

MONDAY 20TH JULY 2009

The Deputy Speaker, Hon Clement Kengava took the Chair at 10.14 am.

Prayers.

ATTENDANCE

At prayers, all were present with the exception of the Ministers for Justice & Legal Affairs, Culture & Tourism, Foreign Affairs & External Trade, Environment, Conservation & Meteorology, Agriculture & Livestock Development, Home Affairs Police, National Security & Correctional Services and Members for West New Georgia/Vona Vona, East Are Are, North Malaita, Temotu Pele, Central Honiara, West Are Are, Lau/Mbaelelea, East Makira, North Guadalcanal, North West Guadalcanal and Malaita Outer Island.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND OF REPORTS

- Solomon Islands Gazettes 2009, Numbers 1 – 59. Presented according to Section 62 of the 'Interpretation and General Provisions Act [Cap. 85] (*National Parliament Paper No. 26 of 2009*)

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Question No.20 withdrawn

Domestic Terminal Project

47. Mr. OTI to the Minister for Communication and Aviation: Can the Minister inform Parliament what specific activities have been or are being undertaken under the Domestic Terminal project in the 2009 Development Budget for which \$3million dollars had been allocated?

Hon LONAMEI: Mr. Speaker, out of the \$3million allocation for the domestic terminal, \$465,000 was used for clearing up the perimeter fencing around the whole airport so that securities can go around in vehicles or motorbike or the grass cutters can go around to check on the fencing.

Mr. Speaker, also costing for rehabilitation of the following areas have already been done: the departure hall, the departure lounge, check-in area, operational offices, aviation information service area, air traffic management offices, operational work space, the car park and additional toilets. By this weekend tenders should be issued out to any interested carpenters or anyone who wants to rehabilitate the terminal can apply. Tenders for these works should come out this week.

In regards to clearing of the perimeter fence, it was noticed that about 150 to 200 metres of fencing have been removed. I believe somebody may have removed or stolen the fence, and so there is need to replace the fence that has been removed with this money.

Mr. Oti: Mr. Speaker, this question was framed on the understanding that this funding is for the new domestic terminal. The Minister's answer is that expenses spent so far were not entirely for that particular project but for rehabilitating of the existing domestic terminal as well as the perimeter fencing. Can the Minister confirm that the new domestic terminal is not part of this allocation under this year's Development Budget?

Hon Lonamei: Mr. Speaker, no, work on the new domestic terminal will not be done as yet because the cost for that is about \$20million and so we just rehabilitated the old domestic terminal and that I think that is sufficient for our purpose. This \$3million allocation is for rehabilitation of the old terminal and there will be no new domestic terminal as yet.

Hon. SOGAVARE: Mr. Speaker, what is the government's plan then in building of a new domestic terminal?

Hon. Lonamei: Mr. Speaker, at the moment if the old terminal is rehabilitated, it should take us about 5 to 10 more years to use it and it would be after that before we would think about building of a new terminal.

Mr. Oti: Mr. Speaker, I have no further supplementary questions and so I therefore would like to thank the Minister for his response.

Suava port development

51. Mr. OTI to the Minister for Commerce, Industries and Employment: Can the Minister inform Parliament what progress has been made in getting the

preliminary works completed including settlement of land issues to get the Suava port development commence?

Hon. HILLY: The answer to the question is as follows. Everything that needs to be done in Suava Bay in regards to hydrographic survey, land survey and settlement of land issue are being sorted out and we are now in the process of finalizing the building plans and the jetty plan and hopefully the project should start before the end of this year.

Hon. Sogavare: Mr. Speaker, the Minister talked about work on building plan. I just want the Minister to clarify what is the government's plan in getting this project going? Is it going to be given to the private sector to do it or is the government going to do it so that the government starts to work on the building plan?

Hon. Hilly: The Suava bay development has two parts, of which one area is on fisheries and maybe the Minister for Fisheries can enlighten us on development in that area, but I also understand that they have come to some understanding in regards to this project. Another part of this project is trying to establish something like a market centre for people in that area and possibly that shed might be leased out to people who might be buying copra and things like that. The Suava Bay project is basically a market centre and one or two structures there would initially be financed and developed by the government and hopefully they will be leased out to operators who would want to use the facilities to provide services to people there.

Mr. WAIPORA: Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is that this project is partly owned by the government just like other projects in Noro which the government is a part of. What is this entity? Is the government part owner of it, and if so who owns the other part?

Hon Hilly: Mr. Speaker, the government sees that there are certain parts of this country that need to developed into market centres easily accessible to our people. For instance, it is very far for those in the northern region of Malaita to come down to Auki to get some of the services they need and so that is the reason why we are trying to open up Suava Bay for people to easily access services, and perhaps later on may be the banking services. It is going to be a partnership arrangement the government takes the lead in providing the necessary infrastructures but it is the people who would be encouraged to take part and run the services.

Mr. Waipora: Therefore, what the Minister is saying is that it would be like Noro where Western Province is a shareholder and the government is also a shareholder? Is that the case here?

Hon. LENI: Mr. Speaker, I am going to assist my colleague Minister here on the question raised by the Honorable Leader of Opposition on when the government will hand it over to investor. Mr. Speaker, the process now is that the Ministry of Fisheries is working closely with Ministry of Lands for land acquisition. Following the acquisition we will work closely with the Ministry of Commerce and the investor to discuss the general plan of the development in Suava. That part will come later. I think the acquisition work is almost completed. As soon as that is done we will work with the Ministry of Commerce, the Malaita Province and the investor to discuss the actual work that will take place according to this plan.

The investor has money for the development. What is yet to be sorted out is which one the government is going to be responsible for and which one for the investor. Probably by this year the ministries and stakeholders involved should sit down together, especially Commerce and Malaita Province and start to look at the cost aspects of starting the development so that it is included in our budget next year.

The second question is identity and ownership by the Honorable MP for West Makira whether it will be like Noro where Western Province has a part in that business or what. The Cabinet has just recently passed the incentive package for investors in the fisheries sector, and one of the incentives is the condition that allows the investor and the province the development is established in to make a share. The most reasonable one could be 70/30, which is 70% for the investor and 30% for the province or landowners or whichever. These are matters we will discuss with the investor as soon as the ground works we are going ahead with now are finalized.

Mr. AGOVAKA: Mr. Speaker, in terms of land acquisition I heard the Minister of Fisheries said that it is most completed. My question is like this; when the land was acquired, the crown acquires the land, where are the landowners in this? How do you deal with it? When the land is acquired is it sub leased to investors or is it going to be given back to landowners for them to sub lease to investors, hence getting benefit out of it? What is the arrangement here?

Hon leni: Mr. Speaker, I am not very familiar with land regulations but what is inside the jurisdiction of the provinces, the government needs to have the

courtesy to talk it over with whoever is the landowner. In this case Tenaru land is outside of the city boundary but it is still government land, but the government must have the respect of talking with the province and landowners.

In certain areas where land is still under discussions whether to give it back, like in this case or to hold on to it, if it is not given back then there needs to be consultation on issues like this. The Ministry of Commerce and whatever ministries are responsible for such a development like this must try and get the agreement of every party. The responsibility of the government is to rally the support of everybody; the landowners, the province and the government.

On areas where the government holds the title, there are lands which the government holds the title to them but previous allocations were already made on those lands. Some allocations are fixed term, some are TOL, for example on this side most of those places are TOLs, and so what it will come back to the Ministry of Lands for the Commissioner of Lands to go through the process of acquiring the land. If it is a TOL notice would have to be given to the TOL holders or FTEs so that government projects are located on those places. It is a bit of a complex matter to look carefully into. If we want to bulldoze things through, it is okay but that would not be the best approach of doing development in the country and in province, especially in a situation where we would want to attract investors. The confidence of investors must be seen to come from the basics in that they are satisfied with the process.

For that purpose and the reason that if we want to win the confidence of investors there must be a picture set that everyone agrees; the province, the landowners and government. That is why it takes so long, but we think it is a good thing to do it that way.

Mr. Waipora: Mr. Speaker, I am just wondering how much so far we have spent on this project under this present government. How much did we spend on this project this far?

Hon Hilly: Mr. Speaker, the Suava Bay project does not attract a lot of money in getting it off the ground unlike the Bina one which has already taken many years already but we are still not through with it. In terms of actual funds being spent in trying to start the project in Suava, we can give you but it is not as much as what was spent for Bina. The initiative there is later than the one in Bina.

I want to also try and answer the question and that is when we want to get those centres developed, they must be acquired because we only have one law that regulates land titles and no investments, especially huge investments would want to come and develop land that is not registered because that is going to be very risky. Basically if we want to develop the centres and be able to

regulate them, they have to be acquired and there must be understanding with original landowners because in the end it will be also beneficial to them.

Mr. Oti: In terms of government's commitment to this project, and as the Minister has said in his principal response, are the cost of the activities he mentioned already debited against the \$2million allocated under this year's budget?

Hon. Hilly: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Oti: I have no further supplementary question. I thank the Minister for his response to my question and the supplementary questions that were asked.

Swine Flu – contingency arrangement

74. Hon. SOGAVARE to the Minister for Health & Medical Services: Can the Minister inform Parliament whether the government has any contingency arrangement to control any outbreak of swine flue in Solomon Islands.

This question was noticed before the Minister made a statement on this particular issue on the floor of Parliament. But after discussing this question with him outside of Parliament, the Minister wants to go ahead with this question because there are further developments since he made a statement on the floor of Parliament about this particular issue, particularly about the contingency arrangements. With his agreement I went ahead to ask the question.

Hon. SOALAOI: Mr Speaker, at the outset I must also thank the Leader of Opposition for asking that question since the swine flue continues to be an issue of concern to the nation.

Mr. Speaker let me start off with what we currently have in our National Referral as measures to deal with any swine flue cases. The National Referral Hospital currently has 12 beds or 12 isolation rooms for any patients who has swine flue. We also have assurance from Aspen Hospital of RAMSI that if cases go beyond 12 then they will assist us since they have capacity for 50 patients and so they can assist us in that area.

In a situation where it becomes a huge outbreak, the government's plan through the Ministry of Health is for our hospital to be halved so that the eastern part of the hospital becomes the isolation part and the western part of the hospital will remain for other medical emergencies. We are planning towards that because the isolation ward at this time is on the eastern part of the hospital and the office rooms and conference rooms over there can be looked at converting them to isolation wards.

On general outpatients, we are currently supporting the Honiara City Council clinics and we encourage patients to go to the City Council clinics so that the facilities that are now available at the Central Hospital are left to deal with this issue if we are to experience a huge outbreak. That is the contingency plan at the moment.

As an assurance to the public, we want to say that there is no need for us to panic. The swine flue, as we can see, is not as very seriousness compared to the SAS and the avian influenza. Right now we only have 4 per 100,000 ratio of the swine flue. Compared to the bird flue last time, which was 60% fatality rate, which is very serious compared to the swine flue.

Mr. Speaker, we believe that we do not have anywhere to run away to because it will come, but we will just plan as to we how we can manage this disease. Also, whilst I have this opportunity, just to formally inform Parliament that on the 16th July, this month we have two confirmed cases of swine flu. The two persons involved are expatriates and have already gone back. But there are no locals that are confirmed cases of swine flue. The comfort we can have is that the two concerned have already gone back to the countries they come from. We checked with the contact places they came to stay with and it is a training school. We did some contact tracings and it looks like the flue did not spread because immediately after they developed some flue like symptoms they reported it to hospital and they were quickly isolated. In fact three of them came through and when samples were sent to Melbourne, two were confirmed to be swine flue cases. As we speak the two even recovered before they went back, and so they themselves were free from the swine flue as we speak now.

Our activities are ongoing and we want to encourage people to continue to adhere to our advices. Those of you who usually watch the TV, I ask you to take heed of what you see on the TV and what you hear on the radio and see on the newspapers. We are not slowing down the activities of the taskforce; it is still very much busy with what it is doing. To answer this question when this happens, the multi sectoral taskforce set up by the Ministry with other stakeholders are consulting each other with the National Disaster Council to declare we have a national disaster so that the plan I told you about earlier on will be implemented where part of the hospital is treated as the isolation ward and the other part for medical emergencies only. Our Honiara City Council clinics are being assisted to receive general out patients.

Hon. Sogavare: I take it that the arrangement mentioned is by the Minister is for Honiara, but what arrangements are you putting in place for our people in the rural areas.

Hon. Soaloi: Three provinces almost have the same capacity that is in Honiara because we believe they are like places that we need to monitor, which are Gizo, Auki and Temotu. Gizo, basically because it is the entrance to the West and Temotu in the East and Auki because there are many activities going on there and also a good number of visitors is going to Auki. But those places have facilities to do screening and collecting of specimens to be sent to the hospital and our labs here in Honiara can tell if the virus is Influenza A, and from there we will send the specimen to Melbourne for confirmation.

We also have four areas in Honiara called sentinel sites that continue to supply 10 samples every week to be checked at the National Referral Hospital where if it is seen as an influenza type flue then it will sent for confirmation to Melbourne. We are using Melbourne because it is one of the reference labs of WHO, which is not only used by us but other members are using it too.

There are three provinces and the strategic locations I mentioned that we have in place. The only threat we have now is visitors coming into the country because we cannot carry it ourselves as it has to come from outside.

Hon. Sogavare: I do not have any other supplementary questions and so I thank the Minister for briefing Parliament on the arrangements the Ministry is putting in place.

BILLS

Bills - First Reading

The Currency Declaration Bill 2009

STATEMENT OF GOVERNMENT BUSINESS (further statement)

Hon. SIKUA: Mr. Speaker according to government business for today, the House should resolve into the committee of the whole house to consider the Penalties Miscellaneous Amendment Bill 2009, however, have been advised that the Attorney General is ill and a further list of the proposed amendments to the schedule is being prepared and therefore I propose that the committee stage be set down for business tomorrow.

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. Sikua: I move that Parliament do now adjourn.

The House adjourned at 10.48 am