

# **PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI**



## **PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES**

### **DAILY HANSARD**

**TUESDAY, 25TH APRIL, 2017**

**[CORRECTED COPY]**

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**TUESDAY, 25TH APRIL, 2017**

The Parliament met at 9.32 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

HONOURABLE SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

**PRESENT**

All Honourable Members were present, except the Honourable Assistant Minister for Youth and Sports and the Honourable A. Sudhakar.

**MINUTES**

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Monday, 24th April, 2017, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

HON. LT. COL. N. RIKA.- Madam Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

**COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CHAIR**

Welcome

HON. SPEAKER.- I welcome all Honourable Members to today's sitting of Parliament. I also warmly welcome the members of the public joining us in the gallery and those watching proceedings on television, the internet and listening to the radio.

Yesterday, we had a group of students and today, we welcome another group of the Politics and Government PL100 students from the University of the South Pacific. Welcome, and thank you for taking interest in your Parliament.

Honourable Members, we also have a distinguished visitor this morning; the Chairperson of the Commonwealth Youth Council from London, who is here with us today. I am unable to pronounce your name and I do not want to try, so if you do not mind, would you like to stand so that we can acknowledge your presence - all the way from London.

(Acclamation)

We also welcome all the visitors from the International Youth Fellowship Volunteers from South Korea.

(Acclamation)

Welcome to Fiji and to Parliament. We hope that you will enjoy the rest of your programme. Thank you.

**PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES****Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence -  
Review Report on the Fiji Police Force Annual Report 2013**

HON. LT. COL. N. RIKA.- Madam Speaker, I am pleased to present the Review Report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence on the Fiji Police Force Annual Report 2013.

The Standing Committee is established under Section 109(2)(e) of the Standing Orders of the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji. The Committee is mandated to examine matters related to Fiji's relations with other countries, development aid, foreign direct investment, oversight of the Military and relations with multilateral organisations.

The purpose of the review was to scrutinise the Fiji Police Annual Report 2013, specifically on the maintenance of law and order; protection of life and property and preservation of public peace; and leadership and administration of the Force - legislation, budget, organisation structure, functions, policies and programmes for the year.

The findings of the review and the recommendation put forward by the Committee are intended to assist the Force's service delivery of its core functions in reducing crime and keeping Fiji and its citizens and visitors safe and secure on a 24/7 basis. Also, to maintain and improve Fiji Police contribution to global security and world peace as Fiji's mandatory obligations to the United Nations' security mandates.

The review exercise was possible after a round of consultation with the Force. The Committee had identified areas of concern that need addressing to ensure the organisation as an institution efficiently and effectively achieves its goals.

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

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Please hand the Report to the Secretary-General.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. LT. COL. N. RIKA.- Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move a motion without notice, that a debate on the contents of the Report is initiated at a future sitting.

HON. RATU S. MATANITOBUA.- Madam Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

**Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence – UN Convention  
Against Transnational Organised Crime (UNTOC) and Supplementary Protocols**

HON. LT. COL. N. RIKA.- I am pleased to present the Report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence which was assigned to review and examine the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNCTOC) and the three Supplementary Protocols namely:

1. Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children (Trafficking in Persons Protocol);
2. Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air (Smuggling of Migrants Protocol) and;
3. Protocol against Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, their Parts and Components and Ammunition (Trafficking in Firearms Protocol).

This Report provides the Committee's review, conclusion and recommendation from oral and written submissions received and deliberated upon by the Committee as per Standing Order 110(e).

The Report is divided into four Parts:

1. Part 1, covers the roles and responsibility of the Standing Committee and inquiry process in undertaking a review of the Convention and the Three Protocols;
2. Part 2, provides a brief overview of the Convention and the Protocols;
3. Part 3, details the Standing Committee's observations of the Convention and the Protocols; and
4. Part 4, provides a summary of key provisions of the Convention and the Three Protocols.

Madam Speaker, the main purpose of the Convention is to prevent and combat transnational organised crime or effectively through collaborative cooperation globally. Acceding to this Convention will be beneficial to Fiji in terms of:

1. Increasing detection of transnational organised crime;
2. Enhancing greater understanding of trends and patterns of transnational crime;
3. Improving prosecution of transnational crime cases and the protection, rehabilitation and reintegration of victims of human trafficking; and
4. Improving cooperation between border security agencies both, nationally and internationally.

Madam Speaker, after receiving all the submissions from all relevant stakeholders, the Committee recommends that the way forward for Fiji is to accede to the Convention and the three Supplementing Protocols.

Madam Speaker, I commend this Report to Parliament for its consideration.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Please hand the Report to the Secretary-General.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. SPEAKER.- Pursuant to Standing Order 121(5) and Standing Order 130 (4), the Standing Committee has now reported back. Thank you, Honourable Chairman.

The next Item in the Order Paper, Honourable Professor Prasad, you may ask your question.

**QUESTIONS**Oral Questions**Kidney Dialysis - Criteria for Allocation of Funds  
(Question No. 106/2017)**

HON. PROF. B. C. PRASAD asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services inform the House what is the criteria used to allocate funds from the \$300,000 budgetary allocation to patients in urgent need of kidney dialysis at the Kidney Foundation?

HON. R.S. AKBAR (Minister for Health and Medical Services).- Madam Speaker, I rise to respond to the question asked by the Honourable Member and I would also like to thank him for asking the question.

Madam Speaker, unfortunately, the Honourable Member's question reveals that he is not fully aware of the fact, and that the Government does not allocate any funds for the kidney dialysis carried out by the Kidney Foundation. The Kidney Foundation is a charitable trust, which raises its own funds from donations and charges are paid by the patients who undergo dialysis.

Madam Speaker, the Government has allocated \$300,000, over two years, for the purchase of supplies for dialysis machines at CWM, Lautoka and Labasa Hospitals. These services are provided to patients in our public hospitals and in keeping with all other publically funded health services allocated in line with the clinical needs and the patient's ability to benefit.

(Honourable Members interject)

Shall I continue, Madam Speaker?

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Thank you. In the interest of informing the House, Madam Speaker, and enlightening the Honourable Members, I would also like to provide some more facts about dialysis.

The Government currently funds dialysis services for two distinctive groups of patients. Acute dialysis is offered at the main divisional hospitals mainly for those with acute reversible kidney disease. These are patients who are identified through clinical assessments by our doctors. They typically have temporary kidney failure that will improve with the support of kidney haemodialysis treatment. The second group of patients, Madam Speaker, are those with chronic or incurable chronic kidney diseases, who may receive dialysis up to three months prior to kidney transplant. These are patients who have had their organs transplant already arranged and who require assistance with haemodialysis as they await final preparations for the transplant procedure.

Madam Speaker, Fiji cannot currently fund haemodialysis for all kidney chronic patients. The Ministry of Health and Medical Services recognises the financial burden that regular dialysis can impose on, and is exploring ways to exert downward pressure on fees through increasing competition.

If I can further add into that, Madam Speaker, it is truly heartbreaking to know that every year in Fiji, about 600 people develop complete kidney failure or end-stage kidney disease. According to the latest WHO data published in May 2014, death attributable to kidney disease in Fiji reached 127, or roughly one in every 40 deaths.

Fiji has one of the highest rates of NCDs, Madam Speaker, in the world and this is having an impact on our workforce, and the second highest rate of diabetes in the world which is 15.6 percent of adults. Madam Speaker, 80 percent of NCDs are preventable, especially diabetes, cardio-vascular diseases and stroke; cancer is 40 percent preventable; salt consumption in Fiji is doubled the recommended amount; high blood pressure is increasing; 30 percent of Fijians are obese; and 97 of all adults in Fiji have moderate or high risk of dying from NCDs.

Madam Speaker, as mentioned by the Honourable Usamate, at age 45, there is an exponential growth in those dying from NCDs and this suggests that at the age of 20, people are already sick and NCD incurs 44.9 percent of health inpatient expenditure.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Health has its own plans for this challenge, but a lot of issues that lead to NCDs are not medical in origin. The social solutions which need to be social in which a whole cross-section of society gets involved in assisting people to make better choice on what to eat, drink, breath, and to exercise and, of course, to take appropriate rest. Corporate bodies also need to regard this issue as a major challenge.

From the Honourable Minister of Employment's perspective, Madam Speaker, we are concerned and heard yesterday about the impact of this in the workforce; premature retirement and absenteeism. So in 2010, the World Economic Forum pointed to NCDs as the most severe threat to economic development. Even the increasing trend in kidney diseases has also become a great concern for the Ministry of Health and as such, we are moving in a direction to look at sustainable ways to support the development of nephrology clinical care for kidney disease, together with public health programmes to support awareness and education for all Fijians on how to care for their kidneys.

Madam Speaker, as the saying goes, "prevention is better than cure", as the way forward to address this issue, kidney health includes supporting wellness and prevention, particularly prevention of diabetes which is the most significant contributor to kidney failure in Fiji.

Madam Speaker, I do worry sometimes though that as a society, we may be starting to view dialysis as something that is almost routine, something that we expect people to experience as part of their ageing process. The growth in diabetes will inevitably and sadly lead to an increase in the demand for dialysis, but that just highlights the importance of our national effort to reduce the impact of kidney diseases, and it requires our collaborative effort.

Madam Speaker, hard to measure but not insignificant are the costs of pain and suffering associated with life on dialysis which, in general, are estimated to be much higher than the cost associated with having a transplant. Also, nearly impossible is to calculate the cost to society when dialysis stops patients from working, leads to disability, lost revenue and financial and emotional stress on family and needs, and not to note that patients who go on disability, when they start dialysis, rarely return to work, even after a transplant. As such, Madam Speaker, living a healthy lifestyle to combat and overcome the risks of NCDs such as, kidney disease is surely one of the sustainable ways to protect our families from the impact of kidney dialysis. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Professor Biman Prasad?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, a supplementary question; is the Honourable Minister aware that regular kidney dialysis patients are finding it extremely hard to pay for the cost, which is very high? Is she aware of that? Many of them are not able to afford that, and as a result they die. So I want to know from the Honourable Minister whether she is aware and whether there is plan to increase allocation so that we can pay for or subsidise some of the costs for the regular kidney dialysis patients?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I thank the Honourable Member for the question. Madam Speaker, I have just informed the House, yes, we are aware, we are concerned and yes, we are looking at ways on how best we can combat this challenge at the Ministry of Health.

For the information of the House, Madam Speaker, like I said, CWM, Lautoka and Labasa Hospitals have their own dialysis for the acute patients. For chronic patients, the Board of Visitors at Labasa Hospital have started up the dialysis centre, which has indeed reduced some costs and those are the future plans for CWM and Lautoka Hospitals as well.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Nawaikula?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- The Honourable Minister has just outlined the failures of her Ministry on two fronts; fighting kidney problem and NCDs in general. Madam Speaker, \$300,000 is not enough and this Government and the Government on that side has paid \$9 million for some rich people to come and play golf here.

(Laughter)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Can you assure this House that you will be looking at more allocations to fight NCDs and kidney?

HON. J. USAMATE.- Point of Order!

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of Order!

HON. J. USAMATE.- The Honourable Member has a habit of going into preaching and sermonising, when really what he needs to be able to do ...

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. J. USAMATE.- ... is ask a supplementary question. A supplementary question means a question that has a question mark at the end; you do not have a full stop at the end!

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. J. USAMATE.- You ask a question and expect an answer.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. As has been the practice, the person asking a supplementary question is given one minute to have the background leading up to the question and also to ask the question. The question has been asked?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- It has not been answered yet, Madam, I am waiting. The question is, given that you are giving \$9 million for people to come and play golf, can you also consider to increase your budgetary allocation to fight NCDs and kidney problems? Madam Speaker, \$300,000 is not enough.

HON. SPEAKER.- The onus is on the Honourable Minister to answer that question but definitely that was not a question, it was a recommendation.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- She wants to answer it.



HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Thank you, Madam Speaker, I want to answer that. Actually, it is really sad to note that when questions are asked and responses are given, the Honourable Members on the other side do not seem to listen. I have never said this in the House before, but I have to say it, it is very sad and a very concerning issue for the Ministry and I have said it. All they talk about, Madam Speaker, is Government's failure.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- I think, instead of selective hearing they also have selective sight. They do not want to see the good that is happening.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Because it is true. Next year, you will not be here!

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- You wish, you wish, Honourable Nawaikula, you wish!

Madam Speaker, it is a budgetary question and budget submissions are ongoing and, of course, if it is a concern for me I will look into it.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Ratu Nanovo?

HON. RATU S.V. NANOVO.- A supplementary question, Madam Speaker. We do all understand the hardships faced by the dialysis patients in trying to be cured from this epidemic and since they are the most vulnerable population within the society, can the Honourable Minister advise this august House as to why they cannot be provided with this treatment free of charge, so that we can give them a new lease of life?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Madam Speaker, I think that was already explained, but for the benefit of the Honourable Member and this august House, all I hear is; why Government cannot allocate more funds? I do not hear from the other side on how they can educate our people. I have said "prevention is better than cure."

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Madam Speaker, they are very confused again. I do not want to say these things but it is very confusing, you do not listen to what we say.

(Hon. Member interjects)

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Has someone from the other side actually calculated the cost of dialysis treatment?

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- You talk smart enough.

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Yes, that is for you to say *talatala*, thank you very much.

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- I give the floor to the Honourable Viliame Gavoka.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Minister has talked about the cost that is difficult to estimate on how much it will cost, but in terms of a ballpark figure, do you know how much will it cost to provide this across the country for free?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Madam Speaker, it is a statistical question as well as is associated with the costs but from what we have gathered, the minimum cost for kidney dialysis per patient, per session is around \$250. At Labasa Hospital, we provide it for \$200 and the other competitors who have come up, set it on a similar rate.

So with three sessions per week, we are looking at about \$30,000 to \$40,000 per patient and if it a chronic patient, Honourable Gavoka, then that treatment goes on for 20 to 30 years as that person survives. So if someone starts dialysis at the age of 40, we will keep that patient on dialysis for the next 20 to 25 years as long as the patient lives, so that is a challenge for us as well.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Honourable Parmod Chand.

HON. P. CHAND.- A supplementary question; Madam Speaker, the Honourable Minister referred to the Labasa Hospital that the dialysis centre there charges \$200, but may I correct her, it is \$150. I would just like to ask the Honourable Minister if it is possible to see that the people in Labasa are given better benefit, given the economy of Labasa. If the Government can consider helping those people who are unable to pay the \$150. I know that you referred that Government does not have money or you said something like that, that there is no allocation for the dialysis. What I am seeking here that at least for Vanua Levu, there should be some funding.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P. CHAND.- There is nothing there, you only go and blow your nose there, that is all.

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you.

(Hon. Member interjects)

HON. P. CHAND.- You only make too much sound in Labasa, that is all.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. P. CHAND.- Madam Speaker, I would like my question to be answered.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order! Honourable Minister?

HON. P. CHAND.- (inaudible)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order! Honourable Minister?

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Madam Speaker, once again, very limited, talking about Labasa, here we have a Government that wants to look at the interest of every Fijian.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

(Hon. Opposition Member interjects)

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Yes. Madam Speaker, I never said that we have an issue with budget, but that programme is not in place at the moment.

Madam Speaker, again for the information of the House, the cost of dialysis in Fiji is pretty high, it is because the consumables are very expensive. The volumes are very little, and that is why there is a price hike into the dialysis service. That is why we are promoting more private investments into that, and very shortly we will be unveiling our plans for, like I said, Lautoka and CWM Hospitals, in terms of bringing prices down so that it is made more affordable to the ordinary Fijian. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Salote Radrodro?

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Honourable Minister for Health for your explanation. The 2016-2017 Budget cites \$10 million for free medicine and you have stated that you do not have sufficient funds for the kidney dialysis programme. Can you confirm to this House if you can transfer via \$5 million from the Free Medicine Project, bearing in mind that shortage of drugs which focusses on the ineffective procuring system? The money must be there, so can you confirm that you can transfer \$5 million from the Free Medicine Project to fund the Kidney Dialysis Programme?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, you have made a recommendations and you just want the Honourable Minister to confirm?

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Yes, can she confirm, can she do it?

HON. SPEAKER.- The onus is on you.

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Madam Speaker, I will not confirm to the recommendation but as the need arises, it is the prerogative of the Government and the Minister to see where funds can be vired to complement the other programme.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to the Honourable Mikaele Leawere to ask his question.

Plans to Repair Roads in Rural and Remote Areas  
(Question No. 107/2017)

HON. M.R. LEAWERE asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Local Government, Housing and Environment and Infrastructure and Transport advise the House if there are plans by the Ministry to repair roads in rural and remote areas?

HON. P.B. KUMAR (Minister for Local Government, Housing and Environment and Infrastructure and Transport).- Madam Speaker, I rise to respond to the question asked by the Honourable Member and I seek a minor clarification.

(Honourable Opposition Members interject)

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- He is asking me, we have to come and even tell you what to ask.

(Laughter)

The Honourable Member is asking, can the Minister advise the House if there are plans by the Ministry to repair roads in rural and remote areas? Which Ministry is the Honourable Member referring to?

HON. SPEAKER.- Would you like to clarify, Honourable Leawere?

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Madam Speaker, that is addressed to the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport. I think that is under his domain. Maybe, he is mixed up because he has a lot of portfolios to look after.

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker, they are talking about running the Government. By now, they should know that the responsibility of all the roads in Fiji has gone to the Fiji Roads Authority (FRA). So what he should have asked is ....

(Honourable Opposition Members interjects)

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- ... can the Honourable Minister advise the House if there are plans by the Fiji Roads Authority to repair roads in rural and remote areas? I can ask, Madam Speaker, for this question to be thrown out on a technical ground...

(Laughter)

... but I will not because, Madam Speaker, as far as Government is concerned, we are equally concerned about the rural roads in remote areas, that will make it very clear. The FRA will continue to work with the Divisional Commissioners to ensure that the roads in the rural and remote areas are maintained for access.

Madam Speaker, a recent initiative by the FRA and the Commissioners is to meet on a monthly basis to further improve coordination. Following the signing of the MOA in February 2016 and the construction and upgrade of few rural roads, the FRA and Commissioners have met again to re-prioritise the list of rural roads in each Division.

Madam Speaker, for the information of this august House, FRA is carrying out multiple projects at the moment, across Fiji.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Dulakiverata?

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- A supplementary question; Madam Speaker, we have PWD depots all around the country which have now been left to ruin. All the buildings there are deteriorating and are not used. Does the Government have any plans to reopen these stations so that it can continue to efficiently maintain roads in the rural areas?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Those depots that the Honourable Member has mentioned is used by the FRA contractors.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Aseri Radrodro?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Madam Speaker, can I ask the Honourable Minister to advise this House on the cost of backlogs in terms of repairing rural roads?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Member. I can submit a written response in the future sitting.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Nawaikula?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Minister through the advice of the Honourable Prime Minister, you will see that despite all those plans by the FRA, it is not working. If you go to Labasa, Tavua and everywhere, it is not working. Could you please explain to the House why with all those plans, the roads are still not improved?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker, it may not be working for this Honourable Member but it is working for us. And as I have mentioned about the plan, the programme has been there for each district and we are taking care of the rural roads in remote areas.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Bulitavu?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Madam Speaker, my question to the Honourable Minister is, given that FRA contracts to the contractors, what can the Ministry do to review contracts given out by FRA to contractors who man rural roads because the contractors are not doing a good job? Those were two lanes before are changed to one lane now, also the drainage and the road edges, what can the Ministry do to review its allocation to FRA? Is there any plans to review that?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker, there is a Monitoring Unit within FRA which monitors the works of all the sub-contractors. Those contractors who do not perform are out from the job and recently we have taken a few contractors out of their jobs because they were not doing the work according to the standard of what we expected.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Salote Radrodro?

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just came back from Bua, from Nabouwalu take it up to Wainunu, and the roads are very bad. These affects the arrival time or the delay in the students reaching their schools. So can the Honourable Minister enlighten us on the \$56.9 million under upgrading of rural roads in the budget, how much of that is being allocated in the Northern Division and particularly, the Nabouwalu side or the Bua side of the Northern Division?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister?

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have got no issue with that, definitely I can table that as a written response in a future sitting.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Viliame Gavoka?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam Speaker, my colleagues spoke about PWD and in the past, we saw PWD visiting rural roads two or three times a year. As a minimum today, how often does FRA visit those rural roads, in the sense of repair and all that?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker, FRA has got sub-contractors around the country and as far as I am aware, FRA also makes regular visits to the rural roads. Now, we have Divisional Offices in all the Divisions, so there is an improvement in terms of managing the Authority. Let us not forget that all those roads that you are talking about, in the past years, those were the roads that were supposed to be done ...

(Honourable Opposition Members interject)

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- ...whereby the community used to pay. Now, the Government has taken that responsibility.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- It would not be done overnight, but gradually these roads will be taken care of.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Honourable Jiosefa Dulakiverata to ask his question.

Monitoring of Dalo Prices and Other Rootcrops  
(Question No. 108/2017)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development and National Disaster Management explain to this House, how is the Ministry monitoring the price of *dalo* and other rootcrops all around Fiji, so that there is fair return to farmers?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU (Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development and National Disaster).- Madam Speaker, I rise to respond to the question asked by the Honourable Member and I thank him for the question.

Madam Speaker, let me acknowledge all the farmers throughout Fiji and, of course, all those who are involved in the supply and value chain as well, particularly the traders and vendors because they all contribute to the sector.

Madam Speaker, the simple answer is, yes, we do monitor the price of *dalo* and other rootcrops and we do this on a weekly basis. We disseminate the information to all farmers, vendors and traders throughout Fiji.

Madam Speaker, let me take the Honourable Member back to 2014 where the new Agriculture Sector Policy Agenda was launched by the Honourable Prime Minister, looking at the period between 2014 and 2020. The focus is on modernising Fiji's Agriculture Sector and I have previously stated on a few occasions before this august House that with this, the focus was not only on the production but, of course, from production right through to the market.

Madam Speaker, I have stated that we do monitor this every Thursdays. We have a team from the Ministry of Agriculture called the AgTrade Unit, who work under our Economic Planning Team, and they go out to all the 12 markets in Fiji.

We have two applications available which farmers can access, and not only farmers, I have talked about traders and vendors. One is called M-Pricing and the other one is called Fiji Makete. Fiji Makete is with the Fiji Crop and Livestock Council based in Lautoka. We have 20,000 farmers, traders and vendors, who are subscribed to Fiji Makete. With M-Pricing, it was given to us by the assistance of the International Trade Centre (ITC). It is currently based in Raiwaqa. Unfortunately, I could not bring the tablet this morning because our Officials are out in the field.

Every Thursdays, Madam Speaker, they go out to the 12 markets throughout Fiji. They look at the commodities, what are available in the markets by quantity and, of course, they give all the details and in that, the pricing as well. So, that gives farmers an idea of what is available in the markets and where they select to take their produce because we are talking about fair pricing in here, Madam Speaker. Farmers have the option to decide which markets they go to, based on the availability because when it comes to fair return, we do appreciate all those who are involved. But this is very simple, basic economic supply and demand, and the pricing will basically be determined by the demand and, of course, the supplies that are available on the current day.

Farmers particularly, can have the market information for over a month and the last week or even the current week, based on what is available. It creates that platform where the farmers can liaise directly with the buyers. Middlemen play an important role but we want, as much as possible, to cut out the middlemen so that there is fair pricing. The beauty about the two applications that I am talking about here, Madam Speaker, is that farmers can liaise directly with the buyers and arrange pricing.

The other component that I have stated, Madam Speaker, is M-Pricing, we have about 10,000 people registered. Of course, under Fiji Makete we have about 20,000. The same thing with Fiji Makete and particularly with Fiji Makete administered by the Fiji Crop and Livestock Council, most of the exporters are subscribed to Fiji Makete because farmers' information are with the Fiji Crop and Livestock Council. At the same time, when buyers and exporters are in need of certain commodities, the platform is there with Fiji Makete being administered by the Fiji Crop and Livestock Council. So they will be connected directly by the Fiji Crop and Livestock Council to the farmers and, of course, they will arrange the pricing.

There is another step that we are currently undertaking, Madam Speaker, where the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) based in Rome is assisting us. This will be launched in Naitasiri. We are just waiting now for us to fix the Office in Lomaivuna and then we will bring in all the electronic components. Hopefully by next year, Madam Speaker, we will have the system in place.

One the difficulties in agriculture is linking production to the market, production driven by demand rather than producing for the sake of producing. So when we have the system which we will trial in Naitasiri, and that is another tablet that we will provided with by FAO. What the farmer plants today, the Agricultural Officer logs in that information and it will be directly accessed by our office in Suva. So, the beauty of that, Madam Speaker, is from next year, we will be more proactive. We should be able to tell all the exporters and all the buyers in Fiji; "This is the amount of commodity that is available

in the geographical regions throughout Fiji, whether it is kava or cocoa or rice or *dalo* or vegetables". As soon as the farmers log that in, we will be able to access that from Suva and then we will distribute this as well so that farmers can commit to major markets.

However, in terms of fair pricing, let me assure this Honourable House that because we analyse all these everyday and we talk to the various stakeholders, we convene meetings as well, the farmers are very much given their fair return. But for *dalo*, I know specifically that post-*TC Winston*, it was \$5 per kilogramme in Naitasiri and now, it is coming down to \$2.00, \$1.70, so again supply and demand.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- A supplementary question, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Supplementary question.

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Minister for his reply.

Some farmers in Naitasiri especially those who plant *tausala* for export, had reported that some of the agents who work for the exporters go and buy *dalo* there, they grade the *dalo* on the field - Grade 1, Grade 2, Grade 3 and they pay different prices. But when the *dalo* goes for export, there is only one grade. They reckon they have been robbed in broad daylight. Can the Honourable Minister, please investigate this matter?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. LT.COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Speaker, let me assure all farmers that no one is being robbed and no one is being denied their fair return. *Dalo* is actually graded for the export market, Madam Speaker. Unfortunately for now, even Grade 2 *dalo* are left behind. If you go to Sai or you go Peni Moi now, or go to Ram's in Valelevu, most of the Grade 2 *dalo* are not exported. It is simply because Samoa is back in the international market. They were affected by the taro leaf blight in the last few years, but now after *TC Pam*, Samoa is back in full production.

Likewise, Tonga is into the market as well. That will somehow have implications on our farmers. But, Madam Speaker, let us assure all farmers that definitely, the grading system is something that is necessary because for us to attract the good dollars, we have to do this. These are all dictated by the dynamics within the market as well.

Madam Speaker, when we had *TC Pam* and *TC Winston* and there was very limited *dalo* in the market, all these Grade 2 *dalo* or whatever, that is why the farmers are coming on because they were all exported. Now, when we have an abundance of supply, these *dalo* remain in Fiji. Hopefully, we will get this to the local tourism markets.

Last Friday, I launched a new cookbook called *Kana Vinaka* and that will be another new dimension for Fijian farmers where local food will be used for contemporary cuisines in hotels and it will do wonders for Fiji, Madam Speaker. Hopefully, most of those products that do not qualify because of the grading system will end up in the domestic market, Madam Speaker. .

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Ratu Kiliraki?

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- A supplementary question, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Supplementary question.



HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- Can the Honourable Minister explain where does Agriculture Marketing Authority (AMA) stand in the equation as far as the purchase of *dalo*, especially when AMA does not take *tausala*? Where does AMA fit into all these explanations in regards to the *dalo* production and market?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Member, a very relevant question. AMA under the Act, is not allowed to compete with other traders, particularly where traders are gaining access. Areas where these traders do not gain access, then that is where AMA goes to, but particularly for *dalo*, for the benefit of the Honourable Member, first AMA facilitates the current exporters. For example, I will not mention the exporter, but he has got an export licence. Lutu Co-operatives, they have been operating over the years but they do not have a facility. AMA processes and only charges the administrative costs and gives it back to the Lutu Co-operatives, and the same with other exporters. Sometimes farmers in Taveuni, for example, the buyers cannot go to Taveuni so AMA goes and picks up the *dalo*, pays the farmers, does the logistics on behalf of the exporters and then between AMA and the buyer, they take the cost.

However, for *dalo* alone, *Tausala* goes to the fresh export market and AMA does not export *Tausala*. We started this way back in 2009 when we revived AMA. So we leave the *Tausala* to the other operators but what we did was, we hired this gentleman who wrote the cookbook, Chef Colin Chung. He is Hawaiian but based in New Zealand. We did market research and also some marketing promotions for our other *dalo* varieties.

Now, Madam Speaker, *Uronivonu* is going to Australia, United States of America and all the *dalo* markets and all the yellow *dalo*, whether it be *Maleka Dina*, *Jabeni* and the good thing about this is, it means income for the farmers because *Tausala* goes as fresh whereas all those other varieties go as frozen *dalo*. That is another market segment for our farmers, and that is where AMA facilitates, it is more into frozen *dalo*. Most of the other traders are into frozen *dalo* as well but still, we do not have sufficient *dalo* from the farmers to meet all the demands that we have.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister. For the sake of our viewers, where can we get this recipe book '*Kana Vinaka*'?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Speaker, I will bring it to the House tomorrow. It costs \$50, if you want to buy one. Nothing is free, Madam Speaker. The Ministry of Agriculture sponsored that. It will be distributed to all the hotels in Fiji and I have one copy available, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Professor Biman Prasad?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Minister is right, supply and demand came with the price so if prices are slower, we need to increase demand. The question is; is the Honourable Minister looking at incentives to promote more value-adding and processing of *dalo* and other rootcrops to create, for example, *dalo* chips which, consumed locally or exported, might actually bring better prices? I also want to say to the Honourable Prime Minister that exporters are exploiting our farmers in terms paying lower prices and what they sell there.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Speaker, again, a very relevant question. Definitely, the Ministry is seriously looking into value-addition. I did mention in the last Sitting that I

was going to travel to New Zealand. I did and I have launched a paper with Massey University which is renowned for agriculture development, particularly value-addition. Hopefully, Massey University will look at the laboratory that we have in Koronivia and we will go into more product development.

At the same time, we are encouraging the private sector to go into this, particularly with most of what we have in Fiji and hopefully, once this is addressed and we upgrade the laboratory in Koronivia. Of course, FNU is now seriously looking into their food production, the value-addition and food processing training, we will get more of this.

However, I still go back, Madam Speaker, to supplies. This is something that we are fixing now. Once we firm up with our cluster systems because even now, for products that are already processed, we still have limited supply. FMF Foods Limited wants to do a lot of *dalo* and cassava chips but still, we have a problem with suppliers. They want to do potato chips as well, we are working on potato and hopefully, *kumala* and others will come on board.

I have mentioned '*Kana Vinaka*'. Even this cookbook, Madam Speaker, there is already value-addition and hopefully one day, we will bring the USP TAFE students and our people in Koronivia, may do refreshment for us here so that we can try some of those new products that we are developing. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor Honourable Semesa Karavaki to ask his question.

Board of Inquiry Report on the *RFNS Kiro*  
(Question No. 109/2017)

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Defence and National Security enlighten this House on the Board of Inquiry Report on the Royal Fiji Naval Ship (RFNS) *Kiro* that ran aground at Cakauyawa Reef near Makuluva Island in July 2016?

HON. RATU I. KUBUABOLA (Minister for Defence and National Security).- Madam Speaker, I rise to respond to the question asked by the Honourable Member and I thank him for his question.

I am glad to report to the House that the Board of Inquiry Report has been completed and submitted to the Headquarters of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces. The implementation of the Board's recommendation is ongoing and subject to review.

There were a number of recommendations put through by the Board that were disciplinary in nature. Those disciplinary recommendations are currently with the Force's Legal Services for legal verification and due diligence.

A number of recommendation were in reference to review of operational procedures and training of Fiji Naval personnel. Those systemic recommendations are currently being implemented with the Fiji Navy, and is an ongoing process.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Supplementary question?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Can the Honourable Minister, please confirm to us the rumour about what happened on that night, that the only senior personnel on board was the Captain, who was asleep at that time and a very junior Officer was in charge, as well as the GPS was not working?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I am afraid we cannot entertain rumours in this House.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Ratu Nanovo?

HON. RATU S.V. NANOVO.- A supplementary question, Madam Speaker; can the Honourable Minister advise this august House the total costs involved in the salvage operation, and whether the amount used was provided for in the budget?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister?

HON. RATU I. KUBUABOLA.- Madam Speaker, there was no salvage being carried out. All the fuel and hazardous materials had been removed. There is no plan for a salvage. The ship will stay right there.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Viliame Gavoka?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam Speaker, with the *Kiro* out of circulation now, what is the fleet right now of the Navy? What is the strength right now?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. RATU I. KUBUABOLA.- Madam Speaker, as you know the Fiji Navy has 344 regular Naval Personnel. Currently, there are 4 Naval Vessels – one operational Vessel which is the *RFNS Kula*, *RFNS Kikau* which is to be sealifted to Australia on 27th April, 2017 for refit until December. The *RFNS Lautoka* is awaiting safety and structural survey next month. The *RFNS Levuka* is awaiting to be decommissioned because of its age.

HON.SPEAKER.- Honourable Aseri Radrodro?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Madam Speaker, I just want to ask the Honourable Minister whether the Board of Inquiry Report will be tabled in Parliament?

HON. RATU I. KUBUABOLA.- Madam Speaker, there is no plan for that Report to be tabled in Parliament.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Professor Biman Prasad?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Can the Honourable Minister tell the House whether the wreckage is not going to pose any environmental threat or environmental pollution?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. RATU I. KUBUABOLA.- Madam Speaker, as I had mentioned, there will be no effect on the environment as the way the ship is right now. So there is no need for salvage.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Semesa Karavaki?

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI.- It is about nine months, Madam Speaker, since the Vessel ran aground. Can the Honourable Minister explain why it has taken so long, and the Board of Inquiry is still ongoing and has not been completed? Why has it taken so long on such an important issue like this?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. RATU I. KUBUABOLA.- Madam Speaker, I think the Honourable Member is not listening to my reply. The Board of Inquiry Report has already been completed. The recommendations are with the Legal Unit of the RFMF for verification.

HON. SPEKAER.- Honourable Leawere?

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Madam Speaker, just a question; what will be the cost of the loss of the Vessel?

HON.SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. RATU I. KUBUABOLA.- Madam Speaker, I apologise as I do not have that answer with me right now, but I can give it to the Honourable Member at a later time.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Dulakiverata?

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- Madam Speaker, can the Honourable Minister inform this House whether the Vessel has a valid Seaworthiness Certificate at the time of accident?

HON.SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. RATU I. KUBUABOLA.- Yes, Madam Speaker, I can confirm that the Vessel was seaworthy.

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI.- Madam Speaker, a supplementary question.

HON. SPEAKER.- I am afraid you had already asked one question. I am not allowing any second question as it is against our Standing Orders.

There being no other supplementary question, I now give the floor to the Honourable Alivereti Nabulivou to ask his question.

Types of Assistance Given to Farmers in the Rural and Maritime Areas  
(Question No. 110/2017)

HON. A. NABULIVOU asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development and National Disaster Management enlighten the House as to the types of assistance given to all farmers in the rural and maritime areas as of today?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU (Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development and National Disaster Management).- Madam Speaker, I rise to respond to the question asked by the Honourable Member and I thank him for the question. I will just basically provide two very brief answers and then I can be available to take any further supplementary questions.

The first major component in which our communities in the rural and maritime areas are assisted is through the Demand Driven Approach (DDA) Programme. There are five major capital programmes under the DDA, Madam Speaker, as follows:

1. Rural and Outer Island (ROI) Programme;
2. Food Security Programme (FSP);
3. Export Promotion Programme (EPP);
4. Dairy Industry and Support (DIS) Programme; and
5. Sigatoka Valley Development Programme (SVDP).

Madam Speaker, there are reasons behind these capital programmes. ROI Programme is basically about the people in the rural and outer island areas and it is holistic. I have talked about production and the whole value chain market access, et cetera, Madam Speaker.

We have the FSP. I had mentioned in this House, Madam Speaker, that last year, the Honourable Prime Minister accepted on behalf of Fiji, our achievements as far the Millennium Development Goal is concerned where we are providing sufficient food security for our people. But as highlighted by the Honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations as well as the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services, perhaps the bigger challenge now for Fiji is not food security but nutrition security, because that links to NCD. Of course, this is where we can focus and we are working with the Ministry of Health on the Zero Hunger Programme which focusses not only on food security, but on nutrition security as well so that we can have an impact on NCDs.

The EPP, Madam Speaker, as much as possible, we want to increase our export levels, there are some challenges but we are working on it, particularly with the introduction of mechanisation and cold storages. We should be able to improve our export levels in far as the commodities that we have.

For that, you would note that the Kava Manual for *yaqona* has been passed, and likewise I had talked about "*Kana Vinaka*". Hopefully, most of our local products will not only be for us here, but we look forward to the day where *Ota* and other commodities will end up in Auckland, Sydney and Melbourne because even now, half-cooked bele, frozen and then vacuum-packed are going into these markets, as well as *duruka* and so many other things. That is the EPP, Madam Speaker.

On the SVDP, Sigatoka Valley is one of the most productive areas in Fiji and it has been there for quite a while. Unfortunately, we have lost some of the areas, particularly near the banks, but we are still working on the Sigatoka Valley. Hopefully, we will continue to produce better quality products out from Sigatoka Valley.

Of course, on the DIS Programme, I talked about dairy in the last Parliament Sitting. Government has the will and commitment to assist our dairy farmers and, of course, we are working on our Eradication Campaign for Brucellosis and Tuberculosis as well. On the 3rd or 4th May, 2017, there will be a forum jointly organised by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) and the Ministry for Agriculture, where we will bring in all the stakeholders, not only in dairy but the cattle or livestock sector as well, so that we can look at the way forward.

Additionally, Madam Speaker, there are also commodity-related programmes because as we see the demand in the market, we are asking from allocations out of the DDA. We have now allocations for Dalo Development, Rice Development, Coconut Development, Yaqona Development, and others.

Additional to that, Madam Speaker, we also have other programmes. One is the Sigavou Development Programme. Just like Sigatoka Valley, we also have very good fertile land in the Ra area and this is the Sigavou Valley. Government started developing this area from 2008, I believe, and now

Ra is very much into production. This is also targetted towards our Poverty Alleviation Programme because as we know, in the Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) Report, some of the districts within the Ra province are high in terms of poverty level. Therefore, this is targetted towards that Programme, thus the development of the Sigavou Development Programme.

We have Rice Revitalisation Programme, Cocoa Development Programme and Coconut Development Programme. This includes the component on *TC Winston* Rehabilitation. I talked about Yaqona Development and, of course, Dalo Development, including rehabilitation.

Cottage Industry Development Programme is mainly and specifically for our women. They have the opportunity to plant more *Voivoi* (Pandanus) and go into coconut virgin oil and other cottage industries.

We have the Vanilla Development Programme and the Nadarivatu Development Programme as well. We also have the Flat Land Development Programme, this is particularly targeted low lying areas in the Central Division - Rewa and the Tailevu South areas, where most of the concentration of this Programme is currently undertaken.

Of course, we do not forget Rotuma. Rotuma has got a special allocation and my Assistant Minister will be going to Rotuma next Monday to go and visit the farmers there because we also have a Rotuma-Tuvalu Trade arrangement and hopefully, things will pick up.

We also have land preparation facility for farmers particularly. These are some of the new incentives, particularly farm mechanisation and the land preparation facilities, so that we can bear most of the costs that farmers used to shoulder previously. Most farmers want to go into the high level of production, but unfortunately smallholder characteristics do not have capital. This is where Government comes in to subsidise the costs for them so that they can produce more and most importantly, contribute towards the development within their localities as well.

Farm mechanisation; most farmers now are getting access to machinery and I wish to congratulate and thank the farmers who are coming forward. We have been issuing tractors now to farmers who can afford their contribution and, of course, the fertiliser subsidy as well. These are the range of programmes available to all farmers throughout Fiji, whether it be in the mainland or in the maritime. Of course, forms are available in the agricultural stations for them to fill, so that we can know their requests and then the system follows through in order for them to be assisted.

Those basically are the programmes available in the rural and maritime areas, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER. – Thank you. Honourable Prem Sigh.

HON. P. SINGH. –Madam Speaker, a supplementary question; given the types of assistance to rural and remote farmers, could the Honourable Minister inform this House what sort of performance monitoring or evaluation process are in place so that these assistance are fully utilised?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Speaker, the Ministry has recently established a Monitoring Unit within the Economic Planning Division. This is, apart from the monitoring that is done by the implementing Divisions. Say, for example, in Agriculture; we have the Animal Health and Production Division, Land and Water Resource Management Division, Crop Extension Division, so they all monitor their own programmes, but from the Ministry, we have a Monitoring Unit.

Madam Speaker, I have talked about modernisation and this is a beauty about technology. In the last two years, our focus was on Agriculture and Rural Statistics, a programme that we undertook with FAO. Now, almost all the active farmers in Fiji are registered in our database. I have talked about Naitasiri and the results from Naitasiri are very encouraging.

I was briefed last week by our team that even now, most of the farmers who were left out or were not registered in the initial registration, are now coming forward because with a click of a button, all the details of a farmer is there. For example, Mosese Bulitavu, this is his land, this are the assistance that he has been provided with, et cetera, because this is about taxpayers money, Madam Speaker. We also want to monitor very closely the performance of each farmer. So, this is the beauty about the new programme that we have.

I keep encouraging farmers to please, get registered, either in the Fiji Crop and Livestock Council or through the Ministry of Agriculture Statistics Unit because previously when we did the first round of surveys, most farmers did not want to be interviewed. Maybe they feared about taxation or whatever but now, we are encouraging all the farmers to get interviewed. So that is how we monitor their performance but we also have a Monitoring Unit at the Ministry.

HON. SPEAKER. – Thank you. Honourable Leader of the Opposition?

HON. RO T.V. KEP. – A supplementary question, Madam Speaker; the Honourable Minister mentioned earlier about the new *Cookbook* that is being launched and I was wondering because in that *Cookbook*, there would be highlighted organic food and other fine foods. I did not hear him mentioning anything about organic farming in the types of assistance that are being provided by his Ministry. My question to him is, what type of assistance is being given for organic food production, particularly for farming and for export focus?

HON. SPEAKER. – Thank you. Honourable Minister?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.– Madam Speaker, I wish to thank the Honourable Leader of the Opposition because this will be a big one for Fiji in the future. For us to be competitive, we just need to be smarter and, of course, organic products is a niche end which will give us lots of opportunities in the future.

Madam Speaker, we have realised this. What we have done, we have now a Committee which is chaired by the Permanent Secretary for Industry and Trade. We have convened the first meeting last year between the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism and, of course, the Ministry for Agriculture, where we discussed about organic products for Fiji.

Why trade? Madam Speaker, because in any business, the first thing that you ask is, what can I sell? That is why we have given the responsibility to the Permanent Secretary for Industry and Trade, under his Minister, if they can start making arrangement now with organic products.

The big challenge that we have now is the certification process. It is quite an expensive exercise for us to penetrate into the American, New Zealand and the Australian markets but we know the standards that they require. With the assistance of the Pacific Organic and Ethical Trade Community (POET Com), the agency that is responsible under the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), we are getting that relevant assistance. But in the meantime, some of our farmers are already into organic farming, particularly those who already have a market.

Madam Speaker, if you drive past Pacific Harbour just before the Uprising Resort, is the Ranadi Plantation which is owned by Jodi Smith and she is the biggest player, I would now say on organic, apart

from David Gilmore, who is in Wakaya. David Gilmore does organic products but Jodi Smith is perhaps, our technical person and farmer who is helping us with this. Hopefully, this will be our focus - the registration and certification, Madam Speaker, so that we can get most of our organic products, not only into our local outlets but hopefully, this is a big one for Fiji in the future because of the pristine environment that we have. So, we are developing that, Madam Speaker, and of course we look forward to the assistance from all of our stakeholders, particularly SPC and the Ministry of Industry and Trade.

HON. SPEAKER. – Thank you. Honourable Naiwaikula?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.– Madam Speaker, Honourable Cawaki was the Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee that looked into the Annual Reports. They recommended statistics in production for each commodity. Can the Honourable Minister please, maybe not now, submit to us the statistics on production for the rural areas and outside of rural as well, for each commodity for the last 10 years, so that we will know whether the production is going up or coming down?

HON. SPEAKER. – Honourable Minister?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU. – Madam Speaker, we have annual reports and this is one of the reasons, I have to admit, that we went into this exercise about agriculture and rural statistics. How reliable is the data that we have? That is questionable because of the reporting systems that we have. One of the difficulties that we had when we were developing the agricultural policy agenda was to know exactly where we were so that we can strategise and chart the way forward. So, we have started with the agriculture and statistics.

The good news now, Madam Speaker, is that the University of the South Pacific (USP), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the World Bank and FAO, are all coming for the data. So I can confidently say that the data that we have now is more reliable than what we used to produce in our annual reports. Those previous data are available, but they are subject to further analysis, I would say, Madam Speaker, because of the reporting systems. We can provide those data going back a few years, but I have stated some reasons behind that.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Parmod Chand?

HON. P. CHAND.- Madam Speaker, I would like to ask a supplementary question; the Honourable Minister mentioned about tractor, I would like to know the contribution of the farmer, the contribution of the Government and if that comes out duty-free?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Speaker, again, let me assure all farmers in Fiji, if you want to know information about all the programmes that I have stated, including the mechanisation component where farmers are assisted, it is for them to go directly to a Ministry of Agriculture Office. With machines, Madam Speaker, the selection of machines is determined by the Major Tender Board. They award the yearly contracts for the supply of machines.

With tractors and other machinery that qualifies under the programme, the farmer pays one-third. For a tractor, I would say that the contribution from the farmer or farmers group is now about \$20,000. I have just given one to the *iTaukei* farmers in Nasarowaqa in last December because they contributed about \$20,000. Depending on the size or the capacity, whether it is 45 horsepower or 65 horsepower, but ranges from \$15,000 to \$20,000. It comes with all the full component of implements, the basic ones; disk plough, harrow and everything, and farmers will be trained by whoever supplies the machines because that is part of the contract by the Major The rest of the responsibility rests with the farmers. So the



allocation of the machines is through the Major Tender Board in the Ministry of Economy, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Semesa Karavaki?

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI.- A supplementary question, Madam Speaker; the Honourable Minister mentioned about the land preparation component. Farmers have been waiting for two years now and no information has been coming from the Ministry of Agriculture about the application for land preparation. Can the Honourable Minister just explain to the House whether the Ministry is still committed to this or has it been terminated?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Speaker, definitely the Ministry is committed but unfortunately, some of the applications are lost along the system and we are doing our very best now to improve our service delivery - the processes and systems that are in place.

I do admit the fact that some applications are lost and this is something that frustrates our stakeholders but Management is working very hard to improve this. Definitely, it is not too late to resubmit, it is not too late to approach the Ministry for Agriculture again because I have talked about the production and the needs. We just need a lot of farmers now so that we can meet the expectations, particularly with the demand that we have. So we are committed, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Ratu Kiliraki?

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- A supplementary question, Madam Speaker; in terms of qualification and accessibility for assistance, can the Honourable Minister, please explain those who do not have registered leases, like you are farming on your own *mataqali* land, also qualify for this assistance like those who have leases?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Yes, Madam Speaker. The difference is that this is part of the Ministry's social responsibility. We are not a lending agency where we require collateral or security, so with the assistance insofar as machinery and all the assistance that we have, we do not have any demarcation between those who have leases and those who do not and are farming on communal land.

What is important in this, Madam Speaker, is their farming record, how well have they been farming because when we are committing these big investments, we want to ensure that they also produce the return that we expect. That is why we are encouraging farmers to be registered but nothing to do with the land leases, unless you are under the Northern Development Programme (NDP) in Vanua Levu or you are seeking assistance from the Fiji Development Bank (FDB). But with the Ministry of Agriculture, there is no difference on whether you are a lessee or whether you are just farming on communal land.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Viliame Gavoka?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam Speaker, there appears to be a disconnect here. In the Sigatoka Valley, there is only one tractor for the subsistence farmers, yet the Honourable Minister says that there are a lot of tractors around. Can I ask the Honourable Minister to try and make the connection between the Ministry and the people because in the Sigatoka Valley, the belief is that, the Ministry of Agriculture is only interested in the exporters, not in the subsistence farmers? This is the perception that is being created because there is only one tractor there and here, we are hearing a lot of tractors are around.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Speaker, we have increased the machinery in Sigatoka, including a digger. The biggest digger that we have in Fiji is in the Sigatoka Valley.

(Laughter)

Madam Speaker, on smallholder farmers, let me assure the Honourable Member that the farmers of Narata, under the Participation Guarantee System (PGS), are assisted by us. These are smallholder farmers, who are not commercial farmers, and even to the extent where the Ministry of Agriculture has allocated the cold storage facility that we have in Nacocolevu for these farmers. So that is the assistance we have given.

I was with two *tikinas* in Nadroga last Tuesday, giving out incubators to them and they asked me for machines. That is the actual complaint that we are getting that there are not enough machines. But I have encouraged them, Madam Speaker, to buy their own machines. I told them; “Give us \$20,000 or \$50,000 so that you can own your machines” because that is consistent throughout Fiji

In the Western Division, it is more challenging because we also have cane farmers who are also coming to the Ministry of Agriculture asking for the Ministry’s machines, Madam Speaker. We encourage them if they have the funds to contribute, but we are doing our very best now. There are additional machines in all the stations and what we have done is, the machines that were given to us by the Chinese for rice, we are distributing them all over Fiji as well because those machines are both for dry land and the wet land operations, so all the machineries in Fiji are accessible.

Additionally, particularly for Nadroga, we have given directive to Nacocolevu Research Stations and also other research Stations, that all machines are to be given to the farmers because previously, machines in the research stations are just for research purposes. They do not hire it out to the farmers, but that has changed. We have given them directive. In Seaqaqa, farmers close by who needs tractors, they can get access to that. In Mua, Taveuni, farmers can access that. In Nacocolevu, they can access that as well. In Legalega in Nadi, they can access those machines, so machines that are available in the research stations are also available to the farmers, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Ratu Nanovo?

HON. RATU S.V. NANOVO.- Madam Speaker, rural farm roads are one of the assistance normally required in the rural and outlying areas. As for Kadavu, I think we have already started three rural farm roads but they are yet to be completed; the one from Ravitaki to Tavuki, the one at Mokoisa and the one at Nasegai. Can we be advised as to when those rural farm roads can be completed?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Speaker, the difficulty in the islands is on the machines that go across, but let me assure the Honourable Member that Government is doing its best to work on the roads. Those roads will be completed, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Members. We will now adjourn our proceedings so we can break for morning tea. I am also inviting visitors who are in the gallery to share with the morning tea and meet with the Members of Parliament as well.

The Parliament adjourned at 11.00 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.32 a.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will resume from where we left off and I now give the floor to the Honourable Jilila Kumar to ask her question.

Progress of the 2017 National Women's Expo  
(Question No. 111/2017)

HON. J.N. KUMAR asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation inform this House on the progress of the 2017 National Women's Expo preparation?

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA (Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation).- Madam Speaker, I rise to answer the question asked by the Honourable Member.

The 2017 National Women's Expo which will be held at the Vodafone Arena from 14<sup>th</sup> June, 2017 to 16<sup>th</sup> June, 2017 was initiated way back in 2014, Madam Speaker, by your leadership. It is basically an initiative with the aim of connecting rural women to markets. For the 2017 Women's Expo, the Ministry has thus far finalised the Provincial Craft Shows from where we select women who will represent their communities or their provinces to the Expo in June.

There will be a total of 500 rural women from the various Provinces, who will be represented at the Women's Expo. The selection of these women is done by the Fiji Arts Council for artefacts, and the Ministry of Health for food preparations. So, thus far, after the Craft Shows, Madam Speaker, the Ministry is working with stakeholders, both Government and Non-Government, in preparing the logistics for the upcoming National Women's Expo.

Again, Madam Speaker, the main aim behind this is economic empowerment of women and connecting them to markets. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- I thank you Honourable Minister for your explanation and I applaud the initiative, but for a more sustainable approach, can the Honourable Minister explain what development partners or business partners have been engaged to work with these women's groups to access international markets for their product?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister?

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- Madam Speaker, as I had stated, the main aim is connecting women to markets. In initiating this, there was evidence that there was a lack of marketing rural women's products. There are a lot of women out there who are producing artefacts that can be sold nationally and internationally, but it is the marketing that was the issue here. So, sustainability of these markets, yes, the Ministry is currently working very hard, looking at a model that will be sustainable for these women. Our Expo is, like I said, an annual event. It is once a year, this is the third year and we are already working towards a long-term strategy. What is that?

We are looking right now at putting together a catalogue, first of all, to catalogue the products that are being produced by these women, particularly those who will be represented at the Women's Expo. What happens after the Women's Expo?

First of all, it will be just through social media, *Facebook*, being a very powerful tool for marketing these days. Of course, a longer term, we are already speaking with National Marketing Authority if there is any potential there, and also standalone marketing of rural women's products.

We have started talks as well with the Centre for Integrated Development for the Asia-Pacific Region to look at models in other Asia-Pacific countries that have been seen as successful. Yes, Madam Speaker, a long-term strategy, that is what we are doing at, at the moment.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Politini?

HON. H.R.T. POLITINI.- Madam Speaker, a supplementary question; can the Honourable Minister inform this august House on some of the benefits this initiative will have for these women participating in the Expo?

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- Benefits, Madam Speaker, for starters, some of these women have never had an opportunity to sell what they are making to customers. Here in Suva, that will be an opportunity. It is also an opportunity to have their products recognised as 'Fijian-Made Fijian-Crafted'. That licencing is done in conjunction with the Ministry of Industry and Trade. From 2015, a total of around 43 women have been licenced as 'Fijian-Made Fijian-Crafted' products. So, that is another benefit that will come out of this.

Apart from that, there will be side events around the Expo itself, with the general theme of 'economic empowerment of women'. That, again, is an opportunity for the training of women, capacity building and to get them to see what else is available out there by way of marketing, and the quality standards of their products.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Vadei?

HON. A.T. VADEI.- Madam Speaker, I welcome the initiative by the Honourable Minister but my question is; whether the protection of tangible and intangible artefacts, not only benefits them economically but also protecting their artefacts through intellectual property rights?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister?

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Member might be referring to the protection of traditional knowledge; that is something that can be addressed with the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, which I am sure is also looking at that matter.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Ratu Kiliraki?

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- A supplementary question, Madam Speaker; this is in regards to South Pacific Business Development (SPBD) for Women and the Honourable Minister was the guest who opened the annual celebration at the Vodafone Arena. My question is, will this SPBD be also included in this Expo?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister?

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- Madam Speaker, SPBD is also a stakeholder in preparations for the National Women's Expo. They are critical in that they are an institution that provides finance to rural women for income generating projects. With that aim in mind, they sure do complement what we do at the Ministry and along with other financial institutions, such as Westpac and BSP, who does financial

literacy training for women as a standard operation of the Ministry and also in conjunction with the National Women's Expo.

Madam Speaker, evidence shows that access of women to finance is an issue that is prevalent, not only nationally but internationally as well. SPBD is one of those institutions that harnesses this aim and delivers on the aim of financial inclusion for women, particularly from rural areas.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Bulitavu?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Madam Speaker, a supplementary question to the Honourable Minister. One of the problems that is faced by women is transportation. We are talking about women from as far as Udu Point coming to Labasa their economic centre, and the costs that are associated with that. However, when they come to a National Women's Expo, they bring artefacts and sometimes those are not sold and are kept and probably when they are sold, money is then transferred to them. They have been facing difficulties in the late payment that is coming. Are there measures in place to improve the sale of their artefacts and then receiving the money on time when it is collected here in Suva after the Expo?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- Madam Speaker, I think the Honourable Member is, again, talking about marketing of women's products. That was the whole essence of what I have been talking about here. As for the transport of these ladies, that cost is borne by Government for this particular initiative. We are also looking at ways that the Expo can sustain itself in years to come.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Prem Singh?

HON. P. SINGH.- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Minister for her response. The National Women's Expo is the third year going; what are the lessons learnt and what are the challenges that seem to be faced by women?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- Lessons learnt, Madam Speaker, are all good lessons. It is an initiative that, I think, has really achieved its initial aim of connecting women to markets and also to, first of all, expose women to what is out there in the urban centres and ways in which they can tap into untapped markets. We are talking about rural women, who cannot produce for hotels or for the tourism market. We have a market here nationally, before we even think about international markets, and that is something that we are honing in on, first of all, the national markets.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Viliame Gavoka?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam Speaker, if I could just add my concern to what was expressed by my colleague, Honourable Vadei, in the event a company or a buyer comes along and likes one of the motifs of what the ladies are producing which could be unique to their region, what would be the process for that lady to have her motif with intellectual right, to come under protection? Is there a way that there is legal assistance given to that person?

Let us be mindful of the fact that the Fiji Airways motif created a lot of controversy because it belonged to some people, I believe, in Taveuni or Lau (I think) and it created a lot of controversy that it was not obtained legally. Is there a provision from Government to provide backing to women, in the event someone wants to use one of their motifs or their products?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- Again, Madam Speaker, with traditional knowledge, that is something that the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs is looking at. They have a Unit that is actually mapping all those products and which region they are peculiar to. I do know that there is a draft law on traditional knowledge and protection of that, that is being mooted within the Ministry. It is something that the Honourable Member might want to direct his question to the correct Ministry.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I will now give the floor to the Honourable Mohammed Dean to ask his question.

Strengthening Library Facilities and Services in Schools  
(Question No. 112/2017)

HON. M.M.A. DEAN asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts inform this House as to what are some new initiatives in place by the Ministry to strengthen library facilities and services in schools around the country?

HON. DR. M. REDDY (Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts).- Madam Speaker, I rise to respond to the question asked by the Honourable Member and I thank him for asking his question.

Madam Speaker, it is widely acknowledged that school libraries play a pivotal role in the provision of quality and suitable reading resources, hence laying the solid foundation for the growth and progress of a knowledge-based society. Libraries provide an opportunity for students' holistic growth and development, and provides students for open reading, viz-a-viz what they get to read during class time which is more confined to the textbooks.

It also provides an opportunity for students to understand better from the society about the history of the country, open up to developments around the world, Madam Speaker. We see libraries as a very important integral component of the school system. If we want to produce products out of our education system which are not local products but responsive to the global situation, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, library development in Fiji has evolved and transformed drastically over the last five decades. The Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts through its Library Services has, over the past two years, contributed immensely to the provision of access to information and knowledge to schools, as well as to the few public libraries that we are looking after. We are also supporting some of the libraries looked after by Ministry of Local Government, like the Suva City Library here in Suva, the library in Nadi, et cetera.

Madam Speaker, we are supporting the libraries through our budgetary allocation. In this financial year, we have been allocated \$450,000 to assist in the development of libraries throughout Fiji, and this amount is also directed towards the setup of libraries in schools.

Madam Speaker, since 2014, the Library Services of Fiji has been focussing to install proper infrastructure inside the libraries in our schools, and to set up advisory services to be carried out in schools. Sometimes back, Madam Speaker, you would have noted when you and I were in school in the rural areas, we used to see Mobile Libraries because schools did not have dedicated libraries. We have moved away from that now and we are establishing dedicated library spaces in schools so that when we provide reading materials, there is a place to store them and there is a place for students to go down and sit and read. Also, we can allow teachers to set up dedicated time in their timetable for library reading.

Otherwise, we, promoting library reading becomes futile because it does not get factored into the timetable because there is no dedicated library.

So, in this regard, Madam Speaker, we have been promoting schools to construct dedicated library spaces. From 2014 till today, a total of 414 schools libraries were set up. These included 313 libraries set up in primary schools and 96 libraries set up in secondary schools. Madam Speaker, some primary schools in the interior, rural and maritime Division, they still do not have a dedicated library space, so we are trying to work towards this.

Those 313 libraries that were set up in 2014 is a huge milestone for us, Madam Speaker, noting that we have got about 726 primary schools. We still have a few schools that do not have a dedicated library space, and we are trying our best to do that. Over the last three years, we had set up new dedicated library space for 313 primary schools and 96 secondary schools, a total of 440.

In addition to that, Madam Speaker, from last year till to-date, we had set up 77 Early Childhood Education (ECE) Library Corners. We had also, over the past two years, done community library meetings, Youth Centre Libraries and we had also have set up dedicated library rooms for Technical Colleges.

Madam Speaker, as I alluded to earlier on, we have also supported the setup of Library Corners in ECE Centres and now, we have established 77 ECE Centres with a Library Corner. The Library Corner includes a steel shelf, reading resources, educational toys, games, so these has provided an additional support to the ECE teacher in terms of picking up additional resources for students.

Madam Speaker, we have also encouraged schools to use 10 percent of their Free Education Grant to buy reading materials and stock up their libraries. These reading materials include, encyclopedia, storybooks, et cetera, for libraries.

In addition, Madam Speaker, we have also assisted schools with the building and renovation of library facilities additional outside the library grant. Since 2015 to-date, we have spent \$432,000 for the construction of library rooms outside the library grant, the small grants that we have from the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts.

Madam Speaker, we are also working very closely with NGOs and international counterparts in order to strengthen information and knowledge sharing for lifelong learning. In 2016, through the South-South Cooperation Project, we collaborated with JICA to assist our Pacific Island neighbours in the development of their school libraries by conducting a regional training on Basic School Library Management.

In the past two years, the Library Services of Fiji has seen the tremendous effects of networking and partnership with NGOs and international donors to assist the Department. In this regard, we have worked very closely with Vision Fiji in the project 'Read to Lead', Madam Speaker. The Project's objectives are to ensure that we provide relevant reading materials to all primary schools.

Madam Speaker, what they did was, they had a dedicated package of materials that was required in a primary school from Year 1 to Year 8. With funding from AusAID through the 'Read to Lead' Project over the past two years, we supplied the package which contains a box with a standard reading package for Year 1 to Year 8. 352 schools have been provided with that package, and we are looking at completing all the primary schools in the next two years' time.

Madam Speaker, this is in detail the kinds of assistance we have provided to our schools and public libraries, as well as the local government libraries, to ensure that we contribute towards the holistic

development of our children by encouraging them to undertake open reading. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Vunivalu?

HON. S.B. VUNIVALU.- A supplementary question, Madam Speaker; can the Honourable Minister for Education provide details of acquisition of books that were made over the last two years in school libraries around the country?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, as alluded to, we have been providing storybooks to our school libraries throughout Fiji. In 2015, we had an allocation of \$90,830 which was provided for 1,762 acquisition; 12,296 for accessioning and 32,191 for cataloguing, with a total cost of \$134,000. In 2016, we spent a total of \$220,000 to acquire storybooks to be provided to schools throughout Fiji.

You would note, Madam Speaker, that there is a major chunk of acquisition from 1,762 titles in 2015 to 28,000 titles in 2016. All these 28,047 titles with the value of \$220,000 last year, was distributed to all the schools throughout Fiji. You can see the impact that it has if we have a dedicated library space to hold these books, and then allow teachers to timetable and take children to these libraries and encourage them to read.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Nawaikula?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, it is very important now for students to have access to the internet. Can the Honourable Minister advise us that in these 414 schools, they have computers that allow students (not teachers) to have access to the internet for the purpose of research, and if not, will he be looking into that?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, all the urban schools have a dedicated computer lab and computers. Most of the rural schools have a dedicated computer lab and computers but there are still some schools in the deep interior and maritime areas, particularly primary schools that do not have a computer lab. In some, the PCs are in the normal room and there are dedicated time for children to go and access the PCs and not only learn Word and Excel, but also be able to learn how to Google and search for educational materials.

Progressively, Madam Speaker, when encouraging them to construct a dedicated computer lab, we are assisting them via two ways. Firstly, we are allowing them to save from their Free Education Grant and vire that money towards the construction of a dedicated computer lab, and we are providing building fund. Secondly, we have, over the last three years, provided money for the construction of dedicated computer labs but it will take time because we have limited amount money which we are also utilising to construct quarters in the interior where they need quarters because without quarters, you cannot post teachers, Madam Speaker. So there is a bit of constraint, but it will take time.

We are working towards ensuring that in the interior, schools have enough quarters, a dedicated library and a dedicated computer lab. Some schools, Madam Speaker, have their computer room and library room merged into one and, therefore, it is used for both purposes.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Nabulivou?



HON. A. NABULIVOU.- Madam Speaker, a supplementary question; can the Honourable Minister explain if his Ministry assists schools with the set up and provision of library furniture?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, yes we do, and I want to thank the Honourable Member for asking that question. We have dedicated amount of funds whereby when our library team goes out to set up a library, and we also provide furniture. Over the last two years, 2015 and 2016, we had supported 210 schools with special furniture to set up their library and these are different furniture, not normal tables. These are racks, et cetera, Madam Speaker.

In 2015, we assisted 80 primary schools and 23 secondary schools. In 2016, we assisted 77 primary schools and 30 secondary schools, so a total of 210 schools were assisted with furniture to set up the library over the last two years.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Prem Singh?

HON. P. SINGH.- Madam Speaker, it is good to strengthen the library services by providing facilities and books. My question to the Honourable Minister is; if he can inform this House whether reading is part of the curriculum, and if not, whether he intends to introduce that as part of the curriculum?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, every year from Year 1 right up to Year 13, it is part of the curriculum for the students to do open reading, access materials in the library and there are journals, newspapers and periodicals, so it gets them to go and read library materials.

In addition to that, Madam Speaker, in primary schools, they have compulsory journal writing where every week, a student will be required to write a small piece which will be assessed by the teacher. So it requires students to definitely go and do open reading.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Leawere?

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Madam Speaker, I would just like to ask the Honourable Minister for Education if there are any plans to celebrate 'World Book Day' to complement library week around schools in Fiji?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Yes, Madam Speaker, every year we celebrate that throughout Fiji. In addition to that, we also have library days celebrated throughout Fiji in every town where our Library Team visits them. They will have it in the town area somewhere and invite all the school libraries to come with their children, and there will be sponsors there as well with free books to give out. So, yes, we will be celebrating that.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Viliame Gavoka?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam Speaker, can the Honourable Minister just confirm to the House that with the responsibility given to the librarians in schools, the librarians are well trained in cataloguing and safekeeping of books, their circulation, et cetera? I say this, Madam Speaker, because in the tourism belt, a lot of books are brought in by tourists and I was chairman of a school and I noticed that the books were not properly kept. I would urge the Honourable Minister to ensure that the management of books is properly structured, cataloguing and things like that.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, yes, I want to assure the Honourable Member that we are also undertaking training of librarians. In fact, a lot of Library Attendants or Library Assistants in schools, a small but significant number of them are not qualified librarians because the library qualification has not been offered that widely for long. It is only recently that the University of the South Pacific (USP) started to offer that qualification, maybe about 10 or 15 years ago and the Fiji National University (FNU) started about four years ago.

A lot of the libraries have persons who are not qualified, so for the last three years, we have been holding short courses for them on libraries - cataloguing and how to encourage students to undertake reading, et cetera. So they are being trained through our Library Services.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Leader of Opposition?

HON. RO T.V. KEPÄ.- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Minister for his answer to the questions. My question to the Honourable Minister is that, many of the students who are using these library facilities also have mobile phones, so they are using mobile phones to do texting. With their texting, their spelling becomes an issue. My question to the Honourable Minister is, besides these library facilities, what are you putting in place to assist the students with their spelling?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, the two components to the Honourable Member's question, one is the issue of texting and spelling and I do agree with that, that it is an issue. We had some initial discussions with the mobile phone companies on how they could block those kind of words which are not correctly spelt but we have not completed the discussions. That is something that we are worried about.

However, the whole issue of vocabulary, comprehension and spelling that have been captured in the language courses that we have from Year 1 to Year 13, again, we need to ensure that we encourage students and children at home, et cetera, that when they converse or write, they should use correct spelling.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Honourable Netani Rika to ask his question.

Identifying and Assisting School Dropouts  
(Question No. 113/2017)

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

There are circumstances in which some children are compelled to drop out of the schooling process. Can the Honourable Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts inform this House on what the Ministry is doing to identify these students and how is the Ministry planning to assist these children?

HON. DR. M. REDDY (Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts).- Madam Speaker, I rise to respond to the question asked by the Honourable Member and I thank him for raising that question. This is something that we have recently discovered, and is something that we now need to actively examine.

With that, Madam Speaker, one of the main issues that our Government has been talking about is the accessibility to education. It is in this regard that you would have noted, Madam Speaker, I provided statistics in the past about some of the new schools - primary and high schools, that we have constructed

so that parents do not see accessibility as an issue. In the past, parents were saying that their children had to travel quite a long distance to attend primary school from Year 1.

Madam Speaker, sending a six year old child to go away from home and stay in a boarding school has been an issue and in some cases, had contributed to dropouts. We were thinking that, at least, the primary school education should be within the comforts of their own vicinity and home. And it is in this regard that we have had, over the last so many years, looked at constructing primary schools closer to where the villages and homes are, to the extent that we have schools in the interior and the deep interior maritime Division where the rolls are 20, 21 to 22 and we have not closed those schools because children are still there and we do not want to put them in boarding facilities.

Madam Speaker, since last year, despite all that we have done, we have closely been examining, to ensure that accessibility to education is not an issue. For example, we have providing transportation, bus fare subsidy, free tuition fee and ensuring that Year 1 children do not drop out just because they cannot afford to have a meal.

With all those, Madam Speaker, we noted from our Ministry of Education Information System Database, the situation with regards to students dropping out. From 2016 to 2017, we noted that 1,157 students dropped out (and this is from our Information Data System) and who did not move from one year to the other. The breakdown is as follows:

<b>Education District</b>	<b>Out of School Children</b>
Ba/Tavua	83
Cakaudrove	80
Eastern	63
Lautoka/Nadi/Yasawa	214
Macuata/Bua	115
Nadroga/Navosa	81
Nausori	189
Ra	45
Suva	287
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,157</b>

So we noted a total of 1,157 did not continue.

We took into account those who left early or move on to a technical college or university. Separating that data, we still found that these students dropped out. We noted that there may be cases, like lack of parental or guardian engagement to motivate the children to attend school or there may be some family issues, that probably they are from a single parent family and one of the children has to stay back home to look after the family or the child losing interest in schoolwork due to some reasons or maybe, there is a special need of the child that was not accommodated. So we decided to undertake a special call and to meet them face-to-face, funded by the Australian Access to Quality Education Programme (AQEP) that provided us funding this year to hold face-to-face meetings with these children, to see what maybe the cause.

Madam Speaker, we had two meetings; one in Lautoka and one in Nadi, and I want to note that it was a very good meeting. We had close to 100 students in both places and almost all of them have now volunteered to come back to school, either to high school or to technical college, and we have made arrangements to also look after their educational needs so that they can enter the school. We are working very closely with Save the Children to provide them with the necessary resources that they need, to the extent that we have also promised them that we will provide them with uniforms, should they require.

Madam Speaker, it is quite promising that we want to hold this workshop, again funded by AQEP, throughout Fiji this year and get those students back to school, so that we give them the basic education and skills that will provide them with an opportunity to enter the labour market and have a better life.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Singh, you have the floor.

HON. B. SINGH.- Madam Speaker, a supplementary question; can the Honourable Minister provide details of short courses via the Campus of Technical College in Fiji?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, I want to thank the Honourable Member for asking this question. As I alluded to earlier on, we have also encouraged these students to come and undertake short courses at the various campuses of our technical college that we have throughout Fiji. The short courses that we offer do not require any tuition fee. The short courses range from two to four weeks and are in the area of construction, such as painting, tile-laying, brick-laying, engineering, cookery, bakery, patisserie, beauty therapy, agriculture and garment production.

Madam Speaker, we have found that there is a huge interest amongst the children to undertake short courses, not only children who have dropped out of the school system, but also those who left school and had been staying at home. We noted that last year, 2016, we had 7,190 students who came and undertook short courses at our various campuses, as detailed in the table below:

Students for Short Courses at Various Campuses in 2016

<b>Campus</b>	<b>No. of Students</b>
Nadroga Provincial Council	330
Rakiraki	113
Tagitagi	113
Bua	103
Wainikoro	51
Navua	294
Suva Textiles & Hospitality	987
Nabua Sanatan	1,229
Labasa	481
Nausori	568
Lautoka	1,024
Nadi	1,897
<b>Total</b>	<b>7,190</b>

Madam Speaker, this again is one way of getting the students who had dropped out, encouraging them to come and undertake short courses and up-skill themselves into any of these trade area and then we encourage them to enter the labour market and get a better livelihood. So this is the way for dealing with raising their income profile rather than artificially looking at the minimum wage that someone has been arguing for. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Dulakiverata?

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- Madam Speaker, a supplementary question; can the Honourable Minister advise this House, how many school dropouts you have in a year?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, I just mentioned earlier on that we had about 1,100 dropouts that we saw, who dropped out but did not come back either to the technical college or any vocational programme or the university programmes, so we are now going around.

We have done Lautoka and Nadi and that has encouraged them. I think all of them have said that they will come back in Term 2, or some of them will join when the next trimester starts for the technical college and we are working with Save the Children to see how we could provide them with the resources that they required when they come back.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Leader of the Opposition?

HON. RO T.V. KEP.A.- Madam Speaker, a supplementary question; in terms of the school dropouts which the Honourable Minister had mentioned, 1,157 students dropping out, we know that students start dropping out at Year 2. In terms of identifying the students early, what type of counselling facilities or programmes are there available in the Ministry to identify at risk and high risk students to offer them interventions, to prevent them on this downward spiral where they drop out of school?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Member is talking about at-risk students.

Inn a school system, if students do come forward with any particular problem, then the school has a database of students who have some kind of issues or problems. We could assist the schools to further pursue if these students need any particular assistance, but the dropout data is obtained in full during mid-year when we see that they are not continuing. However, going back to the question about at-risk students, the only database we have at the school is when there are some issues or problems, then the school do note down and keep a list of those students, do counselling and support them. So that particular data could be collected and seen if they could need any support at the national level.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Nawaikula?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, the percentage of dropouts is a very big number, especially when you have free this and free that and you can take parents into account, and the Honourable Minister had stated that his Ministry has consulted them. Could he advise this House what were the reasons for such a big number?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. The Honourable Minister?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, 1,157 over 226,000 students is 0.005 (0.05 percent), so he is saying that it is a big number. For him, .05 percent is a big number. This is the quality of lawyers we have on the other side.

(Laughter)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- You must tell us the reason!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, I just told him that we are now going around examining what the issue is and how we can bring them back. You did not listen!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- (inaudible)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- You didn't listen!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- (inaudible)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- You didn't listen to my presentation. Read the *Hansard* tomorrow.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- You're not doing your job!

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Radrodro?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Madam Speaker, just a supplementary question to the Honourable Minister. We have heard a lot of initiatives being taken and the two meetings that they have had. Can the Honourable Minister advise this House whether he is considering providing home schooling programme to these affected students and provide them with online gadgets so that they can do their classroom activities from home?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, we have got a massive infrastructure out there throughout Fiji. It is not like in Australia or New Zealand but we have got two large islands and those schools are all throughout Fiji, and we have got schools right in the interior and maritime division that we want to provide those children accessibility to education. That is the infrastructure we want to use to educate those children.

On home-schooling, Madam Speaker, that is the responsibility of parents to provide home schooling and not us. However, we are trying to identify the children who may have problems and at the moment, we have finished Lautoka and Nadi. We are going to do that throughout Fiji and see what their issues are and how we could support them using NGOs, using our resources to bring them back to school. If they are not interested in the higher education stream, we can take them to the technical stream.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Viliame Gavoka?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam Speaker, I continue to be intrigued by a number of factors:

1. there is high unemployment;
2. we are importing a lot of basic skills; and
3. what are the technical colleges producing, to fill this skill gap that we are importing?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, I do not know where his figure is from when he is saying, 'high unemployment'. What is high unemployment? Where is your data?

(Hon. Member interjects)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- What is your data? Why do you not say a data? What is high unemployment? What is high?

Madam Speaker, this is the problem with the other side, they do not have data, and they will start making all kinds of general comments, generalisations.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, the technical college, as the Honourable Member has asked will provide technical education in the areas of construction, engineering, hospitality, garment, et cetera. So, we have got several programmes in each of these mainstream areas and targeting to upskill them. A large number of students came out, not only in short courses, but the one-year work programme and, in fact, Certificate 2 Level in electrical, mechanical, automotive in the area of engineering, construction, carpentry and joinery, baking and patisserie and also, garment and textiles. All of them, once they finish, quite readily they are able to get into the labour market.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, thank you very much. Since we have just a few minutes left, we can break for lunch now. We will adjourn this proceedings. Please note that lunch is provided for Honourable Members in the Big Committee Room. Honourable Members of the Business Committee are reminded of our meeting in the Small Committee Room.

The Parliament will resume proceedings at 2.30 p.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.23 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.30 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will continue from where we left off.

### MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

HON. SPEAKER.- The following Ministers have given notice to make Ministerial Statements under Standing Order 40:

1. Minister for Health and Medical Services;
2. Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts;
3. Minister for Local Government, Housing and Environment, Infrastructure and Transport; and
4. Minister for Industry, Trade and Tourism.

Each Minister may speak up to 20 minutes. After each Minister, I will then invite the Leader of the Opposition, or her designate, to speak on the statement for no more than five minutes. There will also be a response from the Leader of the NFP, or his designate, to also speak for five minutes. There will be no other debate.

I now call on the Minister for Health and Medical Services to deliver her statement.

#### Shortages and Stock-Outs of Medicine

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Madam Speaker, before I begin with my presentation, I ask this august House and the nation to pray for the safe rescue of our doctor from Qarani Health Centre and the villagers who are still missing at sea since Sunday, and as the search and rescue continues let us pray for their safe return, and we remember their families in this difficult time.

That is what happens, Madam Speaker, some people take sensitive issues very lightheartedly. Anyways, Madam Speaker, we know that health is a global issue and there are a lot of challenges associated with it and, of course, a very sensitive one as it deals with life and death situation. It deals with emotions of people and issues of great concern and controversy at times as well.

Issues related to infrastructure, medicine, drug shortage and stock-outs, human resources and service delivery have existed for decades and many a times, politicising these issues and making irrational judgments and remarks without realising that there is no quick fix to the issue such as the one we are dealing with now, can be harmful.

Madam Speaker, it takes a lot of courage and commitment to look at practical solutions, strategic measures to address the challenges to deliver the best services to the people we are mandated to serve. Having said that, Madam Speaker, I addressed this august House earlier on, on the Free Medicine Programme and the appropriate steps that was taken to enhance the successful implementation of this Programme, an initiative of the Fijian Government and the Manifesto item of the FijiFirst Government. I stand again to assure the House that the Free Medicine Programme has been fully implemented in partnership with our local private pharmacists, and I ask every Fijian who qualifies for this Programme to take advantage of it.

Madam Speaker, this afternoon, I also rise to address the issues of shortages and stock-outs of medicine in our hospitals, which has been a persistent problem and a challenge for our health system for many, many years.



These are symptoms of bigger underlying programmes that have been existing for a long, long time but have either been ignored or addressed inappropriately.

Madam Speaker, I wish to inform this House that Fiji is not alone and it is sometimes struggling to maintain adequate supplies of medicines around our facilities. The World Health Organisation reports that major hospitals in developed countries such as, the United States, Canada and Australia also experience frequent shortages and stock-outs of medicines, especially injectable drugs.

The United States of America reported that more than 280 medicines were out of stock at some time in 2012. In Australia, the Government's Therapeutic Products Agency operates some medicine shortage information initiative, which provides online information about prescription and medicine shortages. I am informed that as of last night, the site listed 194 current shortages, the oldest of which has lasted for more than a year.

The WHO has also stated that shortages of medicines are a global problem and causes are not new. They include manufacturing issues, increased global demand and various supply chain disruptions. Those factors impact on Fiji just as they do to the rest of the world.

Madam Speaker, secondly, we need to realise that we are a small remote island nation. It takes months for deliveries of medicines to reach our shores and at times, the manufacturers and wholesalers stocks are low. They will give priority to orders placed by larger wealthier countries that may not appear to be fair but that is a commercial reality.

Madam Speaker, despite those truly global challenges, we are committed to ensuring that Fijians enjoy the best possible access to essential medicines and in doing so, we are improving our pharmaceutical procurement and supply systems. I wish to also make it clear that the problems we face today in regards to drugs and consumable stock-outs and shortages are issues that are not new, it has existed for decades. These are problems that we are fixing, and not problems that we are ignoring. The challenges related to stock-outs cannot and will not be resolved overnight but they are challenges that the Ministry is seeking to address with energy and enthusiasm.

Madam Speaker, if I may, I would like to also explain to the House some key aspects of our pharmaceutical procurement and supply system. Each year, the Ministry of Health seeks tenders for almost 500 essential medicines. Of course, the list of available medicines are in thousands but we are mandated to have 493 as part of the Essential Medicine List. The list is further divided into three categories; Vitals, Essentials and Non-Essentials.

Apart from these medicines, Madam Speaker, the Ministry also purchases nine other medical product categories:

1. vaccines;
2. laboratory reagents;
3. consumables;
4. medical dressings;
5. biomedical equipment; medical and surgical consumables;
6. reproductive health commodities;
7. dental materials;
8. bedding linen; and finally
9. uniforms for our nurses.

The lead time between placing an order for supplies and their arrival in Fiji is typically between three to six months. Most items come by sea, and only selected products and urgent orders come by air freight which is several times more costly.

Madam Speaker, stock-outs typically occur when there is a sudden unexpected increase in demand for a particular product. For example, an outbreak of infection in a hospital or in a wider community, will often result in higher than expected utilisation of medical supplies.

For the procurement of medicines, for example, Madam Speaker, the Ministry has to ensure that the medicines provided through the health facilities are safe, effective and good quality. Compromised quality or substandard medicines would mean compromising the health and the safety of our patients. Therefore, prequalification of manufacturers programme takes place as part of our procurement process. Pre-qualification is a process of selecting manufacturers who meet acceptable, quality standards criteria for producing quality and safe medicines. Not all manufacturers around the world are good manufacturers and the Ministry's processes of prequalification is our due diligence process to ensure medicines used by people are of acceptable quality, resulting to people getting better.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry cannot go to any manufacturer to buy the medicine that are seen to be affordable unless the prequalification process is being fulfilled. The World Health Organisation has called all countries to strengthen systems to counter counterfeit medicines that have been circulated in the market and unfortunately, developing countries are victims of such unscrupulous activities. The Ministry of Health has 99 prequalified manufactures from India and other Asian countries to manufacture our medicines.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Health also has prequalified traders and distributors to ensure that they have capacities to provide the supply performance expected by the Government. Traders are usually the 'go between' the manufactures and the client, and financial transaction requirements. For medicines, we have 13 traders who are awarded with a contract to supply medicine.

Madam Speaker, there are quality assurance activities in our procurement processes, to ensure that we get the best value for public taxpayers' fund and most importantly, quality products for the health services.

Madam Speaker, let me also elaborate that one of the challenges we encounter while procuring these medicines from our international suppliers is the delayed expected time of arrival of the medicines in terms of shipment delays, manufacturer delay, production issues, regulatory issues and manufacturing countries concerning good manufacturing standards, and also there is a high demand for medicines globally. So you might question, why do we not hold more stock to ensure we can cope such with such surges and demand? That is a very fair question and a superficially appealing suggestion.

But, Madam Speaker, the reality is that, many medicines have a limited shelf life and cannot safely be used after a certain period of time. If we were to hold larger stocks as a buffer against peaks in demand, there would be a much greater risk of medicines going out-of-date and having to be disposed of, potentially wasting a great deal of money.

Madam Speaker, our wastage rate, that is, proportion of the medicines that we order but which go out of date is now just 2 percent. That is excellent, but it also means that stock-outs are more common. We need to look again at where we strike a balance between reducing the cost of wasted medicines and increasing the risk of stock-outs. Long lead times and the need to reduce wastage are just two examples of the complex issues that we face in seeking to ensure a reliable supply of medicines at a cost that our nation can afford.

Madam Speaker, I have assured the House that I am committed to improving the Pharmaceutical Procurement and Supply System. One fundamental weakness where change is already underway is the crucial area of human resources. Managing a complex procurement and supply operation requires highly skilled staff. In the past, the Ministry has treated this vital area as no different from any other more routine administrative functions. In fact, it needs people with specialised skills who can oversee sophisticated business processes both, centrally at the National Pharmaceutical Warehouse and at the hospital level, where stock of drugs and other items are held and made available to our patients and health professionals.

Madam Speaker, we have already recruited more pharmacy assistants who will be able to better manage stocks at local level. We are also seeking to ensure that the job evaluation process which is currently underway as part of the reform across the Civil Service, gives due recognition to the demands of the modern day supply system. We need to offer levels of remuneration that are adequate to attract expert staff, who might otherwise be tempted by similar opportunities in retail or other distribution industries.

So looking more broadly, Madam Speaker, and again, as further evidence of our commitment to tackle the persistent problem of shortages and stock-outs, the Ministry of Health and Medical Services recently obtained support from the Australian Government through DFAT to appoint an expert in Health Supply Chain Management to review our system and provide a plan for its improvement. That Plan was submitted to me in draft form last week. It provides a clear basis on which we can begin to build a better system, and I wish to put on record by appreciation to DFAT for their support.

Madam Speaker, the draft Plan contains almost 40 specific action points in areas such as, information system and technology, purchasing and contract management, business processes and organisational structure and management. The plan has only been with the Ministry for a few days now and many of the details are still under review, as I have already indicated. However, one area which demonstrates the extent to which the supply system has been neglected over many, many years is the information system and technology.

Madam Speaker, as I stand here today, the purchasing, storage and distribution of Essential Medicines throughout Fiji is being handled by a computer system which was installed in 2003, and has never subsequently been upgraded. What is more, a company that supplied the system has not supported it for the past nine years, which means that any problems are not fixed, and there is no guarantee of recovery from the large scale failure.

Madam Speaker, the computer system is so old that it is no longer fit for purpose and staff are forced to adopt manual approaches for many key tasks. Needless to say, these processes are slow and prone to errors. A more up-to-date system would not only improve processes at our central warehouse, it would also support better management of stocks at the hospital level and ensure fewer shortages and stock-outs across the system as a whole.

Madam Speaker, the Government will address the weaknesses that afflict our Pharmaceutical Procurement and Supply System. As evidence, I can inform the House that during our recent visit to India, the Honourable Attorney-General and I took the opportunity to see the demonstration of a state-of-the-art computerised supply system that is in use in some of India's leading hospitals and health services. We were both impressed by what we saw and I have asked that we give serious consideration to acquiring the system for use here in Fiji and take up the Indian Government's offer of support and capacity building. At the same time, Madam Speaker, I recognise that this is a highly specialised field in which all of us are not experts. So, we are going to take the Government of India's support and expert advice on how the system will be best suited for our country's need.

Madam Speaker, the recent review has also highlighted the need to strengthen senior management and governance of the Fiji Pharmaceutical and Biomedical Services (FPBS). While I wish to further acknowledge FPBS, with the current leadership, I also note that they are being asked to undertake tasks that are beyond their levels of expertise. With that in mind, the Ministry is currently about to begin the process of recruiting a more senior officer who can provide the expert leadership that is needed. Madam Speaker, again, that demonstrates that we are taking action to sort out the supply system and reverse the threats of decades of neglect.

Madam Speaker, making political capital out of the issue of pharmaceutical shortage and stock-outs is inappropriate and will be very unhelpful to our people. The most basic review of international news report conveys that shortages of medicine occur throughout the world. The stock-out report list provided to me by the Honourable Professor Prasad is routinely produced for internal circulation, as a tool to help our doctors at our facilities to plan their management of patients. Many of the drugs listed as out of stock have alternatives, to suggest it signals our crisis, risks causing unnecessary concern on the part of patients and, of course, show the lack of confidence in our doctors.

I wish to conclude by again informing the House that we have focussed on tackling the weaknesses in our Pharmaceutical Supply System from the first day in my office as the Minister for Health and Medical Services. Those weaknesses are a result of decades of neglect, as evidenced by inadequacies in the current computer system and, of course, it will take some time to resolve, but we are making progress everyday.

Madam Speaker, as a Minister, I will not settle for quick fixes which may offer short term benefits, but merely to solve problems in future. We will take a more methodological approach, based on expert analysis and provide Fijians with lasting improvement.

Madam Speaker, if Honourable Members of this august House, especially those on the other side are not serious about making positive contributions, then they must be reminded again that health issues should not be negotiated from a power political point of view, but managed on the grounds of expert and technical knowledge. And that, Madam Speaker, I trust the House should agree and is a sensible way to proceed. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Leader of the Opposition or her designate to speak in response.

HON. A.T. VADEL.- Madam Speaker, first of all, I would like to thank the Honourable Minister for Health for delivering her Ministerial Statement on this issue. I wonder as to why there is no mention of herbal medicine, whether the Ministry of Health is serious about working on herbal medicine in our country?

Madam Speaker, it is the responsibility of the Honourable Minister for Health, to ensure that there is no shortage in the supply of medicines and medical supplies in her own Ministry, as well as the FPBS. A turn in any Ministry or Government is one that continuously addresses this issue because the lives of patients and all Fijians are important to them.

Section 38 of the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji talks about the right to health and the Honourable Minister and her Ministry are mandated to provide the best health services for the people and ensure that no one is denied essential medical services.

Madam Speaker, the maintenance of an efficient public health system is largely dependent on having a robust supply chain management to eradicate delays and minimise stock outages. The

Honourable Minister and her Ministry should have regular follow-ups on all orders placed and charged for delays in supply. There is a need to review and improve the procurement process.

Madam Speaker, for the effective and efficient services, this will ensure that there is no overstock or shortage of drugs in Health Centres and Hospitals as witnessed in the CWM Hospital and Valelevu Health Centre. The Honourable Minister should ensure that a valid contract is in place with all suppliers of medical supplies and equipment at all times, as recommended in the Auditor General's Report. It was noted in the Auditor's Report that the FPBS did not sign contractual agreements with the suppliers of medicines and medical supplies, resulting in performance bond requirements not strictly adhered to.

Madam Speaker, as I mentioned earlier, the lives of all our Fijians is very important and the Honourable Minister must always ensure that the need for medicine and medical services are continuously addressed and processes and systems are strictly followed.

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Minister for Health should also ensure that regular or periodic stock counts are undertaken on all medicine and medical supplies, to ensure that there is enough supply in stock before the next order of supplies arrive. The Ministry must ensure that proper maintenance of records of drugs and consumable stock is in the EPICOR System and stockcards to prevent theft. It is also important for the Ministry to have regular discussions with the suppliers of medicine and medical supplies in order to resolve delays in supply.

Madam Speaker, another reason for delay in the supply of medicine and medical supplies is the delay of payment of invoices due to process issues by the Ministry of Health. It is again the responsibility of the Honourable Minister for Health to work with the Honourable Minister for Economy in trying to resolve those issues, to ensure that there is no delay in payments to suppliers, leading to shortage in supply of medicine to the general public.

To conclude, Madam Speaker, the medicine procurement process and the Free Medicine Programme are a failure. According to the Consumer Council of Fiji, citizens or consumers are always complaining about medicine unavailability or medicine shortage in health centres and hospitals all around Fiji.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Honourable Leader of the National Federation Party or his designate to speak in response.

HON. M.M.A. DEAN.- Point of Order, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of Order.

HON. M.M.A. DEAN.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Vadei is referring to an Audited Report. I just want to ask which year he is referring to.

(Inaudible)

HON. M.M.A. DEAN.- Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the designate of the Leader of NFP to present his response.

HON. P. CHAND.- Madam Speaker, I wish to thank and acknowledge the Honourable Minister for Health for delivering her Ministerial Statement. Yes, it is an ongoing problem that we have been

seeing and this problem of shortage of medicine and medical supplies in our hospitals in Fiji need to be really looked at very properly.

Madam Speaker, let me say that we are thoroughly disappointed with the way the whole procurement of medicine and medical supplies is done by the Government of the day. Like many other issues affecting our nation, this Government is indeed paying a lip service to the fundamental issue of providing basic health care to our citizens in our health centres and public hospitals.

(Honourable Government Members interject)

HON. P. CHAND.- I always hear the other side say; “This is the unprecedented thing that they have done”, but this is the most precedent failure that we have seen with the Government of the day in looking after the people who are unhealthy in this nation by providing medical services, medical supplies and medicine.

Madam Speaker, two months ago, they simply highlighted; “Unprecedented”, but what are we talking about?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, you do not have to respond to interjections. Your time is going.

HON. P. CHAND.- Yes, thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, indeed in hospitals, they run out of ECG gel. Many times, stock run out. We have vehicles, when the fuel runs dry we go and refill it. In the same way, pharmacies in hospitals need to refill their stock. It is an ongoing issue, it is not something new, it is not one-off so it is very, very important.

Madam Speaker, two months ago, we highlighted in this august House the shortage of chemicals used to process x-ray films whereby we are denying patients the right to get x-rayed and diagnosed. This problem remains unresolved, and the Government has to be reminded about what the Honourable Minister said in Parliament when this issue was raised by the Honourable Prem Singh on 10th February, 2017. And what transpired in the last two months is relevant to what was said by the Honourable Minister regarding the issue of medicine, and I will demonstrate how this will be another one of the same old story, the same fable. They call it NATO, Madam Speaker, ‘No Action Talk Only’, that is all.

(Laughter)

The Honourable Minister said that only wet film processing which is processing a film after an x-ray was done, was not being conducted by dry film processing and digital imaging was conducted. She said that wet film processing has phased out but chemicals would be arriving at the end of the month, which was February. February came and gone, the situation has not changed, so this is something that we really need to look at.

Madam Speaker, I just want to ask the Honourable Minister; does she know what is happening in her Ministry?

HON. R.S AKBAR.- Of course, I do.

HON. P. CHAND.- I do not believe so. For example, despite her assurance to this Parliament two months ago, the major hospitals do not have chemicals to process x-ray films. Patients go to hospitals only to be told that they cannot get an x-ray.

Madam Speaker, last week, a patient from Nadi who has a fractured thighbone, hired a taxi and went to Lautoka Hospital on his designated date of review and x-ray. He was told that the x-ray could not be done and he had to pay \$100 as taxi hire charges. Will the Ministry compensate him because it is not his fault that the x-ray could not be done? I will not be distracted by this group of loud mouths.

(Laughter)

The hospital did not even have the decency and courtesy of informing him that the x-ray service was out of order.

Madam Speaker, again last week, a woman who is a cancer patient was taken for review and x-ray at the CWM Hospital. She could not do the x-ray because there were no chemicals to process the film. So this is the situation that is happening.

We simply need to ask this question; in the Constitution, it is clearly provided for health and everything but does the State have sufficient resources to provide health care for all? If it has, then shortage and lack of medicine and medical supplies need not be an issue. We ask; what has happened to the allocation of a quarter million dollars in the last two Budgets to hire consultants to streamline procurement procedures of medical supplies?

Madam Speaker, if private pharmacies can be sufficiently stocked with the list of medicines being listed as in the short and nil supply, why can the Fiji Pharmaceutical Society which has millions of dollars at its disposal or what is shown in the Budget not in a state of preparedness at all times?

(Honourable Government Members interject)

HON. P. CHAND.- Madam Speaker, we call on the Government to look into this matter very properly. Instead of shouting, they should listen to us and go and fix the problem. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I did give you a few extra seconds because of the disruptions that you had to endure, but it is not a precedent.

I now call on the Honourable Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts to deliver his statement.

#### Strengthening Special and Inclusive Education Sector

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and Honourable Members of Parliament; I wish to speak on the topic; “Strengthening Special and Inclusive Education Sector”.

Madam Speaker, Sustainable Development Goal 4 of the 17 Goals focusses on quality education and aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. This Goal requires all nations to make efforts to improve access to all levels of schooling so that all students, including those with disabilities, can participate in quality educational opportunities. The Government of the day’s Free Education Scheme inculcates educational movement at all levels, including Special Needs Education and Education for Children with Disabilities.

Education for students with special needs has been in existence in Fiji since the 1960s when some Catholic Church Schools, such as St. Joseph’s Secondary School and Marist Brothers High School, enrolled students with disabilities. However, students with severe or less visible disabilities, such as hearing impairment and intellectual disability were still getting left out. In 1967, Fiji’s first Special

School, the Hilton Special School, was established by the Fiji Crippled Children's Society to provide education for children with severe physical and hearing impairments.

Madam Speaker, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which has been effective from 2008, is an International Human Rights Treaty which promotes education for all, specifically guiding nations to support the inclusion of children with disability in mainstream schools alongside their peers, so that they have the opportunity to participate in quality education in an equitable way. This Convention has aided to change people's views towards people with disabilities. People with disabilities are no longer only seen as those in need of charity, medical management and protection, but are now fully accepted as fully equal members of the society.

Madam Speaker, Fiji has a long history of commitment to the education of children with disabilities, and Special and Inclusive Education has been a vital component of the current Fijian Educational Movement. The *2013 Constitution of the Republic of Fiji* includes significant provisions for persons with disabilities, including the right to:

- reasonable access to all places, public transport and information;
- sign language, Braille and other means of communication;
- reasonable access to necessary material, substances and devices relating to the person's disability;
- reasonable adaptation of buildings, practices and procedures to enable their full participation in society; and the
- effective realisation of their rights.

Furthermore, the Constitution enshrines the right of every person to early childhood, primary, secondary and further education. In addition, the right to access quality education in local schools is supported by various Acts and captured in the Ministry of Education's Policy on Effective Implementation of Special and Inclusive Education.

Madam Speaker, substantial efforts of the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts, working together with development partners, including the Australian Aid Programme, has increased and improved educational options for children with disabilities. From 2015, our Ministry has undertaken a number of transitional arrangements that was required to meet the critical needs of children with disabilities in schools.

While Special Schools are a significant option for children with disabilities in Fiji, they are unable to support all children with disability. The Special Schools are located mainly in town areas and unless local schools are inclusive, access to education for children who live in the outer islands and rural areas is very limited and, therefore, they ought to get left out. Including students with disabilities in mainstream schools known as inclusive education is, therefore, vital as it allows children to be educated within their neighbourhood schools, closer to home and the schools that they would be attending if they did not have any disability.

Madam Speaker, a child with disability is defined as one having sensory, physical, psychological or intellectual impairment which has caused a significant loss or reduction of the ability to participate in a regular education programme. The types and levels of impairments that we have in schools are diverse, and here are the ones prevalent in schools, to mention a few:

- Vision Impairment ;
- Hearing Impairment ;
- Speech and Language Impairments ;
- Physical Impairments ;



- Intellectual Impairments;
- Specific Learning Disability ;
- Behavioural Difficulties ; and
- Emotional Difficulties.

In addition to the above, Madam Speaker, we also offer Early Intervention to young children with disabilities, generally aged from birth up to six years. These services are provided at the Hilton Early Intervention Centre, managed under the Hilton Organisation, an operating branch of the Fiji Crippled Children's Society. The earlier the children's needs are identified and appropriate intervention measures taken, the better opportunity there is for the child to succeed in the next phase of learning.

Madam Speaker, we have 17 Special Needs Schools fully operational in Fiji; 15 Special Schools are classified under Primary and two are classified under TEST (Vocational Special School). Other than the 17 schools, one secondary school is a fully-fledged school for the Special Needs, that is, Marist Champagnat Institute, but classified under the Secondary Section while Gospel School for the Deaf is a private school.

In addition, Madam Speaker, we have 25 Inclusive Schools where children with Special Needs are enrolled in and are being catered for. Out of these, five schools are supported by Access to Quality Education Programme (AQEP), while 19 schools are supported by the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts under the Special Education Grant.

The number of children with special needs who received education in 2016 in the Special Schools was 1,025 and this year, the current roll has increased to 1,174 students. The increase has been the result of the Ministry of Education's campaign to the parents for them to bring forward their children and enrol them in these schools, whether they are located in the urban area closer to a Special School or the designated Inclusive Schools, Madam Speaker, so that these children can be provided with education as are other children. Madam Speaker, currently the roll is 1,174.

Madam Speaker, apart from these Special Schools in the town areas, we will list out the names of the 25 Inclusive Schools so that those who are listening out there may note this and in case or need be, they could take their children to these schools.

No.	School	School Roll	No. of Students with Disabilities
1	Tavua District School	360	23
2	Ratu Latianara Primary School	342	9
3	Arya Samaj Primary School	606	20
4	South Taveuni Primary School	410	9
5	Adi Maopa Primary School	134	10
6	Kasavu Primary School	89	2
7	Naseyani Primary School	95	4
8	Mabuco Catholic School	80	1
9	Marcellin Primary School	635	4
10	Namosau Methodist School	417	12
11	Navakawau Catholic School	132	3
12	Naqali District school	148	3
13	Lovu Sangam School	526	1
14	Lautoka Muslim Primary School	668	1
15	Lautoka Central Primary School	720	1
16	Bulavou District School	100	4

17	Shastri Memorial School	121	2
18	Nakoroboya Primary School	81	1
19	Rarawai FSC Primary School	185	1
20	Ba Muslim Primary School	546	1
21	Lautoka Central College	566	4
22	Gospel High School	757	12
23	Swami Vivekananda College	899	1
24	Nadi SKM College	1097	2
25	Marist Champagnat Institute	124	124

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts has been making efforts to strengthen Inclusive Education options for children with disabilities and their families across Fiji, while continuing to support the services that Special Schools provide to children with particular and complex disabilities. The Ministry has been working with key stakeholders particularly, the parents and getting them to be fully involved in getting their children to schools, and supporting their educational development.

Together with AQEP, the Special and Inclusive Education Unit at the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts has been working since 2012, to introduce and test a model of Inclusive Education that allows children with disabilities to attend schools closer to their home. This has involved the establishment of five Inclusive Education demonstration schools.

Madam Speaker, AQEP and the Ministry of Education have implemented a number of activities to support children with disabilities to access quality education in these schools. These activities have contributed to an increasing number of children with disabilities participating in schools closer to their homes. In 2012, six children with disabilities attended these schools and in 2016, there were 84. Experiences from these schools have positively reflected our Ministry's efforts to establish additional Inclusive Schools across the country, and we are continuously talking to school managements to assist us in ensuring that the infrastructure is fine-tuned so that it assists us in providing accessibility to these children, while we provide these schools with specialised teachers and the teaching aid.

Madam Speaker, a review of the initial Ministry of Education Inclusive Education Policy was carried out in May 2015, where resources was highlighted as a priority need for improvement. The Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts, through the endorsement of the Inclusive Education Policy in December 2016 is now committed to progressively meet the needs of all schools with Special Needs children and will do so in active partnership with parents, the community, as well as management.

Madam Speaker, having completed the review, the disability education stakeholders worked together to prioritise key areas of action for Special and Inclusive Education. There are five key priority areas of action which include the following:

1. Development and implementation of school-level strategies;
2. Ministry of Education leadership in the development of policies, standards and guidelines to promote and institutionalise Inclusive Education;
3. Ensuring a relevant and responsive curriculum;
4. Strengthen training for teachers; and
5. Provision of appropriate support needed to enhance the education and training of students with disabilities in Fiji.

Madam Speaker, the demand for financial support of a Special Needs child is relatively high, compared to normal children in schools. In the past years up to 2015, the grant distribution was based on the disadvantaged formula and every Special School received an average of \$27,000 to \$32,000 per year only.

Madam Speaker, this amount was realistically insufficient to cater for the genuine expenses of the Special Schools, particularly when different support was needed for different disability types. In simpler terms, the per child expenses varied from one child to the other, and definitely it was not the same as what a normal school would get, the per capita grant.

Madam Speaker, in 2015, based on the needs-based analysis and based on the submission, the Ministry of Finance had doubled the grant that was initially given to the Special Schools. Initially, prior to 2015, the grant that was given to Special Schools was \$550,000 for all the Special Schools and in 2016, this grant was doubled by the Ministry of Economy to \$1.1 million. Thus, Madam Speaker, from 2016, we were providing the Special Schools \$1.1 million grant, a boost that eased the hardships faced by these schools. Under this grant, an estimate of \$500 per child was given, relative to previously where they used to receive \$250 per child.

Madam Speaker, we have also increased the salary allowance of our teacher aides from \$3,000 per annum to \$5,500 per annum and Sign Language Interpreters from \$5,000 per annum to \$7,000 per annum. We have given four new establishment positions to Interpreters to ensure that students with hearing impairment in secondary schools receive proper lessons translated in sign language. We have also paid two Braille support workers to help Braille and De-Braille materials for our students with visual impairments.

Madam Speaker, the Disability-Inclusive Education Handbook for Teachers is a resource created to enable teachers to improve the inclusiveness of their schools and classrooms so that children with disabilities benefit from quality education alongside other children. The Handbook contains general information about creating an inclusive school, information about a range of different types of disabilities, case studies and a selection of reproducible resources. The Handbook was designed for all schools in Fiji to assist them to be inclusive. Trained Special Education Teachers find the Handbook very useful, and this has been distributed widely to both, Special Schools as well as Inclusive Schools.

Madam Speaker, Disability factsheets have also been developed to complement the information given in the Handbook. These user-friendly factsheets are for information dissemination, highlighting the options available for education.

Madam Speaker, we are also updating our Information System Database so that we can get detailed data on students via our information system so that we can take specific measures to deal with students.

Madam Speaker, we have implemented a number of activities to support children with disabilities' access quality education in Inclusive Schools, including the employment of teacher aides, training of teachers and teacher aides in Inclusive Education, awareness raising sessions, regular mentoring and monitoring visits, renovations to schools to improve access and learning environments, provision of equipment such as Braille, white canes, desktop computers with JAWS (Job Access With Speech) software, sign language dictionaries and water and sanitation activities.

Madam Speaker, large scale capacity development programmes have been undertaken in partnership with our Aid partners to train Headteachers, Inclusive Teachers, District Education Officers, Teachers and Teacher Aides. A total of 381 Officers had been trained in 2015 and 2016 from the various

Education Districts. As I speak, a workshop is being undertaken now in Suva for all teachers in Special Schools.

Madam Speaker, we have saved the best for the last. We are now ensuring that we mark and observe key dates and days which was calendared internationally and specifically set aside for Special Needs and disability advocacy. During the last Parliament Sitting, Madam Speaker, we celebrated on 21st March, the World Down Syndrome Day Fiji-wide and on 7th April, we observed the World Autism Awareness Day in Nadi. We also observed the International Day of Persons with Disabilities and other important dates to enshrine to every person that people with disabilities and Special Needs are important to national and global vision, as are all the other people.

We are also using other observances to reach out to people at large, and make them aware of the diverse needs of people with disabilities and how they can contribute to support them, Madam Speaker. What we are emphasising is that, we should not concentrate on their disabilities, let us concentrate on their abilities and how we can get them into the mainstream labour market.

Madam Speaker, the Fijian Education System is enjoying its golden era of progress development. All children and Fijian people at large have given tremendous opportunities to access education and use that to attain lifelong success and prosperity. The inclusion of people with disability and Special Needs people into the mainstream educational goals, objectives and vision is an area we are investing into and pursuing relentlessly, and we will continue to set higher benchmarks of attainment.

Madam Speaker, I wish to end with an emotional confession that came from a parent of a child with disability, attending Fiji Vocational Technical Training Centre, and let me quote:

“Rahul had learning disability. At the get together at his home to celebrate his graduation Diploma in IT (Networking), his father mentioned in his thanksgiving speech how thankful his family is for all that Rahul has achieved.

Rahul is currently doing his Bachelor in IT (Networking) at FNU Nasinu Campus. He is employed with Visual Electronics, works in the day and attends his class in the evening. He had just opened his own company which goes by the name “RAHULZ IT NETWORKING”, specialising in PC Upgrading, Antivirus, Network Cable Cabling, Programme Instalment, Services and many more”.

Madam Speaker, Rahul’s parents have been given hope through the provision of education, and the necessary resource support needed for their child to achieve his dreams. When children with Special Needs are appropriately supported, they live their dreams, and in return become contributing members of society in a dignified and meaningful way.

Madam Speaker, our Government will give the same support to all the children with disabilities so that they can mainstream. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Leader of the Opposition or her designate to speak in response.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Madam Speaker, I wish to thank the Honourable Minister for Education for his statement on strengthening Special and Inclusive Education in Fiji. I fully support the initiative by the Honourable Minister in this area, but I believe there are some areas of concern that I would like to highlight in this august House.

Madam Speaker, from my own observation, it seems that the Honourable Minister for Education is not working according to plan. He is coming up with new initiatives – one yesterday, one today, another one tomorrow, every now and then. And the Honourable Minister is running the Ministry like a circus which clearly shows that there is no plan laid out which should be aligned to the overall strategies of Government. That leads to inconsistent and failing initiatives, like the introduction of tablets to students.

Let me ask the Honourable Minister this question, do you have a plan?

(Honourable Government Member interjects)

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Are you following those trends on your own or are your plans aligned to Government plans?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, please address the Chair.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Madam Speaker, I feel sorry for his loyal and hardworking Ministry staff where at the end of the day, they have to come up with all these *ad hoc*, unplanned activities due to poor planning.

The total expenditure in the Ministry of Education's 2015 Budget, Madam Speaker, showed an increase of \$21 million. This is about 5.6 per cent, compared to the 2014 Budget. Madam Speaker, this increase in expenditure clearly shows very poor planning. Therefore, I urge the Honourable Minister to have more consultations with education stakeholders and senior staff to assist in drawing up a workable plan. Although, this initiative is commendable, there is a lot of doubt on how it is to be independent, especially in its financial implications.

In 2015, Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Economy approved the writing off of the sum of \$49,000. This indicated a lack of poor review, monitoring and supervision of reconciliations prepared by the Ministry of Education, and it is our hope that the budgetary provisions will be utilised well and not written-off.

Madam Speaker, as I had mentioned earlier, I fully support the idea of assisting and strengthening the Special and Inclusive Education Sector but it is important to note that students with Special Needs need our attention and they are not only found in urban areas but in remote areas as well. Networking with *Tikina* and Provincial Councils will be crucial if you are to identify the students for enrolment. The Honourable Minister for Education, Madam Speaker, must ensure that all schools must provide, at least, some space for students with special needs.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- You did not listen!

In order to do that, Madam Speaker. . . .

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- I am telling you now so that you can do it.

(Laughter)

The Honourable Minister must ensure that schools are provided with proper funding to facilitate the needs for inclusion of students with special needs. All schools need to provide proper facilities which are disabled-friendly, Madam Speaker, and to address the need for inclusiveness, even though we have 17 schools and 25 inclusive schools at present.

Madam Speaker, in order to further strengthen the education sector, there is also a need to look at the teacher-student ratio of all Special and Inclusive schools, taking into consideration the situation the teachers are facing in dealing with disabled students, depending on the severity of the disabilities.

Madam Speaker, there is also a need for the Honourable Minister to upgrade the salaries of teachers who deal with special students, considering the nature of teaching that occurs in Special and Inclusive schools. We all understand that students with disabilities need special attention and extra care. This needs extra commitment by teachers, thus justifies the need for a salary upgrade.

The Honourable Minister should also consider providing in-service training for these teachers, Madam Speaker. In conclusion, there must be clear pathways in the curriculum for students, to tertiary institutions and employment opportunities later in life. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Leader of the National Federation Party or his designate.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Minister for his statement. In fact, I wholeheartedly agree that the State must continue to support the 17 Special Schools and the 25 Inclusive Schools in the country, and I also acknowledge the fact that the budget was increased for these Schools. That is also commendable, Madam Speaker.

These measures, as we all are aware, Madam Speaker, are necessities and State obligations, now that we have ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and obviously it flows from the Constitution as well.

However, Madam Speaker, these updates from the Government are welcomed and I note that the Honourable Minister has a number of initiatives. I think those are appropriate and his attempts to ensure that the facilities are available to these schools is also welcomed.

I also think, Madam Speaker, that there is also a necessity for a timeline for when Fiji can hope to have, not only equitable and accessible education for all, but also some targets by when education will be mainstreamed for our young ones, the Special and Inclusive schools and I think the Honourable Minister did indicate some positive steps that his Ministry is taking.

Madam Speaker, it will be a great day for our students when they can welcome in their classrooms, learned with special needs as one of their own, and certainly see them as equal to everyone else. I think that would be great and I think that is the dream that every country has, as well as every society and every parent of children with disability has. So, I think that is absolutely important.

Madam Speaker, I am also reminded of the long-held concerns of persons with disabilities and that is, the decisions, policies or strategies being made for them but without them at the table. I hope that the Honourable Minister will ensure that students with disabilities and their parents are consulted at all times and their views as to how they could be put into Inclusive Schools and how they could be dealt with in Special Schools is very, very important because without their support and without them participating in the whole process of making sure that children with disabilities actually perform and achieve outcomes, especially learning outcomes, will put them through and provide them with some sustainable future.

Therefore, Madam Speaker, it is my sincere hope that the Government, of course, under the current Minister's leadership, when charting these inclusive education measures, that families uphold that persons with disabilities are actually driving these initiatives and suddenly advocating on their own which to me, Madam Speaker, would tell a much more compelling truth.

Madam Speaker, in conclusion, I wholeheartedly support the initiatives, the plans and policies that the Ministry of Education has with respect to special education, special schools and I would encourage the Honourable Minister to look at this whole idea of Inclusive Schools with much more urgency and detail, so that we can achieve that in the shortest possible time.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Honourable Minister for Local Government, Housing and Environment, Infrastructure and Transport to deliver his statement.

Progress Report – Department of Local Government and Municipal Councils

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker and Honourable Members, I rise to inform this august House on the progress made by the Department of Local Government and Municipal Councils. But before I do that, I want to thank the Honourable Professor Prasad for the acknowledgment that he has just made on the Government's performance, unlike what Honourable Leawere said.

Madam Speaker, Municipal Councils in partnership with the Department of Local Government under the FijiFirst Government are committed to improving the wellbeing and living conditions of Fijian ratepayers. Let me detail some of the achievements in these areas as we move towards our vision of smartest towns and cities.

Madam Speaker, we live in new realities. Instead of speaking negative about urban growth, we need to see it as an opportunity, a challenge and a strong indicator of development and economic progress. And in order to capitalise on those indicators, as a starting point, we have embarked on the hiring of urban planning specialists to assess and upgrade our town planning schemes to reflect these new demands in how we plan and future approve our towns and cities. We also need to align it with recent changes to the legislation under the 2016 Heritage Act which needs to be incorporated into our town planning schemes.

At the same time, Madam Speaker, we have established strong and accountable relationships with our Municipal Councils. This is testimony to the strong and progressive relationships between the Central Government, our Ministry and Municipal Councils. Instead of workshops and endless planning seminars, we have development of amenities, facilities and streamlining of processes on the ground within a very limited period.

Madam Speaker, I speak from a wealth of experience in the area of Local Government, going back to 20 years of service in Municipal Councils. During this time, I was witness to many changes in Local Government administration and changes of Government, but the rate of accelerated developments and achievements that I am going to justify in my ministerial speech, I have never witnessed in all those years.

Madam Speaker, these achievements are the result of a more corporate-orientated and bottom line basis to council operations rather than the politics of 'tug of war' between different Wards competing for services.

(Hon. Opposition Member interjects)

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- The endless result as indicated by the achievements that I am about to document for this august House are greater amenities and services for all Fijian ratepayers. You are quite right when you say that I was there, I am talking about the difference, what happened then and what is happening now!

Madam Speaker, let me briefly begin by looking at some of the achievements and capital projects for the two cities, Lautoka and Suva.

Lautoka, Madam Speaker, the completion of Churchill Park upgrade with a total cost of \$5.5 million; market extension at a cost \$1.4 million and the groundbreaking of the municipal swimming pool at Lautoka's Botanical Garden will take place next week.

Madam Speaker, the upgrade of Churchill Park which was opened by the Honourable Prime Minister includes new synthetic tracks. This inclusion, as mentioned by the Honourable Prime Minister in his opening speech, will see people in the greater Western Division and Viti Levu enjoy better athletic facilities and will contribute to sports development.

Lautoka City Council also entered into the public private partnership (PPP) with P Meghji and Tappoos. This is taking Municipal Councils into a new era of change and greatly increasing their revenue stream.

Madam Speaker, this is the only way. Our Councils are under increasing pressure to deliver more and more in amenities, facilities, infrastructure and services. At the same time, ratepayers provisionally do not want increased rates and we do not want to burden them with increased charges. Likewise, market vendors, taxi operators and carrier operators do not want increases in their fees and charges. So, Madam Speaker, this begs the question as to where will Municipal Councils get an increase in revenue?

The way forward will be, sustainable and fiscally sound public private partnership. This increase in revenue stream will be of benefit to all the Fijian ratepayers and we will increase our efforts to spread these PPP projects to all Fijian Municipal Councils.

Suva; Madam Speaker, the completion and opening of the upgraded pavilion and turf facilities at Albert Park has done wonders for this iconic amenity. The difference as they say is clear, and we have many Suva residents and visitors to the capital enjoying the improved facilities.

Work has commenced on the Suva Civic Centre Auditorium and Lower Hall upgrade in partnership with Guangdong Province. This a significant international partnership for the Suva City Council, and more projects are planned with Guangdong Province.

Madam Speaker, I would also like to report that we had a very favourable response to the Expression of Interest for the Central Street Car Park PPP redevelopment with a \$60 million car park accommodation and sea view restaurant project proposed for the site. This proposal is now being assessed by the Suva City Council and their consultants.

Let me now turn to some of our towns and present a report on their major projects, Madam Speaker, and let me begin with our two Northern Division towns.

Labasa; Madam Speaker, a Multipurpose Court facility was opened at a cost of \$90,000 and Subrail Park upgrade was at a cost of \$100,000.

A major project for Labasa is the long overdue relocation of the market and bus station. Madam Speaker, we have begun the planning for this relocation and we expect that this will ease the current traffic congestion into the Labasa CBD, and will provide a major boost for local growers and vendors, with improved market facilities and more car parks. At the existing market, Madam Speaker, work on a temporary fish market and a grog shed had commenced last week.

Savusavu; Madam Speaker, the Ganilau Park upgrade including the fencing, and the construction of the 1,500 seater pavilion at a cost \$250,000 will be completed in June, 2017.



The redevelopment of the Savusavu Town Council Administration Centre with the new events centre and facilities will be a significant project that will better showcase the Municipal Council in this area of increased tourism activities. The Council has also embarked on providing services and improving infrastructure at an informal settlement in Nakama.

Madam Speaker, let me now turn to the remaining towns in the Central Division.

Nausori; the new Nausori Market is now regarded as the largest municipal market in the Pacific. In line with other municipal markets, the women's accommodation block is in the planning stages. The market and modern bus stand was built at a total cost of \$13.3 million. The old market site will be developed into a mall. The Multipurpose Sports Centre was opened earlier this year and was built at a cost of \$250,000.

In Lami; Madam Speaker, Tikaram Park was completed and opened earlier this year to the public. It was built at a cost of \$618,000. We can see that it has now been made into a major local attraction and amenity for the people of Lami. And let me put this on record, Madam Speaker, that this is the first major project for the town of Lami and the people of Lami.

In addition, the Johnny Singh Park upgrade has commenced at a cost of \$198,000. This is the first phase of the project and the second phase is scheduled for the next fiscal year where it will enable Lami to host competitions.

Nasinu; Madam Speaker, I am pleased to report that works in the Valelevu ground has commenced at a cost of \$350,000. This will provide a much needed designated sporting facility for the people of Nasinu. There is also a plan to build a stadium within the ground.

The Laqere market is now at the construction phase at a projected cost of \$4.3 million.

Levuka; Madam Speaker, our UN Listed Heritage Port Town has had its Town Hall that was first commissioned in 1898, refurbished at a cost of \$100,000. Also, upgrading works under the Japanese Aid is at a cost of \$225,000. The Children's Park upgrade at Nasau costs \$35,000, with an additional \$25,000 spent on the mini pavilion.

Madam Speaker, heading to the West, we have a number of significant achievements and projects, apart from what I had outlined earlier for Lautoka City.

Sigatoka; Multipurpose Court facilities was built at a cost of \$113,000 and ready to be opened and the construction of the retaining wall along Sigatoka River at a cost of \$845,000. The retaining walls will both, mitigate against flooding and provide increased river frontage land for development by the Council.

Madam Speaker, talks have commenced on the market and bus station relocation as well.

Nadi; Madam Speaker, the Namaka Market extension in Nadi with a women's accommodation centre with detailed plan is in the approval stages, at a cost of \$4 million.

The upgrade to Prince Charles Park is underway and will be ready in time to host part of the programme for the 2017 Fiji Tourism Expo.

In addition, Madam Speaker, upgrades to the Nair's Dias at a cost of \$90,000 is in progress.

Ba; Madam Speaker, the completion of Fiji's first ever permanent horserace track at a cost of \$220,000 has attracted major races. Now, the community of Nair's regular races which attract around 80 to 90 horses per race.

Civil and fencing works has commenced at the Maururu Landfill at a cost of \$380,000 following relevant environmental impact studies. Work on Govind Park will soon start, after it was damaged by *TC Winston*.

Tavua; Madam Speaker, the Tavua Multipurpose Sports facilities which include the upgrading of Garvey Park with new flood lights and events centre has been completed at a cost \$630,000.

Rakiraki; Madam Speaker, the construction of the Rakiraki Market with a women's accommodation centre has begun at a cost of \$5.8 million. I hope Honourable Niko - he is drinking water because in the last sitting he questioned me whether it will start or not. So, it has started, Honourable Niko.

Madam Speaker, in this round-up of achievements and projects of our Municipal Councils, I would like to point out that all these has happened in the space of the last two and a half years. This is what the FijiFirst Government has given to the people and the ratepayers of this country.

As I had outlined at the beginning of my speech, Madam Speaker, this is a remarkable list of achievements. Let me assure this House that these achievements will only increase in the coming months and days through the partnership of the Central Government, the Ministry and Municipal Councils. We will build on these achievements.

Madam Speaker, with an aim to promote small and medium businesses in our town centres, Municipal Councils, together with the national government support and in partnership with UN Women are fully committed in the development of our Municipal Markets.

Madam Speaker, our town centres have 8,289 market vendors, selling local produce. These hardworking mothers and fathers need our assistance in order to have a decent livelihood. The Ministry of Local Government, Housing and Environment, in partnership with Municipal Councils are totally committed to providing the best facilities for our farmers and market vendors.

Madam Speaker, in addition, the process of getting a business licence has been streamlined with Municipal Councils now issuing new business licences within a maximum of three days, with instant licence renewals in both cases subject to the applicant providing the necessary required documents.

Madam Speaker, to promote good sanitation standards, the Government and Municipal Councils have invested heavily in improving garbage collection and disposal through the distribution of 15 garbage trucks among the Councils. In addition, Municipal Councils have a free quarterly clean-up programme for ratepayers and citizens. The free clean-up is for green waste and white goods collection.

Madam Speaker, this free quarterly clean-up programme was introduced in 2015 and is a very successful programme, widely appreciated by the ratepayers. For the purpose of promoting clean and green environment, Municipal Councils have appointed Litter Prevention Officers and they have reported more than 5,000 litter bookings in 2016. This is apart from warnings issued by the Litter Officers.

Madam Speaker, Municipal Councils have taken on events management as part of its community engagement. In Municipal Councils, township festivals are becoming popular and we now have 12 township carnivals in Fiji, whose winners compete with the Miss Fiji Pageant Contestant. Fiji will proudly host the Miss South Pacific Island Pageant in Nadi at the end of the year.

Madam Speaker, these are important community engagement events and provide significant uplift to the local economy. Through these carnivals, there will be mass awareness programmes for all Fijians on climate change. Each stage of the carnival will carry a theme that the contestants and organisers will act upon.

Madam Speaker, Municipal Councils in partnership with the Central Government and private partners, successfully organised the Centennial Sutelej V Celebrations in 14 town centres last year. This will provide a platform for increased heritage and cultural promotion through Municipal Councils.

Madam Speaker, all centres will again mark 14th May, 2017 as the day of remembrance, in particular for the women of indenture. This event coincides with Mothers' Day and let me take this occasion, as Parliament does not meet before the date, to wish in advance a Happy Mothers' Day to all.

Further, Madam Speaker, on Sunday 14th May, 2017, we will be organising events remembering the hardships and sacrifice of mothers, wives, daughters and sisters under indenture, as part of a larger municipal family celebration in the centres. By hosting mothers, wives, daughters and sisters of Fiji and all Fijians on that date, Madam Speaker, we will pay proper respect to those strong women, who laid the foundation of our families and contributed towards nation-building under indenture.

As part of the programme, we will launch a number of initiatives and partnerships so that awareness celebration and education of Fiji's wider cultural heritage are an ongoing path of our Municipal Councils' plans. This includes an important initiative to include *iTaukei* local history, culture, performance and arts as part of ongoing programmes among local Councils.

Madam Speaker, as part of this initiative, we will also include programmes to celebrate the diverse multicultural nature of our municipalities. Where relevant, we will align these programmes with respective designated world and international days, Madam Speaker. This is an effective means of identifying areas of any shortfalls and working closely with all stakeholders to rectify these areas.

We are moving in the direction of smarter cities by employing sustainable and relevant technology to drive our processes and bring in innovation. We have recently held consultations with the ADB team, whom has chosen the greater Suva area from Lami to Nausori for a global programme, along with four other cities in promoting the Smart City and Towns Programme. This will enable us to pilot smart technology in key identified areas.

Madam Speaker, we initiated an amnesty and incentive programme for our ratepayers for the first quarter of 2017 through Municipal Councils. It was encouraging to note that our ratepayers took advantage of the programme to pay their rates and it has really helped them.

Madam Speaker, may I take this opportunity to thank the ratepayers and citizens of every municipality, who are working closely with their respective Municipal Councils. I am also aware that there are some works delayed in respective municipalities but I can assure you that it will start soon.

I am also aware, Madam Speaker, that there are some areas within municipalities that need improvement, and I can assure this august House that that will be done.

Madam Speaker, on this note, I conclude my statement and wish to thank you for this opportunity.

HON. SPEAKER.- I call on the Honourable Leader of the Opposition or her designate to speak in response.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, firstly, I wish to bring to the attention of the Honourable Minister and the Honourable Minister for Lands of a problem that is happening in their neck of the woods to a place where we produce this water. There is a company there that is called Dayals, who is extracting gravel without any licence, I am told, and despite a stop-notice. It is a concern because we market to the world that we are producing this, closer to the environment and Ram Dayal doing the extraction is entirely contradictory to that, so if you can, please, look into that.

To the statement, Madam Speaker, I always feel that before a Minister comes here, you should be careful to ensure that your Ministry is looked and managed well, that you are performing because otherwise, whatever you say here will affect your credibility, and that is the situation here.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, I have the gift of vision and my vision tells me that this Minister will be out of here next year ...

(Laughter)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- ... as well as the Government. They will be out because of non-performance. Let me give some examples in relation to this Ministry.

Madam Speaker, it says here, 'partnership'. What partnership? You do not have a partnership with the Government. The Government is dragging the municipalities by the bolts, by the nuts, and that is the situation. The Honourable Speaker should know that. The Honourable Minister should know that. He has had a lot of experiences in this area and it must have affected him because he meant very, very well indeed. Unless you have your independence, you cannot say that you are acting independently, you cannot talk of a partnership. You do not have a partnership.

Of course, on the very first time, you promised elections. If you had had that elections, then only can you come here and talk about partnership. If I may quote the former Member of Parliament, Mr. Tikoduadua where he said: "The decision from that side is only limited to the two in front here."

(Laughter)

That is your problem. I know you meant well because of all your experiences. The Honourable Minister wanted to have elections. If the elections were held, then no problem and the municipalities have been used by this Government for its own political reasons, and that is obvious.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Let me give you an example, look at the squatter settlements, the resolutions of squatter. If you were independent, you would have told the Government that it should adhere to planning standards, distances from this house to the next house, make sure that roads are built.

Madam Speaker, I invite you to go to this place called Ledrusasa and you will see how all these planning standards have been sacrificed because the Government is wanting to buy support. There is a road that goes like this and nearly hits a house then it turns that way.

(Laughter)

It is in Nadi, Madam Speaker, please, go there and you have a look at this. You will feel sorry for that municipality.

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- (inaudible)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- It is the standard, so what standard do you bring about here? You should stand for the principle, you should stand for the standards. You do not sell support, and that is all but they are doing there because you did not have elections.

Now, he promised that he will have a review. When will you have the review?

(Hon. Government Member interjects)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- There is a petition in Labasa and it is still sitting there with the FijiFirst. They complained that whatever you did there has not been used. The house that they were supposed to put in, was used for other things. It is just not happening!

If I can just end by saying that the Honourable Minister had given this example in Lautoka, Churchill Park. You know, it is very, very dangerous to have a partnership with private companies. It breeds corruption because they will come back to you to demand, and that will happen.

(Hon. Government Member interjects)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- That has already happened! You were here to weed out corruption but now, you are into it.

HON. GOVT. MEMBERS.- Where's the corruption?

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker, a Point of Order.

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of Order.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I'm not finished yet!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- No, Point of Order. Sit down!

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of Order.

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker, while responding, the Honourable Member has alleged that there was a corrupt practice between Lautoka City Council, Tappoos and P Mehjis. I want him to prove that. If he can prove it, well and good and if not, he should withdraw that statement right now. Thank you.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I said it breeds corruption, it breeds it.

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- No, don't say it breeds corruption.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- It breeds corruption!

HON. SPEAKER.- You have been asked to withdraw that statement. Would you like to withdraw the statement?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- No, Madam Speaker, because I said it breeds corruption.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Leader of the National Federation Party or his designate to speak in response.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I thank the Honourable Minister for his statement and also thank him for acknowledging my response to the Honourable Minister for Education. But let me remind him, Madam Speaker, of what I said during the Maiden Speech, I said very clearly that we will acknowledge, we will support the Government wherever we feel the policies are good and that is what we have done, but we will also hold the Government to account and also point out failed policies. Unfortunately, the Honourable Minister's statement actually falls into that category of failed policies.

It is actually quite hilarious, Madam Speaker, when I read the title of the Ministerial statement - Municipal Council's Partnership. In fact, the Honourable Minister has probably forgotten, and I think he forgot when he left NFP that the Municipal Councils mean elected representatives. What he should talk about is Municipal Administrators.

(Hon. Government Members interject)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- This is the Act, let me read this, and I quote; "The council of every municipality shall consist of such number of elected councillors, as the electoral commission may from time to time by order determine." That is the definition of 'council', so there is no council, and I think the Honourable Minister should stop talking about councils, he should talk about municipal administrators.

Madam Speaker, that is the issue. When you talk about partnership and let me, sort of, remind the Honourable Minister of what he said in his Maiden Speech and we have reminded him many times. He said, his first priority was to have municipal elections. Then we asked him in 2015, he said there is a review. Then we asked him in 2016, he said the review is continuing.

Madam Speaker, when I heard the Honourable Minister talking about the developments in various towns and cities, yes, there are developments that have taken place, but there are also developments that have been very questionable and have not been done with proper consultation with the ratepayers of all the towns and cities.

When you talk about partnership, Madam Speaker, it means partnership with the ratepayers who pay the rate and the Government. In this particular case over the last so many years, the ratepayers have only paid their rates, but they have had no say, absolutely no say in the management of the Councils. The only way the ratepayers could have a say is to have municipals councils elected. That is the point that this Government does not understand, that partnership is with the representatives of the ratepayers, not the partnerships with the administrators that they appoint and they direct, with the Government. That is what should be the definition of 'partnership' and not what the Honourable Minister is saying.

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- That's in your definition.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- This is very clear. Madam Speaker, maybe the Honourable Minister ought to return to his roots now so that he can understand what the council is.

(Laughter)

Let me also remind him, Madam Speaker, that he was the one who wanted me to be the leader, anyway.

(Laughter)

Let me come back to the point, Madam Speaker.

When you create a situation where the ratepayers of this country have no say, absolutely no say, in fact the administrators have no say and they have to go through him on every little decision. Where is the partnership?

So, Madam Speaker, unless we have elected Municipal Councils in place, this Government has no authority to say that there is a partnership. They cannot claim to have a partnership, that is the bottom line, Madam Speaker. I feel that what the Honourable Minister has been saying is a precursor, in fact, my prediction is that they will not have an election, they will review the Act and abolish the elected council. That is my prediction and I hope I am wrong.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Minister for Industry, Trade and Tourism to deliver his statement.

#### Update on the Department of Lands

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Ministers, Honourable Leader of the Opposition and Honourable Members of Parliament; before I actually deliver my statement, I just need to quickly say a few things about something that was just raised.

Madam Speaker, with respect to squatters, I think what needs to be said is that, one of the very reasons why we do have so many squatters is because of the politics and shenanigans of the past because of the non-renewal of leases that occurred before. But as we have said earlier, Madam Speaker, this Government is taking care of the squatters, whether it takes us a year or two years or three years, we will take care of the squatters.

HON. GOVT. MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Madam Speaker, with respect to the river gravel extraction issue that was just raised by my colleague, I am aware of it, we have put a 'stop work notice' on them, and I will give you a full report on Thursday with respect to that.

Also, Madam Speaker, in defence of my fellow colleague, the Honourable Minister for Local Government, if someone wants to talk about roots, maybe they should remember that the tree that was born by the NFP no longer exists, Madam Speaker. That very tree is gone, that tree that was planted by three gentlemen is gone. It does not exist, and I should know, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, this statement is with respect to the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources. The Ministry, through the Department of Lands is responsible for the effective and efficient administration, development and management of all State lands. One of the key roles of the Department is to carry out what is called, cadastral surveys of leased State lands, including regularisations of informal settlements for issuance of lease titles.

In addition to these, Madam Speaker, the Survey Section is also responsible for controls for cadastral and topographic mapping, extensions and maintenance of existing trigonometrical survey network and triangulation and also upgrading of the National Geodetic Datum or Framework.

Madam Speaker, the Geodetic Datum is a coordinate system and a set of reference points to locate places on earth and the Datum is what allows applications, like the GPS system to operate. Fiji's Geodetic Datum System is a little bit out of date when compared to international standards, so it affects the accuracy of it.

The Ministry, Madam Speaker, has therefore undertaken an initiative to upgrade the National Geodetic Framework in order to address the growing demand for more precise positioning frameworks. The National Framework is also essential for very effective decisionmaking. In addition, it is a vital underpinning infrastructure, which is applied in the areas of:

- National Hazard and Disaster Management;
- Sea Level and Climate Change Monitoring;
- Sustainable Management and Development of Earth Resources;
- Spatial Data Interoperability;
- Land Management; and also
- Mapping and Navigation by society at large everyday.

Madam Speaker, as we speak, it has been used to try and locate the persons who had gone adrift on a boat which my fellow Minister just mentioned. So, it is something that is in use everyday.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry continues to deliver the initiatives of the FijiFirst Government which includes the regularisation of the occupation of all squatters throughout Fiji. This month alone, the Honourable Prime Minister issued 21 approval notices to the Naulu and Kinoya informal settlers, which brings the number of approval notices issued so far to 238 in the Western, Central/Eastern and Northern Divisions.

In the next financial year, Madam Speaker, the Ministry is planning to issue an additional 126 approval notices in respective Divisions as follows:

- Within the Central/Eastern Division, we are looking at about 39 approval notices for Wainadoi, an informal settlement in Navua.
- For the Northern Division, there are 60 approval notices for informal settlements of the Vitadra, Boca, Valebasoga and Avua Settlements in Macuata, Vanua Levu.
- In the Western Division, 26 approval notices for Naqoro and Waimari Informal Settlements in Rakiraki.

Madam Speaker, I would also like to highlight in this House that the Ministry is already progressing work on the renewal of the leases that have expired and so far, 788 leases have been renewed. These are the ones that do not have any complications in terms of estate administration issues.

A bulk of the expired leases, Madam Speaker, that have not been renewed are basically due to two major reasons and some of them are because the lessees have yet to indicate in writing whether they would like to renew their leases or not as per the condition of their leases or lessees have actually passed away and there are pending complicated estate administration issues that the close families of the deceased lessees are still not able to resolve. However, the Ministry, Madam Speaker, is vigorously working towards renewing all expired leases by the end of the next financial year.

Madam Speaker, furthermore, the Ministry of Lands' contribution towards the Government's Look North Policy is currently progressing with the development of the Naiyaca Subdivision which includes the issuance of leases for the new Damodar City for Labasa, FNU Campus, a service station and



a creation of more commercial lots for development. This will enable a whole lot of more job opportunities for the North and access to higher education for the people in the North.

Madam Speaker, also in my last statement, I had elaborated on the film production that had taken place in the Malolo Islands in Nadroga and in particular, the process that was undertaken to secure the consent for the waiver of the traditional fishing rights. I had also briefed this Honourable House on the assessment of the compensation quantum for the loss of traditional fishing rights and the economic benefits that this film production brought to the local communities of Fiji and Fiji as a whole.

Madam Speaker, I am glad to bring to the attention of this House that foreign interests of film productions in Fiji continue to rise. There are two TV series currently being shot on our shores, the “*French Survivor Series*” presently being filmed at the Yasawa Island Resort in the Yasawa Group, and “*Wrecked Season 2*” at Naidiri Bay, Malomalo, in Nadroga. These particular activities will, no doubt, contribute tremendously to our GDP and provide job opportunities to all Fijians and small business opportunities for the locals. Currently all the processes that I have alluded to earlier, Madam Speaker, have been executed and complied with, before the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources issues letters of approval to these foreign film companies.

Madam Speaker, having mentioned about the increasing demand of our foreshore for film productions, I would also like to update this House on the Mangrove Management Plan. This Plan, as I had mentioned earlier on, will become the first Mangrove Management Policy that will govern the whole spectrum of foreshore development. This proposed Mangrove Management Plan will embrace the following areas:

- Mangrove loss;
- Carbon Sequestration in the mangroves;
- Establishing the total area estimate of mangroves in Fiji;
- The rate of mangrove loss and the impacts of dredging spoils dumping on mangroves;
- Fiji’s Forest Policy and the role of the Ministry of Forests;
- The linking of mangrove management to the Environmental Impact Assessment process and the regulation of developments on foreshore;
- Establishing means of mangrove ecosystem valuation to assist in the determination of fair compensation value for the loss of traditional fishing rights and ownership rights of the fishing grounds;
- A description of biodiversity mangrove offset as an option in decisionmaking;
- Monitoring of compliance to environment impact assessment conditions;
- Mangrove and traditional fishing rights owners; and
- Preparation plans for mangrove conversion and retention in urban areas.

These are the areas that could be looked at, Madam Speaker, working hard towards getting it completed as soon as possible. The current status as we speak is that, this week we will meeting with the Solicitor-General’s Office to see if we can finalise it.

Madam Speaker, another role of the Ministry is to undertake all valuation works for the Government which includes valuation and negotiation of ground rentals for all State leases on *iTaukei* land under the *iTaukei* Lands Act.

The Valuation Division of the Ministry, Madam Speaker, has taken a proactive role by identifying dormant leases. A total of nine inactive leases are under a surrender process, now for reversion to *iTaukei* Land Trust Board (TLTB) and the landowning units. These include the:

1. Vanuabalavu Biofuel Project;

2. Wailotua Agriculture Station in Wainibuka;
3. Nuku Seismographic Station in Serua;
4. Bitulase Agriculture Station in Waidina;
5. Taqare Seismographic Station in Namosi;
6. Nacawa Seismographic Station in Wainimala;
7. Ovea Agriculture Quarters in Tailevu;
8. Naiyala Agriculture Quarters; and
9. Wainunu Seismographic Station in Bua.

Madam Speaker, we have also applied for renewal of 10 *iTaukei* land leases to State leases after proper consultations with the occupants and official advice received from relevant Ministries. These include the three Cocoa Co-operatives in the North namely; Kedra in Dogotuki, Kubuna in Savusavu and Sigawe in Namuavoivoi, Bua.

Madam Speaker, with the recent publicity on environmental impacts of activities involving the Mineral Development Sector, the Mineral Resources Department has put in place measures to ensure environmental protection and sustainable development of our mineral resources. An Environment Division has been set up and resourced with qualified staff, who specialise in the Mining and Mineral Sector. The Division undertakes inspection and monitoring to ensure that there are no breaches in regulations. The Department is also currently reviewing the Mining Act and Mineral Policy.

Minerals Development, Madam Speaker, is a sector that has a huge economic potential for Fiji in terms of ensuring that these resources are developed sustainably. The Ministry recognises the need to formulate the Policy and upgrade operating procedures.

With respect to the River Gravel Extraction Management Guidelines and the Environmental Management Guidelines, there are two proposals that will be tabled in Cabinet to assist in managing and regulating this particular sector.

Madam Speaker, the Department will also endeavour to conduct workshops in Mining and Quarrying Sector with landowners to enable them to have the necessary skills and be qualified at certificate level to work within that particular sector. I know this is something that may come up a little later but, Madam Speaker, with respect of the Vatukoula situation, I will be speaking on it in a day's time, probably on Thursday.

In conclusion, Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources is committed to fully support the policies and initiatives of the FijiFirst Government, and will persevere to ensure sustainable development and management of the State's natural resources. The Ministry's agenda recognises that lasting prosperity and our nation's ongoing wellbeing comes through embracing every relevant stakeholder, with all new and better ways of doing things so that we can secure a better future for generations to come. Madam Speaker, I thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now call on the Leader of Opposition or her designate to speak in response.

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- Madam Speaker, I wish to acknowledge and thank the Honourable Minister for his ministerial statement.

Madam Speaker, this is the third time in the last two Sittings that a Ministerial Statement has been issued on these subjects. I do not blame the Honourable Minister because he has so many portfolios. If he had spent enough time in the Ministry, he would have had a better understanding of the technical and operational systems of the Ministry of Lands.

On the question of squatters, Madam Speaker, squatters represent a large number of voters and no Government has had the political will to address this squatter problem.

HON. GOVT. MEMBER.- Only FijiFirst!

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- What FijiFirst is doing is carrying out an easy way out of addressing the squatter problem.

I want to reiterate what my fellow Parliamentarian said that the quality of the subdivisions where these approval notices have been issued, is very poor. They do not adhere to the Town Planning requirements because of the sizes of the lots, the sizes of the roads and all the other requirements. The Government is promoting this issue of issuing approval notices to squatters but the thing is, they never contributed any capital development on these settlements to increase the livelihood of the people who are living there.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- All what they do is issue them with approval notices but they continue to live in squalid conditions.

(Honourable Government Member interjects)

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- Madam Speaker, I would like to reiterate what I had said earlier in this House, that regularising of squatter occupants is encouraging more squatting on State land all over the country. I say this, Madam Speaker, because there is a process of applying for a State lease. If a lot is identified and should be advertised, the applications of those who apply are properly scrutinised that they do not have any other property or they have a regular income to be able to pay for the annual rent and build a decent home. Most of the squatters would definitely not meet the requirements of the Lands Department and that is the very reason why they go and squat. They want to bypass the system because they know they do not qualify, and that is encouraging other people to go and squat.

On the development and management of all State Land, Madam Speaker, I want to reiterate that the core function of the Ministry of Lands is to administer all State lands in the country. With the capability of the GIS system within the Ministry, it should be able to identify all State lands; those that have been developed and leased, and the vacant ones. They should pursue development programmes for the vacant land so that the land could be developed for their hire and best use. This is done, Madam Speaker, and with all the budgetary requirements, it will avoid people squatting on vacant land.

On the lease renewal, Madam Speaker, as you know, leases have a definite beginning and a definite ending. So with the capability of the GIS system in the Lands Department, they should bring up all the files of leases that will expire in two to one year, so that it gives enough time for the workers to work on the process and also inspect the land for any breach of the lease conditions. There is no reason at all for some of the leases not to be renewed on time. The system is here, Madam Speaker, and what has to be done is, people to be trained to understand the system so that all these things are carried out properly. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now call on the Leader of NFP or his designate to speak in response.

HON. P. SINGH.- Madam Speaker, I wish to thank the Honourable Minister for his statement. Let me just remind him at the outset that the NFP tree will always stand, come hell or high water, and one day all might look to find refuge under that tree.

Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Minister for, at least, looking at the issue of mangroves and foreshore development by a concerted effort and the holistic approach to the whole mangrove and foreshore settlements.

Madam Speaker, it is no secret that we have two types of squatter settlements. Firstly, as rightly observed, the squatters who are there were forced into squatter settlements by non-renewal of leases. These people were there to fend for themselves. No one looked after them and they had no choice but to move into the settlement. The other is, where leasehold landlords accommodated them on their land and they have been treated as squatters as well. There are many issues that remain unresolved.

(Hon. Government Member interjects)

HON. P. SINGH.- Yes, this is what I am talking about, and I am referring to contentious issues, Madam Speaker, arising out of the Ministry's decision to issue leases and licenses that are required for work or development to be carried out on State leases.

No statistics have been provided on the so-called results of the efficiency of the Ministry of Lands in terms of improving productivity, improving livelihood and even improving and boosting agriculture where agriculture leases on State lands are concerned. Unfortunately, this regularisation process seems to be flawed, both in terms of State land and Native land leases.

It is not a proper lease that is issued, Madam Speaker, which residents can use to borrow money or it is not a bankable document. Only recently, the Honourable Attorney-General had wanted commercial lending institutions to accept approval to lease documents as a bankable document. Therefore, Madam Speaker, this whole issue of regularising squatter land leases is not being done holistically.

Madam Speaker, when such leases are issued, how long does the Ministry of Lands take to issue proper leases? Does the Ministry act instantly on the lease notices issued by Government or does it wait for the residents to fulfil obligations such as, proper survey as required of other tenants to process further documentations? These are issues that need clarification, Madam Speaker, because common sense dictates that one arm of Government complements the other as simply as possible, to ensure the objectivity of any policy implementation is achieved in the shortest possible time.

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Minister has not provided statistics on how many leases on State land are new leases, renewed leases, leases re-issued to sitting tenants or leases issued to new tenants. What has been the criteria of leases being issued to new tenants in favour of sitting tenants reapplying for leases? Without that, productivity of land is a major consideration in the issuance of leases.

Madam Speaker, in many cases sitting tenants have been unable to be productive because of circumstances beyond their control, like personal tragedies, illness or incapacity and inability to ensure the land is productive due to lack of resources. I have known many tenants who have overcome their challenges only to lose their leases to others because the Ministry decided to ignore their plight and explanation, and award new leases to others. There has been no consideration from a humanitarian point of view. I am restricted from naming them but they know who they are. I have received many complaints on this issue.

One wonders, Madam Speaker, to ensure that such aggrieved tenants are not disenchanted, there has to be an investigation to determine the circumstances in the issuance of leases. This is to ensure that nepotism and cronyism was not the criteria used to issue leases to new tenants over the sitting tenants.

I am also aware that complaints were made either to the Honourable Minister or the Ministry of Lands staff, but these have fallen on deaf ears. In one case in Rakiraki, the Ministry decided to award the lease to one brother after his other sibling died, despite the family residing on the land for over two generations. This has caused a family dispute with the lease holder now threatening to evict his brother's widow and family from the land. The family claims that no investigation or survey of the land was done by the Ministry before deciding on the issue. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Members that brings to an end all Items in today's Order Paper, and I thank you most sincerely for your participation in today's proceedings.

Parliament is now adjourned until tomorrow morning at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 4.20 p.m.