

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

WEDNESDAY, 18TH APRIL, 2018

[CORRECTED COPY]

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WEDNESDAY, 18TH APRIL, 2018

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

HONOURABLE SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Honourable Members were present, except the Honourable Prime Minister and Minister for *iTaukei* Affairs, Sugar Industry and Foreign Affairs; the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development and National Disaster Management and Meteorological Services; Honourable Minister for National Security and Defence; the Honourable Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism and Lands and Mineral Resources; the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services; the Honourable Minister for Waterways; the Honourable Assistant Minister for Rural and Maritime Development and National Disaster Management; the Honourable Assistant Minister for Health and Medical Services; the Honourable Assistant Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation; the Honourable Assistant Minister for Agriculture; and the Honourable Assistant Minister for Infrastructure and Transport.

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Tuesday, 17th April, 2018 as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Madam Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome

HON. SPEAKER.- I welcome all Honourable Members to today's sitting of Parliament. I also welcome the students and members of the public joining us in the gallery and those watching proceedings on television, the internet and listening to the radio. I hope that you will enjoy today's proceedings, as well as learn about the Parliamentary Practice and Procedures.

Responses to Written Questions

For the information of Honourable Members, the Secretariat has received the written response to the Written Question No. 827/2018 asked by the Honourable Ratu Kiniviliame Kiliraki, and this has been conveyed accordingly and a copy will also be made available on the Parliament Website.

Honourable Members, it has been noted that there is a need for responses to Written Questions to be circulated to all Honourable Members for their information. The Secretariat will circulate the written responses through electronic means commencing from today. Thank you, Honourable Members.

I now call upon the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs to present the Committee's Report.

PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

Standing Committee on Economic Affairs - Fiji Development Bank Annual Report for the Year Ending 30th June, 2016

HON. L. EDEN.- Madam Speaker, upon scrutiny of the Fiji Development Bank Annual Report for the Year Ending 30th June, 2016, the Committee was pleased to note that despite intense competition in the market and the fallout of *Tropical Cyclone Winston*, the Bank still managed to record a net profit of \$7.31 million, an increase of 18.98 percent over the same period for 2015.

By way of background, Madam Speaker, the FDB first opened for business in 1967 taking over operations of the former Agricultural and Industrial Loans Board.

As per section 5 of the Fiji Development Bank Act 1966, the functions of the Bank include facilitating and stimulating the promotion of development of natural resources, transportation and other industries and enterprises in Fiji, and in the discharge of these functions, the Bank shall give special consideration and priority to the economic development of the rural and agricultural sectors of the economy in Fiji.

The Committee, Madam Speaker, has put forward a list of six general recommendations that it believes will complement and strengthen the objectives of the Bank.

I thank the Honourable Members involved in the production of this Report namely the:

1. Honourable Vijay Nath;
2. Honourable Alvick Maharaj;
3. Honourable Viliame Gavoka; and
4. Honourable Prem Singh.

I also thank the Parliamentary Staff, who had assisted in preparing this Report.

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

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. L. EDEN.- Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move a motion without notice:

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

HON. SPEAKER.- Do you have a seconder?

HON. P. SINGH.- I beg to second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

The Question is:

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

Does any Member oppose?

(Chorus of “Noes”)

HON. SPEAKER.- There being no opposition, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

Motion agreed to.

I now call upon the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence to present the Committee's Report.

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence -
Review of Public Petition for Parliament to Review and Redress Anomaly in Police Backpay of
2015

HON. LT. COL. N. RIKA.- Madam Speaker, I am pleased to present the Report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence on its review of the public Petition for Parliament to review and redress the vast anomaly in the Police Backpay of 2015 (The Petition).

This Report reviews the Petition tabled on 24th August, 2015, requesting Parliament to scrutinise and redress the claims by retired police officers on alleged anomalies in the Police Job Evaluation Exercise (JEE) for 2004 and 2005 and the resulting backpay conducted in 2004.

The Petition was first referred by Parliament to the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights (JLHR) on 24th August, 2015. It was later referred to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence by the Honourable Speaker on 20th March, 2017.

The Committee held its first meeting on 28th March, 2017 and agreed on a work plan that involved the call for oral and written submissions from affected parties and interested stakeholders. A series of Committee hearings were conducted between 4th April, 2017 to 28th March, 2018.

The Committee commends the efforts of the Ministry of Economy; Ministry of Defence, National Security and Immigration; and the Fiji Police Force, for the appointment of a Taskforce in 2015 to initiate the process of pursuing the payment of the Job Evaluation Exercise. As a result, the police pay increment and payment of arrears as far as the JEE was concerned, were

paid to police officers in 2015 for the following years - 2004, 2005, 2006, 2009 and 2012. The budget for the Job Evaluation Exercise was \$28.5 million and the fund was under Head 50.

Whilst commending some of the initiatives of the stakeholders, the Committee had identified some opportunities for improvements; these are outlined in the Report.

Madam Speaker, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, I submit this Report to Parliament.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. LT. COL. N. RIKA.- Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move a motion without notice:

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

HON. SPEAKER.- Do you have a seconder?

HON. H.R.T. POLITINI.- Madam Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

The Question is:

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

Does any Member oppose?

(Chorus of "Noes")

There being no opposition, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Hon. Parmod Chand, you may have the floor.

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

Awareness Programmes - Fatalities from Eating *Daniva*
(Question No. 132/2018)

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

Would the Honourable Minister for Fisheries outline in Parliament what sort of awareness programmes, if any, has the Ministry carried out throughout the past one year following fatalities caused by eating common species of fish like *Daniva* in early 2017?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Hon. Minister for Fisheries, you may have the floor.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU (Minister for Fisheries).- Thank you, Madam Speaker and I thank the Honourable Member for the question.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry acknowledges the issue of fish poisoning and has been working with the communities and relevant stakeholders to create and promote awareness and educational campaigns on this issue.

Madam Speaker, fish poisoning is prevalent in Fiji. However, under-reporting of cases has been an issue. To address this, the Ministry of Fisheries is working with key partners, such as the Ministry of Health and relevant Non-Government Organisations and local communities to address the issues. The practice is that reports are only submitted once the affected face serious illness that lead to fatalities.

Madam Speaker, after the fatalities caused by eating *Daniva* in January last year, the Ministry of Fisheries has strengthened its efforts on the following awareness programmes.

First, in creating awareness through publications, I have here the publications that had been given all around Fiji and available to areas where fish is being sold; in the public markets and in Government Offices all around Fiji, and the Honourable Member can take a copy. Also, the issue of fish poisoning has been published in the daily newspapers and other publications, and had been circulated around Fiji.

Madam Speaker, with regard to awareness through publications, the Ministry has printed more than 2,000 copies of this and these posters had been widely distributed, as I had alluded to.

These posters carry details of fish species and the likely area where they are to be found, and also the months in which consumers need to be more vigilant because of the various species that can be poisonous. The publication also urges the public to take necessary precautionary actions when choosing which fish to buy as ciguatera-toxin fish cannot be destroyed by freezing, cooking or any other process. It cannot be detected by appearance, colour, texture or taste. This is why it is important for consumers to be vigilant.

Fisheries have weekly radio talkback shows in the three main languages, moreover through collaborative partners such as the Ministry of Health, we were able to develop the information packages on fish poisoning. These information packages are used to raise awareness with the communities around Fiji during roadshows and community workshops.

Madam Speaker, we are currently holding discussions with municipal markets to assist and create the awareness, not only to vendors but the general public by the establishment of information boards.

Moreover, Madam Speaker, through further collaboration, the Ministry is working closely with the Ministry of Health, the Fiji National University and the University of the South Pacific in collating data pertaining to fish poisoning. Our ability to come up with solutions will depend on additional science and the assessment of incidences. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

HON. P. SINGH.- A supplementary question, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- A supplementary question.

HON. P. SINGH.- The Director of Research at the Ministry of Fisheries had said after *TC Winston* that fish poisoning would be all-year-round for the next three years. The Director also said that the toxins released from coral reefs should affect at least 20 species. The question is, Madam Speaker, whether the Ministry of Fisheries has been carrying out regular tests to determine the toxicity of our coral reefs in the last two years in order for the Ministry to issue regular updates and advise people on what to eat and what to avoid, especially after our recent climatic disruptions? Madam Speaker, if they are not doing it, or if they are doing it, when do we see some reports on that tabled in this House?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I thank the Honourable Member for the supplementary question.

The Ministry of Fisheries do not have the capacity at the moment to test all reef systems that had been damaged by *TC Winston* but we have been proactive and gave out the information that is required to let the public know on fish poisoning in general. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Mohammed Dean.

HON. M.M.A. DEAN.- I thank you, Madam Speaker. I have a supplementary question to the Honourable Minister.

HON. SPEAKER.- A supplementary question.

HON. M.M.A. DEAN.- Can the Honourable Minister give a brief on the different cases of fish poisoning incidents that took place last year and how the Ministry had dealt with them?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I thank the Honourable Member for his question. The last batch of reported cases occurred in January 2017. The first case was received on 4th January which occurred in Somosomo Village, Gau. A total of 15 people fell ill after consuming *Daniva*. Additionally, 11 individuals were affected on the same week when they consumed *Barracuda* in Ba and fortunately, all individuals recovered well from the fish poisoning.

Lastly, Madam Speaker, in the week of January 2017, 10 people who consumed *Moray Eel* in Gau all fell ill but recovered thereafter. This year, there has never been any reports received in the same period as last year.

From these facts, Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Fisheries has worked around the clock to raise public awareness on the matter. For this reason, we believe that it has been successful, noting that no case has been reported for this year.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Salote Radrodro.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker and I thank the Honourable Minister for that explanation.

We noted that the death cases had come in from the rural areas, and can the Honourable Minister explain what programmes are in place where key ministries are working in partnership with each other, like Health and *iTaukei* Affairs in reviving and enhancing the use of traditional medicine to be able to help the communities that do come across these kinds of cases? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think the traditional medicine is well-known in our rural areas and in the cases that we have experienced in 2017, traditional medicine was widely used in the first instance when we waited for the assistance from the medical doctors from Suva.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Vunivalu.

HON. S.B. VUNIVALU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker, a supplementary question.

HON. SPEAKER.- A supplementary question.

HON. S.B. VUNIVALU.- Madam Speaker, in regards to poisonous fish, can the Honourable Minister name some of the common fishes found around Fiji that are known to be poisonous?

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Madam Speaker, and I thank the Honourable Member for the question. I have shown the picture but I will just briefly outline the list of fish that are commonly poisonous in Fiji. They are as follows:

- Great Barracuda (*Ogo*);
- Pickhandle Barracuda (*Ogo bui dromo*);
- Brown-marbled Grouper (*Dela bulewa*);
- Giant Sweetlips (*Drekeni levu*);
- Leopard-Coral Trout (*Donu*);
- Square-tail Grouper (*Donu sedravu*);
- Mangrove Snapper (*Damu ni veitiri*);
- Black-saddled Grouper (*Donu saloa*);
- Long-face Emperor (*Dokonivudi*);
- Green-job Fish (*Utouto*);

- Black-banded Snapper (*Kake sailoa*);
- Two-spot Red Snapper (*Bati*);
- Rivulet Snapper (*Regu rawa*);
- Russell Snapper (*Kake sedamu*);
- Long-spot Snapper (*Tina ni kake*);
- Gold-spot Herring (*Daniva*);
- White-spotted Pufferfish (*Sumusumu se vula*);
- Starry-Puffer Fish (*Samusamu sailoa*);
- Giant Moray Eel (*Dabea levu*); and
- Yellow-Margin Moray (*Dabea*).

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. It seems like the *Regu rawa* is the most poisonous fish.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- That is right.

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Madam Speaker, a supplementary question: from the outset, some of these species of fish have been edible for quite some time in these various areas, especially in Somosomo, Gau. Can I ask the Honourable Minister, has the Government given any thought on the fish poisoning in new areas now, is that something that can be taken on board due to climate change? Has it come about as a result of climate change, because it is not normal?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Member for his question. Yes, these are quite abnormal incidences happening around Fiji. But basically on the disturbance of the seabed and the coral reefs that these fishes live in, I will attempt to go back and ask our officials, just to provide some information on the new era that has created this new phenomena whereby when reefs are disturbed, poisonous substances are generated and if eaten by fish, can cause fish to be poisonous.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Jilila Kumar?

HON. J.N. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker, a supplementary question: can the Honourable Minister advise this House on the identified causes of fish poisoning?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Member for the supplementary question. I think this goes in line with the question that was posed by the Honourable Ratu Lalabalavu. There are two causes; the natural causes and the other being manmade influences.

Natural causes are dependent on the natural changes of weather which would lead to change in water temperatures, currents and food source that increases algae growth within the water column. When these fishes feed on algae, it increases the biotoxin level within them that takes the poisonous substance in before being consumed by humans, and this mainly occurs during the month of October to March every year. Madam Speaker, this is something that cannot be prevented but can be mitigated, if the public takes heed of the warnings that are being raised during awareness.

On the other hand, manmade influences on fish poisoning are commonly caused by nutrient excitement through surface runoff, sanitation, habitat degradation and high oil spills from industrial areas.

Madam Speaker, those are some of the immediate causes of fish poisoning in Fiji and across the region.

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

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- Madam Speaker, apart from the publications and names that have come up, when you come from the highlands, you just go for the colours of the fish, especially the red ones.

(Laughter)

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- In the market, you still see the *Dokonivudi*, *Damu*, *Ogo* being sold. Is there any enforcement by the Ministry of Fisheries, for them to be on the ground to confiscate all those fishes that are being sold, according to the list that he has given?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- I thank the Honourable Member for the question. The species that have been banned are already published in all areas where fish are sold. The Ministry of Fisheries cannot go and confiscate the fish that are being caught by the fishermen without any compensation that needs to be paid. This is basically on the consumer information that is available to them, and if they know that that fish is poisonous, then they should not buy it. We do not have any legislation that can assist us in stopping the sale of those fish.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Parmod Chand?

HON. P. CHAND.- Madam Speaker, a supplementary question: can the Honourable Minister assure us that in addition to the report on MPAs, fishing moratoriums and its social impacts that he promised yesterday that he can add the state of the health of our coral reefs to these reports, as MPAs are supposed to, in the first instance, sustain our reefs as well as our mangroves?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Madam Speaker, I think he needs to raise this issue in another question. He was talking about fish poisoning, now he has gone to coral reefs. If he wants me to submit a report on coral reefs, then he needs to come up with another question at another time, he cannot mix it.

HON. SPEAKER.- Last question, the Honourable Viliame Gavoka.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I am horrified that the Honourable Minister said that there is no law that can stop fishermen from selling fish that are poisonous. Can he then, given the tragedy that we had last year, work on a legislation to bring to this Parliament, so that we can enforce and pass a law to prohibit people from selling dangerous fish? It is like someone selling a bomb and then we do not do anything about it.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Member for the question. This is basically a human need and the need to be aware that if a fish is poisonous because we cannot give a criteria because those fish species are only poisonous at a certain period of time. So we are not able to go out and give a placard which says, "Do not eat this fish". It is like smoking a cigarette, everyone knows that cigarette is dangerous to our health. The choice is up to the consumer. If we produce this in the marketplace, that is very informative, and if you choose to go and eat it, we cannot do anything about it. It is like smoking a cigarette, we know it is bad for our health. So it is up to you if you want to eat a poisonous fish.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Honourable Mataiasi Niumataiwalu.

Functions/Benefits - Credit Information Reporting Agency PTE Ltd
(Question No. 133/2018)

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

Can the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications advise the House of the functions of the newly established Credit Information Reporting Agency PTE Ltd and how will it benefit consumers?

HON. SPEAKER.- Acting Prime Minister, Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications, you have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM (Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications).- Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the Honourable Member for this question.

Madam Speaker, Honourable Members of Parliament may remember that Government introduced a Bill and was subsequently passed by Parliament, which is called the Fair Reporting of Credit Act 2016.

Prior to that, Madam Speaker, we had an organisation or company called Data Bureau, that took it upon itself to start collating credit information on individual citizens and, of course, financial institutions in Fiji without any regulation whatsoever. And notwithstanding the fact it was not a regulated environment to know a regulated organisation, it essentially determined the lives of many Fijians because people could go and report any sort of credit that people owed to this particular agency called Data Bureau and they will simply put your name within the system. For example, if I owed \$50 to an internet company, they could go and put my name in the Data Bureau and even though that Bill may be disputed, the next time I went to Courts to get a loan or

hire purchase, they would say, "You have not paid your previous debts, sorry, we cannot give you a loan." Many Fijians suffered through that. I remember very clearly elucidating that but unfortunately, the Opposition did not support us at that time but fortunately we, of course, have the numbers where we actually passed the Fair Reporting of Credit Act.

Madam Speaker, also within that system, you had no right of appeal. As we were told numerous horror stories where, for example, in particular one internet company, even though the services may be down for two or three months, the individual consumers would get a bill and would dispute it, but notwithstanding that dispute, they will still go and report it and subsequently an individual could not access credit.

So, fast-tracking it now, Madam Speaker, under the Fair Reporting of Credit Act, this Act now regulates the environment of credit reporting, as many jurisdictions do have. Now, Madam Speaker you have to be a licensed credit reporting agency, regulated by the Reserve Bank of Fiji (RBF). In the context of what the Honourable Member has actually asked, we have a company called Credit Information Reporting Agency (CIRA) PTE Ltd, that would be the organisation that has actually been given a licence by the RBF.

The Directors of the Company, Madam Speaker, who have to operate in a regulated environment are:

1. Mr. Winston Penjueli;
2. Ms. Janelle Penjueli; and
3. Ms. Lorraine Foster.

These individuals are the Directors of this Company. They have a background in finance and various other prerequisite requirements to run such an agency and they would be governed by the Fair Reporting of Credit Act.

Also, Madam Speaker, as highlighted, you cannot, for example, simply go running off to this organisation if someone owes you \$50. There is a minimum threshold, so just because someone owes you \$100 or \$150, you cannot. Madam Speaker, from memory, the minimum amount is \$300 and, I stand to be corrected on that, I have not recently looked at this but it is about \$300. So in that way, it is regulated.

Also, for example, if someone puts your name there when they should not have, you have a right of appeal. Previously, there was no right of appeal, people actually used to go and pay people off to get their names off the list. So, Madam Speaker, this will create a very healthy environment for the reporting of credit. Of course, you do need a credit reporting agency in any good financial system because you also do need to know that there are some people who actually do not pay their credit.

We do need to know who are the people who actually breach the conditions of the loan they have taken, so that will also enable banks and other financial institutions, including hire purchase companies to make some smart decisions, but also at the same time, it protects the consumers who want to access credits.

The Bank approved the licence for CIRA on 29th March and we expect them to be operational within the next few months. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Prem Singh?

HON. P. SINGH.- Madam Speaker, a supplementary question. I thank the Honourable Minister for his answer. My question is: now that these local investors have the licence from the RBF, will they have access to previous data of the now defunct Data Bureau or they will have to start from scratch?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, if your data is adulterated, why would you want to access adulterated data?

Madam Speaker, as provided for under the law, they have to start afresh. The banks already have the information, for example, the banks would want to make an input into this new CIRA organisation.

They can make the input. I am sure Courts also has records of people who have probably absconded and not paid their credit, they can also make an input into the CIRA organisation. You do not take unadulterated information from an organisation that did not have the regulatory authority, but banks and hire purchase companies do, and they are a lot more responsible in that respect, so they can have an input.

As provided for under this particular Act, Madam Speaker, the credit reporting agency can get information, both from consumers and also from the lenders. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Samuela Vunivalu?

HON. S.B. VUNIVALU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker; a supplementary question.

HON. SPEAKER.- A supplementary question.

HON. S.B. VUNIVALU.- I thank the Reserve Bank of Fiji that has granted licence to the Credit Information Reporting Agency (CIRA) PTE Limited in Fiji. I know that local investors have been granted this licence in which they are able to access. My question is: can the farmers be able to have access to this Company too?

HON. SPEAKER.- The Acting Prime Minister.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Member is asking the question, "Can anyone set up such an agency?" Yes, but they have to meet the requirements of the RBF as provided for under the actual Act itself, and there is a particular form that you actually have to fill out, you have to meet minimum capital requirements, et cetera. So there is, over here, what they call, an "Evaluation Report" - "Application to conduct a credit reporting agency business". That is the RBF's logo there, but you have to meet the various requirements of the RBF, meet the requirements of the actual Act itself, and then you can actually set up such an agency. We know that there are other companies that are interested in also setting up in Fiji

Madam Speaker, just one other point that I made earlier on, under the regulations of this Fair Reporting of Credit Act, it does say under section 6 that the minimum amount of credit information that may be reported to the credit reporting agency or credit report recipient is a payment of more than \$300, that has been overdue for, at least, 60 days.

That was the problem before. So if someone, for example, owes me \$100 and I will go running off tomorrow and report them to the credit reporting agency, so the law now says that it must be an amount that is more than \$300 and it must be overdue for more than 60 days, not someone who just owes you money for one month, so that is the minimum criteria for that. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Aseri Radrodro?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Madam Speaker, there are a lot of questions to ask on this particular Credit Information Reporting Agency like ownership, criteria for appointment of directors. But one question that I would like the Honourable Minister to inform the House is about student loans. Will they also be part of the information to be recorded at the new Credit Information Reporting Agency?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- No, Madam Speaker, the Government has not decided to report that to the Credit Reporting Agency because we have a separate arrangement which is through the Fiji Revenue and Customs Services (FRCS), Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Dulakiverata?

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- Madam Speaker, as we all know and as has been informed by the Honourable Minister that there was a company before called the Credit Bureau. I do not blame them for the way they operated because there was no legislation at that time, but to be shut down immediately and there were shareholders for that company, it was not their fault. They were doing a great service to the lenders because they were able to recover their money from some very illusive borrowers. My question to the Honourable Minister, will this company be allowed to operate again?

HON. SPEAKER.- The Honourable Acting Prime Minister.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, it is very interesting how the Honourable Member wants to keep on flying the flag of Data Bureau when Data Bureau caused enormous heartache and emotional stress to ordinary Fijians, in particular those who were at the bottom end of the socio-economic scale. They continue to fly that flag.

Madam Speaker, as the law provided (and they seem to be only looking after the rich), the law did not stop or did not prohibit Data Bureau (as it was known), from operating. All they simply had to do was to comply with the law. They have to make an application through the Reserve Bank of Fiji.

Madam Speaker, what it actually revealed was, and I will tell you who the shareholders of the Bureau were, according to the company file, the major shareholder of Data Bureau Limited is Carlyle Limited which holds approximately 33.4 per cent of the shares. Additionally, Carlyle (Fiji) Limited owns 11.1 percent of the shares and this company is a subsidiary of Carlyle Limited, effectively, this means that Carlyle Limited owns 44.5 percent of the shares in the reporting company.

No one knows who Carlyle Limited is and who owns most of the shares in the company that collects and disseminates personal credit information in relation to Fijian citizens. There is no record of Carlyle Limited at the Companies Office.

While there is a company called Carlyle (Fiji) Limited, its shares are owned by Carlyle Limited. One part of Carlyle (Fiji) Limited company file, there is a reference to Carlyle Limited having its address in Vanuatu. When an online search was done with Vanuatu Financial Services Commission, it states that the status of Carlyle Limited is dissolved (removed from the Register on 30th June, 1993). So it would appear that Carlyle Limited is a company incorporated in Vanuatu, which is either dissolved or otherwise, the controller of Carlyle Limited had not been keeping the company's records up-to-date. Madam Speaker, this is just one shareholder with the majority shareholder.

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Member is suggesting that we give private information to an organisation that we do not even know 44 percent of who owns it.

(Hon. Members interject)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- The other point obviously is, it is unregulated in particular with ordinary Fijians who did not have any say whatsoever. If there were two, for example, Honourable Dulakiveratas and by mistake his name went in to the register instead of the other Dulakiverata, he had no right of appeal, unless he knew personally someone within the company, who would do a bit of, "Please, remove my name", he may have the connections to do that. But ordinary "Pauliasi" or "Ram Prasad" down the road had no connections and many of them suffered as a result of that and many of them made submissions to us, Madam Speaker.

So now, we have a regulated, transparent environment. You have to meet the requirements of an independent body called the Reserve Bank of Fiji. If you know the criteria, you can set up an agency. These people who owned Data Bureau can similarly do that if they are quite keen to do that in a transparent manner and in a transparent environment.

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

Job Attachment Percentages for School Leavers
(Question No. 134/2018)

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

Can the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications inform the House if Government would consider enforcing a percentage of intakes for school leavers as job attachments, depending on the size of the firms and companies?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. The Honourable Acting Prime Minister.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM (Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications).- Madam Speaker, Government has, of course, implemented a law that covers job attachments, depending on the size of the workforce. The National Employment Centre Act 2009 states in Section 44, and I quote:

"An employer who employs more than 50 workers must engage suitably qualified unemployed persons as attachés or volunteers on a ratio of at least 5% of the total number of workers employed by the employer."

From 2010 to 2017, the National Employment Centre (NEC) of the Ministry of Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations placed a total of 6,455 clients in work attachment. In the same period, 7,676 clients were absorbed in permanent employment and these include clients who were registered with the Centre but found employment on their own.

The organisations, Madam Speaker, in which attachés are placed, include the:

1. private sector;
2. Government; and indeed the
3. Judiciary.

In the private sector, Madam Speaker, these include the:

1. retail sector;
2. tourism;
3. manufacturing;
4. financial sector; and
5. clothing and textile industry.

In Government, these include the:

1. Ministry of Youth and Sports;
2. Ministry of Civil Service;
3. Ministry of Local Government;
4. Ministry of Employment;
5. Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development;
6. Ministry of Economy;
7. Department of Immigration;
8. Ministry of Social Welfare;
9. Office of the Prime Minister; and the
10. Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The attachés receive allowances where the Centre, under Government, pays 50 percent of the allowances and the employer pays 50 percent shared-cost basis. We have also advised employers through employers' forums and media advertisements on the job attachment requirements in the law, and have encouraged employers to fulfil the legal requirements of engaging attachées in the workplaces per the ratio of the workforce.

Madam Speaker, we will, of course, continue to have dialogue with the overall potential employers but Government itself, Madam Speaker, as you can see does actually take a number of attachés in those Ministries that I have highlighted. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Aseri Radrodro?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the Minister for his comprehensive reply. A supplementary question: in terms of firms and companies, what he has mentioned is basically a list of Government departments and ministries, are there also institutions like private entities that are also being tasked to do this similar exercise?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Acting Prime Minister.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, as highlighted the private sector has been encouraged. The Minister for Employment and his team through NEC, of course, are trying to promote that but from the information that we have received from the private sector, these include the retail sector, tourism, manufacturing, financial sector and clothing and textile industries that have already taken on attachés and continue to do so.

Some, of course, may be more conducive, an environment for attachés, others may not be. Some, of course, may be reluctant to do so because they have not done so, so we need to be able to encourage. I do not know, for example, an organisation like a bread shop, whether they will take attachés or not, it depends on the work environment. Whether you take attachés in FSC, it all depends on particular sections, on what type of work environment there is but also there is no doubt that there are certain employers who are reluctant and perhaps have not done so before and we need to encourage them to do so. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Ro Kiliraki.

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. A supplementary question on whether National Employment Centre (NEC) has an input to address this question. Its mandated role is to provide that, to look for employment and to be able to use this as a way forward for the school leavers in terms of encouraging companies to take them on board for learning experience. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Acting Prime Minister.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, I kind of got lost in that question, but if the Honourable Member is asking about encouraging high school leavers and university students, the Honourable Member may remember that in the budget, we had also approved a tax rebate for employers who actually hired students whilst they were studying at universities. So for example, there may be a person or student studying at the University of the South Pacific (USP) or Fiji National University (FNU), they may have lectures only four times a week or they may have lectures all in the morning.

So we are encouraging them to find work in the hours that they do not have any classes and if they go and work, say for example, if I am studying accounting and I may find a part time work in an accounting firm, may be pushing some paper or doing some basic accounts or verification of accounts, at least I am learning on the job and if my employer then hires me, from memory, it is about 150 percent tax rebate. So in that way when that student comes out of university, he or she can say, "Look, I have got some work experience, I know how an accounting environment works" or alternatively, they may get a placement somewhere else or it could just be simply in retail sales. At least then they can say, "I have actually got some work experience."

We have been promoting that through the Fiji Revenue and Customs Service (FRCS), trying to get employers so we entice them by basically offering them some money with a 150 percent tax rebate with the salaries that they do pay. So if the Honourable Member is talking about that then that is the type of thing that is already happening at the university level and we, of course, encourage all employers through this medium, Madam Speaker, please, hire people, you are giving them opportunities.

There are some of us who, when we were actually at university, we used to work part time which meant that we had a better foot in the door when we actually applied for fulltime work. So that is the environment that we are trying to create. Thank you.

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

Measures - Promotion and Improving Occupational Health in Fiji
(Question No. 135/2018)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations inform the House on the measures that have been taken and will be taken by the Ministry to promote and improve Occupational Health in Fiji?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. The Honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations.

HON. J. USAMATE (Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations).- Thank you, Madam Speaker, yes, the issue of Occupational Health in Fiji is something that is not just a concern to my Ministry, but also the Ministry for Health and Medical Services, obviously, because of the impact that it has on people who are employed which in turn has an impact on the productivity of the places that they work in, which in turn has an impact on the country as a whole.

When you talk about occupational health, you are basically looking at two things: you want to make sure that the places where people work and the occupations that they have in those environments do not lead to health problems, so we want healthy places where people do not get hurt or injured, et cetera.

Secondly, the other aspect (the flip side of this) is that we want to make sure that people who are engaged in occupations, who are coming to work in the first place are healthy people before they enter the workforce. Secondly, when they are in the workforce or in the place of employment, nothing is going to happen to them there that affects their health.

So we have got two things that we need to be able to focus on. In the past, we tended to have (especially in my Ministry) the Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) where there seem to be a stronger emphasis on occupational safety rather than health. Now there is a move to try to address both of these issues; the issues of not just safety but also health.

To do this, my Ministry has set up a working group, there is an advisory committee that includes people from the Ministry of Employment and also from the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, Fiji National University, International Labour Organisation and the World Health Organisation. All these bodies are working together to look at the occupational health challenges that face the country. This group also works very closely with the National Occupational and Safety Advisory Board that sits under my Ministry which is tripartite in nature, as representatives from unions, employers and Government and also that advisory group gives advice to the OHS Advisory Board.

Through that particular work, Madam Speaker, they have been able to produce the first occupational health profile of Fiji. This occupational health profile analyses occupational health situations in Fiji, it identifies things that we need to do as a country and basically set out the road map or ideas of areas in which we need to take action in Fiji.

Later on this month, we will be having the Occupational Health and Safety Day and the World Day against Child Labour. These things are coming together on 26th April, 2018 so these issues will be talked about and discussed. Through these platforms, we want to be able to focus a lot of attention on emerging trends in occupational health and safety, work-related injuries, how we can reduce and minimise work-related injuries, work-related diseases and fatalities with a particular focus on the younger people that we have in our workforce.

Madam Speaker, last year, we also had the first ever asbestos symposium. Though we had an asbestos scare last year, the issue at the Civic Centre and over this past period, we have been looking at addressing other asbestos issues at Steak House, Nausori Market and a few other places. We wanted to raise awareness on asbestos and also teach people how to address asbestos, obviously with the intent of trying to make sure to reduce its impact on people who are employed. Through that symposium on asbestos, we have created networks, collaboration between different agencies to continue to work on these things.

Now that we are moving into this, I think, constantly we have been talking about climate change and its impact on everything in life. Obviously, this is also going to have an impact on those that are employed. With the changing weather patterns, it is likely that we will have a lot more hot days so that can lead to more heat stress which can impact on people in the workplace.

One of the things that the Ministry does or a responsibility of our occupational health and safety is to vet the plans for buildings that are being put in place to make sure that they are designed in such a way that they do not have a negative impact on the people that are working in those buildings. It minimises the impact of physiological and psychological discomfort so that it does not deteriorate the performance and productivity of the people who are working there. The Ministry actually vets building plans prior to construction for commercial purposes to ensure occupational health and safety compliance.

Apart from that, Madam Speaker, my Ministry and also the Ministry of Health and Medical Services are fully committed to the idea of wellness in the workplace, encouraging all staff members to participate in health checks and the one-hour walk for health programmes. The Ministry also encourages healthy refreshments for meetings and for people to take ownership of their own health, living in a healthy lifestyle.

In Government, Madam Speaker, most of the Government Ministries now on Wednesdays, civil servants are encouraged to participate in physical activity. Now, Government has put in place this National Sports and Wellness Public Holiday, once again with the idea of promoting the concept of wellness to everyone so people start taking responsibility for the things that have an impact on their lives. That is basically:

1. Food;
2. Drink;
3. What we breathe;
4. Whether we have enough rest;
5. Our mental state; and

6. Physical activity.

These are the things that we will continue to focus on. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Jilila Kumar?

HON. J.N. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker, a supplementary question.

HON. SPEAKER.- A supplementary question.

HON. J.N. KUMAR.- Honourable Minister, what collaboration efforts have been undertaken by the Ministry to promote Occupational Health in Fiji?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. As I had mentioned before we have set up that Advisory Committee, so rather than Advisory Committee on Occupational Health and Safety, on occupational health so it does not just use the people from within my Ministry but we call upon people from the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, World Health Organisation and international bodies. So we are trying to get a cross section of people who have expertise and competence in this particular area so that they can share ideas to review the data that they have so that we can come up with appropriate plans, so that is multi-sectoral in nature.

We also have the Advisory Committee of National Occupational Health and Safety Advisory body (NOHSA) as I have mentioned before. I have mentioned that it is tripartite; it has representatives from the unions so we are trying to get the unions on board. The unions also should have their own plan of what they will do to enhance the health of their own members.

We have the representatives of employers, so we hope that employers will have their own plans in place to try to enhance the health of the employees that they have within their organisations and it also has representatives of Government. That is a system of trying to make sure that there is co-operation across different sectors.

One of the other things that we are focussing on this project of National Occupational Health is to try to enhance the information systems that we have. Different bodies tend to have different pockets of data information. This information system needs to be able to speak to each other, they need to be analysed so we can learn from it and identify what the situation is in terms of Fiji's labour force, safety, conditions of work, occupational health, occupational accidents, occupational diseases, the development of statistics, conversion of that statistics into information to knowledge that can influence policy development.

Also as a follow on from this, we will need collaboration which we will continue to do to look at development of national training programmes on work life to be included as part of our National OHS and Strategy. We will also be considering ratification in the future of relevant ILO Conventions that relate to occupational health. That is something that we will work towards as the different organisations that are part of occupational health become involved and come up with specific programmes. We will eventually move to look at the ratification of ILO Convention No. 161 in the future. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Niko Nawaikula?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, in a particular incident that I know, employees were complaining and complaining but no one turned up from the Ministry so the point is compliance. Could the Honourable Minister advise the House as to how many employers were prosecuted or taken to task in relation to non-compliance to standards?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. J. USAMATE.- Madam Speaker, I am sure I should be able to get the number of
....

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. J. USAMATE.- I do not have that data with me right now, I should be able to get that and pass it onto the Honourable Member.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Members. We have three other Honourable Members that need to ask supplementary questions but time has caught up with us. These questions can be asked after morning tea.

We will now adjourn Parliament for refreshments and resume at 11 o'clock.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.29 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.00 a.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- We will resume from where we left off and we have three questions still to be asked to the Honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations. I now give the floor to the Honourable Howard Politini.

HON. H.R.T. POLITINI.- Madam Speaker, just a supplementary question to the Honourable Minister. What challenges exist in the promotion and improvement of Occupational Health in Fiji; and how can this be addressed?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Madam Speaker, firstly, I think one of the key challenges is basically the lack of information. Secondly, a lot of times people have the information but perhaps they do not have the urgency to do something about it. So, there is a great need for that, first of all, to make sure that people get the information that they need.

We are constantly hearing about the problems that we have from non-communicable diseases and the fact that it kills up to 80 percent of our people. We are now hearing of people getting amputations from diabetes, I think once every eight hours. I recall when I was the Minister it was once every twelve hours so we have this information. In some areas we do have that information and others we do not have. So, there is a need to enhance the provision of that information and also we need programmes within enterprises and companies that encourage people to actually do something about it. It helps also if we have programmes that get people in an enterprise to start doing things together as a team.

So, that is why the programme that we have in Government now where Government workers, for instance, Civil Service workers, on Wednesdays get one hour to go and engage in physical activities, this is a good thing because it encourages them to start doing things on their own.

I know that the Ministry of Health and Medical Services had developed a booklet about catering on the kinds of food that one should provide. I think, that is also good and now in Parliament we are seeing that is now happening in the food that we get in Parliament, a lot more vegetables are available. So, firstly, is the lack of information and where there is information, there is the lack of incentive to do something about it.

The next problem that we have is, they always say that in management “if you cannot measure it, you cannot manage it”. So, one of the big problems that we have is that, we do not do enough surveillance of our own health status. The Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services has said that any person in Fiji can go to the health centres and get their BMI checked, sugar checked, et cetera. So, we need better health surveillance so that people know their status.

In my Ministry, we have done this for all of our workers and we need to be able to do it all across Fiji. I know currently in the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, they are having a project for NCDs with JICA where they are looking at one particular enterprise to get everyone there surveyed to see what their health issues are so that they can come up with intervention packages for them.

Third is the importance of being able to demarcate work-related health issues and personal lifestyle - the mix between your personal lifestyle and the impact that that will have on your health. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Mikaele Leawere?

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the Honourable Minister for his response, especially on the Occupational Health in Fiji. I would just like to seek his clarification and inform the House as to some companies that are not conforming to OHS compliance, and what is the Ministry doing about it? There was a case in Pacific Harbour where someone got injured and was not able to receive his compensation. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Madam Speaker, I encourage all Members of the House, if you are aware of anything that you think is not in order in terms of the Occupational Health and Safety, please, send me that information and I will ensure that our staff get down to it. For members of the public that are listening, if you think that there is anything happening at any work place where perhaps OHS standards have not been met, please, feel free to contact me personally or my Ministry and we will make sure it is addressed.

HON. SPEAKER.- Lastly, Honourable Prem Singh?

HON. P. SINGH.- A supplementary question, Madam Speaker, I thank the Minister for his reply to the question. On the OHS Act, the independence of workplace committee is absolutely vital. They should always be chaired by an employee without any interference from the employer. The concern is, how effective are these operations? The question, Madam Speaker, is whether the Ministry has records of all Workplace OHS Committees and whether the Ministry monitors these Workplace Committees by way of receiving reports on the functions and operations of the organisation?

HON. SPEAKER.- The Honourable Minister.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Yes, Madam Speaker. The Ministry tries to keep tabs of the work of the OHS Committees but I think that is a good question, perhaps for the Honourable Member to pose again if there is a written question, et cetera, so that I can get the statistics collated and presented back to the House.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to Honourable Viliame Gavoka to ask his question.

Meningococcal C (Men-C) Outbreak
(Question No. 136/2018)

HON. V. GAVOKA asked the Government, upon notice:

Men-C has the potential to harm Fiji's tourism industry in the same way SARS devastated Asian tourism in the late 2002 to mid-2003. Can the Honourable Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism, Lands and Mineral Resources inform the House what the Government is doing together with the industry to assure and comfort those planning to visit Fiji not to be alarmed?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. The Honourable Acting Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism, Lands and Mineral Resources.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM (Acting Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism, Lands and Mineral Resources).- Thank you, Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the Honourable Member for this question.

Madam Speaker, any outbreak of any disease in any country, of course, is always a cause for alarm, in particular when you have a country that is heavily dependent on tourism and the hospitality industry. However, Madam Speaker, it would be alarming to actually draw an analogy or indeed equate SARS with Meningococcal C.

Madam Speaker, for Members who know Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), it is an airborne disease. When an infected person coughs or sneezes, infected droplets spray into the air; that is how you catch SARS by just simply inhaling or touching these air particles. The effect, of course, will be devastating, particularly, in a highly populated country like in Asia or countries in Asia.

Meningococcal C (Men-C) on the other hand, Madam Speaker, is not easily transmissible as SARS as the Honourable Minister for Health very clearly elucidated yesterday. The manner in which you can actually catch Men-C, it is spread through direct contact with saliva or spit of an infected person if it sits at the back of your nose and throat but you cannot infect people indeed, you cannot catch it yourself or suffer from Men-C.

The transmission of the bacteria actually occurs often through the exchange of saliva and, of course, if you are sharing cups or bowls, et cetera, like *yaqona bilo*, et cetera. Of course, Madam Speaker, cough hygiene and hand hygiene is also encouraged to prevent the spread of bacteria.

Of course, there has been an ongoing assurance from the Government and the Fijian tourism industry through awareness and availability of information on Men-C to all the guests.

Bulk of our tourism arrivals, Madam Speaker, come from two countries which are Australia and New Zealand. We continue to have them, approximately 67 percent of our arrivals come from those two countries.

Men-C, of course, Madam Speaker, is not a new disease to Australia and New Zealand, in fact there has been more deaths in Australia and New Zealand from Meningococcal than has been in Fiji.

Therefore, of course, Madam Speaker, for example in 2003, Australia had a Men-C vaccine in its national immunisation schedule for all children at the age of one. From 2003 to 2006, there was a vaccination programme for everyone between the ages of one and nine.

Other developed countries like UK have also had a vaccine on national immunisation schedule since late 1990s and 2000. Therefore, Madam Speaker, Australian visitors who had vaccine obviously are the very low risk to actually catching Meningococcal C when they visit Fiji.

Again, Madam Speaker, Meningococcal C vaccine is available to children under the age of 24 months in New Zealand some time back.

So, Madam Speaker, as we have seen, the Meningococcal C reporting in Fiji has not had an impact on our tourism arrivals because the two key destinations from which our tourism arrivals come from, are fully aware of it and indeed what we have asked the officials to do was to look at what impact took place on the tourism arrivals in New Zealand and Australia when they had the outbreak. One, of course, was in 1990 to 2000 and the other was in 1997 to 2002 in Australia. Their tourism arrivals actually, Madam Speaker, increased also during that time, it did not decrease, so it is how we actually manage it. It is also how you actually create an awareness about it which should not go into an alarm mode as the Honourable Minister for Health did say. We need to create a lot of awareness about it and how it is spread.

In fact it was interesting, two nights ago I was somewhere where they actually had some *kava* and everybody was saying, "Look, I want my own *bilo*" so people are actually becoming more accustomed to that, they did not want to share other people's *bilo*, so whilst awareness is going on, people may actually want to take those types of measures.

As far as the visitors are concerned, Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Health and Medical Services continue to advise basic hygiene measures. A "Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)" section is actually on the Ministry's Website(www.health.gov.fj) where people can get their information online travel platforms such as "Smart Traveller" and "Trip Advisor" have been issued and reviewed Men-C advice by local health authorities which is generally to exercise normal safety precautions.

For media and general enquiries received through Tourism Fiji's regional offices, media statements were prepared, referencing information shared by the Ministry of Health and Medical Services. Visitors were also referred to the fact sheets and information available on the Ministry of Health and Medical Services website. Essentially, we are also working with our tourism stakeholders including the key associations about the information that needs to be shared on Men-C and also as highlighted the other day, we are also working with the WHO and various other agencies that are related to this.

Men-C, Madam Speaker, is not seen as a detractor to visitors coming into Fiji and most are, of course, familiar with the disease and most are aware because most of these countries, including the industrialised countries have had Men-C equivalent of various or little outbreaks, whether it is localised or on a national basis. Most of the people are aware and a lot of them have actually been vaccinated.

It is our responsibility therefore, Madam Speaker, not to create any type of alarm about it but also to take our own personal precautionary measures and we, of course, are working with the key tourism agencies to ensure that that does not have a negative impact on the tourism arrivals. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Madam Speaker, a supplementary question to the Honourable Acting Prime Minister on behalf of the Minister for Health. There should be cause of alarm, Madam Speaker, in this kind of foreign sickness that is in our country. Can the

Honourable Acting Prime Minister explain as to what sort of safeguards do we have in isolating people that are affected with this kind of foreign sickness?

Why I say “foreign”, Madam Speaker, is that the Honourable Acting Prime Minister, in his statement on Monday on Meningococcal disease had indicated in the Honourable House that this Meningococcal disease has an Asian strain on it, stemming from Asia, I suppose, maybe this is a result of these free visas that have been given to these Asian countries. But again, can the Honourable Minister explain as to what sort of safeguards do we have regarding precautions?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. The Honourable Acting Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism, Lands and Mineral Resources.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Member was listening to the comments that were made, not just by myself in respect of the pricing of the vaccines, but also by the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services.

The C-Strain is also found in other countries. Yes, there has been a preponderance or predominance of C-Strain in Asia, in particular, there is dominance of that in China. In the same way, for example, we have had various strains in Africa. It can be, of course, transmitted through people visiting Fiji or Fijians visiting other countries. Indeed, it can be picked up by someone visiting New Zealand, there is a C-Strain of Meningococcal in NZ.

I mean, diseases basically, Madam Speaker, do not know about borders, they do not know about boundaries and we live in a globalised world and people travel a lot. The Honourable Ratu Lalabalavu travels a lot for fundraising purposes like the Honourable Members sitting next to him. Lots of them travel, their leader outside this House travels. Who knows who could have brought what?

Of course, our Ministers travel too. You, yourself travel too, Madam Speaker. The reality is that, we should not be alarmed about this. We have experts within the Ministry of Health who are working together with World Health Organisation (WHO) and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) regarding this.

If you compare on a nominal basis the number of deaths that have taken place in Fiji, compared to other countries, it has been low, but that does not mean that we should become complacent. It is also our responsibility as Members of this Parliament and, indeed, as Fijians who are concerned about our economy and our growth rates, et cetera, that we do not cause alarm when it is not necessary because you actually undermine our tourism sector and our economy. So if there is a need and we have said that we are willing to spend up to \$40 million or \$50 million if it is going to cost that much, we will immunise our people, in particular, the young up to the age of 18.

In fact, yesterday, we spoke again to the Permanent Secretary for Health and they are currently in talks with WHO and UNICEF about getting those vials down so we can start immunisation, so our people are protected.

As the Honourable Minister for Health also highlighted, there are various antibiotics that are also available to be able to prevent the spread of the disease or for the person or individual to deteriorate further where it can cause death, Madam Speaker. Thank you.

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

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Fiji's main tourism segment is families. The Government of Fiji made an announcement globally that Men-C was an issue here and this was about six weeks ago. Immediately, I got calls from travel agents in Australia whether this was under control, so it behoves us, Madam Speaker, to be very open in the way we communicate with our source markets on how we are managing. It is a crisis now, Madam Speaker, you cannot be secretive about this. We know that FijiFirst is a very secretive Government, but when it comes to a crisis, you need to be very open. You cannot hide these things, being mindful of the fact that children, families are the biggest segment of tourism in Fiji. They will not bring their children to Fiji if they know that the children of Fiji are not being vaccinated. So a taskforce has to be set up and the communication system should be in place. So, Madam Speaker, we want to know whether the commitment is there between Government and the industry. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Acting Prime Minister.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, I find this kind of questions so ridiculously inappropriate.

(Laughter)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- What is this nonsense about being secretive? What nonsense?

Madam Speaker, it is absolute nonsense! I have just read out; the Honourable Minister for Health has said for the past couple of occasions in the past two days about the awareness that they are creating. It is reported in the *Fiji Times*, *Fiji Sun*, *Fiji TV* and FBC, so what is so secretive about that? What is so secretive about having it on the website? I just gave a website, www.health.gov.fj. Anyone in Lithuania knows that Fiji has got an issue here; anyone in Australia and New Zealand knows that we have got an issue here. But it is not as big of an issue as they are trying to make it out to be. You see, their political point-scoring has always meant trying at any expense, even if it means undermining our tourism industry, they will go to score cheap political points.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Absolutely, Madam Speaker!

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI.- Accountability!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Accountability, what nonsense, what accountability? We have given a Ministerial Statement on that.

Madam Speaker, I can assure you and this Parliament, when we had Meningococcal outbreaks previously under previous Governments, they were not as transparent as we are. They did not have websites running as we do. They did not give ministerial statements in the way that we have done. We have spoken so much about it, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, the point of the matter is this.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, the point of the matter is this: there is a lot of information given out. The Honourable Member talked about Australian families coming to Fiji, yes, our hotels are full during the Australian and New Zealand school holidays. Yes, we are also family destination, we are not just a friendly destination, but we are also family destination.

As I pointed out, many Australians and many New Zealand children were vaccinated, therefore, they are protected. If I am vaccinated, if someone comes who has Meningococcal and touches me or kisses me, I will not get it because I am protected. Even if he or she comes into contact with that person, they would not get it; that is what vaccination is all about.

We have also said, Madam Speaker, that we will be immunising or giving the vaccination to our young people. We are just waiting for the vials to come along, we have made a commitment. It will be a mammoth task to actually vaccinate over 300,000 Fijians which we have given a commitment to do so.

Please, I urge Honourable Members of the Opposition, just to score cheap political points, do not try and undermine our tourism sector, do not try and do that.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Niko Nawaikula.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- From what the Honourable Minister has said, will he consider advising New Zealand and Australia to vaccinate their children before they come to Fiji?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, what a preposterous question!

Madam Speaker, they are already vaccinated! You see, again, you are trying to get, as the saying goes "Get the ghee around your back". If you cannot take the ghee out from your straight finger, use the crooked finger.

Madam Speaker, it is a preposterous question which is not even worth responding to.

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

Trends in Child Sexual Abuse
(Question No. 137/2018)

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Madam Speaker, this is a very important public interest question in terms of the public opinion on this and we have a Bill pending before the Committee as well, to address some of these issues.

My question is:

The recent data given by the Ministry for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation shows that a total of 292 cases of Child Sexual Abuse had been reported under the Child Welfare Act from January to November in 2017. Can the

Honourable Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation further elaborate on the trends in child abuse in the last 5 years?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now invite the Hon. Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation to have the floor.

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA (Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation).- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Before I go into the data and trend in child abuse cases, I just like to inform the House that the data that I will be referring to are those calls that have been received from children, authorities and caregivers through the Child Helpline (1325) under the reporting obligations under the Child Welfare Act of 2010.

From 2012 to 2017, the Ministry had received a total of 4,566 cases through the Child Welfare Act reporting mechanism, Madam Speaker. Out of these, the year 2017 recorded the highest of 1,145 cases.

Madam Speaker, these cases include, not only sexual abuse, but also child neglect where maybe a child has been sent to school without food, physical abuse, even children whose parents cannot control them any more. It also includes emotional psychological abuse, children who have been left unsupervised in homes and also those who have absconded from residential homes, so the cases are varied. But the statistics in the year 2017, we registered the highest number of calls, Madam Speaker.

In looking at this trend, Madam Speaker, it is interesting to note that when the Child Helpline (1325) started in 2014, the number of reports more than doubled from 2013 to 2014. This, Madam Speaker, is because there is now a mechanism in place which has made reporting of child abuse cases more convenient, more accessible to those who come across cases of child abuse.

Madam Speaker, in that regard, we are thankful and I think we can all agree on this that the Bills that are before the House in relation to that may counter and lend a hand to dealing with these high incidence of child abuse reporting that we are receiving at the moment. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Niumataiwalu?

HON. M.A. NIUMATAIWALU.- A supplementary question, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- A supplementary question.

HON. M.A. NIUMATAIWALU.- The question to the Honourable Minister is, what are the current plans of the Ministry to address the issue of child abuse, and like you said “neglect overall”?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister?

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Apart from the big umbrella body of the National Coordinating Committee on Children (NCCC) that meets on a quarterly basis to look at national efforts towards dealing with child abuse cases, amongst other things in

relation to children, there is also a lot of awareness going on within the Ministry at community level.

Madam Speaker, at the end of the day when we are talking about these kind of cases, we are talking about children being left unsupervised in homes, children coming from broken homes and getting on the wrong side of the law, parents remarried or living in de facto relationships, whose children we find are more vulnerable to cases of child abuse being reported to us.

In other cases, older children are left to look after their younger siblings in homes, children living with grandparents or elderly guardians.

Madam Speaker, it points to the need to raise awareness or continue to carry out awareness programmes and training programmes at community level. In that regard, there is a strong Unit within the Ministry and we are looking further to build capacities within the Child Services Unit to make it better able and better equipped to deal with this matter within the Ministry and also in partnership with Non-Government Organisations (NGOs).

There are also partnerships in place at the moment with NGOs in relation to counselling of those children who do require counselling out of the calls that have been coming in. In other cases, referrals have been made where appropriate to the Police if there are cases of suspicion of a crime or an offence that has been committed against the child. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Salote Radrodro?

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the Honourable Minister for her explanation. But the 292 cases is only the tip of the iceberg because that is only the number of cases from the Helpline in the Ministry, it does not include other agencies that do take care of these kinds of issues, for example, in the Women's Crisis Centre and other NGOs and Civil Society Groups, and even in the Ministry of Health and Police. So it is unfair that these cases had been cited as only 292 because there are more cases, particularly the unreported cases. So, the question to the Honourable Minister, what is the progress on the establishment of the national database?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. As I had highlighted from the outset, this data that I had referred to has been accumulated from the calls that the Ministry has received and yes, there are other cases that have been reported directly to the Police that would not be captured by the calls to the Ministry, and the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions does publish data in that regard, Madam Speaker.

For 2017, the data that the DPP has published shows that there were 130 victims of prosecution and upon clarification, Madam Speaker, they have advised that these all refer to High Court cases. So, with the Police data on this again which includes also the Magistrates Court cases, the numbers are indeed higher than what we have been receiving through the calls. Madam Speaker, because they are not only the phone calls in which children can refer or can call in to report cases of abuse but there is also the Police to which they can refer to for child abuse cases.

On the need for a central database, yes, there is a need for a central database but then the question will be, here we are collecting data that have been referred to us through calls. With the expertise on our side of the helpline which is being run by Medical Services Pacific with counsellors in place, they then assess in which cases there need to be referral to the Police. That is then captured by Police and prosecuted accordingly and that data is available nationally.

If we go also to the Director of Public Prosecution's Website, their data on abuse cases is also published nationally, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Ashneel Sudhakar.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Madam Speaker, my supplementary question to the Minister is, does the Ministry have any mechanisms or arrangements in place to provide emotional support and counselling to child sexual abuse victims?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. As I have stated earlier, the Ministry works in partnership with some Non-Government Organisations like Medical Services Pacific and Empower Pacific that do provide counselling for children that come under the radar from the Child Welfare Act.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Madam Speaker, my question to the Honourable Minister is on faith-based organisations. What is the data on faith-based organisations' involvement in the Ministry's work?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think this also relates to the question that I answered yesterday. The Ministry has started working with Non-Government Organisations and particularly faith-based organisations because of the nature of abuse cases that have come to us. It shows that there needs to be more information, training and workshops out there and we believe that faith-based organisations have a major role to play in this and particularly because of the nature of faith-based organisations in drawing a lot of people together weekly for services. It is a strong platform to do this. At the end of the day, it is up to faith-based organisations to take this up.

From our end, we have met with faith-based organisations and we have drawn to them the importance of their role in this fight against child abuse and we hope that they can take it up more diligently and strongly in advocating against child abuse.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Lastly, Honourable Professor Biman Prasad.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think the Ministry is doing a good job in terms of collecting the data and from what I hear from the questions, I think there are a lot of issues in relation to child sexual abuse.

I am just wondering, Madam Speaker, if the Minister now feels that it is time for us as legislators to actually have a Parliamentary inquiry into the causes and why there is a trend? Would the Minister support such an inquiry from Parliament?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- Madam Speaker, from our end, we are happy with the current initiatives by Parliament in the Bills that are before the House, so we are looking forward to the other side of the House supporting these Bills when they come before us. I am referring specifically to the Registration of Sex Offenders Bill and also the Online Safety Bill.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to the Honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa, Leader of the Opposition.

Decibel Level of Sound System on Public Buses
(Question No. 138/2018)

HON. RO T.V. KEPA asked the Government, upon notice:

Many passengers are concerned about the high decibel level of the sound system on public buses, how is the Minister dealing with this issue?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Hon. Minister for Local Government, Housing, Environment and Transport, you may have the floor.

HON. P.B. KUMAR (Minister for Local Government, Housing, Environment and Transport).- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Leader of the Opposition. At the outset, let me state that my Ministry is equally concerned about this matter.

Madam Speaker, the Land Transport Authority through the LTA Act of 1998 and Regulations together with the relevant codes of practice have provisions on the control of the undue noise from vehicles. These include private, commercial or public service vehicles.

More importantly, Madam Speaker, Regulation 46 of the Land Transport Traffic Regulations, Legal Notice No. 64 of 2000 clearly states that no person may drive a motor vehicle or permit to motor vehicle to be driven on a public street in a manner causing undue noise. It is through this Regulation that the LTA is able to enforce penalties concerning undue noise from the vehicles.

Madam Speaker, furthermore, with reference to Section 38 of the LTA Act 1998, the LTA has an established Code of Practice which includes Noise Inspection Guidelines. As per the Code of Practice, the maximum allowable sound limit is 80 decibel. Madam Speaker, to ensure compliance to the Regulation and the Code of Practice, LTA has formalised various standards and approaches as follows:

1. Roadside inspection - an authorised officer has the power to inspect any vehicle for non-compliance to the above Regulation and Code of Practice; hence
2. Manual inspections are undertaken for verification of sounds.

Madam Speaker, the sound level meter used in this case is to measure the noise level and ensure that sound loudness does not exceed 80 decibel. The LTA currently has three portable sound level meters, one in each division. The sound level meters are used during vehicle inspection at LTA's main centres, namely Valelevu, Lautoka and one in Labasa and, of course, during this special enforcement operation conducted once in a month at random locations.

Madam Speaker, as a result of LTA's enforcement efforts between January 2017 to October 2017, a total of 105 TINs were issued for undue noise. These include 67 TINs from the Central/Eastern Division (which is the highest out of all the divisions); 22 from the Western Division and 16 from the Northern Division.

Under the new Regulation of 2017, Madam Speaker, prosecution in court will only take place once an offender notifies LTA of his decision to take LTA to court, prosecution in court for this offence has never been undertaken between the periods from January 2017 to October 2017.

The offenders are given 90 days to settle their fines. Madam Speaker, failure to settle their fines within this period, an additional 50 percent fine is levied. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- A supplementary question, Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- A supplementary question, Madam Speaker. I thank the Honourable Minister for his response and also his concern and the LTA's concern on this particular issue. As majority of the public travel by public transport (which are mainly buses), Madam Speaker, the complaints have come not only from passengers but also newspaper articles and *Letters to the Editor*, we are just around the corner from the Coca-Cola Games where the students like loud music from the buses.

Madam Speaker, from overseas research, there is a strong correlation between vehicle accidents and loud music, and for the last five years, bus accidents were 47.4 percent per year so four bus accidents per month, almost one per week, some horrific accidents involving mothers and young children. So my question to the Honourable Minister is, how is loud music reflected in the LTA database as a contributing factor to bus accidents? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Thank you, Madam Speaker, if I may state that the culprits are few individuals, some of the bus drivers and mostly minivan drivers. As I have mentioned earlier on that there is an enforcement programme. As I have also stated that we are equally concerned, we have issues and we have received many complaints but there are two types of people; those who love loud music and those who do not but we will follow the law that is in place. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Semesa Karavaki.

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Given the fact that the Honourable Minister had explained that they only attend to undue noise and are relying on the enforcement by the enforcement officers of the LTA, also just as what he has explained that there are two types of people, would he consider, Madam Speaker, totally banning any communication device on our public buses in Fiji? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. MEMBER.- No freedom.

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Thank you, Madam Speaker and I thank the Honourable Member. As I have said that the law allows 80 decibel, and that is the freedom.

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI.- Overseas they do not have that.

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- They have, they use the same practice. You can do some search on that to find out. At this point in time, Madam Speaker, no.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to the Honourable Jilila Kumar to ask her question.

Waiver of Municipal Market Stall Fees
(Question No. 139/2018)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Local Government, Housing, Environment, Infrastructure and Transport inform the House on the waiver of the Municipal Market stall fees?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Minister for Local Government, Housing, Environment and Transport.

HON. P.B. KUMAR (Minister for Local Government, Housing, Environment, Infrastructure and Transport).- Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I thank the Honourable Member. Madam Speaker, our major Municipal Markets are 13 in total, with an estimate of 7,800 market vendors trading across Fiji's various locations.

Madam Speaker, it is to be noted that Municipal Markets operate differently to that of the normal businesses that are done in towns and cities.

Madam Speaker, the market bylaws were established to govern the management of Municipal Markets with the sets of fees and charges for the general management and operation of Municipal Markets. The fees and charges are for hire of tables or an open space for their daily use at the Municipal Markets. Market vendors are not charged business licence or any other related fees. Madam Speaker, as a whole, Fijian Municipal Markets now offer an opportunity to promote home-grown products, promote small business incentives, assist in food security and nation-building.

Madam Speaker, *TC Josie* had a direct impact on the Western and the Northern Municipal Markets. Some of the town municipal markets' infrastructure were under water, with vendors incurring personal damages and the supply of municipal market produce was limited due to the heavy damages sustained by our Fijians. The supply chain for the Western and Northern towns and city have been greatly affected due to the unfortunate events. Operational challenges raised by the two back-to-back cyclones, *TC Josie* and *TC Keni*.

Madam Speaker, based on the factors that I have mentioned, the assessment made and the urgent need to reinforce Fijians, it is anticipated a month's space would be required to normalise

the Municipal Market operations. It is for this purpose, Madam Speaker, that the Ministry had waived market stall fees to all Municipal Market vendors operating in the Western and Northern towns and city. This has been rolled out in consultation with the municipal councils and their market vendors associations.

On this note, Madam Speaker, may I take this opportunity to thank the Central municipal market vendors and, in particular, Nausori Market vendors, who were one of the first groups to arrive at the most affected Ba Market with assistance and relief packages supporting their colleagues at the Ba Municipal Market.

Madam Speaker, this assistance is similar to the Care of Fiji. In this instance, it is care for the market vendors. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Dulakiverata.

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. A supplementary question: I thank the Minister for his reply. Madam Speaker, if I heard it right, only the market vendors in the Northern and Western Divisions will benefit from this waiver but most of the people that sell in Suva Market come from Navosa Highlands and Ra from the Western Division to come and sell in Suva.

Secondly, will this only apply to market vendors that come every week to sell or all those sitting vendors in the market who are not affected by these damages to their plantations? Thank you.

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. As I have mentioned that there was a request made by the municipal councils and the market vendors associations starting from Rakiraki to Sigatoka, and in the North, from Labasa and Savusavu. Based on the assessment on the ground, we have waived the stall fees. The stall fee is charged to a vendor for a space, not to a supplier. It is charged to a permanent stall holder and a weekend vendor as well, so it has been waived so in that case, those who come in the weekends will be given that waiver as well.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Prem Singh.

HON. P. SINGH.- A supplementary question, Madam Speaker, it is good news for market vendors that the market fees would be waived. My question to the Minister is, markets have registered market vendors and lock-up stalls, they have convenience facilities which they pay for, overnight providers and you have fish sellers. Are all included in this?

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Thank you, Madam Speaker, firstly, the waiver is already in place. Secondly, it is an inclusive waiver that includes the ordinary market vendor who has got a stall, those who have got kiosks within the market, the fish market sellers are all included in this waiver.

HON. SPEAKER.- Lastly, Honourable Professor Biman Prasad.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Just a quick question, Madam Speaker. I know a lot of businesses also faced a lot of damage after the flood. Is the Minister considering waiving the licence fees as well?

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker, by law, we do not have any powers to waive business licence because without business licence we cannot do a business, that will be an offence but they will take full advantage of the announcement that has been made by the Honourable Prime Minister and I believe later this week, the Honourable Acting Prime Minister will also make some announcements. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. We will now move on to the written questions and I call on the Honourable Jiosefa Dulakiverata to ask his question.

Written Questions

Aerial Survey and Data Compilation (Question No. 140/2018)

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

In order to properly identify the flooding areas and find ways and means of controlling or minimising flooding, does the Ministry take any aerial survey of the flooded areas and compile data for future reference and whether that data could be made available to the stakeholders and the general public?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Hon. Acting Minister for Waterways.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU (Acting Minister for Waterways).- Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Honourable Minister will provide his answer at a later date as specified in the Standing Orders. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to the Honourable Dr. Mere Samisoni to ask her question.

Maternal, Foetal Mortality and Morbidity Rates (Question No. 141/2018)

HON. DR. M.T. SAMISONI asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services inform the House what are the Maternal and Foetal Mortality and Morbidity Rates since 1994?

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU (Acting Minister for Health and Medical Services).- The Honourable Minister will provide the answer at a later sitting date. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now call on the Honourable Ratu Suliano Matanitobua to ask his question.

Government Development Plans for Seawalls
(Question No. 142/2018)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management and Meteorological Services update the House on the development and plans of the Government for seawalls along the villages and settlements?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. The Hon. Acting Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management and Meteorological Services.

HON. O. NAIQAMU (Acting Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management and Meteorological Services).- Madam Speaker, I hereby table my response to Written Question No. 142/2018.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Question time is now over.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND CERTAIN DOCUMENTS

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Acting Prime Minister, the Honourable Attorney-General, Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications to table his Reports.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. In accordance with Standing Order 38, I present the following Reports to Parliament:

1. Office of the President Annual Report 2011;
2. Office of the President Annual Report 2012;
3. Office of the President Annual Report 2013; and
4. Fiji Revenue and Customs Service 2016 - 2017 Annual Reports (From 1st August to 31st July).

HON. SPEAKER.- Can you, please, hand the Reports to the Secretary General?

(Reports handed to the Secretary-General)

Under Standing Order 38(2), I refer the Fiji Revenue and Customs Service 2016 - 2017 Annual Report (1st August to 31st July) to the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs.

Under Standing Order 38(2), I refer the following Reports to the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights:

1. Office of the President Annual Report 2011;
2. Office of the President Annual Report 2012; and
3. Office of the President Annual Report 2013;

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

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

1. The Acting Prime Minister, Honourable Attorney General, Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications, has two ministerial statements; and
2. The Honourable Minister for Local Government, Housing, Environment, Infrastructure and Transport.

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

I now call on the Acting Prime Minister, the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications to deliver his statement.

Update on the Operations of the Reserve Bank of Fiji (RBF)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to provide an update on the operations of the Reserve Bank of Fiji or RBF as commonly known.

Madam Speaker, central banks play a vital role in any economy while the institutional arrangements may vary from country to country, predominantly the core role of the central bank is ensuring monetary and financial stability.

Madam Speaker, a renowned and acclaimed central bank governor once aptly described the purpose the importance of the Central Bank by saying, and I quote:

“The Central Bank can be described as a high impact organisation. Its decisions or indecisions, its action or inaction will have major repercussions and consequences on the economic wellbeing of the public at large and the entire spectrum of businesses. The reason why a central bank exists is for the people, that is the ultimate objective”.

Given the immense responsibility, the role and governance arrangements of central banks are enshrined and protected by law, Madam Speaker. Our Central Bank, Madam Speaker, was established under the Reserve Bank of Fiji Act 1983 or the RBF Act. The primary objectives and institutional arrangements of the RBF are also enshrined in the Constitution reflecting the significant importance as a policy-making institution in Fiji.

Madam Speaker, we have provided to the Honourable Members in our last sitting an update on the performance and outlook of the Fijian economy and Government’s fiscal position. May I highlight once again that the country’s impressive economic performance has been largely attributed to the various well-designed policies and reforms introduced by the Bainimarama-led and the FijiFirst Governments.

Madam Speaker, we are on track for the 9th consecutive year of economic growth unprecedented since post-independence. The economy on average, Madam Speaker, has grown by 4.6 percent in the last five years, excluding the 0.4 percent GDP growth in the 2016 post *TC Winston*. This is real GDP growth, Madam Speaker, and this has been validated by organisations like the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, Asian Development Bank (ADB) and credit-rating agencies like Moody's.

With this buoyant performance in our economy, Madam Speaker, normal GDP per person in 2017 rose to \$12,000, almost doubling from \$6,419 in 2006. Real GDP per capita reached its highest ever level at around \$8,000 last year.

Madam Speaker, the growth forecast for this year and the next two years is currently under review and will take into consideration the impact of the recent cyclones, floods and other developments.

The RBF, Madam Speaker, contributes directly to the unprecedented economic growth the country has experienced by ensuring that monetary policy objectives remain intact and coordinated fiscal policy and there is financial stability in the country.

Madam Speaker, in conducting monetary policy, the RBF's dual monetary policy objectives are:

- Stable inflation on price stability; and
- Adequate foreign reserves on external stability.

Since November 2010, the RBF has maintained an accommodative monetary policy stance in support of economic growth as its twin objectives were intact. As a result, Madam Speaker, the average lending rates have declined to historically low levels from a high of 9.84 percent in 2007 to 5.64 percent in January, 2018.

Commercial bank loans and advances increased more than two-folds to \$6.5 billion as accommodative monetary condition actively supported lending and increased economic activity.

Notwithstanding the unprecedented period of economic growth, the country is experiencing, Madam Speaker, the RBF continues to be vigilant on economic developments and we will align policy accordingly guided by the RBF Board. Madam Speaker, this vigilance is embedded in the role that the RBF plays. As a former Vice Chair of the US Federal Reserves stated, and I quote:

“The job of the central bank is to worry. In prosperity, the central bank worries about sustainability and in times of depressed conditions, a central bank worries about stimulating growth.”

On the objective of stable inflation, Madam Speaker, defined as within the range of 2 to 3 percent per annum, the inflation rate is 2.3 percent in February, 2018. The current forecast for year-end inflation is expected to be around an acceptable level of 3 percent. The main risk to this forecast, Madam Speaker, are the impact of the recent floods, any further adverse weather conditions and to a lesser extent higher global growth feeding into oil (and see what is happening in Syria), food prices and a strengthening US dollar.

Madam Speaker, in terms of external stability, foreign reserves stood at around \$2.175 billion as at 13th April, 2018, sufficient to cover 4.9 months of retaining imports on goods and non-factor services. This is well above the International Monetary Fund's recommended benchmark.

Given the vulnerability of the small open economy like Fiji to risks, such as external shocks and natural disasters, the RBF has consciously built buffers above the recommended benchmark. It was also worth-noting, Madam Speaker, that approximately \$680 million of additional and callable foreign reserves are held by non-bank financial institutions.

Madam Speaker, as highlighted in the Ministerial Statement we provided last month on the Financial Stability Sector Review (FSSR) for Fiji that was conducted by the IMF, the role of the RBF in ensuring financial stability remains intact. The Recommendations, however, have been made by the FSSR Mission on enhancing the supervisory role of the RBF going forward.

Madam Speaker, Government is committed to continuing to reform the financial sector. Reforms are needed when an economy grows and the financial system deepens in the sophistication of consumers increase. Reforms are important to ensure that risks to the stability of our financial system continue to be identified and mitigated.

Our commitment in undertaking such reform actions is underscored by the completion of the Fiji National Provident Fund Reform, having successive past Governments that neither had the political will nor the moral persuasion to implement.

This reform alone has averted a financial crisis in the future as the collapse of an institution that constitutes, Madam Speaker, a third of the financial system would have easily brought our country to its knees.

The RBF continues to formulate and implement strategic plans and other financial sector reforms, including the setup of a new and improved credit bureau as highlighted earlier on or credit reporting agency, a reform of the credit union sector, implementation of moveable asset registry and reviewing the Fiji Insurance Act.

Madam Speaker, recent trends have observed the expansion of the traditional role of central banks of ensuring monetary and financial stability. Most central banks also contribute to objective and initiatives ancillary to its core role or particularly to address specific capacity or resource constraints. Examples, Madam Speaker, include a mandate for financial inclusion, special lending facilities and targeting other macroeconomic indicators, such as the unemployment rate or economic growth to guide monetary and financial stability policy settings.

It is important to note and ensure that this development role contribute to the core objectives of the Central Bank. The RBF's expanded role in economy is guided by a specific mission statement under its vision of: "Leading Fiji to Economic Success". For the information to the Honourable Members, these initiatives include, firstly, the financial inclusion.

Madam Speaker, while a large part of the Bank's financial inclusion work initially focusses on Micro Finance, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), promotion in reducing the unbanked population gap, more recent efforts have expanded to include improving financial literacy, sustainable financing, promoting financial technology which is under (FINTEC) and digital financial services.

Extending well-designed financial services in a responsible and sustainable way to the poor and the underserved, has been universally recognised as a key enabler to reducing extreme poverty and boosting shared prosperity.

Enabling financial inclusion, Madam Speaker, contributes directly to seven out of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. The Government and the RBF will continue to enhance financial inclusion strategies and these include improving data collection and championing the design of financial products to meet the needs of the underserved.

The RBF, Madam Speaker, is also working closely with the Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism in terms of MSME Development and charting a sustainable banking roadmap.

The other area, Madam Speaker, is SME Credit Guarantee Scheme: The RBF, Madam Speaker, also administers a Special Lending Facility to address specific priority areas. These Facilities include the:

1. National Disaster Recovery Facility which was reactivated recently following the recent floods;
2. Import and Export substitution; and the
3. Housing Facility introduced to help address housing affordability.

Funds from these special Facilities are only disbursed through participating in financial institutions that also bear that credit risk and must on-lend the funds at concessional interest rates. In total, 978 applications had been processed under these Facilities and the current outstanding balance stays at \$124.1 million.

The other area, Madam Speaker, is the SME Credit Guarantee Scheme. The RBF also administers the Government's Small Medium Enterprise Credit Guarantee Scheme to assist with the accessibility of credit. At the end of February, 2018, 1,725 SME loans valued at \$100.5 million were registered under the Scheme. The total allocation for claims under the Scheme is \$4 million, of which 0.041 has been utilised. In other words, it is run very, very successfully and very little number of people are defaulting.

Green Bond Collaboration: Madam Speaker, Honourable Members have also been appraised of the country's Green Bond issue. The RBF Team headed by the Governor, spearheaded the efforts to issue our first Green Bond. A Steering Committee including RBF, representatives from Government, IFC and the World Bank, continue to work to ensure the commitments and accountabilities required are met.

In recognition of our efficient process from conceptualisation to issue, the IFC released a Report titled, *Guidance for Sovereign Green Bond* issues, which focuses on lessons from Fiji as the first emerging economy to issue a Sovereign Green Bond and indeed, Madam Speaker, we are the only third Sovereign to do so.

In addition, Madam Speaker, Fiji was only recently awarded in London, a prestigious Green Bond Pioneer Award in the recent Climate Bonds Initiatives Conference in London. Fiji's Green Bond is also being listed on the International Securities Market with the London Stock Exchange, Madam Speaker, a first for any Fijian Bond to be listed on the London Stock Exchange. It is, of course, Madam Speaker, a remarkable recognition and achievement and

indeed, our Honourable Prime Minister will have the opportunity to open the London Stock Exchange at 8.00 a.m. London Time with the Green Bond.

Madam Speaker, Financial Intelligence: Madam Speaker, the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) as highlighted yesterday, is established under the Financial Transaction Reporting Act 2004 which also mandates its role and functions. The FIU is Fiji's Anti-Money Laundering Agency (AML) and Combatting the Financing of Terrorism or the CFT Regulator, and the lead agency, Madam Speaker, on AML-CFT policy formulation, compliance and enforcement in Fiji.

Since its establishment in 2006, Madam Speaker, the FIU has been fully funded and housed at the Reserve Bank of Fiji. The annual operating expenditure of the FIU is approximately \$1 million. The RBF also provides rent-free office space and shares HR, IT, Accounting and Audit Services with the FIU.

The Director of the FIU is appointed by the RBF Governor on the recommendation of the National Anti-Money Laundering Council. The FIU was operationally independent as the powers of the FIU are vested on the Director, who reports to the RBF Governor in the performance of his/her functions.

Madam Speaker, let me now move on to the currency issue. Pursuant to section 4(a) of the RBF Act, the Bank has a core responsibility with regulating the issue of currency in Fiji. The Bank is responsible for maintaining an adequate supply of quality notes and coins in circulation. It issues notes and coins that are commensurate with demand for payment purposes and redeems any notes or coins that are mutilated or no longer fit for circulation, and destroys them accordingly. The Bank also, Madam Speaker, determines the denomination and design of Fiji's notes and coins, subject to the approval of the Minister for Economy.

Madam Speaker, we wish to highlight that the volume of counterfeit notes reported during the financial year ending 31st July, 2017, remained negligible as has been the case for the previous years. Counterfeit notes, Madam Speaker, continue to be less than 0.1 percent of the value of total currency in circulation which implies that the Anti-Counterfeiting Security features that the Bank has invested in, are effective.

Madam Speaker, over the last 10 years, our currency in circulation has grown to almost two-fold and currently stands at \$818.9 million as at 13th April of this year. This is very much in line with the growth in the financial system as alluded to earlier on, Madam Speaker.

I come on to now, Madam Speaker, to human capital. Madam Speaker, one of the RBF stated missions is to ensure it attracts, develops and retains staff to effectively contribute to the delivery of its vision of, I quote: "*Leading Fiji to Economic Success*". A cornerstone on its retention policy is remunerating staff at a premium above the assessed market median for a given staff position or grade.

In terms of gender diversity, RBF has a total of 213 staff, of which 100 or 47 percent are female. At the Management level 44 percent are females, five of which are in the Senior Management Team, Madam Speaker. The RBF is an organisation that values and cultivates a high performance culture.

Risk Management and Communications: Madam Speaker, the RBF also ensures a proactive approach and the safety of its operations through the establishment of its Risk

Management Framework. This Framework provides oversight of its compliance to relevant legislative requirements and internal policies, as well as the promotion of good governance and corporate responsibility.

The institution, Madam Speaker, also maintains a business continuity plan which includes a fully functional Business Resumption Sites (BRS), to provide backup for critical operations during a disaster or crisis.

In terms of ensuring effective awareness of its roles and activities, Madam Speaker, the RBF publishes a number of Annual Reports on its operations, on the insurance industry, financial system stability, financial inclusion, and on the operation, of course, of the Financial Intelligence Unit which we heard yesterday.

Madam Speaker, regular economic and statistical reports are also published by the RBF, including quarterly and monthly reviews, press releases and monetary policy statements which are vital sources of information for policy-making agencies in Fiji and indeed, the private sector and the general public. All these publications are posted on the RBF Website.

Madam Speaker, I wish to conclude by highlighting the financial performance of the RBF. The objective of any Central Bank, Madam Speaker, is not to maximise profit, however making losses is also not acceptable. As an important policy-making institution, financial losses often results in reputational risk which then translates into loss of confidence through the Bank's key stakeholders.

Madam Speaker, for the financial year ended 31st July, 2017, the Bank made a profit of \$28.3 million and transferred to Government a total of \$29.4 million, which included one-fifth or \$2.1 million from the Revaluation Reserve Account. Of the \$28.3 million in profit, Madam Speaker, the Bank transferred \$1 million to the General Reserve Account to strengthen the Bank's capital base.

Over the last 10 years, Madam Speaker, the Bank has transferred to the Government a total of \$347.93 million which included the profit and one-fifth from the Revaluation Reserve Account. Madam Speaker, I wish to commend the Bank for signing off on its Annual Audited Financial Statements for the 12 months ending 31st July, 2017, on 28th September, 2017, or within two months after the end of the financial year. Over the last three years, the Bank has signed off on its Annual Audited Financial Statements within two months after the end of its financial year. This reflects the commitment to accountability and transparency as a public institution.

Madam Speaker, the RBF as Fiji's Central Bank, maintains a unique yet significant role in the management of the Fijian economy. For a developing country like Fiji where it is important that the promotion of growth needs to be balanced with stability, the RBF will continue to be vigilant in the protection of its mandate to ensure sustained economic growth and the continued improvements of the quality and the lives of all Fijians, Madam Speaker. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Madam Speaker, I acknowledge the updates given by the Acting Prime Minister and Minister for Economy this morning on the role of the RBF. Whilst it was wonderfully presented to give a picture of the thriving prudent institution benefiting the nation, I am however, not too convinced with all that had been said, Madam Speaker. There is a saying that, “Not all that is gold glitters.”

The RBF’s vision statement professes to, “Help build Fiji a strong economy and provide confidence and stability to our financial system.” Madam Speaker, at one point in the past, the RBF was a genuinely independent institution. It called out policies of Government and the institution thought to be detrimental to Fiji’s economy. It correctly forecasted bad policy repercussions.

These days, Madam Speaker, the RBF has, in my opinion, become Government’s propagandist to a large extent. Whilst we cannot generalise such statements against each RBF official, we can certainly raise eyebrows at the way some of the senior management today gave obvious slanted public RBF forecasts in the media prior to the confirmation of their positions, to which they hold today. This certain individual claimed then that the current Government has put out some of the best monetary and fiscal policies that are unprecedented in Fiji. All I can say at this stage, Madam Speaker, about such a person in an executive position is that it indeed pays to say the right things.

Talking about claims of unprecedented achievements, on that note, I must point out as well that the RBF itself has also acted in some unprecedented ways that I must make an example of. Just a few years back, the people of this nation were asked to trade off the old Fiji coins and notes for the new ones. People around Fiji were to do this by coming all the way to Suva. Suddenly, shops were not allowing old coins to be traded for goods. To the ordinary people who thought their money had value, they lost it overnight.

Also it needs to be noted that when the changes occurred in terms of denominations, people are still being charged the value of one cent and two cents, although they are no longer in circulation. For example, if a good costs \$19.97, they would be charged \$20. It was sad to see, Madam Speaker, when this obvious impractical pathetic financial policy was being implemented, there was dead silence from the institutions that should be representing the people. Whether this was due to ignorance or simple bias by institutions like the Fijian Competition and Consumer Commission or the Fiji Consumer Council, did not raise much concerns. One can only imagine why not!

Did RBF practise prudent financial measures then? The RBF was doing what it did, forced old currency holders to lose the original value of their money with the added cost of transport to Suva to trade in their money. Of course, RBF knew many people would not be able to do so. Thus effectively only those with huge amounts of the old currency forked out money to travel to Suva and for many others, the old unused coins and notes are now useless and lying around their homes.

That, Madam Speaker, is an example of the RBF we have been so eloquently briefed about today. It seems to be that the RBF committed daylight robbery against the people. I leave our legal beavers to figure out what can be done or should be done about such policies. Madam Speaker, we must impress upon the RBF to be independent and accurate. It is imperative that they are. The public deserves to know the real status of the economy. Pictures presented by the RBF, for example, contradict what is happening on the ground.

To be fair to my friends at the RBF, whilst their quarterly reports are often accurate, their economic forecasts and reports are a lot of times couched to present an economic picture that is hard to believe. But, if we are to ask on the quality of expenses of tourists as well as what jobs are being taken up by the people entering the workforce or ask the dairy farmers who lost their livestock to the brucellosis disease and were promised these cows would be replaced, we will see that indeed all that glitter is not gold.

Madam Speaker, the Annual Report of the RBF for the Year 2017 states on Page 48 that the review of the Insurance Act will continue. It also makes mention of the legislation of the Pension Savings Bill.

The Opposition is alarmed at the delay caused by the Office of the Solicitor-General in drafting the Bill and allowing it to see the light of the day on this floor of the House. This is why, Madam Speaker, there are a lot of questions now about RBF's credibility and independence. Many now question whether RBF is now a political institution used to allay global trading fears and create a picture of stable economy or they genuinely have regressed in terms of quality human resources. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to the Leader of the NFP or his designate.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the Acting Prime Minister for his statement. Madam Speaker, I actually share quite a lot that has been said by my honourable colleague, and in particular with respect to the independence of RBF. In fact the Act for the Reserve Bank of Fiji very clearly stipulates the importance of the independence of Reserve Banks anywhere in any country. In fact, there has been a lot of econometric studies to actually understand how independent a particular Reserve Bank is.

Madam Speaker, I agree that the job of the Central Bank is to worry, but they must worry from a very independent position. It should be transparent, it should be accountable that the Reserve Bank not only in terms of what they do, but the perception to the people of this country must be one that should make the Reserve Bank appear to be entirely independent.

I raised this issue the last time, Madam Speaker, on the appointment of the Governor of the Reserve Bank into various boards. I think that is, in my view, compromising the independence of the Reserve Bank in terms of an institution that should independently provide advice, collate data and make forecast with respect to the economy.

I also want to pick up other issues on what Honourable Acting Prime Minister said. More often than not he talks about intellectual honesty. I think we should have a bit of intellectual honesty in terms of the economic growth record for both the Bainimarama Government as well as the FijiFirst Government. Let me just quote this figure again without repeating, the average real growth between 1971 to 1980 was about 4.8 percent; between 1981 and 1990, it was 2.4 percent; between 1991 and 2000, it was 2.5 percent; the worst average real growth was under the Bainimarama Government and the FijiFirst Government between 2007 and 2016 of 2.2 percent.

Madam Speaker, we may have growth in the last four or five years but, I think, we should put this into perspective. When we talk about what this Government has done and I think it shows a bit of intellectual honesty on the part of the Government if they actually admit that the globe that we have over the last three or four years is due to a lot of the populist policies and I do

want to say this that populism does not always equate to the fact that we can take people out of poverty and improve the standard of living for our people.

Madam Speaker, I think it is absolutely vital, and I agree with my Honourable colleague that when the Reserve Bank has put itself in this kind of position where the Governor of the Reserve Bank actually sits in other statutory organisation boards and when we hear the forecasts and figures coming out of the Reserve Bank, one will have to worry about it, not from the point of the view of the fact that the Reserve Bank is not independent but the perception of the Reserve Bank not to be an independent institution. It can do a lot of damage to the economy in the long run.

Madam Speaker, while I accept the fact that there are a lot of positive things with respect to financial inclusion and the activities that the Reserve Bank has done, but I think the Reserve Bank ought to come out very clearly and ensure that it remains an independent institution according to the Act and not only in terms of the activity but the perception out there must be one of an independent institution. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- We really do not have enough time for the next Ministerial Statement, unless we can go just over lunch for that.

I now call on the Acting Prime Minister, the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communication to deliver his second Ministerial Statement.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, I was going to request because we have a major award at 1.00 p.m. this afternoon, that could affect that. If I could seek your indulgence, please, if we could have it after lunch.

HON. SPEAKER.- Does anyone oppose that?

(Chorus of "Noes")

HON. SPEAKER.- Thanks very much, we will therefore adjourn for lunch.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, if I could just seek this opportunity and invite Members of Parliament that the Parliament actually supports this Bill unanimously. As you may recall that we repealed the Third Party Insurance Act that had existed and we put in a new law in its place and we are making the first award of the compensation under the new Act today at 1.00 p.m.

I would like to invite all Members of the House if they are interested to come to that at Suvavou House, Level 9. This young lass unfortunately died in a road accident just in January or February and today his family is getting compensation for that. This is unprecedented because as you know, previously under the old system, it would have languished in the courts for years. But if you want to see how the laws that you passed is at work, I invite you to be at Suvavou House, Level 9, at 1.00 p.m. today. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you for the invitation.

Honourable Members, at this point, we will adjourn proceedings for lunch. Please, note that lunch is provided for Honourable Members in the Big Committee Room. Parliament will resume proceedings at 2.30 p.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.25 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.32 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- We will resume from where we left off and I now call on the Acting Prime Minister, Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications to deliver his statement.

Update on the Ratification of Core Human Rights Instruments

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I rise to give a Ministerial Statement to update Parliament on the achievements and progress made by the Fijian Government on the ratification of core human rights Instruments and the progress made by the Fijian Government in translating these into our national laws and policies, and indeed a practical application of these Conventions and Rights.

The Fijian Government is firmly committed to advancing and protecting the fundamental principles and values of Universal Human Rights enunciated Universal Declaration of Human Rights whilst cultivating an ethos of responsible human rights culture. The Core 9 referred to often, Madam Speaker, are the big nine Human Rights Instruments as follows:

1. International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) which is from 1965;
2. International Covenant on Civil Political Rights (ICCPR) which is from 1966;
3. International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) from 1966;
4. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) from 1979;
5. Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhumane or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT) from 1984;
6. Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) from 1989, these are the conventions that came into being at the UN level;
7. International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (IMC or IMCW) which came to being in 1990;
8. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) which came into being in 2006; and
9. International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances (CPED) from 2006.

Madam Speaker, with the ratification of CAT and CRPD by this Government through this Parliament, we have ratified a total of five out of the nine Core Human Rights Instruments and we are committed to the ratification of all the Human Rights Instruments by 2020 which is in less than two years' time.

On Monday, Madam Speaker, we moved a motion that the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence review the ICCPR and ASTRA Instruments for ratification. We envisaged that we will also be able to ratify ICCPR and ASTRA this year in the next session leaving us with only two more Instruments to ratify, Madam Speaker. In other words, Madam Speaker, we have ratified seven out of nine by next month.

Madam Speaker, it is clear that Fiji is now on a fast-track towards the ratification of all nine conventions and we are on the fast track for one reason, the foundation of comprehensive and wide-reaching human rights protections that are enshrined for all time in the Fijian Constitution.

Madam Speaker, the Fijian Constitution remains to be one of the most impressive and progressive Constitutions in the world today. It remains as always the cornerstone of our democracy with the vast array of protections and rights upheld in its Bill of Rights.

More importantly, Madam Speaker, the application of such rights in Fiji is no longer simply confined to the vertical application, in other words, application against the State only but also horizontally supplied now. In other words, these rights are now also enforceable against private actors within our society.

Further, these rights are enforceable through an independent Judiciary and by the Human Rights Anti-Discrimination Commission. It is also important to highlight that in interpreting the Bill of Rights provisions, the Constitution empowers the Judiciary specifically, when relevant, to also consider international law applicable to the protection of the rights and freedoms that are outlined under the Bill of Rights.

It is this Constitution, Madam Speaker, that has made it easier than ever before to comply with and ratify the big nine human rights Instruments, Madam Speaker, and by adhering to our Constitution and the Bill of Rights within this Constitution, this Government has done far more than any other Government in our history to further the protection of human rights of every Fijian everywhere in Fiji.

Madam Speaker, take for example, the ICCPR and ASTRA. The rights under both of these Instruments are already clearly protected by our own Constitution. The articles on the ICCPR called for the right of self-determination, life and freedom from torture, cruel and inhumane and degrading treatment, they prohibit all forms of slavery and protect against arbitrary detention or arrests and cover provisions on the state of emergency and derogation of rights. They also urged State parties to ensure that the civil and political rights of the people are realised without discrimination against race, colour, sex, language, religion, political, other opinion, birth or status and indeed now, of course, with other references to gender also.

Madam Speaker, all of these protections are echoed quite clearly in our own Constitution and are reflected in the work this Government carries out every day. No other Government in Fijian history, Madam Speaker, I repeat no other Government could have ever set the same because this Constitution enables us to be able to implement the Conventions and indeed as I will seek to elucidate that their actual practical laws that actually gave meat to the substance of the Convention itself.

I know the other side, Madam Speaker, live in denial of the truth but I also know that every other Fijian can see very clearly that due to the work of Government, the system of

oppression in this country that once suppressed the basic human rights of our citizens are being dismantled. It is no coincidence that only now is Fiji able to push the ICCPR on the path towards ratification.

The articles of ASTRA call for the right to just working conditions, fair wages, equal pay for equal work, safe and healthy working conditions, equal opportunity in the workplace, the right to form and join trade unions, the right to strike, the right to social security, including social insurance and the right to an adequate standard of living for all citizens, including adequate food, clothing and housing, including the right to freedom of speech. Madam Speaker, again these same rights are protected by the Fijian Constitution.

A free, responsible, accountable and robust media is critical in fostering a culture of deep and deliberative democracy. Unlike many other Constitution's jurisdiction that deem the guarantee of freedom of speech, expression and publication to entail implicit freedom of the press, the Fijian Constitution through its Bill of Rights unequivocally recognises the freedom of the press as pivotal in the materialisation of freedom of speech, expression of thoughts, opinion and publication. We can see every day through the multitude of articles published that we have a vibrant discourse in relation to all facets of the economy, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, it is quite unfortunate that the Honourable Biman Prasad and members of his party have been equating media freedom on the level of editorial impartiality or partiality in a media organisation.

I remind this House, Madam Speaker, and Members of the Opposition once again, that media freedom is about having the freedom and ability to report on issues, however, we have huge grievance with *Fiji Times* but they and other media organisations are free to do whatever they like. They have a political proclivity, that is fine, they can do that. This, Madam Speaker, is what we call "media freedom". That, Honourable Prasad, is Human Rights 101.

Madam Speaker, our Constitution also provides for all persons the right to be free from hate speech, whether directed against individuals or groups, and the rights of persons injured by inaccurate or offensive media reports to have a correction published on reasonable conditions established by law. It is prudent to note that the limitations to freedom of speech, expression and publication on the prohibited grounds of discrimination listed in the Constitution are in consonance with CERD on the General Recommendation No. 35 (Go and look that up) of the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination on combatting racist hate speech.

Our Constitution has also clearly defined "hate speech". Hate speech, under our Constitution, means the expression in whatever form that encourages or is the effect of encouraging discrimination on the ground listed and prescribed under section 26 of the Constitution, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, once, again the provision of the Constitution are in line and in harmony with international law. As such, this makes the ratification of human rights Instruments far easier and far more efficient. Once again this Government has put Fiji in the best possible position to ensure ratification.

Madam Speaker, of course, we are seeing a lot of hate speeches on social media and it is unfortunate also that there were supporters from the Opposition, but that is going unbridled, unchecked. Madam Speaker, if we take a step back, and look at the even larger picture, what is truly remarkable about the Constitution is that it establishes the principle that every Fijian is

equal. It does not define or divide Fijians by ethnicity, as we know those on that side of the House are very quick to do so.

Instead, our Constitution restores the title “Fijian” on every citizen of our country, while equally recognising and protecting their different cultures, customs, traditions, language, land ownership. It is only with that basic level of dignity in place that all Fijians can enjoy the full and equal protection of all the human rights and this makes it easier for us to translate the ratified Instruments into effective laws and policies and move forward with the ratification of the remaining Instruments.

Madam Speaker, we are in tremendous progress since 2006 under the leadership of the Honourable Prime Minister in matching our commitment to these Instruments with laws and policies to uphold the rights of the Fijian people.

In the case of the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), when it was ratified in 1973 by Fiji, Fiji made a reservation in relation to the political rights under Article 5(c) that guarantees the right to participate in Elections on the basis of universal and equal suffrage.

Madam Speaker, the 1970, the 1990 and the 1997 Constitutions all mandated voting along ethnic and racial lines in blatant disregard of international protocol and conventions. Unfortunately, Madam Speaker, the Government of the day decided that not all votes and not all voices in Fiji would equally matter when it came to Elections. It is not until this Government that Fiji finally shuts the door on the backwards and divisive way of thinking and operating.

In 2012, it was the Bainimarama Government that notified the UN Secretary-General of the withdrawal of the said reservation made at the time of ratification. Many of the governments before us had the opportunity to do the same, many of the governments had the opportunity to say “no” to discriminatory and exclusionary systems of voting and representation. But they chose to remain silent, and they chose to do nothing, they chose to value some Fijians more than others. No matter how hard they may try and make this forgotten, we will remember, Madam Speaker. The Fijian people will remember and they know that it was not until this Government and the 2013 Fijian Constitution that the requirement to vote on ethnic, racial or even provincial lines were removed.

Madam Speaker, our commitment and action on these issues are the reasons why the 2014 General Elections was the first Election in the Fijian history that was not conducted under the racist and provincialised, divisive electoral system. This is why the 2014 General Elections were the first to be held freely and fairly with the full participation of all Fijians whose votes and voices, for the first time, Madam Speaker, were held “equal value”, that is something you do not value.

Madam Speaker, this Government’s work to implement CERD has touched almost every aspect of our national life, including education, where we did away with discriminatory practices in the granting of the scholarships, allowing Fijian students to pursue tertiary education on the basis of their merit and achievement. I might add that we have recently poured massive new funding into our Tertiary Loans and Scholarships Board Programmes.

In the Civil Service, we are also implementing merit-based recruitment and promotion as we have outlined in this House many times before, all to improve the level of Government

services that are delivered to ordinary Fijians throughout the country. As called for under Article 5 of CERD, other civil libertarianism and the right to equal treatment before the tribunals and all other organisations administering justice, security of persons and protection by the State against violence or bodily harm, whether inflicted by government officials or by any individual, group or institution, freedom of movement in the residence within the border of the State, the right to nationality and the ownership of property, the right to freedom of opinion and expression, the right to join trade unions are all echoed in our Constitution.

Since the ratification of CERD, it was this Government that extended an invitation in 2016 to the Special Rapporteur on the Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance.

In his report, which was subsequently tabled last year in the Human Rights Council, the Special Rapporteur at that time, Mr. Mutuma Ruteere, acknowledged and commended the steps taken by this Government to combat racism and discrimination. We also welcome his recommendations and we will take them into consideration in our efforts to build a strong and responsible human rights culture in Fiji.

Madam Speaker, allow me to now briefly speak on the progress we made in implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child because truly, it is our commitment to the children of Fiji on how we treat our children, how we protect, empower and care for them, that will define the future of Fiji.

Although, Madam Speaker, the Convention on the Rights of a Child was signed and ratified prior to 2010, the actual practical implementation came into being in 2010 with the coming into effect of the Domestic Violence Act and the Child Welfare, Madam Speaker, that actually gave meat or substance to the actual Convention.

This position has also been reflected in Section 41 of our Constitution, which grants all Fijian children the right to be registered soon after birth and to have a nationality and protects the rights to nutrition, clothing, shelter and health care. It also allows them protection from abuse, neglect, harmful practices of violence, inhumane treatment, punishment and exploitative labour.

Section 15(5) of our Constitution also protects children with regards to access to courts and tribunals. Importantly, under section 11 of the Constitution, Fijians are protected from all forms of violence at home and most importantly at school also.

Madam Speaker, it is unrestricted access to quality education that is the greatest equaliser in Fijian society. In 2015, for the first time, primary and secondary education became free under the leadership of the Honourable Prime Minister.

The Free Education Policy covers all primary and secondary education, including textbooks, building fees and other fees charged to students at primary and secondary levels.

In addition, transportation assistance are also provided to children at primary and secondary levels. Moreover, Madam Speaker, we are also the first Fijian Government to invite the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education to visit Fiji in 2015.

Madam Speaker, we are also pleased to state that the establishment and protection of Women's Rights in Fiji are also consistent with the Convention and Elimination of

Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Yesterday, the Honourable Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation has already answered a question in relation to the limitation of CEDAW and on the recent recommendation made by the CEDAW Committee given the presentation of our CEDAW Report in Geneva in February this year, Madam Speaker.

As we stated many times in this House, Madam Speaker, our Constitution protects all Fijians from unfair discrimination, including on the grounds of sex, gender identity and expression, pregnancy, marital status, culture, religion, social origin, conscience and social or health status.

We also have a Domestic Violence Act which facilitates the issues of Domestic Violence Restraining Orders. We also echo the words of the Honourable Prime Minister who has made the elimination of violence against women and children his personal mission, that the attitude of this Government is one of zero-tolerance for violence against women and girls. The Honourable Prime Minister had said repeatedly that it is completely unacceptable to suggest that the onus is on the woman not to provoke a partner's temper and that if she does so that somehow or the other justifies your excuses to domestic violence. It is that backward way of thinking, Madam Speaker, that gives proudly men the excuse to justify the unjustifiable and innocent women to accept the unacceptable.

Madam Speaker, I have to make a diversion here, this patriarchal notion that the Minister highlighted that we need to be able to address. It is not about how the wealthy or how unwealthy a family is, it is about the patriarchal notions, the imbalances of power differentials that actually cause this imbalance in our society, Madam Speaker. It is not only poor women that get bashed up, there are also rich women that get bashed up too.

Madam Speaker, to this end, this Government has also set up the first toll-free Domestic Violence Helpline to ensure women in their time of need can make the call and be protected also, Madam Speaker, it covers children too and it is run by the Women's Crisis Centre.

Madam Speaker, in order to again make a practical application to ensure that the rights of the women are protected under the Family Law Act, we have ensured that *de facto* relationships are now recognised, that women in these relationships can claim for maintenance and access to property rights.

Furthermore, in the last Sitting of Parliament, we passed a Bill to amend the Succession, Probate and Administration Act of 1970, to ensure that women in *de facto* relationships were not discriminated against when it came to inheritance rights.

Previous Governments, again, fell short of amending these laws to ensure that our CEDAW commitments were also translated into our national laws and policies, Madam Speaker.

Access to justice, Madam Speaker, is a right guaranteed to all Fijians under the Fijian Constitution. This right is the hallmark of the rule of law, and as such we have also expanded the services of the Legal Aid Commission, to ensure that there are legal aid services in all urban and peri-urban areas, a very practical application of these rights, Madam Speaker. All of our laws, legislations and Promulgations are indiscriminate and are for rural women as much as they are for women and men anywhere in the country, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, again, I would like to touch on the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhumane and Degrading Treatment (UNCAT). Fiji is the only one of the two Pacific Island countries that have actually ratified it, Madam Speaker. We are also used as an example for other Pacific Island countries as to how to actually engage in UNCAT and indeed, ratify that, Madam Speaker.

We have, for the first time, a Prime Minister who had publicly stated that we do not have and never had a State-sanctioned policy on torture. We do not have and never had a State-sanctioned policy of inflicting cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment in Fiji. It is not an issue we have shied away from, we will continue to openly speak out against the culture of brutality or what some call *buturaki*.

Madam Speaker, to give effect to the rights under Sections 11, 13 and 14 of our Constitution, we have also through the Legal Aid Commission embarked on a pilot programme called the 'First Hour Procedure' in collaboration with the Fiji Police Force and the *Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission* and indeed, the Judiciary. The First Hour Procedure ensures the provision of counsel to every suspect at the police station within one hour of arrest.

Madam Speaker, again, this Parliament ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). For the first time now, we have a law that gives substance to people with disabilities. We have ratified the international convention in that respect. We have carried out many practical examples where under the Land Transport regulations, disabled persons are given first priority, they are allowed to bring in their dogs should there be a blind person who need what they call, "animal assistance" if they require.

We have also given now, for example, tax rebates to anyone who employs disabled persons through a tax rebate. These are very practical applications of these Conventions and these Rights on a daily basis, Madam Speaker.

Of course, Madam Speaker, we have also been working with various other municipal councils and the Fiji Roads Authority, retrofitting public toilets and retrofitting footpaths. These are again very practical notions of the implementation of the Conventions. There is no point in having this huge ceremony and signing these Conventions when practically it does not translate, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, again the Elections Office has special provisions for persons with disabilities.

Madam Speaker, we would like to now once again say that we urge Parliament to work together with our policy of ratifying the big nine Conventions. We will be ratifying, hopefully, another two in the next session of Parliament and we will have only two left. Again, Madam Speaker, we need to ensure that these international Conventions when we do sign, are given practical application and indeed, are translated into very tangible results for the ordinary people because we will, Madam Speaker, only be judged by how much we bring those in the margin of society, how much we mainstream them. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to start with two points that I heard from the Honourable Minister.

On the first point, he said that Fiji is a responsible UN Counsellor, and the answer I wish to say in relation to that is, an absolute no.

The second point that he said is that, Fiji's Constitution is progressive. In relation to the Constitution, I think it is clear from what the Honourable Minister has said today that the 2013 Constitution is designed to remove any reference to group, ethnicity. In my view (and I think I am correct), it is designed to deny especially the rights of an ethnic group which is the indigenous people of this country.

Let me explain that by making a reference to CERD. I went to CERD in 2012 and the first point that the Government representative said to the Committee was that Fiji does not recognise the indigenous rights of its people because they are majority. But the answer that came from the Committee was that, that is wrong for you. You must recognise the rights of indigenous people, you must recognise the rights of other communities that live in Fiji, and the challenge for the Government is to make sure that none topples the other. An example of that is the installation of Native Land Trust Board where we have all equal rights to the land. So those were the statements that were made from this Human Rights Committee.

I also presented to that Committee a complaint from the chiefs of this country in relation to about 14 Decrees at that time, that were designed specifically to terminate their rights. When I say, "their rights" or "indigenous human rights", I am making a reference to ILO's C169 which Fiji ratified in 1998, as well as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) which came about in 2007, and it was very clear what those documents defined as the rights of indigenous people as a group.

Firstly, they have a right to protect their customary institution, for example, the Great Council of Chiefs. They have a very important right prior and informed consent before any Government makes any change to any policy or changes any law. Now as I say that, I refer back to the 2013 Constitution which specifically with clear motive, remove that very section from the consent that was there before, that we call the entrenched part of previous constitution that was designed to protect and safeguard any changes to any policy or any core law, including land rights before we approve. So that was taken away.

I was here at the CERD to complain about the Decree that terminated the Great Council of Chiefs on those rights to their customary institution; to complain about the amendments to the Native Land Trust Act and the Fijian Affairs Act which breached their right. What right, you might ask? It is their right to be independent, and this Government had by then passed the law to take away the rights of the indigenous people to independently choose who to be Chairman of our Provincial Councils, as well as the Native Land Trust Board. So those were the rights that were breached so I said - this is another clear breach of their rights.

There was also a very clear breach of their rights in relation to the Land Bank that was established. Also the Mahogany Decree - all these were passed without consulting them but the message that came back was that, these laws are discriminatory, because the definition of "discrimination" is to deny or favour a person or group on the basis of their racial ethnicity.

These laws were designed to take away the rights of indigenous people in this country on the basis of their ethnicity and, therefore, they were discriminated. Thank you.

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

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the Acting Prime Minister for his statement and I also acknowledge his commitment to ratify all nine Conventions or Covenants.

Madam Speaker, it is pleasing to note that the Government is actually finally finding its way to adhering to the Multinational Observer Group (MOG) Report on the 2014 Elections and some of the recommendations that they made, and in particular, they made the recommendation for Fiji to ratify the Covenant on civil and political rights.

Madam Speaker, this together with the recommendation of MOG is important, given what the Government has done or has been doing, backed by laws and limitations in the 2013 Constitution, that actually derogate the political rights and protection of electoral rights of all our people contrary to what the Covenant states.

As far as we are concerned, Madam Speaker, the review and possible ratification of the International Covenant on Civil Political Rights (ICCPR) while welcomed, in our view, has come too late (at least) from the point of view of the Elections which is likely to be held within the next six months and the Recommendations of the MOG Report have not been implemented.

Why we are saying, Madam Speaker, that it has come a bit late is that the Elections is now clear unless, of course, the Committee can get the Report, it is going to be held under the same restrictive and regressive laws that needed substantial changes and these were recommended by the MOG 2014 Report, as well as the former Election Commission Annual Report.

Apart from some of the cosmetic changes, nothing much has been done, Madam Speaker, and I know both Reports are with the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights. Madam Speaker, despite your goodself urging that we need to get these Reports to Parliament, we still have not heard that Report in Parliament. I am just hoping, Madam Speaker, that it is not the sudden interest into ratifying all these Conventions and Covenants, it is not for us to campaign for the Human Rights Council seat that we have been campaigning for a while, Madam Speaker.

Also, Madam Speaker, Government may argue, for example, that the ICCPR was not ratified for 32 years. But, Madam Speaker, it is important to also understand that no previous Government or Constitution since Independence actually had imposed such severe limitations contained in the 2013 Constitution.

Madam Speaker, Section 173 of the Constitution which I have highlighted before actually preserves all the Decrees from 5th December, 2006 right up to 5th October, 2014 and many of those Decrees, Madam Speaker, such as the Political Parties Decree; Electoral Decree; and Media Decree are draconian pieces of legislation which we should have reviewed by now, Madam Speaker, in three and half years of Parliament.

In fact, the Honourable Attorney-General talks about the media laws. I know, Madam Speaker, and he knows it as well that journalists in this country have been reeling under all kinds of pressure. I know one TV Journalist who was removed by his boss because apparently he was told that he had offended the Government.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Nonsense.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I know the Honourable Attorney-General himself, Madam Speaker, in 2015 went on to say; “Do not read the *Fiji Times*.” We do not go around and say, “Do not read the *Fiji Times*” or “Do not watch FBC TV.” It is very, very important, Madam Speaker, that we understand that these laws are restrictive, so it is very interesting.

Let me also point this out, Madam Speaker, within the minute that I have, that in relation to the MOG Report (because this Election is going to be very, very important and the Government has actually failed in the last three and a half years to act on the MOG Report), unfortunately, Madam Speaker, those countries which are part of the MOG Report, to our disappointment, have not properly done enough to put pressure on this Government to actually implement those Recommendations.

I also want to make this point that the Electoral Commission, in our view, is a compliant Commission, they are hiding behind the excuse that the laws will be changed by Parliament, so they need to also act and make recommendations to Parliament or to the Committee so that we can change those laws well before the Election so that the Election can be held under the implementation or after the implementation of the Recommendations of the MOG Report which are very, very useful, Madam Speaker. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, I have being informed that there are no Bills for consideration.

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

REVIEW REPORT ON THE FIJI DEVELOPMENT BANK ANNUAL REPORT 2014 AND 2015

HON. SPEAKER.- Before I call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, I wish to clarify that at the end of the debate, we will be voting merely to note the Report and once the vote is taken, it ends there and the Report will not be debated again in Parliament.

I now call upon the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs to move the motion.

HON. L. EDEN.- Madam Speaker, I move:

That Parliament debates the Report on the Fiji Development Bank Annual Reports 2014 and 2015 which was tabled on 22nd March, 2017.

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

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

HON. L. EDEN.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the Committee was pleased to note that despite challenging economic conditions, the Fiji Development Bank (FDB)

was able to improve overall performance throughout 2014 and 2015 respectively, and were to be commended for their efforts.

The Bank had maintained economic viability and continued to position itself as the bank of choice, in line with their vision and core function.

The Bank had an improved overall performance for the 2014 financial year with a net profit of \$4.8 million which was an increase of 18.2 percent in comparison to the 2013 financial year.

Likewise, Madam Speaker, for the year 2015, the Bank realised a net profit of \$6.14 million which was a marked increase of 25.64 percent in comparison to the 2014 financial year.

Madam Speaker, the Committee also noted with interest the introduction of new products such as the:

1. Parri Facility which was targeted at retirees enabling them to obtain financial assistance in setting up the business or farm at the age of 55 years;
2. Residential for rental loan package to cater for those willing to invest in residential properties as a business;
3. Start SMART Programme - this was a Bank initiative to help graduating students obtain a loan to start up their own business using the skills that they had learnt;
4. Top Credit Facility - a proposed overdraft stretched facility made available for existing customers in times of cash flow crisis.
5. SME Advisory Services also came on line providing financial advisory services to existing and new clients of the Bank. The advisory services were implemented with the training programme on how to manage a business and finances.

The Committee suggested, Madam Speaker, that to achieve all of the above the FDB needed to strengthen their awareness and outreach programmes which would enable people to understand what the Bank had to offer and how they could access these products.

In addition to all of these, Madam Speaker, the Bank also continued to provide special attention to the North in line with our Government's Northern Development Programme.

Major infrastructural developments in Vanua Levu, such as the Nabouwalu to Dreketi Highway upgrade and enhanced shipping services had provided Northern farmers and small businesses much-improved access to markets in 2015. The Bank therefore applied particular focus to enabling individuals and organisations in the region to capitalise on this situation.

Madam Speaker, agriculture-related loans formed the larger part of the Bank's loan portfolio in 2015. In addition, the Bank also advanced significant funds to small and medium-sized businesses and to projects whose focus was environmental management and renewable energy.

While scrutinising the 2014/2015 Annual Reports, Madam Speaker, the Committee noted that the cost of funds to FDB was considerably higher than that of commercial banks. FDB was at that time exploring ways of remedying this which included the ability to obtain a Credit Institution Licence (CIL).

The Committee recommended that whatever was allowable under the Act should be approved to help FDB obtain competitive or cheaper cost of funds for its lending. This has since come to fruition, Madam Speaker, and the Bank is now on a more level playing field with its competitors.

To conclude, Madam Speaker, the Committee was pleased with the overall position of the Bank with its strong and ever-improving balance sheet.

The Committee was confident that FDB was well-positioned to carry out its role and would continue to grow as a profitable and self-sustaining financial development institution. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. The motion is now open for debate and I invite input, if any.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am just a little worried today, why is the Government side so depleted?

(Laughter)

Do I see the seats that will be occupied by SODELPA or NFP after the

(Laughter)

Madam Speaker, let me contribute to the debate. FDB, as a financial institution, needs our support to make it competitive in the marketplace. We see a lot of banks coming into the system now and indeed a healthy financial system is good for a country.

You will recall, Madam Speaker, when the global financial system imploded in 2008/2009 and people in America were trying to decide who to help to prop up the system, President Obama was heavily criticised for supporting the banks because they had lost so much money, people were saying, “they have lost it, let them collapse, let them go.” But President Obama said, “No, you help these guys, you prop them up, the economy will then be able to rebuild itself”, and that is very true. The financial system is very critical in any country

Madam Speaker, FDB is a proud institution, going back to the 1960s and has done very well, but what it has today, Madam Speaker, in competition with the other banks is the cost of funds, how much it pays for the funds it lends to its customers. As the Chairman of the Committee has highlighted, at that time, it was looking for the CIL, the ability to take deposits like any other bank to enable them to lend cheaply with reduced interest rates.

As we know, Madam Speaker, in many occasions the Government subsidised the interest rates to help the farmers. So I think it behoves us to support FDB and ensure that we legalise some aspects of the operation to enable them to accept deposits. I know we were told in the last meeting that there has been some accommodation. They can now accept deposits from

institutions which is a good start. I would suggest that we broaden it, perhaps not immediately, to do retail banking like accepting deposits from members of the public, but gradually improve and broaden the possibility of taking any more deposits from institutions, may be some corporate clients in a more special way like short term or overnight money lending and things like that, Madam Speaker.

So, I would just highlight that, that perhaps it is something that we as Parliamentarians could look into to try and strengthen our Development Bank by giving them more access to funds inexpensively. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Prem Singh?

HON. P. SINGH.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Just a few notes on the Fiji Development Bank. Under the Act, the Bank provides finance for projects that contribute to the development of the Fijian economy and to improve the quality of life for the people of Fiji, so long funds are provided by the Bank for agricultural purposes, Micro, Small and Medium Term Enterprises and corporate projects. The Government also uses FDB as a financial instrument in its development projects and plans and special assistance programmes that may be necessary from time to time. So these are the core functions of the Bank, Madam Speaker.

In carrying out these core functions, we note from the Report that prior to 2014 and 2015, though it is a consolidated Report, in 2013 the Bank carried a huge irrecoverable loan which is bad debts. To balance the books, so to speak, the Bank wrote off most of the bad debts to have a healthy balance sheet and to continue from thereon. From 2014 and 2015 we have seen that the Bank had undertaken a lot of proactive measures to look for funds at cheaper cost to lend for these projects work or core businesses.

Madam Speaker, we must not lose sight by being competitive in the market in terms of obtaining competitive rates for our loans or funds and not be able to look after our core function. Our core function should remain to assist the rural economy and also to innovate the thinking along the lines of the modern day practices.

On Recommendations 3, 7 and 8, my colleague talked about obtaining a special licence to accept deposits from institutions, this just gives some comfort to the Bank in terms of acquiring cost of funds but on the other hand, it puts it in a position of competition with the other commercial banks which have huge reserves, Madam Speaker, and most of the banks, as you know, are foreign-owned except for one in Fiji.

Madam Speaker, the Bank is also lending funds for sustainable energy financing facility. This is a new concept, although it has been there from 2010, it will carry on. As the momentum picks up, then the Bank is also looking at tourism in a big way.

There is a project in Vunabaka, Malolo. These are the big projects which FDB has financed. The returns which they will get on these investments, I believe, will be in line with what we have said earlier, that the cost of funds to sustain the advances to the rural economy by way of agricultural lending, micro, small to medium term, of course, the capital projects will also come about with this. So with these words, Madam Speaker, I think, the Bank, in the final analysis, should not lose sight of its core function which is to help and grow the Fijian economy.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, my apologies, I would like to firstly thank the Committee for the Report. I just wanted to very quickly highlight that FDB has recently been accredited by the Green Climate Fund (GFC) as a recipient of Green Climate Funds to the tune of US\$10 million. FDB is also going for further accreditation, so they can actually be accredited to the tune of US\$15 million. What this means, Madam Speaker, is that FDB is able to then venture more on a sure footing into the areas, for example, renewable energy and various other projects in particular with relation to adaptation, finance and also perhaps even mitigation which will be of a great help.

But what it also does, Madam Speaker, is that it puts FDB in a position where it can become a regional player. No other development banks in the Pacific has actually been given that level of accreditation that GCF has given to FDB and we are looking from a policy perspective as to how we can strengthen FDB and in various international forums, through the initiative of COP 23 forums that we have had, we are looking at how we can place FDB in that position. We are talking about organisations like UNESCAP and how they want to be able to perhaps use FDB as a vehicle in respect of furthering FDB's footprint and indeed Fiji's footprint.

We have a new CEO in FDB, Madam Speaker, who has had a couple of decades of experience in banking and we also have a good Board that has got a lot of experience. The Chair is Mr. Robert Gordon Lyon as we know that he used to be the Regional Manager for ANZ for a number of years. I think it is now in a much better footing, of course, there has been a lot of shenanigans from the past, which we need to get over, and I just wanted to highlight that to Parliament and also to again thank the Committee for their Report. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs to speak in reply.

HON. L. EDEN.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have nothing more to add.

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

(Chorus of "Noes")

HON. SPEAKER.- There being no opposition, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

Motion agreed to.

REVIEW REPORT ON THE FIJI POLICE ANNUAL REPORT 2013

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the upon the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence to move his motion.

HON. LT. COL. N. RIKA.- Madam Speaker, I move that:

Parliament debates the Review Report of the Committee on the Fiji Police Annual Report 2013 which was tabled on 25th April, 2017.

HON. H.R.T. POLITINI.- Madam Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now invite the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence to speak on the motion.

HON. LT. COL. N. RIKA.- Madam Speaker, the Acting Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and Honourable Members of Parliament. On behalf of the Honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, I take this opportunity to speak on the motion in regards to the debate on the Review Report of the Committee on the Fiji Police Annual Report 2013.

I wish to express my sincere thanks to the Members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence for executing a bi-partisan Report and I also extend my appreciation to the following Government Ministry and Department for their contributions:

1. Ministry of Defence and National Security; and the
2. Fiji Police Force.

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

Madam Speaker, there were important facts to note about the Year 2013 that shaped the Fiji Police Force (FPF) towards the future of the Force:

1. Police population ratio in 2013 was 1: 222 (This is a huge number);
2. Ascension of the 2013 Constitution;
3. 2013 was the Year that the Duavata Concept was launched for community policing; and
4. 2013 was the preparation year for the General Elections in 2014.

For the Fiji Police Force, 2013 was a very special year for them. The FPF had a very clear vision whereby their strategic focus and operation focus were well in place, the focus and plan from the period 2012-2050 and there were thematic themes for each decade. For example, for 2013, the theme was "Plugging the Gaps". It means basically the processes and systems used by the Fiji Police Force at the time were old and did not match the reality on the ground. So there were consolidated efforts to improve their Standing Orders Procedures (SOPs), administrative directives, instructions and policies.

However, there were challenges identified. They were:

1. The process of succession planning, identifying future leaders;
2. Human Resource retentions;
3. Staff Welfare;
4. Scientific and technological transition and transformation; and
5. Improving the Fiji Police Force professional training.

Madam Speaker, the findings of the review and the recommendations put forward by the Committee were intended to assist the Police service delivery of its core functions, policies and programs in 2013. The review exercise was possible after a round of consultations with the

Force. The Committee had identified areas of concern that need addressing to ensure the organisation as an institution efficiently and effectively achieves its goal.

Madam Speaker, the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, a bipartisan Committee agreed on the three recommendations in the Report.

Recommendation 1:

Leadership challenge of mitigating the high turnover of heads of the organisation is a concern that affects the morale of the Force and quality service delivery in the law and order.

Recommendation 2:

To consider appropriate resources such as financial and technical support to shape and modernise a Force fit to carry out its duties on a 24/7 basis without fear, favour or malice.

Recommendation 3:

There is a need for additional finance for the maintenance, upgrading and renewal of existing infrastructure such as officers' accommodation, amenities and a centralised headquarters.

Madam Speaker, with those few comments, as the Member moving the motion, I thank you for this opportunity. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. The motion is up for debate and I invite input, if any. Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the Standing Committee for their Review Report on the 2013 Annual Report of the Fiji Police Force.

In terms of the budget, Madam Speaker, and the Chairman has alluded to that where the operating budget was 80 percent and 20 percent capital because of the police to population ratio of 1:222.

Madam Speaker, in terms of the different issues that came up, I will speak just on a few. Firstly, the "Duavata Initiative" which the Chairman has alluded to, is a very important one in the rural areas where the police works with the community and the community knows the police and the police knows the community, so it helps to minimise criminal activities in those different areas, so I commend the police for that particular Initiative, Madam Speaker.

Another one that they also have in that Report is the "Neighbourhood Watch Scheme" which I have not heard of lately but when it first started, it was very effective. I think they need to work on that a little bit more because of the criminal activities that we hear reported in the papers, one of which is in the Nasinu area where they have reported up to 8 break-ins in a day. If they have the Neighbourhood Watch Scheme, I am sure that would help them, particularly with the people that are arriving as we have heard from the 2017 Census that people are being more

mobile now moving from the rural areas to the urban areas, and many of them are in the informal settlements. So we really need to improve on that.

Madam Speaker, in terms of physical training, I think the police really need this and they need to look fit and look like they can run better than any of us. I believe that the police need a lot of physical training as alluded to in this Report.

Also counselling services that they speak about here because of the type and nature of work that the police undergo and carry out, they really need counselling services and I believe that the families also need these counselling services.

Another one that is mentioned here, Madam Speaker, is the Border Control, which I believe is very important. We see on television how the Border Control is handled in overseas countries like Australia and Canada. I believe with the visa waiver that we have here in Fiji, we really have to be very careful about the Border Control and our coastline that can be policed too with the different yachts and boats that are coming in, and with the 1:222 police ratio, I believe it is going to be a challenge in that regard.

Madam Speaker, police training is very important because for us, lay people, we know that police are trained and not very well-trained, and I am sure the criminals can pick them out even better, so with proper training, the police should be able to handle most situations so that there is less police brutality and less excessive force, so better training is important. Probably the most important issue in this Report is what is termed here as the “Constant Change in Leadership”. Madam Speaker, we ask, what is the succession planning model used by the police? Will their organisation identify and develop from amongst internal candidates and with a clear objective to fill in senior level positions as and when they become available?

Madam Speaker, the police group that came to make their presentations were so concerned about this that they really did not want to speak much about it, they just left it to the Committee, maybe to draw their own conclusions. Madam Speaker, this is a very very important point where the succession plan is there and the police know that when they rise to senior positions, that one of them will become a Commissioner of Police one day. That is for the police morale, for their self-esteem, self-confidence, they need to know that if they work hard enough and do everything well, one day they will become the Commissioner of Police. Nobody is going to come from somewhere else, helicopters-in and become the Commissioner of Police, because all these people have had proper training and we really need to give confidence to the police that one day one of them can become the Commissioner.

I would also like to commend the Senior Police Officers because this has happened more than once and for them to be able to handle the difficulties from the top ranks right down to the bottom ranks, Madam Speaker. I really commend the Senior Police Officers that they are able to look after the police, probably given the confidence that they need and just tell them, “We have better times ahead than what we are facing now.” So, I would like to congratulate the police on that point, Madam Speaker.

The last point is the updated legislation which is also alluded too here in their Review Report that they need to bring up their Police Act in line with the other legislations so that they will be able to work better and work more professionally, so those are just the issues that I would like to bring up. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Howard Politini?

HON. H.R.T. POLITINI.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Acting Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and Honourable Members of Parliament: I wish to express my sincere appreciation to the Honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence for the bipartisan Report on the Review of the Report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence on the Fiji Police Force 2013 Annual Report.

Madam Speaker, I think we have all come in agreement to know that over the many years, crime has gone through a period of evolution in Fiji where criminal syndicates have become a bit more smarter. I must commend the Office of the Prime Minister, the Bainimarama Government for establishing the first Forensic Laboratory in Nasova and also to its continuous capacity-building within the Police Force.

Therefore, Madam Speaker, I concur with Recommendation 2:

“To consider appropriate resources such as financial and technical support to shape and modernise a Force fit to carry out its duties on a 24/7 basis without fear, favour or malice.”

The Force needs our support as public safety and national security is the Fiji Police Force’s core responsibility. Madam Speaker, with those few comments and as a Member supporting the recommendation of the Report, I thank you for this opportunity. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister for Labour.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Madam Speaker, I just like to speak briefly to this particular Report. I think for all of us, the work of the police is something that is always very critical in the influence that they have on our country in terms of law and order and we think about the efforts that they put in to their work.

I think in the papers this week, there was a story about a policeman (if I am not mistaken) who got bashed up as he was trying to carry out his duty, his role of trying to look after people. So we salute them for their efforts and I also like to salute the Committee for the work that they have done and the recommendations that they have come up with.

The first recommendation they have is the leadership challenge, and this is something that Government has recognised. There is always the challenge that if you really want to change any kind of organisation, the biggest thing that you can always do is to improve the leadership. Without a good leader, no organisation can flourish and that is something that this Government is focused to try to make sure that we have the right leadership in place.

There have been some concerns made about the fact that I think the high turnover has of the organisation. That high turnover is also a reflection of the fact that you are looking for the right leader. There is a saying, I think that somebody did a study once, Jim Collins. He said, and I quote:

“If you want the bus to go in the right direction, you must put the right driver of the bus on that bus and the bus will automatically go where you want to go.”

That is something that the Government is focused on, put the right leadership in, put in the right system to develop leaders within the system.

Having had some experience with what is happening in the Police Force now, I think they are well down on that track. It is not a matter of just people expecting that if they work in the place long enough that they automatically become good leaders. Being a good operator does not make you a good leader. Good leaders are people that follow them and that is what we are focussing on. We need a strong Police Force, you need good leadership in place, then you need good systems that develop leaders out of that organisation, and not just operators. So I think now we have the basic, even mechanics for that and I think the Commissioner of Police is doing his best to make sure that we can develop that so we can have a good impact on the service delivery.

I notice that in Recommendation 2 and once again, I congratulate the Committee for this, for appropriate resources, financial and technical support and I am aware that there is a lot of work currently taking place in the Police Force on this. I know that they have big plans to be able to address the police officers to population ratio. They have a lot of plans in place that perhaps, will be explained later on in this House as to how they will try to address that in terms of their structure and sizing.

The last one that they have here is the need for additional finance for the maintenance, upgrading and renewal of existing infrastructure, such as officers' accommodation, amenities, et cetera.

I think, over the past few years we have seen the influx of vehicles, the influx of enhancing their own facilities so that they can begin to provide better services. Over the past few months we have heard in this House, the focus now on the Duavata Policing which is coming back in, partnership collaboration between the Police and the members of the communities so that they can provide better services. So, I congratulate the Committee for their Recommendations and I am glad to see that a lot of these Recommendations are already being implemented and continue to be implemented as we speak. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Honourable Ratu Suliano Matanitobua.

HON. RATU S. MATANITOBUA.- Madam Speaker, the Acting Prime Minister, Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Ministers and Honourable Members of Parliament: I wish to express my sincere appreciation to the Honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence for their bipartisan Report which is the Review Report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence on the Fiji Police Force Annual Report 2013.

Madam Speaker, I concur with Recommendation 3; the Honourable Minister for Labour has alluded on leadership. Recommendation 3 is on the accommodation of the police officers. Some of these police stations, especially in Nasova, the barracks have not been repaired or renovated for almost 10 or 15 years. Therefore, there is a need, Madam Speaker, for additional funding for maintenance, upgrading and renewal of the existing infrastructure, such as officers' accommodation, amenities and to centralise the police stations in one headquarters especially in leadership. At the moment, we have Samabula, Nabua, the Headquarters in Vinod Patel, CPS, so we should have only one headquarters for the Fiji Police Force. The Fiji Police Force, Madam Speaker, needs our support and prayers in building a better stronger Force for a safe and secure Fiji.

Madam Speaker, with those few words, as a Member supporting the Recommendations, I thank you for this opportunity.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Jilila Kumar.

HON. J.N. KUMAR.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. As a Member of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, I wish to also contribute to this debate this afternoon.

This is something that really concerns me, Madam Speaker, in the Annual Report, that is the early deaths of our police officers.

In 2013 alone, Madam Speaker, there were 20 police officers who passed on whilst on duty. As we all know, Madam Speaker, in any organisation or Ministry, it is very important to provide a conducive environment for people so that they can enjoy their work peacefully.

As we all know, police officers' work involve high risk kind of activities. For instance, when there is a case of accident, if there is a death in that accident, the police officers are the first to go there to get that person, so while they do that, in other words, they are psychologically affected in one way.

Another way, Madam Speaker, in the case of natural disasters. In this case, flooding, they will risk their lives in swimming flooded-waters to rescue people from their communities.

Another case, another incident, Madam Speaker, in the case of criminal activities. So in that case, they will be the first ones to be there and risk their lives, they might be killed in the process. So in other words, psychologically their psychological cognitive domain is severely tested and severely challenged, Madam Speaker, so in other words, they need quality leadership.

In this regard, Madam Speaker, I wish to thank the current Commissioner of Police for coming up with initiatives in allowing the police officers at least to train during their lunch hours, during their break, because this is very important to them. At least they release their tension, they release whatever confronted them and frustration that they have, we all know that.

This is why, Madam Speaker, I am for one that really support Recommendation 3 - Leadership challenges of mitigating the high turnover of heads of the organisation is a concern that affects the morale of the Force and quality service delivery in the law and order. Therefore, Madam Speaker, the Force needs our support, our prayers in building a safe, secure and friendly Fiji.

Madam Speaker, with those comments, as a Member supporting the recommendation of the Report, I thank you for this opportunity. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Professor Biman Prasad?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I also thank the Committee for the bipartisan Report. I am also aware from the records that the Committee actually looked at the 2015 Annual Report as well. Madam Speaker, I agree with the contributions made so far and most of the Honourable Members did pick up on the challenges facing the organisation in terms of leadership and the high turnover of heads of various organisations within the Police Force. Madam Speaker, we know the Police Force had eight Police Commissioners and two Acting

Police Commissioners since May, 1987. Apart from the Heads of Departments of the Force, there has been a high turnover of Police Administration itself. So in some ways there has been limited continuity in terms of the leadership positions within the Force.

Madam Speaker, just looking at the Report, I wanted to pick on one particular issue, I know this is in relation to staff welfare and we know that the Job Evaluation Exercise has been implemented. In fact in the 2017-2018 Budget, this was provided for. One of the things that I have noticed, Madam Speaker, and I thought it is appropriate for me to highlight, perhaps the Government and the Police Force, as an organisation, needs to look at that, and that is really in terms of the salary scales for various ranks. I find that it is quite a bit of disparity and perhaps the way it has been determined, it is not going to raise the morale of the police officers.

I have a copy of the Police Salary Table Gazette Notice, this is from July 2017, Madam Speaker, and I went through the salary scales and I just wanted to point out that particular aspect of the salary scale ought to be looked at and I just wanted to point out some examples. This is what is available now, this is what the salary scales are now and if it is being reviewed, Madam Speaker, that is good but let me nonetheless point out some of the issues.

The salaries for Deputy Commissioners, Madam Speaker, ranging from about \$71,131 to about \$79,000 (if one is in service for over four years); an Assistant Commissioner will receive just over \$62,000 and over \$68,000 (if in Police service for six years), this goes on for other ranks like SSP, SP, DSP and ASP; a Senior Inspector, Madam Speaker, has to serve for more than eight years to be eligible for the maximum of \$39,617 while a newly appointed Senior Inspector would receive \$36,570. A newly appointed or a newly promoted Inspector of Police would receive just over \$34,000 but one has to serve as an Inspector for over eight years to receive the maximum salary in that grade of just over \$35,850. So in eight years, you are just having a raise of a mere \$1,700 in that eight-year period and I think that is an issue.

A newly appointed Sergeant, Madam Speaker, will receive about \$27,802 but has to serve in that position for over 14 years to be eligible for a maximum salary of about \$30,091 in the grade; an increase of almost \$2,300 for 14 years of work as a Sergeant. The same anomaly exists for those holding the rank of Corporal, a newly appointed Corporal would receive about \$22,624 and has to serve in that post for over 14 years to receive a maximum salary of \$26,900; just over \$4,000 for 14 years of service. Similarly a Constable, Madam Speaker, would have to serve in the position for over 14 years to receive a maximum salary of \$22,027, while a newly appointed colleague would get about \$18,831.

Madam Speaker, those disparities, I think, are quite glaring and perhaps when the next job review is done, I am told that it is being reviewed, it should be reviewed quickly so that that disparity could be removed because I think our police officers, Madam Speaker, need better support. In terms of very specifically, salaries, we need to make sure that this disparity is removed.

One other point, Madam Speaker, before I finish, I said this the last time when we were looking at another report, the practice of police beat. I think we need to look at the number of police officers we have, especially in urban areas where the population is increasing, where there are new settlements, where a lot of streets and police presence is the most important thing in preventing crime. I think we should need to focus on prevention.

I remember in the 1970s and the 1980s, especially in the 1980s, Madam Speaker, when I came to Suva, we used to have police beat. So if you are walking from USP to the city or you are walking along Raiwaqa, you will see police officers around 10.00 or 11.00 in the night, during their shifts where police used to go for what they call “police beat” and much of the prevention strategy was based on that. So I think, Madam Speaker, we need to bring that back and Government ought to put in more resources, even if it means hiring more police officers, we need to do that. It is not already because there are no police beat at the moment. Madam Speaker, that is a very, very important consideration for the prevention of crimes. Not only do we need more police officers but we need to remove the disparity in the salaries that we have so that those at the lower level could be motivated and made to work in the way that they should.

Madam Speaker, I also think that because the numbers of positions within the Police Force, not everyone can become inspectors, assistant commissioners of police or deputy commissioner of police but we need to look at a salary scale where a constable, sergeant or inspector, say for example, if someone wants to remain a sergeant for the next 20 years until they retire, the salary scale should take that constable or sergeant because not everybody will get to be promoted because of sheer number limitations. But if they serve for that many years, they should be at a reasonable salary level without being promoted and somewhere near to perhaps those at the top.

In that way, Madam Speaker, I think we can motivate more people to actually join the Police Force and motivate the police officers who are there to actually deliver the services that people need. Madam Speaker, those are the suggestions that I would like to make and I hope that the Government takes that into account and if they do not, Madam Speaker, when we come into Government, we will do that.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Acting Prime Minister.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am tempted to say “they wish” but vote results will obviously speak for themselves.

Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the Committee for the Report. The Report, of course, makes three key recommendations. One of them, of course, is about the morale of the Force and the quality of service delivery. The other one, of course, has to do with the financial and technical support and indeed for the Police Force to carry out its duties without fear, favour or malice. The third is about the additional finance that is required for existing infrastructure, in particular, for accommodation, amenities and centralised headquarters.

I am glad the Honourable Professor Prasad, the Honourable Leader of the NFP actually did tell Parliament that the rot started in the Police in 1987 when we have had since then a lot of changes taking place: it is a fact, he said that.

HON. MEMBER.- *Seti, seti.*

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- To say “*Seti, seti*” is actually hiding the fact. You had the then Commissioner of Police like I have said before (they do not want to hear this), the Commissioner of Police being put in his underpants in CPS at the 1987 *coup* (that was when it all happened and started). When you actually take the head of any organisation like that (which is a

regimental organisation) and carry out that sort of act, it has a huge impact on the structure, morale and indeed the career path of that particular agency. It is a fact, Madam Speaker. As Honourable Minister Usamate who is more of an expert than most of the other Members on the other side on human resources, et cetera, has very clearly stated about the impact of various other factors within a particular organisation and in particular the human resource capacity within that. They do not like to hear that, Madam Speaker, about 1987 because they are all supporters of what happened in '87.

Madam Speaker, the fact of the matter is this: the structures in the Fiji Police Force have actually remained in that form for a number of decades. So it is not just only a question of increasing the numbers within the same structure but it is a question of restructuring the entire organisation. As any organisational expert will tell you, you simply do not improve the structure just by tweaking it, you may need to completely revamp the entire structure, and that is precisely what the current Commissioner of Police is doing.

We have already had discussions in the various agencies, the Security Council meeting, et cetera, about the restructuring of the Fiji Police Force. Now that restructuring is very important, not just only to provide specific career paths but as also provided for in the Civil Service Reforms that you need to have salaries that actually cater for people to stay within a particular band (which is exactly what Honourable Prasad was talking about) and that is precisely what we have done in the Civil Service Reform. So if you take teachers, for example, not all teachers want to become the head teacher, some of them are very passionate about the subject area. They simply just want to teach Science and that is all they want to do and that is their career. Some, of course, want to move up the ladder and become a head teacher, others do not.

The question then arises, if they want to simply pursue that particular pursuit of theirs which they are very passionate about, do they have actually a liveable salary in that respect and does the system actually allow for people to move within the band? This is why we have talked a number of times in this Parliament about the Civil Service Reform and how we have created the bands, and how you can take cognisance of the fact that a person's contribution whether it is a particular scarce skill or whether it is longevity in a particular regimental area, whether that can be recognised or not?

Madam Speaker, a lot of work is being done behind the scenes. As we know, the first report that came out was by the former NFP Senator Shardha Nand who headed Flour Mills of Fiji. He headed the Committee that actually looked at the Fiji Police Force, et cetera, and they made various recommendations.

Madam Speaker, we still are very much caught up with the old way during the Colonial times. The police officers are given quarters, kerosene allowance, et cetera, when many of them actually use gas stoves now. There are many police quarters that need to be revamped so we are looking at those structures too. Do we, for example, provide accommodation in different forms? Indeed do we give accommodation allowance and simply get them to look for accommodation themselves or do we tear down the structures and put up new structures. A lot of work is being done behind the scenes in that respect.

The other fact, of course, Madam Speaker is that the society has changed as Honourable Howard Politini has remarked. Technology is being introduced, so nowadays you can actually be in touch with your fellow officers and others and people in the community through the use of technology. Everyone having, for example, 'walkie-talkies'.

Many cities, have, for example, Madam Speaker, reduced the number of physical presence but also introduced CCTVs, so you know you have CCTVs, for example, in the Central Business District (CBD) areas. Recently I was in Sydney and nearly every corner of the street has actually cameras and that is how actually the modern day policing takes place.

Madam Speaker, the other point, of course, is that in respect of the remarks being made about personnel changing. Madam Speaker, any organisation that actually deals with other organisations over which they have power of, they need to have the administrative will to be able to change people if they are not performing well. Just because someone has filled in a position, it does not mean that they will remain there forever. They need to be able to be performing as per the Job Description. So it goes precisely to the point that the Honourable Usamate talked about. You need to be able to change people if they are required to be changed, as long as your change is for a positive move. As the Honourable Jilila Kumar has remarked that the current Commissioner of Police has brought about a number of changes. Obviously, we are complimenting that, I was just looking at the budgetary figures, the Honourable Members actually looked at that.

Today, the Fiji Police Force, if you look at the funding allocation, the total expenditure in 2015-2016 was \$117.9 million; 2016-2017 was \$131.7 million; and today they received in this year's budget, \$148.79 million. This budget allocation, of course, has increased quite substantially, a lot of it has gone in respect of the salary increases according to the Job Evaluation Exercise. The Police Force was the last agency to have the fulfilment of the Job Evaluation Exercise, that has now been achieved.

Now, Madam Speaker, as we said, there is no point in simply increasing it within the existing structures, we may need to look at the restructures again.

The other point, of course, Madam Speaker, the Fiji Police Force has never had so many vehicles like now. They have now received over 130 motorcycles, they will be receiving vehicles also. Now again, that increases their response time, it has increased the morale of the Police Force and Honourable Usamate highlighted too, he had a police officer was recently, you know, assaulted quite badly too.

Honourable Members may recall that in the last session of Parliament, we actually approved a particular amendment to the Crimes Act 20009 so that people who actually attack police officers who are actually supposed to represent law and order, you get a heavier penalty in that respect and many other jurisdictions have done that.

So, Madam Speaker, the reality is that, there is obviously a lot of changes that are taking place within our society. The Police Force needs to deal with issues. There is no doubt, we have harder drugs than the actual *marijuana* in Fiji.

There are people using all sorts of new technologies. Before, if you had speed cameras, now you can go and buy an equipment that will tell you that a speed camera is ahead of you. I mean people have all those sorts of technologies available. The Police Force needs to get up to speed with that, we need to be able to give them the level of sophisticated access to resources.

Madam Speaker, there is no doubt that a number of the issues that had been recommended in this Report are being addressed. Some of them, of course, need to be addressed

in a lot more fuller way because a lot more work is being done behind the scenes in that respect, Madam Speaker. I would like to thank the Committee for their recommendations.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now invite the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence to speak in reply.

HON. LT. COL. N. RIKA.- Madam Speaker, in reply, I would like to remind us once again of our role as citizens of this beloved nation. We are also policing civilians. Our full support for the Fiji Police Force is very much appreciated and we need to support them fully.

Secondly, to the Honourable Professor Biman Prasad, we have tabled the Job Evaluation Exercise (JEE) Report this morning. I recommend since we have a lot of appendices that are for good reading, you can familiarise yourself with that.

Finally, Madam Speaker, I also commend the support rendered for the 2013 Police Annual Report that has been shared this afternoon. With those few words, I once again, thank you.

HON. SPEAKER. Thank you. Parliament will now vote to note the content of the Report. Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of “Noes”)

HON. SPEAKER.- There being no opposition, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- We have a group of young people who have just entered Parliament. We would like to welcome you to Parliament, unfortunately, you have come to see the end of today's sitting. But hopefully just coming in and seeing the environment here would help you in gaining some knowledge about Parliament. Our staff will be able to take you around and inform you further on the processes of Parliament. Thank you for your interest in coming to Parliament and we welcome you once again.

Honourable Members, that is the end of today's Order Paper and we will now adjourn until tomorrow at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 4.03 p.m.