health Ministry will have to improve upon, in order to make sure that these kinds of problems are minimised in the future. There are a number of issues that the investigation team found. They found, for instance, that part of the ante-natal history of the mother in question was missed and in this case, a diabetes screening test was not done. This is an area that we are now looking into improving within the Ministry.

The team has found that the staff in the ante-natal clinic at the Ba Mission Hospital should be alerted to these criticisms, and they have been alerted as to the areas that need to be improved. The team has also found that there are a number of issues requiring urgent attention at the Lautoka Hospital, Maternity Unit, and these issues can compromise the level of clinical care. This is something that is now being addressed through our clinical services network that looks into the area of obstetrics and gynaecology.

The other area that has been identified by the team that carried out the investigation is the staffing in all shifts in the birthing suite should reflect their case note and complexity of their shifts. This is also an area that we are looking at and that there should be formal handover rounds for those who are coming into work at different times; that patients should be consulted about management plans; and also that the medical officer should provide better support to the midwives.

So, what I can say, Madam Speaker, is that the investigation has been carried out, there are a number of processes, there are a number of areas of training that need to be enhanced and those will be addressed by those who are looking after our hospitals especially where maternity issues take place, mainly in Lautoka, Labasa and Suva.

HON. P. SINGH.- Supplementary question. Now that the investigation has taken place, what remedy is made available to the victim and their families? I believe there has been some correspondence between the Solicitor-General's Office and the victim's solicitors. Where do we go from here?

HON. J. USAMATE.- Madam Speaker, I think that there are avenues available legally for people to pursue any action that they wish to undertake, but that is all I can say about that. From my point of view as Minister for Health, my emphasis is on trying to improve the processes to make sure that we can minimise this in the future.

HON. P. SINGH.- Supplementary question. Now that the investigations are completed, has the Ministry admitted liability?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Point of order. The question being put is to the Honourable Minister for Health, he is not the Attorney-General. The question emanating from the Honourable Member is to do with legal liability or culpability for that matter and I think it is misdirected.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you, the question is not accepted.

HON. A.T. VADEL.- Supplementary question. How will the Honourable Minister confirm that this problem will not be repeated in future?

HON. J. USAMATE.- Madam Speaker, I think there are some things that we cannot always predict. One cannot always predict whether one is going to live or die all the time, the best that we can do is to learn from the experiences that we have, identify what we can do to improve the processes so we can reduce the risk. Dystocia is something that happens very rarely, but when it does happen, it can have an impact. What we are intending to do within the Ministry of Health is increasing the drills so that our teams are aware of the likely complications and how to address this. But you can never ever eradicate the fact

that someone could pass away. We will do it to the best of our ability, but we cannot give a guarantee that that will never happen again.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Supplementary question. While we have the Honourable Minister on the floor, and the subject is also on Lautoka Hospital; one of our Members lost his wife because the lift in Lautoka did not work. Has that lift in Lautoka Hospital been fixed?

MADAM SPEAKER.- The supplementary question does not relate to it.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Point of order Madam Speaker, that is a completely new question.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- But he talked about Lautoka Hospital, Madam Speaker

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you, as I have mentioned, the supplementary question does not relate to the death of the new born baby in this case.

Fiji Institute of Surveyors
(Question No. 77/2015)

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources briefly explain if the Ministry will consider improving and enhancing the Fiji Institute of Surveyors in order to alleviate the issue of lack of qualified and skilled surveyors in the country?

HON. M. VUNIWAQA (Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources).- Madam Speaker, I rise to answer the question asked. The Fiji Institute of Surveyors, first of all, is a professional body. They have their own constitution which governs their membership rules. I was trying to correlate that institute with the increasing of skilled labour in the survey field, but I would like to elaborate a bit on what Government is doing to alleviate this issue of lack of qualified and skilled surveyors in Fiji. It is a real issue.

At the Ministry of Lands, we see it as a barrier to more efficient delivery of our services. To address that, we are tackling it at three levels.

Firstly, is the review of laws relevant to surveyors. We have seen the budget for this year and there is an allocation for the review of the Surveyors Act for Fiji. We are going to start preliminary works towards that.

Secondly, is the educational field. There is no tertiary institution in Fiji right now that is offering a degree in Bachelor of Surveying; we do not have that. What we do have is a Diploma of Surveying at Fiji National University. The Ministry to that end is carrying out talks with the Ministry of Education to assist us in this area and we are hoping, come 2016, we will have a bachelor of surveying degree offered in Fiji, in one of the tertiary institutions.

Thirdly, to address our short term needs within the Ministry, Government is looking towards other governments, foreign surveyors to come in and assist us with this drastic need we are facing right now in the Ministry of Lands and to also assist in capacity building within the Ministry in the survey field.

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- Supplementary question. I thank the honourable Minister for the explanation. I would like to ask another supplementary question, it will be in two parts. Firstly, the lack of surveyors is a critical issue in the country, not only with the Ministry of Lands but we need surveyors for the proper management of land in this country. What measures has the Ministry undertaken to train surveyors and what is the timeframe that they will fill all the vacancies in the Ministry?

Secondly, how can the Ministry allow surveyors employed in Government to do private work while they do not have enough surveyors in the Ministry? How do they supervise those surveyors?

HON. M. VUNIWAQA.- Madam Speaker, on the first supplementary question - the training of surveyors, since 2014, Government has set aside 39 scholarships for Diploma in Surveying and also a Degree in Land Management. With those qualifications, most of the students who come out of USP and FNU are absorbed into our Ministry. What they do is, they actually work with registered surveyors within the Ministry, to up skill or go into the field of surveying. It does not mean that they automatically become surveyors, however after so many years of doing practical work, they sit for an exam which is set by the Surveyors Registration Board in Fiji. If they pass that, then they become registered surveyors in Fiji.

In reply to the second supplementary question on Government surveyors doing private work; this was a decision that was made by the PSC. The idea was that, because there was more lucrative work outside and there was more pay, most qualified professionals in Government opted to shift out of Government. So, what Government did...

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- You can't serve two masters!

HON. M. VUNIWAQA.- ...was to allow them to do that, but there are conditions. They cannot just do it as and when they wish, but approval has to be given by the Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of Lands.

In order to do that, of course, a relevant factor to consider would be the amount of work that needs to be done in-house. So, if we reach a decision that there is too much work to be done, which is the case right now, they cannot do that. That discretion is still with management to make as and when it is appropriate.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- A supplementary question, Madam Speaker; I thank the honourable Minister for her explanation this morning in regards to the processes that are in place and the need for more surveyors.

On a daily basis in Labasa, Madam Speaker, landowners come to me with their proposals to make subdivisions and the cost of surveyors are very high. There are a few surveyors in Labasa who are not qualified surveyors, but they know how to do the drawings to assist the landowners to prepare a scheme plan to be submitted to the Department of Town and Country Planning. Normally, they are certified by surveyors in Suva.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Question!

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- I am coming to that, listen to the question! Allow the Minister to hear the question.

Madam Speaker, the question is; what can be done by the Ministry so that the Board can register these surveyors and how long does the process take in order for them to become registered surveyors? They have the technical knowledge but they need to be registered. What can they do?

HON. M. VUNIWAQA.- Madam Speaker, I had said in my first answer that there is an exam that they need to sit which is set by the Surveyors Registration Board.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Irrespective of the exam, most of them they learn and know!

MADAM SPEAKER.- Continue please, Honourable Minister.

HON. M. VUNIWAQA.- There is an exam that is set and they need to pass that exam before they can become registered surveyors. That is the requirement. They do not just become surveyors by doing a few surveys, there are standards to implement which is the reason why Government is looking at the laws in relation to the standards. It is very important to do that.

MADAM SPEAKER.- We will move on to our third oral question and I will invite the Honourable Ratu Kiniviliame Kiliraki to ask his question.

Non-Operational of the Vunidawa Mortuary
(Question No. 78/2015)

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI asked the Government, upon notice:

The Vunidawa Mortuary has not been operational for the past two years till to date. Can the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services advise of the Ministry's stance on this?

HON. J. USAMATE (Minister for Health and Medical Services).- Madam Speaker, I rise to respond to the question asked by the honourable Member and I thank him for his question. I visited the Vunidawa Hospital on Saturday and the mortuary was working. There were staff who were there yesterday and the mortuary was also working.

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- Madam Speaker, a supplementary question; I commend the Honourable Minister for his action in visiting the Vunidawa Hospital and saying in this honourable House that the mortuary is working. In fact, Madam Speaker, the Mortuary has not been in operation for two years and for those years, there was no temporary ...

MADAM SPEAKER.- Please, can we have your question?

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS: What's the question?

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- I will come to that.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Could we have the supplementary question.

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- My question is; why did it take two years till now, to repair? Madam Speaker, the Vunidawa Mortuary services the Waidina area, up to Monasavu and for this lack of service, why did the Ministry take too long? Was it because it is in Naitasiri or is it the lack of prioritisation?

HON. GOVT. MEMBERS.- Oh!

HON. J. USAMATE.- Madam Speaker, I am also from Naitasiri. I was brought up and raised in Kalabu so I can tell you, Naitasiri is very important to me. I know that there have been some issues with the Mortuary but I can assure this Parliament that our officers who are responsible for the Central

Division are constantly visiting those places. There is a problem with the power switch. We have an issue with the FEA power going off and sometimes it fails to kick in, so that is an area that we will be addressing. I can inform this Parliament that Naitasiri is very important to us in this Chamber.

HON. L. EDEN.- Madam Speaker, my supplementary question; could the Honourable Minister advise us on the number of deaths on average that occur at the Vunidawa Hospital and whether or not the mortuary is sufficient and able to handle the capacity?

HON. J. USAMATE.- Madam Speaker, the mortuary in Vunidawa has four slots, so we can have four bodies that are put in there. On average, there are about two bodies per month that make use of the services at Vunidawa.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Those from Naitasiri live long as well. There being no other supplementary questions, we will move on to the next Oral Question.

Market for Women's Products – National Women's Expo
(Question No. 79/2015)

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

Can the Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation inform this House on what plans does the Ministry have after the National Women's Expo, to ensure there is a guaranteed market for rural women's products?

HON. R.S. AKBAR (Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation).- Madam Speaker, I rise to answer the question posed by the honourable Member. If I may enlighten Parliament once again, the 2014 National Expo was quite a success. As debated, there was no economic return on investment for women. Madam Speaker, this Government is a very caring Government and we do not put monetary value to women's empowerment and progress in the country, ...

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS: Hear Hear.

...neither do we put money values to the smiles and satisfaction that we bring to women across the country nor it is the waste of taxpayers' money as was mentioned yesterday.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Is that so?

HON. R.S. AKBAR. - If the honourable Members care to listen, the waste of taxpayers' monies came from the other side of the House.

Madam Speaker, in terms of plans to ensure that there is a guaranteed market for rural women's projects, we are closely working with key partners, such as the Ministry for Industry and Trade, and the Fiji Arts Council to ensure that we up-skill the women to produce quality-made products, that qualify and obtain the Fijian-Made emblem. And, of course, marketing networks have already been established where reliable markets are opening up for women. An example of this is in regards to our virgin coconut oil products for the Koro and Kadavu women. They have secured a market with the coconut company, Fiji. It is a Suva-based company, and these women have signed a one-year contract with them to sell their products which amounts to 40 litres per month.

Again, in terms of our divisional craft shows as planned for this year, the Ministry needs strategic endeavour to improve the quality of products for marketing. Again, with the Fiji Arts Council, we will open up markets and provide opportunities for the sale of these products.

We are also negotiating with corporate bodies to maximise other opportunities for women to access market services. We are in talks with Courts Fiji Limited to ensure that our sewing programme, that is proving to be quite successful, women will have a space with this company to sell their sewn products. The products will also be marketable, post the expo, and to the cruise liner shipping that will be docking in Fiji. Markets are also available with hotel industries, supermarkets and even handicraft centres. These are some early engagements that the Ministry has ventured into, and we are assured that there will be long-term benefits of these markets.

There are also plans underway for women artisans, who will be participating in this year's expo, to participate in a craft show that is organised by Investment Fiji, which will be held in Sydney later in the year. We are also working closely for our women to participate there and showcase their handicrafts.

Madam Speaker, we have also embarked into consultations with our bilateral partners, such as the foreign missions and UN agencies in Fiji and abroad to obtain potential markets for women. I am proud to say here that my counterpart in Indonesia has shown keen interest for us to have our crafts showcased in Indonesia later in June, this year. And, of course, we will keep this as a priority and negotiate with all stakeholders to set clear markets for the women.

At this juncture, can I acknowledge our ladies in the gallery. Thank you for being here this morning.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Supplementary question, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER.- I will ask honourable Salote Radrodoro to ask her question.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you. Madam Speaker, and I thank the Minister for Women for that dream, in having to provide markets for the women, particularly, the rural women. For this instant, I speak for the women of the Province from the Eastern Division, particularly the women of the Lau Group. I gathered yesterday, that the women from the Eastern Division raised the most funds in terms of the Expo last year, and brought success, if you want to call it 'success'.

HON. GOVT. MEMBERS.- Your question?

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- It's coming!

MADAM SPEAKER.- Can we have the question, please?

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- In terms of market access, Madam Speaker,...

MADAM SPEAKER.- Is that the question?

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- ... the women from the *Soqosoqo Vakamarama*, Lau....

MADAM SPEAKER.- Order! You are repeating an information that we shared yesterday, so can we have the question, please.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Madam Speaker, may I ask the honourable Minister, what kind of assistance can be given to the women from the *Soqosoqo Vakamarama o Lau*, in terms of rent, because

they are renting an office in Suva, which offers a refuge to these women for these women who come for this Expo? I believe, the *Soqosoqo Vakamarama*, Lau had already written...

MADAM SPEAKER.- Order! The renting of premises has nothing to do with the question we have at hand.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Madam Speaker

MADAM SPEAKER.- And the plans of guaranteeing a market are...

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Madam Speaker, that premises offers market access...

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you very much.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- ... to the women of Lau.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Sorry?

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- The premises that I had mentioned offers market access to the women of Lau, in terms of their handicrafts. It buys, it stores, and it sells the handicrafts from the Lau Province, and it is a market for the women of Lau. I request the honourable Minister, if there can be some kind of assistance in terms of rental, because the women centre...

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you. Your question is clear.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER.- The onus is on you, Honourable Minister, if you would like to answer that question.

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- I would like to answer that Madam Speaker. In response to the question posed, and the response made, currently the Ministry has equal opportunities for all women across the country, and we are assisting women in terms of resource centres. The question that the honourable Member has posed to me was brought to our attention late last year, and because we do not have any budget for those requests, we had advised them that we will take it into consideration. However, at the moment, we do not have assistance whereby we pay rent for women organisations. We do have provisions for resource centres, which we can look into in future if the requests are made to us in terms of resource centres for women. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you. We will now give the floor to the Honourable Sanjit Patel.

HON. S. PATEL.- A supplementary question. Can the honourable Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation inform this House what are the type of products the women will produce that can attract the markets after the Expo?

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Madam Speaker, a brief rundown of the products that we are looking at. Currently, we have mats, *masi*-making, *voivoi* products, coconut products. We have home and leisure; wall hanging, crochets, patch works, and then we have adornments, such as belts, neck wear and earrings. In terms of textiles, we have screen printing, tie and dye, shirts, *sulu jabas* and uniforms. Food products, include virgin coconut oil, honey products and of course, pickles and jams, that are being made.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Leader of the Opposition?

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Supplementary question, Madam Speaker. The question is on the rural women, and where they sell. At the moment, we have many women out on the roadside selling their produce. We see them, on the way to Nadi Airport, Nausori Airport, and other areas where they have been selling for many, many years.

When it comes to sunrise to sunset, they are there - hail, rain or shine. My question to the honourable Minister, in terms of their Budget, would the Ministry be able to look at some of these shelters for the women, because they are rural women, and here is the marketing of the rural women's produce?

Could the honourable Minister also factor in conveniences because the women are there from morning till night; this is for showers and toilets, because they are far from home. They need these conveniences, so I would ask the honourable Minister if she could factor that in also. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Madam Speaker, I thank the honourable Leader of the Opposition for bringing that question. However, I believe the question that we have this morning is regarding the marketing of products after the Expo, but if that can come as a separate question in a later session, I will be more than willing to answer that. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you. That is the third and last question that is allowed under that question. We will now move on to the fifth oral question, and I invite the Honourable Netani Rika to take the floor.

Future Plans for Rising Athletes after the Coca Cola Games (Question No. 80/2015)

HON. LT. COL. N. RIKA asked the Government, upon notice:

The Coca Cola Games has produced a few rising stars in the making. Could the honourable Minister for Youth and Sports inform this august House what are the future plans in place for these rising athletes?

HON. LT. COL. L.B. TUITUBOU (Minister for Youth and Sports).- Madam Speaker, I must thank the honourable Rika for that question.

Madam Speaker, yes, the Coca Cola Games has made rising stars in school children, and there are future plans that each sporting organisation has for the development and strategic plans for these rising athletes.

Madam Speaker, in terms of total athletic participation, the Coca Cola Games is the Region's biggest sporting event and the world's biggest school athletics meet, in the combination of policies, development plans and strategies in place to support the product of the Coca Cola Games.

Madam Speaker, this is where athletes and coaches not only showcase the opportunity of their talents, it also gauges the success of development plans that have been produced during the early years of Primary Schools athletics.

Madam Speaker, while the Coca Cola games have provided a platform to showcase and identify secondary school talents, the process of development by Athletics Fiji starts at the early years when the children are at Primary School in the under nine Primary School Athletics. To warrant greater accountability Madam Speaker, the Sports Commission, while administering grants to sports organisations

such as athletics, encourages that all our national sporting organisations have in place a Strategic and Development Plan for these individuals in their individual sports.

I was fortunate this year to be at the presentation of Athletics Fiji Strategic Plan for 2014 to 2019 which illustrates and puts in place guidelines and direct pathways for the development of young athletes. Madam Speaker, one of the key components of this Strategic Plan by Athletics Fiji is the focus on development and linking the elite players' pipeline to include schools development through certification and providing strong domestic competitions to test development work.

Madam Speaker, these elite athletes are prepared for international competitions such as the World Youth Games, Olympic Youth Games, the Commonwealth Youth Games which will be conducted in Apia this year, and other games that professional athletes go through to attain the development plan by the sporting organisations.

Madam Speaker, plans are in place to establish a national sports academy. This is to ensure that all talented athletes are given the opportunity to receive the best and the most significant training program available. Madam Speaker, this will further ensure a pathway in sports and representatives from Fiji.

Madam Speaker, the National Sports Academy will retain our athletics in-country and focus on hosting more international meets that bring the Pacific to Fiji. In this way, Madam Speaker, more and more athletes will have the motivation to continue and to aim to make the Fiji team. So, Madam Speaker, this will only be realised when budding athletes follow their sporting organisation Strategic and Development Plan.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you. Supplementary question from the Honourable Netani Rika.

HON. N. RIKA.- Madam Speaker, can the Minister for Youth and Sports inform the House what percentage of Secondary School athletes that take part annually in the Coca Cola Games remain in the sports of athletics after they exit from the school system?

HON. LT. COL. L.B. TUITUBOU.- Madam Speaker, I must thank the honourable Member for the supplementary question. Yes, after school the ability of the sports of athletics to retain athletes is a challenge. A good example is that of the 240,000 students that took part in the Primary and Secondary School Zone only .01 remain with the sports when they leave school. The Ministry together with the Sports Commission encourage strategic plans for each sporting bodies so that they can carry on with the talents identified during the Coca Cola Games. Athletics Fiji has recognised the need to retain its athletes and has put in place a Strategic Plan which I have already mentioned for 2014-2019, to address the retention of sporting athletes.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you, I now give the floor to the honourable Jiosefa Dulakiverata.

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- Thank you Madam Speaker, a supplementary question. I thank the honourable Minister for his response and the organisers of the Coca Cola Games. I would like to ask the honourable Minister if he has any influence on the organisers of the game to change the sponsor from Coca Cola to something more palatable to the children, maybe Rewa Dairy which has enormous government subsidy.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you honourable Minister for Youth and Sports.

HON. LT. COL. L. B. TUITUBOU.- I must thank the honourable Member for that supplementary question. Coca Cola has offered another four years sponsorship this year but may be after that, we will consider Rewa Dairy. Coca Cola have a lot of resources to sustain the development of Athletics.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you the honourable Prem Singh.

HON. P. SINGH.- Supplementary question Madam Speaker. I thank the honourable Minister for giving us a brief overview of the Coca Cola Games and its success. As you will note from the Coca Cola games this year, most of the rising stars were from the West; is the Government planning to build an academy for the sports people in the West and in the North?

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you honourable Minister for Youth and Sports.

HON. LT. COL. L.B. TUITUBOU.- Yes, I must thank the honourable Member for that supplementary question. Yes, the Government has a plan in place for a Sports Academy in the West and one now in Suva. For the Northern Division, that is in the strategy.

MADAM SPEAKER.- I thank you honourable Members for those answers. We will now move on to the sixth oral question and I invite the Honourable Samuela Vunivalu to have the floor.

Squatter Settlement Upgrading
(Question No. 81/2015)

HON. S. VUNIVALU.- Madam Speaker, before I ask my question, I first of all, would like to congratulate the Divisional Education Officer West, Mr. Lorima Voravora, for his promise to me two weeks prior to the Coca Cola Games that the two teams from Natabua and Jasper will win the tournament.

Madam Speaker, can the honourable Minister for Local Government, Housing and Environment explain to this august House the Government programme in place for squatter settlement upgrading the following:

- i) How many Fijians will benefit through this programme; and
- ii) What are the Ministry's future plans for the squatter settlement upgrading programme?

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you the honourable Minister for Local Government, Housing and Environment.

HON. P. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker, my Ministry through a government programme which was set up way back under the Bainimarama Government, continues to upgrade the squatter settlements.

Madam Speaker, the Squatter Settlement Upgrade Programme which is in place now under the FijiFirst Government led by the honourable Prime Minister are as follows:

(Hon. Government Members - Applause)

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Oh! No!

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- What is the 'oh' for? This is a fact and if you people want to know about the previous government, I had said in this Parliament that they only used to go during election time, and tell them that once they were going to win, they were going to subdivide. So don't say 'Oh'!

(Hon Government members burst out in laughter)

The first programme, Madam Speaker, is the town-wide informal settlement within the Suva-Nausori corridor.

The second programme, Madam Speaker, is the city-wide informal settlement upgrading within the municipality.

The third programme is the squatter settlement upgrading throughout the country.

Madam Speaker, apart from the land development, we also have the housing programme for the squatters namely the Lagilagi Housing Project in partnership with the PCN, which is expected to assist 10,000 families. Madam Speaker, the total number of families that will be assisted through this programme for three years will be 29,000. Madam Speaker, as we all know, land cannot grow and therefore, our future plan is to move towards high-rise buildings to assist our people.

Madam Speaker, talks are also underway with individuals and corporate companies to provide a design and build concept. I am in consultation with the honourable Minister of Finance, talking to these companies and individuals, where we are going to provide 20 acres to 30 acres of land. With their funds, they will subdivide and there will be a formula worked out (30:70) where 70 per cent of the residential unit will take place and 30 per cent commercial where they will get the money that has been invested during the subdivision. The idea of doing this is to assist the very poor people. That is the aim of this Government and by doing that, we will definitely assist around 15,000 families that the survey reveals.

Madam Speaker, all in all, when these issues were raised, I thought I would be making a Ministerial Statement in regards to this because the subject matter is very huge. I do not think I can just explain about the squatters within five or two minutes. However, I can assure you that I will be making a Ministerial Statement in regards to the entire squatter resettlement programme in the country. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. A supplementary question directed to the honourable Minister. The resettlement programme which he rightly stated will need a big amount of land to develop. As we know, land is associated with the landowners, so what would be the participation as well as the benefits derived from these developments for the landowners? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you, the honourable Minister for Local Government, Housing and Environment.

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, all these land developments taking place are on the *itaukei* land and State land. We acquire development lease from iTLTB and we pay premium and that money goes to the landowners. I believe I have answered the honourable Member's question. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER.- The honourable Mosese Bulitavu.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- I thank the honourable Minister this morning for his answers. In a normal subdivision, the development lease is with the developer, so after the subdivision when there is a proper lease, the people who are living in these squatter settlements, how will they own the lease? Will they buy the lease, or will it be given free, or is it under this whole programme, or how will they acquire a proper lease from TLTB?

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you, the honourable Minister for Local Government, Housing and Environment.

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker, that is a very valid question. It is basically a concern for everyone but let me assure this august House, that after the land subdivision, all the lot owners will be issued 99 years of residential lease. They will have to pay some money, but they do not have to pay for the development cost, they will only have to pay for the administrative cost. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER.- That is the third and last supplementary question for the oral question.

Written Questions

MADAM SPEAKER.- I wish to advise honourable Members that pursuant to Standing Order 45(3), answers to the following written questions have been tabled and given to the honourable Members who asked the written questions. The answers will also be available on the website for Question Numbers 7, 14, 21, 28, 35, 36 and 37 of 2015.

The first written question is by the honourable Semesa Karavaki.

Plans for Processing Backlog of Cases – Magistrates Court and High Court
(Question No. 82/2015)

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to refer to the Written Question No. 82 of 2015 directed to the honourable and learned Attorney-General and Minister for Justice.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you, the honourable and learned Attorney-General and Minister of Finance, Public Enterprises, Public Service and Communications.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the honourable Member for his question, I will be supplying that in due course, as the Standing Order applies.

MADAM SPEAKER.- The second written question, the honourable Aseri Radrodro to ask his question.

Successful Local Sub-Contractors - Fiji's Major Road Works
(Question No. 83/2015)

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to ask the written question listed under my name, Question No. 33/2015 which is directed to the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you, the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport.

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker, I will table the written answers as per the Standing Orders at a later sitting, thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Members, I thank you all for your contributions and discussions. Question time is now over. I would ask the leave of Parliament to agree that we now break for refreshment and we will resume at 11.30 a.m. as usual, to allow more time for the preparation of Ministerial Statements.

The House adjourned at 10.33 a.m.

The House resumed at 11.30 a.m.

MADAM SPEAKER. – Honourable Members, I will now rule on the point of order made by the honourable Karavaki this morning.

Firstly, I will remind the House of the ruling I made yesterday, under Standing Order 41 (3), and I quote:

“I have the power to direct that a question be treated as a written question, where it deals with matters of statistical nature.”

Accordingly, I had directed that the honourable Salote Radrodoro’s question was listed as a written question. I used that power, having consulted with the Business Committee. Yesterday when I stated that the ruling was mine and the Parliament’s, I was reminding the House that I was using the powers given to me by the Parliament, under Standing Orders.

I take this opportunity to remind Members that under Standing Order 74 (4), it says that –

“The Speaker’s decision on a point of order is not open to appeal except by a substantive motion.”

I had been lenient up to this point on this matter, but will no longer tolerate honourable Members challenging my rulings.

Finally, let me remind all Members that the door of my office is always open to any Member who wants to clarify any issues with regards to Parliamentary proceedings. Thank you.

STATEMENT BY MINISTER

MADAM SPEAKER.- The honourable Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts has informed me that he wishes to make a Ministerial Statement under Standing Order 40. Even though this Ministerial Statement is not on the Order Paper, I did receive notice within the time stipulated under Standing Orders. Therefore, I now call upon the honourable Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts to make his Ministerial Statement.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.– Point of Order. Madam Speaker, still under your ruling yesterday, the information came to us at 9.10 a.m., this morning to reply to the honourable Minister’s ministerial statement. So that ruling was supposed to be one hour before the sitting and I request a ruling on that, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER.– Standing Order 40 requires a Minister who wishes to make a Ministerial Statement to inform me and each Party at least an hour before the sitting. I can inform the House that the honourable Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts informed me within the time required by Standing Order 40. Once I received the topic of the Ministerial Statement, I shared that information with the other parties, as agreed by the Business Committee. Therefore, I will allow the statement to proceed.

HON. DR. M. REDDY (Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts). – Madam Speaker, I rise to speak on this important initiative of our Bainimarama-led FijiFirst Government, the establishment of Technical Colleges.

Madam Speaker, I have chosen to speak on this initiative, given it is important to meet the labour market demands of skilled workers in the country. This ability is to give a new ray of hope for potential students who pursue higher studies and technical education, as well as raising the standard of living of those who would pass through these technical colleges.

Madam Speaker, our honourable Prime Minister, in his opening speech in Parliament last year, and also by our Minister of Finance in his 2015 Budget Address, alluded to the establishment of three Technical College Campuses in 2015 and seven in 2016.

Madam Speaker, this announcement, along with others, brought joy amongst the rank and file, as it was the beginning of the ruling out of FijiFirst Party's Manifesto, which have a direct bearing on the living standards and economic growth of Fijian People, and the Fijian economy respectively.

Madam Speaker, as promised, we now have three Campuses in operation that have carded skilled training, two of which have been opened by our Prime Minister himself. These three are:

- 1) Technical College of Fiji, Vanua Levu Arya Campus, Labasa;
- 2) Technical College of Fiji, Nabua Sanatan Campus Nabua, Suva; and
- 3) Technical College of Fiji, Dr. Shaukat Ali Sahib Campus, Nadi

Madam Speaker, a total of 714 Students are enrolled at these three Campuses, 62 at Nabua (a smaller outfit), 275 at the Labasa Campus and 377 at the Nadi Campus. Madam Speaker, these are the Programmes that we run at these three campuses:

- 1) Certificate II in Auto Electrical Engineering;
- 2) Certificate II in Auto Mechanical Engineering;
- 3) Certificate II in Fabrication and Welding;
- 4) Certificate II in Cabinet Packing and Joinery;
- 5) Certificate II in Carpentry;
- 6) Certificate II in Cookery;
- 7) Certificate II in Baking and Pastry;
- 8) Certificate II in Information Technology;
- 9) Certificate II in Graphic Design and AutoCAD; and
- 10) Certificate II in Horticulture.

Madam Speaker, the way we have structured the Programme is that these students are placed on an industrial attachment for a period of four months, after four months of study on campus at the workshops. Now, all students are on industrial attachment (those who were enrolled in Term 1) while a new lot is being enrolled as we speak, and they will begin their studies next week at the three Campuses.

Madam Speaker, when these students return to campus in Term 3 (the Term one lot), the Term 2 will then go on industrial attachment. This is how it is done.

Madam Speaker, this is a one year study and we expect the first lot of students who graduate to enter the job market in December. All enrolment fees for these students are waived and tuition fees are paid via the Tertiary Education Loan Schemes (TELS).

Madam Speaker, students apply for admission at these Campuses and they are assisted by our staff, along with 10 staff visiting the Campuses, to assist the students there and collect the forms. All the students are given bus fare vouchers to assist them meet their transportation costs.

In the near future, we are looking at the establishment of boarding facilities at these three Campuses, along with a new campus that would come into being next year. These boarding facilities will basically cater for students from maritime zone, who will not be able to travel to these Campuses.

Madam Speaker, unlike the rigid and pre requirements for higher studies in Universities, these programmes are opened to students who have undertaken 10 years of formal study up to Form 4. However, it is also open to students who have attained lesser number of years of formal education but, at least, they are of 15 years of age and can read and write in English and have an aptitude for technical education.

Madam Speaker, as the honourable Prime Minister had mentioned earlier last year, these colleges are meant for those students who have an aptitude in technical education, who may not want to go for higher education studies. For example, Bachelor of Science (BSC), Bachelor of Commerce (BCOM), et cetera, but would want to pursue a technical education pathway and then enter into university and become a qualified engineer.

Madam Speaker, in addition to these formal award programmes, we also offer short courses out of these Campuses to address the immediate need of the labour market, as well as upskill and provide career opportunities for those who just do not have any skill to enter into the labour market because they do not have any skills. Madam Speaker, as we speak, we are enrolling students in 56 short courses in the area of engineering, construction, hospitality and agriculture. These short courses are supposed to begin next week and the fees for the short courses are paid by Government. So, none of the students are required to pay any fees for any short courses that they will do out of these three Campuses that we have.

Madam Speaker, I will talk about the potential, say another campus that will come up next year in January. As the honourable Prime Minister announced a few weeks back, we will have a Technical College in Bua, to cater for students from that particular district.

Madam Speaker, to cater for students from Naitasiri and greater Nausori area, we will have a campus in Nausori, possibly in Nausori High School.

Madam Speaker, we have also identified a campus in Wainikoro to cater for Students in Wainikoro, possibly the Daku Primary School.

Madam Speaker, we have identified a campus in Tavua, the Tavua District School. The *tikina* there has given us that campus, so that particular school probably will be our Tavua Campus of the Technical College of Fiji.

We are looking at one at Navua, to cater for the population there, probably Rampur College.

Madam Speaker, we are looking at a campus in Sigatoka, most likely the Nadroga Navosa Provincial School and talks are underway.

Madam Speaker, there will be one at Lautoka, to cater for the population there and one at Rakiraki, quite likely the Nakauvadra High School where talks are underway. So that will give us probably 7 to 8 more campuses to start in January.

Madam Speaker, as the honourable Prime Minister and the honourable Minister of Finance had announced, we are in line and on track to deliver the technical colleges to cater for those students who have an aptitude in the area of technical education.

Madam Speaker, as alluded to by our honourable Prime Minister in his maiden speech and mapped out in the Budget by the Minister of Finance, our new mode of development will ensure that every Fijian,

immaterial of what corner they live in Fiji, or what ethnic group they belong to, we all will go together, we all will inch by inch graduate out of poverty and hardship. That is our collective responsibility for a just shared vision.

MADAM SPEAKER – I now give the floor to the Leader of the Opposition or her designate.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.– Madam Speaker, although the activities the honourable Minister for Education as articulated in this House looks good on paper, the fact is that, it needs to be analysed and discussed widely amongst stakeholders before implementation. The fact remains, Madam Speaker, that the honourable Minister should take into consideration the existing facilities that are already there in schools around the country. What is going to happen to these facilities? They cost a lot of money to establish these schools and now with one stroke of the pen, the honourable Minister thought that this reform is good for this country.

Furthermore, Madam Speaker, where will these students go to? Where is the job market? How can the honourable Minister visualise what will happen to these students later on, in terms of acquiring the skills from these technical colleges?

Madam Speaker, it is quite expensive for our students because these are at tertiary level, whereas it is much more easier in terms of cost cutting for the parents to send their students or children to schools that are already in existence. Furthermore, Madam Speaker, this is only a money making machinery for the Government.

(Chorus of interjections from Government and Opposition Members)

What about the *iTaukei*? What about the indigenous students, will they be able to afford this technical college in terms of its tuition?

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS: It is free

If it is free – good, but what about stationery, Madam Speaker, and other expenses?

MADAM SPEAKER.– Order, order!

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.– Madam Speaker, we do not agree with this initiative. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER.– I now call on the Leader of the National Federation Party or his designate.

HON. DR. B.C. PRASAD.– I always take delight with what my honourable friend on the other side, the honourable Minister of Education, is trying to do with the education reforms in the country.

On this particular matter, Madam Speaker, technical education is not a new idea. It was always there and the idea is not a bad one.

(Hon. Government members applause)

Labour demands studies show that there is always a mismatch of skills in this country, and particularly technical skills.

HON. MEMBER.- Labour market – fixed.

HON. DR. B.C. PRASAD.- But I am surprised - well you were there, you could not fix it for a long time.

I am also surprised that the honourable Minister has conveniently shied away from talking about the quality of these colleges. He has not talked about the pathway that these students will have, and the link between what is offered by the Fiji National University and the training programmes offered to the employers by the Training and Productivity Authority of Fiji. He has not clearly articulated how he is going to integrate the existing vocational schools, vocational programmes in schools throughout the country.

Madam Speaker, I know where the idea came from, for establishing technical colleges and I know it was a different idea. I will reveal that someday. It was an idea to create technical colleges for students after Year 10, where they are likely to make a choice of whether they want to pursue an academic or a technical pathway. What we are seeing now, (and I think they are having problems already with the three technical colleges and this is why they are offering short courses) they are not able to get those students after Year 10, who are making or who are given a conscious choice of going this way or that way.

What we are seeing is the decimation of the existing infrastructure, and there was a path way - you know this very well. There was a pathway from vocational schools for students who used to do a two year programme. They used to get Stage Three certificates and then they had the option. You go and check with Rishikul College, check there, honourable Minister!

Then they would go and pursue Stage I and Stage II, Madam Speaker. There are lots of students coming out with certificates and the honourable Minister gave this whole list of certificates. They are always there, but what the employers in this country are finding is the quality, whether the skills these kids are getting out of technical colleges match what we have, or what is required. This is why Madam Speaker, I kept telling the honourable Minister for Education that he needs to consult more widely. Consulting does not cost a lot of money, like the honourable Prime Minister does very well sometimes. They should learn from him. They should have a little bit more consultation on educational reforms.

Madam Speaker, education is a long term thing and we cannot allow the whims of one individual Minister to suddenly pop in and say; "This is what is going to be good for the country". We need some real discussions in this country. We need dialogue, Madam Speaker, and the other side of the House needs to understand what dialogue means.

(Chorus of interjections from both sides of the House)

MADAM SPEAKER – Thank you very much for those responses.

You will have noted that we had withdrawn the statement that was to be presented by the Minister for Defence at his request.

FIJI PARLIAMENT TO REJOIN THE INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION (IPU)

HON. REAR ADMIRAL (RET'D) J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Madam Speaker I rise to speak in support of a motion we are tabling for Fiji to re-join the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU).

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.– Madam Speaker, I second the motion.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now call on the Honourable Prime Minister to continue.

HON. REAR ADMIRAL (RET'D) J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Madam Speaker, as I have said, I rise to speak in support of a motion that we are tabling for Fiji to re-join the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). We do so with the expressed purpose of strengthening our democracy by fostering relations with other Parliaments around the world and, of course, to improve our own ability to serve the Fijian people through the exchange of information, training and our attendance at conferences and workshops organised by the IPU and its global membership.

The IPU is an international organisation of parliaments established in 1889 (I understand New Zealand is also part of this) to encourage dialogue between our institutions, to work for peace and co-operation, and to strengthen the principle of representative democracy. It works in close co-operation with the United Nations, whose objective it shares, as well as inter-governmental and non-governmental organisations on every continent.

Madam Speaker, the IPU is an important way in which all of us as elected representatives of the Fijian people can have dialogue with citizen's representatives of other nations - to exchange ideas; to learn from each other and to improve our ability to serve the people we represent.

There are currently 166 members and 10 associate members of the IPU, stretching across the globe.

Now that Parliament has reconvened after the General Elections last September, in which, of course, the FijiFirst Party won convincingly...

HON. GOVT. MEMBERS.- Hear! Hear!

HON. DR. B.C. PRASAD.- Your seats are empty!

HON. REAR ADMIRAL (RET'D) J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Definitely, it won't be long in some people's case.

... the Government proposes to re-join the organisation to begin rebuilding and strengthening the old ties we once shared with Members of Parliaments (MPs) around the world; to reengage with them for the benefit of the Fijian MPs and, of course, to foster closer relations with our counterparts elsewhere.

Madam Speaker, this motion arises from the visit you made to the United Kingdom in January of this year, as the head of a Parliamentary Delegation. During your study tour of the Parliament of Westminster in London, the Scottish Parliament and the National Assembly of Wales, you and your delegation also had a meeting with the Secretary-General of the IPU, Mr Martin Chungong. He expressed a keen interest in having the Fijian Parliament re-join the organisation, to benefit from the experience we have as Pacific Islanders and for us all to begin taking advantage again of what the IPU has to offer.

I am very pleased as Prime Minister to lend my support to the idea, and to introduce this motion into Parliament because anything that strengthens our democracy and our ability to serve the Fijian people deserves our support. We can learn a great deal through person to person contacts with our fellow MPs around the world. The IPU slogan is: "For democracy. For everyone". In essence, the 47,000 MPs who are members, commit themselves to serving ordinary people wherever they may be and to uphold the principle of parliamentary democracy and representative government.

Madam Speaker, the IPU has a specific commitment to gender equality. To empower women around the world and to encourage more women to pursue parliamentary careers, and give women a genuine voice in the formulation of national policies. Your selection by the Members of this Chamber to be Speaker, is a powerful symbol of our own commitment to achieve gender equality in Fiji, and as I continually stressed in this Parliament and elsewhere, every Fijian needs to support the principle of

empowering our women, giving them the voice they deserve, and enabling them to reach their full potential through the strict implementation of a transparent merit-based system.

Of course, gender equality is only part of the IPU's agenda and certainly, its broad principles are such that every single Member of this House can agree on them. They are to:

- 1) foster contacts, co-ordination and the exchange of experience among Parliaments and Parliamentarians of all countries;
- 2) consider questions of international interests and expresses views on such issues with the aim of bringing action by Parliaments and their Members;
- 3) contribute to the defence and promotion of human rights which are universal in scope and respect for which is an essential factor of parliamentary democracy and development; and last but not least
- 4) contribute to better knowledge of the working of representative institutions and to strengthening and developing their means of action.

In short, Madam Speaker, belonging to the IPU provides the following benefits:

- 1) the exchange of ideas;
- 2) turning those ideas into action for the benefit of the people we represent as MPs; and
- 3) promoting human rights and strengthening democratic institutions.

These are all the principles that are at the heart of our Constitution, and the foundations on which this Parliament exists.

We all, Madam Speaker, are here in this Parliament because of the genuine expression of the political will of the Fijian people in September last year, a place where we all must be committed to serve all Fijians to the best of our ability, whether they voted for us or not. Only this approach will strengthen our own democracy as a foundation for a strong nation which we already are and even a stronger nation we intend to become.

Madam Speaker I commend to the House our motion to re-join the Inter-Parliamentary Union and seek the support of all Members for this motion.

Vinaka vakalevu, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you, honourable Prime Minister.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Madam Speaker, I rise with the concurrence of the Leader of the Opposition to make a brief statement on our behalf regarding the motion that is before this august House.

Madam Speaker, from the outset, there are two kinds of pictures that this side of Parliament is scrutinising in terms of this motion, and that is to re-join the IPU and coming from the Government.

We are trying to re-join IPU and having the motion from the honourable Prime Minister, I would say from the outset that it is commendable, timely and also to say that at last, he is coming out from his shell. We hibernated for the last eight years, now he is coming out and we commend him for that. This is democracy, honourable Prime Minister! What you have done is commendable, in taking us back to where we were before.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear! Hear!

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- But, before we take that full jump or leap, let me remind the honourable Prime Minister, Madam Speaker, we also have a sister parliamentary association that comes under the Commonwealth. It would have been great if we had two parliamentary associations come together or put together in this motion, because just recently the chief advisor to the honourable Prime Minister, the honourable Attorney-General was pictured in one of the dailies, shaking hands with the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth in London and giving him a copy of the 2013 Constitution. But surprisingly, having just come back from Commonwealth office, why did he not advise the honourable Prime Minister to re-join the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) as well?

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear! Hear!

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Madam Speaker, we have our counterparts from the New Zealand Parliament here, the honourable Speaker of the New Zealand Parliament, and as well as Members of Parliament of New Zealand. They have been here with us, thick and thin. They have been with us all these years, and especially through the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. Most of us have had the benefit to attend meetings and seminars carried out by the CPA.

Honourable Prime Minister, the Opposition would like to request you, Sir, please, consider the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association as well, because these are two great institutions that we have a lot to learn from, in how they practice democracy within their Parliamentary systems. The one with IPU, we have countries that we do not know of right now, as to how they practice this democracy that we want to promote here. These are countries that are quite new and foreign to us. So, before we take this jump to go outside of the Commonwealth, we would like to request the honourable Prime Minister, if in future or at a later date or not in the too distant future, to consider the Parliamentary Association as well, because it will help us with how Parliament is being run, especially the great and laborious duties and decisions that befall your good office, Madam Speaker.

I know, and we all understand from this side of the House, that you are still learning. We are all still learning, but if we join all these....

MADAM SPEAKER.- Order! Do not bring the Speaker into the debate.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Speak on the motion.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It will help us to learn, and we do not close our doors; we open it, and hopefully, if the honourable Prime Minister can take this leap forward with this motion, Madam Speaker. We were wondering as to why then we left aside the Pacific Island Forum and try and form our own, when here we are doing exactly the opposite. And, this is the very picture that I said from the outset, this is something that we are looking at, and it is clouting our view as to where the honourable Prime Minister is coming from. But again, Madam Speaker, we commend this great motion here, to re-join the Inter Parliamentary Association but, at the same time put our request on notice that the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association be put on notice as well. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER.- May I kindly remind you all honourable Members, to always keep the Speaker out of the debate. Thank you.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I wish to contribute on the dialogue on the motion before the House today. Yes, at the outset, let me say that we commend this. It is about time Fiji re-joins the global community in its entirety. We have been out there in the wilderness for eight years in darkness, it is time to come back, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, just on that victory by FijiFirst, if you count all those who did not vote for FijiFirst, there is only a 9 per cent differential. So, let us not get overboard about this landslide victory that they tend to boast about, it is only 9 per cent.

Madam Speaker, we want our people to sit at the same table as everyone globally. We used to be like that. This morning we had students from the university. We have empowered our 18 year olds to vote. Madam Speaker, it is our duty as parents, as leaders of this country to give them the world as their oyster. We must open up the world for them. I commend this re-joining IPU. Likewise, we should re-join the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

However, Madam Speaker, there is a famous Fijian saying or idiom, which says, “*Tekivu mai Jerusalem*”. Start from Jerusalem. Where is your Jerusalem? Our neighbourhood, the Pacific Islands Forum. They are in our neighbourhood, Madam Speaker.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Tell them!

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- We join them here, and we build on regional basis. We go global, that is how you do this thing. You do not go into the world by forgetting your Jerusalem, forgetting your home. Our colleagues from New Zealand and Australia are in our neighbourhood, an economy of \$1.3 trillion. Why would we turn our backs against them and go outside of our homes? Start from the neighbourhood!

Madam Speaker, we commend this. We want it to go ahead, but let this be the beginning of the opening of Fiji which we deserve. As you know, the whole country is now watching, enjoying these Parliamentary debates and enjoying the democracy. Let us take it to its fullness, Inter-Parliamentary Union, Commonwealth Pacific Association and Pacific Islands Forum. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to support the motion that has been put on the floor by the honourable Prime Minister. Sometimes, when we listen to the comments from the Opposition, we tend to forget what they are actually trying to say. The motion on the floor is whether we join IPU or not, and we need to support this joining to the IPU.

No doubt, we could not be a member of IPU post-2006 because we did not have a Parliament. We now have a Parliament, Madam Speaker, that is now being hailed and is elected on a truly democratic system based under this Constitution, under this Constitution Madam Speaker, where there is equal value of every single Fijian, as far as the vote is concerned. We can talk about that, Madam Speaker, for hours till the cows come home. This Constitution is the one that has given the voting age being reduced to 18 years.

Madam Speaker, issues regarding the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. Yes, we were in London, the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth will be visiting Fiji very soon, and of course, this is part of the work that has been carried out through our Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and these motions will obviously take place. We will be seeing the fruits of these relationships that have been developed through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Therefore, Madam Speaker, to cut it short and without diverging away from the topic, we rise in support of this motion. We believe that it is a good association.

Madam Speaker, ultimately the reality is that of joining IPU is not just simply to go to conferences and having a bit of a perk on this. The idea is to strengthen democracy and actually believe in it, because there are many people or some people in this House, Madam Speaker, there only use democracy only when it suits them. The idea is to inculcate into an agender, the actual belief in democracy, the actual belief in equal opportunity, and this is what we hope, Madam Speaker, in particular giving up exposure to the honourable Members of the Opposition through the IPU process to actually believe in it. Many of them, Madam Speaker, in the events of 1987 and 2000, they actually believed in that. They believed in the overthrow of governments, but because that form or that elected member of government did not suit them, that is basically, Madam Speaker, the reality for them. So, the idea of joining IPU, Madam Speaker, will in fact hopefully educate many honourable Members of this House, in particular those from the Opposition to believe in true democracy, and I support this motion. *Vinaka!*

MADAM SPEAKER.- Honourable Dr. Biman Prasad, you have the floor.

HON. DR. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I commend the honourable Prime Minister for bringing this motion and it is heartening that Fiji will join this 166 member organisation. The IPU also has a permanent observer status at the UN and I think that is very helpful.

I was also heartened, Madam Speaker, by the honourable Prime Minister's statement when he was moving the motion or speaking on the motion and he talked about strengthening democratic institutions and the honourable and learned Attorney General, I remember presenting this Constitution to the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth and, Madam Speaker, this Constitution led to the General Elections and therefore, we have this Parliament.

Madam Speaker, when you talk about strengthening the democratic institutions and the honourable Prime Minister has a real opportunity to leave a legacy for this country and we all believe that we are making a start. We want to strengthen democratic institutions in this country. But, Madam Speaker, you cannot strengthen democracy, if you have Section 173 of the Constitution, which says that all the Decrees that was used by the previous government to govern from December 2006 until the last Decree on Parliamentary Emoluments before the Parliament sat, is all intact. I want to say to the honourable Prime Minister that, perhaps as a Parliament, as a country, it is time for us to look at some of those Decrees, in particular, Madam Speaker, the Media Decree which is very, very draconian, the Political Parties Decree, the Electoral Decree and if we want to bring genuine democracy which the honourable Prime Minister, quite rightly talks about. If we want to bring in genuine democracy in this country, Madam Speaker, we need to look at Section 173.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Speak on this motion!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I am speaking on the motion, Madam Speaker, it is related to the motion and let me repeat this to the honourable Prime Minister that he can leave a legacy and I call upon him to show real courage

(Chorus of Interjections from Hon. Government members)

to set up a Parliamentary Committee, to review some of these Decrees and let this Parliament repeal some of those Decrees. That is when we will be part of a bigger global community and I am very happy and I commend the honourable Prime Minister, I thank him for bringing this motion to get Fiji to join the IPU. I do hope that he will consider looking at some of these provisions that are there, which will indeed

strengthen democratic institutions in this country and we will leave a legacy for our future generations, Madam Speaker, thank you.

(Minor Applause from Opposition Members)

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you, honourable Member, I call on the honourable Roko Tupou Draunidalo.

HON. ROKO. T.T.S. DRAUNIDALO.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I join the honourable Members on this side in commending the motion. We do support the re-joining of the IPU and we note that the IPU, Madam Speaker, when it was initially setup, it was to arbitrate conflicts, which is helpful to us in this country and now it's primary focus is democracy. I thank the honourable and learned Attorney-General, for reminding us of consistency in believing in democracy and democratic principles. We are two days short, Madam Speaker, of 28 years since the first coup. We really need these principles, Madam Speaker, to be brought home much more strongly than it has been in the past.

As my learned colleague talked about one term, about starting at Jerusalem, there is another one that I usually like to point out to voters when I am talking to them, the electorates and it is the term *were ubiubi*, which means sweeping things under the carpet. Madam Speaker, if we are to re-join the IPU and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, all lovely, wonderful things, Madam Speaker, but as the honourable and learned Attorney-General has said and I agree, I hope it is just not another perk, I hope it means substantive things for this country. I hope members of the IPU and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, prominent members are sitting in this House from our neighbouring country, New Zealand and I hope they put a little more effort and not mirror the denial and *were ubiubi* that is elevated in this country to an art form. We really do, Madam Speaker.

It is rather unfortunate that sometimes I see in the foreign policy of our friends the same thing, sweeping things under the carpet, so long as we have elections, it is part of what the honourable Member has said about the problems with the Constitution. So long as we have elections, some Members are elected, we are all sitting in this nice beautiful building, we call ourselves Members of Parliament, yourself as the Speaker, but we are forgetting the damage to the institutions that have occurred since 1987.

Our institutions have crumbled with every *coup*, got worse and worse with every coup, Madam Speaker, and I just hope in supporting the honourable Prime Minister and his endeavour and I join my honourable leader and I think he can leave his mark, ironic for some, but he really can leave his mark to end this *coup* culture, if we do more substantive things in this country and that includes having the hard discussions about that institution which I will not name because I get embarrassed about it too, as my family was very much part of that institution as well, Madam Speaker. I wouldn't be laughing because they would be the primary beneficiaries of all these that I am saying, now that they are elected. Madam Speaker, but if we did more substantive things in this country, it will augur well for peaceful, long term stability and that is the only thing that will help our democracy. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

(Applause from Opposition Members)

MADAM SPEAKER.- The honourable Minister for Health.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to support the motion before the House, for our going back into the Inter-Parliamentary Union and I think there has been a lot of statements made this morning that has been distracting from the purpose of the motion. There has been a lot of talk about leaving a legacy. I think the legacy is already here. If we are talking about the kinds of things that we need to leave a legacy in this country to move us forward, it is all in this Constitution and it is also found in the leadership of our honourable Prime Minister, who has made sure that we stop being myopic, stop

separating ourselves but begin to see ourselves as one country. This is the thing that will leave a legacy over this country, that is how we will get development. You forget about grouping ourselves into little groups and think about the principles that are here. Once we do that, if you live by that, then you will leave a legacy for the children that will follow us. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you, I will now give the floor to the honourable Prime Minister for the right of reply.

HON. REAR ADMIRAL (RET'D) J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker, I request that we put the motion to the House and ask for its endorsement. *Vinaka*.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you, the Parliament will now vote on the motion.

Does any Member oppose that the Fijian Parliament re-join the Inter-Parliamentary Union? Since there are no Members opposing the motion, it is therefore, agreed to unanimously and I thank you very much, honourable Members.

(Acclamation)

That brings us to the end of our sitting today and I thank you all for your contributions. I thank the visitors in the gallery that have joined us, thank you for your presence today.

Again, I would like to thank the honourable Speaker of the New Zealand Parliament and Members of his Delegations for your patience to be with us today and we wish you all the best and a safe journey home.

I request the members of the Business Committee to meet in the Big Committee Room straight after this and I now adjourn this sitting to 9.30 a.m., tomorrow.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.19 p.m.,