

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

FRIDAY, 21ST FEBRUARY, 2020

[CORRECTED COPY]

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FRIDAY, 21ST FEBRUARY, 2020

The Parliament resumed at 9.31 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

HONOURABLE SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Members were present, except the Honourable Prime Minister and Minister for iTaukei Affairs and Sugar Industry; the Honourable Minister for Defence, National Security and Foreign Affairs; the Honourable Professor B.C. Prasad; the Honourable L.S. Qereqeretabua and the Honourable Lt. Col. P. Tikoduadua.

MINUTES

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I move:

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Thursday, 20th February, 2020, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATION FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome

HON. SPEAKER.- I welcome all Honourable Members to the final sitting day for this week.

I also welcome members of the public joining us in the gallery and those watching the live broadcast of the proceedings on television and the internet. Thank you for taking an interest in the proceedings of Parliament.

POINT OF ORDER

Ruling on Standing Order 34(5) - Contents of the Order Paper

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Mr. Speaker, I wish to raise a Point of Order and seek your Ruling...

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

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- ... on the contents of today's Order Paper, and I am referring in particular to Standing Order 34(5). If you allow me to read that out, and I quote: "Government business takes precedence over any other public business item except on a Friday..."

Then if you read that together with Standing Order 35 which refers to End of the Week Statements, Standing Order 35(2) states that one hour is allowed at which three members may each speak for ten minutes with a ten minute right of reply to each of these speeches by the Minister or Ministers responsible.

That, to me, makes it clear that the items listed in Schedule 2, Honourable Speaker, lists out the speakers and the first on the list is Honourable Alvick Maharaj. So, my reading of Standing Order 34(5) tells me that, that should be either taken out, or put as the last item.

I know that the Order Paper has been approved by both sides but still, we have to comply with the Standing Orders. So, I seek your Ruling in relation to that.

HON. SPEAKER.- Have you finished?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Yes, I am finished.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, when we come to that Item, I will address that Item.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I have made some changes in the order, but there would not be any deviation from those making End of the Week Statements. That will take place, it is just the order.

Honourable Members, we will move on to the first question.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I also rise on a Point of Order.

HON. SPEAKER.- Yes.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Thank you, Sir. In addition to what has been raised by Honourable Nawaikula in the way the Questions and the End of Week Statements had been formatted and agreed to by both sides, it is just a matter of consistency.

I also would like to add, Sir, that in Question No. 47/2020, the Honourable Minister answering that particular Question is the Minister for Waterways but, again, in Question No. 51/2020, it has to do with the same thing but the Question is being directed at the Honourable Minister for Economy. So, as a matter of consistency, Sir, and taking into account the Oath of Office that has been sworn in by the substantive Minister, now including budget allocations...

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- No, no, that is a different Question.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Hold on, you listen!

... you are fully answerable and accountable there. Yet, this particular question is directed to the Honourable Minister for Economy. I only wish to raise that, Sir. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- You have raised the point, Honourable Member. The Order Paper has been approved by the Business Committee, that is the thing. I have not altered the Order Paper. All that, I have done with this session is alter the order of speakers, that is all. I do not see any problem whatsoever, so we will move on.

Ruling on Standing Order 74(7) - Question No. 232/2019

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

HON. SPEAKER.- Yes, you have the floor.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Under Standing Order 74(7), I seek a clarification of your ruling by a flying minute. If you notice, Honourable Speaker, there are only seven questions today which was supposed to be eight but one was excluded, as a decision taken by vote in that flying minute, Honourable Speaker.

Question No. 232/2019 by the Honourable Leader of the Opposition was agreed to be included, which was moved from the September Sitting, Honourable Speaker. I seek a clarification whether or not that should really be a decision of the Speaker and the Members of the Business Committee note, rather than it being put to vote again because it was already agreed by the Business Committee and cleared for the September Sitting. So I seek your clarification on that ruling, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, as you know, the Business Committee has approved this and the vote taken, and the advice through the flying minute, that was done. You know that very well.

Now, if there are two Members of the Business Committee on one side opposed and two Members on the other side agreed, the Speaker makes the ruling. It is as simple as that. It is a reflection of what takes place in the actual Business Committee, the flying minute is no different.

So, we will move on to the Questions. For the first Oral Question for today, I give the floor to the Honourable George Vegnathan to ask Question No. 45/2020. You have the floor, Sir.

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

Fiji's Ease of Doing Business (Question No. 45/2020)

HON. G. VEGNATHAN asked the Government, upon notice:

It has been raised over and over again that Fiji's Ease of Doing Business ranking has been going down. Can the Honourable Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism, Local Government, Housing and Community Development inform Parliament on what is being done to improve this process?

HON. P.D. KUMAR (Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism, Local Government, Housing and Community Development).- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the Honourable Member for asking this question.

On Tuesday, I presented a Ministerial Statement on the Business Licensing Reform that has taken place from January this year. So in addition to that, this is what I have to say, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that over the years, one of the main efforts of the Fijian Government has been to improve the quality and efficiency of service delivery through reforms, including the better use of technology.

We have invested in infrastructure that will enable services to reach our people faster. Various e-Government initiatives have been launched that are taking services closer to the people. Mr. Speaker, Sir, on 10th July, 2019, we took another step forward in the process of simplifying doing business in Fiji with the launch of the bizFIJI Portal.

We have broken down barriers to information, and we are breaking down the red tapes and bureaucracy in Government systems and processes. In other words, we have got standardised

information now on bizFIJI Portal, which the investors and the general public can access, and the service providers also know that this is the information which is on this Portal and they cannot change their tune when investors knock on their door.

We had not just stopped at the launch of bizFIJI but gone a step further with the launch of their Reform Business Licensing process, which has standardised the application process across all 13 Municipalities. There are now only two processes required for business licences. Business licences, for the first time, are not assessed the same way but risk-based assessment is undertaken by the Municipalities. This has enabled faster and easier processing, thus leading to reduction in time and cost of doing business. In addition, all business licences are issued in 48 hours.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there were a number of reforms that were implemented after May 2019, such as:

1. Registration of Companies and Tax Registration Online;
2. Launch of Personal Properties Register;
3. bizFIJI Portal; and
4. Business Licence Reform.

The World Bank Group Doing Business Report Survey cut-off date is around April to May of each year, so if the reforms have taken place before May of each year that is not considered in the ranking, but it will be considered in the following year. Despite the various reforms that had taken place after May 2018, you have seen that the rank has not improved. It has actually dropped from 101 to 102, but we do anticipate that these reforms will be taken into consideration in the 2020-2021 Report.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in addition, Cabinet, last month, approved a bold target of being ranked in the top 50 in terms of doing business by the year 2025. It now becomes the mandate of the Ease of Doing Business Taskforce to adhere to their monetary, supervisory and review role, to ensure the targets are met. The Taskforce will also articulate progress to the World Bank Group through appropriate reporting mechanism.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in conclusion, I wish to highlight that over the next few months, we will be populating bizFIJI with information in other areas of doing business, such as trading across border and paying taxes. The new business processes that will be put online will not only be information, but will also link to those services that are available online. The end goal is to have a portal for all business-related information and approvals.

As we modernise the way Fijians can interact with and access information on Government services and personnel, we expect that Officials and Civil Servants will ensure the most up-to-date information is available in real time, that it is readily available and accurate for our people. That is what we owe to our fellow Fijians to ensure continued, strong and positive growth. Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you for allowing me to take the floor.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Ro Filipe Tuisawau, you have the floor.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. A supplementary question on that issue; I note that the Ease of Doing Business worsened from 30th April, 2006 to 1st January, 2018. When we looked at the investment figures, it correlates with the worsening situations and also reckless Government spending.

In terms of the figures provided by the Fiji Bureau of Statistics, when you look at general Government spending as a percentage of GDP, in 1996 it was 2.4 percent and it worsened to 7.5 percent in 2017.

HON. SPEAKER.- Ask your supplementary question.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I just wanted to emphasise in terms of public-private spending, that also worsened from 23.6 percent to 10.6 percent.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, you cannot make a statement, that is simple. You ask a supplementary question and she will answer the supplementary question.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- The question, Sir, is whether the FijiFirst Government will ever achieve the public-private sector percentage of GDP spending of 20 percent in 1998 because it has worsened?

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

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we were not talking about 2017 statistics, we are talking about the Ease of Doing Business Report and I do not see any linkage or relationship with that question so I refuse to answer his question, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Honourable Speaker, this is talk, talk, talk.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- In the 15 years, given that you have been using reform and technology, yet the Ease of Doing Business has worsened.

HON. J. USAMATE.- A Point of Order.

HON. SPEAKER.- We have a Point of Order here.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- What is the Point of Order.

HON. J. USAMATE.- The Point of Order, Mr. Speaker, Sir, you have been repeatedly reminding Honourable Members of the Opposition...

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. J. USAMATE.- ...that this is the time for supplementary questions. It is not a time to make statements. You stand up and you deliver the questions, then you sit down.

My concern, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think there is contempt of this House, when a clear instruction has been given and they continue not to abide by the decisions from the Honourable Speaker. That is our concern and that is the Point of Order.

(Honourable N. Nawaikula interjects)

HON. J. USAMATE.- He need to follow instructions.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I have emphasised before - do not make a statement! If you have a supplementary question, you will have the floor, there is no problem. A supplementary question....

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- So given that in the last 15 years...

HON. J. USAMATE.- Ask the question.

HON. SPEAKER.- What is the question?.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- This is a question!

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- You mad or what?

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- You ask the question!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- The use of technology and reform have worsened from 32 percent to 102 percent and this year's forecast to 106 percent. What is new that is better than your predecessor that you can guarantee us that this will happen?

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

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is what happens when you come to Parliament and you do not concentrate.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. P. D. KUMAR.- My whole presentation was simply on why we have dropped the ranking from 101 percent to 102 percent.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- A Point of Order, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, there is a Point of Order.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. As in my previous question, the Honourable Minister has not answered the question. For Honourable Nawaikula's question, the Honourable Minister was not answering the question. The Honourable Minister needs to answer our supplementary questions. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I do not know what has got into people for today. Within this week, we have had, in one day, more Points of Order than the whole week.

Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the question was, what new we have done? I had just explained that we have introduced reform to business licensing process. That is absolutely brand new.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- It was rolled out, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- It was rolled out in January. I had spoken on Tuesday about the assessment of that reform and I had also shared statistics on it, so that is the major reform that just took place in 2020.

Mr. Speaker, as per the 2020 Ease of Doing Business Report released in October 2019, Fiji's rank has definitely gone down from 101 percent to 102 percent. We are not in denial, which is why we are talking about this issue.

If you look at the Doing Business Score, it has improved by 0.35 percent as compared to 0.04 percent improvement in the 2019 Ease of Doing Business. That is statistics, and that is facts.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- This is an indication that reforms have taken place for Doing Business but it is not as fast as other countries. Other Pacific Island Countries have dropped at a faster rate, with Samoa down 8 ranks from 90 to 98, Tonga from 91 to 103 and Vanuatu from 94 to 107.

It is worth noting that Fiji is the second best Pacific Island Country to do business in, and every effort is being made, as I shared, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that we would like to improve our Ease of Doing Business ranking to 50, and that is why we have got a Taskforce in place and we are going to work towards that. By year 2025, our ranking should improve better.

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

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. A supplementary question to the Honourable Minister, knowing that currently the economy is being driven by consumption, there is high inflow of remittances and high inflow of importation of goods and services.

There is a change in the Investment Act where there used to be restricted activities for locals, but has now been taken away. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the question is, in this reform that you are doing to improve ease of doing business ranking, can you advise the House, what strategies does this Government have to ensure that the locals are not deprived of investing in Fiji?

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

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, locals were never deprived from doing any activity because even now, the locals can do any type of business they prefer. The reserved and restricted lists are still there, but like the Honourable Member said that we have a new Act, but let me tell him that we do not have a new Act yet. We are still undergoing a draft Bill which is in place, and you will be given an opportunity to comment on the draft Bill when it is presented in this House. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- We will move on to the third Question for today. Now, I give the floor to the Honourable Alipate Nagata to ask Question No. 47/2020. You have the floor, Sir.

Plans to Dredge and Desilt Waterways
(Question No. 47/2020)

HON. A.T. NAGATA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment provide an update to Parliament on plans to dredge and desilt waterways filled with silt that is contributing to flooding in lower plains?

HON. DR. M. REDDY (Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment).- Honourable Speaker, Sir, siltation of waterways has been and is a major concern for our Ministry.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I mentioned a number of times that a large number of our waterways, over the last two and three decades, have been filled with silt, because of what is happening in the catchment. Not only it is affecting infrastructure, agriculture and household communities in the lower plains, but it is also not good for the ecology of these waterways because when we siltation, then the natural ecology is affected - the vegetation and species that are in the waterways. So it is a major concern.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, what we have done last year, we had advertised in the papers emergency desilting of 136 creeks or waterways around Fiji. On 13th November, 2019, we put out a full page advertisement in the paper, exactly identifying where these waterways are.

We did scoping of all 136 waterways and the volume of silt that is needed to be extracted because when we do an Environment Impact Assessment (EIA), the EIA is not based on the number of years, it is based on the volume that needs to be extracted, because we do not want to extract more than what we should extract because then we are changing the structure and nature of the waterways because the idea of any extraction is to restore the waterways to its original strength. Therefore, we need to be very careful when we allow any extraction from any waterways.

We did a detailed scoping of the 136 waterways, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Then that information went to the Department of Environment, the regulator, saying, "This is what we want to do. This is our Environment Management Plan (EMP). Go and examine it and tell us whether we can do that."

Once that was done, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we then advertised these 136 waterways saying, "Here is the completed EMP, we have done it for you. Who wants to come and extract it and take the material?" So, we can then protect and secure our infrastructure - the roads that are around these waterways, the agriculture activity that is taking place, the surrounding villages and settlements around these waterways.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am quite pleased to say that we have received Expression of Interests (EOIs) from companies in the various Divisions - 44 in the Central Division, 41 in the Western Division and 51 in the Northern Division.

For the Central Division, we have got confirmed EOIs for the following Creeks:

1. Waibula Creek in Tailevu; we are now ready to roll out the desilting of that 10 kilometres of Waibula Creek. This is the level of siltation that is taking place in that waterways.
2. Nakoba Creek in Serua; we will be undertaking 2 kilometres of that. We now have it from a private sector where we have been given the EOI, without spending a single cent from the Ministry's budget. While we have done the technical part, of course, there is money involved. Our engineers, the Department of Environment's EMP, et cetera, and the scoping exercise.

3. Naibukavesi Creek, Namosi, we will be doing 7 kilometres.
4. Wainadoi Creek in Namosi, 5 kilometres in the Central Division.
5. Wainibuabua Creek in Namosi, 5 kilometres, so we are ready now to roll out.

Over the next two to three weeks, we will be commissioning this one by one. Of course, Honourable Nawaikula would not like it when he opens up the papers and sees how we are protecting and securing the communities around this particular area.

For the Western Division, there are eight creeks or waterways, as follows:

1. Yaqara Creek in Tavua; we will be desilting 4 kilometres, Mr. Speaker Sir. We have got confirmed EOI, so we are now working with them in terms of rolling out.
2. Tuvu Creek in Ba; 2 kilometres.
3. Saru Creek in Lautoka; 3 kilometres.
4. Legalega Creek in Nadi; 4.5 kilometre.
5. Waimalika Creek in Nadi; 4.5 kilometres.
6. Qeleloa Creek in Nadi, 1 kilometre.
7. Nawaicoka Creek in Nadi; 0.6 kilometres.
8. Nadele Creek in Nadi; 1 kilometre.

For the Northern Division, Mr Speaker, Sir, we have received EOIs from six different companies to desilt the following Creeks:

1. Macuata area, 22 Creeks; and
2. Cakaudrove, 13 Creeks.

We need to desilt that so that we restore. The idea is to restore those waterways to its original state.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are in the process of finalising the due diligence with the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources. We had submitted to them and we have received a good feedback from them in terms of ensuring that we comply with their requirements.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, apart from the emergency desilting of the Creeks, we have also commissioned environmental impact studies for the dredging of the Penang River and Deuba River mouth. That is on our desk now.

We want to clear up the river mouths of these two Rivers. We have done the upstream in Rakiraki - the Nakauvadra Creek. We have done upstream very successfully, up to a half kilometre from the bridge down in Rakiraki. We did 3 kilometres. Then from the bridge - half kilometre, we have done another 2 kilometres upstream. But we were not able to open up the river mouth because at that particular point in time, our EIA had expired, so we are wanting to do that now.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the dredging of rivers will see the removal of approximately 180,000 cubic metres of silt from the Penang River and Deuba River, all aimed at restoring the conveyance capacity of these Rivers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, when we are talking about desilting and dredging of rivers, one thing that we often forget is, where are these materials coming from? This is coming from upstream, in the catchment, from the actual arable good land, so basically within the Ministry, we have talking about, how do we ensure that we minimise this amount of good quality fertile top soil coming from the arable land into our waterway?

Often, we have forgotten that particular aspect in terms of really dealing with the problem when it arises. The root cause of the problem is what is happening in the catchment area because if we fix the cultivation practices and logging practices in the catchment, then we will be able to minimise what is coming down the waterways. So, desilting and dredging is a temporary solution. The real long term solution is to define the conduct of people or machine operators up in the catchment and in the agriculture field. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Viliame Gavoka, you have the floor.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

People who saw the front page of the *Fiji Times* yesterday would be absolutely terrified that their area is being identified for dredging.

Honourable Speaker, can I ask the Honourable Minister, when he scopes the Sigatoka River, did he know the results to the environment and the way it has been devastated? Did he know that? I mean, he is talking about scoping. Did he know that it would destroy fertile farmlands?

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

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, first of all, that article is incorrect. The articles, says, that because of mining, there is an effect on the flora and fauna in that area.

Mr, Speaker, Sir, there has been no mining.

(Honourable Opposition Members interject)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Magna Mining Company has not done any work.

(Honourable Opposition Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. DR M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the year before last, the Sigatoka Town was in a mess in terms of flooding. The river mouth was clogged up and if you do not know...

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Please, you have asked the question, let me explain.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Honourable Gavoka has seen this, and I am sure you have passed through the bridge there and if you look on the right hand side when you go from Suva, you will see that the entire river is clogged up. You can play rugby there during low tide. That needs to be cleaned up because if we do not clean it up, then where will the water pass through? It will overflow. He is talking about protecting those villages, but those villages will be affected when the River overflows.

(Honourable Members interjected)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Sigatoka Town will be affected. People's activities would be affected.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government spent \$1.2 million to open up the river mouth. Now, what has happened?

The photo that he is showing, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the flora and fauna of that area has changed and, therefore, those plants that were there were replaced by sand, so obviously it will change. Nothing to do with Magna Mines, nothing to do with mining, no mining has taken place.

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

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. Last year in October, the Honourable Minister had said to the landowners of Waidamu River in Tailevu, and I quote from the media: "We cannot dredge any river, we do not have any money," That was what he said.

Through you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to ask; why did the Honourable Minister say that? Does he really mean that there is no money in regards to dredging and he is only talking about plans today, or are they relying on private companies to take up these dredging works? Can he confirm to us whether there is money for dredging works?

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

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is rather unfortunate that Honourable Bulitavu is using an out-of-text quotation in the *Fiji Times*, that I said that there was no money and, therefore, we cannot do dredging.

Now, if you go down there, Mr. Speaker, Sir, through Vuci Road, as soon as you get to the Police Post, there is a bridge and that is the Waidamu River. From that bridge on the left, we have completed the entire desilting using our own money. If you go down now, you will see that.

Secondly, from the bridge on the right, from the river mouth upstream 1.7 kilometres, the dredging company, Dredging Solutions, they have begun work but at the moment, they are taking the Dredger out of the Rewa River. So Rewa River is totally clogged up. Honourable Kepa will tell you that. So the river mouth needs to be opened up. At the moment they are opening up the river mouth so that they can take the Dredger to the Waidamu River.

At the Waidamu River, 1.7 kilometres, the Dredger will do it. Upstream from 1.7 kilometres, we are doing it using our hired machines. We have completed from the bridge upwards and now, we are doing it from the bridge downwards. So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, if we did not have money, how did we do that?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, will move on to the next question. All I am interested in is why are there five rivers being done in Namosi and only one in Tailevu.

(Laughter)

I will give the floor for the fourth Oral Question, Question No. 48/2020, to be asked by the Honourable Ratu Suliano Matanitobua.

Appointment of Members of the Fiji Youth Council
(Question No. 48/2020)

HON. RATU S. MATANITOBUA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations, Youth and Sports inform Parliament on the criteria and processes in the appointment of members of the Fiji Youth Council?

HON. P.K. BALA (Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations, Youth and Sports).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I also thank the Honourable Member.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am happy to update the Honourable Members of this august House that the establishment of the Fiji Youth Council is aligned to the National Youth Policy. As such, an open and transparent process was followed in its establishment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the appointment of the Fiji Youth Council members was done through an Expression of Interest (EOI) published in the *Fiji Sun* and on the Ministry's website. Interested individuals were given four weeks to apply directly to the Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of Youth and Sports.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, two very important principles for selection, amongst the other requirements but not limited to us, are for applicants to be within the age of 15 to 35 years and must be involved in youth or sports development work in their respective communities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is also imperative for those appointed that they are youth leaders who have the capacity to assist the country with new development work. As a peak national youth body, there was a lot of interest from individuals and applications.

For a big national youth body with a limited number of positions, the best of the best from amongst our youth had applied. This was very encouraging Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the Ministry and for the status of our youth in our country.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I must state here that my Ministry had applied best practice approach in a transparent manner, in ensuring that we appoint the right fit youth leaders, who match the requirements of the role to be the members of the new Fiji Youth Council. The National Youth Council bio-data and their achievements are impressive, to say the least, and this means that they had been selected from a wider range of applicants who all had merit. But as the Council is composed of a set membership to ensure that their operational and logistical capacity is at the optimum, we could, of course, not accommodate all the applicants, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the requirements set out and the call for expressions of interest required an existing set of achievements in the youth initiative and for having achieved high levels of continuous achievements as youth leaders.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I must commend the Officials of my Ministry for putting together the requirements and following it to ensure that the best of the best among our youth, are represented in the National Youth Council. We look forward to this select group of Fijian youth leaders to lead the way forward, as we see to broaden horizon and better place our youth as leaders of our future.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to thank all the 16 members who have come forward to assist us and they all are volunteers. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Ratu Suliano Matanitobua, you have the floor.

HON. RATU S. MATANITOBUA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. I thank the Honourable Minister. Most of those members are in the urban centre. My question to the Honourable Minister, can you select members from the provinces or rural areas for the betterment of the Committee Council? We have 14 Provinces and I think you have to involve the Provinces too. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

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

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the National Youth Council that has been formed will be policymakers and that is why recently, we have appointed 29 Assistant Youth Officers, who will be spread out throughout the country, which includes the maritime, peri-urban and urban centres. Thank you.

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

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Can the Honourable Minister explain why are they appointing and selecting, as opposed to leaving it to the youth to elect their own members as we expect in a democratic process?

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

HON. P.K. BALA.- I could not get his question.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Can he explain the reason why they are appointing as opposed to leaving it to the youth to elect their own representatives?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, in my response, I have said that the appointment is in line with the National Youth Policy.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- But that is not democratic.

HON. P.K. BALA.- The National Youth Policy requires the formation of the National Youth Council and that is exactly what we have done through a transparent manner. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Salote Radrodoro, you have the floor.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Honourable Speaker, we note that a lot of youth structures are in the rural areas. So what is the main responsibility of this Youth Council, apart from policymaking and how

is the Ministry equipping them to be able to build the capacity of every existing youth structure, particularly in the rural areas? Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Mr. Speaker, Sir, apart from the policy, they will work very closely with the 29 Assistant Youth Workers that I have mentioned, whether it be in maritime, whether it be in peri-urban or in urban centres. This Council will be allocated a budget to work with the Assistant Youth Officers, who would be spread out throughout the country. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- We move on to the next question. For the fifth Oral Question for today, I give the floor to the Honourable Joseph Nand to ask Question No. 49/2020. You have the floor, Sir.

Master Plan for Rezoning
(Question No. 49/2020)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism, Local Government, Housing and Community Development brief Parliament on how the Master Planning of the greater Suva, Nadi and Lautoka will minimise the need to rezone?

HON. P.D. KUMAR (Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism, Local Government, Housing and Community Development). - Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

The Department of Town and Country Planning for the calendar year 2019 had received a total of 401 rezoning applications. The Western Division had the highest number of rezoning applications, where Department of Town and Country Planning received about 166 applications, closely followed by the Central/Eastern Division with 157 and 68 for the Northern Division. So we can see there are lot of applications being received by the Department of Town and Country Planning for rezoning.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, while these statistics are good indicators to gauge a number of land development-based investments, however, there is a need to streamline land use and future growth of strategic areas in the country, to ensure that both foreign and local investors are not subjected to cumbersome processes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to address the issue of timelines and to support the ease of doing business objectives, Government has engaged the services of Singapore Cooperation Enterprise, who are in the process of refining the concept Master Plan for the greater Suva, Nadi and Lautoka areas. Once completed by mid this year, this dynamic and long term planning document will provide a blueprint to guide future growth and development up until 2075.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Master Plan will identify land use for agricultural, commercial, industrial, residential and tourism related activities and where it is best located. So this will require a lot of data analysis and various old plans need to be taken out and studied before the areas are identified for various land use purposes. Growing population not only need land for housing, but for manufacturing and doing business as well. There is a shortage of such land which will require land to be rezoned from rural to urban use, and also to be subdivided into different allotments.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, upon the completion of the Master Plan this year, work on the revision of the outdated Town Planning Scheme for Municipalities, such as Suva, Nadi and Lautoka, can commence.

Normally, the City and Town Schemes are valid for 20 years. Suva and Lautoka City Schemes are old, the last time it was done was in the year 1978. Until now, the Schemes are not updated and that is why there is a demand for a large number of rezoning to be done.

Similarly for Sigatoka, the last scheme plan that we had was done in 1977. Really, these are totally outdated scheme plans and we can only renew or revise the schemes based on the Master Plan that is being done. Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir, for giving me the floor.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Mosese Bilitavu, you have the floor.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I am of the knowledge that the Government had hired the architect of modern Singapore in designing this Master Plan and also the timeline that will take. I am also aware they are in stage 2 of the planning.

What is the cost of the whole exercise and the plan conducted by the Singapore Company in trying to convert Fiji into something like what they did in Singapore 20 years ago? What consultation has been done in terms of these areas and putting together these plans with those who will be affected, especially the residents, and looking into the traffic and the issues that we have when we come into the greater Suva area?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Honourable Bilitavu has posed two questions. The first one is on the cost and the second one is on consultation. In terms of cost, because I do not control the purse, I will leave that question to the Honourable Minister for Economy or we can answer that at a later stage.

For consultation, this is the preparatory phase and as I have said, this requires data collection, data cleansing and conforming to the old plans in which you have to get all these information. Consultation has started with the various Government agencies in getting all these information together before a draft Master Plan can be out. So once this is done, that is when consultation will begin with the community. So, that is the process involved in that exercise.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Mitieli Bulanauca, you have the floor.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, just a short question; how will this Master Plan help the people who want to do business and development on other land for rezoning? The application for rezoning always takes times. How will this help those developments so that the return time in application for rezoning is shorter rather than getting longer all the time?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister you have the floor.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I have said, when you have an outdated scheme plan, you cannot really quickly get the rezoning done because there is a whole process to be followed and the process is the suspension of the scheme plan, followed by advertisements that come out in the paper, then there is an objection period, then there is an appeal process; that is why it takes so long.

What I am trying to say here is that, if we have a master plan, the area will be zoned so that area, whichever area it is, can be zoned residentially, and it can also be zoned commercially. So, investors whether local or foreign can look at the scheme plan and they will know precisely that they can do business in this particular area without having to apply for the rezoning. So, that is how it will assist in speeding up the rezoning.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. We will move onto the sixth Oral Question for today. I give the floor to the Honourable Simone Rasova to ask Question No. 50/2020. You have the floor, Sir.

Municipal Councils Contractual Agreement Guideline
(Question No. 50/2020)

HON. S.R. RASOVA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism, Local Government, Housing and Community Development inform Parliament on the guideline(s) for Municipal Councils in monitoring contractual agreements?

HON. P.D. KUMAR (Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism, Local Government, Housing and Community Development).- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the Honourable Member for the question.

Mr. Speaker Sir, there is a wide range of contractors that undertake Council work. The Councils use contractors for capital projects and for service-related works, such as grass cutting and waste collection.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Special Administrators at Fiji's Municipal Councils have been tightening services agreements and contracts, to ensure that the contract itself is sound and clearly written with no ambiguity so that performance can be monitored. During Councils' meeting, the Chief Executive Officer presents reports on contractor compliance and performance.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we know that there is a lot to improve in these areas and we have sought the assistance of the Auckland City Council to coach and mentor Suva City Council Management on better procurement processes, scrutinising and tightening up asset management and building contracts and re-designing guidelines to effectively monitor service contracts.

I would like to thank the New Zealand Government for their assistance. The team from Auckland City Council has been visiting the Suva City Council and this is a pilot project where documents will be developed, knowledge will be shared and once the work at Suva City Council is completed, we will use that information and will roll it out to the other 12 Municipal Councils.

Mr. Speaker Sir, specifically in the area of grass cutting, drain cleaning and street sweeping, the Council has made a number of changes in service specification, such as:

- changing grass cutting requirement along both sides from two times per month to maintaining grass level of the maximum 10 millimetres above ground level at any time; and
- changing drain cleaning programme from two times per month to maintain drain cleaning to allow free flow of water at any time, ensuring that silt collected is taken to spots approved by the Council and it should not lie on the verges.

Those are the new changes that have been brought about.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we know there is a great deal of work still to be done and we acknowledge the energy and commitment of the Special Administrators, who are working their way through to make our Councils are customer service-oriented and accountable. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. A. JALE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and Honourable Minister. There used to be a clause in all Government contracts in the past which is called fair wages clause. Is there a similar provision in the contracts that you are talking about?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is the law that protects, so the law is there and everything is done based on the law.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Lynda Tabuya.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I wish to ask the Honourable Minister, you only need to drive down through Nasinu and on the suburbs to see a lot of rubbish that is increasingly not been collected. I want to ask the Honourable Minister, with the monitoring of private companies that are collecting the rubbish in Nasinu, why are they not paying the private companies on time which is the reason why they are not collecting?

HON. SPEAKER.- I give the floor to the Honourable Minister.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me share the real facts about Nasinu.

Nasinu is dubbed as a squatter area, this is a reality. If you look at the squatter figures, majority of the squatter communities live in the Nasinu-Suva corridor. What has happened in the Nasinu area, only 44 percent of the ratepayers are paying rate and 56 percent are not paying rate. We have just completed the rates profiling, just to understand who these people are and why they are not paying rate because without money, you cannot deliver the service.

For the Nasinu area, Government has contributed \$3 million for garbage collection but that is still not sufficient. So, if ratepayers want service, they have to pay. Without paying the money, you cannot ask for service. It is simple logic.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- What we are trying to do, that is, on humanity grounds, even for that reason we are paying \$3 million for garbage collection. We have done the profiling, we know precisely...

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- ... what is happening. So, what we did, we picked up areas, such as Laucala Beach and Kinoya and we tried to understand who are these people who are paying because it is supposed to be professionals living in those areas, people who can afford to pay and we have found that there are number of them not paying their town rates. So, there are steps being taken.

In fact, Nasinu Town Council has put a caveat on these properties so that if they sell, then the Councils will come to know and they will recover their dues. But there are other methods that are being used at the moment. Through rate profiling, we know exactly how many ratepayers or money, for example, up to \$5,000, all these cases are now going to Small Claims Tribunal and we have categorised it in that way so that we can recover the rates. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- We will move on to the seventh Oral Question for today. I give the floor to the Honourable Sanjay Kirpal to ask Question No. 51/2020. You have the floor, Sir.

Nadi River Flood Alleviation Project
(Question No. 51/2020)

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

Can the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications provide Parliament an update on the Nadi River Flood Alleviation Project?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM (Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Nadi River Rehabilitation Programme or indeed now commonly known as Nadi River Flood Alleviation Project (NRFAP) is going to be probably one of the largest undertakings by Government or perhaps, by any other Government. We are looking, at this point in time, approximately a spend of about over \$400 million.

As we know by way of background, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Nadi is the gateway to Fiji. Over 90 percent of all tourism arrivals in Fiji that have a stay of more than a day or two days come through Nadi Airport. And because it is a gateway, we need to ensure that the gateway is always open, not just to the airport but, of course, in the surrounding areas.

Nadi, of course, is soon to be declared a city. It is one of the fastest growing urban centres in Fiji and you can only see that by the number of developments that is taking place on a daily basis around the Nadi area. There was some funding, we understand, that was given, or some ideas given by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) to the then SVT Government but nothing eventuated.

At that point in time, the project was termed, we understand as the Nadi River Diversion Programme where there were plans to actually divert the Nadi River. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, Sir, because it did not take place, we now have those areas that were actually earmarked for the Nadi River to be diverted through, are now developed.

So to actually have a diversion now will cost us literally billions of dollars because we have to pay compensation to all those people who have developed their land around that area. The idea at that point in time was to straighten Nadi River. If you look at Nadi River, those of you who drive through the Back Road, you will see it kind of snakes its way through Nadi Town, reaching Nadi Town, then spills out and pass Denarau.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, now, of course, the idea is to rehabilitate Nadi River or elevate the flood potential. Before I do that, rivers *per se* in Fiji are very much underutilised. If you look at all the townships in Fiji, apart from Lautoka and Suva, nearly all of them have a river, they are built next to a river. One of the fundamental reasons why they were built next to rivers was because boats actually could come up to those rivers. In those days, they were called cutters, Honourable Lalabalavu probably know this, he predates those times.

Those people who know Fijian history would know, if you look at Nadi Town, Sigatoka Town, Ba Town, Tavua, Labasa even Rakiraki, you look at some of the old historical photographs, Navua, of course not forgetting, all of these towns were built along the river banks and the accessibility were not by the Queen's Road or the King's Road but actually by these cutters. Ships came to Suva then they took goods to all those other parts of Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, however, if you go to those towns now and try and access those towns apart from probably Rewa River, but even then there may be some issues with it, the depth of those rivers have actually become extremely low, in other words, become very shallow. As the Minister for Waterways highlighted because of the enormous levels of siltation that have been gone unchecked for decades, even during the colonial times it went unchecked and as a result of those decades of siltation, those rivers are now actually very shallow.

Apart from the fact that the cutters can no longer go up there, the actual conveyance level of those rivers are very shallow. In other words, they cannot convey as much water as it used to. This is why you get flooding. In most cities around the world, when you have very healthy river systems, apart from the fact that it gives accessibility, it also means that there is a lot of economic activity around the areas.

So what we are trying to do in this particular instance is to create an economic base around those rivers. We do not have in any of those rivers, for example, boat rides where you have dinner by candlelight up the river. If you go to most major cities in the world, they will have that and it generates economic activity. Fiji is a tourism country, 38 percent of our GDP depends on tourism so the idea is to have more ancillary services available. So rivers are a perfect example as to how we can make use of the system to create economic activity.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I know the subject matter at the moment is Sigatoka River. I also come from Sigatoka, I do know a little about Sigatoka River. Where Laselase Village is, you can play rugby at low tide now, you could not do that before and Honourable Gavoka would know that. I used to walk along that bridge as a young kid all the time. We used to fish there all the time, but you cannot do that now.

Recently when the dredging took place up the Sigatoka River, I had people from Yavulo Village telling me that they are now seeing fish that had disappeared in the past 20 to 30 years, coming up the river. They had not seen the fish for a long time.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- In fact, a lot of people are now commenting about the *kai* (river mussel). The Sigatoka River *kai* is the best *kai*, it is better than the Rewa *kai*. Now, they are saying that there is an abundance of it. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am digressing slightly, but the point is, there is a lot of economic activity around that.

We also should see our major rivers as a mode of transportation. Now, we are complaining, for example, about traffic jam. There obviously are a lot more people than cars. If you go to Nadi Town, there are a lot more cars. I mean, you could actually have water taxis running along Nadi River. It is a source of livelihood for people who live along those villages, who can provide that particular service. So river systems are good from that point of perspective. Of course, from an aesthetic perspective, from a point of social cohesion, people can gather around rivers, recreational fishing, et cetera.

The Nadi River Project currently sits with the Ministry of Economy because it is a major project and there are a number of partners that are involved. Those partners, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the first time, the French Development Bank wants to lend money to Fiji because they only lend to French territories outside France, and to Fiji for this particular project.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, JICA has been very intrinsically involved in the work that has been carried out for the past two years. The Asian Development Bank has been working with us too and so has the

Australian Infrastructure Finance Facility Programme that recently launched a \$2 billion facility that the Australian Prime Minister had announced.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Nadi River has actually been divided into three sections in what we call, Projects A, B and C. Project A is from Nadi Town and the inland areas of Nadi Town going towards Nadi River. Project B is from Nadi Town, from Namotomoto coming up to the Back Road which is the largest section, and then you have the upstream project.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, and Honourable Members, you would also know this from the Budget, that we have allocated in this year's budget \$7.95 million:

- to meet the completion of the topography survey;
- for the basic design of structural measures and geotechnical investigation and the test for proposed facilities;
- the EIA in any resettlement that may be required because we have a number of squatters who live around the riverbanks; and
- we also have numerous community consultations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Project A for Nadi Town area will actually include the building of a surrounding dike, our Nadi River because if you look at the Nadi Town elevation, it is extremely low. So there will be a dike, there will actually be what we call the flap gates to actually shut the water out and we have already had a team that visited Japan.

We have a dike gate for roads and railways because we have got a railway system we need to take care of rainwater storage facility, improvement of existing drainage channel. Because we have certain drainage or huge drains that actually go underneath buildings in Nadi Town and unfortunately back in the 1990s or so, a number of buildings were allowed to be built on these easements; huge drains and the buildings were allowed to be built upon that as a result of which because there is no monitoring, those drains have actually become very narrow.

Those of you who know Nadi Town well where the Municipal Market is, across that there is actually a drain and there is a huge building on the corner at that intersection, you will see the drain going underneath it. Now, to really do a good job, you have to tear down that entire building and all the shops in front of it, to drain out that water. There are enormous drainage issues and, of course, the equipment supply for mobile pump trucks, et cetera.

The Japanese Government has actually indicated that they will do Project A by way of a grant which is very much appreciated, and I would like to thank the Japanese Government and, indeed, the Japanese people for this.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are currently working with them, there is a Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) team that is there. We have engaged a Japanese Company by the name of Yachiyo Engineering, who has carried out the additional survey at a total cost of approximately FJ\$1.5 million. This is the same company that did the feasibility study and the Master Plan for the Nadi River Basin area in 2016. We expect to get a final report within the next month or so.

Now, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will not take too long but just by way of Project B, again, Yachiyo Engineering is undertaking the feasibility study for this. It, again, involves building retarding basins, river-improvement works downstream, ring dikes and river-widening (the river needs to be widened).

There is also a couple of options. One of the designs was, you do not actually improve the depth, in other words, the conveyance level of the river, you do not widen it but what you do is, you build what we call “flood plains”, just where the river is. Here you actually excavate land, make it all flat, no one does anything in those areas and then when the water comes up during flooding, it just goes through the flood plains.

That will require a huge amount of acquisition of land and also an ongoing operational cost which will also mean you have to make sure no one builds on those areas, and that is very difficult to manage. We had the 2016 feasibility study, widened the river slightly and increased the depth of it which, of course, has a positive impact on the marine life and the river life.

Now, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), through a technical assistance in the sum of US\$2 million, is helping with this technical assistance for Project B. Again, as we have said, one of the ways that we are looking at in respect of Project B is that, we are incorporating the Japanese and the Dutch management ways of managing risks from flood.

It is the flood-risk management policy based on making room for the river to discharge flood waters safely into the sea. Some of you who do know Nadi, there is a Nadi River, there is a Nawaka River that spills into it, and there is another river (the name escapes me) that actually spills into and joins into Nadi River. So there is a huge confluence of water coming in at one point in time and, therefore, when you have sudden gushes of water coming down, if your conveyance level is not great, it will obviously spill over beyond the riverbanks.

Now, Mr. Speaker, Sir, if I could also talk about Project C, this Project which is more upstream is, again, being funded by grant funding which we have secured through the Australian Infrastructure Finance Facility Programme to the tune of AUD5 million where they are looking upstream. So one of the things that they are looking at is to minimise overlap and dependency between the three Projects which could result in delays of service delivery and, of course, ensure the non-structural elements.

There have been a number of proposals whether we build strong, smaller mini-dams upstream going up the Nadi River, to be able to contain the water when they come down and divert it. There have been various other proposals where you actually build what we call, “holding pans”, and they are only going to, kind of, create small lakes where people can go and fish, but all the additional water actually goes into that, so that is currently being worked out, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just very, very quickly, I would also like to highlight that we have had a number of community consultations last year with a number of villages, et cetera, that were involved in it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Niko Nawaikula, you have the floor.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Can the Honourable Minister confirm whether the Government is currently facing a cashflow crisis and how that will impact on this Project, especially the \$7.9 million budgetary allocation, and even the willingness from overseas countries to fund this Project?

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will try not to give any credibility to his question, but as I have already said, that \$7.9 million has been allocated in the budget.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Can you like for once, please, just listen?

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Listen! Mr. Speaker, Sir...

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir...

(Honourable Members interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I think he has run out of ideas.

(Laughter)

When yesterday....

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- It is Friday now.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Yesterday, when the Honourable Members from this side of the House said to him as to how his salary is being paid, he went “*Dinau, dinau, dinau, dinau.*” What a nonsense!

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as announced, \$7.95 million has been allocated in the 2019/2020 Budget, and I will read out again what that money will be used for:

“Completion of topography survey for basic design on structural measures and geotechnical investigation and test for proposed facilities, EIA and Resettlement Action Plan, community consultations, the workshops and the detailed design for Project B, currently the terms of the reference have been finalised.”

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if the \$7.95 million was not available, would these have gone ahead? Any person with logic would understand that.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. We will move on. Time moves on and we have to move on to the Written Questions for today, and I call on the Honourable Ratu Suliano Matanitobua to ask his Written Question No. 52/2020.

Written QuestionRural Electrification Project
(Question No. 52/2020)

HON. RATU S. MATANITOBUA asked the Government, upon notice.

Can the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure, Disaster Management and Meteorological Services inform Parliament on the:

- (a) Details of all rural electrification projects carried out in the Central Division in 2018/2019 fiscal year;
- (b) Total value of all the rural electrification projects carried out in the Central Division in 2018/2019 fiscal year;
- (c) Details of all the rural electrification projects suspended for the Central Division in 2018/2019 fiscal year; and
- (d) Details of all the rural electrification projects being planned for the Central Division for the year 2019/2020 fiscal year?

HON. J. USAMATE (Minister for Infrastructure, Disaster Management and Meteorological Services).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I thank the Honourable Member for his question.

I would just like to inform the Honourable Member that details for Part (d) of that question, there is such a thing that is called the Budget Kit that has the list of all the projects for that are going to be done in that particular year, so projects for 2019/2020 are in the Budget Kit. He should go to Page 125 and 130, those answers are there, but since it has been asked, I will make sure that I reproduce what is already in that Budget Kit as part of their reply to this question. So I will table my late response, Mr. Speaker, Sir, at a later sitting day as permitted under the Standing Order 45(3).

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. Honourable Members, time moves on, but we have time to take tea adjournment and we will adjourn for morning tea.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.53 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.16 a.m.

SPEAKER'S RULING

Standing Order 34(5) and (6) – Contents of the Order Paper

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I will now give my ruling on a Point of Order that was raised earlier. Standing Order 34(5) provides that Government Business takes precedence over any other public business items except on Friday's Sitting days in which case the Opposition Business takes precedence over other public business item.

Honourable Members, Standing Order 34(6) further provides that Government Business means, proceedings on motions for which notice has been given by Ministers and proceedings on Bills in the charge of Ministers. Standing Order 34(6) also provides that Members' Business means proceedings on motion for which notice has been given by Members other than Ministers and proceedings on Bills in the charge of Members other than Ministers.

For the information of the Honourable Members, Schedule 2 in today's Order Paper contains the list of End of Week Statements that will be made today. Honourable Members, I wish to clarify that End of Week Statements as the name suggests, are statements and not motions, as referred to under Standing Order 34(5).

Additionally, Honourable Members, the definition of motions is outlined in Standing Order 47, and I would encourage all Honourable Members to read that.

As far as today's Order Paper is concerned, there are no Government motions listed. In that regard, I hereby uphold the decision of the Business Committee that today's Order Paper is in order and that there are anomalies, with the listing set up in Schedule 2 of today's Order Paper.

END OF WEEK STATEMENTS

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, for End of Week Statement as you all know, each Member may speak up to 10 minutes with a 10 minutes response by the Minister or Ministers responsible for the subject matter of the Member's speech. No seconder is required and there will be no other debate.

I am allowing the Honourable Viam Pillay to deliver his statement first, and the Honourable Alvick Maharaj will deliver his statement before the Honourable Lynda Tabuya.

I now call on the Honourable Viam Pillay to deliver his End of the Week Statement. You have the floor, Sir.

Groundwater Development

HON. V. PILLAY.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. Honourable Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and Honourable Members of Parliament; thank you for allowing me to stand in my capacity as a concerned Member of Parliament, to deliver my End of Week Statement on a matter dear to my heart since I was brought up in the drought-stricken area of Ba.

Honourable Speaker, water, as we all know, is one of the most important basic needs for every living human being, while one-third of humanity totally depends on groundwater for their daily needs.

In the face of growing cities and thirsty farms, there is a need to conserve and protect groundwater sources.

Groundwater is not only a valuable resource but has become a critical element for our rural dwellers, settlements and infrastructural development. For the people of Fiji, it provides a second alternative source of safe drinking water, agriculture, social benefits and reliability during droughts.

Globally, it provides 45 percent of global domestic water demands and about 40 percent global irrigation to grow crops. Locally, groundwater has become the source of drinking water for majority of the rural population.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, since the Election in 2014 till to-date, the Bainimarama-led Government stands by its promise to ensure that all Fijians have access to clean and safe drinking water.

Because the Government cares for its citizens, it has incorporated the SDG 6, which states; “to ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all”, into Section 36 of the 2013 Constitution – provide the right to adequate food and water.

The Government’s five-year and 20-year National Development Plan also provides clean and safe water in adequate quantities and proper adequate sanitation for every Fijian household.

I must acknowledge and commend all the relevant Government Ministries and stakeholders who have been working tirelessly in implementing and adhering to the aforementioned.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, in Fiji, groundwater where available continues to provide alternatives or complementary sources of potable water to maritime and remote communities and schools in rural areas which alternatively contributes to alleviation of poverty.

Together with the benefits, come the challenges which include; pollution pressure, water severity and environmental degradation, to name a few. Accordingly, those living in these areas need to be protected from potential cross-contamination from other water sources and waste streams on site, ensuring compliance with the relevant plumbing and drainage requirements.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, with the right resources, management of water through rainwater harvesting and installation of rainwater tanks should mitigate water loss and avoid misuse of treated water. The installation of both, below and above groundwater tank for domestic consumption, such as shower, laundry and toilet may not require water to be treated to such a high standard. However, sustainable management of water must be advocated.

Similarly, water used by businesses for activities such as irrigation, vehicle washing and cooling towers does not require treatment to such a higher standard, but can be satisfactorily supply from either sources, such as rainwater collected from roofs and stored in tanks or groundwater.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, although drilling boreholes is costly, the long-term benefits of having boreholes are worth it. Based on cost analysis, it is evident that the use of borehole water is cost efficient and a viable alternative to municipal water for those un-reticulated remote villages and maritime islands.

A well-maintained borehole is also cost-effective and self-sufficient asset. Although initial costs of drilling and reticulation may be high, there are long-term financial benefits to groundwater, particularly the fact that borehole water costs significantly less than municipal water.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, groundwater depletion, a term often defined as long-term decline in groundwater level caused by groundwater pumping, is an associated issue with groundwater use. This issue may be resolved if we better understand:

- how much groundwater is there;
- to what extent can we utilise this resource without causing damage to the environment?
- how much groundwater is currently being used; and
- how is groundwater resources and supply managed?

Honourable Speaker, Sir, it is, therefore, crucial that while Government provides this alternative mean of water source, all other parties, including the people, must know how to effectively use and manage water. The FijiFirst Government has planned strategically to devise cost-effective boreholes and improve groundwater development.

Further, the Government aims to strengthen its monitoring and public awareness initiatives to improve existing borehole drilling procedures, related policies and regulations, including the clarification of roles and responsibilities of relevant Ministries and stakeholders in the overall supply and management of water-related resources.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, in providing the best for all Fijians, continuous dialogue between water-related civil organisations and collaboration among Government agencies, including regulators, encourages and support efforts to improve decision-making and public awareness on sustainable water management.

I reiterate that more public awareness on proper use of groundwater sources, routine monitoring and cleaning of boreholes safeguards groundwater sustainability and better management of both, reticulated and non-reticulated areas.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, undesirably, the abstract nature of water resource contributes to its vulnerability towards over exploitation and contamination. Together with the added responsibility of the groundwater development and reticulation without proper management procedures and standardised abstraction rates, it will surely threaten water security and deplete water resources in Fiji.

I am reminded by a statement made by the former Vice-President of the World Bank, Ismail Serageldin, on water severity, and I quote:

“Many of the wars of the 20th Century were about oil, but wars of the 21st century will be over water unless we change the way we manage water.”

To conclude, Honourable Speaker, groundwater development is a critical growing industry and supporting agencies must work smart and reposition themselves to improve the effectiveness. Furthermore, the people of Fiji must be fully equipped to understand groundwater value and r preservation practices for its sustenance.

Finally, before I take my seat, I would like to take this time to thank the Honourable Minister and the staff of the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources for the hard work carried out in the past years, and being the expertise to strategically execute groundwater development. Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. I now call on the Minister responsible for the response. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Honourable Speaker, I rise to respond to Honourable Viam Pillay's statement and thank him for raising such a significant matter in this august House which is, indeed, very dear to everyone.

Honourable Speaker, given the importance of water for preserving our health and supporting balanced economic development, the groundwater development project contributes to sustainable utilisation and equitable distribution of resources, and also towards SDG 6, which is to ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all. Therefore, we are proud to have contributed to this SDG, as human survival is dependent on water.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, today 88 percent of Fiji's population, which is about 800,445 Fijians, has access to clean and safe drinking water, whilst 12 percent which is about 96,000 Fijians do not. This is mainly in the remote rural areas and maritime islands.

The Ministry's contribution towards achieving the target of 100 percent of Fiji's urban population having access to clean and safe water by 2021 and the rural and maritime areas by 2030, is to continue with the groundwater development projects. This is to ensure that water in these areas are reticulated and sustainably delivered to every household. Furthermore, there is no doubt that the challenge is, ensuring that every person has access to sufficient supply of clean and safe water in most of the fundamentally remote areas in Fiji.

Honourable Speaker, this groundwater development is nationwide focussed and runs complementary to the Water Authority of Fiji. The Ministry being the administrator and facilitator of the country's mineral sector and groundwater resources, has purchased the latest versions of drill rigs and drilling equipment during the 2018-2019 financial year to replace the obsolete drilling rigs and equipment.

The investment in purchasing these high quality drill rigs and drill rig accessories are for the effective supply of groundwater services. The investment cost to the Government is approximately \$4.2 million. This includes equipment, spare parts and training. This indicates our Government's commitment towards serving the people of Fiji.

Honourable Speaker, at this juncture, I would like to explain that the rigs that the Department of Mineral Resources digs for groundwater extraction is about 8 inches in diameter and it goes anywhere from 100 feet to 200 feet and a maximum of 300 feet. This is in contrast to the exploration that is currently going on in Sigatoka where the diameter is a mere 9 centimetres, ending up to 15 metres or 18 metres. Once the sample is extracted, that hole is covered and is rehabilitated.

Honourable Speaker, Honourable Gavoka is greatly mistaken. There is no mining activity being carried out near the Sigatoka River by Magna Mines. His ignorance has caused a bit of a stir in the people of Fiji and in Sigatoka. He has come here and told us that there is mining activities going on in Sigatoka, it is not true. There is no mining activity.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- For his knowledge and to show some light on his ignorance, the prospecting is digging a 9 centimetre hole, taking the ore out as sample and covering that hole, rehabilitate it. It does not cause the damage. The picture circulated by Honourable Gavoka and the media

had nothing to do with Magna Mines. He should withdraw and should actually apologise to the people of Fiji.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Honourable Speaker, moreover, to enhance the Government's stance on the Sustainable Development Goals and the National Development Plan, the Government through the Rural Water Supply Programme is determined to provide access to clean water in rural areas, to meet the target of 85 percent of rural communities having access by 2021. Therefore, it is crucial that this new advanced equipment was purchased to realise this vision.

Honourable Speaker, in the past five years alone, the Ministry with the given financial and human resources, has drilled 94 boreholes, of which 65 were successful and 39 reticulated in villages, schools and in communities, such as:

- Vatani Village, Kaba;
- Navatu and Natokalau Village, Kubulau, Bua;
- Nakanacagi Village, Macuata;
- Yavuna Village, Nadi;
- Navasua and Lekutu Government Station, Kubulau, Bua;
- Tai District School, Tailevu;
- Ratu Latianara School, Serua;
- Napuka Secondary School and Volivoli Primary School, Cakaudrove;
- Lomawai Settlement, Nadroga;
- Tavuto Settlement, Sigatoka; and
- Nalalawa Settlement, Ra.

The project has benefitted approximately 7,000 Fijians, which is a total of about 400 households. In addition, another 26 boreholes are yet to be reticulated and will benefit more than 2,000 Fijians.

As I speak, the staff of the Department of Mineral Resources is currently drilling three boreholes in Navia Site 2, Ba; Nasea Village, Macuata; and Matawailevu Village in Ra.

In addition, another nine boreholes have been drilled, namely at:

- Najia Village, Waitabu Village and Waciwaci Village in Lakeba;
- Salia Village, Narocivo Site 1 and Narocivo Site 2 in Nayau, and
- Navia Site 1 and Nadari Village in Ba

Furthermore, two boreholes had been successfully reticulated at:

- Nasavusavu Primary School, Nadroga; and
- Nakorokula Village, Nadroga;

In addition, Honourable Speaker, there are two boreholes done in Qerelevu and Nakavika Village in Ba, which are yet to be reticulated and we are working in joint collaboration with the Ministry for Infrastructure and Ministry for Rural Development in reticulating those two projects, plus three boreholes in progress at Qelemumu Village; Raranikawai Settlement, Labasa; Volivoli Primary School; Sese Village, Cakaudrove and Nautoloulou Village, Wainivesi Settlement in Wainunu Bua.

In the next quarter, the team is finalising logistics for the maritime islands, specifically in Nabukelevu-i-Ra Village in Kadavu and Narocivo Village in Vanuabalavu, Lau. Despite the Hydrology and Drilling Unit being a small team, they are able to execute wide coverage of groundwater development around Fiji.

Honourable Speaker, with the continuous programme of groundwater reticulation, villages, communities and schools are strongly advised that they should adhere strictly to the recommended pumping rate and pump duration. Failure to comply with this could lead to an unsustainable yield and a possible degradation in water quality. However, these reticulated areas are constantly reminded to continue using other reliable and safe sources, for example, rainfall harvesting which should not be neglected and should be maintained to supplement groundwater.

Furthermore, for a rural water supply to be safe and reliable and to give the benefits of improved health, livelihood security and poverty reduction, it must meet several basic requirements, for example, water should be of sufficient quantity to meet all domestic needs. Consumption should not pose a health risk, it should be reliable and accessible to all community members within a reasonable distance. There are some specifications that the Ministry will look at, to ensure successful and sustainable drilling and reticulation of groundwater source.

Honourable Speaker, water quality tests are conducted to determine the mid-long term sustainable yield for abstraction and quality assurance of the borehole source. Only then, the groundwater source is available for the community water supply with standard reticulation works to households.

Additionally, Government is continuing its effort in providing clean and safe water to communities in remote locations or non-reticulated areas, such as Navia in Tavua, Malele and Volivoli in Ba. Nevertheless, with the Ministry's Business Process Re-Engineering Initiatives, one recommended initiative implemented for projects, such as the reticulation of groundwater to households is the laying of pipes under the sea or above rivers, similar to the Navutu and Yavuna Projects which had benefited approximately 200 Fijians.

Honourable Speaker, in the attempt for the Government to respond to the questions stated by Honourable Pillay, the Ministry is currently formulating a groundwater policy that will address the sustainable management and supply of groundwater resources. The formulation of the Groundwater Resources Exploitation and Management Policy (GREMP) will clearly outline the strategies that will ensure that groundwater resources are well-managed and protected from contamination, pollution and over-exploitation.

The 5th Stakeholders' Consultation was held yesterday with 28 representatives from NGOs, private drilling companies, commercial water-bottling and Government agencies, namely:

- International Union for Conservation of Nature;
- Rotary Pacific Water for Life;
- Secretariat of the Pacific Community;
- Western Drilling Company;
- G. Nandan Drilling Company;
- McMillian Drilling Company;
- Fiji Water;
- Pleass Beverage;
- Water Authority of Fiji;
- Office of the Prime Minister;
- Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development;
- Ministry of Waterways & Environment;

- Ministry of Forestry;
- Ministry for Infrastructure, Transport, Disaster Management and Meteorological Services;
- Department of Water & Sewerage; and
- Department of Social Welfare.

It was a successful and fruitful meeting whereby the Policy was further amended to avoid any loopholes. Furthermore, the commercial water-bottling companies and private drilling companies have requested for further discussion on the Policy for which they will meet sometime next week. The Ministry is hoping to table the Policy to Cabinet before the end of the financial year.

The GREMP aims to address the following:

- protection of groundwater supply to the rural communities and the general public;
- protection of valuable commercial interests in groundwater bottling industry while at the same time ensuring environmental and resource sustainability;
- introduction of standards in the survey, development and supply of groundwater to ensure health security of citizens and sustainability of the boreholes and the resources;
- stakeholders' collaboration in the management and protection of the resources; and
- define and demarcate responsibilities of the line ministries and stakeholders.

Honourable Speaker, as I had stated earlier in my Statement, the Ministry will continue to strengthen collaboration with stakeholders, more public awareness and continuous monitoring for better protection and management of groundwater resources.

To conclude, the FijiFirst Government will not tire out of its responsibility to deliver to all Fijians the best of that which they can be provided, and I must remind this august House that as a citizen of Fiji, you too have certain responsibilities to uphold. Our commitment to the well-being of ordinary Fijians surpasses previous Governments, and we will continue to do so, Honourable Speaker. Thank you very much.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Get your facts right, it's not mining.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister for his response.

The next Honourable Minister to deliver his End of the Week Statement is not present in the House, so we move on to the third Honourable Member, Honourable Alvick Maharaj, to deliver his End of the Week Statement. You have the floor, Sir.

Change in Climatic Patterns

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Honourable Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Ministers, Honourable Assistant Ministers, Honourable Members and the general public either in the gallery or watching from the comfort of your homes; good morning to you all.

Honourable Speaker, it is evident that the change in climatic patterns is occurring at an unprecedented rate and has a strong impact on waterways-related disasters, including floods. We live in a connected world and changes to our climate, including rainfall, temperature and evaporation, influence the hydrological cycle which in turn drive the hydrology of waterways.

Honourable Speaker, the mega challenge of adapting to climate change is by far dependent on how we manage our water resources and waterways. Any description of the perils of climate change immediately mentions drought, flood and extreme rainfall because climate change is water change, something that we need to recognise.

Honourable Speaker, as such, managing waterways in such an uncertain climatic future requires foresight and strategic intervention now, rather than dealing with disaster strikes, hence, the basis of the Department of Waterways.

Honourable Speaker, in 2017, recognising the recurring threats that flood imposes to Fijian communities - a threat that is projected to worsen due to the effects of climate change, the Fijian Government established the Ministry of Waterways with the responsibility to improve stormwater management, mitigating flooding, improve mitigation and manage draining system in Fiji. This was further consolidated into the Ministry of Waterways and Environment in 2018. Honourable Speaker, this demonstrates Government's commitment to ensure environmental sustainability and resilient communities by reducing chronic vulnerability of these communities to disasters.

I congratulate the Ministry on launching the Strategic Plan and website last week. The Strategic Plan shall guide the Ministry in its service delivery.

Honourable Speaker, the establishment of the Ministry of Waterways and Environment, specifically the Department of Waterways, particularly in an era of increasing climate uncertainty provides for mainstreaming of waterways management, strategies, amongst other policies such as disaster-risk reduction and climate change policies in ensuring resilient and thriving future for our people and ecosystem. It is important that we understand and manage these risks now and implement the necessary intervention to better our adaptive capacity, rather than laminating on the economic loss during floods.

Honourable Speaker, to understand the roles and activities of the Department of Waterways, it is important that we understand and appreciate the importance of waterways in our lives. Waterways are multifunctional assets providing multiple economic, social and environmental benefits. For centuries, our society has interacted with waterways. They are an integral part of our local environment on which we are historically dependent for food, shelter and basic survival.

It is rightly stated by scholars that waterways are arteries of our planet and we are all aware what happens when our arteries get clogged. Honourable Speaker, during inception, the Ministry of Waterways was allocated \$24.2 million, which was allocated to drainage and flood protection, watershed management activities, infill drainage for sugarcane farms and maintenance of irrigation system and drainage scheme.

Honourable Speaker, in the 2018-2019 Budget, \$55.7 million was allocated to the Department of Waterways for its operations, while the Ministry has carried out excellent work since its inception, it is important to note that we still have issues around drainage, floods and coastal erosions.

Honourable Speaker, while we kindly acknowledge the commitment of the Ministry of Waterways and Environment, it is keeping all Fijians safe through the provision of drainage, flood and coastal protection service. I kindly request the Honourable Minister of Waterways and

Environment to take us through the operations at the Department of Waterways, its achievements, challenges and intended future direction. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member, and I give the floor to the Minister responsible. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament, I thank the Honourable Member for asking this question. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Gavoka and Honourable Members from the other side understand very well that waterways is intrinsically linked to the lifestyle of Fijians.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, they must thank this Government and the Honourable Minister for Economy for establishing a dedicated Ministry to look after our waterways. For so long, our people have taken our waterways for granted. In those days, they did not realise that in some time day ahead, waterways could become a threat to the communities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if you go along Baulevu Road, you will see how the waterway there is threatening Baulevu Road, in Koronivia Road, you see how the Nakaikogo Primary School could be washed away. We have just approved a budget of about \$48,000 to do a riverbank protection.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am honoured to stand and speak about the achievements of the Ministry of Waterways and Environment, especially the Department of Waterways, for its accomplishment for the Fiscal Year 2018-2019.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I absolutely agree with the Honourable Maharaj that the nature of the water-related hazards are evolving as climate change alters the size and scope of these hazards and as such, it is essential that we keep pace with the quickening pulse of climate change, its impact on waterways and social and associated economic repercussions. I further concur that waterways play a very vital role in the lives of us, Fijians, and has vast importance in our tradition, customs and sustenance.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is important to reflect that Ministry of Waterways and Environment has been established by the Fijian Government in recognition that waterways management and preservation of Fiji's natural environment share many inherent linkages and more importantly, understand that Fiji's waterways, as part of our natural environment, are at the forefront due to the worsening impact of climate change.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me provide an insight into the operations of the Department of Waterways. By way of context, the operational functions of the Department are guided by the 5-Year and 20-Year National Development Plan (NDP), the National Adaptation Plan (NAP), the recently-launched Strategic Plan, the Drainage Act 2018, Irrigation Act 1973 and the 2013 Constitution of the Republic of Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to bring things into context, let me discuss our operations at the Department of Waterways and its synergies to national policies and plans. The Government of Fiji's 5-Year and 20-Year National Development Plan, with the vision, "Transforming Fiji", maps out the way forward for Fiji and all Fijians to realise its full potential as a nation. We, at the Ministry of Waterways, through our operations, provide the enabling environment to achieve this national ambition.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one may ask how the Department of Waterways and its operations come into play in the broader context of NDP and NAP. Let me explain, Mr. Speaker, Sir, if you look at the strategies outlined in the Hazard Management of the NAP, the Department of Waterways, in its

operations, is the key agency to deliver eight of the eleven of these interventions, as such we align our operations to achieve the implementation of these interventions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to take this opportunity to give insight into the operations at the Ministry of Waterways and Environment. The Budget for the Ministry of Waterways and Environment for the fiscal year 2018-2019 was \$69.9 million. The total budget for the Department of Waterways for the fiscal year 2018-2019 was \$55.7 million, comprising of \$4.2 million for Operating Expenditure, \$47.5 million for Capital Expenditure and VAT of \$4 million.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, when I walk out of this Parliament, I was stopped by Honourable Members on the other side asking me, “You know, we need to do this river bank protection for this village in Serua,” et cetera. Just now, the Honourable Saukuru stopped me and asked, “How about Vitogo River?”

Mr. Speaker, Sir, they are raising these issues now because these are issues which are affecting their communities. These are the issues that they feel that their community, villages and settlements are being threatened and this is the money that Government has allocated to deal with them, assist them and secure them.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Department of Waterways carried out under nine Programmes, namely:

1. Flood Protection Programme, which is a totally new programme.
2. Coastal Erosion Protection Works Programme, a totally new programme.
3. Watershed Management Programme, a totally new programme.
4. Maintenance of Drainage System for Non-Municipal Areas Programme. This was the dedicated public drainage system that used to be undertaken by the Land and Water Resources Management Programme which was under the Ministry of Agriculture before, and is the only old programme.
5. Drainage for Farmlands Programme, we did not have this allocation other than under the Ministry of Sugar. Now, we can do drainage for cassava farmers, *dalo* farmers, rice farmers, all those Non-Sugar Agriculture that can also be in field drainage, which was not done.
6. Maintenance of Drainage – Municipal Councils Programme. From two years ago when the Ministry was announced, we now provide dedicated money/grants to Municipal Councils to upkeep and maintain the drainage system.
7. Drainage for Rural Residential Areas Programme. A lot of villages are now being threatened by floodwaters and there was no specific dedicated allocation for that. Now, we have got this allocation. We have done a lot of drainage work, for example, in Galoa Village. Honourable Leawere had raised that issue a number of times with us. A number of villages in this area of Serua and Namosi, Sigatoka, Votua Village in Ba, we have done that as well.
8. Maintenance of Irrigation Schemes Programme, which is an existing programme under the Ministry of Waterways and Environment.
9. Irrigation Support for Farm Development Programme, a new Scheme.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the above Programmes are aligned to the strategic objective of the Department of Waterways which is, and I quote:

“Building Resilience to Climate Change and Waterways related Hazards through Irrigation, Improved Drainage, Flood Control, Riverbank and Coastal Protection.”

Now, allow me to highlight the results accomplished under the different Programmes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, waterways hazard, such as floods which now tend to occur with an increased frequency, duration and with increased magnitude are among the most widely cited expected impacts of climate change. So, this stems out that the number one impact of climate change would be through waterways.

I agree with Honourable Maharaj that climate change is water change and it is very important that we realise this. In Fiji, we have approximately 385 first-order streams or waterways with a total length of 4,540.40 kilometres. Managing these under certain climatic future is an enormous undertaking, however, we have to start with our efforts and that is what we have exactly done.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to address the flooding challenge posed by climate change, we need conscious strategic re-orientation of flood management practices and an integrated holistic approach to managing these challenges.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Waterways and Environment flood risks is alleviated through projects delivered under the Flood Protection Programme. This Programme allows for the provision of adequate infrastructure to mitigate the impacts of flooding on our communities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, briefly, the following projects were carried out in the 2018-2019 fiscal year - River Bank Protection of the Vunivau, Navua, Muaniwaqa River, Nadakuni River and Phase I and Phase II of the Sigatoka River Dredging. These and a number of other works are being undertaken currently in this fiscal year and as I have alluded to earlier on, we are ready, we have a vision, we have a strategy to secure and protect our communities, no matter where they are in Fiji. That is our vision, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are not just rolling the Government or rolling the Ministries, we are looking ahead and anticipating the challenges and problems, and we are ready. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister for his response and I now give the floor to the fourth Statement, the Honourable Lynda Tabuya to deliver her End of the Week Statement. You have the floor, Madam.

Porn Addiction by our Youth

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I rise to give my End of the Week Statement but before I do that, I wish all Honourable Members and the people of Fiji a very happy International Mother Language day, which is today. And it is a joy to hear the Honourable Attorney General say, “*Ahre yaar*”, it is actually quite refreshing to hear that today.

On that note, Honourable Speaker, I wish to beg your indulgence to speak in my mother language to express how we, the Opposition, feel about today.

Ni sa tiko saka na Turaga na Sipika, ni sa tiko saka nai Liuliu ni To ni Veisaqa, au via taura na gauna oqo me'u vakaraitaka na neitou duavata ena neitou marautaka na kena mai vakananumi tiko na noda vosa na i Taukei, oya na vosa vaka-Viti ena siga nikua. Vinaka vakalevu, Turaga na Sipika."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise to address the growing concern of porn addiction, especially in our youth in our country. Now, this is not only having a huge negative effect on the moral fabric of our beloved country, but new scientific studies have linked it to our worsening of crime and drug epidemic and in particular, the growing violence against women.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Pornography or porn is defined as the betrayal of sexual subject matter for the exclusive purpose of sexual arousal. It can be presented in a variety of media, such as books, magazines, photos, movies, videos and video games.

Now, porn, like cigarettes, were both regarded as harmless pastimes but just like the scientific studies linking cigarettes to cancer and other medical diseases, so too is more research on covering the shocking effects of porn on our society.

Porn Hub, the world's biggest porn site, released statistics that it has 92 million visits per day. Figures released in a *Fiji Times* article, stated that Fiji has been ranked in the top 10 countries in the world per capita in terms of the percentage searches for the word 'porn', according to figures compiled by Google Trends.

In the latest ranking on similar web.com which is a website that ranks the top 50 website hits in a country, in Fiji, out of the top 10 websites, three are porn sites. Now, Mr. Speaker, I would like to shed some light on how this porn epidemic in Fiji, especially amongst our children is having a catastrophic effect.

In a 2011 Research Paper on the effects of porn on children and titled, 'Points on the Harm of Porn on Children', states the following:

1. The average age of first internet exposure to pornography is 11, and this age is getting younger and younger all the time.
2. 90 percent of 8 year olds to 16 year olds who were viewing porn online admitted that it was done during homework time.
3. With over 90 percent of youth ages 12 years to 18 years using the internet, the media has arguably become the leading sex educator in the US today, instead of parents and school education programmes.

Pornography gives children unrealistic ideas about sex. Often that violence is appropriate and women are to be subjugated, and the opposite gender affecting their ability to develop healthy relationships. It becomes difficult to form intimate relationship beyond sexual arousal and pleasure.

Children exposed to pornography tend to engage in sexual acts at younger ages, resulting in increased teenage pregnancies and many other emotional consequences. Now, the truth is, Mr. Speaker,

this proliferation of porn is directly linked to increase cases of rape and sexual abuse and most importantly, suicide related to the release of revenge porn.

Research carried out in the United Kingdom by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty against Children recently conducted a survey of more than a thousand children aged 16 years to 18 years and found that, at least, over half had been exposed to online porn. Of this group, almost all or 94 percent have seen it by the age of 14 years.

Just a few months ago, there was an article in the *Fiji Sun* about a 7-year old boy being raped by a 14-year old boy and a 16-year old on two separate occasions. In the *Fiji Times* just this week, an investigation is underway and allegations of four boys who gang-raped a 15-year old girl in a maritime high school.

Honourable Speaker, in the 94 cases of rape by the High Courts in 2018, all the accused were male and the youngest accused was 11 years old and the oldest at 85 years of age. All the victims and survivors of the 94 cases were female, with the youngest being a six-month old baby and the oldest survivor or victim, a 71 year old woman. The average age of the accused was at least 39 years old and the average age of victim survivors at 14 years old.

In the latest DPP rape and sexual offence statistics for January 2020, 18 people were charged with a total of 46 counts of separate incidents. Out of that: rape was 28; attempted rape - 4; indecent assault - 3; sexual assault - 11; and of those 11 people, two were juveniles.

Another in-depth 2017 Report titled, 'How Consuming Porn Can Lead to Violence', shares extensive insight on this and please, allow me to directly quote and share its findings in the House today:

“At the heart of it, porn is mostly about the violent domineering power of male sexuality. It usually portrays the men as powerful and in charge while women are submissive and obedient. It becomes normal for women to be dehumanised and subdued with research confirming that those that consume porn, even non-violent are more likely to support statements that promote, abuse and sexual aggression towards women and girls. But porn does not just change attitudes, it can also shape actions. Study after study is shown that consumers of violent and non-violent porn are more likely to use verbal coercion, drugs and alcohol to coerce individuals into sex. And multiple studies have found that exposure to both violent and non-violent porn increases aggressive behaviour including both having violent fantasies and actually committing violent assaults.”

In 2016, a team of leading researchers compiled all the research they could find on the subject. After examining 22 studies, they concluded, and I quote:

“The research left little doubt that on the average individuals who consume pornography more frequently are more likely to hold attitudes conducive to sexual aggression and engage in actual acts of sexual aggression.”

Now, if you are wondering how sitting in a chair consuming porn can actually change what a person thinks and does, the answer goes back to how porn affects the brain. Our brains have what scientist call, “mirror neurons”, brain cells that fire not only when we do things ourselves but also when we watch other people do things. This is why movies can make us cry or feel angry and scared. Essentially mirror neurons let us share the emotion of other people’s experiences as we watch.

So when a person is looking at porn, he or she naturally starts to respond to the emotions of the actors seen on the screen. As the consumer becomes aroused, his or her brain gets to work wiring together

those feelings of arousal to what is seen happening on the screen, almost as if he or she was actually having the experience. Now, to make matters worse, when porn shows victim of violence who seem to accept and enjoy being hurt, the viewer is sent the message that people like to be treated that way, giving porn consumers a sense that it is alright to act aggressively themselves.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to briefly highlight some policy solutions in combating the porn epidemic, and this policy efforts will complement the great work done by the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre and the Ministry of Women in addressing sexual violence.

Porn block, is an ambitious attempt by the UK policy makers to restrict access to porn. There are countries in the Middle-East, as well as Cuba, China and parts of Africa, that have either completely or partially banned pornography. Raising awareness now with any social-ills, such as drugs awareness campaigns must be launched to inform the public about the dangers of porn addiction.

To this end, on 28th January, 2020, a group of concerned citizens (mostly parents), launched the "Fiji Free from Porn Campaign", which is to raise awareness in Fiji on the harms of porn. It is not an NGO, it is a movement which is open to any concerned citizen to join on *Facebook*. They are working with school principals on better education in the schools and also equipping parents with resources to help their children. We hope to have easier access to schools in the future.

We are also working with churches, youth groups and sports clubs, who have sent invites for presentation. At this time, I wish to thank Latisha Shelton, my dear friend and champion, who is not an outsider, she attended Adi Cakobau School for a year and she is an Old Girl; Naca Tiko; Esther Karanavatu; Marjorie Whippy and Anare Tavu, who were spearheading this campaign. After posting on my *Facebook* page a short video on the harmful effects of porn, there have been 81,000 views and there has been overwhelming support from all over Fiji and many invites to speak on this issue, that the team is already busy.

Now, Honourable Speaker, I lost about 20 voters because of this cause but it is worth it. I just want to tell the Honourable Minister for Health and the Honourable Minister for Women, it is not always about gaining likes, Honourable Speaker, the availability and proliferation of porn and drugs is just one of the many contributing factors to the rise of sexual violence in this county. It will need the concerted effort of all - the Government, non-Government, community leaders and parents. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member for the End of the Week Statement and I now give the floor to the Minister responsible. You have the floor, Madam.

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I thank the Honourable Member for her End of Week Statement.

Let me begin by saying, I am no defender of pornography, but Honourable Tabuya and I disagree seriously about how we get there. I believe that porn is bad as most of us would like to think that porn is bad and 'bad' is too mild a word. Porn is destructive, it is vile and it absolutely should never fall into the hands of children. I believe we can create a Fijian society where men and women can enjoy safe and healthy relationships in the real world and do not find sexual satisfaction online.

On her *Facebook* page, Honourable Tabuya says it is smart policy for the Government to regulate internet and institute a porn block. In fact, I would like to quote her, she says, "the porn block is an ambitious attempt by the United Kingdom policymakers to restrict access to pornographic websites by under-age children". She failed to say, Honourable Speaker, that this attempt by the UK Government in

2017 has been delayed indefinitely in 2019 - a statement made by the UK Government because of the various challenges that surround porn block. Let us shed some facts on that issue for a porn block.

The experiences of other nations who have tried the same teach us that pornography bans are virtually impossible to implement. There has been a lot of talk about the sources, Honourable Tabuya claims, reaffirmed her position. Well, there are only three key internet service providers in Fiji and all three (Vodafone, Digicel and Telecom Fiji Limited) have written to the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Communications confirming they have had zero communication with Honourable Tabuya on this subject, nor have they disclosed any statistics to her or anyone else.

In fact, Honourable Speaker, the three telecommunication companies reaffirmed this position on mainstream media yesterday. I do not know who she thinks she has been talking to but we actually have spoken to these telecommunication companies and they have explained to us in great detail the many easy ways anyone can circumvent an internet ban.

We would also need to come up with a firm definition of what constitutes a pornographic video or image. Otherwise, decades-old photos showing bare-breasted indigenous women would only be wiped from our history books, but classified as illegal. Intimate photos or home videos shared between couples could also land them in legal peril. And even if you could block the many millions of sites hosting x-rated material, with new ones popping up every hour, this does not even begin to consider social media and private messaging applications.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, even if Fiji were to implement any type of ban on pornography, those resources would go to waste with just a few clicks of the mouse on any computer or smartphone with access to the internet. In just five minutes, a person can download a Virtual Private Network (VPN) to change their IP address to another country and avoid a Fijian internet block.

To implement such a ban, would be to throw away money straight down the drain, all to delay a would-be viewer the five minutes it takes to find a way around the restrictions and access one of the literally millions of pornographic websites online.

Banning pornography would yield for us three scenarios:

1. Creation of an illicit market - when we prohibit the access to a commodity by the whims of passing a law, there is definitely going to be a set of people who would like to capitalise the opportunity and try to run an illegal system.
2. Further solidifies our already traditional perception that sex is a taboo, so every time a young girl gets caught having sex, she is beaten up by her brothers or has hair shaved off by her parents to shame her.
3. Rise in subscriptions to VPN.

So what is next, Honourable Tabuya?

With so many loopholes to avoiding a ban, would Fiji then criminalise the consumption of pornography? Would you propose locking up any of your supporters who watch in the privacy of their homes? I think not!

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Honourable Tabuya has also claimed that pornography is linked with sexual violence. Again, let us look at the facts. Norway, Finland, Switzerland, Denmark and Iceland are routinely ranked as some of the safest places to be, for a woman, in the world. None of these countries

have banned internet pornography. On the other hand, take a nation like Egypt, despite an official decision to ban pornography in 2009, in 2013, 99 percent of Egyptian women reported they had been sexually harassed, and that is the data provided by UN Women, a source we know actually exists.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, not only would Honourable Tabuya's proposed pornography ban fail, her reasoning is totally off-base, and I think she already knows that. She knows that Fijian women have been sexually abused...

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- ...long before anyone in Fiji gained access to the internet. She knows that the root cause of sexual violence in Fijian society has always been a deep-seated patriarchal mentality that sees women inherently as less than men in their homes and communities.

But, Mr. Speaker, she and the other female Members of the Opposition also know that they have an appalling record when it comes to advocating for victims of domestic violence. She knows the nation remembers shameful sights when Honourable Bulitavu made his racist and backward claims about victims of domestic abuse in Fiji.

Now, she is looking for any cause, no matter how unrealistic she can take up to erase that stain on her political career. To those who share my genuine concern about pornography and violence against women, join me and our Honourable Prime Minister is pursuing a real solution, a solution that starts with the values we teach young Fijians, truly freeing Fiji from porn.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- It begins with instilling in our young people, good character. Let us teach our sons to respect girls, to see them as equals and to support their dreams.

The Honourable Tabuya has very articulately produced the statistics provided by the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) and on that note, I would like to thank the DPP's Office for the monthly statistics that they produce in relation to sexual offences. We keep an eye out for those statistics every month, Honourable Speaker, and if you look at the statistics, it proves and shows that the programmes that the Government had put in place for domestic violence - the strong laws, is truly working, and I thank the DPP's Office in this regards.

The society that our children live in includes the rise of new media in which objectifying and sexualised imagery of women is commonplace. Our children can access pornography before their first sexual experience and this may be their only or primary source of information on sexuality and sexual relationships. This may influence behaviours, as well as attitudes and norms. Let us start with educating our own children about comprehensive sexual education.

I believe that prevention and education work by parents in the comforts of their own homes, goes a long way in educating our children. Social media and other settings is a good start to develop our children's ability to critique such influences, and build their capacity to create healthy sexual identities and respectful, egalitarian, intimate relationship.

It is imperative that parents take the charge in monitoring our children's access to the internet. Let us break the silence and talk about sex with our sons and daughters. But also take the initiative to check your children's internet surfing history frequently and consistently. Go a step further and search online for free solutions to filter what our children can access to the internet. Check the applications that they have on their mobile phones. In a nutshell, let us take more parental responsibility in looking after our children and their wellbeing on the internet.

The Honourable Tabuya can also help lead that charge by challenging the backwards, patriarchal mentalities that dominate her Party. In the meantime, I ask she leave her fake sources in "Lynda-Land", where facts do not matter and coronavirus blows in the southeast trade winds. Please, join us back in reality, where this side of the House is striving to make real, positive progress for the women and children in this country. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I call on the Minister for Fisheries, the Honourable Semi Koroilavesau, to move his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

ADJOURNMENT

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move:

That Parliament adjourns until Monday, 16th March, 2020, at 9.30 a.m.

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

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I thank you all for your participation and contributions during the parliamentary proceedings in the course of this sitting period.

Honourable Members, I now declare that Parliament adjourns until Monday, 16th March, 2020 at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.19 p.m.