

# **PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI**



## **PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES**

### **DAILY HANSARD**

**TUESDAY, 2ND APRIL, 2019**

**[CORRECTED COPY]**

# CONTENTS

	<u>Pages</u>
Minutes	767
Communications from the Chair	767-768
Speaker's Ruling	768
Presentation of Reports of Committees	768-769
Review Report of the Fiji Financial Intelligence Unit Annual Report 2017 – Standing Committee on Economic Affairs	
Ministerial Statements	770-797
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Municipal Elections and Reforms</li> <li>▪ Call to Action to Protect our Rivers</li> <li>▪ digitalFIJI Programme</li> </ul>	
UN Convention on International Settlement Agreement resulting from Mediation	797-798
Review Report - Petition to Introduce Service Fee in the Tourism Industry	798-805
Petition on the Removal of the Double Penalty System, Ill-Treatment and Illegal Booking on Drivers by the LTA Officials	805-812
Review Report on the Fiji Financial Intelligence Unit Annual Report 2016	812-816
Consolidated Review Report on the iTaukei Trust Fund Board 2013 And 2016 Annual Reports	816-830
Suspension of Standing Orders	829
Facilitation of the Municipal Elections	831-849
Questions	850-869
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Pending MIDA Annual Report (Ques. No. 53/2019)</li> <li>▪ Update on Free Shares by Energy Fiji Limited (Ques. No. 54/2019)</li> <li>▪ PPP - Government of Fiji and Yalamanchili PTE Ltd (Ques. No. 55/2019)</li> <li>▪ Village Bank Protection and Coastal Protection Capital Projects (Ques. No. 56/2019)</li> <li>▪ Question No. 57/2019 withdrawn</li> <li>▪ Development of Healthcare Facilities (Ques. No. 58/2019)</li> <li>▪ Safety of Inter-island Ferries, Passengers and Crew (Ques. No. 59/2019)</li> <li>▪ Commission of the Status of Women (CSW) (Ques. No. 60/2019)</li> </ul>	



**TUESDAY, 2ND APRIL, 2019**

The Parliament met at 9.35 a.m., pursuant to notice.

HONOURABLE SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

**PRESENT**

All Honourable Members were present, except the Honourable Professor B.C. Prasad and the Honourable Lt. Col. P. Tikoduadua.

**MINUTES**

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Monday, 1st April, 2019 as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Honourable Speaker, I second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote on the motion.

The Question is:

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Monday, 1st April, 2019 as previously circulated be taken as read and be confirmed.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Noes')

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, as no Member opposes, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

**COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CHAIR**

Welcome

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

PL100 Students - University of the South Pacific

Honourable Members, today we have another group of PL100 University of the South Pacific students. I welcome you all most warmly to Parliament and I hope that you will find today's proceedings educational and useful. You are most welcome.

### Birthday Wish

Honourable Members, I am told that today is a special day for one of our Honourable Members. And I wish a very happy birthday to the Honourable Minister Jone Usamate. Many happy returns of the day.

(Applause)

### **SPEAKER'S RULING**

#### Oral Question No. 51/2019

Honourable Members, for the information of the House, the Leader of the Opposition had stood on a Point of Order pursuant to Standing Order 45(4), saying that the Honourable Attorney-General has misled Parliament referring to Question No. 51/2019 which he asked.

Honourable Members, the Leader of the Opposition mentioned that he was referring to the Procurement Regulation 2012 and in particular Regulation 29(3). And he mentioned that the figures were substituted, corrected or amended from \$32,000 to \$50,000 and he believed that the Honourable Minister should have answered his question. Honourable Members, as you would all know that the Honourable Attorney-General clarified that the law he was referring to does not have the amendments he was quoting.

Honourable Members, I said that certain parts of the question were good and we could consider it later in the week but to replace one of the Opposition questions later in the week. The Honourable Attorney-General then clarified that he would ask the Leader of the Opposition to further correct the question as Regulation 29(3) deals with purchases made under \$50,000.

Honourable Members, I now rule that the Opposition should undertake further research when dealing with laws so that they provide the correct law when used as reference in a Question and as the Members of the Business Committee are aware, I stressed that the questions prepared should be accurate before it is considered by the Business Committee to be included in the Order Paper.

I believe that the onus is now on Honourable Members to prepare questions accurately and I should not be referring questions as such to a later sitting in the future. In this regard, I hereby rule that the question by the Honourable Leader of the Opposition can be resubmitted in the May sitting.

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- Sir, I accept your ruling. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Members. We move onto the next Agenda item. I have been informed that there are no Papers for Presentation.

### **PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES**

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, the Honourable Vijay Nath, to present the Committee's Report. You have the floor Sir.

#### Review Report of the Fiji Financial Intelligence Unit Annual Report 2017 – Standing Committee on Economic Affairs -

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Speaker Sir, the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs was tasked by Parliament to review the Fiji Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) Annual Report 2017. The

Committee commends the overall performance of FIU. The deliberations were inclusive of contributions from the Fiji Police Force and Reserve Bank of Fiji (RBF) who also acknowledged and appreciated the important role played by FIU.

The Committee appreciates FIU's efforts to produce an Annual Report despite the fact that they were not mandated to do so. While deliberating on the report, it was very evident that the data collated by FIU is of great value to law enforcement agencies and financial institutions in detecting high-level financial criminal activities. Continuous capacity building must be encouraged and the key role of FIU must be further enhanced to include database of people of interest locally and internationally.

Furthermore, the Committee was also made aware of the various strategies the FIU has put in place in order to expand their network such as signing an MOU with REALB and Interpol. Such partnerships are strongly encouraged as it would enhance the organisation's ability to detect and investigate fraudulent activities.

On gender equality, the Committee noted that FIU prides itself as an equal opportunity employer. Since the policies and procedures of FIU are adopted through that of RBF's, an open competitive recruitment and promotion system has been implemented based on merit and work related qualities. Various policies have also been put in place to carry out non-discriminatory and harassment free environment.

Finally I would like to thank our Committee Members who were part of the team that produced this paper, that is, Honourable V.K. Bhatnagar (Deputy Chairperson), Honourable George Vegnathan, Honourable Ro Filipe Tuisawau, Honourable Inosi Kuridrani and Honourable Viliame Gavoka.

I also take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank the Parliamentary staff who have given us invaluable support. On behalf of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, I commend the Fiji Financial Intelligence Unit 2017 Annual Report to Parliament.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move a motion without notice that a debate on the content of the Report is initiated at a future sitting.

HON. V.K. BHATNAGAR.- Honourable Speaker, I second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote.

The Question is:

That a debate on the content of the Report is initiated at a future sitting.

Does any Member oppose?

(Chorus of 'Noes')

HON. SPEAKER.- As no Member opposes, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

We move on to the next agenda item.

### MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the following Ministers have given notice to make Ministerial Statements under Standing Order 40:

1. Honourable Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism, Local Government, Housing and Community Development;
2. Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment; and
3. Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications.

Honourable Members, each Minister may speak for up to 20 minutes. After each Minister, I will then invite the Leader of the Opposition or his 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.

Honourable Members, I now call on the Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism, Local Government, Housing and Community Development to deliver her statement. Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, Point of Order, please.

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of Order.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I would like to draw your attention Honourable Speaker to our Standing Order 66 which forms the basis of our argument, that we need to disqualify two Ministerial Statements that will be presented this morning based on Standing Order 66 (2) and (3) and I specifically refer to subsection (3) and I quote:

“It is out of order to anticipate any question by discussion of a motion or by debate before the day appointed for the consideration of that question.”

Now Honourable Speaker, Sir, in Standing Order 66(2) and (3), the Ministerial Statements we argue are both from the Minister for Local Government and also the Minister for Economy and Communications, both pre-empt questions that were submitted to the Business Committee and approved for discussion today.

These two questions are, and I refer to the Order Paper, Honourable Speaker, Sir, the Minister for Local Government is pre-empting the motion by the Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua, which was listed in Schedule 1 to move that the Parliament agrees to uphold the Local Government Act, and approves the facilitation of the municipal elections by October 2019, so as to provide legitimate and fair representation to the ratepayers and citizens of the municipalities.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Premila Kumar is presenting in her Ministerial Statement to highlight the operations of municipal councils via to 2009, reasons for municipal reforms achievements and proposed blend towards transformation of our cities and towns. We are, the Honourable Speaker, Sir, of the view that this Ministerial Statement which we only received this morning at 8.30 a.m. pre-empts the presentation by the Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua in Schedule 1, and it goes against Order 66(3).

The next argument, Honourable Speaker, Sir, on the Ministerial Statement by the Honourable Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum again anticipates Question 55 of 2019, the question by the Honourable Aseri Radrodro will be asked of the same Minister to update Parliament on the progress of work arising out of the Public Private Partnership (PPP) signed between the Government of Fiji and the Yalamanchili International PTE Ltd.

In his proposed Ministerial Statement, he proposes to present on digitalFIJI and transformation and seeking our strategic partners, both domestically and internationally as I understand this company; the Yalamanchili, a company from India which is in partnership with Pacific Technology, a local company which the local Director of that company happens to also be the Director of ITC.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, both Ministerial Statements which we only received this morning; both pre-empt the question and the motion and they are out of order under SO 66(3) and they should be ruled out because they both break the 6-month rule in subsection (2) and also anticipating the debate on subsection (3). Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, you made your statement, I will now make mine and it will be very short.

What we are dealing with here - Ministerial Statements; it is the right of the Minister to make those Ministerial Statements, it is in the Standing Orders, there are no two ways about it. We are not talking about questions. In any case, when those questions come up, how do you know that what the Ministers are going to give now will be the same as the answers for the questions this afternoon?

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- So, we will carry on with that. Honourable Members, I will now call upon the Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism, Local Government, Housing and Community Development. Madam, you have the floor.

### Municipal Elections and Reforms

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Ministers, Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament and members of the public who are sitting in the gallery and those joining us live in Fiji and abroad.

I rise today to speak on a topic that has been a subject of national conversation for some times and this conversation has been quite rife in the media and the subject here is municipal elections, and the reforms that had taken place.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- I think it is very important, there is a glaring mission whenever we talk about municipal elections and it is essential to have an informed discussion on the subject. That piece, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is the troubled history of Fiji's municipal councils. It is a history ...

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!



HON. P.D. KUMAR.- ... rife with scandals, corruption and squandering of ratepayer's money, mismanagement and malpractice.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order! You have the floor, Minister.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- It is a history that has been ended by this Government and this Government alone.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- In reality, history tells us that many municipal councils fell short of their legislative mandate, far short. History tells that municipal councils were often used as a means of self-gain more often than a force of communal good and when history tells us anything, Honourable Speaker, Sir, we would be wise to listen and learn from it. By ignoring history and the problems this Government is working to resolve ...

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- ... they are not calling for elections at all, they are calling for a return to council corruption.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji had elected councillors from 1972 until 2008. What did they do to improve our cities and towns? Who benefitted when the elected councillors had the reins?

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Did our cities and towns improve? The Fijian people deserve to hear the background on Local Government operations, a history that will make it loud and clear, why the comprehensive reform this Government is undertaking are so critical before any municipal elections are held.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, under elected councillors, corruption and mismanagement has risen to such extreme levels that on six separate occasions, municipal councils had to be dissolved entirely.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- In 1977, the Suva City Council was dissolved under the Alliance Government.

In 1978, the Nausori Town Council was dissolved, again under the Alliance Government.

In 1997, the Lautoka City Council and the Savusavu Town Council were dissolved under the SVT Government.

In 2000, the Sigatoka Town Council was dissolved under the People's Coalition Government; and in 2008, the Nasinu Town Council was dissolved under the Bainimarama Government.

Over and over again, we see examples of municipal councils' extreme corruption and inefficiency. Let us look at some actual examples of what we are talking about.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the SCC sold off six residential properties where one property was purchased by a councillor. Prime foreshore land was also sold off by councillors with zero consideration given to the land's future value and potential. Now that land is owned by the Carpenters Group and they are building a three-star hotel in a prime location. To all those who struggle every morning to find proper parking space in Suva, guess why, again the Council sold off the Stewart Street Car park and Greig Street car park.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Savusavu Town Council once owned 150 acres of freehold land. They do not anymore because they chose to sell prime 80 acres for peanuts. To who, you might ask? It was bought by councillors, their friends and family members.

The Savusavu Town Council also sold off another six lots of prime foreshore area to the councillor's wife's friends and relatives. There is a record on this. This happened during the term of the SVT Government and you might like to ask the Honourable Leader of Opposition.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- We still wear the scars of that corruption. Today, we cannot even expand the market, bus, taxi and carrier stands in Savusavu because the surrounding properties were sold off.

Nausori Town Council had its own share of shady dealings. Renewal of lease for a golf course area was not pursued; not for any strategic purposes but because the councillors at that time were interested in supporting their friends.

The Nasinu Town Council also sold land to councillors and business people connected to councillors, and the subdivision was financially mismanaged.

Sigatoka Town Council also mismanaged grants given for subdivision of land for the relocation of market and bus terminal.

Labasa Town Council constructed a swimming pool by taking a loan of \$400,000 financed through special rates which simply means that the ratepayers in Labasa are still paying for this swimming pool which they cannot use, because this swimming pool was leased to a former Mayor also Director of a hotel next to the swimming pool for 25 years at \$1,000 per annum for the first 10 years, followed by \$500 increase after every five years.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Labasa Town Council supported by self-interest lost a prime piece of land in Naiyaca given for the purpose of market and bus stand relocation. Council did not pursue the project given that elected councillors have business interest around the existing market and bus stand.

Some of the taxi drivers who have been driving for some time will remember the blatant favoritism displayed by municipal councils with regards to the issuance of taxi base permits by Lautoka City Council and Nausori Town Council. Again the permits were issued to councillors and their family members.

Money was flowing straight from hard-working Fijians into the pockets of certain councillors who were not there to protect the interest of cities and towns. For example, the Suva City Council's annual estimated councilor allowance stood at just about \$190,000 which excluded travel, reception and entertainment costs. We now know that many councillors were holding multiple meetings for no reason other than the collection of sitting allowance.

In 2007, over \$420,000 was paid out to councillors in allowances alone; and that does not even include travel allowances.

Mr. Speaker Sir, in 2008 Government conducted a review of the councils run by an independent three-member committee. The review identified a number of crippling inefficiencies and outright corrupt practices.

It found that some municipal council was kept smaller than others out of fear that political control would be lost. The boundary extensions were not favoured. This boundary extension came under this Government. This had resulted in developments that were haphazard in nature, especially in the peri-urban areas putting greater pressure on the Government services such as utility and infrastructure. Simply put, there was no strategic thinking.

The review found a number of councils were entirely there for political engines, designed to serve the interest of a single party and work against all others.

Mr. Speaker Sir, some Municipal Councils would regularly challenge and undermine the national government policies. This created a lot of bad blood between the Government and the municipal council leading to insignificant investment by the Government towards Municipal Capital Investment.

Ratepayers in Suva may recall (and I am sure all of you can recall) that there was a time where some roads were marked as council roads, others as Government roads. This was the division between the municipal team with the Government team. This brand of petty politics ruled the roost those days, when the national government was from a different political party to that of the municipal council or vice versa, they would wilfully stall improvement and development only to make the other side look bad.

In some places, funds had been expended on public works with little to no supervision or accountability. Large avoidable debts were raking up in no small part because contracts were given out to favored members of the Council, their friends and family members.

Mr. Speaker Sir, sadly our institutions, systems, processes, personnel and policy frameworks were draconian and it needs a major overhaul.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, my Ministry has made progress to improve municipal operations in Fiji since the Government stepped in. One of the key areas that all Municipal

Councils faced difficulty in was with the maintenance and upkeep of roads, including street lights and footpaths.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, from 2012, Road Assets Management were taken over by the Fiji Roads Authority. The results are obvious.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Look at the quality of the footpaths now.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Hear, hear!

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Not just excellent but are also consistent with high standard and uniformity.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Council corruption is not acceptable in any circumstances and not for any reason. With this state of affairs, the Government immediately decided to pay closer attention to municipal affairs. In doing so, innovative solutions were found to resolve long standing problems. Recently, the Rural Local Authorities basic services relating to development permits and sanitation were amalgamated with Municipal Councils and General Health Sanitation Services were shifted to the Ministry of Health.

This was done to provide better services to rural areas and to expand the boundary based on the fact that population distribution is changing in Fiji. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government has also contributed significantly to support Municipal Councils in upgrading municipal markets, public parks, sports and recreational venues including stadiums.

Projects include contribution towards construction of:

- Nausori Market and Bus Stand;
- Laqere Municipal Market;
- Suva's Albert Park;
- Tikaram Park at Lami;
- Sigatoka Riverbank Development;
- Namaka Municipal Market Re-development;
- Swimming Pools;
- A Synthetic Athletic Track and indoor Sports Facility for Lautoka;
- Govind Park Re-development in Ba;
- Garvey Park Re-development in Tavua;
- Rakiraki Municipal Market;
- Levuka Foreshore Wall Upgrade and Old Market Site Upgrade;
- Savusavu Municipal Market; and
- Ganilau Park Upgrades.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the summary of capital investment on municipal assets over the last 10 years stands at an impressive \$130.6 million, the majority of which has been provided by the Government.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, from Colonial days we saw a single market and a bus stand providing little or no access to other towns and villages. Now the Government is decentralising markets across Fiji, providing easy access to all Fijians. We are ensuring no Fijian is left behind whether you live in urban or rural areas.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the levels of autonomy held by Municipal Councils differ from country to country. Generally, cities and towns from a more a developed nation show more autonomy in comparison to those from developing or under developed nations. In Fiji, Municipal Councils have been given delegated powers to manage sanitation, traffic, market/bus stand management, parks management and development management powers. In other countries, the responsibilities are much greater. Municipal Councils actually provide medical services, security services, housing, education and even water, sewerage and electricity services which our Municipal Councils do not.

Internationally, national governments have adopted various models to establish Municipal Councils. Let me share some examples, Malaysia has had Mayors and Councillors appointed by the Government since 1965. The results are obvious. Kuala Lumpur is regarded today as an international destination.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Barbados had no elected local government and councillors are appointed by the Government. Some countries such as Botswana have Council Members partly elected and appointed. It is clear that there is no one-size fits all solutions here.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Learn, learn!

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- But what is also clear is that Fiji must find a solution that best fits our own development needs.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Since 2009, Fijian Municipal Councils have appointed Council Members known as Special Administrators. These Special Administrators have included mix specifically-appointed roles, including Council Chair, Council Chief Executive Officers and Heads of Department. But as the public's expectations of service delivery evolves alongside the municipalities themselves, the Councils need to be bolstered further, especially in the areas of goods stewardship and responsible decision making.

To this end, Mr. Speaker, Sir, my Ministry will search and appoint up to five Special Administrators to oversee the strategic management and provide direction to Municipal Councils. We have also commenced our search for Chief Executive Officers and Heads of Department who will then form the management team and report to the team of Special Administrators. We must first focus on instilling the necessary accountability for our Councils, preventing them from quickly devolving into the culture of corruption that mired our communities for decades.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is equally important that Town Planning Scheme are reviewed for Municipal Councils on a 10-year cycle. Most of our Town Planning Schemes are outdated. The Government has budgeted and commenced an extensive review of Master Plans for the greater Suva, Lautoka and Nadi areas. This work is being undertaken by the world-renowned architect Professor Liu, the man dubbed as the "architect of modern Singapore."

Mr. Speaker, Sir, from 2016 to 2018, the Local Government Committee has been working hand in hand with the Ministry in the area of town and city declaration, extension of town boundaries, development of terms of reference for the reviewing of the Local Government Act, identification of new growth town centres such as Nabouwalu, Seaqaqa, Keiyasi and Korovou, assisting with the development of master plan and in the amalgamation of Municipal Councils with the former rural local authorities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, during the beginning of this Parliament, His Excellency the President informed that Subdivision of Lands Act and Town Planning Act will be considered by Parliament for review. These two legislations have a bearing on the Local Government Act.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a Local Government Act Review Committee shall be appointed to carry out this comprehensive review.

In Fiji we need to find the solution that best fits our nation's need and best serve our people. As such, the level of autonomy to be given to Fijian Municipal Councils essentially will depend upon the level and scale of the activities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for many decades elected Municipal Councils governance arrangements have not worked. Years of pettiness, factionalism and lack of strategic focus and vision has left Municipal Councils in a poor state. It will take time to fix this as it requires a paradigm shift. My Ministry will continue with the reforms to put a better system of governance in municipalities based on global best practice to ensure ratepayers get better returns. We cannot rely on the flawed election system that was introduced in 1972.

Without these reforms in place, we would undermine the progress that this Government has made when it comes to better servicing our municipalities.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- By calling for Municipal Elections, the Opposition is actually calling for a return to corruption and inefficient development.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- We must not and we will not bend to these demands for the sake of political expediency.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank you for allowing me this opportunity to take the floor. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister for the statement. I now give the floor to the Honourable Lynda Tabuya, you have the floor and you have five minutes.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to acknowledge the Ministerial Statement given by the Honourable Premila Kumar and her reasons for the municipal reforms and its achievements. So to summarise the reason that this Government has not held municipal elections is because it believes that it can do a better job by appointing its own qualified people to do it. And that the current municipal election system equals corruption; election equals corruption. I am just trying to digest that right now, Honourable Speaker, Sir. The last time I checked the Constitution,

an election is the tenet of democracy. So, please we need to re-check our definition of what election means.

Let me inform the House about this Government's history to combat corruption and fraud. This Government's history of combatting corruption is appointing family members, such as brothers, daughters and in-laws. This Government's history of combatting corruption is awarding Commissioner positions not based on merit and qualifications, but to reward its failed members who are only able to get a few hundred votes.

Now, it is pretty rich coming from the Honourable Minister that she picks on previous Governments selling our parks. Let me remind her, that Government sold Shirley Park and Churchill Park. The Honourable Minister talks about previous perceived differences between Government and Municipal Councils ...

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- ... using that as an excuse not to have elections.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- I will repeat, the Honourable Minister talks about previous perceived differences between Governments and Municipal Councils, using that as an excuse not to have elections. That is an issue of good governance, if you cannot manage Municipal Councils, then step out of the way, let us do it. We will manage the Municipal Councils.

As a town ratepayer, my hope is that Council services will be provided for all members of municipality, not just a few. I know what it is like to live in those conditions and municipal neglect is the form of violence against the most vulnerable of our society. People in places like Vilavou Settlement, which the Honourable Speaker, Sir, is aware of, in Valelevu still struggle. They are right here behind Rishikul Primary School and Secondary School. They have a wall they are so worried about it is going to fall over and there is sewer water coming from Rishikul Secondary School into the property. Where is the justice in that? What is happening to the Municipals Council managing that?

These are the types of people who need their Government to step up and take the responsibility. The only question is, can you do so in a transparent and accountable way? Sadly, my final conclusion is "no". It does not matter how well intentioned or elaborate your Government's Municipal plans are, as the saying goes, "The road to hell is paved with good intentions." Until the people are given a voice through democratic municipal elections, towns and cities will continue to be abandoned by the wayside, just like a lot of garbage we see when we go through the squatter settlements and informal settlements.

The people of Fiji demand their voices to be heard through municipal elections and I can promise you, if we have elections now, there will be a turnout like you have never seen and at the end of the day, this is what the Government fears. Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. I now give the floor to the Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua. You have the floor, you have five minutes.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I thank the Honourable Minister for her statement and I have no doubt that this is in fact an anticipation of my motion that I expect to be tabled later today as per the Order Paper.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it has almost become predictable for the Honourable Minister to blame the past. It might be poor form to blame a colleague Minister of hers, who was her own immediate predecessor, but going all the way prior to 2009, as her speech topic highlights in the papers of notice we received morning is now getting a bit tired and old.

I do not think ratepayers are interested in excuses and grand dreams, Honourable Speaker. The services they receive in return for rates that they pay are not value for money and meaningless. If the ratepayers cannot exercise their fundamental rights to elect their representative, who will advocate for the very practical issues that are dear to them in terms of their living communes and their quality of life. So when ratepayers are bound by laws to pay certain rates, naturally, there are expectations that their interests will be taken into consideration. But how can their interest be protected if CEOs of Town Councils are outsourced to third parties with no skin in the game.

This is the fundamental flaw of governance at the local level under this Government, Honourable Speaker. A few weeks ago and during last year, I was reminded of the plight as the Honourable Tabuya said, of the Vilavou Community on Caqiri Road. They tell me that they pay rates but they do not have proper rubbish collection or proper footpaths or lighting for footpaths, despite many promises made to them in 2014.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it would be extremely concerning if they were being discriminated against because of their heritage, address or community-type. They pay rates and VAT, just like everyone else, and they are entitled to equality under the law in practice, and not just words, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, there is no point in playing the blame game. The Honourable Minister said Fiji's current Ease of Doing Business ranking is 101, could be links to the operations of councils. She would like to know that if indeed were the case and she is correct then how can she justify the much higher ranking of 34 that Fiji had when there were elected Municipal Councils. Does it mean that under the elected council's Ease of Doing Business was far far better?

Mr. Speaker, the ratepayers and citizens are facing countless problems. These have been brought to the attention of the Honourable Minister and let me just give another example.

On 13th March, 2019, the market vendors of Labasa signed a petition and sent it the Honourable Minister airing their grievances about the Labasa Town Council's CEO, over his treatment of market staff and car park attendants. They also highlighted the shoddy state of recent renovations to the market like a leaking gutter that still leaks despite it being changed, cracked floor of a new farmer's shed, to name a few.

We do not need a lesson in history, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and the Honourable Minister should look no further than her own predecessor, the Honourable Praveen Bala, who was the Ba Town Councillor for sixteen years (from 1993 to 2009), and in this period, he was the Town's Mayor for 12 years. There was unprecedented development in Ba. It was regarded as the cleanest municipality in Fiji. Does this mean that the Honourable Praveen Bala was leading a corrupt Council? I will say more on this in my motion, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Sir.



HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member for her Statement. Honourable Members, before we go to the next two Ministerial Statements, I will suspend the proceedings for refreshments in the Big Committee Room and we will resume in half an hour.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.22 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.00 a.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will continue and I now have the honour of calling on the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment to deliver his Statement. You have the floor, Sir.

Call to Action to Protect our Rivers

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- The Honourable Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament. I wish to speak on the topic “Call to Action to Protect Our Rivers.” Before that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I just want to bring to your attention, you have noted how the Honourable Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism, Local Government, Housing and Community Development tried to explain very eloquently how we need to develop responses and solutions based on development needs of our country. She very aptly, based on research, demonstrated that within the Pacific region, small states like the Caribbean region, what is the current practice? Continuously, we have responses from the other side saying, “We need elections, we need elections”.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I term that as “tramline-thinking”, one track mind, not willing to think outside of the box, looking for proposing solutions out of text books learned in universities and high schools.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is the place where we need to think outside of the box, work outside that tramline, go to a soccer field, stand in the middle and look all around and say, “There is so much opportunity out there.”

Mr. Speaker, Sir, 14th March, 2019 was the International Day of Action for Rivers dedicated to honour our life-giving rivers and I appreciate the actions of those who have ensured that our rivers continue flowing.

Mr. Speaker Sir, it is a day dedicated to solidarity, when we all come together in unison to say that our rivers matter. Our rivers are our lifeline and having access to clean and flowing water matters.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the International Day of Action for Rivers empowers us to have a say in decisions that affect our rivers and our lives. This year marks the 22nd year for the International Day of Action for Rivers. International Day of Action Against Dimension for Rivers, Water and Light was adopted during the first international meeting of people affected by dams in March 1997 in Curitiba, Brazil. The aim of that meeting was to ensure healthy and vibrant watershed and equitable and sustainable management of our rivers, including addressing river regulations by depths.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the International Day of Action for Rivers is a day marked for people to rise up to celebrate and protect their rivers. The fight for rivers is a fight for the future and given our connection to Waterways in Fiji, it is vital that we take this seriously.

Mr. Speaker Sir, while having a discourse on rivers and its importance, we also celebrated the life-giving rivers and advocate river health and restoration. That day is a day to reflect on our current efforts to sustain our rivers and demand improvements in policies and practices so that our rivers are clean and immaculate. It is on this day that water enthusiasts and environmentalists raised their voices in harmony to denounce unsustainable water development projects, rescue our rivers and

watersheds and demand equitable and sustainable management for waterways. Together, they demonstrated that issues surrounding waterways and rivers are not local but global in the scope and such apart from local activities, global actions also are needed.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just a few weeks back on 8th March, we celebrated International Women's Day. Women are intrinsically linked to environment and waterways. The theme of this year's International Day of Action for Rivers is, I quote: "Celebration of the role of women in protecting and managing our rivers."

Honourable Speaker, Sir, women are in the forefront when it comes to water management or natural resources management. Often times, women are the main users of water in households and communities. Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is these women who are tasked with securing, sustaining and using water resources. Furthermore, it is these women who fetch food from rivers. Some women in our rural area spends more time taking food from the rivers than any other activity. Women are inherently related to the sustainability of our rivers, yet are often singled out during decision-making.

It is this paradox of their participation in decision-making in regards to water and river management this year's theme aspires to achieve. It is time now to address the inequalities and promote water leaders in our communities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to mark this globally, the inaugural Women and Rivers Conference was convened in Kathmandu, Nepal from 6th to 10th March, 2019. The congress aimed to empower women to raise their voices on behalf of fresh water resources. To achieve this locally, we need greater women participation in resource management, transparency in the development and implementation of water policies, along with empowerment of women in local communities. Only through this, we shall be able to achieve inalienable rights of communities to manage their water, forest and other resources and sustain the right of every person to a healthy environment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for us in Fiji, rivers sustain our lives. We depend on them for food, transport and recreation. Rivers are integral to our creations and customs. We have taken so much from our rivers but what is it that we have given back to these rivers?

Besides dumping our rubbish, contributing to siltation, poisoning gets into waters with waste and chemical from farms and factories. We are literally killing the river prime ecosystem bit by bit. We are clogging this life-giving arteries of our nature and have distant ourselves for certain disaster, if we do not change our conducted behaviour. Our one-sided development paradigm has singled the death-knell rivers. We all, through our actions, will soon be responsible, if we do not react now.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, rivers also play a very important role in agricultural development. Rivers associated with alluvial soils and provide the most productive agriculture land of the country. It also provides water for sustainable agriculture, both crops and livestock as well as for food processing. It further provides the means of transportation for interior parts of the country's population. Rivers support the livelihood of people by providing water for various kinds of domestic uses, it serves as a source of protein and support ecotourism activities.

Most of our economic centres are located on the river banks for major rivers, hence it becomes vital that we take care of our rivers now before it becomes too late.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our rivers are under threat from our activities. While rivers have always given us life, we are suffocating our rivers by treating it as a rubbish dump. We are facing unprecedented impacts of climate change that is affecting our livelihood and our very existence.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we, as a nation, led by the Honourable Prime Minister have led the charge to address climate change and its impact on small island states at the global level.

We have embarked on a new vision for our collective future, to have resilient communities. It is true that water is at the heart of many of today's struggles. Decisions about how our waterways are used, managed and developed affect the lives of many.

For us in Fiji our rivers are sacred, it gives us water and life without which we could not exist. Our livelihoods and cultures are deeply connected to our rivers, the situation is as dire for us as any other riverine community in the world. As such, we need to rethink development concerning our water resources and waterways. We should not be gullible to the greed of capitalism, short-term gains by polluting our rivers and create water crisis, neither shall we let our actions choke our rivers. Let us mark this year and years ahead to raise awareness about the importance of clean waterways and voice concerns to improve water governance and environmental flows and rivers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our Government is committed to safeguarding our waterways and environment. To maintain the inextricable bondage between a river and various forms of life, we have various laws including the Environment and Management Act 2005 and associated regulations, the Litter Act 2008, the Drainage (Amendment) Act 2018 that are aimed at safeguarding these resources and our environment.

The Ministry of Waterways and Environment has started to vigorously enforce this legislation. To mark this, we have over the last four weeks trained approximately 500 Litter Prevention Officers in Suva and Taveuni from various Government agencies and departments to monitor litter issues. These litter often end up in our waterways causing pollution and other environmental problems. We will also use the above and other legislations to prosecute anyone who uses chemicals to obtain short term gains from waterways.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, riverbank erosion has been a major issue surrounding our rivers. Riverbank erosion is a natural and inevitable phenomenon and can be defined as a dynamic and natural process which involves the removal of materials from the banks of the river. Rivers and streams are dynamic system as they are constantly changing, the natural equilibrium however is excavated through our activities. Riverbank erosion is often accelerated through flooding, unsustainable land use, stream management, over-clearing of catchment and riparian vegetation and poorly managed gravel extraction which indeed stabilises the banks.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in Fiji, a considerable percentage of the population live along the banks of meandering rivers and in other high-risk zones. While they have lived in harmony with the river in the past, things have started to change now. These communities are now more vulnerable than ever before. Their personal safety and shelter as well as source of their livelihoods are a threat from riverbank erosion and its impacts.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, unattended river bank erosion may have a major consequences on human settlements and agriculture activity. Our villages, roads, public infrastructure and agriculture are being threatened by riverbank erosion. Parts of the Sigatoka Valley River are being washed away at the rate of 8 metres every year and with this, we are losing the Valley alluvial arable land which has been the main base for the Valley Road's vegetable production. Roads are being washed away, schools are threatened. Mr. Speaker, Sir, displacement and relocations are likely to occur in the riverside regions where people are vulnerable to riverbank erosion and this has multiple socio-economic impacts. These include loss of home, agricultural land, asset, human health and loss of accumulated human capital.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our Ministry of Waterways and Environment has now embarked on a nature-based solution to respond to a problem caused by nature. We have begun planting vetiver grass alongside the river banks to stabilise the banks and prevent it from any further erosion. Approximately 500 metres of river banks along the Naveicovatu Village in Wainibuku has been stabilised using vetiver technology and this will be further scaled up to other river systems in the country.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the goal of this project is to reduce riverbank erosion through ecological approach using vetiver technology, planned, delivered and maintained through communities making this project a unique one. It is unique in the sense that it empowers the community to defend themselves from riverbank erosion and in doing so, evolving the techniques and building necessary capacity to protect their own communities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this project further reflects the responsibility and work taken up by the Naveicovatu community towards ensuring our environment is in a better state for the future. I applaud the Naveicovatu community for having such foresight and taking up this responsibility to secure the existence from the encroaching river. Furthermore, in doing so, this community is doing its part to help sequester carbon and help our nation achieve our commitments under the climate agreements.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the vetiver system is a very simple, practical, inexpensive and effective biological measure to soil and water conservation. Vetiver grass was introduced in Fiji over 100 years ago and it has been widely used for soil and water conservation purposes for more than 50 years. Vetiver has been a very important component of soil erosion control on the sugarcane lands around Lautoka and Rakiraki from 1960s until fairly recently. The Land Resource Planning Division of the Ministry of Agriculture has been involved in vetiver systems to address soil erosion issues in farms. The vetiver grass has distinctive morphological, physiological and ecological characteristics. Together with its tolerance to highly adverse growing conditions provide a unique bio-engineering tool for land stabilisation, flood and stream bank erosion control. It is a non-invasive, a very good pollution control thus making it ideal for soil and water conservation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Naveicovatu community as a village has planted 400 metres of vetiver along the river bank aimed at protecting the village from erosion. Furthermore, fruit trees are also planted to support nutritional security in the village with the surplus going to the roadside stalls or markets in the weekend. This project has been a very good initiative with both men and women involved in planting vetiver.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are multiple benefits associated with promoting vetiver for river banks and slope stabilisation. Some of these are:

1. Conserve soil and water (runoff retention) in the farmlands.
2. It is a low cost bio-engineering tool.
3. It is a green technology, as such helps sequester carbon.
4. The tensile strength of vetiver roots is as strong, long and has massive root network which is very fast growing, it is better than many types of trees which normally take two to three years to be effective.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the river bank protection will further provide the following benefits to the Naveicovatu Village:

1. Protection of land and protection of erosion.
2. Stabilisation of the river banks - reduces loss of agricultural land.

3. Reduction of excessive sedimentation within watercourses which splits up gravel beds and destroys spawning and invertebrate habitat.
4. Reduction of channel widening and associated flow issues.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to take this opportunity to urge donors, NGOs and other agencies to promote vetiver as a tool for river bank stabilisation and for erosion control purposes. We need to work together to scale up such nature-based solutions and approaches and use it as a vegetative candidate for bio-engineering river stabilisation work.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I now wish to invite them to provide funding to take ownership of matching commitment with us. We intend to do 100 kilometres every year. We invite NGOs to commit funding for 25 kilometres and the private sector to also come forward and commit funding for 25 kilometres while we will take the other 50 kilometres, therefore 100 kilometres every year for the next four years. We also urge them to adopt this unique community-based model whereby we pay the community \$12.20 per metre which is equivalent to \$12,200 per kilometre. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this amount goes to the community while the community themselves, who are trained by us and supervised by us gets the required variety of vetiver and does the planting themselves.

In this way, we can achieve a community-based 100 kilometres per year vetiver grass plantation along the river banks throughout Fiji. The community takes full ownership of the project, Mr. Speaker, Sir and this is an amazing way of delivering this particular project. Apart from this being a nature-based solution, this is also a community-centric approach and the Ministry empowers the local community to address river bank erosion through ecological means. The Ministry will further integrate ecosystem-based approaches into its hard infrastructure engineering solutions to address river bank and coastal erosion problems.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to conclude it is vital to ensure that our rivers must flow freely, fearlessly and without its water quality being compromised. I repeat, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is vital to ensure that our rivers must flow freely, fearlessly and without its water quality being compromised. Furthermore as it is now a source of livelihood, means of transportation, avenue for leisure activities and support for agriculture and non-agriculture sector, our activities in and around it should not lead to it becoming a constraint to livelihood, growth or threat to our infrastructure. Just as we all have the right to live, every river also has a right to live; it is life. Located anywhere in the world we have a common struggle when it comes to water waste management.

Mr, Speaker, Sir, it is therefore necessary to implement ways to manage our freshwaters which are equitable, sustainable and effective. As such, I urge fellow Fijians to get together and reduce river pollution by litter of chemicals, unsustainable gravel extraction or indiscriminate deforestation. Let us do our part for conservation and truly sustainable development for our rivers. I ask all Fijians to pledge to protect our rivers and waterways from pollution, ensure environmental flows are sustained, clean our rivers, waterways and take up activities to restore our rivers to its pristine and natural status. Let us show our commitment to not only the current generation but to the future generation as well. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I thank the Minister for his Ministerial Statement. I now have the pleasure of giving the floor to the Honourable Jese Saukuru.

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to respond to the Ministerial Statement made by the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Environment and Waterways on the International Day of Action for Rivers and the importance of rivers to the lives of all Fijian people.

The Honourable Minister did not answer my question yesterday on flooding in the West on Sunday that is related to the Ministerial Statement today. Our rivers, Mr. Speaker, Sir, are part of our natural resources, heritage and the largest ecosystem upon which the lives of almost every living species in these islands are dependent upon. This spells out the need to keep our rivers clean and protected.

We, on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am glad to note the various points raised by the Honourable Minister in his Ministerial Statement expressing the hope should those noble intentions be realised, it will augur well for our rivers, ecosystem dependent upon our rivers and the future generations.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the legacy of this Government with regard to environment conservation and protection as well as sustainable development of our natural resources run contrary to what it preaches. That is the biggest concern and grave concern that eclipses everything that the Honourable Minister has just said and often what this Government has to say on this matter and related issues.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the yardstick to measure our progress in relation to protecting our rivers and the question of honesty by this Government on this pressing matter can be deduced by the following issues:

1. Depleting forest cover as a result of excessive logging and damages caused to the catchment areas.
2. Disturbance of river beds caused by damaging and poorly planned extraction of low value minerals.
3. Failure to enhance the Environment Management Act 2005 and ensure compliance to Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) on the various developments affecting our rivers and water systems.
4. Damages caused to marine life and soil structure by environmental exploitation resulting from mining and release of toxic gas, chemicals and waste into our rivers and water systems.
5. Tampering with lush green pristine waterways contributing to our rivers by mismanaged developments causing landslides, blockade and diversion of water flow as well as destroying local flora and fauna.
6. Irregular management of our rivers systems which has resulted in devastating floods damaging the river banks and causing loss of life and property.
7. Encroaching upon native land and water resources without prior consent and failure to adequately compensate the landowners by way of fair share, royalties, rent and goodwill while not employing the local people in the various industries that is carried out affecting our rivers.
8. Absence of a River Engineering Commission to explore, plan, guide and monitor the sustainable development of our river systems with the view of protecting our rivers and empowering all the Fijians by realizing the maximum benefits from the various projects taking place affecting and related to our rivers.
9. Poor methodologies used in harvesting marine resources affecting the growth and conservation of marine life compromising food security and damaging our eco-system.
10. Failure of this Government and the municipal councils to purchase and install traps collecting plastics and other foreign materials to keep our rivers clean and safe.
11. Cause of concern for delay to devise a National Strategic Plan in line with our National Development Plan and Sustainable Development Goals for the protection of our rivers in partnership with landowners and other stakeholders in nation building.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our rivers are the source of food, water, energy, history and natural resources. They have a meaningful purpose in our national life and our rivers will continue to play a defining role in many more ways the future as we enter an era bearing the brunt of climate change and environmental exploitation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we cannot be an island as a development nation divorced from the developments taking place on the world stage and this statement provides us as much as it has provided upon the Honourable Minister to add a few words in that respect on the protection of our rivers. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.-I thank the Honourable Member. I now have the pleasure of giving the floor to the Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua. You have the floor, Ma'am.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker, Sir. Honourable Speaker, I thank the Honourable Minister for his statement and I do agree, indeed healthy rivers are crucial to maintaining the equilibrium in our biospheres, but honouring our rivers cannot be left to a one- day opportunistic celebration and the associated public relation events.

(Laughter)

This type of honour is meaningless if at a practical level they dishonour the lifeblood of our waterways at the local level by;

1. Unregulated extraction of gravel on riverbeds;
2. The unimpeded pollution of waterways link to streams and rivers because rubbish collection is not a provided service to people outside of towns and city areas; and
3. The brow-raising EIA Reports that boldly claim minimal damage to swimming and washing in the Wainikoroiluva River for hydro-power objectives in Namosi.

So I would like to ask at this juncture, Mr. Speaker, Sir, are these three examples of honouring our rivers by the Government is something they can be proud of? Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Minister would be right to say that some of the issues I have just highlighted belong to another portfolio, and he would be right. However, this in no way excuses the Minister from strongly advocating for the utmost of protecting standards for rivers, streams and lakes to his own peers during Cabinet meetings or during those intense strategic planning meetings for low-hanging fruits like, I think the famous one held at Level 9.

(Laughter)

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if the Honourable Minister starts there amongst his own, all these words can actually start to mean something, and the taxpayers will then of course be able to separate fact from fiction about Fiji's rivers during the budget process. I thank you Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I thank the Honourable Member for her statement. We now move on to the next Ministerial Statement.

I have the pleasure of giving the floor to the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications to deliver his statement. You have the floor, Sir.

digitalFIJl Programme

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to inform Parliament



about Digital Government Transformation Programme now referred to as digitalFIJI. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fijian Government under the leadership of our Honourable Prime Minister has made it top priority to find the very best strategic development partners be it from the public and private sector to further grow the Fijian Economy.

We are constantly searching around the globe for the best possible fit that will help us resolve any challenges that Fiji is faced with, and especially in the rapidly accelerated world of technological advancements. Mr. Speaker, Sir, Nokia used to be the world leader in mobile phones and were proud of their applications which were regarded as advanced at that point in time. They did not change fast enough to adapt to the smartphone revolution and they have lagged behind the more innovative supply such as Samsung and Apple.

Even Sony is now reportedly already in the process of cutting 50 percent of their workforce in the Smartphone Division by 2020. Everyone of course knows about the story about Kodak, it no longer exists because they did not change with the time. That is why, Honourable Speaker, it is so important for Fiji to modernise our economy as efficiently as possible and on a strong foundation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is exactly what the Digital Government Transformation is all about. We are not only about making Government service more accessible and transparent, we are also making them more efficient and from the very top. However, we are driven by the fundamental philosophy that while the digital age can be hailed as the great equalizer, it can also be the greatest dis-equaliser if not everyone has equal access to it too.

Once such service has the access to digital television through *Walesi* whereby our people have access to information and as mentioned yesterday, there is a dedicated Parliamentary Channel. We have made a Ministerial Statement on *Walesi* last year and we will be making one separately in a later sitting to further update Parliament. *Walesi* is also a platform Mr. Speaker, Sir, where we want to have ubiquitous applications.

Mr. Speaker, the Digital Government transformation journey that we have embarked for a number of years has shown exponential growth and our processes are flexible to allow for the engagement of a number of new development partners.

Mr. Speaker, this progress has not been short of challenges and this demonstrates how massive the Digital Government Transformation Programme is and more importantly, how agile our processes are and how we have addressed these challenges.

For instance, Mr. Speaker, for the Register of Titles and Deeds Office, we have to hire 60 additional Project staff on the massive scanning exercise of all the leases, titles and deeds, some of them actually date back to pre-colonial times. Some of the deeds, forms are actually big as this, so we have to actually have the colossal task of scanning of all these, and we did that 24/7.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in fact that there were no scanners available in Fiji that will actually scan these size documents. If we were to bring in scanners from overseas, what they call a Book-eye scanners, we have to physically do this over a long period of time. The reality is that we have always been constantly in breach of the Act.

If you look at the Act, previous Governments and, of course, we had to ensure that these titles are stored in fireproof areas, it never was.

In fact, in 2007 when we moved into the Suvavou House, the Title's Office used to be on the second floor. The second floor was actually sinking because of the weight of the paper so much so

we had to move the Title's Office to the ground floor at Civic Towers because it could not sink on the ground floor. So, today by the scanning of these documents, God forbid if there is a fire, we will at least have preservation of all these titles and deeds.

Mr. Speaker, in 2017, there will be greater costs if all were burnt down and you never had any title to any of your lands.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in 2017, the Fijian Government partners with the Singaporean Government through the Singapore Corporation Enterprises, which is an agency of the Singaporean Government. The partnership, Mr. Speaker, was to build upon the foundation that we have set and to undertake an ambitious and sweeping four-year Digital Government Transformation initiative, now known as digitalFIJI, and it is no coincidence that when we were looking for a strategic partner to continue to bring Fiji forward digitally, we turned to Singapore, one of the most cutting edge innovative places in the world.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Singapore is a nation that had already been faced with, not only bringing its own Government services online, but others all around the world. Fiji became the first project in the Pacific for them, another milestone that further cements our recent leadership.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, of this ongoing initiative we are going to provide convenient 24/7 access to Government services for all Fijians that is already becoming a reality.

On the 14th June, 2018 last year, the Honourable Prime Minister launched the digitalFIJI and the following mobile phone applications, namely Directory@Gov and my Feedback. The Government directory (Directory@Gov) puts the up-to-date contact details of key government officials from the Director level up to the Ministers, including the Personal Assistants of these key Government officials, Government companies, entities and Fijian missions all at the fingertips of our people.

Since its launch, the Government Directory is receiving over 1,000 unique users a month coming from over 30 countries around the world. It is becoming the primary source of obtaining up-to-date contact details across Government.

The myFeedback portal allows Fijians to communicate their feedback directly to the Government and track its status while they await a response. Since the launch, the My feedback application has received over 300 feedback reports and of that, 70 percent had been resolved within a week and with the majority of those remaining resolved within the next 14 days.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these myFeedbacks are being tracked and traceable making Government Ministries and agencies more accountable and thereby including service delivery, including very soon the Municipal Councils.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we urge more Fijians to utilise this mobile phone application. It is the best way to actually see an issue that you are facing being resolved. In addition to the DigitalFiji mobile phone application, this service is also web-based and can be accessed through our web browser.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government has already demonstrated unparalleled commitment to Fijian families. We are furthering their commitment through digitalFIJI. Next week, the Honourable Prime Minister will be launching a Birth Registration mobile phone application that will allow new mothers and hopefully fathers to initiate the birth registration process electronically from the hospital or at home as opposed to going to a BDM office. The details on the birth notification, which is normally given to the mother upon birth, will automatically be extracted from the hospital system.

With this new system in place, parents can pre-book a time to collect the birth certificate, so the mother, while having the comfort of her bed whilst the child is born, once she decides what name she will give the baby, she can go on to the app., fill out all the details that she would normally fill out manually, and then submit it online through the phone and make a time as to when she will go and pick up the birth certificate. That is precisely what is going to happen, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

We will initially start off with CWM Hospital and very soon, we will progressively extend it throughout Fiji. We will also, Mr. Speaker, Sir, launch shortly an e-service for the request to reprint birth certificates. Again a lot of people come before school starts to pick up birth certificates. They can now put those requests in on their mobile phone app. and then they have a time, they simply go, pay for it and collect the birth certificate.

Mr. Speaker, we will soon thereafter, have what we call, e-birth certificates, which you will have on your phones which is simply tapped at machines and they will get the information on the birth certificates.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji is also able to create an e-profile on the digitalFIJI app. You can then have direct access to the Fijian Government's e-services.

Users are issued a surname and password upon registration for any profile so they can provide e-authentication of their identity each time they go and use a Government service. Through this secured single sign-in, Fijians can access all current and future digitalFIJI services.

The e-profile will also display personal information, text lodgement history from the Fiji Revenue and Customs Services database. FNPFI information will also be available on the e-profile.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, by August of this year, the Fijian Government aims to have the e-payment component roll out too. What this means is that Fijians will be able to pay for Government services online instead of queuing up at Government offices for the services. You will only need to go to a Government office to collect the documentation or instruments, so you do not have to go and queue there with the cashier, et cetera, so with the mothers who are going to send their birth certificate registration, they can pay online and they simply have to go and pick it up.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, new and emerging technologies are giving us the opportunity to review, streamline and optimise Government processes. We can remove redundant, obsolete and non-value adding activities in our current processes. We are doing just that.

The business process to re-engineer the Births, Deaths and Marriage Registry and the Companies Registry or Registrar of Companies (ROC) have been completed. The birth module within the BDM system is live and this has enabled the development of the mobile phone application for birth registration, while the death and marriages is module for the mobile phone app. and is scheduled to go live by the end of 2019.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, by June of this year, the ROC system will be online. What this means for our people is that they will be able to do 24/7 online company searches for companies that have been digitised and verified. Of course, the older ones will continue to get digitised and verified. This will be a progressive exercise given that some of these instruments and companies date as far back as pre-independence.

We have also found that many of the companies before, for example, if you have registered a company and you open a bank account with a bank, the bank should normally send their clerks to go and verify with the XYZ director of the company. When clerks or lawyers come in, they

physically go and pick up the files and do the searches. Sometimes when people are a bit lazy, they do not want to photocopy, they rip out the originals and walk out with it, so we have to have an authentication process. The turnaround waiting time to receive documentation will be reduced by approximately half and the accuracy of data and service quality will be dramatically improved.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the work on the data harmonisation for BDM and the Registrar of Companies had already started last year in December. By June this year, we will begin work on the Data Exchange Platform. What this means is that the people data and the establishment data for companies and businesses will be shared across Government agencies with security guaranteed by strict access protections.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Data Exchange Platform will give us a common central source of data-sharing ensuring consistency and accuracy of the data. No more operating in silos, no more decentralised system it may have, but one reliable, consistent and accurate source of information across the Government, so the Minister for Health, Minister for National Disaster Management, Minister for Education, Minister for Local Government, Minister for Women, they can all have access to the same data without actually having to establish their own databases.

More importantly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fijians will no longer need to constantly fill in the same common details in every application that they make to a Government agency, and this will now feed in to what I wanted to mention about a National ID card.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the Fijian Government has commenced the business process for engineering of the Register of Titles and Deeds Office in January of this year and we expect this to be completed by June of this year. Upon completion within two years, Fijians will be able to do 24/7 online searches for Leases, Titles and Deeds that will also include lodgement and any other transactions regarding land instruments. The turnaround waiting time to receive documentation will be reduced by approximately half the time and the accuracy of data and service quality will be dramatically improved.

Our partnership with the Singapore Economic Corporation does not stop there. We are also undertaking a systematic approach to improve the ease of doing business in Fiji. A growing economy means growing opportunity, opportunities to start a business or expand a business in Fiji and throughout the region. We want to make that process as easy as possible for our people and we are leveraging new technology to make that happen. We are reviewing the process to obtain Construction Permit Approvals with an expected improvement in efficiency of 25 percent immediately, decreasing the number of required forms from 27 down to 9. At the moment, you have to fill out about 27 different forms, cutting turnaround time by over 40 days just by implementing the re-designed processes.

Mr. Speaker Sir, by next year we expect to complete the Integrated Construction Permits Online Approval System which should provide an efficient, one stop shop for all construction applications and approvals. For Budding Entrepreneurs looking to start a business with dramatically improving the efficiency of what was once "Let Us Be Honest A Painful Process" by using technology to improve communication across agencies, whether it is the National Fire Authority, OHS, the municipal councils, we expect to immediately improve performance by more than 40 percent, cutting the current 45 days of turnaround time to just 18.5 days. We expect the turnaround times to decrease even further following the implementation of the Integrated Online System for starting a business.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, by June this year, we will be launching an Online Information Portal that will be a one sub-portal for builders and developers to obtain all the information and forms required

when applying for construction permits. The portal will also provide all the relevant information for starting a business.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fijian Government is also in discussion with the Singapore Corporation Enterprise to conduct a study and implementation of the Fijian National ID Card. The Fijian National ID initiative will establish our authority to the Identity Scheme. Under this Initiative, the Fijian National ID Card holder will be assigned a unique number combined with the use of biometrics. This will ensure that every ID card issued is unique to every individual

Mr. Speaker Sir, today there are various number of references attached to one citizen, such as your birth Registration Number, , Fiji Revenue and Customs Service Number, , Health Card Number, FNPF Card Number, Driving Licence Number and some of these numbers are as long as nine digits. Under this initiative, our people will only have to remember one ID No. This will remove the hassle of having to remember or fill various ID Nos. in different applications.

With the single ID card, Mr. Speaker, there will be an effective mechanism to prevent identity fraud which is becoming a big issue, not just in Fiji, but many countries in particular to do with money laundering, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker Sir, in reviewing our systems, we have discovered incidents whereby one person had two different IDs. For example, with one name, one saying, Tevita one with one i, one with two i's, one person whose siblings have spelling variations of one or both of their parents in the birth certificate. Under the National IDs initiative, we will cleanse the data and improve the quality of our data.

Mr. Speaker Sir, by way of reference, in 2014 our birth systems statistics showed that more than 25,000 people did not have their birth certificates, these are full grown adults. As a result of this, there was an amnesty drive carried out by the Ministry of Justice to register those whose births had not been registered and it was found that Fijians as old as 86 years old have been living their entire life without a birth certificate.

The National ID card will go through a process of data validation which will help improve and bring accuracy of the people data. Combined with matrix information kept at the point of registration, it will ensure the quality of the data as a single source of truth for citizens is maintained.

The National ID Card collated in the future, Mr. Speaker Sir, Government will be able to generate National Population and Social Statistics for long-term planning and policy formulation that will create efficiency and reduce the need to do costly census exercises to a minimum.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the private sectors such as banks would be able to use the National ID for the purpose of KYC or Know Your Customer, thereby making business processes easier and trustworthy. Having a National ID with a unique number will allow for a unified identification of citizens across all Government offices without each Ministry or Agency having to create their own ID systems. This will eliminate duplication and reduce unnecessary costs, both administrative and financial.

Today Mr. Speaker, Sir, key Ministries and national organisations, since the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, FNPF and Fiji Revenue & Customs Service (FRCS) have their own ID systems and there is a need to iron out discrepancy which are ongoing, time consuming and indeed costly.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we see this initiative as our continued determination to build trust in our economy, a necessary step to be part of the global and digital economy. Mr. Speaker, with all these developments taking place, we must realise that this Digital Government transformation journey started a few years ago with the Yalamanchili Solutions PTE Limited who have undertaken the digitisation work in a few Ministries.

In fact one of the first digitisation efforts we undertook was in 2014 with partnership with Yalamanchili to digitise the *Vola ni Kawa Bula* register. Mr. Speaker, as of 20th February this year, over 12,000 *i tokatoka* and more than 640,000 members have had their manual records converted and digitised with the GIS mapping. By putting this information on a computer database, we are preserving the critical information for all time. We are bringing greater efficiency to the equal distribution of land lease monies and other hallmark achievements of this Government. How much money are we talking about? Well for the period of 25th of February 2015 to the end of February this year, we have distributed nearly \$200 million in lease monies to our landowners.

Another key project of the Yalamanchili Solutions PTE Limited is a social welfare application through which there has been a digital implementation of the social pension and care benefits scheme by the Department of Social Welfare. Through this software, the details of the beneficiaries of these schemes are digitally recorded. Mr. Speaker, as at February this year details of a total of 3,216 beneficiaries have been digitised through this software.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the area of ICT hardware and software procurement, the Yalamanchili team has also introduced the e-tender portal known as “TenderLink” which provides a secure, transparent, efficient and effective tool for both the suppliers in Government whereby the tender or request for quote is advertised through the portal and proposals of bids are securely uploaded and downloaded at the closing date and time of uploading a proposal or bids is also accounted for.

This tender portal is now being used in the Fiji Procurement Office for all Non-ICT procurement as well. Mr. Speaker, the technical expertise provided by the Yalamanchili team has resulted in massive Government savings to the tune of \$9.5 million from 2013 to December 2018 through negotiations held with suppliers. Mr. Speaker, prior to this partnership, the ICT Department would actually purchase end of life hardware and software at exorbitant prices. This was because of the calibre of people there at that time.

Mr. Speaker, as a result of our partnership with the Yalamanchili, ICT hardware and software purchased by Government, our IT internationally accepted standards and the warranty periods are for longer periods from one year previously to now three to five years or longer depending on the ICT software and hardware. As mentioned earlier we are now partnering with Singaporean Government through the Singaporean Corporation Enterprise and there are number of areas where the Singaporeans have a great advantage in implementation than others including Yalamanchili.

Mr. Speaker, under this partnership with the Singaporean Government, we are also building capacity not only Government but in our people. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have now new internship opportunities to work with the Singapore Corporation Enterprise on the digitalFIJI Programme. Mr. Speaker, this will give young Fijians interested in ICT, studying ICT course at universities direct access to the extremely competitive IT team from Singapore.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sorry is that the first bell or second bell?

HON. MEMBERS.- Second.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- It is a pity. I wanted to tell you about LexisNexis which you need to have access too.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- You have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sorry, can I continue, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Thank you.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I was saying, currently there are three students from USP and we will shortly be having students from FNU. In fact, Mr. Speaker, tomorrow we will be advertising expressions of interest for young people to be part of the Internship Programme and we encourage our young people to be part of this exciting journey. =

Mr. Speaker, when it comes to computer based lexis legal research, the Fijian Government partnered with LexisNexis. Mr. Speaker, Members of this House will remember back in 2016 when partnered with LexisNexis, we unveiled the consolidated laws of Fiji. The first time we had undertaken consultation of laws since 1985, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and the hardcopy is there on the shelf next to you and the Honourable Leader of the Opposition also was given a copy.

Last Friday, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we built on that achievement and in partnership with LexisNexis, we launched a new website that puts the consolidated laws of Fiji online and free for the first time ever.

HON. MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- We digitised every page of every volume of the consolidated laws of Fiji which can now be accessed on this new website and it should be consolidated quarterly and every new legislation in between will be available online immediately.

I urge the members of Opposition to use this source as they appear to be getting the law wrong all the time and even applying outdated laws in their questions. These people have provided an easy to use one-stop online resource that allows anyone anywhere to read and access the laws of our country. This is available on [www.laws.gov.fj](http://www.laws.gov.fj).

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we move forward in the months and years ahead, the needs of our nation will undoubtedly evolve and naturally the strategic partners that we choose will morph and develop alongside our economy. Further, we will build capacity here at home in Fiji and that is the reason we have invested in such extensive resources for funding scholarships and training for high need industries, so as many Fijians possible feel this new and modern careers of training.

Finally Mr. Speaker, Sir, we will constantly be re-evaluating the partners we work with to ensure the needs of our nation are met in the most efficient and effective way possible and that the needs of tomorrow are today filled with the most suitable partner. Across our economy, the partnerships that we have forged have been pivotal to bring our economy to its position of unprecedented economic strength and stability where we stand now. Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir and thank you for allowing me to complete my speech. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General for his Ministerial Statement. Now I give the floor to the Honourable Adi Litia Qionibaravi. You have the floor, Madam.

HON. ADIL QIONIBARAVI.- Thank you Sir. Honourable Speaker, I rise to respond to the Ministerial Statement delivered this morning by the Attorney-General and Minister for Communications on the digitalFIJI Programme. We are informed that this project is contracted to the Singapore Cooperation Enterprise (SCE). It is commendable that the SCE have worked very quickly to deliver on the contract with the Fiji Government.

Mr. Speaker, SODELPA's vision for the Fiji information, communication and technology sector is a universal access to international competitive information and communication technology services in Fiji and to be the ICT hub in the Pacific. SODELPA recognises the ICT is an important component of our development efforts because it cuts across all sectors of the economy. A well-developed ICT sector will facilitate and contribute to economic growth.

The *Soqosoqo ni Duavata ni Lewenivanua* (SDL) in 2006 started the e-Government programme implemented by the Government ITC services department. Honourable Speaker, it is the duty of every Government to continue and improve on the foundation set by previous governments. As I have mentioned many times in this House, the other side cannot continue to always claim that it is the first ever government to do this or do that.

Honourable Speaker, if you review our nation's development, there is no denying the developments that previous governments implemented according to its resources, available technology and our level of development. Mr. Speaker, may I pose that the difference with the current Government is that previous governments consulted with the people and received their support for the implementation of their reform programmes. Rather than the current practise, where all previous Government achievements are belittled and written off as if this government is the only one with good ideas or intellects.

Mr. Speaker, 12 years of Auditor-General Reports say otherwise. We must remember that for eight years the people of Fiji were denied good governance when the Auditor-General's Reports were not published and are still being examined by the Public Accounts Committee.

The SDL's e-Government project established in 2006 involved:

- i) The deployment of Government services online by a Fiji e-Government portal;
- ii) The development of the Government information infrastructure to cater for the flux in traffic of the Government network; govnet.

Under the e-Government programme, company information infrastructure was strengthened whereby many Government officers were connected to govnet along with many e-community centres deployed across various schools to enable maximum coverage for the Government's online services.

Mr. Speaker, given that this is a second alteration of the e-Government project, now known as "digitalFIJI", questions arise as to what happened with the e-Government programme. The e-Government portal is still online. Is digitalFIJI going to replace the e-Government portal or is it additional? Has a cost-benefit analysis been done on retaining some Government ministries services on the e-Government platform or is it totally moving this to the digitalFIJI Programme?

Honourable Speaker, may I raise the following concerns. Did the first e-Government project fail because the Government, specifically the Minister interfered in the operations of ITC with the sacking of successive ITC directors until how a Yalamanchili Ltd were engaged through Pacific



Technologies, whose director coincidentally is the Director of ITC. This is also a question of conflict of interest that a director of a private company also being the director of a Government department. What is the total cost and source of external funding if any for the digitalFIJI platform? Were procurement rules under the Financial Management Act and Procurement Regulations 2010 complied with in the contracting of the Singapore Cooperation Service? Has the Singapore Cooperation Enterprise taken over the work undertaken by Yalamanchili PTY Ltd? If so, is the SCE an entity owned by a foreign Government been given access, process, manage and store of confidential information about Fiji citizens?

Honourable Speaker, SODELPA is fully supportive of developments that will ease access to Government services for our citizens. We also ask about the digital divide in Fiji. What is the level of access and usage of this service?

Mr. Speaker, with most Ministries having toll free complaint telephone lines, is the feedback service of digitalFIJI app actually being utilised by our people? I also must ask whether local expertise is available to carry out digitalFIJI programme. In my view, this is preferable for our national sovereignty and to protect the privacy of our citizens, confidential information. The Government should have first made all efforts to determine whether local expertise is available before going overseas or whether a local company could be engaged if they sourced external expertise.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the basic question appears to be, given the Ministerial Statement by my learned friend, the Attorney-General this morning, I would love to ask, who will be left behind because they do not have access to a smartphone that is required to run these apps. Another concern is whether in future Government will be penalising political opponents or those with alternative views for the Government as the Government of China is doing through the Social Credit System. Is this the eventual future of the digital platform in Fiji? I believe the Fiji National IT project pulls together information on all citizens poses great privacy concerns and risks to our liberties to freedom. The question is, what safeguards would be installed in the system to prevent theft of identities, birth certificates can be printed online.

With those few words, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank you for the opportunity to respond to my learned friend, the Attorney-General and raise our concerns and also, I would like to give a caution to Government to tread cautiously for teething problems will arise and to be vigilant on the possible commitment of cyber-crimes by those who will try to benefit in some way or other in the proposed ambitious way of digital Government transformation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I thank the Honourable Member for her statement and since you are the only one holding the fort, I have the pleasure of giving the floor for the third time this morning to the Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua. You have the floor, Madam.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I thank the Honourable Minister for his statement and I rise to respond, Sir.

I understand that it was in June last year that digitalFIJI project was launched. The CEO of the Singapore Cooperation Enterprise in his remarks at the event highlighted that this was not a new relationship and that in 2010, the Singapore Cooperation Enterprise had worked with the FNPF to “realise its transformation process”. Those were the exact words used by Mr. Mun.

My immediate reaction to that in relation to recent media reports about FNPF is, what exactly transformed there? All the possibilities of technology as has been highlighted by the Honourable Minister sound wonderful but are just bells and whistles if it is of no use to the end user and in this instance, the taxpayer.

If the technology and medium is unaffordable, if it is limited only to areas of good data and connectivity and signals, if it is dependent on a third party gadget like a phone or computer, if it provides no training on how to use the online platform and if it is hindered by the English language barrier, there are large numbers of our most vulnerable who do need the Government services, but who will be discriminated against because of the inequitable access to the predominantly online base services through no fault of their own.

What would be very helpful to also understand ....

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- ... is the uptake of these services by taxpayers or directory feature and feedback services. What kind of numbers and from which regions in Fiji have the Singapore Corporation Enterprise managed to track by numbers as users of these digital services and can this House be appraised of those details, please?

Mr. Speaker, despite all these, I am missing a key part of the equation which is, how much is this project going to cost Fiji? Because the only thing I remember from the 2018/2019 Budget documents is that the definition of “information, communication and technology” was broadened in its definition in the Income Tax Regulations to include customer contact centres, engineering and design, research and development, animation and content-creation, distance learning, market research, travel finances, finance and accounting services, human resource services, legal procedure compliance and risk services and other administrative services, including purchasing.

So, essentially, Mr. Speaker, there are many challenges and issues that need to be addressed for the successful implementation of services and this is common in all developing countries. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member for her Statement. Honourable Members, I have been informed that there are no Bills for Consideration. We will move on to the next agenda item.

I now call on the Honourable Attorney-General to move his motion.

### **REVIEW OF THE UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON INTERNATIONAL SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT RESULTING FROM MEDIATION**

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, I move:

That the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence review the United Nations Convention on International Settlement Agreements Resulting from Mediation.

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

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the Honourable Attorney-General has moved the motion to refer the Treaty to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence. I confirm that the Honourable Attorney-General has provided me with copies of the Treaty and written analysis as required by Standing Order 130(2).

Therefore, pursuant to Standing Order 130(3), the Treaty and Analysis shall be referred to

the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence for consideration and review. The Committee may table a report to Parliament no later than 30 days from today.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I wish to clarify that at the end of the debate, we will be voting merely to note the report, and once the vote is taken, it ends there, and the report will not be debated again in Parliament.

I now call upon the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, the Honourable Vijay Nath, to move his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

**REVIEW REPORT ON THE PETITION TO  
INTRODUCE SERVICE FEE IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY**

HON. V. NATH.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. I move:

That the Parliament debates the Report on the Petition to Reduce the Service Fee in the Tourism Industry, which was tabled on 22nd March, 2017.

HON. V.K. BHATNAGAR.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now invite the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, to speak on the motion.

You have the floor, Sir.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, on behalf of the Honourable Members on the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, I take this opportunity to speak on the motion in regards to the report on the Petition to reduce the service fee in the tourism industry which was tabled on 22nd March, 2017.

On Wednesday, 10th December, 2014, the Honourable Viliame Gavoka presented the report to introduce a service fee to be charged to all the guests and clients' bills for the purposes of supplementing the income of the tourism industry workers in Fiji to Parliament for consideration in accordance with the Standing Order 37.

The purpose of the Petition was to introduce a new service fee charged to the tourism sector in vis-à-vis the services provided to the local and international guests and clients for the utilisation of various trade, hotel and transport services. The Petition was signed by approximately 690 individuals from the tourism industry in Suva, Coral Coast, Nadi, Denarau and the Mamanucas.

The Committee consulted and deliberated on the presentations received from the relevant stakeholders. Some of the key points highlighted by stakeholders were as follows:

1. Service fees will adversely impact the affordability of Fiji as a tourism destination.
2. Decrease visitor numbers could lead to reduction in investment in tourism and decrease future employment in sector.
3. Introduction of service fees in the tourism industry might lead to wage-inequality when compared to other sectors.
4. Employers would find cost of business has increased and this additional cost would be sufficient to close many operations resulting in job losses.
5. Service fee should not create additional compliance cost for the business, especially for SMEs, small hotels and the tourism industry.

Upon conclusion of deliberations, the Committee decided that there is no need for further consultation and that no further actions would be necessary. In light of the various stakeholders' oral and written submissions, the Committee deliberated, analysed and evaluated the documents quite thoroughly on the socio-economic impact and did not see it prudent to further the public consultation process.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with those few words, comments to enlighten the House as the Member moving the motion, I thank you for this opportunity. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I thank the Honourable Member for his motion.

The floor is open for debate on this motion. You have the floor, Honourable Viliame Gavoka.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. As indicated by my colleague, the petition was mine on the request of members of the tourism industry to introduce a service tax to supplement the income of the tourism workers. It actually came by way of a meeting I held with the people at Mana Island Resort on all those iconic properties in the Mamanuca.

Honourable Speaker, service fee for supplementing tourism income is practised in most of the Asian countries; namely Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Maldives, and others. As you know when you travel to that part of the world, automatically, 10 percent is added to your bill. That 10 percent is known as a service fee which is shared amongst the workers of that establishment. It is a huge source of income for tourism workers in that part of the world.

As you know, Honourable Speaker, if you go to the United States of America, say, to Northern America, if you have a meal in any eatery there, automatically you pay the 20 percent tip, it is not mandated but it is custom, traditional. So this is what our tourism industry workers in Fiji are saying, "We want that also to be introduced in Fiji."

Tourism is now more than 60 years old; tourism is now grossing more than \$2 billion, are we not going to allow that opportunity to our workers to earn extra income in the way other people do within the neighbourhood of Asia Pacific?

Honourable Speaker, recently there was this Excellence Award, a yearly event and everyone was celebrating the excellence in tourism but I continue to say, Honourable Speaker, that we cannot celebrate this if we are not looking after our workers the way they are looked after in other parts of the Asia Pacific.

Honourable Speaker, if you look at some of the deliberations, if I can go through them, according to the Society of Fiji Travel Agents, 100,000 workers are directly and indirectly dependent on tourism. Often, we talk about the sugar industry, impacting the lives of the 200,000 people, now these tourism workers, Honourable Speaker, are also a force within Fiji and I must say today whether we do it today or not, the time will come when the tourism workers will exert political pressure on the Government of the day to get their service fee.

If you go further into the deliberation, the Fiji Hotel Association said "Proposed fee or reduced visitor arrivals and thus total income for Fiji." They claim that if we increase this fee, it will impact on visitor arrivals. Honourable Speaker, at the time we were debating this, tax in Fiji for tourist was 20 percent. It has gone up to 25 percent yet tourism will still be increasing. So that line of argument by the hoteliers does not carry weight.

Some of them said, "There will be administrative costs associated with service fee". Honourable Speaker, most of the players in Fiji operate in the Orient, with Asia, the big names, Holiday Inn, InterContinental, Shangri-La, Warwick, all these people operate in Asia. They know how to administer this and they know how it is done. They can easily do the same thing in Fiji for our workers.

Then we go on to the contribution from the Workers Union, they encourage multiskilling in terms of multitasking which is something that most employers would like to see. It will reduce absenteeism as more workers absent themselves knowing if they do, they will make less. It would be a greater level of care for workers, and the level of service will improve to be at par with the Asian countries. That is very critical, Honourable Speaker. If you look at the hotel industry today, the hospitality, there is a huge difference between the rest of the world and the Asians.

The quality of service in Asia, Honourable Speaker, is still amongst the highest in the world and we want to grow to become like them. Honourable Speaker, it all comes down to rewarding our people. I would urge this House that we continue to explore this. I was very saddened that we had mapped out a consultation programme that we would travel to Savusavu, travel to the Coral Coast and to Mamanuca and talk to the people, but very abruptly on a day that I expected something better to discuss, FijiFirst said, "We will shoot this down." They just said, "We will kill the petition, I think we are happy with the way things are going."

There was an academic at USP who had studied this thing and we had earmarked him. We had asked him to come and present to the Committee but because FijiFirst decided to kill this, we did not get the benefit especially from the USP to come and show us how to setup a service fee. It will come to Fiji.

I was very greatly saddened and I actually stomped out of the meeting room at that day because I was so disappointed with my colleagues that we had agreed through a cause of action, I do not know where the pressure came from, FijiFirst shot this down. I think, Honourable Speaker, the service fee for the tourism industry must come. In the Maldives, it comes to about US\$12,000 per person every year, supplement your income. Imagine that for our people in Fiji. If we have a man and a wife team, one in housekeeping and one in the bar, imagine what they would make in a year, imagine what they can build if they work together in an establishment for 20 or 30 years.

Honourable Speaker, there is this fear as someone is saying, "It will create an unequal playing field". Other industries when complaining why those in the tourism industry are getting all these advantages. Every industry has its own way of creating supplementary income for its people. If you are a miner, you can be rewarded on the quantity of what you mine every day. We see our people across the room giving out bonus cheques almost every three months or four months. So you should not blame the tourism industry if they want to enjoy this, that will not create an unequal playing field.

It is a way for an industry to create that additional income and they must be rewarded for it. I know it is being killed, I know it will not get any further than this, but I believe they will organise themselves (the hoteliers and the tourism people) as they say here that 100,000 people are affected by this. When they develop to become a political force, a Government would ignore them at their peril.

Honourable Speaker, people are saying it is going to be expensive, we are already charging 25 percent tax, the numbers are still growing. Out of the 25 percent tax, take something out to become what to go to the workers. We are not asking for more as I said, when we started out it was 20 percent, Government has gone up with 25 percent, they knew that the 5 percent would not impact on

tourism arrivals, so they added another 5 percent, 25 percent, some of that should go to the tourism workers.

That is, Honourable Speaker, based on the petition I raised and I was really aggrieved when FijiFirst in its wisdom started to kill my petition. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. Honourable Aseri Radrodro, you have the floor.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I just wanted to share a little bit on the motion before us. Looking at this Report, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is very sad to see the comments and the reactions that have been deliberated in this Report by the Government side. What we can see is that respective organisations representing the Government, key points that they have submitted to the Committee, for example, for Investment Fiji what they have stated is that this service fee will adversely impact the affordability of Fiji as a tourist destination. Also rewarding employees for good services where tips is common across the world. Introduction of a fixed service fee will potentially curtail this and employees would therefore be less likely to receive tips. Potential loss of tips may not be compensated by income derived from the service fee and the decision is that Investment Fiji does not support this notion of introducing service fees in the tourism industry.

It is very sad to be reading these comments by Government institutions Mr. Speaker Sir, especially the petition is to charge service fee so that it supplements the income of industry workers in Fiji. We recently have impasses between Airports Fiji Limited and the Control Towers operators on similar grounds.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker Sir, this is something that the Government should be looking at to ensure that the workers are well looked after. I am sure this is a common denominator across the workers in Fiji to ensure that the workers are properly looked after. By introducing such fees would be a bonus to them so that it will improve their service and performance.

Mr. Speaker Sir, to look back to some of the comments by members of the Committee especially if a Committee Member is still here, the comment by Honourable Alvick Maharaj that the petition is a minority one as there were only 4,500 people who were receiving land lease money and now 300,000 so it speaks for itself. Therefore, the current petition is not worthy to be brought into the House. That is a sad reflection of the Government Member's view of the petition.

A petition is something that needs to be entertained in this House and likely these petitions come through a Committee to highlight what has been faced by the workers in the industry but unfortunately we did not see any opinions, any voices from the workers themselves. Going by what the Honourable Viliame Gavoka has been saying that they have been stopped to go and visit the workers of the hotel, then that is a sad reflection of how Government is treating this petition. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. Do you wish to take the floor, Honourable Koroilavesau?

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Please, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- You have the floor?

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Sir, I would like to make a short contribution to the discussion presently being carried out on the floor. I thank the Committee for the points that they have been highlighting in the Report. I think it is important to say that in the Report, out of the eight organisations that contributed, six did not agree with the issue of service tax, only two supported the issue.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Also the Honourable Viliame Gavoka seems to have a very selective memory. He did not read fully the point that was highlighted by The Society of Fiji Travel Associates. I would like to read that, Mr. Speaker Sir, and I quote:

“... 690 signatures do not represent the views of 100,000 workers who are directly or indirectly dependent on the tourism industry”.

He selected to just say that there are 100,000 workers working in the tourism industry. Honourable Speaker, Sir, the Report clearly states the disadvantage of service tax being introduced into an already highly fixed cost for tourists coming into Fiji, for someone who had been running a tourism industry for 22 years.

I understand fully well that the Tourism Industry workers are one of the highly paid workers in Fiji. They do not only comply with the minimum wage but they actually pay above the wages that have been instigated by the eight voluntary authorities that are dished out by the Ministry of Employment. Thank you, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. Honourable Lynda Tabuya, you have the floor.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you Honourable Speaker, Sir. I obviously was not present during this petition but I do want to speak to the subject matter. As is being raised by my colleagues earlier about the need to reward our workers accordingly with the work that they provide for the Tourism Industry which is one of our top industries in the country, we are now touting our workers as “Bulanaires”, well then pay them accordingly. Pay them this service fee which is fair, which is what is done in other jurisdictions and really live up to your statement of being paid to smile. Now one good thing though I must commend the Government is that they have come up with a tax threshold. For now tourist operators that earn less than \$1.25 million, which is good, but one reality we have to face, Honourable Speaker, Sir, and I face this when we had the fortune of going to Denarau last week, the women’s Members of Parliament. It is just becoming so expensive to visit a hotel here now.

And this we are looking at especially Denarau and the bigger operators who are not entitled to this tax threshold, make up for about 70 percent of the income of tourism. So this service fee is becoming too expensive for this country and so we got to look at this, that our tourists will be choosing cheaper destinations like Bali and Thailand.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Yes, they will be going to cheaper destinations because of this STT and ECAL; ...

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- ... together 25 percent of the tax is now going to Government.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- We are talking about all the STT, we are talking about over the threshold, now that is about 70 percent of the big operators in Denarau. Tourists come to this country and it is getting expensive to visit our country. We should be concerned. In the near future Papua New Guinea is going to have a very similar type of Denarau development, so will our tourists now go there because it is cheaper, you bet. Because they come here and they have to pay 25 percent taxes on cost. Now you go to Denarau and I was just looking at the price list of the hotels there, and it is \$200 for a massage and it is \$50 for a burger.

(Laughter)

I mean it is ridiculous. Yes, you are laughing because as Government Ministers you stay there for free and you are entitled.

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- We have to pay that. Our tourists come here, they should answer about why we only have an average of 40 percent occupancy, this is lower now. You should be concerned this is lower now than compared to last year; 40 percent occupancy rate in hotels.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Are you not concerned about that, is it a laughing matter?

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Obviously it is to the Government, but, as the Tourism Industry that sustains our economy, we have got to be concerned about how expensive it is becoming to visit this country as a tourist.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- It is becoming expensive.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- So this is a concern we should have. This is raised from this particular Report and I just ask the Government to be considerate of that, moving forward and to be concerned about this issue. Thank you Honourable Speaker, Sir.



HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, first of all I would like to say that the Honourable Member is so confused.

(Laughter)

First of all, she is talking about service fee which we do not have and then she is saying that the service fee is going to increase and make the place very expensive. Well, we are doing, that is why we are not supporting this petition, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Going back to this debate, I think, the example used by the Honourable Gavoka where he talked about Maldives, he failed to mention that in Maldives, they do not have social wages to assess the workers.

Fiji believes in equality, we cannot create divisions amongst our workers. We strongly believe the vision of our Government is: one Fiji, one people. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Cabinet just made a recent decision, to review the national minimum wages in a more meaningful approach, and that is a better way rather than introducing a service fee as proposed by the Opposition.

We are here to look after each and every worker, and not just the tourism workers or just the garment workers. This is not how you run a government, we have got to take a strategic approach. This is the problem we had in the past where strategic approach was not taken and as a government, we strongly believe in strategic approach and treating all workers equal.

We must entirely support all employees and all industries and then by creating fairness among all workers, as I said earlier on, tourism, for example, connects to many other auxiliary sectors like agriculture, transportation, food, beverages, retail, fashion who provide equally important service. Does that mean your service tax or service fee will also be shared amongst them? You are only talking about one particular group.

It is unfortunate that the Honourable Member comes up with a proposal without research himself. I mean, you have not conducted the research, you have not done that. Look at the majority of the countries we have that promote tourism, this is not the way they go. Some of the examples he has picked up are from least developed countries, for example, Nepal, Bhutan where even workers take donations to survive and these governments have opted for service fee, whereas in our situation, we are very different, we are looking after our workers, we are paying them well, at the same time, the social wages is also offsetting the costs, and that must be recognised. I think that is all I have to say, thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Member. I think we have covered this motion enough.

(Laughter)

I give the floor to the Chairperson of the Committee for his Right of Reply.

HON. V. NATH.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, looking at the input from the Honourable Minister, she had in fact, reasoned out most of the things which I have to conclude with and I do not want to probably waste valuable time of this august House. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote to note the content of the report. Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Noes')

HON. SPEAKER.- As no Member opposes, the motion is agreed to.

Honourable Members, I thank you for your cooperation. At this point, we will suspend proceedings for lunch and this will be provided in the Big Committee Room. We will resume at 2.30 p.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.34 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.30 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now call upon the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, the Honourable Viam Pillay, to move his motion.

**PETITION ON THE REMOVAL OF THE DOUBLE PENALTY SYSTEM,  
ILL-TREATMENT AND ILLEGAL BOOKING ON DRIVERS BY THE LTA OFFICIALS**

HON. V. PILLAY.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. Honourable Speaker, I move:

That Parliament debates the Report on the Petition to Remove the Discriminatory Double Penalty System, Ill-Treatment and Illegal Booking of Drivers by LTA officials, which was tabled on 24th April, 2017.

HON. G. VEGNATHAN.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now invite the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs to speak on the motion. Honourable Member, you have the floor.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. Honourable Speaker, Sir, the petition was tabled by Honourable Aseri Radrodro for the removal of the double penalty system, ill treatment, illegal booking on drivers by the LTA officials. Deliberations were carried out with the LTA in obtaining their views on the issues raised against them.

Honourable Speaker, the Committee acknowledges the efforts of LTA in putting in place measures to improve and strengthen the enforcement of its functions and obligations as per legislated under the LTA Act, not only to address the issues that were raised for the demerit points system that relate to Land Transport affairs in Fiji. The Committee appreciates that the monitoring that was undertaken by LTA in terms of ensuring that its Divisional staff had been trained and educated on the amendments made to the LTA Act in 2015, as well as the awareness that was conducted for the stakeholders.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, therefore the Committee has no recommendations as a result of LTA's response on the issues raised in the petition as it was addressed on the amendments that were made to the LTA Act 1998 in 2015. Honourable Speaker, with those comments, as a Member moving the motion, I thank you for the opportunity. Thank you, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is open for debate and I give the floor to the Honourable Aseri Radrodro. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I would like to speak as a mover of this petition that was presented in the House in 2015.

First of all, I would like to thank the Government for addressing the concerns and the plight of the people that raised the petitions from the Northern area. I thank the 100 taxi drivers from Labasa for voicing these complaints which they raised through the Parliamentary petition process. I would like to thank the Government for the effort taken.

Two months after the petition was presented and deliberated by the Committee, the Act for LTA was amended to address the demerit points penalties that were issued to owners of Public Service Vehicles (PSV) in Labasa, and I would like to thank the Honourable Minister at the time,

Honourable Parveen Bala, for allowing the process of amendments to go through in terms of addressing replies in the petition.

On the petition process, I would like to also take this time to say that if they request in future as I know there are a lots of issues that are raised regarding Land Transport Authority (LTA) operations, Mr. Speaker, Sir, especially in the areas of e-ticketing concerns by the general public when they face e-ticketing issues, problems in terms of e-ticketing card top-up, some bus companies may be lax in the use of e-ticketing machines that we do have.

Similarly, on taxi permits, I think I have also raised this on previous occasions where bellows have been used to decide and decipher who to be given the taxi permits, something that the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure could also look into, to ensure that there is equitable distribution of taxi permits to all the possible applicants whose permits are processed. The LTA process the applicants up to a stage before the new law was introduced where permits are determined through the use of a bellow.

Possibly going forward, in terms of gender compliance, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I know the Honourable Minister for Women has already deliberated on the gender policy inside the House. Possibly, the PSV could also be addressed in terms of gender equality. We know that with Public Service Vehicles, it is mostly a male-dominated area, something that the gender policy could also address going forward, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

I also like to thank the Committee for deliberating on this petition that is now being resolved as they concluded. Hopefully, this will be the way that the Opposition and Government can work together to address most importantly the issues that have been brought up by the people. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Member. I now give the floor to the next speaker, Honourable Tuisawau.

HON RO F. TUISAWAU.- Honourable Speaker, just contributing to this motion regarding LTA, we are looking at the report which relates to LTA regulations. I think, overall, for LTA, we could say it is part of the issue which we are concerned about, which is the over-regulation of our business environment. It is something we need to review, especially the cost to the citizens in terms of registration fees, licencing, fitness test, et cetera.

So, at the moment, even for private cars, it is ranging from \$150 to \$300 for the total cost, including what used to be the third party. I bring to your attention a report we received, I suppose the over-enthusiasm of the LTA officers in monitoring the regulations which happened in Labasa where a lady was travelling to sell pandanus leaves in Labassa Market, did not have a ticket and was fined \$250.00 by the LTA officers, but the fare was \$2.50.

What I am saying is that our ordinary citizens who were trying to earn a living, then the LTA officers are entering the buses and checking the tickets, that is still a problem now.

I know it is to do with getting the citizens to comply with regulations but then they need to just have some balance in the way they apply this. What I mean is, if you see someone who is struggling going to the market just to sell a few things for a living, why fine them \$250? It is ridiculous.

Just looking at the LTA website, I have noticed in the last report, there was 2012, so I am not sure what happened to the rest of the reports. So it is probably something for LTA to look into.

The other concern I had regarding LTA, you must have seen the letter from the Honourable Attorney-General dated 31st October, regarding the Deputy Chairperson of LTA, the salary of the CEO of LTA which in that letter, it was approved to be \$539,747, so more than half a million dollars.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- It is related to the report, it is related to the organisation, related to this regulations, so there are so many regulations and it is related to collecting of fees.

At the moment, it is approximately about \$20 million to \$22 million which is adding to the Government coffers. So here we have a CEO, and we have the citizens who are suffering because of this increase in the registration fees, et cetera, or whatever they are charging. They are charging the ordinary citizens who are travelling to sell in the market \$250, just for \$2.50 and he/she will be paying the CEO more than half a million dollars. So where is the logic in this, Honourable Speaker?

How much are we getting in this Parliament? How much is the Honourable Prime Minister getting? How much is the Honourable Attorney-General getting? It is less than this person is getting. This is \$539,747, more than half a million dollars.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

Honourable Member, is has got nothing to do with the Prime Minster or the Attorney-General or Minister's salary here Just stick to the report. You brought up the salary of the CEO, that is alright, it is all part of that, so stick to that, there is no problem.

You have the floor, Honourable Member.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

So what I am saying in relation what is being discussed on the regulations and in relation to that, the funds and the income. That is why I was explaining that it needs to be taken into account when we are looking at the expenditure of LTA because expenditure is linked to creating revenue streams and expenditure also covers cost of manpower which is why I am raising that issue. And at the end of the day, it is the taxpayers who are paying.

The other issue, Sir, regarding not only LTA but the other Government statutory bodies, is the hiring of expatriates and this is the perfect example we are seeing here. The continuous hiring of expatriates which we are seeing in this country which costs a lot of money and depriving other citizens of opportunities. For example, I received a letter from one of the Departments and I do not want to mention the name of the Department, but they have been sidelined for expatriates, contracts were not renewed and no reason was given. So for me, the whole thing is interrelated with this report - revenue generated, low fees, collecting money and paying this money to pay for extra costs which is manpower. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member.

Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. I think we continue to witness these meandering contributions to the House that completely miss the point.

Thank you for the birthday wishes. I think it takes the birthday boy to remind us about what we need tackle.

(Laughter)

I mean, we are talking about something that is very simple -  $1 + 1 = 2$ , very simple. We are talking about the fact that a Petition was raised about something that was then dealt by the amendment to the Act that took place in 2015. That is what we are talking about - demerit points, people being penalised twice and the fact that, that has already been addressed. Now, we have all these meandering. I keep thinking of the Mississippi River, it never goes straight. It goes this way, winds back and forth and it can never find its way to the sea. There is constant meandering.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. J. USAMATE.-We are talking about salaries, et cetera, it is a very simple paper. Can you just talk on that paper? Maybe, Honourable Members of the Opposition have forgotten how to read, and we have to read for them what it is all about. It is a very simple issue. Everyone is in agreement that the issue was raised and it was resolved by the amendment to the legislation and now we know that awarding of demerit points for certain offences used to be awarded by the LTA or by the Courts, is now just done by the Courts. That is in place and since that has taken place, according to the LTA, awarding of demerit points is now done only by the Courts and the LTA just maintains the record of the points that are awarded against any person.

I have just received information from the LTA that between the years 2015 and 2018, LTA received a total of 1,100 notifications from the Courts of drivers' licences that were suspended or cancelled. Get that figure!

People are breaking the law about 1,000 of them. Now, the point that was raised by the Honourable Ro Filipe Tuisawau was that, sometimes if someone does something wrong, we should turn a blind eye to it. This is the point; if you keep on turning a blind eye to people who are doing things wrong, they keep on doing it. And if they keep on doing it, we still get the problem. So it is incumbent on all of us or as the Honourable Viliame Gavoka like to say, we are behoved to make sure that we do the right thing. If we see something that happens that is wrong, we need to do something about it. When you see the stove is red hot, you know when you touch that stove you will get burnt. If the stove is red hot and you touch it and you do not get burnt, you will touch it again, and then you will touch it again. And that is what agencies must do. If someone does something wrong, the stove must be hot, they must get burnt so that they can learn to do the right thing.

But you see what is happening in this case for these demerit points, the information that has come from the LTA between those three years, there were 1,101 notifications from the Courts on drivers' licences suspended or cancelled. That means people did not learn their lesson.

We know right now there is a lot of problems with not following the rules on our roads. Drivers who do not follow the rules, those sorts of things need to be addressed.

The LTA in addressing frequent offenders are dealt with according to an internal process which involves a 'show cause' before the CEO, as to why the driver's licence was not being cancelled or suspended. Between 2015 to 2018, a total of 768 drivers were brought in for 'show cause' before the CEO which resulted in 482 drivers issued with warning letters, 263 were suspended from driving,

three were counselled and 20 drivers' licences were cancelled. This is why we need to enforce the laws.

The penalties are not there just to punish people, it is there to help people to start doing the right things. So agencies that put these into place, such as the LTA, have to make sure that they police these things.

LTA has continued to put in new policies between legislation, as an effort to improve road safety in Fiji which includes all learners to be equipped with sufficient driving knowledge and tested through a randomly selected test from the system, the inclusion of road safety projects in the national development plan and continuous awareness on road safety.

And in carrying out its mandate, we have appointed the new CEO. There has been a lot of statements made about salaries being paid to people. If you want to have good people, you have to pay good money, people with the ideas, the management, experience and expertise to be able to come up with new ways of looking at things.

We have also emphasised the restructuring of LTA so that they can have better service delivery. We have restructured the local management from regional management to more customer focussed Branch Managers who can deal more effectively with customer issues and strengthen local LTA presence.

The Public Transport Unit is now a centralised head office function. When it was decentralised, people use to apply different criteria to the awarding of public transport permits, et cetera. Now that we have decentralisation, it gives us that consistency so we can get rid of the inconsistencies.

There has been a stronger focus on recruitment of Enforcement Officers. An additional 50 Officers have been recruited and they focus on all of the enforcement issues that are looked at by LTA.

The LTA has been focusing also on more integrated approach, working with the Fiji Police and the FRA to address underlying issues of mutual concern for the improvement of everyday life of all Fijians.

There has also been a focus on gender balancing of recruitment of LTA Officers as has been highlight in the Report, and customer service is also something that is looking to be improved as the Authority now continues to open new branch offices and now has a network of 22 such agencies.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I commend the paper to the House.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. I now give the floor to the Honourable Mikaele Leawere. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Just my brief contribution on the petition on demerit points by LTA. The Honourable Aseri Radrodro presented this petition on 20th May, 2015, almost four years when it was presented to this House. Then subsequently in July 2015, Bill No.12/2015 was presented to Parliament and it was passed to amend the Land Transport Act 1998.

The issue, Mr. Speaker, Sir, of demerit points is subject to the decision of the Courts, whether or not to award it. LTA maintains a database on the point system and the LTA prosecutors update

the records to capture the demerit points that had been awarded. However, the Committee notes on Page 6 of its Report, which I would like to quote as follows:

“The Committee has no recommendation as the result of the LTA’s response on the issues raised in the petition as it was addressed on the amendments that were made to the Land Transport Act 1998 in 2015. The Committee was primarily focused on the LTA’s view on the issue raised against them.

In summary, the Committee after examining the petition and consulted the Land Transport Authority has confirmed that the issue of demerit points that were raised in the petition have been addressed.”

However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee fails to satisfy whether or not those points were demerit from the drivers, which were awarded to them or are still pending before the Courts. We are interested to find out the statistics of the status of these drivers at this point in time.

The Committee, Mr. Speaker, Sir, should have made recommendations to Parliament to empower or direct the Government and LTA to take necessary steps to ensure that they are making institutional and structural adjustments to avoid such incidents in future. Despite the fact that the key issue raised by way of petition being addressed by way of amendment through LTA Act 1998, it is appalling due to the time taken by Parliament to deal with this issue, given its importance and impact upon the drivers who were affected.

An issue, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that I would like to bring to the attention of this House, is the scope of the presentation of the petitions. Petition is a basic redress mechanism which should be available to even one Member, given if there is an independent Member in the House. Present provisions, Mr. Speaker, Sir, are draconian and seek to curtail public participation.

Petitions, Mr. Speaker, Sir, enable the public to air their views through the individual Members of Parliament and be heard in the corridors of Parliament.

Before I conclude, Mr. Speaker, Sir, can I ask the Government to ensure that driving tests and other programmes be conducted in other respective Divisions or provisional offices in order to ease the work or whatever that is being carried out by LTA Headquarters in Valelevu or in Suva. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member for his contribution.

I now give the floor to the Chairperson of Standing Committee on Social Affairs to speak on his Right of Reply. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. I would just like to thank the team from LTA who came to present to the Committee: the Regional Manager, Central/Eastern, General Manager Finance, Manager Planning and also the General Manager Legal Policy.

Also for the information of the Honourable Leawere, this is a bipartisan report and two Honourable Members from the Opposition were also part of this Committee; the Honourable Salote Radrodro and the late Honourable Anare Vadei. Thank you very much.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Chairperson of the Standing Committee.

Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote to note the content of the Report.



Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Noes')

HON. SPEAKER.- As no Member opposes, the motion is agreed to.

Honourable Members we move on. I now call upon the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, the Honourable Vijay Nath to move his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

### **REVIEW REPORT ON THE FIJI FINANCIAL INTELLIGENCE UNIT ANNUAL REPORT 2016**

HON. V. NATH.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker Sir, I move:

That Parliament debates the Report on Fiji Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) Annual Report 2016 which was tabled on 8th March, 2018.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Honourable Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now invite the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs to speak on the motion. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. V. NATH.- Thank you Mr. Speaker Sir. On behalf of the Honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, I take this opportunity to speak on the motion in regards to the Report on Fiji Financial Intelligence Unit Annual Report 2016 which was tabled on 8<sup>th</sup> March, 2018.

Upon conclusion of our deliberation on the FIU Annual Report 2016, the Committee was pleased to note the tremendous progress made by the FIU in fight against money laundering and other criminal related activities in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker Sir, six recommendations have been put forward by the Committee which we believe will assist in FIU's mission of implementing an effective Intelligence Management Framework. Some of the recommendations focussed on awareness sessions to general committee regarding FIU's role, importance of highly specialised staff to be equipped with FIU skills as well as the significance of developing strategies to protect vulnerable people from global scams.

To conclude, the Committee was pleased with the overall performance of FIU. Mr. Speaker Sir, with those few comments to enlighten the House, as a Member moving the motion, I thank you for this opportunity.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Chairperson. The floor is open for debate on this motion. Honourable Viliame Gavoka, you have the floor, Sir.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to make some comments being part of the Committee to support the work of FIU. We spoke on this last evening on their Report for 2015. For 2016 six recommendations have been made by the Committee which my colleague, the Chairperson, had touched upon in some way.

There are two recommendations that I would just like to highlight here, Mr. Speaker Sir, is the matter of unexplained wealth. Basically Mr. Speaker, in this day and age, no one should be sitting

on wealth that he or she cannot explain and regulations are now in place because this is an area where people can abuse to park their ill-gotten wealth.

In Fiji today, any transaction exceeding \$10,000 will need to be reported to the authorities, they will need to know where you got that money from. Our concern as a Committee was with our people, the ordinary farmers. Say if a *kava* dealer or *kava* farmer harvests his crops and gets cash to the amount that we all know today which is quite huge. He needs to understand that the proceeds that he gets from this *yaqona* will come under scrutiny of the authorities, he needs to know that. So, our recommendation here is for FIU and indeed the authorities and us to say that, “your wealth must be explained.”

I am talking about a *kava* dealer here, but, it could be a *dalo* farmer, it could be any farmer. It will help if we setup a programme to educate our people about this unexplained wealth, because the danger is that, if they feel threatened by this, they may decide to keep their cash at home instead of putting it into the Financial System to circulate and thereby help the economy. So it is a programme that we all need to embrace and gets to help our people understand about this initiative or new reality today.

The more I learn about FIU, the more you become in tune with the reality of life today. I belong to a generation when I was a banker, where your bank account was confidential to you; not anymore. FIU can look into your bank account and it is all part of the reality today to combat crimes and illegal activities. But that is something that is in Fiji today and it behoves us all (there goes my famous words again – behove) to educate our people to understand this unexplained wealth.

There is also another recommendation here, Honourable Speaker, about the Real Estate transactions. A lot of money can be parked with Real Estate operators from overseas including the trust accounts of lawyers and accountants. These people also will need to open up their books. We need to empower FIU, I believe they are now, to look into these areas. We have gone to the extent of recommending in the latest report that Real Estate Agents take up formal training in the field of Real Estate as opposed to just through his experience before they get their license today. These are all part and parcel of strengthening FIU.

And lastly Honourable Speaker, the last recommendation is these global scams. I think we all know about the Nigerian letters; you send money, letter comes from Nigeria, I am sitting on these millions of dollars, but, I would like to share it with you, but, I cannot send it to you because of certain difficulties with regulations, but, if you send me some money, it can help me access this money and I send it to you. I think we all know about that.

But the unfortunate thing, Honourable Speaker, is that it is still happening in a big way in Fiji. In my province, there is this person who is promising employment in America and they are holding meetings; late night not in the daytime, so that they are collecting money from people to enable them to go and work in America. It came to me from our *Turaga ni Koro* who said, “can you look into this? Our people are being swayed by this promise of going for employment to USA.”

Immediately I said, “look the Americans are building walls, they are not welcoming anyone into the USA.” How can this be happening? This is a scam and our people are very gullible and it behoves us, Honourable Speaker, to set in place a structure, this is what we recommended to FIU, please try and help with all the scammers who appear to be operating in Fiji. And scam, Honourable Speaker, is not unique to Fiji, it is all over the world. It is not only our people.

You may recall, Honourable Speaker, in New York, there was this person called “Madoff” who made off with people’s money; you may remember that and that was \$50 billion. And not the

ordinary Americans, these were some of the huge financial institutions in America and Europe who put their money with a person called “Madoff”. Later they found out that this was all a scam, what you call the “Ponzi Scheme.” Scam, as I say, is not unique to Fiji but our people are very vulnerable to this and we need to find ways to help them against falling victim to scammers.

In Fiji today, FIU is well developed to identify or isolate some bank accounts overseas where they have instructed the banks not to send money to those accounts. Women have been known to go to the bank to send money to this address and the bank says, “No, you cannot send the money”. They say, “Why?” FIU says you cannot send the money. So you go to FIU and these are women who were being promised marriage by someone outside of Fiji but they have to pay some money to make it possible in marrying this person.

These are the kinds of things that FIU is doing and I am saying this because our vulnerable people are falling victims to this, and all the more reason why we should continue to support FIU, develop it and if you look into our recommendation, the speciality that is required is quite rare. The people who need to work here need to be very highly trained and they have to serve in that area whether they are in the Police or FIU for years to enable them to be more effective in collecting the intelligence that is required.

Today FIU is like a one-stop data bank. It has the most developed data in Fiji today in the financial sector. So all in all, Honourable Speaker, we should continue to support FIU.

Lastly we highlighted this to FIU, most of these big money coming in to be parked in Fiji originate from huge economies. And we ask the question to FIU. Are we carrying a burden in Fiji for those big economies to catch their criminals? Are they helping us in the process to catch these people? That is throwing a new light into this because they are making this ill-gotten wealth in those economies and bringing it to Fiji to park (in a small country like ours) and they expect us to catch them. So in our relationship with these countries through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, we must try and develop this relationship.

Today they are part of 147 countries, a group where information is easily available but we must always remind those big economies to help us set up a structure and find some of the special areas where we need to combat these types of crimes effectively. Fiji, a small country should not be carrying the burden at all. That is my contribution to this, Honourable Speaker, and I would like to commend again the fine people at FIU who continue to fight money laundering in our country. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER. – I thank the Honourable Member. Honourable Bulitavu, you have the floor.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Thank you Honourable Speaker, Sir. My short contribution will be just on Recommendation No. 1, and that is the progressive development of FIU to become an independent stand-alone entity. Given in the annual report, staff of the Fiji Intelligence Unit have undergone overseas training in adopting a future model. At the moment, they come under the wings of the Reserve Bank of Fiji.

This has been raised by the Head of the Fiji Intelligence Unit in one of our Committee meetings, it was raised to him and his staff whether there is progressive move towards evolving into another model. It was confirmed by him that there are several models of Financial Intelligence Unit around the world but at the moment they are stationed under the RBF, but towards that and other future functions that fall under the Act that cover this particular agency, given that at the moment,

they cannot prosecute nor investigate. They only provide intelligence for the Fiji Revenue and Customs Service, Police and FICAC in those regards.

Also, given that they have an intelligence unit which gathers and collates intelligence, considering the global trends of money laundering and other terrorism finance activities happening around the globe, and also that their system is now connected with FRCS and also other banks in monitoring financial discrepancies of those who might be earning a lot with questionable sources.

But again, just for the Government to note, in future or as to when will this recommendation come to reality in the future where a step towards the independency of this particular organisation or entity so it is to fulfil the mission and vision of the organisation and its ability, given that Fiji now is increasingly becoming the hub and also there is increase of economic activity in the region where we now, on a daily basis, have seen sophisticated crimes happening and done through cyber and other communications network.

Given that the Honourable Attorney-General has also said this morning that the ICT development that the country is now undergoing, these are some of the problems that will happen in the future, and we need to have our systems and measures in place to monitor those that would like to play around or test the system or to beat the system, to bring them to task so that our citizens are not affected.

Those are few comments in regards to my contribution this afternoon on the motion for the Government to take note on future developments of this Unit becoming an independent body on its own.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. I will be very brief. Given the contributions by the various Members on the motion before the House, Honourable Speaker, Sir, I just wish to give assurance that from the Government, particularly from the Ministry that I look after, we are looking at the national security structure that we have against the environment that we are in.

Of course, there are some gaps, priorities that we need to look into but in terms of, particularly with the FIU, and if I may link this to one of the meetings that I had while in New York last week, with the Office of the Directorate of Counter-Terrorism.

One of the major concerns about the transfer of funds is its link to Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTF), and we have extended an invitation to the Directorate's Office, for them to come to Fiji and again, look at the setup that we have so that we can ensure that our national security arrangements are, of course, consistent with the challenges that we are currently facing and, of course, the development trends as well because we need national security for economic security and likewise, we need economic security for national security as well.

This is why we are working very closely with all the national security agencies, particularly, taking not only a whole of the Government approach now, Honourable Speaker, Sir, but in terms of security for the future, it is the whole of the nation approach, it is the whole of society approach, it is no longer the whole of Government approach, and that is the way forward for all of us. That is why we need to break the barriers, the compartmentalisation that used to exist because we are in different times and, of course, the challenges that come with it are different as well and we need to adjust quickly. Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister. I now give the floor to the Chairperson for the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs for his Right of Reply.

HON. V. NATH.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, no further comments. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote to note the content of the Report. Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Noes')

HON. SPEAKER.- As no Member opposes, the motion is agreed to.

Honourable Members, I now call upon the Chairperson on the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, the Honourable Viam Pillay, to move his motion.

**CONSOLIDATED REVIEW REPORT ON  
iTAUKEI TRUST FUND BOARD 2013 AND 2016 ANNUAL REPORTS**

HON. V. PILLAY.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I move:

That Parliament debates the Consolidated Review Report on iTaukei Trust Fund Board 2013 and 2016 Annual Report, which was tabled on 12th March, 2018.

HON. G. VEGNATHAN.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now invite the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, to speak on the motion.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, on behalf of the Honourable Members of the Standing Committee for Social Affairs, I take this opportunity to speak on the motion in regards to the review that was made on the Consolidated Report on iTaukei Trust Fund Board 2013 and 2016 Annual Report.

Honourable Speaker, the Members then, I, as the Chairperson and:

1. Honourable Veena K. Bhatnagar (Deputy Chairperson);
2. Honourable Salote V. Radrodoro;
3. Honourable Anare T. Vadei;
4. Honourable Ruveni Nadalo.

Mr. Speaker, above were Members of the Committee, and it is a bipartisan report.

Honourable Speaker, the Chairman of the iTaukei Trust Fund Board, in his presentation, clarified some pertinent issues and focussed on:

1. Members of the Board;
2. Functions of the Board;
3. Investment portfolio of the Fund;
4. Mandate objectives on language, cultural studies and indigenous knowledge;
5. Members of the Board;
6. Functions of the Board;
7. Members of the Board;

8. Members of the Board;
9. Functions of the Board;
10. Investment portfolio of the Fund;
11. Mandate objectives on language, cultural studies and indigenous knowledge;
12. Entrepreneurship;
13. Leadership; and the
14. Fund's Financial Statement.

The Committee noted in the Report that the iTaukei Trust Fund Board investment portfolio remains with shares and fixed income plus in properties. It was also noted that the funds overseas investment remains with the listed securities in the Australian Stock Exchange.

In Fiji, the Fund's investments are in a number of stocks which are listed in the South Pacific Stock Exchange and also in properties.

The Committee, in its findings, found that the iTaukei Trust Fund Board's local investment has not changed much from previous years, and it still has FHL Class B shares and still has an investment at Amalgamated Telecom Holdings Limited, RB Patel Group, BSP Bank (for local investors who would like to invest shares listed in the stock exchange) and Future Forests (Fiji) Ltd.

In addition, the Fund has investments in the Unit Trust of Fiji and the Fijian Holdings Unit Trust on two products in the form of Income and Growth Fund.

The Fund highlighted that it has built upon its term deposit for equity purposes to take care of the big projects that were planned.

The Fund also has termed deposits with Westpac, BSP, Credit Corporation, Merchant Finance.

I thank the Honourable Members' contribution towards the scrutiny of these two Annual Reports and the formation of this bipartisan report.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Chairperson of the Standing Committee.

Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on this motion. Honourable Niko Nawaikula, you have the floor.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Yes, Honourable Speaker, I wish to contribute to the debate on this motion. The motion on the floor is to debate the Report of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs on the iTaukei Trust Fund Board Reports from 2013 to 2016.

The Report, Honourable Speaker, is very brief. It is a seven-page Report, and I note in the Chairman's Foreword, it says, "The Committee has assessed the iTaukei Trust Fund Board from 2013 to 2016 ..."

Further to that, there is only one recommendation which is gender balance. I think what must have happened here is that, the Committee turned around to see the Board and there were eight of them, two were women and that is how the recommendation came, but it is very restrictive and I would like the Committees to have a wider latitude in looking at Annual Reports and Committees rather than just looking at the reports and inviting, in this case, the Board or the members of a Ministry to respond to it.

The Committee should also invite other stakeholders and then come up with different views. That is possibly the reason why the recommendation here is too restrictive.

In the Introduction, it says that the purpose of the iTaukei Trust Fund Board was established by the Fiji Government to foster the advancement of the indigenous Fijians and Rotumans, and then it sets out other research.

I would like to come back to that, because that is not the original purpose of why this Board was set up. I think, Honourable Speaker, that it is very sad indeed what this Government did to the iTaukei Trust Fund Board (the Fijian Trust Fund Board, as it was known then). This Board was established in 2004, specifically to empower the *vanua*. I am not too sure, but I think what happened then was that, there was money held, returned to the Government in relation to the Fijian Holdings and what the Government did, possibly the Qarase Government set up this Trust Board to empower, to finance the *Bose Levu Vakaturaga* in its administration of indigenous issues.

The Bose Levu Vakaturaga, Honourable Speaker, is the Head of the Native Local Government, just in the same way we have the other local governments that we have heard of today, Suva City Council and all those. Like what the Government did to other local governments, that would be the same here to the iTaukei Trust Fund Board.

If you look back at the Act that established the Trust Fund, clearly it says: “To establish a trust fund for Fijians and Rotumans and to provide financial autonomy to the *Bose Levu Vakaturaga* to earn income for the purposes of the Fund and related matters.” So, other local governments source their income through rates. The Native Local Government previously had land rates but that was not enough, so it was looking for other ways to fund itself and to empower it.

Honourable Speaker, this was not a standalone thing, this was made in accordance with what the obligations of the Government were at the time. The Government had then ratified the International Labour Organisation Convention (No. 169), so this is basically in accordance with that.

A lot of these were reflected in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and if you can allow me just to read Article 4, it says:

“Indigenous people, in exercising their right to self-determination, have the right to autonomy or self-government in matters relating to their internal local affairs, as well as ways and means for financing their autonomous functions.”

So this ties up neatly with UNDRIP.

I know the other side of the House does not believe in UNDRIP, and their reason as we have all heard is because indigenous people of this country are a majority but to me, that does not give them a licence to take out their rights, to abolish the Great Council of Chiefs, for example, or in this case, to remove. And if I explain to you, that was how it was in the 2004 legislation.

In Section 4, the purpose of the fund are:

“To provide financial independence an autonomy in relation to the operation and administration of the *Bose Levu Vakaturaga*.”

That was taken away, firstly, by two Decrees that came out in 2009 and totally in 2012 when that side of the House terminated the Great Council of Chiefs, it also took this out, so that was totally removed.

The other point I wish to say here is that, in doing so, it had breached the rights of the indigenous people (the first peoples) in this country because according to UNDRIP and according to ILO Convention 169, it says before the Government changes any legislation or policy that affect them it needs their prior and informed consent. That was not done.

Further, we all understand legislations that were passed by the military governments before under the authority of the case of Chandrika Prasad were re-submitted again to the House to be re-debated and passed, and that happened in 2001. But in the 2013 Constitution of the Republic of Fiji, they are very smart and they have decided to lock this up in Section 70 so that it does not have to be debated again, so that automatically it becomes law.

So therein, the difficulties lie and I wish to say here that it is a clear breach of the rights of the first people of this country, legal of course because they did a law and they had the control and authority, but it will remain so. I say that, that is the biggest mistake by the Government is to try to alienate the rights of the first people of this country, and it should be addressed.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Well, I will repeat that. The biggest mistake that you ever made was to remove or try to alienate the rights of the indigenous people of this country. By What example? By terminating the Great Council of Chiefs.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Why? Assuming, nationalising the control and management of their native land.

Yes! I ask, how come the Honourable Prime Minister is the Chairman of the iTaukei Lands Trust Board? Because you amend an Act to allow you to take over control of that. But coming back to this because that is a real example, that is a shadow that will follow you and you better deal with it. You cannot even face your own shadow. This is just more than a shadow.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Coming back to this, some say that the gist of this and I want to conclude by asking the other side to please, restore the purpose and holistically this Act, which was based primarily to fund the cultural autonomy of the first people of this nation and it is their human rights.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Well, do you want me to quote you the other section, it is from here. Article 19 says, and I quote:

“State shall consult and operate in good faith with the indigenous people’s concerned through their own representative institutions in order to obtain their free, prior



and informed consent before adopting and implementing legislative or administrative matters that may affect them.

This one, we are talking about legislation. Now, I hope that is clear. So I am basically asking you, please, restore their rights.

Honourable Speaker, allow me to go to the other objectives. The other objective of this legislation or the iTaukei Trust Board is outlined in section....

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Well, I have the floor, I can take the whole afternoon, so let me take the first page. I have 20 minutes, mind you.

Section 4 is on the purposes of the Fund; Section 5, the beneficiaries of the Fund, and let me read this. Who are the beneficiaries of the Fund? It says and I quote:

“The beneficiary of the Fund are the indigenous Fijians and Rotumans, and the institution...”

It contradicts.

Now let me read to you the recommendation of the Committee. Here, you have a Government that has taken away their rights and here you have a Committee that says this, let me conclude:

“To conclude, the Committee has examined the iTaukei Trust Fund Annual Reports and recommends the performance of the Board in promoting the interest, culture and the rights of *iTaukei* and Rotumans.”

A big contradiction! In the Act, you took away the whole purpose and in here you are saying this, so there you go.

Its purpose is to invest these funds and use that funds for the benefit of the indigenous people. How? This is what the Act says:

“To provide funding for undertaking promotion and sponsoring programmes on Fijian language, culture and study of ethno-history and ethno-geography.”

I am totally disappointed. We have had USP and other universities and we study about everything else in everywhere, but we have never studied about us, nothing about our own culture. To say that, most of indigenous culture is oral and it will go away with all those who are alive there. For example, in my village, my mother is 85 years old. She will die in the next two or three years, and with her...

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- You might die sooner than that.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- And with her will go all the knowledge of the songs, the *mekes*, the lullabies that were present in the village.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- What have you done?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Why I am disappointed, because the USP has been there for so many years, and this one has been established for so years too, but never once have they gone around the villages noting that our custom or tradition is oral, and we need to record this, we need to keep that in a repository.

For this Board to become meaningful, we must have a repository of all our indigenous culture, most of them are orals. Where are our *meke*? The *meke* have gone. Where are our knowledge? Where are our knowledge of the environment? Where are all the Fijian herbal knowledge? They are dying because we are studying about herbs in New Zealand, we are studying about cultures of the other people and we are not studying about us.

I wish to say that I am disappointed that these ...

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Go on, I am listening.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Well, let me tell you something, Honourable Minister. I am teaching you. I am spending my time here to tell you what should be done, so you should be happy for that.

Also, to provide funding to boost, and drive and sustain impact levels of management leadership, entrepreneurial skills of indigenous Fijians and Rotumans to empower them.

And what is happening to that? Compare that to the other side, what does “empower them” means to them? Not the election, but appointing to their own, their friends, their family members.

We just heard about Local Government and clearly from that side, they said that empowerment for them does not mean elections. Empowerment to them means appointing people of their own. That is not democracy, that is not good governance.

(Hon. A. Sudhakar interjects)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA. - Yes, because you are talking to me and I am talking back to you.

Next, it says, “sponsor research into languages, art and culture of indigenous Fijians and Rotumans for the better understanding of their culture.” None! Disappointed as well. Where are all these? Where are all the books? Where can you get all the books? So, you better ask this Committee to ask that Board what it is doing about its role and its responsibility.

Lastly, “sponsor research into languages and culture of indigenous Fijians.” So, basically, my two points are, to the other side, please, restore our lives that you took out by amending this Act to take away the holistic purpose for that which was to provide financial independence and autonomy in relation to the operation and administration of the *Bose Levu Vakaturaga*, and please, empower the indigenous people and the *vanua*. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. Honourable Salote Radrodro, you have the floor.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- I thank you, Honourable Speaker and I thank the Honourable Niko Nawaikula for his contribution. I also acknowledge the concerns he raised in regards to our Report and also the Honourable Attorney-General shaking the Report and looking at me. I want to clarify in here that because the Report is very outdated, the instructions we were given in our former term that we only take note of the Report.

But having said that, Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a contribution on the Report in regards, particularly to the investment portfolio as done by the organisation. And I must say it is a very financially healthy organisation. You look at the investments that it has undertaken in regards to shares, terms deposits and even owning properties.

But then, Honourable Speaker, as you look at the vision and their mandate, there is a big gap there in regards to investing in the indigenous people. Mr. Speaker, I say this, and may I give an example in regards to the Nawailevu Bauxite Mining.

In my former term as an alternate Member to the Standing Committee on Natural Resources, I was fortunate to have accompanied the Committee to Nawailevu Bauxite site and also in the village. In the discussions, it highlighted and brought forth the issue that they were quite ignorant of the laws in regards to the Land Bank, sustainable development and in the protection of the environment.

Having said that, this is the kind of investment that iTLTB should be investing on so that when indigenous leaders make a decision in terms of the development of their resources, they are making well-informed decisions, not only about themselves but also for the protection of their environment, as well as for the benefit of the future generation.

This is a gap where there is a lot of improvements in which the organisation could invest in. So, to assist the indigenous landowners or resource owners in developing their leadership skills, in upskilling them so that they can also partake in development.

One of the mandate is to develop their entrepreneurial skills and that is an area that needs improvement and also an area where iTLTB could work together with iTaukei Affairs. They go on roadshows but this is the kind of thing that could be taken on board on the roadshows in terms of educating, informing and enlightening the people on the legal framework or the legal issues that affect when it comes to the development of their natural resources.

I will conclude and say that the Committee in its next deliberations in the coming Report and hopefully the Report will be timely this time. We made a thorough assessment and made appropriate recommendations along the lines and the contributions that has been undertaken by the Honourable Nawaikula and I and maybe others in the House, we indeed to promote the mandate and invest in the indigenous people of this country in regards to the development of their own natural resources. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you Honourable Salote Radrodro. We have the last speaker for this motion, the Honourable Adi Litia Qionibaravi.

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- Thank you Honourable Speaker. I would like to ...

HON. SPEAKER.- You have the floor.

(Laughter)

Ignore the other side. You have the floor.

HON. ADIL QIONIBARAVI.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I would like to contribute to the discussion this afternoon regarding the Fijians Trust Fund. By way of some information, this was first established in 2001 under the Interim Government of Mr. Qarase. It was established as an incorporated trust and that was changed when an Act of Parliament was promulgated in 2004.

Honourable Nawaikula has given us the initial objectives of the Fund. Initially, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Board Members of the Fijians Trust Fund were appointed by the Bose Levu Vakaturaga. They amend the Fijians Trust Fund by a Decree during the period of the Interim Government saw the appointment of the Members of the Board removed from the Bose Levu Vakaturaga because it was not sitting at that time, given that it was suspended from 2007.

The initial seed funding for the Trust Fund was provided by Government together with the \$10 million shares that was part of the \$20 million shares purchased through a loan from the Fiji Government with the Fijian Affairs Board to enable the Fijian Holdings Company to acquire blue chip shares in the companies that were strategically placed and earning good dividends at that time.

I would like to thank the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, it was in his time when the \$20 million loan was approved, which was funded by Government and provided to the FAB for the purchase of shares.

I am happy, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to again review the Annual Report of the Fijians Trust Fund, the last one that I was able to renew was in 2006 when it was tabled to the Bose Levu Vakaturaga, which under the law at that time was mandated to consider the Annual Reports even to approve the Budget of the Fijians Trust Fund.

A lot has happened between 2006 and now. I am grateful, Honourable Prime Minister, that this Funds is not being dismantled and it has continued to invest the funds that it was endowed with for the purpose for each it was established. Initially for the autonomy of the Bose Levu Vakaturaga, and for strengthening issues that concerns the rise in aspirations of the first people of this nation.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, I would like to just ask two questions:

1. Which institution is the Fijians Trust Fund responsible to now, given that the Bose Levu Vakaturaga has been removed by the Interim Government; and
2. What would be the long term vision of the Fijians Trust Fund Board given what we have heard today?

I am very happy and I would like to commend the Fijians Trust Fund Board for its continuing good results over the years.

Honourable Speaker, I had said on Monday that the fact that saddens me is, I am unable to speak my own language in this Honourable House. I would like to again reiterate our request that Government considers allowing the speaking of the Hindi and the first people's language in this House. Our people out there would like to hear us speak in our own language, even if it has to be, we speak in English but it will be interpreted. We should be a role model, we should be able to speak our language and also practise our culture.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- Mr. Speaker Sir, I would like to recommend for the consideration of the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, which the Honourable Prime Minister is the Minister to consider establish a training institution from under the Fijian's Trust Fund.

As alluded to by Honourable Nawaikula, we need lot of research into the first people's nations' language, customs, tradition, its intellectual properties, its intellectual capacities, its knowledge - *vuku vaka iTaukei* I call it, Honourable Speaker.

The institution, we do not have to look very far. In New Zealand they have the *Te Wananga o Aotearoa* which provides holistic education opportunities for the highest quality for Maori people of *Aotearoa* and the world. We could consider establishing our own tertiary institution for the first people of this nation, Sir. In New Zealand, the institution is guided by Maori principles and values enforces a nurturing and inclusive learning environment. The depth and diversity of this course included Maori arts, culture, *Te Maori* or the Indigenous Maori language.

Over 300,000 people have graduated from the five *Wananga* that have established in New Zealand. That is my contribution Sir, this afternoon. I request that the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs under the Honourable Prime Minister to consider expanding the objective of the Fund to ensure that our culture, our language is protected and it continues for our future generations. *Vinaka*.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. Honourable Minister?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I just want to make one clarification for the record of this Honourable House. This is concerning Nawailevu because it was brought up in the motion and talking about enlightening people on investments and of course the legal aspects of the resources as well; the development of their natural resources.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, in Nawailevu for the record of this House, for those who have no access to what transpired in Nawailevu. Initially when the mining was under consideration, the land was under Fiji Pine. And Fiji Pine, I am not sure about the amount that they settled the deal with but they requested for about \$3 million or so (it could be plus or minus) so that that land can be surrendered and transferred back to the owners and then the processes for the leasing can be, so there was money paid to Fiji Pine so that that processes can take place.

At that point, Honourable Speaker, Sir, iTLTB was administering the process and iTLTB settled an amount with the investors which came to almost \$1 million and the landowners were not satisfied with that. Then came two *iTaukei* lawyers who then provided advice to the resource owners and suggested to them that they transfer this arrangement to the Land Bank. That was how this occurred, Honourable Speaker, Sir. They were not satisfied with the amount that was offered to the iTLTB by the investors and then these two iTaukei lawyers came in and then they advised them to transfer the land to the Land Bank.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, in that process, in as far as the enlightening and the advices that were given to the landowners on investments, there were workshops conducted at the agriculture station in Dreketi to the landowners on options for them when they are going to receive their money. Only the *qoliqoli* owners invested the \$250,000 that they were each given but not the other *mataqali* where mining and the access and the port facilities were in, but it was the *qoliqoli* owners who invested. So there were lots and lots of workshops organised by Government at Dreketi but the people had opted not to invest, Honourable Speaker, Sir. But the most unfortunate thing in this, Honourable Speaker, Sir, when the discussions were being undertaken, the locals were saying that the two lawyers

came to assist them. But when the deal was finalised because they were doing the Minutes of the meeting, 20 percent of the deal was to go to them.

So for the first landowning unit, \$500,000 that was given, \$500,000 plus, they had about \$115,000. This is the kind of advice that we are providing our own people.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Very poor.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- That is the fact of the matter at Nawailevu, Honourable Speaker, Sir. There were investment plans, the Northern Development Programme office, they came, we did a strategic plan for them about their development but when they received the money, the Saturday they received their money, Honourable Speaker, Sir, there were two bags full of money taken by bus to Nawailevu so that people can share. But that was their choice. But all the advices, and all the enlightenment and all the training had been given to them but they stuck to the advice that was given by their lawyers and of course, that was the end result, Honourable Speaker.

I want to bring that to the House because it has been raised so many times, because I know that they were not given the full information particularly the Committee when they visited Nawailevu mining project, Honourable Speaker, Sir. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. I give the floor to the Honourable Prime Minister. You have the floor.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. Honourable Speaker, there has been a lot of talk on culture this afternoon especially from Honourable Nawaikula. He goes on and on and on, reminds me of the wording by the Honourable Minister here (indicates behind him) about the Mississippi River; meandering (it just goes on and on.) That is the story of his life. I think he is wasting his time. He should go home, go to his village, try and look at the culture in his village and learn from his mum before he kills her off. Seriously! Because that is what he wants to do.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- But that is what you said.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Can he be advised to talk on the issue?

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- That is what you said.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- If you can debate, we debate.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- That is what you said.

We have just heard from the Honourable Minister explaining about Nawailevu. We will do this again and again and again, we have done it in the past, because that is also what they tried to do to confuse the public out there about what is happening in Nawailevu.

Honourable Speaker, culture is not something that can be pushed under the rug, it is not something that can languish in the back of our minds. Culture must be cultivated, it is something we must constantly strengthen and uphold for ourselves and for the future generations.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Honourable Speaker, the Honourable Nawaikula talked about me being Chairman of iTLTB and he says they hated the idea because, me, being Chairman dictates what happens in iTLTB. Why do you not look to your left? I mean to your right. There is nothing on your left. Look to your right. There is a former Chairman who was the Minister, what have you got to say for that, nothing!

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. MEMBER.- No problem ....

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- No problem then?

In recent years, Honourable Speaker, iTaukei culture has received awareness and recognition at a scale never before seen in our history.

HON. MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Fiji's global leadership, has seen our cultural traditions showcased on some of the grandest stages in the world. Millions of eyes have been upon our culture; millions of eyes are upon our traditions; upon everything that makes us proud to be iTaukei people. Our culture is not being forgotten, it is not being pushed aside, it is being carried out at the highest level of global prestige and understanding.

I think Honourable Nawaikula should come to the present 2<sup>nd</sup> of April 2019, instead of going continuously in the past, in 2002 and 2004 when the Great Council of Chiefs (GCC) was there. It is no longer a Great Council of Chiefs now, please, talk of the present; talk of what we are going to do today in promoting the culture of the iTaukei, Mr. Speaker, and that of the Rotuman culture.

The Fund plays a vital role; the Fund has a direct impact on the wellbeing of our people, as our culture underpins our very identity and our way of life.

By running a diverse investment portfolio in Fiji and overseas, as you have heard, Mr. Speaker, the Fund maintains a steady stream of income that funds a number of projects that strengthen and promote iTaukei and Rotuman culture. The Fund's leadership and management training of community leaders educate on good governance practices to the next in line chiefly title holders, the "*i sausauvou*" and conduct professional development training for the staff at the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs.

The Fund supports teachers of the iTaukei languages. It carries out professional development for teachers of the iTaukei language through skills workshop, Literacy conferences and provides support towards a diploma programme at USP. The Fund also provides financial assistance towards the professional development of Ministry staff on Cultural Heritage, protection and promotion in partnership with the Sainsbury Research Unit of the University of East Anglia, in the United Kingdom.

Additional financial assistance is also provided towards the partnership with the British Council to implement the Active Citizen Programme in communities, including in villages.

From a broad front, Mr. Speaker, the Fund has actively worked to both preserve and promote the iTaukei language. They do not know that.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- They don't want to know that.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- They do not know that, and we have found innovative ways to accomplish this. A case in point could be the development and launch of the *i Vola Vosa* App. I do not know if they know that. I do not know if they have that app, maybe they should start learning which has ensured that languages are enshrined permanently and forever, with over 24,000 words, images and audio files stored online for all to use, because, Honourable Speaker, as the Attorney-General said yesterday, we want to create a Fiji where the vernacular languages are widely-known and understood. We are not there at the moment.

If the Honourable Qionibaravi wants to go to her people and speak, go ahead, she is going to use the Bauan language ...

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- I do not understand his language...

(Laughter)

I don't understand the language of the person next to him because they speak in a different dialect.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- The work of the Fund, Honourable Speaker, is putting the future within reach, so while the Opposition tries to focus on differences and divides, my Government and the Fund are offering all solutions to develop our economy ...

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- ... to develop our economy, serve all of our people and preserve our heritage.

Honourable Speaker, to that point, we actually have our constitutional requirement in place that mandates every primary school student to be taught a compulsory subject, the iTaukei Language.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- This will not only enhance greater capacity and ability on the population to converse and crack jokes, of course, more readily than now, enhance understanding and consolidate nationhood, but it will also help preserve the *iTaukei* Language.



Honourable Speaker, there is still certainly room for improvement. Honourable Nawaikula is talking about herbs, we should start with the *botebotekoro* which is right here, there is a whole lot of books on Fijian herbs that he has not read, *Wainimate vaka Viti*.

There is certainly room for improvement, Honourable Speaker. I support the recommendation of this report that calls for greater gender balance in the composition of the Fund and there are presently two women, as you have heard, Honourable Speaker, out of the seven board members and let me remind you, Honourable Speaker, that under my Government, there are far more women holding senior Government positions, serving in boards and even Parliament, more than ever before. Thank you, Sir.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Hear, hear!

HON. SPEAKER.- I think, we have come to the end of this debate. I thank the Honourable Prime Minister.

I now give the floor to the Chairman for his Right of Reply. You have the floor.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. I must thank all speakers and also our Honourable Prime Minister for all the information provided but just to respond to the Honourable Nawaikula's information as far as the recommendation is concerned, it is not that the three persons who were present before the Committee, two were male and one was female that we came up to this recommendation on gender balance.

I think the Honourable Niko Nawaikula is not able to understand that. Honourable Speaker, Sir, allow a farmer to explain to him. Under the recommendation he has not read all, he has just read what has suited him to speak in this House.

Under Introduction, the iTaukei Trust Fund Board was established by the Fiji Government to foster advancement of the Indigenous Fijians and Rotumans, by prompting initiatives that will better their standard of living and enhance appropriate culture, tradition and values.

The objectives of the iTaukei Trust Fund Board are intended to be charitable in purpose. They are to:

1. provide funds for undertaking promotion and sponsoring programmes in Fijian language, culture and study of ethno-history and ethno-geography;
2. provide funding to boost the drive to invigorate and sustain at the impact level the management leadership and entrepreneurship skills of the indigenous Fijians and Rotumans;
3. key Sponsor Research into Language and Art and Culture of Indigenous Fijians and Rotumans for the better understanding of their culture and heritage; and
4. carry out any other purposes approved by the Board which would benefit the Indigenous Fijians and Rotumans.

Under gender balance, gender is a critical dimension to the Parliamentary scrutiny. Under Standing Order 110(2) where a Committee conducts an activity listed in clause 1, the Committee shall ensure full consideration be given to the principle of gender equality so as to ensure all matters are considered with regards to the impact and benefit on both men and women equally.

The Committee considered the issue of equal opportunity for all citizens, including women and men, during the consultation with the Chairman of the iTaukei Trust Fund Board and has been assured by the Board of its commitment in playing a significant role towards gender equality. That is the full information, Honourable Niko Nawaikula. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote to note the content of the Report.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Noes')

HON. SPEAKER.- As no Member opposes the motion, the motion is agreed to.

Honourable Members, for the purpose of complying with Standing Orders with respect to the sitting times, I will allow a suspension motion to be moved, and I now call upon the Leader of the Government in Parliament to move his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

### **SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS**

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir, I move:

That under Standing Order 6 that so much of Standing Order 23(1) is suspended so as to allow the House to sit beyond 4.30 p.m. today to complete the remaining items as listed on today's Order Paper.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Honourable Speaker, I second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now call upon the Leader of the Government in Parliament to speak on the motion. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. We still have a motion and the Oral Questions as listed on Schedule 2 to be completed but hopefully well before 10 p.m., Honourable Speaker, Sir, so thus the motion before the House. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament and I will take note of your request. The floor is open for debate on this motion. I now call on the Leader of the Government in Parliament to speak again.

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I have no further comments to make.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote:

The Question is:

That under Standing Order 6, that so much of Standing Order 23(1) be suspended so as to allow the House to sit beyond 4.30 p.m. today to complete the remaining items as listed in today's Order Paper.

Does anyone Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Noes')

As no Member opposes, the motion is agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will now take an adjournment for afternoon tea, and the Secretary-General will advise you through the bell when we resume. We are adjourned.

The Parliament adjourned at 4.08 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 4.41 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will move on with the Order of the day.

I now call on the Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua to move her motion. You have the floor, Madam.

### FACILITATION OF THE MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to move:

That Parliament agrees to uphold the Local Government Act and approve the facilitation of the Municipal Elections by October 2019 so as to provide legitimate and fair representation to the ratepayers and citizens of the Municipalities.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

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

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now invite the Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua to speak on the motion. You have the floor.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, in 2008, the Military Regime decided to abolish elected Municipal Councils in all Municipalities throughout the country for reasons best known to it. This decision was effected in 2009, elected Councils and Mayors were replaced by Special Administrators, and this has been the practise for almost 10 years.

Now, we see that the Ministry of Local Government, under the Honourable Minister Premila Kumar, had decided not to hold elections but further consolidate Government's hold on Municipalities by appointing a team of Special Administrators to replace single Administrators.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, why is it that this Government does not want Local Government elections that will give Municipal Councils transparency and to be held to account by ratepayers and citizens of each Municipality? What is it that despite resumption of Parliamentary democracy and conduct of the two General Elections, Government continues to ride roughshod over the wish of ratepayers and citizens, to have elected Councils and elected Mayors?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on 24th September, 2014, immediately after being sworn in as Minister for Local Government, the Honourable Parveen Kumar Bala, himself an elected Councillor for 16 years, 12 years of which he served as Mayor of Ba and widely recognised as the best elected Mayor of his time made a statement that the holding of Local Government elections would be his top priority, now that the General Elections have been held. But very quickly, the Honourable Minister made an about-turn after joining FijiFirst, and said that there would be no elections until the review of the Local Government Act was complete.

Mr. Speaker Sir, this coming from the same person who excelled as Mayor for 12 consecutive years under the same Local Government Act that he was now calling archaic. More than four years have left since then, and the Honourable Minister for Local Government's announcement and there

is no sign of the reviewed Act or the review process itself.

On 21st March, 2017, the Honourable Minister Parveen Bala in response to a question by the Honourable Salote Radrodro, said that a review committee had been formed and a report and terms of reference would be with him by September 2017. He also said that the Opposition should be happy as the Ministry was fast-tracking the changes.

In response to a supplementary question by the NFP Leader, the Honourable Professor Biman Prasad, the Honourable Bala said and I quote:

“What we need to do is to review the Local Government Act and at the outset, I did say that the associated laws are in the final stage. You just want to have an election, just for the sake of having it or whether you test the ground whether you have the support or not.”

Mr. Speaker, what has happened to the fast-track review of the Act and other associated legislation? Was the review done at all? Was the review tailor-made to endorse Government's plan to appoint a team of Special Administrators? If a review has been done, why has the outcome of the review not been made public?

The review sound song continues to be sung by the new Honourable Minister for Local Government and it is clear that both the Honourable Ministers have the same song sheet which is, “Review First, Elections Later”.

Mr. Speaker, ratepayers and citizens in the Municipalities deserve democracy and not dictatorship. The Honourable Minister Premila Kumar's plan to appoint a team of Special Administrators to run Municipal Councils is tantamount to turning Municipal Administration into dictatorial regimes, all in the name of revamping Councils.

In January this year, Honourable Minister Kumar claimed that reforms were needed, including the reviewing of the Local Government Act before elections are held. She did not say that a committee was looking at the Act for the last three years, as revealed in Parliament by her predecessor, the Honourable Parveen Bala.

It is now clear that her version of reforms is to appoint Special Administrators, similar to the Sugar Cane Growers Council when non-representatives of cane growers have been appointed, making the Sugar Cane Growers Council (SCGC) dysfunctional and in effect, a toothless tiger.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Speaker, Municipal Administrations will face a similar fate. We can foresee appointments based on nepotism and cronyism of FijiFirst supporters and well-wishers. This is a sad but indisputable fact, and I make no apologies for making this statement.

We have irrefutable evidence of who are financiers of FijiFirst and we can link them to certain developments and appointments, but that is best left for another day, Mr. Speaker. Sadly, these unelected personnel will determine the use of rates, with ratepayers have no say whatsoever in how their money is being used.

Mr. Speaker Sir, taxation without representation is tyranny. Already, the Special Administrators and Chief Executive Officers of Municipal Bodies are toothless tigers and admit, they

are powerless to make decisions, even on matters concerning the welfare of their workers in terms of negotiating collective agreements and wage rises.

Unnecessary long delays are experienced in decision-making because the decisions are made by the Ministry, and we know that many issues are still pending because the Ministry is still dealing with the matters. I am afraid, it might be worst under the new Honourable Minister's plan.

Already, Mr. Speaker, ratepayers and citizens' complaints have fallen on deaf ears and we have a few examples. This morning I raised the issue of the Labasa market vendors writing to the Honourable Minister last month about the conduct of certain Council activities and decision-making, but they have yet to receive a reply.

We have two cases about Nausori Town Council. A ratepayer of Nakasi has been knocking on the doors of the Council as certain development has damaged his property. His entire retaining wall has collapsed because of the drain dug by a neighbour which bypasses development regulation, and nothing has been done to-date.

An ordinary citizen was granted a hawkers licence to sell food in Manoca outside the town boundary, yet the Council revoked his licence, basing its decision on untruthful claims and allegations. The citizen raised the issue with the Honourable Minister, but has yet to receive a reply. He gathered evidence and that has been forwarded to us. Selling food has been his only source of livelihood but the Council and the Ministry ignored his plea, yet many others are selling food without a licence every night in Nausori.

This morning I highlighted the plight of residents of Vilavou Community of Caqiri Road in Nasinu, who are victims of broken promises made five years ago. Honourable Speaker, I know that you are familiar with their plight.

They tell me that they pay rates, but they do not have proper rubbish collection or proper footpaths or lighting of footpaths, despite many promises made to them in 2014. In all cases, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the aggrieved citizens would have had access to their local Town Councils, had there been legally constituted elected councils. But, they are made to run around and get kicked from pillar to post. It is just totally unjust Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, it is wrong for the Honourable Minister and others to keep referring to Municipal Bodies as Councils under the current administration because the Local Government Act clearly defines what constitutes a Council.

Section 2(9) of the Local Government Act defines the composition of a council as:

“The council of every municipality shall consist of such number of councillors as the Electoral Commission may from time to time determine.”

The Act also says, I quote: “Elections of councillors should be held every three years.”

Therefore, Special Administrators who are under direct control of the Minister do not constitute a council.

Last year, when a poll, run by the *Fiji Times* and *Tebutt* was conducted on whether Mayors or Administrators should run Councils, 68 percent of respondents preferred Mayors. The fact that 68 percent of our people want an elected Mayor instead of the Administrator...

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- ... to run the affairs of the municipality is concrete evidence of the need to allow the ratepayers and citizens their right to elect their representatives, so that they are accountable to them. This right has been denied since the dissolution of Councils in 2009. The ratepayers have no right and no voice in determining how their rates and other fees and charges levied by Municipalities are used. This is unacceptable, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

None of us in this Parliament would want someone or any organisation to have absolute control of our future in this way. Like I said this morning, Honourable Speaker, the Honourable Minister should stop laying the blame game and make sweeping generalisations by accusing elected councils as they being corrupt.

Mr. Speaker, over the last decades, we have had Mayors who are persons of repute and stature. This morning, I singled out the Honourable Praveen Kumar Bala, who was Mayor of Ba for 12 years. His predecessors included; Kishok Kumar, who later become a Supreme Court Judge; and there was Vinod Patel, a household name in Fiji, who was a Member of Parliament for seven years.

There was one Dilip Khatri, a Mayor of Nadi, who is the owner of Jacks Group of Companies. Hari Punja was the Mayor of Lautoka and Kanti Lal Tappoo was a long serving Mayor of Sigatoka. Maan Singh, let us not forget, became the first Local Lord Mayor of Suva (I believe) in 1981 and he too was a Member of Parliament for seven years, Honourable Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the last Lord Mayor of Suva, Ratu Peni Volavola, was a person of innate decency and goodwill and worker-friendly. The development of the Nasese foreshore as a creational area used by many thousands of people, who are residents of other Municipalities, continued under him which was started by his predecessor, Chandu Umaria, who later became the Special Administrator for the Suva City Council.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, they all served their ratepayers and citizens to the best of their abilities and we all know about their abilities and acumen. To make a sweeping generalisation that all elected Municipal Councils were corrupt is casting a slur at these eminent personalities.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I implore the Honourable Members of this House to do the right thing and allow our ratepayers and citizens of all the Municipalities to democratically elect their representatives. Let democracy and freedom prevail, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

With those words, Honourable Speaker, I commend the motion.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- *Vinaka.*

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member for the motion.

Honourable Members, the floor is open, if anyone wishes to speak on the motion. Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I wish to make my contribution to the motion on the floor. My understanding is that the Honourable Qereqeretabua just wants to hold the election because it is the normal thing to do.

The reason is to provide legitimacy and fair representation to the ratepayers and citizens of municipalities. Will this motion, ensures transparency and accountability? We have had town councils and cities in past ages and these municipalities have suffered corruption and lack of accountability. It is said that if you want to hold elections for the sake of that process, and ignore the facts of corruption and the lack of accountability, then it is not really worth the time that has been given in this Honourable House.

The Minister of Local Government, Housing and Community Development had alluded in her Ministerial Statement on the various past incidents which had actually involved Mayors and Councillors and we should learn from that process; learn and move one. It is important to again highlight the example of corruption and mismanagement. You must learn from the past and records show examples of extreme corruption and inefficiency. Is this the reason why Honourable Qereqeretabua wants Municipal Elections? While there have been Honourable Mayors and Honourable Councillors, it is very few and far apart.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, under the elected Council, the corruptions and mismanagement have reached extreme levels.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- That is why we have made the changes.

These were the 1977, 1978, 1997 and in 2000 and basically that is why we came in and removed them because they were not doing their work. Over and over again, we see examples of Councils of extreme corruption and inefficiency.

All the Councils have had effect on these municipal authorities that have governed this. It starts from Suva, Savusavu and the list goes on. We still wear scars of the corruption today. Today we cannot even expand the market and taxi stand in Savusavu, as being alluded to by the Honourable Minister. Nausori Town Council has its own shares of shady dealings, Nasinu Town Council sold the land to business people connected to Councillors, Labasa Town Council constructed a swimming pool by taking a loan for \$400,000.00, financed through rates. The list goes on, Honourable Speaker, Sir. It is not of significant importance to bring an assumption into this House and try and convince members to change something that is running very well. Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. Honourable Member you have the floor.

HON. RATU S. MATANITOBUA.- Thank you Honourable Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to make a short contribution in support of the motion by Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua calling the Government to facilitate Local Government Elections.

I support this motion for a number of reasons.

Firstly, Mr. Speaker, the Local Government is the basis of delivering of some basic services and when the people do not have a direct say in their Local Government, there is high risk of those services being compromised as has been the case since the elected Town and City Councils have gone into oblivion.



Secondly, Sir, we have had a lot of dance and songs by this Government in this House and by its supporters outside on democracy and good governance. Yet by not holding Local Government elections, they have systematically robbed the citizens and ratepayers of their right to self-determination as far as local governance in Fiji is concerned.

Thirdly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, our towns and cities were places of attraction during the era of elected councils unlike now where the state of our towns and cities have been reduced to a state of despair and the ratepayers not getting their fair share or just returns. The appointed administrators basically have no sense of belongingness and ownership to the urban centres they manage except a few with some previous experience.

Fourthly, Sir, this morning, the Honourable Minister for Local Government made a statement alleging that our elected councillors were ineffective and corrupt. I wonder who wrote that speech for her and what are the basis of her allegations which is nothing but an insult to the ratepayers of Fiji that they elected corrupt people to manage their Local Government. The fact is that whatever one may choose to allege or say about our elected councillors, you are at the liberty to do so but they have done a wonderful job in transforming the geo-political and socio-economic landscape of Fiji which the trumpeters of this Government will never be able to do in their lifetime. I say to them, “give it a try and let us see whether you prevail or fail.”

Fifthly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Local Government is still a statutory law and has been preserved as such. It stipulates as highlighted by the Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua that Local Government elections shall be held at an interval of three years. By failing to adhere to that statutory provision, this Government has again made a mockery of the law and its earlier pronouncement by the previous Minister for Local Government to facilitate the Local Government elections.

Sixthly, Sir, I was appalled when the Honourable Minister for Local Government asked this morning what the elected councils have done for our towns and cities. Well, not to waste the time of this House, let me politely request her to ask that question to her predecessor, the Millennium Mayor, Honourable Parveen Bala, who is a fine product of Local Government leadership in this House. His wisdom may enlighten and inspire her or rather liberate her from her level of ignorance on this point.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I plead with the Honourable Members of this House not to perceive this as an Opposition motion aimed at points scoring but realise the mandate we have secured recently from the people who raise this issue here in this House, seeking redress to the same.

Honourable Speaker, with those few words, I support the motion before the House.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Ratu Suliano Matanitobua for his statement. Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, regarding this motion, I spent quite a substantial time in the morning explaining as to why we could not hold Municipal Elections and it was backed with facts and figures, you may like to check the Auditor-General's Report, you will find all that information there. If not, you can go to Archives and again you will be able to pull out this information.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, he is not disputing it now, but he is still making all those comments. You are not convinced.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the petition is requesting the House to provide legitimate and fair representation to the ratepayers and citizens of the municipalities. We have actually seen what has happened. The ratepayers and citizens have lost the land. They have completely lost the buildings. It cannot come back.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, we have seen that in 2002 when the municipal elections were held  
....

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- In 2002 when municipal elections were held only 37 percent of the city and town dwellers voted. In 2005 it reduced further to 31 percent of the city and town dwellers voted. It is a clear indication that years and years of corruption and mismanagement actually led to loss of confidence in the elected councillors and their abilities to govern municipal councils.

This was the reason why a change was made. And we have seen in last 10 years the amount of investment the Government has made towards municipalities which you would have never seen, which we have never seen before and it is a clear indication that today the municipal councils are in better hands.

I have also heard what Honourable Qereqeretabua had said. This is what happens, Honourable Speaker, Sir, when the Member has limited knowledge of Local Governments. I just want to make it very clear it is a fact that globally Local Government is created by the national government and the level of autonomy is given by the national government depending upon what they can do, what they cannot do and that is how the system is worked out.

In the morning, I had given a number of examples where election is not the answer. For example, Kuala Lumpur, Barbados, I had also given Botswana. So, there are different modalities to getting the Councillors in and we have made it very clear from the beginning that we will look at the review process.

Let me thank my predecessor for all his hard work. For the last four years he has done the following and you may have heard the report that he presented in the Parliament on what he did.

1. He had completed the boundary extension for Navua and Nadi; Local Government Committee was established under him and this Local Government Committee went to the various places identifying the most potential towns that can be developed or small centres that can be developed; and
2. Another area where substantial work was done was in the amalgamation of Rural Local Authorities into municipal councils as well as into Ministry of Health.

That is a very important work which was left for three decades by the Municipal Councils. The reason was they did not want the boundary extension and now it has been included in the municipality. Why that has been done? Simply done to provide better service to the rural dwellers.

In the past, we have seen that the Governments did not support financially two municipalities. They were left on their own. There was so much of bickering within the Municipal Councils and the Government and I gave you the examples of how the roads were named as Suva City Council Road and Government Road. There was so much of disconnect between the two. What we have done, we have brought the party together and we are trying to work on the review process.

On the review process, election component comes under the Local Government Act 1972, that is the election process. You cannot just change the Local Government Act 1972. There are certain other requirements that we have to complete before we can change the Local Government Act 1972, for example, the Sub-division of Land Act 1937 and the Town Planning Act 1946, both legislation have a bearing on the Local Government Act 1972.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Again if you look at the Local Government Act 1972, as the Honourable Member had given a deadline of October 2019, if you look at the Local Government Act 1972, it talks about people who are above 21 can vote, but our electoral system has changed, it is 18 and above.

So, what I am trying to say here is that you cannot just change the Local Government Act 1972, it has to be changed along with other legislation and other legislation cannot just change overnight.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, they also had opportunity to make these changes. For three decades, the Oppositions were running the show, nothing happened ...

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- ... but in 10 years, we have shown you such a big progress that we have done in the Municipalities.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Regarding the election process, I am adamant that we cannot proceed with the election process unless and until the review of the legislation, that is the Local Government Act 1972 is done in consultation with the people of this country, and not just the politicians.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Give us the time.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- I will not give you the time.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- That is all I have to say, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister.

Honourable Bultavu, you have the floor.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Finally, thank you, Honourable Speaker.

The motion is very clear, Honourable Speaker, Sir, and I stand to support the motion by the Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua, and that is to for the elections in the municipal elections to be held to provide legitimate and fair representation of ratepayers. Those are the operating words in the motion that the ratepayers are represented. It is the cornerstone of any democracy, whether it is

national democracy or whether it is a local government, people need to be represented, and cornerstone is the right to vote.

With that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, what has brought about this particular motion is a promise that was done by the Honourable Praveen Bala, my Honourable friend on the other side in 2014, and he has not even revealed or explained to the House why he has failed to fulfil that promise, and we await that on what was said in the media after he was sworn in. He has come up with plenty explanations in the last four years in terms of the review process, and how they are reviewing the Act, et cetera.

Now the two stages, the two achievements mentioned by the Honourable Minister in terms of boundary and the other things that were done in his tenure but I find it very interesting, Honourable Speaker, Sir, in an article in January this year, where the Honourable Minister was quoted saying: "I am not Honourable Bala."

So that was a very promising statement he made, and we thought that she was moving towards....

(Honourable Government Member interjects)

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- That was on record. I repeat....

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- I quote, Sir, from one of the leading newspapers in the country, where she said, "I am not Honourable Bala".

I thought that given what she said, she will be better than the predecessor who called for these elections to take place. But again with the justifications he has made this morning, why this; why are they still doing this; blaming previous Government; blaming other governments.

I think the Members of the Public Accounts Committee can stand up and talk about how our Municipal Councils are performing, in terms of submitting timely yearly financial statements and that has been a problem too, and that had happened in the last 10 years.

Even in that same public statement, Honourable Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Minister said that Councils are the culprits, saying that most of them due to the delay in development projects and all other plans, the Councils need to be blamed. I thought "Oh, this Minister is going to change, revolutionise the Local Government reforms", but those are some of the things. Again, given if people are not represented in a Council then they do not have a say.

The two good examples mentioned by the Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua on the Labasa case and other cases where they have written to the Honourable Minister, but again there is no response which shows that the representation trickles down to people, how are ratepayers hurt, what are the measures being done to substitute or to allow people to give their views on a particular project that the Council intends to do?

I will talk about one example in Labasa, one is the Labasa Market and the one way street that comes from Labasa Town (from the BSP Bank to the Labasa Town Council Office) which is only a bus route. People complained that it was a wrong decision that people were not consulted about and now they have been writing complaints on that and other issues.

I think the Honourable Attorney-General came to Labasa a few months ago at the Labasa Marketplace in Labasa, he received some complaints too from market vendors. I am raising these issues on why we need to have people represented in the Council for people to regularly contact and represent their interest in the decision-making of the Local Government and their plans and anything that needs to be done. That is my contribution, Sir.

Also in terms of the allegation on corruption, I think you have to look back in the last ten years and see how many Municipal officials were also charged with the corruption-related charges. We cannot be pointing on other Governments, sometimes we have to just take the speck out of our eyes first before we point at others, and those are some of things, Sir.

I support the motion before the House. It is very important for the people to have their voices heard and also to have a representative in the Municipal decision-making. *Vinaka vakalevu*, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to contribute to the motion. If I had an opportunity to talk to the Honourable mover of the motion, I would probably have discouraged her from moving this motion.

But now that she has moved it, and many if not all Honourable Members on the Opposition side, none at all support the idea. I would like to just say that the Honourable Prime Minister enjoys the company of a graduate of a Strategic Studies Institution, the Honourable Inia Seruiratu. If they have done their homework well, they would think that this is the right time for them to have Municipal Elections, so when they look at the political landscape and the support they received from the urban areas, it is now the right time for them to have it before the tide changes. Thank you, Sir.

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Leader of the Opposition. Honourable Attorney-General, you have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, I would like to, just from a legal perspective, correct the fundamental mistake in this actual motion from the Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua. If we look at her motion, it says, "The Parliament agrees to uphold the Local Government Act".

In other words, the next is being that the Council Elections are not being held therefore you are not upholding the Local Government Act 1972 which is furthest from the truth. She only read Section 9, whoever wrote it for her actually did not put in Section 9(a) into her speaking notes. Let me read out Section 9(a):

"The persons appointed as Special Administrators under subsection (1), which is the Special Administrator provision, shall be deemed to be the fully constituted Council of a municipality and shall be subject to any general specific directions issued by the Minister, have the power to perform and discharge of all the rights, privileges, powers, duties and functions vested in or conferred or imposed on the Council. The Mayor and any office of the Council by the Act or any other written law."

So, actually the premise of her motion is incorrect legally speaking, because what she is saying that we are not upholding Local Government Act 1972, when that particular Act itself allows for the appointment of the Special Administrators which in itself consists or is deemed to be the Council. That fundamentally is the wrong premise of the actual motion itself, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

In the same way we saw yesterday and probably see it again later today, but just very quickly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to just go on the governance aspects.

What the Honourable Members seem to be intimating is that, the Elections or the Municipal Council is the end objective. No, that is not the end objective. The end objective is to ensure that we actually have a Council that will manage the Council's affairs well, professionally, and you will have the right people to be able to conduct those affairs.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me give you an example, by way of Fiji National Provident Fund. Before the composition of the FNPf Board was based on two representatives from Employer organisations, two representatives from Government and two representative from Trade Unions, irrespective of their qualifications, irrespective of their calibre. This is the Board that was dealing with one third of the value of our cash reserved in Fiji.

Today, FNPf has 38 percent of our cash reserves. Can you imagine, if we had a Board today, two representatives from Unions, two representatives from Government and two representative from the Employers Group, managing those funds. We knew what happened when it used to happen in that fashion. We know what happened in Natadola, we know what happened in Momi. So Mr. Speaker, Sir, the point of the matter is, the elections itself are not the end objective.

The point of the matter is that it is not the representation on the FNPf Board that is the end objective, it is how those funds are managed. In the same way with the cane Growers Council, it is not about getting everyone waving the political flag, it is about how the Cane Growers Funds will be managed. We have given numerous examples prior to Honourable Qereqeretabua coming to Parliament how before because we engage in party politics, when all 37 got elected from different political parties when there was an overseas meeting to be held, they did not want to send the others because they were from different parties, all 37 of them went.

Is that good use of the funds of the Council which is being paid by the farmers themselves? Is that what we want from Municipal Councils? None of the Ministers both, the existing Minister nor her predecessor, have said there will never be elections. They have said, "We need to look at the governance structures." Today we have four Municipal Councils within 20 kilometres or so: Lami, Suva, Nasinu, Nausori. Many overseas jurisdictions have looked at this and have merged councils. The Honourable Minister had spoken about that.

Do we still maintain the four different Councils or can we merge them to get better utility, get better return on the buck that has been paid by the ratepayers of those municipalities. So we need to look at these fundamental issues. What is the end objective? They have cited that someone did not get their request met, I can give hundreds of thousands of examples of how people have said that municipal council services have improved.

I can give thousands of examples of how when we had elected municipal councils, thousands of people's pleas and their calls were not heard. I can give numerous examples of that. Let us not paint a hunky-dory picture of anything. The reality is if we want to be focused, let us move away from dogma, "have municipal council elections, come what may." Let us look at the future. Let us look at the current status.

As the Honourable Minister highlighted, for example, purely from her financial perspective that today the ratepayers' rates are not going towards maintenance of roads, they are not going towards the maintenance of footpaths or streetlights, these were very big expenses, it is taken out now, so what are they going to invest in, Mr. Speaker, Sir?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, over the past number of years, the Honourable Parveen Bala was the Minister for Local Government and now Honourable Premila Kumar.

We have had the UN Women working with Municipal Councils to set up overnight shelters for women to come and sleep in those Municipal Councils. We have built facilities. The Honourable Prime Minister was, in fact, the one who drove this. We had women coming from Naitasiri and Tailevu to the Suva Market, sleeping on the footpath on a Friday night, on the footpath. Now, they do not have to do that. Most Municipal Councils now actually have facilities for them.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker Sir, if there was lack of credibility in the Municipalities, the UN Women would not participate with us. Today, we have the market being built in Rakiraki. They are contributing substantial funds towards that and we had just last week a meeting, what we call the donor (now called development partner) roundtable before the Budget. All the UN agencies came, all the bilateral partners came to look at how they can work with us to bring about a modern way of thinking, a modern way of contributing through direct budget support or even direct support in respect of these particular facilities..

Mr. Speaker Sir, let us focus on the way forward. Do not get caught up in a time warp! What we have said, Mr. Speaker Sir, we need to have right people in the right places. Let us look at the structures. Mr. Speaker, Sir, running a modern day council is not how it used to be. Times have changed, technologies have been introduced, traffic system have changed and financials have changed.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You see, again, that kind of dogma they cannot get away with! They are very dogmatic people. They are simply just stuck in that dogma. We have cliché terms coming around - all dictatorial, et cetera, when it is contrary to what is actually happening on the ground. Let us move away from cliché terms, please, open up your minds!

Mr. Speaker Sir, the last point I like to also say is that, what we are doing now, the level of funding that has been provided through the Budget is unprecedented. Please, look at the Budget books, the 2018-2019 Budget Books. The setting up of Municipal swimming pools, setting up of sports facilities, places for elderly people to go to, all of those changes are taking place,

Purely from the Government's perspective, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would urge the people to see how we are investing in our assets. Look at Albert Park! Albert Park today has become a landmark with modern day facilities. It is something to be proud of in our capital city.

Look at Churchill Park! You will see the changes that will be taking place in the other Municipalities. All of these positive changes have taken place. What the Opposition Members are hung up about or keep on saying is 'elections'. That is not the end game. The end game is to get the right structures in place, the end game is to make sure that the ratepayers get a good return.

(Honourable Opposition Member interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Yes, of course, we have to catch up with the decades of neglect. Yes, of course, there would be some Municipal Councils that can do better, but the answer

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Yes, of course, we have to catch up with the decades of neglect. Yes, of course, there would be some Municipal Councils that can do better, but the answer is not just elections. The answer is to fix up the administration of those Councils.

Both Honourable Ministers have said how we can fix that up, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I hope common sense will prevail. Thank you Mr. Speaker Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General. I give the floor to the last speaker for this debate. Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to briefly contribute on the motion that is before us. As mentioned earlier on that this subject matter has been on the floors of this Honourable House before, and I do not wish to repeat what has been said earlier on.

It has been also said by the mover that I have served as the Mayor under this Act which I do not deny, but what I am going to say now is through experience, so you will have to accept it.

(Laughter)

Honourable Speaker, before I go into the subject matter proper, I just want to respond to the Honourable Leader of Opposition. I never expected such statements from him but he said that this is the best time to have elections because of the political landscape. In other words, we have won and we should go for election. It is not about winning or losing, it is about getting things in its proper perspective. This is exactly what we have been saying in this House.

Now, the mover talked about the terms of reference. I would like to say and as mentioned by the Honourable Minister, that the terms of reference is in place. It has been endorsed by Cabinet and the Local Government Committee is working on it.

Honourable Speaker, the Honourable Mosese Bulitavu had spoken about the Labasa Market and bus station. I do not know how times he has said that and he got the answers from us on this side, but then again he seems to talk about something that has already been said in this House. The allocation for the relocation of Labasa Market and bus station was allocated in the Budget. The work has commenced and I leave that to the Honourable Minister in future sittings, he can update the House.

Now, going back to the motion proper, I have been targeted this morning and now on the Municipal Elections. Honourable Speaker, what I said was that the process for municipal elections was subject to a review of the Local Government Act 1972.

Honourable Speaker, previous Governments going back to the 1980s, including the Alliance, Labour Party and the SVT and the current, have recognised the need to review the Local Government Act 1972 to bring it up to speed with the current demands on Local Government. But, Honourable Speaker, it was only the Bainimarama Government who had the political will to agree and approve to review the outdated Local Government Act 1972.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

(Honourable Opposition Member interjects)



HON. P.K. BALA.- That is a fact, I am telling you through experience, so you have to listen.

(Laughter)

There has been piecemeal amendments, no doubt about it, but not in totality. This is the first time it is happening, so let us work together and let us do this process. Assist in this because towns and cities are the faces of our beloved nation.

Honourable Speaker, there were a number of reviews of Local Government policies and procedures and by extension, the Local Government Act 1972, but unfortunately not one of these reviews had a properly defined terms of reference.

Honourable Speaker, it is important to note that municipal elections were a major area of concern and the terms of reference recommended a major review of the current electoral system. They advised that this should include input from the Fijian Elections Office and other stakeholders in devising a more relevant and contemporary electoral system.

I will tell you who are voting in these municipal elections. Are you people are aware of that? Everyone is talking about ratepayers. All those who reside within Municipalities, irrespective whether they pay rates or no, they vote. So someone who stays in Suva, works for one bank and is transferred to Ba, so if he or she resides there for six months, he or she is eligible to vote. What interest does that person have in that municipality?

Those are some of the things that we should revisit, and that is exactly what we are saying to you, not just for the sake of having election.

Honourable Nawaikula, we cannot be holding municipal elections for the sake of elections. Given the outdated legislation, including the electoral system, this will not be fair to the local municipalities and ratepayers.

Honourable Speaker, it must be noted that the appointment of Councils and the Administrators is nothing new. It was done under the previous Government, and what they did not have was the foresight to review the Act and electoral system and then call for municipal elections. Instead, after appointing Administrators, they went back to the old system.

There has been talks about democracy. I will tell you what was happening in Municipal Councils because we want to improve the system, and there has been lot of talks about democracy. What democracy is this?

When there is an election, then a political party leader goes to his team and asks all the elected members to take an oath that that person should become the Mayor. Is that the democracy that you people are talking about?

(Honourable Opposition Member interjects)

HON. P.K. BALA.- Is that the democracy that you people are talking about?

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. P.K. BALA.- Can I tell you something?

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. P.K. BALA.- I never took oath to become Mayor. There was no pressure, there was no political interference. I am talking about a political party leader in Lautoka where he called all his elected members and asked them to take oath that this is my nominee, you people have to vote him for the Mayor. Is that the democracy are you talking about?

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. P.K. BALA.- Honourable Speaker, the last matter that I want to touch on is that, there is lots of talks about the squatter settlements. Who created squatter settlements in this country? Political parties! Yes, you people need to know. I will tell you.

(Laughter)

What used to happen before election, they will make sure that before six months, they will get their voters outside municipal boundaries and will build some houses for them, just for votes. And that is how the squatters started in this country.

The last one, limited liability companies in respective Municipalities, as a citizen, they have a vote. Apart from that, they have three other votes that they can nominate, and that can be outside the boundary. Is this the democracy that we are talking about?

(Laughter)

No, I want to ask. You may be thinking that I have served the Council and why I am saying this. That is because at that point in time, I have been voicing this concern to the respective Ministers, to the respective Government at that point in time, that we need to amend the Local Government Act 1972.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. P.K. BALA.- The towns and cities cannot and will not operate in the current legislation that we have. We have to move with time, we have to make some changes and adjustments.

So what I am saying and it is my plea to this House, that we have to work together and we have to see that there is a successful completion of this review and when it is ready, the Honourable Minister responsible will make an announcement, not me. But I must say that this is my last statement in regards to the municipal election.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. P.K. BALA.- I want to put it on record that this review is not about me, I am just an individual. Let us not forget that! All in all, Honourable Speaker, I very strongly and honestly feel

that we should complete this process before having election.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. Honourable Lynda Tabuya, you have the floor.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you Honourable Speaker, Sir. I appreciate the submissions that have been made so far. In support of this motion, I am really quite saddened that the Minister, Honourable Premila Kumar, has changed the tune in a way. As the former CEO for the Consumer Council of Fiji, in her recommendations as CEO of CCF, she actually advocated for Local Government Elections to be called and she made the recommendations and I quote from her Consumer Fiji Report, and I remind her and this is back in 2008.

Back in 2008 that she was advocating for Municipal Council Elections. In this report that she prepared and presented when there was a Local Government Review, and she presented to the Committee and I quote, “Recommendation One – Only registered ratepayers should be allowed to vote based on fair and equitable electoral poll when choosing councillors” so she was advocating for the ratepayers which is exactly what we are advocating for.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- The ratepayers deserve Municipal Council Elections and then Recommendation Seven, “The Supervisor of Elections to prepare electoral rolls, not the Municipal Councils themselves.” Again, she is calling for Municipal Council Elections and for the Supervisor of Elections to supervise.

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Never in that report or any time moving forward from that did she ever oppose Municipal Council Elections, so what has happened, Members of Parliament, what has happened, Honourable Speaker, Sir? It is quite unfortunate ...

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- ... that she has changed her tune as a champion for ratepayers, as a champion for consumers that this has changed and it is most unfortunate. Now she has gone on to talk about the low voter turnout in 2002 and moving forward, this is before she made these recommendations about ratepayers that they should be able to vote. She mentioned about low voter turnout. May I remind the Honourable Minister that it is the right of individuals not to vote. They have the right to, so a low voter turnout does not necessarily mean that they do not have faith in the process. If they do have faith in the process, they would turn out in numbers and change the Council.

Again, she is talking about the Rural Authority joining Municipal Councils and because of this, there is going to be change. There has been no change. There is still no rubbish collection services for informal settlements. You speak to the largest settlement in Fiji; Qauia. They are still facing issues about rubbish collection. Anytime it floods, they are under water. Why, because the rubbish that is blocking the drainage and the Minister for Drainage will confirm that and so nothing has been done.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- They are not receiving services from the Municipal Councils.

There are more of our people living in informal settlements and squatter settlements than organised Municipal Councils. What are we doing about them? They are under rural authority, adding them to Municipal Councils has not done anything for our people. So to tout that it actually makes a difference, it does not and we do not see any results of that.

Then moving on talking about the UN Women. The Honourable Attorney-General talked about the UN Women coming on board and helping out with the Councils. Again, why is this being done now? They are now in their fourth term of Government. Four years of elections, 12 years already, now this is your fourth term so you are your previous Government, you are now current Government so why has not this been done before?

Again, yes, we are talking about what is going to be done or what is being done now, what has been done in the past has not been done. So I would just like to remind the Honourable Minister and also the Honourable Attorney-General, it is very well to talk about programmes that have been done but our people still are not benefitting. I know, I was raised in an informal settlement, it is still the same way. There is no rubbish collection services, they are dumping in the rivers that are going out to the Rewa Delta so you only have to see all the rubbish coming out on the foreshore and Honourable Speaker, Sir, you walk that seawall everyday. You only have to look to your left or your right and you see all the rubbish that is there that is coming out from the Rewa Delta.

Still nothing is done for this rubbish collection service. It is a huge problem. It is both our problems. What are we going to do about it? Please, can we honestly just try to give it back to our people, give it back to the ratepayers and have Municipal Council Elections? What you are doing as administrators is not working? It is not helping our people so I am appealing to Members of the Government, I am appealing to this House to give it back to our people. Just like you brought General Elections in 2014. Let us try Municipal Council Elections, Honourable Speaker, Sir. So in support of this motion, Honourable Speaker, Sir, I do beg this House, please take us back to Municipal Council Elections as proposed by my Honourable colleague. Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

I thank the Honourable Member for her statement. I now give the floor to the Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua for her Right of Reply.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker.

Honourable Speaker, may I just first start with a correction whilst I was speaking to the motion, I mentioned Mr. Kishore Kumar as a former Mayor of Ba, I should have said Kishore Govind. Thank you.

HON. MEMBER.- That is when someone writes for you.

(Laughter)

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- I was not Qorvis.

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, if I may speak, thank you.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Unfortunately the response from the Government side has been very predictable as the tone was set this morning by the Honourable Minister.

It is as it was, they know it all, do not trust the ratepayers and citizens to choose the representatives who can be held accountable.

In January we heard the Honourable Minister's concerns and allegations on Municipal Councils while on her tour of the Western Division and she was quoted when was making a blatant accusation that Fiji's poor performance in the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business ranking had drastically fallen due to their culpability. This substantial downward movement, she emphasised, was due to the various Municipal Councils laid back approaches to development goals and were deemed the culprit.

As I said this morning, Honourable Speaker, Fiji's ranking is now 101. In 2006 when we had elected councils, we were ranked 34; much higher up. Using the Honourable Minister's logic, Government controlled Municipals Councils since 2009 have caused this drastic fall.

Further, Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Minister's remarks in January that waste collection, clearing drains and passing building plans are the only work undertaken by municipalities' points to a very steep learning curve. That municipal elections need legislative review begs the question, why this is being pending for five years under the same Government? Her comments remain premature.

If the good Honourable Minister had perused the National Census 2017, she would be aware that 57 percent of Fiji's population has drifted to urban and peri-urban areas, Honourable Speaker.

Informal and squatter settlements continue to mushroom and many of these folk service the regular urbanise as domestic workers or cleaners, casual workers or construction workers; an important part of urban society. It is evident that in healthy progressive societies addressing poverty alleviation results in greater national productivity and population equality and equity.

Centralised bureaucracy disables ingenuity at municipal levels, just like it does in the Civil Service. People are fearful of vendetta and guard themselves remaining still.

The Honourable Minister must realise that the top down directives, the fear within municipal administration and many statutory bodies lead to business repercussions. People remain fearful to think outside the box. Municipalities are not the culprits. The system of the current top heavy leadership is.

Mr. Speaker, I trust the Honourable Minister amongst her other colleagues will develop a deeper national overview in alignment with national and the global SDGs. Becoming advocates of meaningful progressive local and national development to address and advocate for people's basic needs of local governance and leadership.

There has been talk of roads and streets within the municipalities, Mr. Speaker, Sir, following the takeover. I gladly invite the Honourable Minister to please accompany me on a drive of the streets.

FRA is on the streets in Samabula, for example, to see for herself the deplorable conditions of the streets. FRA is only working on major roads and streets where they can be seen to be working.

Mr. Speaker, 20 yards away from the SCC Samabula works depot, cars have to move at a snail's pace to avoid damage to the vehicles or the drivers. It was never like this when the road maintenance was under the Council's care.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- And I have to say, Sir, that we are always delighted when we have our dignitaries come along our suburbs or our towns because invariably the route or their route will be miraculously free of potholes a couple of hours before their arrival.

(Laughter)

Mr. Speaker, Sir, advocacy to ownership by communities will truly be democratic. Then and only then will social determinants of a healthy existence be addressed. Our population need Municipal Elections on their agenda even as the laws are being modernised.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the blame game is naïve and does not address the current of centralised high powered democratic politicians that we sometimes have in Fiji and the people need to be given ownership of their own municipalities, their democratic need to grow and develop not to be barked at by Government. Once again I commend the motion, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua.

Honourable Members, the Parliament will now vote.

The Question is:

That Parliament agrees to uphold the Local Government Act and approve the facilitation of the Municipal Elections by October 2019 so as to provide legitimate and fair representation to the ratepayers and citizens of the municipalities.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Ayes' and 'Noes')

HON. SPEAKER.- There being opposition, Parliament will now vote.

<u>Votes cast:</u>		
Ayes	-	21
Noes	-	27
Not Voted	-	3

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the results of the vote, there being 21 Ayes, 27 Noes and 3 Not Voted, the motion is therefore defeated.

Honourable Members, we will move on to the next agenda item.

**QUESTIONS**Oral QuestionsPending MIDA Annual Report  
(Question No. 53/2019)

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA asked the Government, upon notice:

Could the Minister inform Parliament when the Media Industry Development Authority (MIDA) will present its Annual Report from 2010 to Parliament through Cabinet?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM (Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have been informed that, that will be tabled in June of this year. Thank you.

Update on Free Shares by Energy Fiji Limited  
(Question No. 54/2019)

HON. DR. S.R. GOVIND asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications update Parliament on the Offer of Free Shares by Energy Fiji Limited (formerly FEA)?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM (Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I would like to thank the Honourable Member for this question.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we had an unprecedented decision made by Government in respect of following the corporatisation of FEA which is a statutory body and which became a limited liability company which is Energy Fiji Limited (EFL) to give 5 percent of the shares ex-gratia to domestic account holders, ordinary Fijians who will become shareholders of EFL.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the 5 million shares accordingly have been allocated to those ordinary Fijians who can get access to that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the plan, of course, as has been highlighted in Parliament earlier on, is that the Government will hold on to 51 percent of the shares eventually, we will have institutional investors up to 44 percent and ordinary Fijians will hold 5 percent.

So far, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and the process has been that if you have an electricity account under your name, you will get a notification saying that you need to actually fill in the form to get the shares and to date approximately 36,439 customers have applied for and have been allocated shares in the EFL.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, also what we did do is because Government now allows FEA to actually apply the right tariff rate because FEA needs to maintain a good balance sheet so that you can access loans, go out in to the private sector without necessarily a Government guarantee and build up these assets and provide more services and indeed carry out rural electrification. So Government, of course, has taken a different view in respect of other Governments where we help those households that earn

below a particular income level, what we call, subsidised EFL account holders, where we pay up to 50 percent of their electricity cost or thereabouts.

So those subsidised customers, Mr. Speaker, Sir, under this ex-gratia allocation of shares have in fact been given additional shares and those people who are not subsidised customers, in other words, low income earners are getting more shares.

Of the 36,000 customers, Mr. Speaker, Sir, who have actually got shares, 20,517 are non-subsidised customers and 15,922 are subsidised customers who have all been issued approximately 7 million shares. Issued to-date for about 25 million shares have been offered, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

There are 29,778 subsidised customers, out of which 15,922 have applied and have been allocated to 250 shares each. The subsidised customers, of course, Mr. Speaker, Sir, have 150 shares each. I would urge all those domestic account holders who are actually account holders of EFL to, please, if you have not applied, please, apply and get your ex-gratia share. So when EFL will next declare its dividends, you will actually get dividends paid to you.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we have said that the low income households are the ones that benefit the most from the share offers as they are the recipient of the larger parcel of shares, and this is an excellent opportunity for Fijians who qualify for that subsidy scheme to get those shares.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the management, the administrative side of it, it is controlled by the Central Share Registry Limited which is, in fact, a subsidiary of the South Pacific Stock Exchange. Their role is to maintain the central database of the share applications who are providing other share registry services on behalf of EFL.

As such, the Central Share Registry Limited will issue the share certificates to the shareholders and, of course, it is an ongoing process as more and more people become shareholders. So, we have Rural Electrification Programme going around Viti Levu, in different parts, different villages, farms, et cetera, and as soon as they become a customer of EFL, they can become a shareholder of EFL. So they have a stake in the actual company itself, Mr. Speaker, Sir. That is the update that I would like to provide to Parliament. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General. Honourable Niko Nawaikula, you have the floor.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- We understand that each customer is allocated 150, what about the other members of the public, what is the basis of their qualification? Can they also apply, who are not customers?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I gather the question is, if you are not an account holder?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Yes, not the account holder, that is correct.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- At the moment, you cannot buy shares but eventually the idea, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that the shares will be listed on the South Pacific Stock Exchange, as we have informed Parliament before that eventually, the shares will be listed in the South Pacific Stock Exchange and people can buy and sell shares then. Indeed, these customers that have been given an ex-gratia allocation of shares, will in future be able to also buy and sell shares themselves.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Aseri Radrodro, you have the floor.



HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. As I have always advocated regarding resource owners of the Monasavu and Wailoa Power Stations, they need to be reflected in terms of their contribution towards EFL, in terms of resources that they have given up to allow EFL to operate as it is today.

I think, specifically Yavusavitu of Monasavu and even Wailoa Power Station, the lease of that particular land is not yet being formalised and I think the Honourable Minister and Honourable Prime Minister are fully aware about concerns that they have brought to their Offices. They have also requested shares in the share offering of the EFL. The question is whether the Government will reconsider the resource owners in terms of this share offering?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Member fully knows the history as to how the land was actually accessed during the Alliance Government days. One can only say that the debacle that took place when the landowners at that point in time were not adequately compensated.

He also knows the fact therefore they took the matter to court and the court then compensated them, and you would also know that currently EFL and I have highlighted to this Parliament previously, there are three methodologies on which EFL pays the lease monies to the landowners. They also pay on the kilowattage of power that is being generated, they also pay them for that. So if a landowner has a domestic account where they have access to electricity, they already would have been given shares.

Let me also remind this House over and over again, it was only under the Bainimarama Government that the landowners who saw the cables going over their villages finally got electricity after so many decades. And I have to reiterate that and they keep on saying that all the while.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the landowners are being given three forms of lease payments, also upon the kilowattage or generation of power, EFL also contributes towards that. They can become shareholders if they are domestic account holders and of course, in future they can also buy shares once it is listed in the South Pacific Stock Exchange. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Attorney- General.

We move onto the third question of the day. I give the floor to the Honourable Aseri Radrodro.

PPP - Government of Fiji and Yalamanchili PTE Ltd  
(Question No. 55/2019)

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the gist of the next question has already been mentioned by the Honourable Minister this morning during his Ministerial Statement but I would like to ask the question anyway.

My question is:

Can the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications provide an update to Parliament on the progress of work arising out of the Public Private Partnership signed between the Government of Fiji and Yalamanchili PTE Ltd?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM (Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker Sir, the Honourable Member, I would like to thank you for this question.

He is also right that much of the question in fact has been answered but just to re-iterate for his sake. The VKB digitisation, Mr. Speaker, Sir, has taken place through the Yalamanchili arrangements whereas of 28th February this year, 12,000 *i tokatoka* and more than 640,000 members have had their manual records converted and digitised with the GIS Mapping. So, we know exactly where they are, and of course this includes all members of the landowning unit, including babies and children and, of course, the \$200 million have been given out on lease monies.

There are also under the partnership with the Yalamanchili the Social Welfare application through which there has been a digital implementation of the Social Pension and Care and Benefit Scheme of the Department of Social Welfare. Through this software, the details of the beneficiaries of this Scheme are digitally recorded and, of course, it is a building blocks approach and so far 3,216 beneficiaries have been digitised through this software.

Again, Mr. Speaker Sir, the tender link where we have in this area of ICT hardware and software procurement, they have also introduced e-tender portal known as Tender Link which provides a secure, transparent, efficient and effective tool for both the suppliers in Government whereby the tender or request for quote is advertised through the portal and proposals of bids are securely uploaded and downloaded at the closing time and date of uploading proposals of bids is also accounted for.

The Tender Portal is now also being used in the Fiji Procurement Office for all non-ICT procurement as well. So, if you, for example, want to tender for a particular, say, a supplier of exercise books, you go through the portal and you then put in your bids through that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in respect of relationship, apart from the software development, we have a management agreement and through that, they have been helping us build capacity. We have been hiring a lot of local staff to actually build the capacity as a result of their expertise we have had a savings and this has been accounted for, \$9.5 million over the past five years in respect to the negotiations that have actually been held with the suppliers.

We also have seen, Mr. Speaker Sir, the ability to tap into that level of expertise to get new equipment. Previously if you look at the way ITC was running, we used to get end of life products, products that was going out of the shelf. We have seen, for example, even software that were going to reach the end of life have actually been flogged off on to Government, so this relationship obviously has been working whereas we have also highlighted this morning that we are getting the joint collaboration with the Singapore Economic Corporation too. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General. The Honourable Mikaele Leawere, you have the floor.

HON. M.R. LEAWARE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Honourable Minister, thank you for your explanation. I would just like to ask the Honourable Minister if there has been any ongoing payment made to Yalamanchili since 2015.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Yes, read the audited accounts and you will see it.

HON. SPEAKER.- The Honourable Niko Nawaikula, you have the floor.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- What measures will the Government put in place to guarantee the security of information to avoid it from being taken out of the country or elsewhere?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker Sir, just to inform the Honourable Member and, of course, it is a legitimate question. If you do not know anything about ICT, one can actually ask these types of questions.

(Laughter)

Mr. Speaker Sir, there are two types of what you call “source codes”. One is what you call the “front end source code” and the other one is the “back end”. So if, for example, if you use a computer which let us say Microsoft then you use Word, you cannot go in and change the source code of Word because that intellectual property belongs to Microsoft, that is their property. But, if you can develop an App from using that platform and you develop your own App, that frontend becomes your intellectual property.

So in the same way, many countries, Mr. Speaker, Sir, if you go to USA and various other countries where you have software companies that actually provide the capacity for you to, for example, store data. So just to give an example, the Singaporeans, who were actually sitting here earlier on this morning, went to Mauritius and they completely digitised Mauritius. They also implemented the National ID Card. They registered approximately 960,000 Mauritians in a span of two years. So what actually happens is, that data and the integrity of that data remains with us. The source code, the frontend, remains with us, so that is how you actually protect it and obviously, countries like Singapore have that provision in place.

Similarly, with the Yalamanchili, many Honourable Members of this Parliament, in particular on the other side, do not know that Yalamanchili provides software to most of the banks in Fiji. They do the electronic banking and, in fact, when I used to work in the private sector, they also used to provide at the backend, for example, your EFTPOS machines, your ATM machines, they look after that.

So there are different source codes and, of course, if you have financial institutions that are governed by Act or rules and governed by our Reserve Bank rules, and they have confidence where there are tens of millions of dollars or hundreds of millions of dollars involved, if they can use it, obviously we can use it because of the integrity within the system. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Attorney-General. Honourable Lynda Tabuya, you have floor.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. The Honourable Attorney-General has touted the Singapore model like a perfect model for this e-tendering, what he has failed to advised is that, what it costs Singapore to maintain the system. It is about \$2.6 billion to maintain this.

Now, my question is simple to the Honourable Attorney-General, given our debts with other strategic Asian partnerships, do we have the capital to invest in and maintain the system or will this be another case of a well-intentioned plan that will just add to the billions of dollars of debt that we already have?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Attorney-General, you have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we know the Honourable Member’s track

record of statistics, so we cannot rely on her figures of \$2.6 billion, nor am I interested in the budget of Singapore's finances.

What we are interested in is the contract we have with the Singaporean agency. We are fully aware of what are the costs involved and it is in the Budget. Please, read the 2018-2019 Budget, the figures are allocated there. Mr. Speaker, Sir, she says, "tell us the figures", the question is about this, if she wants a specific question on figures, I am quite happy to give her the answers later on. I do not have figures on top of my head like you do, which is always incorrect.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reality of the matter is, as we have said, they seem to be really caught under this sort of siege mentality. The reality is, they all lament the fact that the Ease of Doing Business in Fiji is not good. Here is the Honourable Minister for Local Government talking about how we are going to fix the processes, earlier this morning, I talked about digitalFIJI and how we are getting, for example, construction applications. Instead of 24 or 25 separate application forms, now there will only be nine forms to fill out, that obviously attracts Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). So obviously, it is going to be good for the country, it is a good investment and they will continue with this. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- A supplementary question, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thought you had a supplementary question before?

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- I had asked my main question, I still have to ask a supplementary question.

HON. SPEAKER.- You have the floor.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir. My Supplementary question is, can the Honourable Minister advise whether the current Director of ITC...

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

You have the floor Honourable Member.

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

Can the Honourable Minister advise whether the Director of ITC is a local partner of Yalamanchili? If it is, has the rule changed against the Civil Service?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Attorney-General, you have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, again, this is what we say, "some people with very little knowledge are very dangerous." They have been harping on about this for the past four or five years, they really think there is some kind of red-herring here. We have repeatedly told them.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- This morning, Honourable Qionibaravi, also alluded to this, she is absolutely wrong. The Director of ITC is not the Director of Pacific Technologies. He is part of the management team that is carrying out the reforms. There is no Director. If they actually bothered to look at the newspapers, they would see that we only advertised the position twice. We have not been able to find the right candidate, it will be advertised again. They have again factually got that wrong.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. We will move onto the next question.

I give the floor to the lone ranger, Honourable Vijendra Prakash.

Village Bank Protection and Coastal Protection Capital Projects  
(Question No. 56/2019)

HON. V. PRAKASH asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment provide an update on the village bank protection and coastal protection capital projects?

HON. DR. M. REDDY (Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment).- Honourable Speaker, I thank the Honourable Member for asking this question.

Honourable Speaker, as you would have noted this morning when I presented the Ministerial Statement on action for rivers, I very eloquently demonstrated our commitment and plans on how we wish to protect our rivers, given its importance to the livelihood of the Fijians throughout Fiji.

Honourable Speaker, apart from that particular project, I will now talk about the structural bank protection work that we are undertaking this year to immediately provide protection to communities as announced in the Budget by the Honourable Minister for Economy. As you know, Honourable Speaker, the underlying theme of our current Budget is to protect communities and the households.

Honourable Speaker, for the coastal protection work, we have got 25 villages that are listed for coastal protection work this year. For four villages, were already awarded the contract and two of them have already started. This is Lamini Village Coastal Protection Work in Taveuni and Namoli Village Coastal Protection Work in Lautoka. Also, for Navolau Village Coastal Protection Work, the contract has been awarded and Rukurukulevu Coastal Protection Work, the contract has been awarded to a particular civil works company.

Then, Honourable Speaker, we have got six more that are awaiting the Government Tender Board's (GTB) final decision which is:

1. Matamaivere Village Coastal Protection Works in the Central Division;
2. Naloto Village Coastal Protection Works in the Central Division;
3. Nananu Village Coastal Protection Works in the Central Division;
4. Qelekuro Village Coastal Protection Works in the Central Division;
5. Namuana Village Coastal Protection Works in the Eastern Division; and
6. Tavuki District School Coastal Protection Works in the Eastern Division.

So at any time in the next sitting of the GTB, most likely there will be a decision made on which contractor would be awarded.

Honourable Speaker, then we have got the other 15 projects that are under the evaluation process. It will take a little bit of time, but they are on our list and they will be done. These are:

In the Central Division:

1. Toki Village Saltwater Intrusion and Protection Works.
2. Bau Island Seawall Rehabilitation Works - three times we called for tender and no one bided. Honourable Speaker, whenever we advertised for coastal protection works in smaller islands, contractors rarely want to go and do work there, given the issues of transporting of labour, materials, et cetera. So for Bau Island seawall rehabilitation works, we advertised three times and not a single person bided, so we have to advertise again.
3. Dromuwaqa Village Coastal Protection Works.
4. Dravuni Village Coastal Protection Works.
5. Naisausau Village Seawall Rehabilitation Works.
6. Nasilai Village Coastal Protection Works.
7. Nawaisomo Village Seawall Upgrading Works.
8. Rukua Village Seawall Upgrading Works.
9. Salia Village Seawall Upgrading Works.

All of them are in the Central Division. Tender evaluation process is being undertaken.

Then we have in the Eastern Division:

1. Qarani Village Seawall Rehabilitation Works.
2. Naikawaga Village Coastal Protection Works.
3. Yaroi Village Coastal Protection Works.

In the Northern Division:

1. Sasa Village Coastal Protection Works.
2. Nasekula Village Coastal Protection Works.

All of them are, at the moment, under tender evaluation stage.

Then, Honourable Speaker, we have got eight River Bank Protection works. Three of them, most likely the Honourable Prime Minister will be commissioning these works next week based on the schedule. All of them are ready to go, contracts awarded, the machines are deployed and are now awaiting to be commissioned. These are:

1. Nadakuni Village Coastal Protection Works in the Tailevu area.
2. Nadaro Village River Bank Protection Works in the Central Division.
3. Wainawaqa Village in Waidina.

All three are ready, contracts were given, contractors are ready and most likely next week, the Honourable Prime Minister might commission that.

Then we have, Honourable Speaker, under the tender evaluation process another five projects. They are:

1. Draubuta Village River Protection Works in Wainibokasi, Central Division;
2. Nakaile Village River Protection Works in the Central Division,
3. Savu Village near the Waidina River;
4. Wainibuabua River Protection Works in Wainadoi; and
5. River Bank Protection Works near Labasa Court House.

All those projects are under evaluation process now.

Honourable Speaker, as I alluded to this morning, Government is totally committed in terms of ensuring that we protect our communities which are vulnerable around river banks and also around coastal areas and we are willing to put in the resources.

Honourable Speaker, as I alluded to in the morning, we have to look at long term sustainable solutions which are also eco-friendly and would be sustainable and manageable. So, we are looking nature-based solutions to provide long term solutions. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. Honourable Member, you have the floor.

HON. RATU S. MATANITOBUA.- Honourable Speaker, I thank the Honourable Minister. In the last four years, I have been asking this House for the seawall in Veivatuloa, Namosi. I thank the Honourable Minister that scoping has been done but my question is, when will the work start?

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

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Honourable Speaker, we had taken to the budget submission these 25 and eight projects and we have got the funding. We have got another list and I have to check whether that is on the list for the new set of places where we will have to do Coastal Protection work as well as River Bank Protection. I will need to check whether that is on the list or not, that we will be taking to the next budget meeting. If it is not then I will see why it is not in the list. There are other urgent priority areas that we need to address too but after I find that out, then I will let you know.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister. Honourable Member, you have the floor.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Honourable Speaker, I would like to thank the Minister for his answer. Can the Honourable Minister explain some of the challenges faced in the implementation of those Coastal Protection projects?

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

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Honourable Speaker, all the Coastal Protection as well as River Bank Protection, the first thing is you need to undertake is an EIA, always. But before we do an EIA and I think tomorrow, I am responding to a question which explains in detail about the EIA process.

We will have to do a survey. Once that is done, then we do an EIA and once that is done, then we develop an environmental management plan which needs to be undertaken and monitored to ensure that the work is carried out and post-work. Of course, then we have to vire for funding and as you know, there is no unlimited amount of fund. Every Ministry is vying for funds and every Ministry is to convince the limited amount of funds that Government has.

Once we get the funds then with that documentation, we have to go to FPO and put the advertisement out. Once the advertisement is out then they know it will go to the Government Tender

Board. So, it is something that I have been explaining to people. It is not something where I have got a private business, I want to dig a drain or something, I can give the money, call a contractor and get the work done in a couple of weeks' time. There is a process involved, Mr. Speaker, Sir, because it is taxpayer's money. The process must take place. It takes months, it takes a year or over that to get to the stage where you will offer a contract.

As I said, I just alluded to that for Bau Island, we have advertised three times. We have been through the entire process of scoping, tender documents and all those but no bidder. All these things needs to be noted when someone says as to why this project has taken so long. It is because of due diligence must be given whenever you are doing a project which involves taxpayer's money.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Tuisawau, you have the floor.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Through you, Honourable Speaker, thank you, Honourable Minister. I was surprised that there is no Rewa River here because it is the largest and fast flowing river and also as mentioned by one of our Members all the rubbish is going through there. In particular, you mentioned Wainibokasi River, those down river are Burebasaga, Nakaile and across Vunisei Village, there is a lot of erosion there and down river towards Nabua Village and all those areas, the bank protection which was there has seriously eroded. At the coast is Nukui Village. So, Nukui is working with Red Cross.

HON. SPEAKER.- Your question.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- The question is, will you include the Rewa River's estuaries and river banks in this budget?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Honourable Speaker, I do know that Commissioner Central has forwarded a list to us and our office has fine-tuned the list to take it to the budget submission in May. But, Honourable Speaker, I do not know whether that is included but I do know that our staff has done scoping works in the Central Division. There are some urgent areas that we need to deal with and address those issues. I also know that the one that was being washed away which was done before, that we have undertaken the scoping which means that it is on the list. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.-Thank you. We have one more supplementary question. You have the floor, Honourable Nawaikula.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I am sure the Honourable Minister will take a tour after this to Vanua Levu, Lau, Kadavu, Yasawa and realise that will be about 3,000 or 4,000 total villages. Can he assure them now that their needs on coastal protection will be addressed? This has been an impending issue for them. On costal protection, can you assure them now that there needs will be looked after and how do they apply? How do they request, please?

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

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Honourable Speaker, I want to assure that every community, every village, every island needs will be adhered to and looked after. Be rest assured.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.-And how do they apply?

HON. MEMBER.- By tender.

(Laughter)



HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Not the Commissioner because the Commissioner will tell them next time, next time.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- They can get me through my mobile number, I can get my staff to go and do the assessment. (But of course, the Commissioner's Office, District Officers and Provincial Councils all can bring the information to us. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister.

Honourable Members, the fifth Oral Question has been withdrawn.

(Question No. 57/2019 withdrawn)

Development of Healthcare Facilities  
(Question No. 58/2019)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services please explain how can the Ministry entice highly qualified healthcare specialists from overseas who are willing to return home and help develop Fiji's healthcare services to international standards?

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE (Minister for Health and Medical Services).-Thank you Honourable Speaker, and also thank you to the Honourable Member. With the question, Honourable Speaker, seems to be suggesting what about those who are originally of Fiji who are now overseas? What are the possibilities that are in place for them to actually return and offer their expertise?

I have a great pleasure in informing this august House that this has been happening over the last couple of years. We have a very strong contingent of former Fiji citizens or Fiji residents all over the world who are highly qualified in health, and I am not only talking about doctors but also nurses, allied health and physiotherapy, environmental health and working in, not only in health services, but also in organisations such as WHO and United Nations. Over the last few years they have been coming back, and there are different mechanisms of their returning.

Some of them volunteer on their own because they still have friends and colleagues who they worked with back in the days when they were in Fiji, and they have grown together so that network is still intact and so that is a personal to personal relationship that is in place. I am also pleased to inform the august House, that we also have former Fiji residents who come because of certain programs. For example, the Open Heart Team that comes regularly from Sydney, that is supported by the Sydney Adventist Hospital.

Over the years, we have seen a few more Fiji residents coming with this team, including allied health professionals and also physiotherapists. We also have the Open Heart Team that comes from Auckland which is mostly our former Fiji residents who now live in New Zealand. The Open Heart Surgeon is Doctor Parma Nand who he is quite famous in New Zealand and he heads a team that comes to Fiji and operates once every year, initially out of Lautoka for the last few years, and last year I believe they came to CWM.

So part of that programme we have volunteers that actually become part of that programme, and this is supported through Ministry of Health and also the stakeholders that support them from where they are coming from. We also have those that come on other programmes, for example, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, they support us through what is called the Pacific Island

Programme and this is managed through Royal Australasian College of Surgeons and their visiting specialists who come and work with us in Fiji, and my Honourable colleague, Dr. Ratu Atonio will attest to that, that they have been very helpful in the training.

As we speak, I can just give us some names so that we are aware of this very highly skilled health professionals. Doctor Vijay Kapadia who now resides in the Gold Coast grew up in Toorak and about seven to eight years ago, he came and he initiated what we now have the Cardiology Unit at CWM which also has the Catheterization Laboratory (Cath Lab). He was very instrumental in doing this, again with Government support, and we have that capability and the training of our cardiologists who are beginning to improve their expertise in that area. This also includes the medical imaging specialist and also our nurses, and all these has been able to happen because of the support that Doctor Kapadia and his group from not only Australia but New Zealand and Cardiac International has been able to do.

We also have at the moment currently at CWM, Doctor Jitoko Cama who is a Paediatric Surgeon at Waikato. I went to school with him, did Surgical Training with him and he has come back and is spending three months with us; teaching our surgeons and also our staff on how to manage very complex paediatric cases.

We also had Doctor Raghwan Narayan, he now resides in Australia. He supports us with the Masters in Pathology Programme that is in place at the CWM Hospital and FNU Hospital. So these are the variations of how we have the support from our former Fiji residents. And as I have alluded to Honourable Speaker, it is not limited to doctors. They are now beginning to see other health professionals come back.

It is nice to see nurses that have once worked in our institutions coming back as part of these teams to come and support us, even physiotherapists. I thank the Honourable Member for that question and I am happy to be able to enlighten the House that we have these programmes in place and our reputable friends and former residents are able to come back and support us. *Vinaka*.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. Honourable Salote Radrodro, you have the floor.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker and I thank the Honourable Minister for that explanation. The key word I find in that question is to entice and I believe our nationals under the profession who have gone overseas, they have gone for greener pastures. So the question is, what incentives are there in place to be able to entice the people that would like to come back and work in Fiji? Are their services free? Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you Honourable Member. Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. Predominantly, is a volunteer scheme so they volunteer their services, some of our friends have what we call sabbaticals. For example in Dr. Jitoko's case it is a paid sabbatical. For example, we have Heart International in Nadi which is a group of former Fiji residents who have set up Heart International in Nadi. They have been able to set it up because economically it is favourable to them and so they have been able to set up that facility where Fijians can be able to go and access it without having to travel overseas.

Also as I have alluded to earlier and I have said, this again, we are expecting a new General Surgeon to join us in May, Dr. Ilaitia Delasau from Rewasau in Naitasiri. He is a trained surgeon in New Zealand but he has been able to come back and one of the reasons is because of the salaries that

are in place. So the enticement is the economic capability that is in place and also for few that have come to be able to join the service is the fact that we have increased the salary. And also talking of Naitasiri because Honourable Radrodro was looking at me, the current Sub-Divisional Medical Officer in Naitasiri, Dr. Josaia Qovu from Galoa in Kadavu was actually working in Africa with another organisation and he took up the opportunity to come back because the salary was attractable to him. *Vinaka*.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. Honourable Mikaele Leawere, you have the floor.

HON. M.R. LEAWARE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I would like to thank the Honourable Minister for explaining about the specialists that were asked of him in today's Order Paper especially the questions that were raised to him.

The issue that I would like to ask is about eye specialists. Are they also included in your list of those who are coming into the country to assist? Because talking about Pacific Eye Institute, the patients go right to Sigatoka to have their operations conducted but not at Pacific Eye Institute because of the fact that their laboratory is not working or maybe it is not been renewed or renovated.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you Honourable Member.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. The eye is one area that we do not have many former Fiji residents as experts in this field overseas. Pacific Eye Institute exists because of the Fred Hollows Foundation's desire to support ophthalmology or eye training in the Pacific and predominantly for Fiji and that is funded through New Zealand Aid. So they have been providing training and the Degree is given by the Fiji National University.

They have specialists that they have brought from overseas and over the last few years, they have trained a cohort of our own eye professionals and eye specialists who are now beginning to do the work of specialist around Fiji. They are beginning to spread themselves. As we speak we now have graduates working in Suva, I think one is in Lautoka and also someone in Labasa. But every year as we begin to get more graduates from that programme then we will have more localised specialists. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. We now move onto the seventh Oral Question for today and I give the floor to the Honourable Jese Saukuru.

Safety of Inter-island Ferries, Passengers and Crew  
(Question No. 59/2019)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Disaster Management and Meteorological Services inform the House on the procedures in place to ensure the safety of inter-island ferries, passengers and crew at the various jetties?

HON. J. USAMATE (Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Disaster Management and Meteorological Services).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. To ensure the safety of inter-island ferry passengers and crew, there are a number of agencies that are involved.

The first of this is, of course, the Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji (MSAF). They have regulations in place from the Maritime Regulation of 2014 in relation to Safe Ship Management

System, and from this regulation, they have developed Standard Operation Procedures (SOPs) on how they prioritise the safety of passengers and crew when they embark or disembark at the various jetties around Fiji.

Under the MSAF they also have the STCW Regulation which requires that all crew members need to undertake training on crowd control, how to handle crowds when they are getting on ships or getting off ships, just to ensure that all the seafarers and passenger vessels are capable of controlling the crowd at all times. So that is the work done by the MSAF.

Related to this also is the work done by our Meteorological Services that looks at the weather, they disseminate the marine weather bulletins, they give advice about adverse weather conditions that can compromise the safety of people who are travelling on the ships. These weather bulletins are prepared at intervals of every four hours and they are provided to seafarers and the ships and captains of the boats. They are broadcasted in print media, coastal radio stations and also in televised advertisements.

Third, is the role that is undertaken by the Fiji Roads Authority, in particular in relation to jetty infrastructure. FRA is responsible for construction and maintenance of all the 32 jetties in Fiji, including the waiting ships. They have developed a Period Inspection Maintenance and Audit Programme. This whole programme is focussed on trying to ensure that all the jetties remain accessible and safe at all times.

In 2017 and 2018, FRA undertook a review on jetties around the country and they developed a repair and maintenance plan for each jetty. In 2018 and 2019, the Government had set aside a total of \$4.7 million for the inspection, audit and maintenance of jetties in Fiji. The future upgrade survey, as a result of that they have programmed it over a five year period to address all of these jetties within this five-year network improvement plan.

In terms of future development, FRA is looking to design and build new jetties that will withstand higher loadings and should have the ability to withstand severe weather conditions, which we know will be happening in Fiji because of climate change, et cetera.

FRA also works with MSAF in installing aids to navigation. Some of these aids to navigation includes lateral marks which used to guide boats to berth safely at the jetty at night or during the day. These marks will be in the form of beacons or buoys with flashing lights for night berthing and they are placed near the jetties. With the installation of these navigation aids, boats can be safely navigated into and out of the berthing points of the jetties.

They are also installing cardinal marks, these are navigation aids that have been installed for navigating boats to the jetty through the most convenient passage in the vicinity of the jetties. These marks will also indicate the danger areas, like reefs and shallow passages that may be unsafe for navigation, and also have isolated danger marks. These marks will indicate the areas within the navigable channel that are shallow and pose a danger to boats. Such navigational aids will prove to be quite useful for night navigation.

In terms of safety measures, crowd control at various jetties, in the urban ports that are managed by Fiji Ports Corporation Limited, there are existing Standard Operation Procedures (SOPs) in place, that includes the timeframes for off-loading, loading and off-loading of cargos, vehicles and the embarking and disembarking of passengers. There is a collaborative approach that is undertaken by all stakeholders and that includes the LTA, MSAF, the Fiji Ports Corporation Limited, the Fiji Police Force, Municipal Council and also my Ministry. They try to work together to ensure the smooth flow of operations, especially during peak seasons.

In the rural outer islands, the Police officers if they are available, they will be involved together with the Government representatives like the District Officers, the Rokos who work closely with our local shipping crew to ensure crowd control in the outer islands.

For overloading, this is another very important aspect in relation to safety. To address the overloading, there are measures that are in place for ships that are departing our main ports. For these boats, they have a Survey Certificate that indicates the maximum number of passengers and crew that should be on board on a particular voyage.

It is then the responsibility of the vessel operator to ensure that the passenger manifest and crew list is in accordance with the requirements under the Survey and Safe Manning Certificate. Upon meeting the requirements satisfactorily the MSAF Enforcement and Compliance officer will issue the marine clearance accordingly.

However, in outer islands jetties it is the responsibility of the Master of the Vessel and his officers to ensure that the number of passengers on board the vessel do not exceed the maximum number as stated in the Survey Certificate. When these boats arrive back in Suva or in the main ports, then the MSAF Enforcement Officer verifies the passenger manifest list. So, those are the different agencies that are involved to try to ensure the safety of passengers travelling in our inter-island shipping. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. The Honourable Anare Jale, you have the floor.

HON. A. JALE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker Sir, the question is about a year ago, where a young cadet serving in one of the ferries that services Natovi to Nabouwalu was killed because his leg was caught in a mooring rope in Nabouwalu. My question to the Honourable Minister: what action has his Ministry taken to avoid any other accidents happening in the future in similar circumstances?

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. The Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker Sir, I am not too familiar with the specifics of the case but I am sure that in any work situation there is always procedures of how you are supposed to carry out that work. There are safety procedures and safety processes. I can recall that case because I was still the Minister for Employment at that time and that case came up for Accident Compensation for workplace compensation but in those cases I am sure the procedures that are used by the boats should have been revised in terms of the Standard Operating Procedures if the procedures were followed then the accidents took place then the shipping company would have been required to review the procedures that they use.

If the procedures were not used then obviously there is probably a need for training, or re-training for people to make sure that they comply with the procedures that should be used in any particular boat. Thank you, Mr. Speaker Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister. The Honourable Ratu Tevita Navurelevu Niumataiwalu, you have the floor.

HON. RATU T.N. NIUMATAIWALU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I think I had the same supplementary question asked by the Honourable Anare Jale.

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- I will give the floor to the Honourable Mitieli Bulanauca. You have the floor.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have been twice to Nabouwalu, Bua at night, there are no lights there at nights, but there are lights in Natovi, fine. I am not too sure about the other jetties whether there are lights or not, I am not too sure.

Also, if there is an accident in one of these jetties, who is responsible for that? In terms of the payment of compensation, who is responsible for that big compensation, is it the companies or the officials working in there, and whether that is enough deterrent or caution to be taken? Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister Jone Usamate, you have the floor.

HON. J. USAMATE.- I am not sure whether he is talking about the navigation lights or the lights on the Jetty itself.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. J. USAMATE.- I think the FRA is responsible for the general safety of the various jetties around the country, and as I mentioned, before they have developed their programme of periodic inspection, maintenance and audit that is focused on ensuring that they remain accessible and safe at all times.

Since they have the responsibility for the jetties, that will also be part to their responsibility. I know also that in Nabouwalu, there is also consideration about improving or adding on some of the navigation lights, especially for the fishermen coming back home trying to find their way back to Nabouwalu, so FRA will have that responsibility.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister, Jone Usamate. Honourable Dr. Ratu Atonio Lalabalavu, this is the last supplementary question, you have the floor, Sir.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- I thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the supplementary question to the Honourable Minister, is there any updates with regards to the jetty in Lovonivonu, better known as the, 'Korean Wharf'.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Is this the jetty where the small wooden ferries come from?

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

HON. J. USAMATE.- I do not have the specifics of what is planned for that particular jetty but I will have to check on that, if there is any specific plans for that jetty. But, I can tell us that over the past five years FRA has been carrying out jetty construction works at places like:

- Qarani;
- Yasawa i Rara;
- Nabouwalu (Refurbished works); and
- Bau Landing.

Last year, they spent around \$4 million on immediate repairs on Cicia, Rotuma and Kavala, and right now there is work happening in Lakeba, and that should be finished in another three weeks' time. We have just finished work on Vunisea Jetty, approximately \$280,000 was spent on the installing of four mooring buoys and the construction of two bollards and the jetty head for the safe boat berthing. But, for that particular one, I would request the Honourable Member maybe to send me an email or text, and I will find out what the plans are for that specific jetty.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Jone Usamate.

HON. MEMBER.- Wainiyabia?

HON. J. USAMATE.- Wainiyabia is already there. The Geotech work jetty is being undertaken, the current jetty in Lakeba is being repaired and that was developed.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister, just make sure you finish the one at Lakeba.

HON. J. USAMATE.- *Vinaka vakalevu*, Sir.

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- I now have the honour of giving the floor to the Honourable Rohit Sharma to ask Question 60/2019, you have the floor, Sir.

Commission of the Status of Women (CSW)  
(Question No. 60/2019)

HON. R.R. SHARMA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation enlighten Parliament about what the Commission of the Status of Women (CSW) is about?

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA (Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Last month, I participated in what is arguably the largest global gathering on gender equality. It was the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in New York.

The CSW, Honourable Speaker, is principally the global inter-governmental body established by the Commission of Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). It is exclusively dedicated to:

- the promotion of gender equality;
- instrumental in promoting Women's Rights;
- documenting the reality of women's lives throughout the world; and
- shaping global standards on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

During the two weeks session, Mr. Speaker, Sir, which is normally held in March every year, representatives of UN Member States, Civil Society Organisations, Academia and UN Entities gathered to discuss progress and gaps in the empowerment of women and girls. While member States agree on further actions to accelerate progress in political, economic and social fields, the session also provides space for civil society-hosted panels.

The first week of the CSW, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is all about discussing, sharing ideas and lessons learnt, delegates share and are inspired with ideas and new possibilities of what could be done to improve the status of women and girls around specific fields.

For this particular year, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the priority theme for the session was focussed on social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

As the head of the Fijian Delegation, it was quite an honour to sit on a panel and discuss best practice we are doing right here in Fiji, in relation to gender sensitive infrastructure. This was referred to earlier by the Honourable Attorney-General, the project that is being facilitated by UN Women and funded by the Canadian and Australian Governments and what we call the 'markets for change' project. It was very well received by the members of the Bureau that were at the panel and Papua New Guinea was the other country that presented on this as well.

Coming from UN Women themselves, Mr. Speaker, Sir, high accolades on what the Pacific is doing in relation to gender sensitive infrastructure. The Markets for Change Project, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is basically a recognition of the fact that over 70 percent of market vendors in Fiji are women and yet, prior to this project, that particular fact was not considered in the building of municipal markets.

Women travel from all over Fiji. I have personally walked some miles to go to a village up in Naitasiri. They would walk overnight to the closest place where they could catch a bus from, and sleep there in order to catch a bus to come down to Suva. And because they wanted to look after their products and make use of the high sales during the weekends, they would sleep on the footpaths or under the tables at the market.

So the Markets for Change has changed this dynamics for women market vendors in Fiji. Apart from a place to sleep, it is also empowering women market vendors in relation to leadership skills.

When the project started, UN Women was working with six Market Vendor Associations. They are now looking at 12 Market Vendor Associations and majority of them are headed by women; women who are articulate in relation to the issues that affect market vendors (both male and female) in the respective municipalities that they represent, and are able to bring up these issues to municipal level and even to Government level.

There is a lot of best practice happening here in the Pacific, other countries are learning from us and similarly, as Pacific Islands, as a nation, we also take this advantage of the CSW to learn about best practice in other countries. For this particular year, we are very encouraged by a guideline that has been submitted and distributed by UN Women, guidelines on how we can mainstream gender into infrastructure and into budgets for national governments.

I am not saying we are perfect in relation to gender equality. There is a lot to be done, and our Honourable Prime Minister has always said this as well. We have a lot to do, yet, in relation to gender equality, but taking concrete steps towards that and making sure that the steps accord with our international obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and in accordance with the policy guidelines that come out of CSW.

As a Government, Honourable Speaker, I can honestly say, looking back at the track record of us as a nation, after signing up to CEDAW in 1995 and if you were just to take one, the budgets of the Ministry of Women in relation to gender equality, up until 2012, our budget was sitting at \$300,000 per year. And that is a clear indication of the importance of gender equality in relation to us, as a nation. But I am proud to say that in this current year, we are sitting at \$7.3 million. There has been a progressive increase in the budget for the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty



Alleviation for the women's Plan of Action and for other projects pertaining to women. From 2012, starting at \$1.79 million to \$7.39 million.

Another project that we highlighted at the CSW, again, in relation to gender sensitive infrastructure, is the Barefoot College which is a partnership between the Governments of Fiji and India. A college will be built in Nadogo, Macuata. We have a budget in the current year and the project has been tendered. Consultants are already working on the design that has been completed.

The idea is to empower women living in rural communities to basically become solar engineers. As a nation, we are looking to the year 2050 where there will be no carbon footprints and there will be renewable energy. And therein lies the role of women in this area, Honourable Speaker, and Government has realised that.

In building this college, we are going to educate women living in rural communities to become solar engineers and will be able to maintain solar systems within their own communities. Again, a project that received high accolades from the international community and UN bodies and there you have it, Honourable Speaker.

CSW as a commission, the ultimate outcome of it is basically an agreed conclusions document. It advises policy at a national level and that is what we have got back and we need to work towards in accordance with also our international obligations, our Constitution and national gender policy. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister for her reply. Honourable Salote Radrodro, you have the floor.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- I thank you, Honourable Speaker and I thank the Honourable Minister for that very enlightening report from the 63rd CSW Meeting. I note the issue on Barefoot College that they are trying to build in Macuata.

Honourable Speaker, the maritime zone after *TC Winston*, like in Vanuabalavu, Yacata and all other islands, we had to put up our own solar infrastructure. I would like to ask the Honourable Minister, how will these women in the maritime zone be taken through the Barefoot College training in the solar engineers programme?

The need is there, Honourable Speaker, and the women are there so how will they be incorporated into this programme because it is right in Macuata and we are in the maritime? Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Member. Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. Barefoot College is a complete package, there is accommodation as well. So far, we have trained 17 women from Fiji. They have gone to India for months to become solar engineers and in building Barefoot College, it is not only a school, a day scholar school, it has got accommodation. So women from all over Fiji can access this particular training and be empowered to go back and help their own communities.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Member. Honourable Rasova, you have the floor.

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker. *Vinaka vakalevu* and

thank you as well, Honourable Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the late Speaker as well. She was the former Minister for Women at that time in 2012 where my village of Nabouwalu in Kadavu, the lady went for the first time to Barefoot College in India. It has been about seven years now to be precise. Last year, on my campaign trail.

HON. SPEAKER.- What is your question?

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- It is coming.

(Laughter)

This programme is implemented in Kadavu. The lights that they brought from India, right now last year, it was not working in the village. So I asked what the problem with the lights were and they said that they were awaiting for the Barefoot College in Labasa whereby they will bring all these spare parts for the last two years. Thank you. If you just can come up with how or when is it going to be.

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- What is the question? I did not hear a question.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I think we have covered this question enough and everything that you want to know regarding this question has been answered by the Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation.

Honourable Members, the next agenda item is adjournment. We will adjourn for the day and I want to thank you for your co-operation. It has been another long day, not as long as yesterday but we will be looking at our timings as we proceed, but I thank you for your cooperation. We adjourn until tomorrow morning.

The Parliament adjourned at 7.06 p.m.