

THURSDAY, 12TH FEBRUARY, 2015

The Parliament resumed at 9.30 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

MADAM SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Members were present, except the honourable Col. I.B. Seruiratu; the honourable A.A. Maharaj; and the honourable Ratu V.M. Tagivetaua.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Secretary-General

SECRETARY-GENERAL.- Confirmation of Minutes

MADAM SPEAKER. - Leader of the Government in Parliament

POINT OF ORDER

Clarifications on *Fiji Times* Report

HON. J.D. DULAKIVERA.- Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order under Standing Order 31(5). In yesterday's proceeding Madam Speaker, the honourable Sayed-Khaiyum, Minister for Finance, Public Enterprises, Public Service, Communications and Justice and Attorney-General, when questioned whether the Government will revoke the licence for the casino development by the One Hundred Sands Limited, given they have failed to comply with contract conditions, he replied and informed Parliament, the licence was in fact, revoked on Monday.

In today's *Fiji Times*, Madam Speaker...

HON. DR. M. REDDY. - Oh, not the *Fiji Times*!

HON. J.D. DULAKIVERATA.- ...I just want some clarifications Madam Speaker. In today's *Fiji Times*, on page 3, can I read Madam Speaker:

“WHILE the State yesterday confirmed it had revoked the licence of casino development One Hundred Sands, the company maintained it still held the exclusive licence to construct and operate Fiji's first-ever casino.”

I just want some clarification on the issue, Madam Speaker.

HON. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Madam Speaker, I thank the honourable Member for his intervention. I fail to see the issue here really, despite the statement that he has made but nevertheless, the honourable Minister is yet to arrive and I am sure, when he arrives that he will have the opportunity to make a statement with regards to the point of order.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you, we will do that. We will go on with the agenda for today and I call on the leader of the Government in Parliament.

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held yesterday, Wednesday, 11th February, 2015, as previously circulated be taken as read and be confirmed. I thank you Madam Speaker.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to unanimously.

COMMUNICATION FROM THE CHAIR

Acknowledgment of Visitors

MADAM SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I welcome you all to yet another sitting of this august Parliament. I also welcome our visitors in the public gallery and I hope that you will enjoy and appreciate the rather vibrant and robust discussion in the House, especially during question time.

Conduct and Behaviour of Members in Parliament

On another note, I wish to bring to the honourable Members' attention a few housekeeping matters. When speaking, you must always address remarks through the Chair. The speeches must be in English, and please this is based on the experience of yesterday. There should be no pointing at each other whilst making speeches, or interjecting, and I will no longer tolerate elements of personal attacks which is clearly becoming very un-parliamentary, and proper conduct and behaviour must be observed in the Chamber at all times.

Lastly, I would expect that if I give a ruling on a matter, that honourable Members comply with it. Any Member who does not comply with the direction from the Chair, could find themselves ordered to withdraw from the Chamber under Standing Order 75.

I ask honourable Members to observe the rules, which are laid out in the Standing Orders, so that we can all ensure order and decorum in our august House.

Clarification on Passage of Bills

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- I rise on a point of order, Madam Speaker and that is to do with your statement that you have just made regarding the procedures and orderly behaviour of Parliament.

Madam Speaker, I seek clarifications on the passage of the two Bills that were passed yesterday. We have no objections regarding Standing Order 51, but it is just the passage, when it comes to the second reading and beyond. Are we fully taking away the opportunity to go into Committee and take clause by clause observations of the Bill that are before us, Madam Speaker?

Madam Speaker, I understand that that has been the practice in the past and since you have been highlighting the observance of proper procedures, we are seeking clarification on this as to whether the

short circuiting or kicking in of Standing Order 51, we do not have any problems with that, Madam Speaker. It is just the passage from second reading and onwards, Madam Speaker - the stage by stage observation or clause by clause, et cetera, as depicted in the normal passage of Bills in the Standing Orders. That is all that we are seeking clarification on.

Madam Speaker, the other issue would be the gazetting notice of the respective Bills. We have noticed that very short time is now being carried out by the Government of the Day, in just having two days to be gazetted, under Standing Order 85. In the past, it used to be 30 days for normal gazetting.

Those are some of the issues that we seek clarifications on, regarding your instructions on proper procedures to be observed, Madam Speaker, Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you. I will respond to both issues today but at a later time, but thank you for bringing that up.

Urgent Oral Question

MADAM SPEAKER.- I will continue with my Communications this morning. I received an urgent oral question in my Office, but I have rejected the question on the grounds that it has not complied with the provisions of Standing Order 44, in particular Clause 11, Clause 2, and I quote:

“A question may not refer to a debate that has occurred or answer that has been given within the previous six months.”

May I, therefore, remind honourable Members to please ensure that provisions relating to questions in the Standing Orders are complied with before submitting questions. Thank you.

We will move on to the next item in the Order Paper.

PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

Referendum – Fiji flag

HON. V.R GAVOKA.- Thank you Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, colleagues, in accordance with Standing Order 37, I respectfully lay before Parliament today a petition signed by approximately 1,500 Fiji citizens, demanding that this august Chamber consult the people via referendum before any changes to the flag are effected.

Those undersigned also have left comments for all the Members of Parliament, detailing why they feel this issue needs to be dealt with appropriately, and why far-reaching consultations are critical.

The citizens in this petition, including myself and Members of the Opposition, in seeking truly bipartisan approach that will engage voters and taxpayers on whether they want a new flag, and prepare the nation for a concerted effort in owning this proposal. The signatories come from all walks of life: rugby players, British Army officers, tertiary students, high school students, market vendors, civil servants, artists, lawyers and doctors.

My petition is as follows:

“That the Parliament request the honourable Speaker to appoint and convene a relevant committee within seven days, they will then report to the Parliament within 14 days of it being convened on a process and an approach to holding a referendum by June 2015.”

MADAM SPEAKER,- Thank you, please hand the petition to the Secretary General.

Under Standing Order 37, I refer this petition to the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights.

Preservation of Shirley Park, Lautoka

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, I stand to address you and before this Chamber under Standing Order 37, and in accordance with that Standing Order, I confirm that the requirements have been met and certified on the petition that I hold here, and as well I also wish an opportunity to speak on this petition before I ask your leave to table.

Madam Speaker, the petition that I am going to present is about Shirley Park in Lautoka. The prayer that is requested in this petition is for this Parliament by the committee that this will be presented to, to look at very closely with maturity the need to preserve Shirley Park.

The problem that we have with this, as we have with others, is the overbearing influence and exertive of the commercial business ventures on decision making. That has been happening in the case of Shirley Park, to the extent that the process for the re-zoning is clearly influenced by the need of these commercial people, and that clouds the decision making. That is the very reason for this.

This petition is submitted by over 500 residents of Lautoka, ordinary people and it goes right across the section of the community. The very ordinary people, many of those do not have a say, or do not even have money to take up their grievances to the authorities. Not only that, a lot of these people who are written here are FijiFirst supporters and they have taken up their cries to the fathers of Lautoka, as well as to the relevant authorities but to no avail. No one has listened to them and the need is for Shirley Park to be preserved.

Shirley Park, Madam Speaker, is very unique, it is not like Sukuna Park, where the traffic goes it and there is too much noise. The uniqueness of Shirley Park is that it abuts the shore line and that is the reason why it has been influenced or it has been targeted by commercial people. And by this Madam Speaker, and I wish to refer this Chamber to a very good article in the *Fiji Times* about the need to preserve our environment, and in that too there are references there for the honourable Minister. It is quoted here that the honourable Minister has not allowed the 500 petitioners to be heard because they have not fulfilled some kind of requirements. There is also evidence that the decision-making process has been stifled with.

Last week, on the 19th of January, a protestor was told by one of the developers, his name is Romit Meighi who says that he has been told by the relevant authorities to go ahead with development, to bring his machinery even before the public consultation process is being made. That is a reason for a Judicial Review to go to court, but why the need to go to court when you can preserve this very important landmark in Lautoka.

With those words Madam Speaker, I wish to tender this and table it.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you, please hand the petition to the Secretary General.

Under Standing Order 37, I refer this petition to the Standing Committee on Natural Resources.

I also refer a petition that was presented to Parliament on 10th of December, 2014 to the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs.

Now, that the honourable Attorney General is in, can I ask the honourable Member to repeat your point of order which will be responded to by the honourable Minister.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Point of order Madam Speaker, I would just like to reiterate the issue about the reference to a Standing Order that my good friend, the honourable Member with regards to his point that he is addressing with the honourable Attorney General. Perhaps if he amplifies on that, then it would give it some relevance. Obviously right now, I do not see the relevance of it.

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- Thank you Madam Speaker, I just want to repeat the Point of Order 31 (5) in yesterday's proceedings, as appeared on page 746 of the *Uncorrected Copy of the Daily Hansard* dated 11th February, 2015. The honourable Sayed-Khaiyum, Minister for Finance, Public Enterprise, Public Service and Communications and Justice, when questioned whether the Government will revoke the licence for the casino development by the One Hundred Sands Limited, given they had failed to comply with the contract condition.

He replied, Madam Speaker, that the licence was in fact revoked on Monday. Contrary to that, Madam Speaker, on page 3 of today's *Fiji Times*, there is a report by Nasik Swami and Repeka Nasiko, and I quote "while the State yesterday confirmed it had revoked the license of casino developers One Hundred Sands, the company maintained it still held the exclusive licence to construct and operate Fiji's first ever casino". We just want some clarification on the correctness of the statement yesterday.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you, my ruling is this that the point of order really should refer to procedural matters of Parliament. The issue can be brought up on a question at a later date, if you wish to pursue the matter.

PAPERS LAID ON THE TABLE

Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji – 2013 Annual Report
(*Parliamentary Paper No. 10 of 2015*)

Office of the Prime Minister – Annual Report 2013
(*Parliamentary Paper No. 12 of 2015*)

Referral of Reports to Standing Committees

MADAM SPEAKER.- Under Standing Order 38(2), I refer the Marine Safety Authority of Fiji – 2013 Annual Report to the Standing Committee on Natural Resources.

Also, under Standing Order 38(2), I refer the Office of the Prime Minister – Annual Report 2013 to the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights.

QUESTIONS & REPLIESOral QuestionsConduct of Municipal Elections
(Question No. 22/2015)

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

Would the honourable Minister for Local Government, Housing and Environment inform Parliament as to when Local Government Elections in our municipalities will be conducted, as announced by him after his swearing in as a Minister on 24th September, 2014?

HON. P. KUMAR (Minister for Local Government, Housing and Environment).- Madam Speaker, I also thank the honourable Member for raising this issue, as it allows me to explain the Government's plan for the municipal council elections.

Madam Speaker, in my statement on 24th September, 2014, I had highlighted that the elections for municipal councils would be one of my priorities. There are so many priorities under my Ministry, and municipal election is one of them.

Madam Speaker, to answer the honourable Member, municipal council elections will only be held once we review and reform our Local Government Act, and my friend knows very well that the Act that we have is an outdated one.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.-Five years.

HON. P. BALA.-It is a 1972 Act. I have always branded it as a "Hurricane *Bebe* Act". You all were part of that government and when we had raised this with the successive governments to please amend this Local Government Act, no one heard and I am happy to inform that this Government will review and reform ...

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

HON. P. KUMAR.- ... the Local Government Act.

Madam Speaker, the focus of review and reform process will be to improve the governance and service delivery of municipal councils and to enhance the Local Government process in Fiji. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.-A supplementary question, Madam Speaker. We understand the priorities of the honourable Minister in question, and as a matter of priority, the question is basically asking, if the honourable Minister could give a timeline of when the Local Government elections will take place. It is simple question of timeline – when? If it is a review, is it two or three years?

HON. P. KUMAR.- It might be simple for you but not for us.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- (Chorus of interjections)

HON. P. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker, there is a process to follow, and I do not want to lie to this august Parliament, unlike others.

(Laughter)

There is a process to be followed, and there has to be a wider consultation.

HON. ROKO T.T.S. DRAUNIDALO.- Decorum.

HON. P. KUMAR.- It is not only one or two entities. I am surprised that these people are rushing to it. These are the same people who are asking for commission, the time – what is all happening in this Parliament, Madam Speaker?

To answer the honourable Member, I just want to say, Madam Speaker, that there is a process that will be followed and we will also invite the Opposition members to make submissions.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, a supplementary question. I wish to say that we will be failing in our duty to the community, if we did not conduct this election, as soon as possible ...

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Hear, hear!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- ... within three months. The reason for that is accountability, transparency - the whole democratic process, and the question is this,....

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, a point of order. He needs to ask a question, not a statement Madam Speaker, Thank you

MADAM SPEAKER.- And your question, please honourable Member.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- You need a statement before you have the question. The question is this: in the meantime (because this can take five years), how can we assure the people of the accountability of their representation that they need to be accountable for? What measures do you have to ensure this in the meantime – the democratic process?

MADAM SPEAKER.- That is the question.

HON. P. KUMAR.- Really, I do not need to answer that, because I have already answered that the election will only be conducted after the review and reform of the Local Government Act.

HON. DR. B.C. PRASAD.- Then give us a timeline?

HON. P. KUMAR.- No committee will be set up now, so how can I give them the timeline.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- How do we write our notes?

HON. P. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker, just to answer honourable Dr. Biman Prasad. Most of the time, he says that I am confused...

HON. S.V RADRODRO.- Madam Speaker, I would like to acknowledge the response from the honourable Minister in terms of the review of the legislation. May I ask the honourable Minister, as to

how will you contextualise the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), in terms of women's participation in the local government?

MADAM SPEAKER.- I will make a ruling on that supplementary question. It is irrelevant to the initial question. I will therefore, not be asking for a response to that question. We will now move on to the second oral question and i invite the honourable Prem Singh to ask his question.

Elections – Sugar Cane Growers Council
(Question No. 23/2015)

HON. P. SINGH asked the Government upon notice:

Would the honourable Prime Minister and Sugar inform this Parliament as to when elections will be held for the Sugar Cane Growers Council so that cane farmers have a democratically elected voice, directly representing their interests?

HON. REAR ADMIRAL (RET'D) J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Madam Speaker, in short, I think I have discussed this in my Ministerial Statement yesterday, there is currently no plan to hold elections for the Sugar Cane Growers Council.

Madam Speaker, as I also stated in my statement yesterday, the fact that no representations have been made by the growers to convene a new election, and they know the reason why. Why would they want to pay more to support 38 councillors and who would spend more time boxing, sparring with each other than looking after their interests?

Madam Speaker, the administrative arm of the Sugar Cane Growers Council, as I also stated yesterday, continues to exist and provides regular assistance to growers. And as I said yesterday, we believe that the Council should exist to serve their best interests and not those of a select few.

So I repeat, Madam Speaker, there is no plan in the future to hold elections for the Sugar Cane Growers Council.

HON. P. SINGH.- Supplementary question, Madam Speaker. Will the honourable Prime Minister confirm that the administrative arm of the Sugar Cane Growers Council is being funded by the growers themselves, and if so, how much are they paying?

HON. REAR ADMIRAL (RET'D) J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- I apologise, Madam Speaker, I do not have the particulars right now. I can furnish the facts to this august Chamber later on.

MADAM SPEAKER.- That question requires some facts and that will be supplied later on.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I wish to ask the same question because I know, once we move to democracy, it follows - we have elections, et cetera, to ensure the same process of accountability. The honourable Prime Minister said that they have no plans, why are there no plans? Secondly, how do you account for the concerns of the representative people, who are the sugarcane farmers; how do you address their concerns?

MADAM SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, in my opinion, the question has been adequately answered.

Details of the Proposed RFMF Restructure
(Question No. 24/2015)

HON. RATU I.D. TIKOCA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Minister for Defence, National Security and Immigration inform Parliament on the details of the proposed restructure of the RFMF, and confirm whether this is based on expansion of the RFMF's military and intelligence capabilities? HON. CAPT. T.L. NATUVA (Minister for Defence, National Security and Immigration).- Madam Speaker, honourable Prime Minister, honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Leader of the National Federation Party, honourable members, I would like to go back a little bit.

Madam Speaker, at this moment, we have formed the Defence Review Committee in this country, formulating the National Security Strategy for Fiji, which is their first assignment. That should be completed in April this year, after being subjected through the National Security Forum which should be conducted on 20th February, 2015; the National Security Sector Reform Workshop from 24th to 26th February, 2015 and other consultations, including civil society and religious groups, before getting through to the National Security Council and for Cabinet approval.

The National Security Strategy will drive the formulation of the National Security Policy (NSP) which will determine, not the White Paper, but the Green Paper because it is not finalised yet, which include the Defence, Police and Immigration. The Green Paper of these three Departments will, of course, be subjected to the process of public consultation before it is presented to Parliament in September this year. This will include the due process of getting through the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence. The release of the Defence White Paper will then drive the formal and entire review of the RFMF according to the security environment.

At this point, the RFMF is currently conducting its internal restructure based on its immediate and priority needs. Some of the things that they are doing at the moment is to conform to the provision of the 2015 Budget, to:

- 1) reflect the current deployment of troops to task;
- 2) reflect the current level of peace support operations commitment;
- 3) the re-organisation of the Regular cadre of the Territorial Force in order to strengthen the Navy and the Engineers;
- 4) properly organise the voluminous RFMF rural development roles;
- 5) review the current manning level of the three RFMF Camps in Labasa, Nadi and Lautoka;
- 6) consider the relocation of the closed Radio Station 3DP from Togalevu Naval Training Base to the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) at Selbourne Street in compliance with the requirements and standard of the International Maritime Organisation;
- 7) strengthen the Hydrographic Unit in terms of funding and activities, and provision of a hydrographic vessel; and

- 8) to strengthen the Maritime Search and Rescue, to be in compliance with the requirement of the International Convention on Maritime Search and Rescue.

Madam Speaker, there is no reviewing of the RFMF intelligence capabilities but there is an emphasis on information analysis, in order to properly understand our strategic environment with regard to the trends out there in relation to transnational challenges, threats and other issues. The review will lead to the increase in the total strength of the Engineers Regiment and the RFMF Naval Division within. We will not recruit any more from outside due to the augmented rural development role and the maritime surveillance responsibilities.

HON. M. BULITAVU.- Madam Speaker, I thank the honourable Minister for Defence for his replies. My supplementary questions will be based on what he has answered in regards to the construction of the Camps. What is the timeline? When can the Black Rock development start?

HON. CAPT. T.L. NATUVA.- Madam Speaker, the Black Rock Project will take about three years to complete. The funding that was allocated this year was just enough to cover part of it, and there is a Master Plan being developed at the moment. We do not really know how much it will cost, but we are also seeking assistance from other countries for its development.

HON. RATU I.D. TIKOCA.- Madam Speaker, I thank the honourable Minister for his reply to the question. Madam Speaker, can the honourable Minister clarify and therefore, in the next three years, you will not be seeing any deployment at the Black Rock? You said it would take three years to complete that programme.

HON. CAPT. T.L. NATUVA.- Madam Speaker, the programme for Black Rock Project is in phases – Phase 1 to Phase 4, and I do not have information at the moment to tell you. However, I will furnish those information, if you want.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you, the information with regard to that supplementary question will be provided later on.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Madam Speaker, I have a supplementary question; in terms of the restructure and for any restructure, like the Civil Service, it clearly said that the Civil Service will be downsized to make it a leaner and more effective organisation. So, for the Military, are you going to downsize so that you can become more effective and efficient? Like the civil service is being proposes?

HON. J. USAMATE.- Madam Speaker, I want to reiterate the point that you made this morning, that any questions or comments made, need to be directed to the Chair. We have a propensity by honourable Members on the other side, who keep directing their questions directly to the Member to whom they want to answer. I think that is something that we need to maintain, that all communications needs to be through the Chair.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I understand that in Standing Order 45, it says that a supplementary question or question tabled, the respective Minister has to provide an answer either orally or written. Thank you Madam Speaker.

HON. J. USAMATE.- I have not made the point that the Minister should not answer, the point that I am making, the Standing Orders say, as I am doing now, that all communications need be communicated through the Chair, which means that you should look at the Chair and you talk to the

Chair. It does not mean that you look at the Chair and then talk to the Member that you are referring to. That's the point that I was trying to highlight.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, that is very clear, and I am sure it is clearly illustrated in the Standing Orders as well. So, if you are addressing a Minister, you address the Minister or another Member through the Chair.

Waila City Development
(Question No. 25/2015)

HON. S.V. RADRODRO asked the Government, upon notice:

Would the honourable Minister for Local Government, Housing and Environment explain the status of the development of Waila City and confirm when the development is likely to be completed?

HON. P. KUMAR (Minister for Local Government, Housing and Environment).- Madam Speaker, I rise to respond to the question raised by the honourable Member and I thank him for his question.

The Housing Authority with its Development Partners from Malaysia, are the developers of the Waila City. The concept proposed is for an integrated development with an area of around 700 acres of freehold land. The parties have entered into a Master Service Agreement on 11th May, 2012. The project will accommodate a population of between 25,000 to 30,000.

Madam Speaker, the Authority and the contractor have concluded the final discussion with the functional requirement and performance specification relating to buildings. At best, the anticipated first draft plans are expected by May 2015. On the completion, Madam Speaker, it will only be determined when the first draft is submitted.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- A supplementary question, Madam Speaker, and 2012 was a long time ago and now it is 2015. The question that I wish to ask, Madam Speaker, is; given the credibility of this part of the Housing Authority, that was obtained from Malaysia or somewhere else, I do not know. What due diligence process did Housing Authority do to investigate the background of the person that we are dealing with here?

HON. P. KUMAR. – Madam Speaker, this Waila City is not a town or city like what we have; unplanned towns and cities. This will be a planned city, however, the honourable Member is talking about timeframe. The city will be on 700 acres of land. On the process Madam Speaker, the Housing Authority Board has resolved to enter into agreement with this Malaysian Company.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA. – We need a process to investigate this Malaysian; what is his background?

MADAM SPEAKER. – The question is being repeated and the Minister has already answered.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, he did not answer.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Madam Speaker, a supplementary question. Can the honourable Minister explain how these projects are going to be funded and how much is it? If it is a loan, where is the loan coming from; and what are the loan conditions?

HON. J. USAMATE. – A point of order, Madam Speaker. I think the first question is talking about timelines, and now we are talking about funding. These are completely different things.

MADAM SPEAKER. – The supplementary question is statistical in nature and the honourable Minister may provide the honourable Member with an answer at a later date or in writing.

Subsidised Electricity
(Question No. 26/2015)

HON. RATU S.V. NANOVO asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Infrastructure and Transport confirm to Parliament when will the Government intend to provide subsidised electricity as promised, and precisely explain how the system will be applied?

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA (Minister for Infrastructure and Transport). – Madam Speaker, I thank the honourable Member for his question, with regards to the issue of subsidised electricity.

Madam Speaker, at this juncture, I think I would like to reaffirm Government's commitment in trying to make the livelihood of our people more pleasant and giving them those level of assistance that will make their family lives more bearable and even more liveable. As such, I think the other side of the Chamber would agree with me that we would like to present and give to the people the best of our services. In that regard, the taxpayers' money are well spent for the best interest of our people.

Madam Speaker also, in addition to this, I think earlier on in the week, I had, through a similar question, had alluded to the benefits that had been given to our people through free water. The honourable Member for the leader of the NFP would say that it is subsidised water but definitely free, as I said, in terms of not having to pay for it. But here is another example, Madam Speaker, and I would like to clarify to Parliament today in answer to the question by the honourable Member, that with regards to subsidised electricity, in the 2015 Budget, Government has promised to increase the level of subsidy from 75 units to 85 units and additional 10 units.

Madam Speaker, this is to conformance with what we have promised to deliver and this is for the betterment of our people. In that light, this level of assistance will come into effect from January and then when our citizens will receive their electricity bill at the end of this month, they will note this level of subsidy increased within the electricity consumption. So, it is an increase from 75 to 85 units. Thank you Madam Speaker.

HON. A.T. VADEI. – A supplementary question, Madam Speaker. We have heard some good intentions by the Government on subsidies and free water. What we are worried about is the development that is taking place behind the scenes.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM. – What is the question?

HON. A.T. VADEI. – I am just explaining, I am coming to that.

(Laughter)

The changing of metres of the Water Authority and Electricity; what protection to the consumers that they are using certified meters as ancillary to these standards internationally.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA. - Madam Speaker, I had also alluded to this in one of my earlier answers on a similar matter, on the supplementary question raised by the honourable Member.

I said in my previous answer that when we have these changes, obviously we are trying to replace the system that has not been working, or has not been working too well due to the age, or when it was introduced into the system and it is not giving accurate readings. That is the reason for the change, and because it has been so long, cost grows over time but it is cost that is manageable, Madam Speaker, because we give subsidies in other areas that also considered these changes, whereby we have to introduce new things and they do definitely come at a cost.

In terms of certifications, we have international certification for the meters that we use. Every once in a while, consumers come up with their complaints about faulty meters and all these stuff, and this is normal. We have the Consumer Councils that deals with these and it relates to the Water Authority of Fiji that looks at these complaints. If the complaints are genuine, obviously we will come out to help. But, also at the same time, you know like lawyers when they take their oaths, sometimes people do lie and then we have to deal with them when that does happen.

HON. RATU I.D. TIKOCA.- Madam Speaker, another freebie not honoured!

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Hear! Hear!

HON. RATU I.D. TIKOCA.- Can you just refer this freebie to the promise of Christmas present, that you promised to the people of Wainibuka? Please, let the people know, another freebie never honoured.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Madam Speaker, I am perplexed to that supplementary question. Perhaps, the honourable Member would be more specific about his question.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Madam Speaker, a supplementary question. Can the honourable Minister provide to this august House a listing of all the beneficiaries of this electricity subsidy?

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you, honourable Member, I think the supplementary question is going beyond the initial question.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Madam Speaker, I would be very happy to answer that question. Obviously, every domestic user in Fiji is entitled to this. It has taken up from 75 units to 85 units. I have relative numbers of that but in the best interest and for the sake of accuracy, that is a question that is better answered in a written form.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you.

HON. V. R. GAVOKA.- Madam Speaker, can I please ask a question on this?

MADAM SPEAKER.- In my opinion, that question has been adequately answered; subsidised electricity and how the system will be applied have been very clearly answered.

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

HON. DR. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, I rise to ask Question No. 27 of 2015, to the honourable Prime Minister.

Madam Speaker, I know the honourable Prime Minister did allude to this particular issue in his Ministerial Statement yesterday and the Prime Minister, Madam Speaker, I know in his heart and mind, knows that more than 70 per cent of the sugar cane farmers in this country who earn a net income of less than \$9,000 needed that cash grant. In that context, I would ask that question again that I think the honourable Prime Minister did answered.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, there is a point of order.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- No, Madam Speaker, the moment has lapsed because the honourable Member did not stop when I stood up. The point I was going to make, Madam Speaker, is that, these questions have actually been stipulated here, and as all the other honourable Members from the other side of the House have done, they have simply read out the question that has been written. The honourable Biman Prasad did not do that, he started off with a statement. That was my point of order.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you, the point of order is taken. Please, read the question as is on the Order Paper.

HON. DR. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was only helping the Prime Minister.

Special Cane Payment - Refusal of Payment by FSC
(Question No. 27/2015)

HON. DR. B. PRASAD asked the Government, upon notice:

Could the honourable Prime Minister and Minister for Sugar inform this House on the following:

- (i) Why did the Fiji Sugar Corporation refuse to pay a Special Cane Payment by way of Advance to farmers in January this year, similar to arrangements at the beginning of previous years; and
- (ii) Why did the Prime Minister and Minister for Sugar not direct the FSC to make the Special Payment?

HON. REAR ADMIRAL (RET'D) J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Madam Speaker, as I said in my statement yesterday, the Fiji Sugar Corporation is a corporate entity of its own. It has its own governance structure, its own management and its own Board. The Corporation makes its own decision based on economic, financial and governance fundamentals that they are used with. As I said yesterday, in my statement, not all cane farmers required such payment, only a handful of these have been assisted through the assistance provided by the Cane Growers Fund. That is the answer to the first question.

My answer to the second question "why did the Prime Minister and Minister for Sugar not direct the FSC to make the Special Payment" is exactly for the same reason. Again, I found no justification in directing the FSC in making the special cane payment. I was satisfied with the arrangement FSC made with the Cane Growers Fund, to give loans to those farmers needing assistance, in the absence of

a special cane payment. I was also satisfied, Madam Speaker, with the explanation that any special payment would have eroded or eaten away funds which growers would normally get to assist with cane planting during the cane planting season in March, April and May this year.

Those are the answers I have prepared for the honourable Member.

HON. P. SINGH.- Madam Speaker, a supplementary question; the advance to farmers is an advance of their own money. They have sold the cane to the FSC and all they are asking is advance. As the honourable Prime Minister has referred that if the Sugar Cane Growers Council or the Sugar Cane Growers Fund which advances money, they come with a cost, the cost is in the form of interest. Why should the farmers and the growers pay interest from their own moneys? That is my question.

HON. REAR ADMIRAL (RET'D) J.V. BAINIMARAMA. - Madam Speaker, I have just said that the cane crushing season is coming in the next couple of months and they will need those funds then. We really do not want to get them short changed when the crushing season comes around, even though it is their money.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I wish to ask a supplementary question, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Yes, honourable Member.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- The honourable Prime Minister has stated that only a handful of farmers were affected. Could he explain the reason why these handful of farmers were refused payment and why did he not direct FSC to make payment to this group?

HON. REAR ADMIRAL (RET'D) J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Madam Speaker, I have already stated the reason why I did not direct FSC.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- To the handful of farmers; they have denied.

HON. P. SINGH.- Madam Speaker, just a point of clarification from the honourable Prime Minister.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, you had your turn.

HON. P. SINGH.- This is in response to my supplementary question where the honourable Prime Minister said that the farmers do not need the money now, they will need it at a later stage during the cane harvesting; is that correct? Is that what the honourable Prime Minister was alluding to?

HON. REAR ADMIRAL (RET'D) J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Madam Speaker, majority of them don't need the funds now. Do you want the numbers?

HON. P. SINGH.- Yes.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Yes.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you, we will now move on to the next item on the Order Paper.

Written QuestionVillages/Settlements for Rural Electrification (2012-2014)
(Question No. 28/2015)

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

Would the honourable Minister for Infrastructure and Transport inform this House of the names of the villages/settlements that had submitted their 10 per cent contribution for Rural Electrification from 2012-2014, and state which of these villages/settlements the Ministry has completed the Rural Electrification for?

HON. P. TIKODUADUA (Minister for Infrastructure and Transport).- Madam Speaker, I thank the honourable Member for his question. Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 45(3), I would like to inform you and the House and the honourable member that I will table the answers to this question within the time that is allowable within the Standing Orders. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you, honourable Minister. That brings us to the end of question time and I thank the honourable Members for your contributions.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS

MADAM SPEAKER.-Honourable Members, the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport; the Minister for Industry, Trade and Tourism; the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Environment; and the honourable and learned Attorney-General and Minister for Justice, Minister of Finance, Public Enterprises, Public Service and Communications have informed me that they wish to make Ministerial Statements under Standing Order 40. Each Minister may speak up to 20 minutes, and I will then invite the honourable Leader of the Opposition and the honourable Leader of the Fiji National Federation Party to speak on the statements for no more than five minutes, or they may designate another Member of their party. There will be no other debates.

I will now give the floor to the honourable Minister for Infrastructure and Transport to make his statement.

Transition of the Department of Roads to the Fiji Roads Authority

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Madam Speaker, I thank you for this opportunity and I rise to address this august Parliament, and to inform honourable Members on the transition of the Department of Roads to the Fiji Roads Authority (FRA). However, before I begin, it would be prudent of me not to take you on a time travel, as to the reasons why we had to undertake this change.

Madam Speaker, in the latter part of 2011 when the Government created the FRA, we started the journey to give back to the people of Fiji, better and safer roads. At that stage, Fiji's roads were in dire conditions, as a result of years of under investment, neglect to some extent, questionable management practices and levels of expertise. Simply put Madam Speaker, the Fijian people were demanding whether Fiji was getting the value for the taxpayers' dollar.

While the Government had invested in sealing the last section of the Kings Road and the construction of two new bridges, the existing roads were falling more and more rapidly into disrepair.

Our resealing programmes were questionable, with our high rainfall, we still continued to construct and maintain our roads during these periods which resulted in rapid generation of potholes and road infrastructure failures every time it rained.

There was a similar story on unsealed roads, where re-gravelling was infrequent and when it was done, it was often with the wrong material. Heavy rain made key routes to Nabouwalu, Buca Bay and on the Rewa Delta quickly impassable every time it rained. Many bus companies were fed up of complaining about impassable roads because nothing happened.

The drive to Nadi from Suva took 30 minutes longer than it does today, as drivers dodged potholes, the size of *lovo* pits. Surprisingly, there were even potholes on the speed bumps.

It was not so long ago that we cannot remember potholes being filled with red gravel that was compacted by a Fijian gumboots. These repairs would fail again later the same day.

A good number of street light networks had been held together for too long with dangerous repairs. Some of it was well beyond its best before date, in which some dodgy fixes were undertaken just to keep it going for the little light it provided. We can all see the street lights that do little more than light up the top of the pole they are fixed to.

Taxi drivers suffered frequent high repair costs, one bus company said it was repairing more than 10 sets of shock absorbers each week. These companies were quite reluctant to invest in new cars and buses, hence this cost or fear in the low return of investment trickled to the quality of services provided to the 85 per cent of travellers, who did not own a vehicle. Let alone even private vehicle owners also had their fair share of this same dilemma.

The management of roads was split between the DNR, poorly funded town and city councils, the Ministry of Provincial Development, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests and the Fiji Sugar Corporation. At times, it was difficult for people to know who should be responsible for a particular road and who to call if you had a problem.

Madam Speaker, the DNR did not have enough professional engineers. The ones who were there, were stretched too thin to effectively manage the networks. Emigration of skilled and experienced engineers also meant that many of the staff lacked the experience and training, needed to manage a difficult network. While engineers were in short supply all around the world, Fiji was no different, however, we failed to do the right thing to make sure that we had the right skills to manage our road network.

Similarly, the professionalism to drive accountability expected from DNR and its 1800 staff were questionable. No meaningful performance targets that related to the service to be delivered, no real measures of success (apart from spending the budget) and most importantly, there were no sanctions if things were not done right.

Madam Speaker, today we see the legacy of this lack of accountability. Roads that were supposed to last 20 years were falling apart after less than five years. Bridges that should have been standing for 50 to 100 years but rather lasting only 10 years because of inferior materials being used in the construction. Short-term thinking that gave us cheap solutions, like the Yasawa-i-Rara jetty, collapsed in the first big storm that came along after it was built.

To top it off, Madam Speaker, those in the DNR knew that the transition was going to happen, however, no one took ownership of making that change because of the fear of disturbing their comfort zones. There was too much short-term thinking, resistant to adopting a professional approach, and more importantly, being accountable to the people of Fiji.

Something had to be done and, Madam Speaker, this Government had the vision to see what was needed and the tenacity to make it happen.

Madam Speaker, having elaborated on the experiences of the past, Government realised the need to turn things around, we needed to act quickly. The evidence of the past had to be inherited and be made good. While this was not a new initiative, Government through the Peoples Charter for Change, Peace and Progress had already indicated this transition through public sector reform programmes.

Government took that bold step to intervene, but we did not want to put more money into a broken system. We needed to create a structure that drove accountability, was adaptable and could quickly respond to the increased work that was necessary. We needed to be consistent; consistent in our funding, consistent in our demands for quality and consistent in our payments. To make this happen, we needed a new professional road management organisation with access to the best in consulting and contracting.

Madam Speaker, this transition had also been reported in the past reports by the ADB, stressing the need to reform the management of our roads, many of them laid blue prints to a new corporate management style, consistent with what we have now implemented.

These were not small changes, Madam Speaker. To implement what was needed, required drive and commitment because there was a lot of resistance to the changes. Some of the resistance was understandable for the fear of the unknown, but some of it was deliberate obstruction of Government's intentions to reform this vital part of the Civil Service.

As the first Chairman of FRA, I know what it took for us to overcome the resistance. Everyone involved had to be singly focussed and dedicated to the task at hand. We looked at the obstacles in front of us and it did not matter if we had to go over them, under them, around them or through them. We would prevail and the reform would succeed.

We knew it would be a tough journey, but we could see and experience the roads deteriorating caused serious breakdowns in the network, where buses in particular were unable to reliably provide services. There was an air of urgency that Government had to move fast.

Fly by night operators, contracted companies with suspicious performance levels and those in collusions, were eliminated in the process. Madam Speaker, this led to a large vacuum in which Fiji was in need of reputable engineering consultants to take us forward. The MWH, a reputable consulting company who was concurrently working for MOF and managing the Nadarivatu Hydro Project was engaged, given their expertise.

We had been impressed by their commitment to quality and we learned they were also one of NZ's largest specialists Asset and Road Management Consultants. We knew we had to move quickly to minimise further deterioration of the network, so we asked them to give us a proposal to help us establish the FRA.

Contrary to some erroneous statements made in this Parliament, Madam Speaker, MWH did not appoint themselves as the consultant. It was a fully considered Government decision to deliver change

of the scale required at the pace we wanted to deliver it. In their first year as Change Manager, MWH reviewed systems and processes, and helped with the recruitment of staff for FRA. They also uncovered some \$3 million of fraud that FICAC is investigating.

A key role was assisting Government with a sensitive management on the redundancy of some 1,800 staff. While the disruption to so many people and their family lives is always regrettable, Madam Speaker, it is pleasing that many of these staff have now found work within the industry and certainly my discussions with those staff, whether they are working on the road with contractors, with consultants, or with FRA, they are thriving in a new environment of accountability and opportunity. They are being given development opportunities they could only dream of before.

Madam Speaker, by any objective measure, the results so far have been impressive - impressive that many of us have already forgotten just how bad the roads were only two years ago. However, people feel the improvements every day, just ask a taxi driver.

We can all appreciate the benefits to our fellow citizens of things like:

- 1) The improved rides and reliability of bus services through both improved roads and improved bus fleet;
- 2) Numerous new foot and Irish crossings, allowing people in villages like Nasau in Wainibuka and many others to have reliable access;
- 3) Accessibility to remote areas have opened up new routes to buses and RSL carriers; and
- 4) improved traffic control systems and safety at road construction work sites.

Engineering best practices were reinforced like high strength concrete on our new bridges, slip form kerbs construction, or the impressive sight of seeing foam bitumen being laid in Suva with the train of multi-million dollar vehicles constructing roads quickly and efficiently.

The reform, Madam Speaker, has not just been noticed in Fiji. It has been recognised here in the Pacific region, at conferences in New Zealand and Australia, and as far afield as South Africa and China.

A senior World Bank Infrastructure specialist had this to say, and I quote:

“The transition from DRN to FRA has been impressive both for the speed with which the conversion has taken place and in terms of impact, which is evident from the steadily increasing annual expenditures and commitment to rehabilitate and maintain road sector assets. Our experience with similar reforms in other countries is that they can typically take up to five years before the types of gains experienced by Fiji are registered. The aggressive approach adopted by government of bringing in outside expertise to support the transition has resulted in genuine impact on the ground”.

Madam Speaker, the ADB and the World Bank also had such confidence in how the FRA was structured and managed that they saw no need for any special external project management unit or structures for their US\$150 million investment. The structure, management and systems Government has established in the set-up of FRA passed the strict quality tests of these Multi-National Development Banks.

Madam Speaker, the list goes. This Government's boldness and commitment in following through with this reform is validated by those watching us from afar. And it goes beyond just the FRA itself, Madam Speaker, it is particularly pleasing to see how the industry has responded. Our consultants and maintenance contractors have committed to not only the development of their own staff, but also the wider industry.

Who has not been impressed by the professional outlook of our Fijian workers out on the roads, with their greatly improved safety procedures and signage? Who has not seen the pride these men and women are showing in doing the job, now that they are getting the training and the right tools to do it right? No one is suggesting it is perfect yet, Madam Speaker. There are those who seemed to think it should happen overnight. Our answer to them is that this is a major reform, aimed at long term sustainability. It is not, and was never intended to be a magic wand, or a silver bullet to fix things overnight.

Every day, we see the improvements continuing. Through their alignment with the large overseas contractors, and the training seminars conducted by FRA, we are seeing more of our local contractors bidding for and winning projects in their own right. We are seeing improvements in quality almost every day. They have had a steep learning curve, but they are making the most of the opportunities this reform has presented to them. They are investing in staff and equipment to keep growing their businesses. Madam Speaker, in 2014, 41 of the 59 contracts FRA awarded went to local contractors.

Much is made of the so-called invasion of expatriates. As of the middle of 2014, the number of expatriates in FRA's maintenance contractors was four per cent of the total workforce - just four per cent. These are engineering and asset management specialists who are in Fiji, to grow a Fijian business with Fijian people, a scarce skill that is locally available. Madam Speaker, hundreds of Fijian staff have been given training, ranging from how to keep themselves and others safe at work sites, better techniques for grading gravel roads, through to highly technical construction practices like Foam Bitumen Stabilisation that we saw in the upgrading of our Suva CBD last year. Fijians have had the opportunity to travel to New Zealand for secondments to learn from specialists in their field. They have come back energised and enthusiastic, ready to implement what they have learned.

Madam Speaker, Fiji operates in a regional and international market place. We have to provide our people with development opportunities and creating the right environment to retain our best and brightest people to remain. That is part of what we are achieving within the Road Sector, as part of the reforms this Government has implemented - opportunity with accountability.

Road building, Madam Speaker, is not a foolproof 100 per cent guaranteed activity. Variability in materials, especially in Fiji, Madam Speaker, workmanship issues and weather can all combine to mean that not everything is right the first time. As expected we have had issues at times with solutions not working as planned. A key part of the reform is to ensure that where this happens, accountability sits where it should. We are pleased to see contractors responding and making the necessary repairs at no cost to the Fijian People.

Madam Speaker, from having virtually no asset management or long term planning in place three years ago, Fiji now has world standard asset management system for roading. In a first for Fiji, we have an Asset Management Plan that links the road, bridge and jetty networks to key objectives for the road networks. This flows through into plans and work programmes to address the following objectives:

- 1) Maintaining existing assets;
- 2) Reducing risk and improving resilience;

- 3) Improving access and stimulating economic activity, with investment in both major and minor rural roads;
- 4) Improving road safety;
- 5) Reducing congestion;
- 6) Enhancing community amenities (with programmes such as footpaths and lighting); and
- 7) Enhancing tourist amenities.

This approach Madam Speaker, ensures a balanced investment programme.

The establishment of a world class Geographic Information System (GIS) based asset management information system allows better understanding of what assets we have, and how they impact peoples' lives and livelihoods. This in turn allows improved decision making, and as we move forward under my Ministry, we will see improved integration across the different infrastructure sectors as well.

I get asked all the time, what is the priority areas? The answer is, the whole of Fiji is our priority area. The FRA has to manage the demands from across the country. Everyone understands it will take time to fully recover from the neglect of the past. But as people see the roads improve in nearby communities, they understandably get impatient for their turn.

At this point, I would just like to mention some specific achievements that the FRA has done since its inception and these are some of the numbers from the last two years:

- | | | | |
|----|---|---|---------------------|
| 1) | 31,000 km of unsealed roads that are being graded | - | \$11.1million; |
| 2) | 770,000 potholes filled | - | \$23.8 million; |
| 3) | 464 km of road re-gravelled | - | \$39.8 million; |
| 4) | 110 km of road rehabilitation | - | \$51.5 million; and |
| 5) | 170 km of road resealed | - | \$31.9 million. |

In 2015, Madam Speaker, FRA is well underway with some major projects, targeting significant economic development opportunities. To mention a few:

- 1) Nabouwalu to Dreketi on target for completion later this year.
- 2) Buca Bay will be completed later this year.
- 3) The Suva and Nadi road improvement projects will be well underway with some sections completed this year.
- 4) Moto road and the new bridge has already been completed.
- 5) Sigatoka valley road – completed.
- 6) Qarani Jetty to be completed within months.
- 7) Yasawa-i-Rara jetty will be completed by the end of February.

Grants from the government of China have been negotiated for the new bridges at Stinson and Vatuwaqa, bringing forward these replacement projects by several years. I am challenged by others in Government and elsewhere about where FRA is putting the resources that it has been allocated, in particular, are the rural areas getting their fair share? I can say emphatically - yes.

Madam Speaker, FRA has been allocated \$130 million, Madam Speaker, for works in rural areas in 2015. This will deliver road upgrades, bridge replacements, as well as re-gravelling and general maintenance. This is just a small snapshot of what the reforms are delivering.

Madam Speaker, as we go forward (we have not finished yet), at the start of 2013, we stated it was a seven to 10 year programme, to get back to a sustainable state, and that was before we understood the true extent of the problems with our bridges. Elevated investment levels will be required for the next few years, but after this major effort to get on top of the backlog of deferred work, we expect to see investment levels stabilise at around \$250 million per year for sustainable maintenance of the network.

Madam Speaker, given that my time has run up, the lessons learnt from the transition of DNR to FRA could be used as a guide for institutions embarking on organisational reform, reduce the unnecessary red tape and bureaucracy, create structures that empower people to act, and hold them accountable for delivering on their objectives.

So I ask, was the roading reform needed? Undoubtedly, yes. Was it a pain free transition; no. But is it doing what was intended and is it delivering the results we want? Yes, Madam Speaker, and I say it as a resounding and irrefutable yes.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you honourable Minister for your Statement, I will now invite the response from the honourable Leader of the Opposition or her representative.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Madam Speaker, firstly, I would like to commend the honourable Minister of Defence in restoring our faith with some semblance of justice that will indeed help our people regain their lost faith, and rebuild the trust they once had in our security forces in the justice system.

Now, Madam Speaker, I thank the honourable Minister for Infrastructure and Transport for his ministerial statement. Of course, with the huge allocation, he needs the support and encouragement of all honourable Members of this Parliament. It is obvious that the Minister's mammoth task of developing and implementing the infrastructure needs is now crucial in the development to Fiji's long-term economic and social sustainability.

The revelation this morning indicates the commitment by Government and the recognition that infrastructure development is the role of any government. Over the years, past governments have also committed to infrastructure development and the taxpayers of this country will always expect their money to be put to good use.

Madam Speaker, this is something that comes with developments. The advantageous are many, like improve accessibility and improve living standards. We also have to acknowledge that the downside for this (which is the haste and pace of this development) will cause to our quality of living. For example, Madam Speaker, I draw your attention to the China loan funded, Nabouwalu- Dreketi Road refurbishment. Our lease development is positive for the province of Bua, it has had some unintended negative consequences, like the environmental damage to the areas biological ecosystem and the impact of food security for villages, as a result of gravel extraction from the Nabouwalu River.

I ask, Madam Speaker, how is Government approving such major developments without carrying out a holistic due diligence and an Environment Impact Assessment first? The villagers themselves are questioning whether the responsible authorities did carry out proper scientific assessments to evaluate the effects of extraction from the river. Is this Government desperate to push developments through as a "tick in the box exercise", or does it just want to satisfy private sector investment partners? Government must be more responsible.

HON. GOVT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear. True!

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- I will ask Government to consider the social factors, as you bring development to our people, to acknowledge that part of the “tick the box exercise” is also refilling of the potholes and remanning of the whole bridges.

Madam Speaker, what I would like to remind the honourable Minister and honourable Members of this august Parliament is that, we are equally responsible to work together, to ensure that the negative effects of bringing infrastructure development to our people is minimised.

In recent days, we have watched our national television and read in newspapers significant number of accidents as in the television last night, in the period of 24 hours, there were some fatal accidents happening on our roads. I ask the honourable Minister to ensure that the monitoring and usage of our roads be given heighten importance.

In conclusion, Madam Speaker, I wish to reiterate the provision of electricity and water which are basic needs and are crucial for everyone’s living. There are just too many blackouts and water disruptions that occur on a regular basis and has inconvenienced consumers. Therefore, I request the honourable Minister to ensure that the respective institutions, tasked with providing these basic needs be improved, and if for example you are not getting any positive feedbacks and your management and boards are not performing – change them. Honourable Minister, you should not be copping the flak for their laxities.

HON. P. SINGH.- As usual, the honourable Minister has been powerful in his presentation and I take note of Government’s plans way back in 2011, to move away from the Department of National Roads (DNR) to a more professional body, that is the FRA. Together with this professionalism came a lot of challenges. Yes, we agree with that, but Madam Speaker, this transition from DNR to FRA cost our people a lot in terms of employment, in terms of job losses. The DNR, when they were done away with, there were 1800 people and the honourable Minister failed to inform this Parliament as to what happened to them - whether they were redeployed or deployed elsewhere, and whether all of them had been taken into the system by the new FRA.

Madam Speaker, this new FRA, the professionalism we are talking about, does not come free, it comes at a cost. The DNR was given a specific budget in the previous allocations and had they been given this type of budgetary allocations, like \$653 million to FRA, which I still doubt whether they have the capacity to take on the works. I give an example to back up my claim. In last year’s budget, the FRA underscored by \$118 million of its capital expenditure and this time we have allocated more. We welcome more allocations to infrastructure development and we can see things happening. However, can the honourable Minister assure this Parliament that this will be spread for the next 12 months or would it be in the next couple of years?

Madam Speaker, infrastructure development is always welcomed and NFP welcomes this, but it has certain reservations. One, can we have a cost benefit analysis to, at least, determine the value that the taxpayers would want?

Secondly, the honourable Minister keeps referring to the past governments, may I ask the honourable Minister, they are also there for the last eight years.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Hear, Hear!

HON. P. SINGH.- It only came about in the last three years. It would be better for us or for the Government to have a national infrastructure plan and a maintenance plan, which would assist the Fiji Roads Authority and the Government in monitoring those projects. I will give you an example. Madam Speaker, our shift from doing things – the paradigm shift that the honourable Minister talked about, to professionalism, the four lane road that are being done in Nadi. It looks very good ...

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

HON. P. SINGH.- ... but it is coming at a cost of around \$2.765 million per kilometre per lane ...

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

HON. P. SINGH.- ...and the contract I believe is for \$69 million for six kilometres of road. So, how do we monitor this?

I agree with the honourable Minister alluded to that there are accounting procedures in place and monitoring in place. Whether we justify that amount of money for one kilometre one lane or not, and there are four lanes. Compare that with the Dreketi-Nabouwalu Road which is coming at almost \$229 million.

Madam Speaker, I leave that to the Ministry but this is what we would like to highlight. The best thing would be, to do a cost benefit analysis and we support your programme, honourable Minister.

MADAM SPEAKER.- We will now adjourn for refreshment for one hour and we will resume again at 12.00 p.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 11.03 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 12.05 p.m.

COMMUNICATION FROM THE CHAIR

Speaker's Ruling – Clarification on Passage of Bills

MADAM SPEAKER.- I thank honourable Members, you for this time and being patient with the extended refreshment time. However, there was a Point of Order raised this morning by the honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu that we needed to make a ruling on.

Honourable Members, on the Point of Order, raised by the honourable Ratu Naiqama, I hereby give this Ruling.

Honourable Members are bound by the rules and procedures laid out in the Standing Orders, and as I had mentioned in my communication this morning, I requested that honourable Members observe such rules, so that we can all ensure order and decorum in our august Chambers.

With respect to the clarifications sought by the honourable Ratu Naiqama, Standing Order 51 provides for a motion for a Bill to proceed without delay. Again, under Standing Order 91, the special provisions stipulate that a Bill may proceed more quickly than permitted by Standing Orders 83 to 88, if Parliament approves the consideration of the Bill without delay, and that a majority of all Members vote in support of the request.

I also wish to bring to honourable Members' attention Section 47(3) of the Constitution, which states, that:

“(3) A Bill may proceed more quickly than permitted by the Standing Orders if –

- (a) ... Parliament approve consideration of the Bill without delay, and
- (b) a majority of the Members of Parliament voted in support of that request.”

The motions of the two Bills were moved on Monday, 9th February, 2015 and Parliament approved the consideration of the Bills without delay, and majority of all Members voted in support of the request. Should there have been an amendment to the motion specifying that the Bill be considered clause by clause in committee of the whole Parliament, and this amendment would have been passed, then the Bill would have been committed to the committee of the whole Parliament for consideration clause by clause.

This was not the case with the Bills before the House on Monday 9th February, 2015, and therefore, the rules and procedures were observed. The procedures that we have followed are in line with the provisions laid out in the Standing Orders, as well as in the Constitution.

I thank you, honourable Members.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

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

That Standing Order 23 be suspended so that Parliament may continue to complete the order for today.

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

MADAM SPEAKER.- The motion before us is really to enable us to continue with this sitting and to complete our proceedings before we go for lunch.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS

“Fijian Made-Buy Fijian” Campaign

HON. F.S. KOYA. – Madam Speaker, honourable Prime Minister, honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Leader of the NFP and honourable members. Madam Speaker, thank you for allowing me the time to take the floor today, to speak on a very important and successful pro-growth initiative of the Fijian Government the “Fijian Made-Buy Fijian” Campaign, an initiative that we Fijians should be proud of.

Madam Speaker, we should not hesitate to use the word Fijian. We should not hesitate to call each other Fijian. We should not hesitate to use Fijian for our Fijian products, because in this recognition is our strength as a nation.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM. – Hear, hear!

HON. F.S. KOYA. – Madam Speaker, this campaign was launched in 2011 by the honourable Prime Minister. There was a clear and unfulfilled need for a unified national campaign to give Fijian products the platform they deserve to stand out in the marketplace. It was also important to instil national pride in all Fijians to believe in the quality of the things that we make and grow in Fiji.

It was just a matter of giving our products a little boost with a strong brand that people recognise, trust and have confidence that their money is supporting local families and businesses. The National Campaign aims to promote and raise the profile of our Fijian made products, both domestically and internationally through branding and market strategies. The Fijian Made products carry the “Fijian Made” logos which visibly distinguish these from imported products.

Madam Speaker, through this campaign, we have been able to create a resilient, strong economy from within. There are total of eight representations of our logo, namely:

- a) Fijian Made;
- b) Fijian Grown;
- c) Fijian Crafted;
- d) Fijian Sewn;
- e) Fijian Packed;
- f) Fijian Assembled;
- g) Fijian Designed; and
- h) Fijian Product.

I am pleased to inform this honourable Chamber, that the Campaign has successfully registered 1001 products and licensed 211 companies to-date, and this number is growing. In fact, the Fijian Private Sector has broadly endorsed this Campaign. I am also pleased to report that 90 per cent of the licensed companies are micro, small and medium enterprises.

Madam Speaker, similar Campaigns are run in countries, such as, Australia, New Zealand, the United States of America, India and the Pacific Island Countries amongst many others. What sets our Campaign apart from these countries is that, this has been an initiative of the Bainimarama Government, however, with the very strong backing from the private sector and the Fijian consumers. Given the strong public private partnership that exists, I am confident of its continued success and future sustainability.

Madam Speaker, the Fijian Made Campaign supports Government's efforts to reduce our trade imbalance by promoting the production and consumption of products which can be easily produced or grown in Fiji. A good example is the move towards using locally grown tropical fruits and vegetables in our tourism sector. For example, Fiji used to import products such as, tomatoes, lettuce, English cabbage and capsicum but today Madam Speaker, we are able to supply 100 per cent of the hotel and supermarket demands for lettuce and have greatly reduced the import of the others.

Madam Speaker, we need to capitalise on the synergies that exist between this Campaign and the Ministry of Agriculture, in order to reap the maximum returns from the agricultural sector in Fiji. Madam Speaker, we have the best agricultural products such as, papaya and pineapple. We have the best in the world, in my opinion. We thank the Minister of Agriculture, for the vigour with which he promotes the Fijian Grown products and his initiatives to grow the agriculture sector.

Madam Speaker, for a number of years, the contribution by small producers and our grass-root communities has not been acknowledged and largely unaccounted for. This Campaign has provided that platform through the "Fijian Crafted" brand, for micro and small handicraft entrepreneurs. It has given them authentic Fijian arts and crafts the recognition not just locally but for our visitors as well.

Madam Speaker, the Fijian Crafted brand has provided our artisans and grass-root entrepreneurs a leg-up in marketing their products and authenticating these creations as genuine Fijian crafts. To-date Madam Speaker, we have licensed 93 authentic and genuine Fijian crafters. But, we did not stop at just providing them with a brand, but we have also linked them to the mainstream retail outlets in Fiji. 65 of the licensed crafters are today selling their arts and crafts to major stores such as, Jacks Handicraft, Prouds and Tappoos.

It is worth noting Madam Speaker, that on average revenue for each of these crafters has increased by \$500 per month or \$6,000 per annum. Madam Speaker, this basically means that they have an extra \$500 per month to support their family's needs and wants.

Furthermore, we have also partnered with our own airline, Fiji Airways in screening "Fijian Crafted" commercials on all in-bound flights to Fiji, alerting tourists to look for the "Fijian Crafted" brand when out buying authentic souvenirs to take back home.

Madam Speaker, on the broader promotion of the Campaign, the Ministry has advertised on television and cinemas, placed radio commercials, advertised on Facebook and printed brochures and posters, which have been widely circulated. The Ministry also owns 16 permanent large structured billboards with the Campaign messages printed and these are located in almost all towns and cities across the country, which most of you would have seen.

Campaign merchandise, such as, Fijian made shirts, have also been produced and distributed widely to the general public. Speaking of our famous Fijian made shirts, we wish to thank our biggest advocate and supporter, the honourable Prime Minister who has made it the unofficial uniform, Sir, we thank you, please continue wearing our famous shirts.

The Ministry recognises that whilst the Campaign has gained momentum with its wide publicity through various mediums such as billboards and other forms of advertising, a survey was undertaken in 2014 to ascertain the impact of the Campaign. Madam Speaker, the outcomes of the survey revealed that significant expansion of production facilities have been undertaken by licensed companies. New investments by these companies ranged from an average of about F\$250,000 to F\$5 million. In terms of job creation, on average there has been positive increases across the board, with one firm recording as much as 100 new employees. The most recent economic review by the Reserve Bank of Fiji, job advertisement survey also revealed an improved labour market condition by 12.8 per cent. Apart from the increasing local sales, licensed firms have gained new markets in the Pacific, Australia and New Zealand and as far as Sri Lanka. The value of our total exports in 2013 increased by \$35.5 million, a significant portion of these exporters are Fijian made licensees.

Madam Speaker, in the Pacific, the Fijian made logo is in demand. For example, amongst other manufactured products, we have recently supplied Fijian Made busses to Nauru, Samoa, Wallis and Futuna and Kiribati and this is what it looks like...

(showing a model of a Fijian Made bus to honourable Members)

(Applause)

...whilst there is also potential for all of this in Papua New Guinea, Australia and New Zealand. Might I also take this opportunity to offer to the honourable Members on the other side, including the whole of the other side, shirts for all of them, if you please would let us have your sizes, the Ministry would gladly accommodate.

(Laughter)

We have already made in-roads, Madam Speaker, for the Fijian sewn clothing and footwear products in the Pacific and Australian markets. For example, this sector is supplying non-combat uniforms to the Australian Defence Forces and military boots to the Solomon Islands, and indeed we are supplying our own Fijian Defence Force with uniforms. Madam Speaker, the statements made above, are supported by the trade figures, vis-à-vis the Pacific Island Countries. Exports for the Pacific Island Countries have increased by approximately 30 per cent from 2011 to a tune of \$356.4 million to 2013 to a tune of \$460.8 million.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry will continue to promote the Campaign and enhance the integrity of the Fijian Brand by putting in place quality control and audit criteria and processes. Madam Speaker, the purpose is for our people to see the Fijian Made stamp and be reassured that they are buying a great product, to know where it comes from and it's up to the standards that they expect. After the success of the Fijian Made brand nationally and to an extent in the region, we intend to take it a step further and target the international markets, such as Japan, we have already an established great Fijian name offshore.

Madam Speaker, we believe in the quality of things we make and grow in Fiji, and we think others will too, if we just give them a try. It is just a matter of giving our products a boost with a strong brand that people recognise and trust.

Madam Speaker, at this juncture, I wish to thank the honourable Prime Minister and the honourable Attorney-General, who was the previous Minister for Trade, for initiating and bringing the Campaign this far.

I assure you that the Fijian Made-Buy Fijian Campaign will continue to secure new markets for our Fijian products and will generate income, create employment and improve livelihoods for all Fijians. We have a vision that every product, Madam Speaker, made in Fiji will someday wear the Fijian made logo, like a badge of honour, which says, “yes” this was grown by hardworking Fijian farmers, or crafted by skilful Fijian hands and made in factories with dedicated Fijian workers, earning a living for their families.

Madam Speaker, I again thank you for giving me this opportunity to make my statement.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you, honourable Minister. At this juncture, I would like to welcome all the staff from the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism that have joined us in the public gallery today.

I will now call on the honourable Leader of the Opposition or her representative to present their response.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam Speaker, honourable members, I rise to reply to the comments by my colleague, the honourable Minister for Industry, Trade and Tourism. At the outset, let me say that we fully support this initiative, and I assume, Madam Speaker, that the colourful attire there is all locally made. We also wear Fiji made here, so we fully support the initiative by the Government on this one.

There are a number of issues, Madam Speaker. Yesterday, we spoke about bringing the casino into this country. Madam Speaker, this side of the House says, the money you can make from the casino, we can make it in a meaningful way through buy FijiFirst, because buy FijiFirst is all ours....Fiji Made, Fiji Made rather...

(Cheer, Laughter and Applause)

Madam Speaker, I have this issue with passing fads, you know things that are passing, FijiFirst is a passing fad, Madam Speaker. Buy Fiji Made Madam Speaker, it will bring us more meaningful contribution to our economy, than a casino that is foreign to us.

Tourism, Madam Speaker, is dependent on the host country, on what they want to offer their visitors. Visitors today come to a country and want to interact in a meaningful authentic way. This is an authentic way for them to buy Fiji made stuff, Fiji made handicraft, everything that is Fiji made. Our visitors have travelled the world, they have boats, they have shopped in Rome, Paris, London, wherever. When they come to Fiji, they want something Fiji Made. It is better by far, Madam Speaker, to focus on this instead of bringing in something alien, something foreign like a casino.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Hear! Hear!

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Don't bring in the casino, Madam Speaker. Focus on bringing this, on developing, Fiji Made products.

Madam Speaker, I know my colleagues tend to speak disdainfully about the FVB that I used to head. We used to have what we call an "International Visitors Survey" (IVS), and visitors to Fiji used to come and say that they leave Fiji with money in their pocket because there were not enough products to spend their money on. And I applaud the honourable Minister for doing this, and hopefully this will ensure that there is no money leaving the country, that it is all spent in Fiji. Let's do it, let's do it properly.

Madam Speaker, the *itaukei* products, I would like to see more structure to that and a better support system. I come from Nadroga area and we are famous for pottery making. We would like to see a better structure, beautiful pottery products to be made available to tourists. We are the heartland of tourism, and I would like the Government to have a look at that.

Also, Madam Speaker, we have to be very careful...

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

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- ... of the motifs that we use. For instance, Madam Speaker, the motif on *Fiji Airways*, some of that belong to other parts of Fiji, for instance, the 'Walu', the design. That belongs to the *Vanua o Lalagavesi*, to Cakaudrove. Did we ask them for that? We have to be careful. They are authentic motives and you need to research this properly before you use it on a commercial basis.

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

HON. RATU I.D. TIKOCA.- Why you are shaking your head?

HON. V. R. GAVOKA.- Madam Speaker, there is something that we need to be aware of now is that, we tend to use things across the country, not realising their value and authenticity to various parts of Fiji. Let me say this, Madam Speaker, the *Sisi ni Lakeba* is only for the people of Lakeba. Let's protect the authenticity of all our products. In Nadroga, it is the *Tavutaru* that we usually grow in the beach, and I believe it is the same as the *VononiMatari* in Kadavu. Let us be careful about this. We applaud what you are doing, but please, do it carefully, be sensitive (do your research properly) to the authenticity of all these items across the country. Once you do that, once accomplish that, visitors to this country will come and spend their money because they want something authentic, they want to interact with our people, and our economy will grow.

Madam Speaker, in closing, I applaud what they are doing but it must be done properly, done with research and ensuring that there is continuity in this and there is a longevity, in this issue, on this matter. I applaud the honourable Minister, I support what he is doing but please, be mindful of the observations we have made. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER.- I thank the honourable Gavoka for his response. I will now invite the honourable Leader of the National Federation Party for his response.

HON. DR B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to respond to the honourable Minister's statement. Madam Speaker, let me say that for the first time, I have had a very clear

articulation of Government's attempt to address the whole issue of export-led growth, and I thank the honourable Minister for giving that to us.

For a small Island Nation like Fiji, export, Madam Speaker, or trade as a whole is really the engine of growth. But I also appreciate the honourable Minister's good understanding of the link between Small Micro Enterprises (SMEs), not only within the agriculture sector, but more broadly, and in particular Small Micro Enterprises, small farmers and their supply, and the link to the Tourism Industry.

Madam Speaker, I think at the end of the day, the competitiveness of the small scale holders, and their ability to make Fijian products will depend on the efficiency, productivity, innovation and true entrepreneurship of those entities. And for them to be able to do that, Madam Speaker, you need an enabling environment, you need, very good enabling environment, and I noticed that the honourable Minister did not say a lot about that. What we have today, and I would like the honourable Minister to think carefully about this, and in fact, he might consider, Madam Speaker, setting up a Productivity Commission.

HON. GOVT. MEMBERS.- (Chorus of interjections)

HON. DR B.C. PRASAD.- You may laugh about this! Madam Speaker, the other side has the habit of behaving like I call 'God complex! Know it all'. This is a very good suggestion, and you look at every country which wants to increase productivity, competition and trade, actually focusses on productivity, and unless you have a body which assesses, which understands what is happening...

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

HON. DR. B.C. PRASAD.- ... you won't be able to put out policies that will improve productivity. So, take that Commerce Commission, Productivity Commission cannot go together.

Let me also say this, Madam Speaker. I think the intention to increase our exports is a good one, but at the macro level, I think we still have a huge trade deficit. In fact, from the year to August 2014, the trade deficit increased by about 13 per cent. Let me go back to what I said earlier, Madam Speaker, with respect to small, medium and micro enterprises and I have said this before.

I think the honourable Minister should carefully consider the Export Development Fund (EDF), because I understand that a lot of those funds have gone to businesses which are really not engaged in increasing exports, or producing products that will lead to increase in our exports. I would suggest to him that he should look at the EDF, target small and medium micro enterprises so that those categories of entrepreneurs are supported and held by Government to increase the efficiency and productivity, so that they can address the whole issue of supply constraint. The real issue, Madam Speaker, is the supply constraint.

Madam Speaker, I know the honourable Minister talked about the relationship of the agricultural sector to the tourism industry. It is a very good one, but most tourism operators, most hoteliers complained about the inconsistency of the supply, and the inability of some of these small and medium enterprises to be efficient and be able to provide products on a timely basis. So, I would ask the honourable Minister to relook at the use of the EDF, and how it can be used to help small and medium enterprises, Madam Speaker. Thank you.

Overnight Accommodation for Women
at the Six Municipal Markets

HON. P. KUMAR.-Madam Speaker, I rise to make a ministerial statement as stated in today's Order Paper. During the tea break, I was asked by one of my good friends from the Opposition that why Ministers are making Ministerial Statement. So my response to that was, that from now onwards, all the Ministers from this side, we will make Ministerial Statements, so that we can inform this honourable Parliament, and the people of Fiji what we are doing. So come after four years, there will be nothing left for the Opposition to say because we will cover everything.

Madam Speaker, I speak today on an innovation realised in recent times that has had a positive impact on the lives of rural Fijian women. This is the provision of overnight accommodation at six municipal markets.

These markets were identified as having substantial numbers of women, traveling long distances to sell their produce. Most of them slept in the open overnight, at or near the market, or the bus stand.

Madam Speaker, I am pleased to let Parliament know that this relief for our rural women is a result of a direct initiative by the Bainimarama Government. It is an initiative that addressed an issue to which many had turned a blind eye. A blind eye by the successive governments since Independence to the plight of our women market vendors. These brave and hardy women endured the night, sleeping in the open, in insecure conditions - usually on the footpath. They endured all this in order to sell their produce the next day at the market and run their households.

Shelter is a basic human need. The Bainimarama Government took the initiative and to-date have provided secure and clean accommodation in Suva, Ba, Sigatoka, Lautoka, Nadi and Rakiraki Markets.

Madam Speaker, I am happy to inform Parliament that the Labasa and Nausori Accommodation Centres will begin this year, as well. As of now, around 350- odd women are currently benefitting from this program. That means over 300 families can now sleep easy at home. They can sleep easy knowing that their mothers, sisters, wives and daughters are in a safe and secure environment. These numbers are projected to grow over the coming years, and the current accommodation is geared to meet this increase.

Madam Speaker, I was present at the opening of the Nadi, Lautoka and Sigatoka Accommodation Centres. For many of the women whose pleas for shelter were ignored in the past, it was an emotional moment. There were tears in their eyes, as they realised the days of sleeping in the open, helpless against the elements, were finally over. I must commend all these vendors. These women are strong family-focused individuals, whose efforts put food not only on their tables, but also on the tables of many of our urban residents. I am sure many of you know of children who have stepped up the rungs of education and the work place and their starting steps was from the money earned by their mother selling produce at the market.

Madam Speaker, as I was listening to see some of the contributions on the side issues and sideshows these past few days from the Opposition benches, I was reminded about the more humane aspect of life and most of them they were confused, as displayed by these women and their relief when their accommodation were made available to them.

As a Local Government Administrator and former Mayor, I am aware that this was pointed out to successive governments, like the Local Government Act I mentioned in the morning. None came forward to provide assistance until now, under the present Bainimarama Government. Madam Speaker, the general public are happy about the development that has impacted on the life of ordinary Fijian women.

Madam Speaker, given that, we have many strong and hardy women at these centres. Maybe, we can consider a programme to identify their talents as well. The very first thing that comes to my mind is boxing. Because yesterday, we have passed the Boxing Bill, which allows for everybody to take part, unlike what we heard yesterday that we do not want our women to be in the boxing ring.

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI.- You and me!

(Laughter)

HON P. KUMAR.-On a more serious note, Madam Speaker, as we expand this programme, I am appealing to the business community to provide their corporate responsibility, by entering into partnership with my Ministry, to help in the building and upkeep of these facilities. I also invite them for innovative ideas towards adding value to these centres from the business sector. I am hopeful that some of them will come forward in other areas, just as the Fijian Resort assisting the Sigatoka Town Council by giving \$30,000, and that was recently opened by the honourable Prime Minister. Madam Speaker, we would like to value add as a next step for this initiative. Government will explore ways of initiating small business projects among women market vendors.

For the information of this Parliament, we have also allowed women to sell their products in the market, even after 5 p.m. and on Sundays as well, because what we have realised that these women vendors come all the way from the highlands and this opportunity was not given to them and now we have allowed that in all the markets. Not only that, we have also allowed women to carry out business in residential areas on a small scale business. So, you can see the initiative of this Government, Madam Speaker.

At this point, let me also thank the UN Women groups for the market chain, for their financial assistance towards this initiative, and they have committed additional financial assistance for 2015. I commend them for their continued assistance on behalf of the women market vendors of Fiji.

Madam Speaker, Fiji is unique in its municipal markets. It has been photographed and promoted in various mediums as a way of life in Fiji. It has been used to showcase our famous fresh tropical produce in all its colour and glory - this was all fine and good. What failed to happen were steps by governments in the past to re-address a basic human need - providing a shelter for the market vendors, especially our women who make our vibrant market possible.

It is not enough to say nice things about these strong women. Madam Speaker, we under the Bainimarama Government have taken immediate and pro-active steps to alleviate a basic problem for them, their health and well-being is being nurtured through this initiative. A good night's sleep in a safe secure and clean environment, I am sure this has added to their friendly smile. Madam Speaker, and they know very well who they have to thank for this. Thank you Madam Speaker.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, I rise to make the reply. The first point that was stated by the honourable Minister was that from now on, we should expect a lot of ministerial statements. On that point, Madam Speaker, I wish to make a request to assist this side of the Chamber, in our

response, that we be given notice. We must have notice, at least on the subject matter. The reason for this is that the whole purpose of this debate is to ventilate the issues, to benefit firstly the other side of Parliament, especially the Ministers in your work as well as to benefit the public. And here the only time that we have to reply is when we listen to the other side.

HON. CDR S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Point of order. Madam Speaker, I want to highlight that the subject has already been discussed, and it was supposed to be discussed in the Business meeting.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you, that will be addressed in the Business meeting.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I hope that our request will be made.

Next on the substantive statement that was issued, I am surprised, totally surprised that the honourable Minister has chosen a project that is initiated by the UN, to claim it for their own and you can see the depth of the statement. The UN helps, especially people who are disadvantaged and one of those are the women. So, he tries very, very hard, he is at pain to say that it is their initiative, and it is for the public.

HON. P. KUMAR.- Tell the truth.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- It is the initiative of the UN to help the disadvantaged like women, like children, like indigenous people and they have special projects, special funds for that. So, for the honourable Minister to claim that it is the Government's initiative, amounts to misinformation, I might say.

HON. P. KUMAR.- You have no idea what you are talking about.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- And then it begs the question, why women? You are not here only for the women what about the public? What about the Public? This issue has been there for a long, long time and it affects indigenous people who come all the way from Wainibuka, indigenous people who come down here from Namosi, who are sheltered there in the rain, not only women but men and children also. Men too. Men also come down to sell in the market. How do you accommodate these men? Isn't that the responsibility of the Government also? Is the Government's responsibility here limited only to the women? So, we will take all the women in the shelter and leave the children and their husbands in the rain. Is that the purpose of all this? No, the purpose of this Parliament, the purpose of the Government is to service the public.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear! hear!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- It must be inclusive, there is a gender issue here, because the other side will ask, what about us? I commend the initiative and I hope this Government will do something as soon as possible to look after the plight of these poor people.

At Nausori, I go around Nausori Town every Saturday night. I go there and feel sorry for them. You can't help but feel sorry for these people come in at 4.00 a.m., 5.00 a.m. and they have to stake out a place in the market, for the selling of their produce on Saturdays. So, please do your work and address the public, not only the women.

MADAM SPEAKER.- I thank the honourable Nawaikula for his response, I will now invite the representative from NFP.

HON. ROKO T.T.S. DRAUNIDALO.- Madam Speaker, we welcome these initiatives and we just wish to say (I am not going to use the word 'but' because my colleagues keep pointing at us when we say but. I suppose Madam Speaker, if the Government did more (and we do not want to sound like a broken record) but if they remove draconian decrees, it would help grow the economy much more and improve market access so that these women did not have to leave their homes for long periods to come and sell at these municipal markets.

I also mentioned earlier in another reply to a ministerial statement about excess red tape for those roadside vendors. They also could be helped if those onerous obligations on them from the Government were removed, and that would help them to sell their Fijian made goods, produce, right there near their homes instead of having to leave their homes and come to municipal markets.

So, we urge the Government to consider one at a time if they can in removing these draconian decrees that really turn investors off Madam Speaker, that don't help the economy to grow at a rate that would increase market access for our people at a much greater rate. I notice, Madam Speaker, that the Minister was really campaigning for 2018, good on him and he seem to allude to the fact that ministerial statements would be directed in that manner. I don't not why they bother *Fiji Sun* does a very good job, Madam Speaker.

(Laughter)

And if the Media Decree was removed, many of the Ministers will be running for cover and I suppose the substance of our reply to this honourable Minister is to improve market access and you can only do that if you encourage more investment and investment would be greatly encouraged by this Government if they were to start reconsidering the Decrees that turn investors off.

MADAM SPEAKER.- I thank the NFP representative for her response. I now give the floor to the honourable Attorney-General and Minister of Finance, Public Enterprises, Public Service and Communications to have the floor.

Civil Aviation Industry

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you Madam Speaker, as Minister responsible for Civil Aviation, I rise today to give a report on the range of activities that falls directly and indirectly under this portfolio.

Madam Speaker, before I go ahead, I just want to make a few observatory comment as part of the ministerial statement as part of what I am going to talk about is investment. I find it very interesting that the other side keeps on harping that there is no investment, people are frightened away, but the figures by the Reserve Bank speak a different story. They tell that banks are now lending more than ever; they tell that unemployment has decreased; they tell that the figures relating to economic growth rate in the construction industry is booming. It is very interesting that sometimes when people are being economical with the truth, and they keep on being economical with the truth, they start to actually believe their own truth. That is one observation, Madam Speaker.

Another observation, Madam Speaker, just factually being correct. It was said that it was only all driven by UN. The UN was here before the Bainimarama government. The UN was here before the FijiFirst Government and none of the shelters were built. It was only when the Bainimarama government came in and the FijiFirst government came in, that these shelters were being built. Logically, that makes sense but then again, that seems to be lost on the other side.

Madam Speaker, more than 90 per cent of visitors to Fiji, come on an airplane, and more than 90 per cent of all Fijians travelling abroad depart on one, and that is not to mention all the Fijians who rely on our domestic airlines to travel within Fiji to visit families, travel home or into the city and access crucial services in the outer islands.

Given the huge importance that civil aviation plays in the Fijian economy, supporting our tourism industry and in our national life, we thought it would be appropriate to provide this honourable Parliament with an update on this important portfolio. Madam Speaker, I will cover a broad range of topics and touch on a number of important initiatives, policies and plans within the Department of Civil Aviation, to ensure amongst other things that air travel into, within, and out of Fiji is safe, reliable and affordable.

Madam Speaker, I would like to begin by outlining Government's plan to develop the infrastructure of the 15 airports operated by Airports Fiji Limited. This is line with the FijiFirst government's plans to reform and modernise the Aviation Industry in Fiji, to be globally competitive. All told, AFL is looking to deliver around \$250 million worth of capital upgrades over the next five years, which demonstrates just how serious we are about this programme. It will have huge benefits in terms of economic growth and development, including our maritime zones and in job creation. The centre piece of this programme is the Nadi Airport Terminal Modernisation Project which commenced in August, 2014. A New Zealand company, Hawkins Infrastructure Limited was selected to carry out the work, which is scheduled to be completed by May 2016.

This year, the Fijian people and visitors to our shores can expect to see a burst of activity and we kindly ask for patience and understanding, as the work is being carried out. We promise it will be worth the wait: faster cues at check-ins and through security, a spacious departure and check-in hall, views for the passengers in the departure lounge, top quality food and beverages, a children's play corner, a prayer room, a modern VIP lounge and staff facilities and of course, a segregated smoking area for those who do smoke.

There is also plan in the near future to build at least a 70-room transit hotel located within the Nadi Airport complex. As we can see, a lot more transit passengers are coming through Fiji.

Of course, Madam Speaker, the major upgrade plans for Nausori Airport are equally exciting. They include a runway extension, so that larger planes can land in Nausori and a new terminal. This will have huge benefits for our capital city, its people and its businesses. Government will intensify negotiations for the acquisition of about 35 hectares of land, necessary for these upgrades, and we look forward to finalising this matter, this year.

Of course, Madam Speaker, we also have our eyes on Fiji's 13 outer island airports. We are committed to providing AFL the necessary support for capital projects, maintenance and upgrade for these facilities. In this regard, one of our major focuses is the upgrade of the Rotuma airstrip. Madam Speaker, we also focus on helping AFL to continue to improve its own performance so that we can maximise the benefits, we, as a nation, derive benefits from these facilities, especially after they are upgraded.

As a result of the successful revenue restructuring and achievement of operational cost efficiencies over the past few years, AFL's profit forecast at a conservative approach, Madam Speaker, after tax is \$33 million for 2015 and \$46 million for 2016. While these numbers are forecasts, we believe it is possible to surpass them if we are able to continue accessing new markets, working with *Fiji Airways* and with other airlines.

HON. MEMBER.- The share!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.-(I will come to that). We take a disciplined commercial approach to operating the airport. Disciplined commercial approach, Madam Speaker. Of course, this was not possible under the previous governments nor would it have been if the other side was on this side. In fact, Madam Speaker, until 2007, AFL was either making a loss or breaking-even, or at times a miniscule profit, if any.

Madam Speaker, Government has called for Expressions of Interest for the acquisition of shares in AFL by the private sector and confidential negotiations are currently underway. This is critical to ensure commercial confidence. As AFL's performance continues to improve, the share value in AFL will complementally rise, generating more interest internationally, and giving more value to Fiji and all Fijians.

With a divestment and increased profits of AFL, the current arrangement, where Government funds outer island capital works, while AFL as part of the social responsibility, picks up the tab for operational costs for these airports, we would be in a position to have AFL carry out all the capital works, from its own cash flow, including the operational costs. We are in the process of developing an MOU in this respect.

Madam Speaker, there is no doubt the AFL's turnaround has been remarkable, in particular under the guidance and leadership of its Chairman, Mr. Faiz Khan. The other Board members consists of *Geoffrey Shaw*, a former well-known hotelier, the Tui Macuata, Ratu Viliame Katonivere and Xavier Khan. But the question isn't if AFL is doing well, because it is beyond doubt that it is doing really well. It is remarkably doing well compared to what used to happen there. The question is whether it can do even better, as a nation we want the best for our people and our nation.

The point, Madam Speaker, is this: with the right people, for the right job and now the right strategic partner, we can do even more, achieve even more and offer even more. As we have seen in Fiji ports, the right partnership with the private sector has incredible benefits. It will further our case to become the hub for aviation in the region, recognised around the region and the world for the high standard of our facilities and the quality of our services.

Madam Speaker, I am pleased also to report to this Parliament today the spectacular performance of *Fiji Airways*. As I am sure my fellow Members will know, it has been a busy few years for the airline, as it has achieved a remarkable turnaround of fortunes. A complete rebranding: a profit sharing scheme for its staff, never done before in Fiji's history, and an ambitious plan to expand its operations. It feels like yesterday when we welcomed the first new Airbus A330, "*The island of Taveuni*." As the honourable Prime Minister said at that time, "bearing a uniquely Fijian design, the plane is a flying billboard for Fiji, a message to the world that we are open for business and we want to share our beautiful surroundings, our culture and hospitality with the people of other lands."

Since then, Madam Speaker, there has been no looking back for the airline. Two new airbuses A330's followed the first; the *Island of Namuka-i-Lau* and *Yasawa-i-Rara*. Following that, *Fiji Airways* has also announced plans to lease a new Boeing 737-800, and Airbus A330-300, which will both enter its fleet towards the end of this year. Following that, an additional Boeing 737-800 is planned for 2017.

In the domestic market, *Pacific Sun* has become *Fiji Link*, another addition to brand Fiji. The FijiFirst Government's programme to distinguish an internationally recognised Fijian brand that is known for its quality and uniqueness. *Fiji Link* has revamped its fleet by purchasing an ATR 72-600

and an ATR 42-600. It has also leased an additional ATR72-600 to meet the demand for expanding routes. This has significantly improved the services it can offer its customers. Indeed, the new fleet has allowed our national carrier to strengthen its Pacific and international network.

Madam Speaker, results of all of these activity are undeniable. *Fiji Airways* will soon announce its 2014 financial results, which are more than doubled the best profit in its history. But Madam Speaker, I think that many would agree that the Airline's biggest accomplishment is no doubt the creation of a team of people committed and motivated, made up of individuals who are working together, better than ever, to bring our national airline to new heights. We have no doubt that this great success will continue in 2015, together with the great dividend for its shareholders.

Madam Speaker, I would like to pay a special tribute to the Managing Director and CEO, Stefan Pichler, for the great work he has done in *Fiji Airways*. We are very sorry to see him depart ...

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Why?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- ... but are happy that he will remain on the board, and continue to support he strategic development of the group. Stefan has ensured that he is leaving behind an outstanding group of senior managers, and is also playing a key role in the selection of a new CEO. So, I can assure this Parliament, that business will continue as usual.

Madam Speaker, *Fiji Airways* is continuously adding new routes to its service on the back of its fleet expansion. Beginning this month, *Fiji Airways* will start a Shanghai Charter services, in partnership with Rosie Holidays – the first step towards tapping into the vast Asian markets.

In April, it will commence its direct Honiara service and in June, the Airline will add Wellington to its list of direct New Zealand destinations. There are plans to have an extra flight to Sydney, Melbourne and Christchurch, to increase the frequency of ATR services, and to add an additional flight to Hong Kong in the peak holiday periods. There will also be more flights to Taveuni, extra capacity on the Nadi/Suva route and more supplementary services in peak periods.

What is more, Madam Speaker, the new A330-300 will provide a six per cent capacity increase for the Airline's popular Los Angeles route. I think we can all agree that the future of the Airline has never looked brighter.

Unfortunately, Madam Speaker, there are those who want to downplay *Fiji Airway's* potential by amongst other things, arguing for a closer of relationship with Qantas. I would like to clearly state that they still hold 46 per cent of *Fiji Airway's* shares, an issue we need to deal with in time to come. But the fact is this, Madam Speaker, as a country that relies on tourism, it is absolutely critical that we have a national airline that we have control of, and that we have control of the fortunes of that airline. It is a matter of national interest. We cannot be subjected to the commercial interest of foreign airlines alone. That is why, Madam Speaker, it is so important that we remove Qantas's veto rights in essential areas of the airline's operations.

HON. GOVT. MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- As a minority shareholder, these should have never been granted in the first place by the SVT Government.

HON. GOVT. MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- And that is why the FijiFirst Government is committed to ensuring the viability and success of Fiji Airways.

Madam Speaker, as a nation, we have acceded to many international conventions and treaties relating to civil aviation, such as the Warsaw and Chicago Conventions, to promote the safety and security of air travel.

Madam Speaker, I would now like to turn my attention to providing an update on the activities of the Department of Civil Aviation, which is responsible for ensuring that Fiji is in compliance with these Agreements.

Madam Speaker, the Department of Civil Aviation is responsible for the safe, efficient and effective regulation of air transport in Fiji. It develops Air Safety Protocols, in line with international standards and regulates and oversees the development of Fijian airports. Specifically, the Department of Civil Aviation is in charge of ensuring necessary compliance to the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) Standards through the regulatory arm of the Civil Aviation Authority of Fiji (CAAF).

Madam Speaker, CAAF regulates the safety and security in the civil aviation industry in Fiji. By effective implementation of the International Safety Standards set by the ICAO and their recommended practices, the Fijian civil aviation system is well above the global average and the highest in the South Pacific Region, excluding Australia and New Zealand.

We are currently in the process of harmonising the Fiji Air Navigation Regulations with international best practices and standards, to further raise our already exemplary record. So, Madam Speaker, the Department manages the allocation of \$3 million to CAAF, for safety and security oversight.

Madam Speaker, in addition to the focus on safe management, the Department also negotiates and reviews Air Services Agreements (ASAs) for the expansion of our aviation and tourism markets. For those who do not know, an ASA is an agreement between two nations, to allow international commercial transport services to be established. They are extremely important to a nation like Fiji which relies heavily on tourism, and is an island nation. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary that we enforce their terms, which have been carefully considered and agreed to by both parties. An example of this was the recent dispute with Solomon Islands, after it breached its agreement with us. Flights were suspended after a Fiji Airways flight was refused a landing slot in Honiara by the Civil Aviation Authority of the Solomon Islands.

Madam Speaker, I am very pleased that this dispute has been amicably resolved. But the point remains, Madam Speaker, Fiji takes its obligations under the ASA as with other international obligations, very seriously and fully complies with its obligations. At the same time, Fiji expects that those countries that sign ASAs with Fiji also comply with their obligations. If they fail to do so, Fiji has a clear sovereign right to assert the terms of those Agreements.

Madam Speaker, Fiji has concluded Agreements with 28 countries, including New Zealand, Australia, France, United States of America and Singapore. A total of 11 airlines including Fiji Airways, have been issued licences, permitting them to operate air services.

Recently Jetstar, one of the designated airlines of Australia (one of the representatives was sitting in the gallery about two days ago), has recently been approved to operate three flights per week from the Gold Coast to Nadi. (I think it is Coolangatta). The opening of this route through Jetstar will capture the Australian Eastern Seaboard Region, North of Sydney and South of Brisbane, in addition to the existing four flights they have per week on the Sydney/Nadi service.

In addition, Madam Speaker, Russia and the United Arab Emirates have both approached Fiji to sign ASAs and negotiations are currently underway. But I think it is important to stress, Madam Speaker, that it is our responsibility as government to ensure that our national interests are always protected. Therefore, Fiji does not support full air transport deregulation also known as the “Open Skies Policy”. This policy must be approached with caution and great care, as the time is simply not right for Fiji to enter such an agreement with other sovereignties. We also do not support generally, giving fifth and sixth freedom rights because they can have a deleterious effect on Fiji Airways and Fijian interest.

Madam Speaker, the Department also oversees the continual implementation of the important Air Subsidy Scheme to encourage air operators onto routes deemed uneconomical via a tender process. Domestic airline operators used these subsidies to facilitate trade, tourism and public travel needs that are so essential for our maritime communities. The tender process requires airline operators to bid the cost of operating air services to the outer island routes. Government then subsidises any shortfalls in the total revenue generated on a trip.

Madam Speaker, the 2015 tender was advertised on 4th October, 2014 and Fiji Link was awarded the tender for Vanua Balavu, Lakeba, Rotuma, Cicia and Koro. Northern Air was awarded the tender for Gau and Ono-i-Lau, and for the first time, Government is also now subsidising the Suva/Kadavu route.

Madam Speaker, the award of tenders takes into account various factors, such as the cost of operations which incorporates the airlines’ profit margin, the aircraft capacity, air fares and the ability of the airline to generate revenue on the tendered route. Madam Speaker, allow me to provide a few examples that illustrate my point.

The Koro route was awarded to Fiji Link, as it tendered a larger capacity - 19 seat Twin Otter aircraft with the lower cost of operation of \$4,830, whereas Northern Air tendered a lesser capacity of a nine-seat island aircraft with a higher cost of \$5,000. Similar things have been done, for example, for Rotuma and the Kadavu route, and I do not have time to go into all the specific examples. Just Rotuma, very quickly Madam Speaker, for example the distance between Nadi to Rotuma is approximately 587 kilometres, which is a two-and-a-half hour flight from Nadi to Rotuma with no refuelling facilities available in Rotuma. The airline operator on this route has to ship its fuel in advance to cater for the return flight from Rotuma. The Government then subsidises and assists the airlines to recover the cost of operating this route with a reasonable profit margin.

Madam Speaker, given the time constraints, overall, what I have highlighted is the general matters pertaining to Civil Aviation. We are extremely excited about the year ahead and there is much to look forward to in the year. *Vinaka*.

MADAM SPEAKER.- I thank the honourable Minister for his statement and I will now invite the honourable Leader of Opposition or her representative to present their response.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA. – Madam Speaker, I rise to reply to the Ministerial Statements made on Civil Aviation. Indeed, it is impressive Madam Speaker, let me just start with AFL, \$33 million is a

remarkable profit. I have some knowledge of how it works, and I just want to know who is being squeezed to give this kind of revenue to the corporation. This is a truly remarkable result of \$33 million profit, is truly remarkable.

I just want to take us back to December last year, when the honourable Tui Cakau put forward a motion that Fijian Holdings or Fiji Companies buy in to these public entities, instead of selling them overseas. These are profitable companies Madam Speaker, and I recall during that day, Government appeared to bristle at the idea that what they have made very profitable to go to a local company. I can remember the expression on their face on the day, similarly, FEA. They said “FEA is making \$63 million or something” but we know who has been squeezed to give them that kind of profit, we know that.

(Laughter)

As I said Madam Speaker, in one of my addresses, this is the most fearless Government, squeezing everyone...

(Laughter)

...with tax, with fees, with all sorts of charges has given them his revenue line and giving us all the profits that we have today. Madam Speaker, so we applaud that, but give us the opportunity to buy that and own those companies locally, no point in selling that overseas as a way they appear to be going.

Madam Speaker, I applaud the proposals to upgrade the local airports. I think Savusavu needs an ATR, and I do not know whether that is in the plans to bring in that kind of capacity, improve the runway at Savusavu. I believe, Madam Speaker, that it can be done very cheaply by the people of Savusavu themselves, but please, there is so many room inventory in Savusavu, they need bigger aircrafts. I applaud the initiative to increase capacity to Taveuni, but, Madam Speaker, I used to look after estates in Taveuni, flying from Nadi to Taveuni. I could have flown cheaper to Auckland rather than flying from Nadi to Taveuni.

(Laughter)

So who is being squeezed, Madam Speaker? Who is being squeezed? Government should look into reducing domestic air fares, and then brag about the huge profits that these companies making, and who is being squeezed Madam Speaker?

Madam Speaker, we applaud the profits that are being made by Air Pacific, but let me just say this Madam Speaker, it could be much higher if they bought the right type of aircraft.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER. – Hear, hear.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA. – During the SDL Government Madam Speaker...

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER. – Tell them!

HON. V.R. GAVOKA. - ...we were going to buy the Dreamliner 787-9 Series. Madam Speaker, we were ready, everything was in place to buy that. However, there was a change in Government and someone came and told this Government, “do not bother about Dreamliner, buy the Air Bus A330”.

Madam Speaker, Qantas has made profits lately, and are refurbishing all the Air Bus which the Australian public are applauding, but the Australian public is saying “Qantas, get into the 787-9 Series”. Fiji could have had the 787-9 Series in Nadi, instead of the Air Bus, and with that you could have got the million visitor very easily, if you get that kind of 787-9 Series, Madam Speaker.

HON. GOVT MEMBERS. - (Chorus of interjection)

Madam Speaker, this was all part of the planning for the SDL Government and us, to bring in a million by bringing in the right aircraft. Madam Speaker, I just wish I could have those glory days of SDL and all that wise planning and all those ideas, Madam Speaker.

(Laughter)

And the beauty about it, Madam Speaker, two executives, two Qantas Executives were given the job of doing feasibility study for the Dreamliner, and their names are Mr. Manoa Kamikamica of Dravo and Mr. Maikeli Nacolavu of Nasukamai in Ra.

We salute the gentleman going back to Berlin, but I wish he would not keep saying that no local can do the job. Thank you Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER.- I thank the honourable Member for his response and I now invite the honourable Leader of NFP for their response.

HON. DR. B.C. PRASAD. – Thank you Madam Speaker.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM. – The Committee!

(Laughter)

HON. DR. B.C. PRASAD. - I rise to respond to the honourable Attorney-General’s Ministerial Statement. I hope he was listening to the honourable Villiame Gavoka carefully because what he has laid down for this Chamber exactly says about the lack of transparency, accountability and honest information about the profitability of the AFL.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS. – Hear, hear!

HON. DR. B.C. PRASAD. – I share all his views with respect to that. Madam Speaker, let me also talk about this idea of national interest. We are a country of less than a million people, the global trend today, Madam Speaker, is for small countries, small markets and especially those who rely on tourism. Tourism is our major source of foreign exchange earnings, it contributes a significant percentage to GDP. Our objective Madam Speaker, should be to bring more tourist to the country, our objective should not be about running an airline. This word “logic”, what economic logic that we should not partner with international airlines? Every small country which relies on tourism partners with international airlines so that they can get more tourists.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS. – Yes!

HON. DR. B.C. PRASAD. – Let me give you some examples, Madam Speaker. Let me. Current Fleet, 3 x A330 equals 246 per aircraft, equals 726 seats per day, and 3 by 737, equals 150 by 3, 456

seats per day. The total available seats per day is 1,176, at 70 per cent seat factor, we are looking at 823 seats.

Fiji Airways Madam Speaker, has 3,468 seats available to contribute. If Fiji Airways does twice daily to all destinations, it will still not come close to carrying 70 per cent of total inbound tourists. So it is quite evident Madam Speaker that Fiji Airways cannot be the sole contributor towards bringing million tourists, and the more we partner with international airlines, Madam Speaker, the more tourists we will bring to this country - that should be the logic. It shouldn't be just a logic about national interest. National interest Madam Speaker will be served when we have more tourists coming to Fiji, when we have significant economic growth, when we are able to reduce poverty and when we are able to improve the quality of life of people in this country, that is what you call national interest...

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS. – Hear, hear!

HON. DR. B.C. PRASAD. – I am not saying to an old recognised partner from where we get majority of our tourists, that we do not need them, that save the company, so let us get our logic right about how we want to make Fiji a competitive tourist destination in the world. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER.- I thank the honourable Dr. Biman Prasad for his response. We are ending today's sitting on a high note. I wish to thank you all for your contributions to the discussions today, and may I please remind the Members of the Business Committee that we will meet in the Big Committee Room straight after this.

Honourable Members, the Parliament is now adjourned until 9.30am tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 1.23 p.m.