

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

FRIDAY, 2ND MAY, 2025

[CORRECTED COPY]

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FRIDAY, 2ND MAY, 2025

The Parliament met at 9.38 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

MR. SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Members were present, except the honourable Minister for Defence and Veteran Affairs.

MINUTES

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move:

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Thursday, 1st May, 2025, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE SPEAKER

Welcome

I welcome all honourable Members to the final sitting for this week. I also welcome all those joining us in the gallery and those watching the live broadcast on television and the internet.

PL100 Students - University of the South Pacific

Honourable Members, please, join me in welcoming the final group of PL100 students from the University of the South Pacific. I welcome you to your Parliament, and I hope that today's proceedings will provide you with some enlightenment on the workings of Parliament as one of the three arms of Government.

Uncorrected Daily Hansard

For the information of honourable Members, the uncorrected *Daily Hansard* for yesterday's sitting will be circulated once it has been finalised. That will be later this morning.

Ruling - Point of Order

Finally, honourable Members, please kindly take note that I will deliver my rulings on the Points of Order raised yesterday by the honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament and honourable Filimoni Vosarogo at a later sitting of Parliament.

POINT OF ORDER

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to raise a Point of Order on Standing Order 60(1), 62(1) and also Standing Order 133.

MR. SPEAKER.- You may proceed.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is in relation to some of the comments that were uttered yesterday by the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-operatives, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications. He has a habit of continually doing

that, talking about this side of the House and 16 years of nothing, of not achieving anything. All of these assertions, that continuously to be done over the past years, about the mess that was there, when he continuously did that without giving any evidence of what he is talking about.

(Honourable Members interject)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order! Carry on, honourable Usamate.

HON. J. USAMATE.- I refer in particular, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to Standing Order 133, and there is a precedence for this. In the Standing Order that was raised against the honourable Bala by the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics, for which a ruling was done in July last year.

In that particular Point of Order, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Deputy Prime Minister had mentioned, quoting under Order 133, that says that every member and other person speaking in Parliament has freedom of speech and debate in Parliament subject to the Standing Orders. Then he quoted that deliberately misleading Parliament is a very serious matter and must be viewed as contempt, and he established three elements that must be proven. These are three elements which must be established in order to show that a member deliberately misled Parliament, and he quoted these:

- (1) the statement must, in fact, have been misleading;
- (2) the member must have known at the time that the statement made was incorrect; and
- (3) in making the statement, the member must have intended to mislead Parliament.

The judgment was done on the basis of that Point of Order, and honourable Bala had to produce evidence on a statement that he had made about something to do with the price of sugar, the promise of \$110 per tonne.

In this particular case, the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-operatives, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications is making statements that there have been 16 years of nothing. First of all, not everyone on this side of the House has been in Government for the past 16 years.

The other thing that I would like to say, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that when he says “nothing”, he has to provide evidence, just like the honourable Bala was required to do. If you say that “nothing” has been produced, you have to show that “nothing” has been done! The burden of proof has to be given by the person that makes that statement. I am saying this because the precedent has been set. You make a statement, and in honourable Bala's case, he went and got the evidence. If you make that statement, you have to give the evidence. As has also been said, we have shown that when we came out of 2022....

(Honourable Member interjects)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, please! Let the Member complete his statement.

HON. J. USAMATE.- What I am trying to say, Mr. Speaker, is that this burden of showing proof is something that the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics had raised as something that is required of someone making a statement in this House.

All we are saying is that, if you make that requirement for this side of the House, both sides of the House should be treated equally. If someone from this side of the House makes a statement

and has been told to show the proof that it is true, and he went to the extent of getting the letters to show that it was true and if the Deputy Prime Minister makes a similar statement, he must show that it is true. If you are saying that the Government has not produced anything, show it! Show the evidence! If not, forever be silent. That is the Point of Order, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- I will make my ruling on the Point of Order raised by honourable Jone Usamate at a later date.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, may I be allowed to just briefly respond factually to his Point of Order?

MR. SPEAKER.- I am making my ruling at a later date, but would you wish to clarify? If that is the case, then I will let you.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Sir, one of the things that I learned very quickly when we came into this House is that we are open to criticism, and so we all need to come in here with a bit of thick skin. That side of the House, when people are talking, someone says, 'hogwash', that means what is being said is nonsense, with no proof. Some people say 'microwave', which means that we are copying stuff, but there is no proof.

Mr. Speaker, you have heard me in this House acknowledge the contributions that have happened on the other side of the House. Yesterday, I mentioned the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework. That started from that side of the House and we have completed it, so there has been a balance in my contribution here.

Of course, now and again, I say nothing, but it is meant in terms of the whole discourse. It is not meant to insult them. Mr. Speaker, they need to grow thick skin. After eight years in government, they have not learned to grow thick skin. Why? Because they were using these laws, these Standing Orders, to protect themselves. They do not like being told the truth, Mr. Speaker.

With due respect, Mr. Speaker, Sir, what is being said is total nonsense. I repeatedly spoken in this House about the messes that they have created. Look at my speech last year in my contribution to the 2023-2024 Budget, I had clearly articulated there, a half-a-billion dollars' worth of wastage from your side of the House.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- I said in that statement that it is going to go to a billion, and it has gone to a billion. So, I will tell the next time we go to the Budget this year. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have been very factual here. I have acknowledged what they have done, but when they have not done much or done nothing in some instances, I have highlighted that as well.

In terms of the communications and discussions yesterday, they did nothing, Sir!

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- I say that factually because the money that we had from the universal service fees....

HON. J. USAMATE.- 95 percent coverage all over Fiji!

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Calm down, calm down! You did not do it, Vodafone did!

(Honourable Members interject)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order! Can you, please, finish your statement?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is what I am trying to say.

(Honourable Member interjects)

MR. SPEAKER.- No, I will stop it! That will do! I will decide on the issue in my own time after I have looked at the evidence which you have provided, honourable Usamate, referring to a previous ruling, together with the explanation from the honourable Deputy Prime Minister. Give me time to do that and in good time, I will give you, my response. Thank you.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- I rise on a Point of Order. Standing Order 62(4)(a) and (d). If I may be allowed to read it, Mr Speaker, Sir, it says, and I quote:

“It is out of order for a member, when speaking, to use-

- (a) offensive words against Parliament and or another member;
- (d) words that likely to promote or provoke feelings of ill-will of hostility between communities or ethnic groups within Fiji.”

I refer to a statement made in this House by honourable Alvick Maharaj during his contribution to the Work Care Bill 2025, implying that I, in my former role as the Attorney-General had made a false statement regarding compensation matters handled by the Accident Compensation Commission Fiji (ACCF). He claimed that all compensation cases were being processed under a repealed law and further suggested there was no governing legislation at that time.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, that assertion is incorrect and offensive. It misrepresents the facts and casts unjustified assertions on my integrity as the former Attorney-General. To set the record straight, workplace accidents that occurred up to 31st December, 2018 were processed under the Workmen’s Compensation Act, while repealed in 2018, remained applicable to cases arising before that date. Those cases were administered by the Ministry of Employment under a fault-based system with compensation paid by employers from insurance companies.

On 1st January, 2019, compensation for employment and school-related accidents had been administered by ACCF under the Accident Compensation Act 2017 which established a no-fault compensation system funded through a levy on employers.

The Workmen’s Compensation Act was repealed in 2018, however, there was a Legal Notice No. 105 dated 23rd October, 2018 by the then Minister for Employment, honourable Bala, appointing 1st January, 2019 as the commencement date for the Workmen’s Compensation (Repeal) Act 2018. Additionally, this then gave the Ministry of Employment until 31st December, 2024, to deal with cases that were pending with the Ministry of Employment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there was a clear continuous legislative framework governing compensation matters. Honourable Maharaj’s statement that there was no governing law and his implication that I misled this Parliament is entirely without basis.

I raise this Point of Order so that the honourable Member may be asked to withdraw his remarks, apologise to this Parliament and apologise to the people of Fiji for making unfounded and

offensive statements against a fellow Member of this House, and to the hardworking officers of the Ministry of Employment.

MR. SPEAKER.- I will also take on board the Point of Order that has been raised, and I will look at the records equally. I now owe the honourable Members of this House four Points of Order, which I will answer to in due course.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise on a Point of Order under Standing Order 62 – prohibited reference which states, and I quote: “When speaking a member must not impute improper motives to any other member.” Yesterday, the honourable Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources stated that the discovery of 95 kilogrammes of drugs was caught in Sydney, and I was insinuating that it came from Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I stated, “90 kilogrammes of drugs came from Auckland”, and I was using it as an example. My honourable Chair had corrected me in a right of reply, but I urge the honourable Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources not to mislead Parliament with baseless facts. Get his facts correct before he raises a Point of Order and imputes improper motives. This is out in the media, and it is undermining my credibility in Parliament of stating facts, Mr. Speaker, Sir. He should get his facts correct!

MR. SPEAKER.- That makes five Points of Order that I will answer to and make a ruling on in due course.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND CERTAIN DOCUMENTS

The following Reports were tabled by the honourable Ministers responsible in accordance with Standing Order 38(1), and referred to the relevant Standing Committee for deliberation in accordance with Standing Order 38(2):

Standing Committee on Natural Resources

- (1) Water Authority of Fiji 2019–2020 Annual Report (*Parliamentary Paper No. 01 of 2023*)
- (2) Water Authority of Fiji 2020–2021 Annual Report (*Parliamentary Paper No. 117 of 2023*)
- (3) Water Authority of Fiji 2021–2022 Annual Report (*Parliamentary Paper No. 99 of 2024*)

Standing Committee on Economic Affairs

Sugar Cane Growers Fund 2023 Annual Report (*Parliamentary Paper No. 165 of 2024*)

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

Criteria for Administering Specific Infrastructure Projects
(Question No. 60/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport inform Parliament on the criteria that determines whether Fiji Roads Authority or Public Works Department handles specific infrastructure projects?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the criteria for determining whether a specific infrastructure project is handled by the Fiji Roads Authority (FRA) or the Public Works

Department (PWD) is guided by legislative mandate, functional distinctions and the evolving institutional transition currently underway.

The FRA, established under the Fiji Roads Authority Act 2012, is primarily responsible for the management, maintenance and upgrading of all national roads and associated infrastructure. However, over the years, it has become increasingly evident that rural roads, especially those in remote and less accessible areas, have not received adequate attention. That situation led to a strategic Government decision to revive PWD, whose original role is still legally preserved under the Roads Act 1914, which was never repealed when the Fiji Roads Authority Act 2012 came into force.

As part of that shift, all rural roads, those located outside of town and city boundaries, are now designated to fall under the responsibility of PWD. The FRA will progressively phase out its involvement in the construction of new rural roads and instead focus on the management, maintenance and upgrading, and expansion of existing national road infrastructure. Once fully resourced, PWD, through the Department of National Roads, will also be responsible for the development of national road policies, some of which are currently underway, and the setting of construction and maintenance standards across Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is important to note that we are currently in a transition phase. While efforts are ongoing to restore and re-establish rural depots and build capacity within the PWD, the FRA continues to manage all national roads, including those in rural areas. This temporary arrangement ensures continuity in service delivery until the PWD is fully operational and capable of assuming its full mandate.

In summary, the division of responsibilities is guided by the Fiji Roads Authority Act 2012 whereby FRA handles national roads, primarily focussing on maintenance, rehabilitation and new national main trunk roads. With reference to Roads Act 1914. PWD's role in rural roads is being reactivated.

On geographical classification, as mentioned, PWD will handle basically rural roads and FRA the national networks. On institutional capacity, during the transition, FRA retains oversight until the PWD infrastructure and resourcing are fully restored.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, in one of the Public Accounts Committee meetings, the Permanent Secretary for Ministry of Public Works was present and he alluded to that he had actually requested for more than 700 workers for PWD, which has basically been declined by Cabinet. With that in mind, if Cabinet has declined resourcing the Department with HR, how does the Minister plan to have PWD effective and efficient if there are no people to work in the Department?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- That was part of the Cabinet paper. It was not actually declined, it was approved, but as you know, some of that will involve transfers. I do not have the numbers with me here, as we progress with the reform and the phases in terms of rebuilding PWD.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, a question to the honourable Minister and it is in two parts. When will PWD be fully restored? What will be the future of FRA once PWD is fully restored?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Yes, that question has been asked several times, but it is important to know that the other side of the House had stated that we should not go back 16 years. However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have to, in order to understand the situation, we are in because if you look at it factually, those who came in 2006 are the same people who were there from 2014 up to

now. Basically, it is the same group of people who came in throughout the legal system and imposed their own legal system, the 2013 Constitution, which is running now. It is the same core group, their leader and their Attorney-General, who are both out now.

What I am trying to say here is that they go on pontificating about all these things but the original issues are from there. We cannot just suddenly remove something and replace it with what we come up with because this is a responsible Government. The kind of questions I have been receiving on this for the last 24 months shows the lack of understanding about change management.

Change management is about assessing the current situation, assessing the resources needed, and building it in a phased, responsible manner, which we are currently doing. This is not dictatorship, we cannot just come and kick people out and replace them. That was what happened when they kicked out PWD.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- That is what you are doing now.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- That is what you did.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- What happened with PWD is really one of the saddest occasions in Fiji, which resulted in hundreds of people being moved out. Not only that, but they were also technical people and we cannot just build that up in 12 months or 24 months. We need 16 years to do that.

(Laughter)

If we have 16 years, Fiji will be just perfect, but we will not do it in 16 years. We will do it in this phase and when we come in after the next elections, the good work will continue from there.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me give you an example. When PWD was done away with, \$8.6 million worth of PWD vehicles and plants were transferred. There was a written instruction to transfer that out from PWD.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Where?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Yes, that is the question. Where to?

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Investigate it!

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- I have the list here. The Black Beko, cranes, graders, loaders, Pajero, twin cab, they are all here. There are 118 pieces of equipment. Central and Eastern, number transferred - 45 pieces, worth \$3.03 million. Western was 26 pieces worth of \$2.2 million and Northern was 47 pieces worth of \$3.3 million – a total of 118 pieces of assets worth \$8.6 million. In the correspondence, it was transferred to FRA. There is another correspondence which states that it was transferred to FWH, an engineering firm which was engaged by the same people sitting on that side of the House, from the last 16 years. That is why we keep on referring to 16 years.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Point of Order!

MR. SPEAKER.- What is your Point of Order?

HON. J. USAMATE.- It is on Standing Order 133 - misleading the House. There is no one sitting on this side of the House who was involved in that decision. The honourable Minister said, “people sitting on that side of the House”, no one sitting here was involved in that decision. The person who was involved in that decision normally sits behind him. So, he is misleading the House!

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Usamate, I take the point he is making. He is pointing to the other side in a general way, meaning those who were in authority before. Honourable Minister, can you also conclude your statement on this issue?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Basically, what I am saying is that when we came in, as the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-operatives, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications stated, we came into a ‘mess’, although it might sound unparliamentary.

(Laughter)

It made it impossible. If people understand human resource management and technical skills development, we cannot do that in 12 months. You need about three years' lead time. For example, a grader has about 12 or 14 functions. Some of the drivers now just know three functions, so we need experience. All that experience was removed, but the most frightening thing is the disappearance of 180 pieces of equipment. We are trying to find out where that is.

To conclude, in one of the other correspondences, it was transferred to the engineering firm, MWH. However, when we came in, MWH says that the last government owed them \$23.6 million. They said, “You pay us \$23.6 million which is through the courts, et cetera. Those are the shenanigans that we have to deal with when we came in. It is not as simple as the assertion being made in terms of the questions raised.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- So, get on with it!

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Another statement being made is, “Two years you have been doing nothing.” We cannot be doing nothing because we are correcting the situation, we need to correct the situation and then go on to the next....

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- A Point of Order, Sir, Standing Order 61 and Standing Order 62(1) – irrelevance and improper motives. He should just get on with it.

MR. SPEAKER.- I take his Point of Order. Please, get on with it, honourable Minister.

(Laughter)

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have four minutes.

MR. SPEAKER.- Yes, you have four minutes.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have explained the situation and how we are moving with it in phases or in a phased manner. Realistically, in order to build up the workforce needed for us to implement this plan, which is the rural roads, et cetera, to be taken up by PWD, I would say that it will need another two or three years.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the development partners. Japan is standing by for the resourcing of our depots, which is the first stage. So, if we resource those depots, we have some

machinery right now that have worked through a few areas, including the maritime and some of the interior areas and complementing FRA. We have the correct synergy to produce that maximum or optimum output, which will be a good arrangement. That is why I am telling the people of Fiji, put us back here after the next election and we will complete the good work.

Honourable Ketan Lal keeps on saying, “Minister for pothole.” I could sue you for that. However, once we have these two elements rolling and complementing, as well as monitoring the programme of works, et cetera, then the whole thing will be rolling forward. I am sure there are gaps and all, that I have not denied.

MR. SPEAKER.- It is a follow up from the Leader of the Opposition, I assume.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the only reason why I asked that question was because everyone in Fiji knows and this House knows the statements that he used to make when he was on this side of the House. He said that if they are going to come into Government, he is going to get rid of FRA and bring back PWD. When is that happening? Are they going to run parallel and supplement each other? Come on, be a man! Find out what you have stated and commit to your earlier statements. When is that happening?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Stating that we will throw out FRA, did I say that? You have not provided the evidence, so I am not sure whether you are correct or not. Even if I said that, I was not in Government and what I said is not law. As a responsible elected Minister, when you come into Government, you were not even talking to us. When we went in and out of this House, we were like lepers here. So, we could not communicate in that environment. I could not really make an evidence-based assessment of what the situation was.

HON. V. NATH.- A Point of Order! Standing Order 61, Mr. Speaker, Sir - misleading...

MR. SPEAKER.- One moment, I will deal with this first. You just wait until I recognise you.

Honourable Nath, are you raising a Point of Order?

HON. V. NATH.- Misleading parliament, Standing Order 61.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Minister

MR. SPEAKER.- No! You tell me what Point of Order.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

Honourable Nath, have a look at your book and tell me what Point of Order.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, my apologies, it is Standing Order 74(1)(a) – practice of Parliament.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Just read the whole thing.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr Speaker, Sir, the Minister just mentioned...

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Please, honourable Members, there is so much interference.

You mentioned Standing Order 74. I have already made a ruling before that Standing Order 74 only allows you entry into stating a Point of Order. Then from Standing Order 74, you have to go to another Standing Order which specifically deals with the point you are making. Yes, I agree, Standing Order 74 is a Standing Order. As you say, there is an alleged breach of Standing Order, which particular Standing Order are you referring to after you have opened up Standing Order 74?

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is Standing Order 74(1)(a) and with it, it is irrelevant, and Standing Order 61?

MR. SPEAKER.- That is what I am getting to. You have opened up your door on Standing Order 74(1)(a), now you are going to Standing Order 64 or Standing Order 61. Standing Order 61 is judicial proceeding, as the Leader of the Opposition is saying.

HON. V. NATH.- My apology, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to correct the honourable Minister that is why I want some time. Mr. Speaker, Sir, Standing Order 60(1) which is irrelevance, reason being is that the Minister just mentioned that we were not talking to him.

I want to correct him, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that for a number of times, I being the former Assistant Minister for Infrastructure, he did call me for water, road to fix, and I have always assisted him. Always! It does not matter if he was sitting this side and always saying that the potholes are as big as a *lovo* pit, but I have always assisted him, giving him water and fixing the road wherever he asked me. I want him to correct it, and I want him to withdraw it.

MR. SPEAKER.- I take your Point of Order. Honourable Minister, there are certain statements that you have made which are not correct, as far as he is concerned. I can have this at a later, date but I prefer that you handle it now.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, yes, he is correct. He is my good friend. He was a very good Chairman of our Standing Committee. I would like to, yes, he appreciates that.

MR. SPEAKER.- I am hearing that you are drawing it now. Is that correct? You are withdrawing your statement?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Yes, I was referring to two levels. One is the Standing Committee, and one is the general Parliament discourse in terms of bilateral cooperation. That was non-existent. In terms of making statements from the Opposition, I did not really have access to do a proper assessment. If I had said that, then it was in that context. But now, as you become a Minister, you really assess the whole situation properly. This is a responsible Government. We just do not go in and abolish a Department and raise a new entity.

As a responsible Government, it is very important to make proper assessments, which is what we are doing, and a phased change management type of implementation. Of course, it has serious resource implications for this Ministry and what we are doing, so it has to be done in a responsible manner.

On the question of abolishing FRA, I cannot say 'yes' or 'no', because as we progress with the implementation and from what we are seeing now, that might not happen here. It will be a dual system with the Ministry of Public Works and FRA.

As I have mentioned in my statement, one is to focus on national highways and main trunk routes and the other on the rural roads. If we complete this, it will be a good setup and with the

resources there to complement each other, we can really have good services and programme going forward.

HON. H. CHAND.- The honourable Minister has informed the House that PWD has been revived and established. My simple question to the honourable Minister is, what is the current workforce of PWD?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- I do not have the numbers, but in the Cabinet Paper we proposed a certain number. As you understand, given the skills shortage in Fiji, it has been quite difficult in recruiting, especially in the technical areas. Applications have been received but in terms of experience, there are some new graduates, et cetera, and that is the situation being faced. Not only that, but there is also serious mismatch in the technical skills required to have the organisation or the department running. As I have mentioned, it is, sort of, a phase or progressive kind of development as go forward, especially in the HR side.

That is why it is very important and part of the approved paper too, is the need for apprenticeship which we are looking at establishing. That has been done, for example, in Water Authority of Fiji, given the current shortage of skilled technical people, we are closely liaising with our training institutes - FNU and Pacific Polytech, et cetera.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- My question to the honourable Minister is, you have just mentioned that there is a shortage of skilled workers, but the work must continue. Is there any plan from your Ministry to recruit skilled workers from abroad?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Yes, we actually have some expatriates in WAF and also in PWD but at the moment, we are just looking locally. If the situation comes to that, that might be a consideration.

Update – Fiji's Cruise Tourism Sector
(Question No. 61/2025)

HON. T.R. MATASAWALEVU asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation update Parliament on the Government's strategy to maximise specific economic benefits from Fiji's growing cruise tourism sector?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, cruise is a significant part of the tourism market with even greater potential. In 2023, Fiji welcomed some 83,473 cruise ship passengers, which was significantly higher from 2022 when we received 15,863 cruise visitors; of course, COVID-19 being the factor. Looking at 2024, we received 86,151 cruise visitors who contributed \$7.4 million to the economy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, tentative cruise schedules show that we can expect up to 164 cruise visits this year, compared to 133 last year. We anticipate that these ships will call into Kadavu, Lau – which is in Vanuabalavu and Fulaga – Savusavu, Taveuni, Lautoka, Suva and Levuka.

In 2018, with the support of the International Finance Corporation, we undertook an assessment of the economic impact of cruise tourism in Fiji. Please, allow me to share briefly with you some of the findings. Cruise tourism contributes US\$21.4 million directly to the Fijian economy, and with a flow-on effect, the indirect contribution to the economy is estimated at US\$22.7 million. Each cruise ship voyage brings in an average of FJ\$305,000, or US\$147,000 in spending per port-

of-call, and one cruise ship passenger brings in \$90, or US\$44 of spending each. That is significant, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

What are we doing? On Fly in Cruise, we will see the first ‘turn around’ ships coming to Fiji, and this is a partnership with Fiji Airways. That means, multiple ships will be coming to Fiji where the cruise will start and culminate. We are looking at upwards of 2,000 to 2,500 people at a time flying into Fiji to commence a cruise, and likewise, disembark at the end of their journey. That is a significant new development that will help grow occupancy in May, as those tourists will need flights and rooms. That is a major area that we are working to increase and grow into Fiji.

On infrastructure, the foundation of a thriving cruise tourism sector begins with safe and reliable maritime infrastructure. The Government has been working with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to identify new sites for the relocation of Suva Port. That will essentially mean, looking at a port which can accommodate all container ships, fishing vessels, and shipbuilding, while the existing Suva Port can be essentially used for cruise liners.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on maritime safety and navigation, we are also working closely with the Fiji Navy, Fiji Hydrographic Services and key partners, including Kenua Fiji and iTaukei Trust Fund Board, and partners such as, the Market Development Facility of the Australian and the UK Government to update hydrographic maps. That critical work ensures that cruise vessels can navigate Fijian waters safely while minimising risks to our marine environment.

Last year, Yasawa-i-rara Village welcomed the *Seabourn Pursuit* cruise liner after a 16-year hiatus. Yasawa-i-Rara Village was added as a port of call for cruise liners after Kenua Fiji shared the finalised hydrographic map. The community welcomed over 200 tourists, and a lot of work was put in to prepare the communities to receive those tourists.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is also an established National Hydrographic Committee, through which we are working to update maps in other regions that cannot benefit from the cruise market.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, product development is equally important. On average, cruise passengers spend \$118 in Lautoka per person, followed by \$104 in Suva, \$102 per person in Denarau, \$56 per person in Savusavu, and \$3 per person in Dravuni, Kadavu, per day.

A strong positive correlation was found between passenger satisfaction and spending. That is, the more satisfied passengers are with a variety of things to see, do, and purchase, the longer they stay ashore and the more they spend.

For existing cruise companies, the focus is on the opportunity for more tourism businesses to get accredited and available for shore excursions. The percentage of passengers who are getting off the ships to do pre-approved shore excursions, tours, and visits is growing.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the upcoming Tourism Super Week has a range of sessions, including a cruise symposium where cruise companies and industry experts will be providing insights, training, and networking to our tourism businesses to help them better connect to the ships.

We anticipate major brands in attendance, as we seek to add Fiji to cruise itineraries through to 2028 and beyond, as cruise companies set itineraries a long way out. We will also be hosting a tour guide training to equip aspiring and experienced guides with knowledge and skills in the field.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to share that the Pacific in April made its mark in the global arena as the Pacific Tourism Organisation (SPTO), in partnership with the South Pacific Cruise

Alliance, returned to the world's largest cruise trade show, the Seatrade Cruise Global 2025 in Miami. With over 600 exhibitors and a sea of cruise professionals from around the world, we used this as an opportunity to collectively mark the Pacific as a cruise destination.

The SPTO, which Fiji is a member of, represented a powerful alliance of destinations, including Fiji, Samoa, American Samoa, Tahiti, Tonga, Pitcairn Islands, and Vanuatu. SPTO shared its booth with Tourism Fiji, Fiji Airways and the Pacific Village. Their presence signified renewed collaboration, especially around fly in cruise opportunities.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, by fostering public partnerships and aligning with regional maritime strategies, we are positioning Fiji and the Pacific as a preferred and responsible cruise destination.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, while much of this work is ongoing, our direction is clear. We are building a cruise tourism sector that prioritises safety, sustainability, and shared prosperity - one that not only welcomes the world to our shores but also ensures that every Fijian community benefits from its growth.

MR. SPEAKER.- I intend for us to take a break now. Supplementary questions will be asked after the break.

Honourable Members, it has been a rather boisterous and sensitive morning this morning, and I think a time-out is probably the ideal solution. We will now suspend proceedings for morning tea break. We will resume in half an hour.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.33 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.10 a.m.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members we will proceed from where we left off for the break and that is the time for supplementary question in respect of the Ministers answer, the honourable Ro Filipe Tuisawau's answer to the question posed by honourable Jone Usamate.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I understand we have gone to Question No. 61/2025, honourable Taito Rokomatu's question.

MR. SPEAKER.- I do apologise, you are correct honourable Koya. It is, in fact, the second Oral Question and that is the answer that had been made by the honourable Deputy Prime and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, my question to the honourable Deputy Prime Minister with respect to the cruise sector and economic benefits in how to maximise it. Sir, just a little bit of background, most of us who travelled around the world would have seen the DFS. The DFS is the duty-free thing that exists in many places around the world - Long Beach, Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York, Sydney, Singapore, and many of these places.

The DFS had begun by a person called Feeney and Robert Miller in the 1960s. The concept is really good and it relates to tourists who had come whether by sea or whether by air, relates to duty-free because I remember as a child, Lautoka was a thriving place with respect to cruise tourism and there were huge duty-free outlets that were making a substantial amount of money. It also existed in Suva where there was a lot of cruise tourism.

Now, that we are getting back on board a lot of cruise tourism, to make sure or try and get these tourists to spend more and create another avenue for more to happen in Suva, will the honourable Minister be looking at trying to see if we can incentivise that particular industry in the next Budget so that we can actually create our own kind of DFS, or even maybe see if DFS would want to come and open in Fiji? That is my question.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I welcome that observation by the honourable Member. Yes, it is something that we can revisit. I believe it used to be part of Fiji some time back. We would like to see, obviously, a higher spend per person in Fiji.

The figures I have highlighted can be improved quite significantly. I know there have been approaches from outside of Fiji on setting up specific special duty-free areas and to bring in a specific shopping kind of clientele. Certainly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we will take this up and see where we can go with that.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, this storage of a lack of products that are authentic, that are Fijian and that are available here in Fiji, it is strange that people from the remote parts of Fiji would come to Suva and Lautoka and buy from and buy Filipino made products and sell them in other islands. Just two days ago I was commenting on one of the ladies wearing a necklace made of seashells, which she said is locally available. That is the kind of stuff that we need to see and MSMEs can be encouraged to produce it in a big way. One of my colleagues from the party has indicated that there are some parts of the world where skills that are specific to a particular area are developed and become products available for sale.

Mr. Speaker, for craftsmen, where do they make the most crafts? We develop them to make those crafts and they become specialised in those areas and they become products for tourism consumption.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- A Supplementary question, Mr Speaker, Sir. The honourable Deputy Prime Minister has indicated the increasing numbers, but the lack of attraction for tourists when coming on tourist vessels. My question is, - has he thought of creating cultural activities, especially within Lautoka and Suva, where nearby villages can come in and perform at Sukuna Park or whatever? There is a lot of space, so tourists can have that cultural experience. I know that Dravuni and Yasawa-i-Rara are providing the basic necessities and the attraction, but it would be good for Suva and Lautoka, where people can come, perform and provide that cultural experience.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, that is a great idea and certainly worthy of consideration and we will certainly consider that. Most go to the Cultural Centre at Pacific Harbor and to some villages in the Western Division, but I think if we have a proper performance area, maybe Sukuna Park, we could do that.

Going back to the previous years, back in my young days, the Police Force and the Military used to perform during a cruise liner's arrival. You know, they loved the serrated *sulu* worn by our people in the Disciplined Forces. That could also be an area we can develop. But thank you, we will certainly consider that going forward.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Minister just mentioned about the performing area in Sukuna Park. Infrastructure is very important. It is not just about the ports, et cetera, but other infrastructure in towns and cities to welcome the cruise liners.

Sukuna Park also had a project which was to have a coffee shop plus a rooftop beer garden and at the back of the building was like a stadium. You sit over there and then you can see the performances happening in the performance area. Unfortunately, that project was taken off. That was the whole planning done to get the tourists or cruise liners in that area, so that you can have a better coordination, not only with the vendors who are selling local products, but also for the performers. Is there any further discussion between your Ministry and Municipal Councils to develop such infrastructure, where we can have better entertainment, as well as to get our private sector to sell their local products in that area?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, that is also very useful. We certainly consider it. The number of trips, the cruise liners is increasing progressively. As I indicated, there was 164 arriving this year all over Fiji. Volume is critical here. If Suva can get one every week or two a week, it will justify an investment like that, because the volume is there to create an auditorium for that kind of attraction.

As I have highlighted, the plan for Suva Harbour is to have a dedicated cruise terminal, as they do in Noumea, New Caledonia. In Noumea, their cruise is about three times as big as Fiji because of the proximity from Australia and their numbers are increasing. Certainly, creating an auditorium in the Sukuna Park will be very much part of the plans going forward.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- My question is related to the local handicraft that we would like to promote. If you go to all these duty-free outlets that we have at the airport and some of the shops that we have in town, they are selling similar things, but they are not made in Fiji. It is all made in Bali and other places that is coming into our country. Is there any work being done to integrate or better integrate private sector into our cruise liner growth?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, we had quite a bit of discussion on that within caucus. As I was highlighting, the idea of focussing on the strength of every area in Fiji on what they produce best. If you are good in carving, by all means, focus on that, whether it is tapa making or pottery making, we will encourage that, to bring the authentic stuff into the market.

Unfortunately, we are still importing a lot of handicraft, Mr. Speaker, but we certainly have the programme in place to also have the private sector buy into these initiatives. Just last month, we had the Regional Aviation Ministers Meeting Conference here in Fiji and there were visitors from Qatar. They came shopping in Suva, they were looking, and they bought a lot of Fiji-made stuff. They did not want to see anything outside that is not Fiji-made, so that gave us the encouragement that we can do Fiji-made stuff, and there are people who want to buy authentic stuff.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Sir, this is just about bringing tourists to the islands, and you have the Navualiku Project. This is not my idea, honourable Deputy Prime Minister, but maybe it is a good time to share this with you. The first Indonesian Ambassador to Fiji, when their Suva Office opened a few years back, went to Taveuni and saw the international dateline. He came up with a suggestion that we need to develop that.

That is a major attraction. Fiji is multiracial, multi-religious, so imagine if Christians claim that they are the first to worship on Easter or Christmas and the Muslims, et cetera. We sent the District Officer Taveuni to Indonesia but unfortunately, he died a few months later when he got back. I am just putting across the idea if that can be considered, honourable Minister, as part of your Navualiku Tourism Project.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, we will pick up on where they left off and pass it on to the Navualiku Project.

Decline in Tourist Arrivals
(Question No. 62/2025)

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation inform Parliament of the Ministry's plans to address the recent decline in tourist arrivals and improve industry performance?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I had mentioned in his august House earlier this week, while tourism shows resilience, it is still a sector that has vulnerabilities. We acknowledge that the year has begun at a slower pace and are monitoring how Fiji's tourism is performing.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the current situation, the latest data on visitor arrivals for the first quarter of 2025 - January to March, compared to the previous year, indicates a decrease of 5.3 percent. Undoubtedly, this beginning of the year is gentler than we had anticipated, particularly following a recovery that outperformed our expectations.

However, we are aware of several factors that might have contributed to these figures. Mr. Speaker, Sir, some of the reasons include Easter, for example, falling in March last year compared to April this year. The Australian elections on 3rd May typically leads to a decrease in demand.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the volatility of the share market and the uncertainty stemming from the US reciprocal tariffs have led to a decrease in demand in our major markets. While this does not necessarily mean people have stopped travelling, it impacts where they go and how much money they spend. Interest rates continue to stay on the tighter end of the neutral, prompting families to be more careful with discretionary expenditures.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, another very critical reason is that competition is growing. It is growing everyday especially within the Asia Pacific region. The price positioning of Fiji was providing a

challenge compared to cheaper competitors, particularly in Asia, as growth from our key markets to markets like Bali, Vietnam, Philippines and Thailand has lifted off the back of aggressive deals and pricing on low-cost airlines and hotels. So, they are not just less expensive, but also easier to obtain. From March 2024 to February 2025, the South-East Asia region experienced the launch of 494 additional routes, featuring locations such as Cambodia and Vietnam.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the UN Tourism reports an estimated 1.4 billion international tourists (overnight visitors) around the world in 2024, an increase of 11 percent over 2023, or 140 million more. International tourist arrivals are expected to grow from 3 percent to 5 percent in 2025, compared to 2024. So, travel and tourism will still grow.

On a slightly positive note, we began slowly last year as well, but the figures began to rise as we moved into April and May. Forward booking through July appear robust and the pickup trend is also promising. One of the fundamental reasons is around pricing and value. As soon as late January / February hit and numbers were softer, hotels in Fiji got more aggressive with pricing and are working with Tourism Fiji. So relatively, we are still doing alright and are tracking above pre-COVID, and above 2023.

We anticipate that the period from April to July will either exceed or match last year's figures, so our focus is on maintaining our numbers throughout the peak season. Travel from Los Angeles, San Francisco and currently Dallas remains strong. Americans continue to travel, even though the number of visitors going to America has decreased.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, certain hotels are indicating steady performance compared to last year, with a modest increase in average daily rates, resulting in improved yield.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, while there are factors beyond our control, we are actively working on promoting Fiji. Tourism Fiji has been working with major trade partners to put aggressive price options into the market, and some significant discounts have been offered, which is helping lift occupancy. We are focussing on conversion, with Tourism Fiji working with Fiji Airways, to promote sale fares in key markets like Australia and New Zealand.

Asian markets (China, Japan, and South Korea) in the first quarter increases, although modest. This emphasises the importance of diversifying and allocating substantial marketing resources to these markets alongside our traditional partners. As I have mentioned earlier in this august House, we are pursuing connectivity with emerging markets, so we have a more diversified market.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we also recognise the evolving preferences of travellers with more demand for unique, value-driven experiences. This is where we have the opportunity to reassess our product offerings. This is why we need to open up new destinations, encourage more authentic experiences and continuously innovate to make travel as seamless as possible. We need to make the case for value for money.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, a key takeaway, to emphasise, is the understanding that tourism does not develop naturally. Its importance to the economy requires it to be nurtured and supported.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we all know about the slight decline in numbers and why it is actually happening. Westpac also has recognised it, but we all want tourism to succeed. It is a huge thing for Fiji. As you said, we are in a serious competition with some of the Asian markets, but we literally cannot compete with them in terms of price. We have always said to target the high-yield tourism. Is Tourism Fiji going to be given some direction with respect to the marketing in

terms of the higher-yielding markets that we may need to concentrate on to ensure that we buffer this, whilst all of this is actually taking a bit of a rumble, so to speak?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.-Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I had highlighted and captured by my colleague, the Asian markets are really coming back with all guns firing. There are more budget operators operating into South-East Asia and, of course, the volume of inventory in there enables them to offer very inexpensive packages.

Fiji is a high-value destination. We are talking about 14,000 rooms around that figure, and we are talking about a demand, a mismatch between air and land inventory. So, there is always a very careful relationship between supply and demand. We believe the demand will increase over the coming months, as I have indicated. People have asked me, “Why do you not talk to the hotels to drop their rates to make it less expensive?” We cannot, it is determined by the market forces. As an example, early this year, one of the major resorts had dropped their rates, and immediately they picked up 10,000 bookings. But then, as soon as they go into the high season, the rates come up again. It is playing the demand and supply game.

The Tourism Fiji know what needs to be done. They are resourced. It could be more, but sufficient to get us through this year in terms of recapturing the numbers.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is well understood and good to hear that the tourist numbers to Fiji is booming. Some come for holiday, visit friends of relatives, business purpose and other reasons. The AFL 2022 Annual Report – which anyone would read – states, Fiji's economy benefits from the access it provides to over two million passengers yearly who access the airport.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the clarity I am asking the honourable Minister is, when you look at the Fiji Bureau of Statistics for the last two years – just for example and you can go even behind – the two numbers for visitor arrivals is around 900,000, or close to a million. When someone reads these two different statistics, there is a difference of one million. Can the honourable Minister clarify the figures of transiting visitors or transiting passengers, or just more clarity on these figures?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Bureau of Statistics will track arrivals into the country. Airports Fiji Limited is talking about the number of people passing through in and out. While the arrival in the country is about 981,000, the people going in and out of Fiji is about two million. They are two different sets of figures. But then, it gives out the question about the transit elements in tourism, they are potentially huge with two million people moving through our airport.

HON. S. T. KOROILAVESAU.- In the present situation and looking forward, honourable Deputy Prime Minister, there seems to be a double banger that we will face in the near future. We have tariff, which reduces the disposable income of our tourists that normally comes to Fiji and on the second hand, is the cost of the holidays here in Fiji. Would you consider reducing the cost of spending your holidays in Fiji? As a government, the only cost that you can control is airport tax, departure tax. Would the Government consider in case we come to a situation, where tourists need to be attracted to come to Fiji, to employ people that work in the tourism industry, consider reducing the departure tax?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, our tourism industry is quite resilient. We have been through this kind of situation many times in the past, and we have always recovered. The fundamental here, Mr. Speaker, is that our tourism products are world-class, and we believe, if we hold firm, we continue doing what we are doing, continue to offer world-class experience in Fiji, unique exotic experience, peace will come back. But if it comes to that, my colleague here is also

ex-tourism, he knows that we can all quickly meet and look at ways to stimulate demand if we need. Departure tax is certainly a factor, but it will be a whole pricing approach when you look at the offerings for Fiji in total, Mr. Speaker.

Cybersecurity Cooperation MOU
(Question No. 63/2025)

HON. E. Y. IMMANUEL asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Trade, Cooperatives, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications update Parliament on the cybersecurity partnership with Australia, following the signing of the Cybersecurity Cooperation Memorandum of Understanding last year?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, I guess I was somewhat amused by some of the points of order banter that happened this morning, and maybe just to explain to those listening and also to the other side of the House, my approach in this House, Mr. Speaker. We are here to compare and contrast, to compare their performance versus our performance. We have been here for two and a half years. They have been here for eight years, maybe 16 years, depending on their interpretation.

However, there is a contrast being made, so that is the way I have kind of approached the discussions. And if they are offended, all I can suggest respectfully, draw a thick skin, because this will not stop. It will go on until the elections come again. Mr. Speaker, this question is actually quite good because it, again, allows the compare and contrast that I am trying to do here. Let us remember this when I am answering this question.

In 2015, the National Cyber Security Strategy was launched, the first one, by the other side of the House. This is my answer to the question. Mr. Speaker, when we got into Government, what we immediately discovered, that the whole cyber infrastructure in Fiji, was considered not by us, but by external evaluators. We did a cyber security model assessment. We were considered infant. This is after launching a strategy in 2016.

In order to progress, we asked why was things moving so slow? Several things became apparent. First, Fiji had not ratified the Convention on Cybersecurity or the Budapest Convention from 2016. We got into government, we tabled the Treaty, the honourable Naupoto was the Chair of the Committee, he drove it, and then we got it ratified. The countries around the world could not engage with Fiji on cybersecurity, until the Convention was actually signed.

From there on, Mr. Speaker, Australia said, 'they wanted to engage on cybersecurity'. India is now saying they want to engage on cybersecurity. UAE is now saying that they want to engage on cybersecurity. Mr. Speaker, the MOU is a product of government's action on this side of the House. Through our deliberate attempts to progress the agenda on cybersecurity, not just create a document and let it sleep for some time, actually create some momentum, we endorsed the Cybersecurity Convention and thank you to honourable Naupoto. Now, we are now progressing at a very rapid pace, Mr. Speaker. As part of the MOU, we have now launched the National Digital Strategy, which I spoke about earlier.

In April 2024, Mr. Speaker, Sir, one year ago, the honourable Prime Minister signed the MOU with the Australia's Minister for International Development and the Pacific. Within a couple of days of that signing, Mr. Speaker, we had some issues in terms of cyber-attacks in Fiji. What did we do? We reached out to Australia to assist us immediately. That is the benefit of this MOU, Mr.

Speaker and that is the benefit of a government that actually looks at issues, fixes them, and it benefits the country.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- It is in the pipeline.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- It is not in the pipeline, it is happening. Mr. Speaker, Sir, apart from that, because of the great work that has been done.

On 15th April, this year, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we were invited by the Australian Ambassador for Cyber Affairs, to attend a function up at the High Commissioner's Residence to celebrate the Anniversary of the Cyber MOU. That, Mr. Speaker, Sir, shows how significant and important the Australian Government places on cybersecurity, and Fiji's actions in not only creating documents, but doing things. Since then, we have deepened our relationship with the Australian Government. For example, we have already had two visits into Canberra, collaborating very closely with the Australian Cybersecurity authorities.

What does that mean? It actually means that we will be able to leverage both the expertise and knowledge in terms of cyber issues. We are now at the process of the MOU. They have assigned a resource, a very high-level senior official from Australia into our Ministry, because it was under-resourced. Do you remember yesterday, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I was talking about no one existing in the Ministry of Communication. They gave us a resource because we signed the MOU and because we discovered the mess when we got here.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, they are now on board, that lady has been here, I think, eight months. We are requesting for an additional year, because she will be part of the process of rolling out some of the initiatives. One of the major ones, which I have talked about in this House, is the National Computer Emergency Response Team, or FIJI-CERT. The implementation, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is imminent. We are getting ready to set it up. We have done the advertisements for the positions and that will be the first time in Fiji, we have first responders when it comes to cybersecurity.

At the moment, when the previous government was around, when there was a cyber incident, they do look around and who is going to take care of this issue? It is either communication or whoever. Now we will have a first responders, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that will be overseeing cybersecurity attacks in Fiji, talking to Australia, New Zealand all the other regulatory authorities and trying to manage in a very cohesive way our cyber posture in Fiji.

As part of the initiatives Mr. Speaker, Sir, like I said, we are engaging very deeply with the Australian Self-Security Arm of Australia and we see great opportunities arising from the MOU and Mr. Speaker, Sir, again we do thank the Australian Government for providing expertise, which has accelerated our progress. We are about to complete the initial documentation of a second cybersecurity strategy which will actually, unlike the other one does not gain dust, but actually implemented.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these are the types of things that have emanated from this very useful and effective MOU. Apart from that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it has allowed Fiji to talk more broadly in international forums because we are now signatory to the convention.

For example, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we were in Papua New Guinea two years ago to support the *Lagatoi Declaration* with Pacific Island Forum (PIF). Had we not signed that MOU or the Budapest Convention it would have been an embarrassment. We would be going there talking about things that we have not even ratified ourselves.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it has allowed us as well to be more active in terms of the UN Agenda. We all know that I have been mentioning in this House that there is a UN open-ended working group on cybersecurity.

Fiji and Australia have been working together because of the MOU, to put forward the views of Australia and particularly the Small Islands Developing States. As I have alluded to, several other conventions that we will be bringing to the House for ratification as part of this overall comprehensive approach to cybersecurity.

So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in a nutshell, compared to that side of the House that created a document and slept on it, this side of the House in less than three years has actually done so much more in the area of cybersecurity.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me assure the honourable Deputy Prime Minister that we did not sleep on the document that was created. The simple reason Sir, cyber as it exists in Fiji, it is compartmentalised. The Reserve Bank of Fiji has its own protocols on cyber.

So, are the other agencies, the banks and so forth. From a national security perspective, the then Chair well understands this, and I will be interested in how this is going to be approached when we have the national security strategy. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Act has cybered under the Ministry of Communications, but this is a national security issue.

Those were the complications Mr. Speaker, Sir. So, it was not left there intentionally things were moving, it was coordinated, a lot of workshops and visits. We even went to Ireland. I went to Ireland about this cyber issue and discussions with Australia. My question to the honourable Minister is what is the approach and the discussion with the Ministry of Defence on this issue in terms of the way forward?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is a classic compare and contrast question. There is no issue about who manages cybersecurity on this side of the House. The main issue is we actually doing something about it. The problem with that side of the House Mr. Speaker, Sir, is they have the Minister of everything running communications, so he was too busy doing all sorts of stuff and not focusing on cybersecurity.

The Minister for Home Affairs, whoever he was at the time was too scared to tell the Minister for Communication, to do something about cyber security. On this side of the House Mr. Speaker, Sir, I was working with the honourable Minister for Home Affairs. I have a very close working relationship with honourable Iowane Naivalurua. We are working together on cyber security. It is not an issue about Ministries, this is a national issue. That side of the House does not understand this. They absolutely fail to understand this.

And so, Mr. Speaker, when we had a chat with honourable Naivalurua there are components, policy directives, development of strategy. The Ministry of Communications takes care of that. When it comes to cyber, the offensive cyber areas and the defensive areas, we will engage with the security authorities and actually create the right frameworks to be able to progress.

Mr. Speaker, one of the elements that is not in the current cybersecurity framework is the development of a national critical infrastructure 'act', let us call it, to identify which are the areas that are of concern to Fiji and then move from there. This could have been done since 2015. But because of the territorialism that came from that side of the House, as opposed to the collaboration that happened on this side of the House, where the Ministers talked to each other and actually get things done, Mr. Speaker, that is what is emanating from the Leader of Oppositions question. Worried

about who gets carried over. Who cares about who gets carried? What is important is that we get things done for the people of Fiji and the honourable Ministers come to work together to get it sorted.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, I thank the honourable Minister for updating the House on this issue.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the question to the Minister is with the MOU in place, is there an access to funding to upgrade the technological infrastructure that is required to action, what this MOU states for Fiji.

And Part (b), the question is, mostly asked by a lot of people on the ground, is for the Online Safety Commission are we going to be funding them with resources and more power so they can charge those who incite and promote hate, violence, and acts of harm and terror on social media?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, I thank the honourable Rinesh Sharma for the question. Of course, the MOU covers everything including funding. For example, the resource that is stationed in the Ministry at the moment, who is doing a wonderful job, is actually funded by the Australian government, fully. You know that just a classic example of a document that is turned into action straight away.

With regard to Online Services Commission, Mr. Speaker, and again, not to putting a final point on it, the laws of online need to be updated. So, we have actually in that process right now working with the Solicitor General's Office in actually looking at muscling up with the laws. Again, because of the MOU, we are engaging with eSafety Australia, for example. And they are updating their laws. They obviously tell us that our laws are a bit weak, but to be fair to the previous side it was the initial sort of laws that were brought in for online security.

The world has moved on. There is more communication in the world and more sophisticated ways of cyber bullying and whatever, so we are working on that as well. And I can assure in this House, Sir, that hopefully over the next 12 months we will update the online security laws. We will update the Cybersecurity Act. We will update the Cybersecurity Strategy. We will also update the Telecommunications Act. So, we get a full cohesive suite of legislation that can be brought to bear in the world of cyber security and of course working together with other Ministries. I am sorry I did not answer one part of the Leader of Opposition's question was where does defence sit in that?

Defence sits well entrenched in terms of cyber security. It is not like I said, Mr. Speaker, this is nationwide, yes, it is in the Defence Review Strategy. The honourable Naivalurua is holding it up. So, it is already in there. One of the things that I spoke about, the people of Fiji understand this side of the House. We are all working together. We are not scared of one Minister because he holds all the power. We are all working together, Mr. Speaker.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, the question that I had in my head is partially answered, but just to get away from what he spoke about earlier. Honourable Minister, I am asking this question with respect to information sharing with another jurisdiction. How is that going to form an integral part of our legislation? One country sharing information, where does it stop? You must remember, this is not an easy exercise, to actually do that, the laws need to be right and we need to ensure that the foundation is good.

People have rights also, cyber stuff, with respect to their information. So that bridge is a very critical one. In terms of that, does this MOU cover a partnership with Australia to help us in actually doing that? Are we also looking at other jurisdictions to actually make sure that we align ourselves properly?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, another great question by honourable Koya. The Budapest Convention actually allows government agencies to talk to each other internationally. And because the Budapest Convention was not in place, we could not designate authorised persons on the ground in Fiji to talk to other countries. That is now in place. The DPP's office and the police are actually the designated points of contact under the Budapest Convention. They can communicate with anyone in the world if there is a cyber issue, so that is in place.

The other treaty that is coming, Mr. Speaker, will allow private entities to talk to each other. So that means you can call a private entity in Las Vegas or in wherever and say, hey, you have got some information there that relates to a crime in Fiji. Hold on to it. So that will elevate what I think the honourable Koya is alluding to.

IPEF New Trade Platform
(Question No. 64/2025)

HON. F.S. KOYA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-operatives, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications inform Parliament on what indications have been made or given with respect to the new trade platform of Indo-Pacific Economic Framework and its implications in Fiji?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, because I have 10 minutes, I will provide some context, particularly for the audience that is here in the gallery as well. But the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity, or IPEF, was actually originated from the previous government. And I have said it already in this House, honourable Koya whispered to me the first time we came into Parliament to make sure that we try to progress that very important document:

- (1) it was initiated by the U.S;
- (2) it includes 14 countries in the world, which makes up 40 percent of GDP.

As for Fiji, Mr. Speaker, somehow it got in there by good fortune, perhaps, but it allowed Fiji to have a seat at the table with these major economic players. I have to say, over the last two years, when negotiating the agreements, it has allowed Fiji to engage very closely with some of the biggest economies in Fiji and create a more closer working relationship with the trade ministers, particularly. As an example, Mr Speaker, last year I was invited to what used to be two-way meeting between Australia and New Zealand. Fiji was invited to form a trilateral last year, Mr. Speaker, and that is because on the back of more discussions, more sharing of views, through this Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF).

As I had said, it covered 40 percent of the global GDP – I think 60 percent of the employment workforce in the world – so we were lucky to be part of it. And what it has done for us it has opened up our eyes to how we can make our economy – we do not want to copy the big economies because they are large economies – but at least raise the standards in our own country so that when people look at Fiji, they go, “That is a country we want to do business with.” The way they conduct themselves in terms of business and trade, supply chain, et cetera, labour relations et cetera, it is reaching good level international standards.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there were four pillars of that agreement: Trade, Supply Chain, Green Economy, and Taxation and Anti-corruption. Pillar 2 to 4 has been ratified, but the Trade Pillar was not ratified. At the moment, the three pillars – Supply Chain, Taxation and Anti-corruption – are still

operating at the moment. They still have committees and having discussions. The Trade Pillar – because it was not ratified, and the new government is coming – will probably take some time to flesh out.

One of the positive things, Mr. Speaker, Sir, when we were attending the meetings was, in attendance was the Republican colleagues from then the other side of the Chambers. The message that meant to us was, there was a certain bipartisan cooperation happening in the development of this. In terms of the Trade Pillar, I guess that we will just wait. Like I had said, some of the arms of the other pillars are under operation.

The Permanent Secretary for Ministry of Employment Productivity & Industrial Relations has gone for a few meetings in the last 12 months, so, it is still rolling. I am hopeful that IPEF will be there in some shape or form, because from what I have seen in the last two and a bit plus years is, this Indo-Pacific Economic Framework has provided some good opportunities for the country and allowed us to talk to the big boys around the world.

Tourism-Related Investment Projects – Navualiku Programme
(Question No. 65/2025)

HON. L.D. TABUYA asked the Government upon notice:

Can the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation update Parliament on major tourism related investment projects for road and jetty upgrades in Vanua Levu under the Na Vualiku Programme?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, on background, the Fiji Tourism Development Programme in Vanua Levu was launched by the honourable Prime Minister on 20th September 2024. This 10-year multi-phased programme with financing of US \$200 million, or Fijian \$447 million from the World Bank, will develop resilient and sustainable tourism infrastructure and services in Vanua Levu, including Taveuni. This financing is on highly concessional terms through the International Developer Association.

We are currently in phase one, referred to as *Na Vualiku* – the first of the three phases valued at US\$61.5 million. This phase will run from year one to year six and will set the foundations for sustainable tourism in Vanua Levu. As I have previously shared with the House, the crux of this programme is to mobilise investments in resilient infrastructure and essential services to create a more enabling business environment and to enhance institutional coordination.

On road upgrades, I am pleased to share with the House that the contract, the design and supervision works for upgrading the cross-island road has been negotiated and will be awarded in May 2025. The cross-island road, which links Labasa and Savusavu, is the island's most travelled route. Navualiku will support the transformation of the cross-island road into a safer, more resilient, and more scenic journey.

While the 95-kilometre sealed road is currently in reasonable condition, it still requires significant improvements, not only to enhance safety, but also to help position Vanua Levu as a leading tourism destination. For many visitors arriving or departing through Labasa the cross-island road is the first and last impression of Vanua Levu. We envision this road becoming much more than a connection between two towns. With scenic lookouts, comfortable rest stops, and clear navigational signs, we can turn this into a beautiful, memorable journey, showcasing nearby attractions like the Waisali Rainforest Reserve. It is also our hope that MSMEs can leverage this as an opportunity to encourage businesses like Urata Lookout.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the design phase is estimated to take 11 months at a cost of US\$1.1 million, with a total of US\$14.5 million allocated for design and construction. On jetty upgrades, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the current phase does not include upgrades of jetties in Vanua Levu, as this is potentially being financed via the Asian Development Bank. However, work on an integrated tourism master plan for the Northern Division will commence next month, with completion targeted for August 2026.

The master plan will deliver a 25-year-phase development framework for the Northern Division, alongside detailed five-year development plans for key tourism areas, including Savusavu and its surrounds, the Natewa Peninsula, and Natewa Bay, Labasa, and Taveuni. The key components of the integrated master plan will include spatial development plans for major tourism zones, strategic planning for tourism growth and investments, strength and destination management and tourism sector coordination, and infrastructure initiatives and services planning to support sustainable tourism development. Infrastructure priorities identified in the integrated tourism master plan, such as jetty upgrades could be financed through phase two or three of the programme.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am confident that this investment in planning and infrastructure in Vanua Levu will help create increased income, boost investment, and ensure long-term sustainable growth for local communities.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, a simple question to the honourable Deputy Prime Minister is, phase one is from Year 1 to Year 6. What is actually in phases two and three?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, simply put, Phase One is a learning stage. We will identify a lot of what used to be done from Phase One and it will come into Phase two and Phase Three. As I mentioned here, that, jetties are not a part of the plan right now but when we are going into Phase Two, after Phase One there is a possibility of that, that becoming part of Phase Two and Phase Three. Initially, Taveuni Airport was not part of the plans, but now as we progress into this, Matei is also now part of the plan going forward. Looking at a dedicated domestic airport around Savusavu that can change to bigger aircraft. As you know right now Savusavu cannot take the ATR the limitation of the hill. They are all coming into the equation as we progress with Phase One.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- A quite significant amount is allocated for the upgrading of the road between Savusavu and Labasa. The Lomaloma slip is the biggest problem along that route. So, is this be covered under that allocation the Lomaloma slip?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I apologise, I am not fully aware of the terrain unlike the honourable Leader of the Opposition, he has got huge interest in Vanua Levu. However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Vanua Levu is also seeing the Chinese programme, \$300 million, about 90 kilometres of road has been developed. So all in all, I would see Vanua Levu being uplifted in a manner we have never witnessed in the past. People are saying, what do you mean by creating a conducive investment environment? Let us not forget, Viti Levu, Denarau has taken 50 years to where it is today. What is happening now in Vanua Levu in 50 years' time, Vanua Levu will be totally different, so patience and support will get us there.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ellington Jetty was closed recently. And we all know that Ellington is a fast ferry connection for tourists. Can the honourable Minister inform the House on the maintenance and the upgrade of Ellington Jetty?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I believe Ellington is in the Sunshine Coast, in Ra, right? It is a new question, but the Sunshine Coast, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is also featuring quite prominently in the development of tourism. I cannot give you a specific answer on whether it is going to be repaired, it belongs to another agency. But certainly, it will all be part of the full whole equation,

the equation for Sunshine Coast.

99 Year Lease for Cuvu Residents
(Question No. 66/2025)

HON. P.K. BALA asked the Government upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources inform Parliament when will the residents of Cuvu receive the 99-year lease which was announced on 12 March 2024 by the Government?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, in answer to the question by the honourable Bala, I could say in this House that we are working hard to provide those leases to the Cuvu residents on State land. They will be issued with 99-year leases. We have just obtained clearance from the Office of the Solicitor-General on the contents of the offer letter.

If the residents are okay with the offer and the conditions, then we are surely ready to provide them with 99-year leases. But to answer your question, honourable Bala, it will definitely be before the end of the year.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, can the honourable Minister inform this House what form of payment will the residents will have to pay? If as what will be the amount?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am sure with the experience that honourable Bala has about dealing with residents, being a former mayor of Ba and former Administrator of Lautoka City, you would understand pretty well what leases will contain. Surely, they will contain a premium. You would understand that. They will also contain rentals which are going to be required to be paid by yearly. The exact amount, honourable Bala, I am not in a position to provide you that at the moment.

We are still sorting out some of the cost of developments that was expended by the Ministry for Housing. But I am sure that is something that the residents will be able to live with. They have been crying for their own lease for much longer than we have existed inside of this House. So, I think 2025 will be a very great year for them. They will be able to have security for tenure and long-term lease to enjoy.

Secure ITC Government Network
(Question No. 67/2025)

HON. J.R. VOCEA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Corporative, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications update Parliament on the efforts been undertaken to ensure a secure ITC government network?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- I thank Honourable Vocea for the question. Again, a compare on contrast situation. When we got into office, we heard a lot about Govnet and issues like that. I suppose it is historical and still I receive concerns from the honourable Ministers. To be fair, quite a bit of it is just not understanding what goes on. But as with most things, if there are complaints, certainly this side of the House we try and be proactive about it rather than stick our heads in the sand.

In terms of the ICT landscape in Fiji, it is managed by the ITC department. What we had done actually it happened in the first year, was roll out few requests to Cabinet to approve a myriad of things. One of them was a digital strategy. And one of them was to actually do a detailed deep dive review of the ITC operations. But I guess, Mr. Speaker, you will reflect on some of the comments I have been making in terms of non-existence of a communications department, et cetera, the ability to move forward, the expeditiously I guess with the review has taken a little bit of time. However, I am pleased to report to this House that we have managed to secure funding from the United States government through USTDA. We are in the stage of signing contracts. And then a very comprehensive review will take place in terms of the ITC network and also its operations.

The intent, Mr. Speaker, is to understand what we have and then look at how we manage our network which continues to grow going forward. Right now, the network in Fiji for Government is still very disjointed. We cannot communicate directly to Rotuma. We cannot communicate directly to Lau, to any government officials. So, there is a need to review the network, review how it is managed, and then try and set some strategies in place to try and see how we can overall enhance the way we serve the whole of Government going forward. The areas that are being looked at include skills assessments.

Looking at the regulatory framework development needs, there was a wonderful data centre that was done in the previous government's time up at Berkeley Crescent. It is a state-of-the-art facility. It is a Tier 3 data centre, which is a top-level global data centre. It is being currently probably used 25 percent, so even for Government an opportunity, subject to Cabinet approval of course and to raise some revenue from the use of that Government data centre. These are going to be part of the review, Mr. Speaker, to try and really look at how we can manage things better. One of the things that we are keen to do on this side of the House is, where we have agencies that can probably run as independent as possible or self-sustaining, including the ITC, we probably will head in that direction. This report, Mr. Speaker, will form the basis of this review.

In terms of security of the network, Mr. Speaker, I thought I would just focus a little bit on this just to explain to the House how we are very serious about cybersecurity in the management of our data and our information systems in Government. Basically, the Ministry, since we came on, it has what is happening. We have continued to invest significantly in cutting-edge technology, cybersecurity technology, to ensure that the government network is secure. And that involves firewalls, intrusion detection systems, encryption tools.

These tools are very important in terms of security settings. It probably does not get much mention during the budget, Mr. Speaker, because everyone is very tight when it comes to communication budget. But this House, Mr. Speaker, approves up to about \$4 million each year to manage cybersecurity issues in the country. Recently, about \$2 million of that was used to try new software to accelerate the management of these threats. It is, of course, an ongoing process, as the protection of government systems is quite important.

Also, I think it was important, Mr. Speaker, just to mention to the House, this is because of the way we view cybersecurity and its importance to government networks. Through the Cyber MOU with Australia, we deployed the first external test since, I think, there was an incursion in Government in 2019, I think, and they used a consultancy firm out of Singapore to have a look back then, and some good recommendations came at that time. We actually got through the Government of Australia, deployed one of the largest and number one or number two cyber firms in the globe called Mandiant, to actually test our cybersecurity, Mr. Speaker. That was done earlier this year. Cabinet received a report on it on 1st April.

As part of that, we are looking at accelerating, of course, the 24x7 security ops centre, which will include the CERT team, Mr. Speaker. Again, what I can say, based on the testing that our security settings are good. However, they did recommend some issues for improvement, and that is a focus for us at the moment. We are actually looking at some of those areas and trying to see whether we can progress with those.

One other thing that irks me at the moment is quite a few of us are still using Gmail, and that needs to be addressed and managed, and getting everyone to come onto the network, and hopefully with this review, we can push for more of our government officials to get onto the network and we can really ensure that we are managing the whole Government network on a very secure basis.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move:

Under Standing Order 6 that so much of Standing Order 23(1) is suspended so as to allow the House to sit beyond 12.30 p.m. today to complete the remaining items listed in today's Order Paper.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have ten Oral questions, three Written Question, one item for the Bills and four End of Week statements.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion, are there any interventions?.

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do not have any further comments.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will now suspend the proceedings for lunch. Parliament will resume at 2.30pm.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.28 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.35p.m.

QUESTIONS

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, when we adjourned, the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade just completed his answer to the question, and we are now at the stage where I am calling for any supplementary questions from the floor. I do apologise because of the time from the delivery to the time of questions and lunch in between. I might tend to forget the rush of his answer but nevertheless, are there any supplementary questions? I do not see any. I think we blame the lunch for that.

Fiji Tourism Development Programme – Northern Division (Question No. 68/2025)

HON. P.D. KUMAR asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation update Parliament on the works already undertaken under the Fiji Tourism Development Programme for the North?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as shared earlier in the House, the Fiji Tourism Development Programme in Vanua Levu or *Na Vualiku* is an important initiative for Vanua Levu and Taveuni as well as for sustainable growth of tourism in Fiji more broadly.

On the background, I am pleased to update the House on the significant progress under the Fiji Tourism Development Programme in Vanua Levu. In the 2024-2025 Financial Year, the project was allocated an estimated FJ\$13.6 million. Of this, the Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation is provided \$7.69 million; Fiji Roads Authority is allocated \$2.4 million; and Fiji Airports is allocated \$3.4 million.

On the current status, implementation is accelerating with a Central Project Management Unit (CPMU), operational with key technical specialists in place. The Strategic Environmental and Social Assessment (SESA), commenced in November 2024, ensuring environmental, social, and cultural risks, are properly assessed and mitigated.

In parallel, the MSME pilot programme is being designed and will be launched in October 2025 to strengthen tourism-related micro, small, and medium enterprises with a focus on community and women-owned businesses. This initiative aims to enhance business skills, marketing, and product development capacity. Work on implementing the revised International Visitor Survey is well advanced, with fieldwork to start this month – May 2025. The new approach will improve data accuracy, operational efficiency and will help Government and the private sector to better understand visitor sentiments, and satisfactorily improve product development, service delivery, and marketing.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as shared with the House earlier, the integrated tourism master plan is scheduled to start in June 2025 and will be a blueprint for tourism development in Vanua Levu and Taveuni. The intended outcomes are:

- (1) priority areas identified for tourism development and conservation;
- (2) detailed financing strategies for infrastructure and services; and
- (3) environmental and social considerations embedded in planning.

A request for proposal will be initiated this month, May 2025, to improve essential

infrastructure and management capabilities within the Waisali Forest Reserve. This will include construction of a Visitor Information Centre, upgrades to tracks and trails, and business models that can be implemented with the National Trust, local communities and the private sector.

Recognising the tourism growth has to be sustainable, a request for proposal for design services for solid waste management and wastewater management will soon be released, that will address current municipal solid waste management challenges and the open dump site practises in Savusavu and Taveuni. The design phase will assess options for the construction of a new solid waste management facility and rehabilitation of the existing dump site in Savusavu. A request for proposal for a feasibility study for installing solar panels, on targeted public buildings in Labasa and Savusavu, will also be initiated in May 2025.

On Fiji Airports Mr. Speaker, Sir, in addition to road infrastructure that I mentioned to the House earlier, the 'Na Vualiku' project will also support upgrades to Savusavu and Labasa airports. A contract will be awarded next month, June 2025, for a design and supervision consultant for pavements and fencing for both airports and a new terminal at Savusavu airport, along with new fire stations at both airports.

In addition, we're in the process of procuring, remote tower, and automatic flight information systems for Labasa and Savusavu airports. Looking to future growth, an Expression of Interest has been issued for a feasibility study for a new airport in Vanua Levu, alongside an air connectivity study for Taveuni and master planning for Labasa and Matei airports.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, we are continuing to look for support across all levels of Government, the private sector, and civil society to ensure the effective delivery of the 'Na Vualiku' project and to develop resilient and sustainable tourism infrastructure and services in Vanua Levu. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sir.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, a bit of background. Despite the launch of tourism initiatives, essential infrastructure like the Hibiscus highway and the one that the Prime Minister mentioned about the fund that is provided by the Chinese government, can the Deputy Prime Minister explain how poor road and airport infrastructure in the North is being addressed under the Fiji tourism development programme, given it continues to deter both investors and tourists?

I visited the Northern Division recently and the roads are in a very pathetic condition. Even in front of the famous resort, Coral Sun Resort, just as soon as you get out of the resort and walk past to the other side, the road has now turned into a one-way highway.

HON. V. R. GAVOKA.- As I said, Mr. Speaker, we realise that work is happening on repairing some of those areas where there are damages. As I was saying, Mr. Speaker, we want to make the drive between the two towns to be scenic and also comfortable, to be more tourism focused, Mr. Speaker. And that will be the general objective for all the infrastructure in Vanua Levu under the scheme, Mr. Speaker. And of course, the airports, as I have indicated, there will be a new terminal at Savusavu and improving the general area. And Labasa is also, will be enlarged, the terminal building.

All in all, Mr. Speaker, it is happening. Let us just realise, Mr. Speaker, this is a World Bank project and the World Bank is very structural in the way they do things. And it gives us a lot of comfort that whatever they do, is properly analysed. The planning is quite comforting and the people who are running it, based in my office, people who have handled similar projects in places like Africa and the Middle East. We are very confident, that the "Na Vualiku" project will realise what we expected.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir. My question is related to the temporary Labasa Terminal that has been built. Recently, we were visiting Labasa. We found that although it is temporary in nature, but the terminal is so congested from the baggage area right to where passengers come out. In fact, most of the people have to be out of the terminal while waiting for the baggage, because there is no space. One thing that really struck at that time, there were some pictures of new terminal building being displayed, and of course, the subway was being taken online.

What I noticed, the design of that terminal, plus my question now is, what is the capacity of the holding area for travellers, considering that we have ATR 72 taking passengers to and from? If I do my basic calculation, the holding area should be much, much bigger, and whatever it is, it should be for the future growth of Labasa considering all these projects that has been done in Labasa or in the Northern Division, is to contribute to the growth of Northern Division.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I cannot specifically answer what the holding capacity will be, but as a general rule, for instance, the plans for Nausori, to extend the terminal would be sufficient for a 737-800 and two ATRs. If I can just use Nausori as an example. Today, if you bring a 737 to Nausori, the queue caused all over the cab, into the taxi ranks. Nausori will be designed in a manner that it can take 737 passengers inside the terminal building, and two full load ATR. I can say, honourable Member, that a similar proposal will be made for Labasa. I believe it will cater two full load ATR. But I can clarify that later, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Minister, in light of the fact that there is quite a substantial amount of volume or traffic into Labasa, for tourism purposes, and also in light of the fact that AFL, I think, has raised the issues with respect to the ATR 72 not being able to go into Labasa currently. Now, because that is a glaring issue, and it is a huge issue with respect to the volume going into the North, is that being addressed by you under this particular programme? Or is that something that AFL is doing on its own with what they have?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, that would be under this programme. Because this programme looks after two key airports such as Labasa and Savusavu. The volume in airlift is very critical to this programme. It will be under the World Bank funding, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for Labasa. Savusavu as you know, increase the terminal, but very little you can do about the runway. There are people who believe that it can be done, and they are also carrying out their own feasibility studies that we can land bigger aircrafts in there.

MR. SPEAKER.- There are no more supplementary, we will move on to the final Oral Question.

Fiji's Initial Biennial Update Report - FCCC
(Question No. 69/2025)

HON. K.V. RAVU asked the Government upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Environment and Climate Change update Parliament on Fiji's Initial Biennial Update Report (BUR) for submission to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank honourable Ravu for the question.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to advise that the Cabinet has formally approved the submission and publication of Fiji's initial Biennial Updates Report for BUR to the United Nations

Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). This marks a major milestone in Fiji's enduring commitment to the global framework for climate action, transparency and accountability.

Biennial Updates Reports (BUR) are submitted to the UNFCCC to provide update information on national emissions profiles and the progress made in reducing Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions. They serve as a critical technical basis for assessing global and national climate action efforts. Under the UNFCCC and its Paris Agreement, Fiji is required to submit a periodic update on its progress towards achieving its climate commitments, and the BUR is a key part of fulfilling this obligation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji's BUR presents the most recent data and analysis of our Greenhouse Gas emissions. The preparation of Fiji's BUR was supported under the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), multi-country project funded through the Global Environment Facility (GEF).

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the BUR comprehensively has documents of our national circumstances, institutional arrangements, GHG inventory, mitigation actions, and the support received and required. It also outlines Fiji's domestic Measurement Reporting and Verification (MRV) framework for emissions. The BUR findings reveal that the energy and transport sector remain the largest contributors to Fiji's national emission profile.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, following Cabinet's endorsement, the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change is enhancing the BUR's visual communication and currently liaising with the UNFCCC Secretariat to facilitate its formal submission. Fiji aims to submit its initial BUR to the UNFCCC in May of this month, 2025.

The submission of the BUR will not only fulfill Fiji's reporting obligation under UNFCCC but will also position Fiji to access enhanced climate finance technology, transfer opportunities, and capacity-building support to strengthen our national resilience against climate impacts.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, following the BUR submission, Fiji will transit to more comprehensive reporting by preparing a Biennial Transparency Report, BTRs, in line with the Enhanced Transparency Framework of the Paris Agreement. In addition, these BTRs will include expanded information on Fiji's progress towards implementing its Nationally Determined Contributions, as well as new data on adaptation action, resilience, building efforts, and support needs. These shifts to BTR will enable a more holistic, balanced reflection of Fiji's mitigation and adaptation priorities.

Cabinet has approved the execution of the Project Cooperation Agreement between the Ministry and UNEP for the preparation of Fiji's first BTR and its fourth national communication. This agreement was formally signed on 18th February, 2025, and now paves the way for the development of this next reports. I wish to acknowledge the strong collaboration of all stakeholders who contributed to the preparation of the BUR, refining Fiji's commitment to robust, transparent, and accountable climate reporting. We look forward to advancing this work as we embark on the preparation of the first BTR.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in conclusion, the submission of Fiji's initial Biennial Update Report will significantly strengthen our efforts to mobilize responsive international support, implement effective mitigation and adaptation actions, and build greater resilience against the impact of climate change

HON. S. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I ask this supplementary question to the honourable Minister for Environment and my question is, why has it taken Fiji until 2025 to submit its initial update report and responses?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji has been actively working towards submitting its initial Biennial Update Report, but several challenges delayed the process and one of the major challenges was COVID-19, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and staff turnover which significantly disrupted the project timelines. As this is Fiji's first BOR, building the foundational system, process, and institutional arrangement from the ground up took considerable time.

It is noted that Fiji had flexibility which significantly disrupted project timelines. As this is Fiji's first BOR, building the foundational system, process and institutional arrangement from the ground up took considerable time. It is noted that Fiji had flexibility in reporting climate change on a non-annexed one country under the Paris Agreement.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- I just have one, Sir, to the honourable Minister, yes, he is correct. There is special consideration for least developed countries and the Small Island Developing States in terms of the submission of reports.

Honourable Minister, we talked about technology-based on the special circumstances and Article 2. In terms of the submission of our BTR and BUR, what are some of the technology transfers that we will be aiming for that we can get from our partners, particularly developed countries to assist us in our efforts in minimising global warming.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do not have the specific list of technologies. But once the report is out or will be out in the website, it will be part of the findings of the report. The specific technologies where the Fiji will be areas of needs for Fiji in terms of adaptation and mitigation.

Written Questions

Social Protection Programmes – Utilisation Data (Question No. 70/2025)

HON. P.D. KUMAR asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Women, Children and Social Protection inform Parliament on the following –

- (a) how much funding has been used to date under each of the following programmes
- Family Assistance, Child Protection, Social Pension, Disability Support, and
- (b) how many Fijians have received support under each of these programmes so far?

¹ HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I hereby provide the answer to the question on behalf of the Minister for Women, Children and Social Protection.

Data on Water Carting Services (Question No. 71/2025)

HON. J. USAMATE asked the Government upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport inform Parliament on the ongoing disruptions to the regular water supply

¹ Editor's Note: Reply to Written Question No. 70/2025 tabled by the honourable Minister for Women, Children and Social Protection under Standing Order 45(3) is appended as Annexure I.

Leading to the engagement of water carting services to supply water to households, can the honourable Minister inform Parliament on the following –

- (a) the total cost incurred for water carting per year from 2022 to 2024;
- (b) the number of trucks currently engaged in water carting; and
- (c) the mode through which payments are made to the contractors providing this service.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will table my response at the later date as permitted under Standing 45(3).

Employment of Officers Above 60 Years – Ministry of Education
(Question No. 72/2025)

HON. H. CHAND asked the Government upon notice:

Can the Minister inform Parliament on the Ministry's policy regarding the employment of officers above the age of 60, including the number of such officers and their roles?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Minister for Education will table his response at a later sitting date as permitted under Standing 45(3).

END OF WEEK STAMENTS

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, each Member may speak for up to 10 minutes with a 10-minute response from the Minister or Ministers responsible for the subject matter of the Member's speech. No seconder is required and there will be no other debate.

Importance of Institutional Effectiveness in Fiji

HON J. USAMATE.- Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir for giving me the floor to give my End of Week Statement on ensuring maintaining institutional effectiveness in Fiji. Institutional effectiveness is something that is key, not only for development, but for sustainable development and growth and there are lot of things that drive national effectiveness - history, environment, leadership, resources, stability, the kind of leadership systems that we have had in the past. Now a particular case, the divide and rule system that was imposed on us by our Colonial masters. The ramifications of those things we have seen down the years. We saw the separation of our different ethnicities, each in their own sphere, and these had consequences, both intended and unintended.

One important determinant of a nation's growth is the strength and nature of institutions, and indeed, the book *The Wealth of Nations* that a lot of people have been talking about, talks about this, with the central tenet being those countries with inclusive, rather than extractive institutions, political institutions, economic institutions, are the ones that succeed and survive over the long term. Institutions must cater to the needs of all equally, and not just for one particular group. This is why institutions are very important, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

In Fiji's case for the three arms of our State - Legislature, Executive and Judiciary, we have important institutions that are part of these arms of government. For the Legislature, we have the Parliament with its various committees, for the Executive, Cabinet and the civil service. We have other institutions which I will want to also address today are some of our security institutions like the RFMF (critical institution) and the various independent commissions and entities in our country, such

as FICAC and the SOE. These various institutions have done their work over the years. The Legislature, evolving from the Legislative Council passing through various changes, and you have seen the move from ethnic-based voting framework to one that is completely non ethnic now, focus on all of us as Fijians, hoping to pull us together in unity, hoping to see ourselves in all part of the same country.

All of these frameworks try to balance different interests, leading to both intended and unintended consequences. Upheavals have happened in this country, 1987 and 2006 and this has impacted greatly on our country and also our reputation globally, our economy, quality of lives of our people for more than three decades. This is now water under the bridge, but it behoves us all to be able to learn from the things that led to those parts of our history. We are now going through a critical phase where government is looking to amend the Constitution, and we are looking to amend our electoral laws. All of these things will have an impact on the efficacy and effectiveness of institutions that if we make the wrong decisions, it will have an impact on the people of this country.

Looking at the executive, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Cabinet is the head of the Executive. The effectiveness of Cabinet is all about delivering the right outcomes and impacts the lives of citizens of our people. The current Cabinet has ridden on the shoulders of the previous administration and spent most of their first two years completing what was already being done. To show, for instance, some of the things that already been done by the previous Cabinet. Previous administrations built a new Ba Hospital, Navosa Hospital, Navua Hospital, Nakasi Health Center, Waimaro Health Centre, Rotuma Airport, Nausori Airport, Nausori Market, Rakiraki Market, Namaka Market, Vunisea Jetty, Valelevu Court House, Valelevu Police Station, Nakasi Police Station, Nadi Police Station, Lautoka Police Station, 52 new bridges, Laqere Market, new fire stations at Nabouwalu, Korovou, Taveuni, new pavilion at Albert Park, renovated Nadi Airport, Rewa Water Supply System, Nadarivatu Hydro Electricity Dam, Somosomo Mini Hydro Dam, Hibiscus Highway, connecting water supply, four lanes from Suva to Nausori, four lanes from Nadi Airport to Martintar, new Denaru Road - that is not nothing. That is a very big something.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, what we now see in the current Cabinet lacks efficiency. This is a very important institution in this country. The current leadership of the Executive consists of 23 Ministers, compared to the 12 Ministers in the previous administration – almost 100 percent increase – 23 Ministers and 15 Assistant Ministers – a total Executive team from amongst the Members of Parliament of 38 Members of Parliament out of 55 Members of Parliament – almost 70 percent of all parliamentarians. Double as the Head of the Executive. This is unheard of, grossly inefficient, and makes us the laughingstock of those that study these things.

In one small Ministry, you will have a Minister, one Assistant Minister, and one Permanent Secretary. They all start trotting on each other's feet or all probably overstepping their marks, with the Ministers micromanaging the work of the Ministry, because they do not have much to do. It is very important for us to be effective.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I was just looking at some of the statistics that we have around the country. A country like New Zealand, with a population of more than 5 million, has only 20 Ministers; a country like Australia with 26 million people, has 23 Ministers. Here we have tiny-tiny, little insy, bitsy, witsy Fiji, with only 900,000 people, and we have 23 Ministers. It shows us that the honourable Ministers who were there, were not able to do the job, that they had to make it bigger and bigger and bigger. If people are being ineffective, you need to take them out and replace them, not keep on adding on, adding on, and adding on. Effective institutions, Cabinet is the very important institution in terms of the Executive, and maybe another two or three are coming, who knows.

Civil Service, the second largest institution I want to talk about it. Civil Service is an apolitical group of professionals who carry out and implement the policies of the Government. It needs to be a stable machinery of implementation and execution that moves the country ahead, no matter who is in control of the Government. We need to make sure, it needs to be people, those who have the abilities and competencies to get the job done, and not according to the political leanings. It is very important that we do this. Governments have come and gone over the years, and they have abused this principle over the years, and I know that this has happened. The current Government, however, is the worst of this.

We have seen failed political candidates being elevated into positions that should have gone to those who have the competencies and are untainted by politics. This has meant that we have had the wrong people running departments, leading to disastrous results, which in turn has had a devastating impact on those who spent their lives working up through the ranks of the Civil Service. We need to stop this. We need to respect this institution, because after we have gone, when the next one comes in, they must have a strong, solid Civil Service that can carry out the dictates of the government in question, and make sure that it maintains its professionalism and integrity. It is the integrity of the institution that leads to its effectiveness. You willy-nilly put people in there, you will destroy the integrity of the institution.

The last one that I would like to speak about, the RFMF – an institution that we all highly respect. It has won accolades the world over for its impact in World War I, World War II, Malayan campaign and national peacekeeping. But it has been tainted by past events, and we all know what those are - 1987 and 2000 – those are all gone. Mr. Speaker, Sir, what is very important for us is to think about the forces that led to the influence on the RFMF. The RFMF is an institute that we must not tinker with, we must not allow anyone to tinker it with. It was done in 1987, we must not allow the *vanua*, *lotu*, et cetera. We must not tinker it. If there is one body that we must keep intact, it is that particular body. We cannot allow it.

(Honourable Members interject)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. J. USAMATE.- The forces of ethno-nationalism and extreme religious fundamentalism or nationalism and the elements of the *vanua* to basically break the integrity of the RFMF, has been devastating for this country. The dramatic decline in how we have fared relative to other countries that were behind us because of those things has been apparent, profound, and has impact generations. In yesterday's discussion on the RFMF, I was glad to see that there were sentiments for a good way forward for the RFMF. What I am saying, we must make sure no one ever again tinkers again the RFMFF, down the *vanua*, all the way; we must not touch it.

Independent institutions, there has been considerable drama on integrity with various independent commissions, with the latest being that of the FICAC. As I left Parliament last night, I read the *Fiji Times* report post that stated the COI recommendations, which they said are very serious. There has been a call this week for oversight mechanisms for organisations such as FICAC, including citizens' oversight. All of these are the kinds of recommendations that we need to look into.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, my time is up, but what I want to say, all of us will come and go. The concerns that we bring about, after we have gone, the things that will linger on are our institutions. If, in trying to achieve what we are trying to achieve, we tinker with those institutions, and we destroy the integrity, the impact will be generational. I call upon all of us, not just us, I call upon you that

are in control now, everyone in this country, we must preserve our institutions for the benefit of those that follow us.

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- It is Friday afternoon, I am sure that we are all entitled to some wits. But if that is the strategy of the honourable Usamate in whatever party he will be joining for the next elections, Mr. Speaker, Sir, whatever it is, whether it is with the honourable Leader of the Opposition or he is going to join and become the party leader of honourable Ketan Lal's new party...

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- ... whatever it is, that strategy is obviously very desperate, be that as it may. I am in agreement with the honourable Usamate on the need to ensuring and maintaining institutional effectiveness in Fiji. That is what this side of the House is doing and that is what this side of the House is going to protect. We are also in agreement that it is not a one-dimensional concept.

There must be first an institutional concept that defines the reason of that institution's existence. Then you must have the capability, design, human resource analysis, and the cost factor of running an institution. It should have vision and mission statement, which explains why that institution exists in presence. Its longevity also depends on drivers, in other words, the leaders who drive targets, set goals, and push for achievements. A leader, of course, cannot do this alone. An institution's human resource power provides the muscles for an institution to carry the load and achieve its set goals, meet demands, satisfy customers' public expectations and stakeholders' interests.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am no expert in organisational structuring and processes. I am a lawyer, and law, unlike the honourable Usamate's vast, colourful area of expertise, the law is only in black and white. Gowns and bibs, black and white. Textbooks, black and white. You either get the verdict of guilty or an acquittal, black and white. You either win a judgement, or you do not, again, black and white. In fact, there are not much other colours in law. You are either right, or you are wrong.

On this End of Week Statement, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Usamate is dead wrong. Wrong about trying to pontificate a holier-than-thou approach to what is otherwise quite a very interesting topic to have discourse about. Let me remind the honourable Usamate of the deeds of the FijiFirst Government. Interfering in institutions, reducing their effectiveness, forget about maintaining it. Who of us would forget the instance of the removal of the Bureau of Statistics, CEO – Kemueli Naiqama in 2021. His removal.

The honourable Minister for Economy did not like his methodology and disclosure of the poverty baseline. Mr. Naiqama however, defended his figures saying that the figures represented an honest snapshot of Fiji's poverty position. This was recorded in the *Radio New Zealand* of Miss Nalini Singh, the Head of Human Rights Coalition of Fiji and I quote, “We find it quite odd that the Minister for Economy has chosen to interfere in this way. Finally, we were getting to the type of data and analysis needed and suddenly, the person who is doing that has been removed from his job. So, it does signal a dictatorial move by the government.” This is 2021.

But not long before that, Mr. Speaker, the former Solicitor-General, whose appointment is equal as that of a judge was unceremoniously suspended for not winning a case that we all know, as senior barristers of the courts, was not winnable from the start. A first-year law student, Mr. Speaker, Sir, would know that the process by government was riddled with mistake and I am sure the lawyers on the other side of the House, also agree that it was not correct procedurally. The courts have had their say in this, Mr. Speaker, ruling that the suspension and the dismissal of Mr. Sharma was

unconstitutional. I think the courts adjudge \$3 million worth of damages to be paid by the government.

Mr. Naigulevu, Mr. Narayawa, Mr. Toganivalu, Mr. Rabuku, removal as DPP during the initialising phase of the previous leader's government, they got rid of all the Fiji-made, vibrant, brilliant prosecutors that the DPP's Office has produced and imported a foreign lawyer whose prosecutorial resume still remains to be seen to this day.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Tevita Gonelevu and Ms. Tanya Waqanika's removal from Fiji TV. You can go to YouTube and hear the press conference conducted by Ms. Waqanika on how they were removed, because they were protecting the TV rights of their employer - Fiji TV, a company that had Yasana Holdings Limited as its shareholder. Today, Fiji TV is struggling with losses.

Our own Minister for Justice, as a Judicial Officer, was criticised by none other than his own line Minister of the Judiciary. It was unprecedented, for the then Mr. Attorney to publicly challenge a sitting Judicial Officer when the proper thing to do, you would know, Mr. Speaker, Sir, if you are not happy with a judgment or a judgment of acquittal, you have 28 days to appeal. But no, the previous government chose to interfere publicly, held a press conference while the appeal period was still alive.

Resident Magistrate Mary Muir, as she then was, sacked at 10 p.m. for questioning why the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption was prosecuting Ms. Imrana Jalal for an SCC notice, Mr. Speaker, Sir, was being prosecuted by Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption.

Resident Magistrate Boseiwaqa, the Presiding Officer who presided over the case of the honourable Prime Minister and acquitted him, transferred to Ba immediately after that and then his contract was no longer renewed.

Mr. Speaker, the honourable Usamate mentioned about the Permanent Secretary's appointment the day before or even yesterday. Let me remind the honourable Member that all Permanent Secretaries post-election retain their jobs. From my understanding, some were advertised because their contracts were coming to an end. Some were moved to other ministries, as PSC had determined. This is very different, Mr. Speaker, Sir, from the treatment of all of the Permanent Secretaries in 2007, when they were all hauled into Government Training Centre at Nasese and told, "you are fired." I thank the honorable Usamate for always preaching in this House publicly and loudly about hypocrisy. Today, as we say in law, it is proved beyond all reasonable doubt.

MR. SPEAKER.- The second statement was to be delivered by honourable Alipate Tuicolo and the response by the honourable Minister for iTaukei Affairs. Both are on official duties which the Chair is aware of and had consented to. Statement No. 2 has dropped from our list.

Electoral Law Reform

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the previous speakers also for making it a rather enlightening afternoon. My End of Week Statement is basically to speak about Electoral Law Reform and it will highlight how we trigger Electoral Law Reforms and the complex and the challenging processes. Right at the outset, Mr. Speaker, the Electoral Law Reform is a tool used by all democratic countries to see if changes are needed, whatever is necessary to make, what is a citizen's right as smooth and as comfortable as possible when it comes to elections.

Mr. Speaker, Electoral Law Reform often catches the public eye when it actually involves representation changes such as electoral systems, et cetera, but there are three roles that are played

in that particular reform. You have got the legal part of it, which literally is involving amendments, maybe even Constitutions, or the law itself, the electoral law itself, and rules and regulations. Then you have the administrative. You are talking about where you need to change the rules of the institutions that are involved in the administrative part of electoral laws. And then, of course, there is the political - what changes that need to take place, et cetera in the political environment. I am talking about more autonomy being created, et cetera, all of these things.

These things are not set in stone ever, Mr. Speaker. They change over time. They change because the political landscape changes, but the most important thing that we must remember when it comes to this is that in the process of doing this, and the foundation of any democracy lies in the integrity of the electoral system. In order to trigger reforms to our electoral laws, it is not just a legal process, it is a moral imperative to restore public confidence, to ensure fairness. However, the point here is, that you need to ensure that you protect the right of every Fijian to vote freely and fairly.

We all acknowledge the complexity that is involved in getting all this done. It is not an ordinary task, it is inherently complex. It involves delicate legal considerations. There are entrenched political interests and the fundamental rights of all citizens. Every clause, every section of the law affects how power is won and how power is held. We must raise the need for inclusive dialogue. True reform cannot be rushed. It cannot be rushed or dictated by a single voice. It must be informed. There must be broad consultation with the civil society, political parties, independent institutions, and above all of this, democracy must thrive when the law reflects the will and the aspirations of all citizens.

We must remember that Fiji has gone through very turbulent times and I say this quite often that we have had since 1970 how many different constitutions, how many different elections held in a different manner and a different tone. It has created division. So, every time we do this, we must remember what we did rather than go back to that, because that again is going to create a problem. We must question our past practices or the gaps that exist. We must ask ourselves at all times, how did the last elections reflect the true will of the people? And that can be ascertained in terms of the number of people that voted. Was there voter apathy or not? Were all voters treated equally? Were our laws designed to serve all those people?

The reform must begin by confronting some uncomfortable truths; we all know that. We must also ensure that we highlight the risk of political interference. As we embark on this process we must guard, and this is very important. We must guard against political manipulation. The electoral reform must not be used to tighten the grip of those that are in power, because the next government will come and change it also, but it must be loosened for the sake of fairness and transparency. We must also remember that we, because we are Fiji, have the ability to bring in and get independent oversight on this. Any reform without independent oversight is actually a reform in name only. We call for independent commissions. When I say this about independent commissions, I have a point to raise and this point is that just in recent times, we have got a Commission that has been appointed and it is rather worrying when the Commission and its members start talking about things where they should not be. Their independence is now put at risk.

Just recently, I think it is about the 4th April when the actual chairperson was admonished and reprimanded by an honourable Minister from the other side, who hit back at a claim made by the chairperson. I will say it, Mr. Speaker, because it is in the public news - the Public Works Minister described as premature the comments made by the Electoral Law Reform Commission. I think he was referring to the Chairman, Daniel Fatiaki's then about ethnic-based voting would be a thing of the past. He is not wrong. Whichever side of the fence he is on, he is not wrong. The chairperson is supposed to remain independent.

The persons on the Committee are supposed to remain independent without fear or favour. This is a man who is a highly respected lawyer and a judge. We admire people like that in this country. Some people may not, but all of us as lawyers understand where he comes from. But again, just two days ago, I read that there was a call by someone who asked about an ex-prisoner who said he wanted to contest the elections, and this was done on 2nd May.

In response, the chairperson stressed that while this is mandated under the Constitution, reducing the number of years to nothing is an option that would enable former prisoners to also contest the elections. But then, and I quote, he says, “frankly, I think the stand down period is unconstitutional and illegal. It constitutes a second punishment for a crime, and that is unconstitutional. That is against human rights and I do not care.” This is what was said, “I do not care what this silly little book says.” I am sorry, Mr. Speaker, Sir, but that is bordering on something called contemptuous. I shudder to think what the rest of Fiji is now thinking when this book which we all adhered to

(Honourable Member interjects)

MR. SPEAKER.- Continue, honourable Member.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is the level of respect that is given to something they have sworn on. Again, to finish the quote he goes, “I do not care what this silly little book says. Take it from me, in my court, that would not stand, I would not tolerate it.” These are not comments that ought to be made by an independent person. Their job as a committee is to receive, not adjudicate on anything and then provide a report to say that these were the things that were mentioned by the general public and not make comments on one person or two persons comments. They just receive them. We do the same when we take the Bills out for discussion and consultation outside of it. That is rather worrying that someone of that calibre would actually do that.

I only have six seconds left, we in this House, we have points of order being raised on references to offensive words, treasonable words, seditious words, what is going to happen to something like that when you pick up the Constitution and call it a silly little book! That is not on, Mr. Speaker, Sir. We cannot allow such things to happen.

We also must rely on Multinational Observer Groups that provide us with reports with respect to making, in terms of what needs to be reviewed. They used to provide good advice, with respect to even the 2022 one, if I could just raise issues - restrictions on public discourse, media environment, caretaker government guidelines, women’s representation and electoral law complexity. These are things that we can rely on when making the reforms possible.

I know I have run out of time but that I think in a nutshell, we must adhere to those conditions that I have actually mentioned right at the outset, with respect to making sure that electoral law reform is done properly and the most important thing for us to remember, is that, it is the citizen’s constitutional right that we must protect at all times for free and fair - the operative word is fair. Everyone is treated equally by this Constitution, we must remain and continue to do so.

HON. S.D.TURAGA.- *Ni sa bula vinaka*. Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker and fellow Members of Parliament. I rise to respond to the End of Week Statement made by honourable Faizal Koya. As the Minister responsible for Elections, I acknowledge that the review of the law reform is complex and challenging.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Faizal Koya is the Ambassador. I am Faiyaz Koya.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- My apologies.

(Laughter)

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we as a Coalition Government with vast experience, knowledge, competency, consultative knowledge and intellect, I have been able to navigate skilfully and meticulously this electoral registration reform process. As the Minister responsible for elections, we have worked collaboratively with the Attorney-General's Office to engage the Fiji Law Reform Commission for this critical work of the Electoral Legislation Review and Reform. The Fiji Law Reform Commission is an independent statutory body established under the Fiji Law Reform Commission Act 1979 to systematically develop and reform Fijian law.

The honourable Koya, as a member of the past administration, closed the Fiji Law Reform and relocated some of the officers to the former Attorney-General's Office in 2006.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Oh, come on!

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Perhaps because they thought they would remain in power forever and would draft the laws as how they wished without consideration for the people and the inherent laws that exist to protect and ensure that the three arms of Government remain independent and transparent as per the principle of good governance.

As a Government that listens, works within the rule of law and applies the law – the re-establishment of the Fiji Law Reform Commission 2023 – has been fundamental to ensure that additional legal service advice is provided, and more importantly, that the Commission is able to work independent of the Attorney-General's Office, provide advice to Government on legal reforms, including modernisation, simplification and codification of laws.

The Fiji Law Reform Commission is a body empowered by legislation through the Fiji Law Reform Act to keep under review Fiji's laws in order to make them modern, simpler, fairer, cost-effective and accessible. In short, its primary role derived from that is to simplify, improve and modernise laws. We have heard honourable Koya highlighted some of these principles.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I ask honourable Koya, how come you did not articulate this in the last eight years or so under the leadership of the former Attorney-General? It is the first time we are hearing this. I know you would have done better being an Attorney-General – although you were an Attorney-General for a few months – you would have done well compared to Mr. Khaiyum. All of us here agree to that. To respond to honourable Koya, laws are written for a time and a purpose. They must be written for the people and by the people. Our people of Fiji must have a say in its drafting through the process of the Fiji Law Reform Commission.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for this particular legislative review and reform, the Fiji Reform Commission is guided by the instructions from the Electoral Commission – an independent commission appointed by the COC under the chairmanship of Justice Usaia Ratuveli. Public consultation and engagement in national dialogue for issues that matters include listening to the people and allowing our people the opportunity to contribute. An example of this is an open merit and call for expression of interest for the appointment of the part-time commissioners. A rigorous open merit process and calls for applications was completed. The appointees were selected on merit, knowledge and experience.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, please allow me to also briefly respond to the comment by honourable Ketan Lal on Wednesday's proceedings when he stated that the Minister of Justice needed to take action and disband the part-time commissioner and start again with the people of no political connections. I wish to remind honourable Lal that these suggestions are a reflective of the lack of depth, wisdom and experience, and the views expressed are narrow, shallow precepts, and short-sighted perceptions of the political landscape.

Service delivery and listening to people means non-interference, it means allowing the process to be followed within the rule of law. The work of the Fiji Law Reform Commission of the Electoral Legislation Review is an example of us – a Coalition Government – to ensure that we listen to our people and work collaboratively across agencies. It is clear to me that the former FijiFirst Party Members, particularly newcomers like honourable Lal have inherited the possessive and interference spirit that is synonymous with the former administration.

Service delivery, independence of electoral law review process and systems need to be respected, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I invite the honourable Members of the Opposition to understand the separation of powers in terms of Executive, Judiciary and Parliament. The public consultation for the Electoral Legislation Review is a multi-agency team, made up of part-time commissioners, representatives from the Ministry of Women, Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, youth groups, FCOSS, women's groups, Ministry of Rural Development, Ministry of Information, and the Fiji Law Reform Commission. Discussion tools are available in *Hindi*, *iTaukei*, English and Rotuman languages and is accessible and inclusive, allowing everyone to participate in a user-friendly format.

The participatory public consultation began on Monday, 7th April in Suva, and the consultations have been held in Korovou, Vunidawa, Nasinu, Namosi, Levuka, Lovoni, Ovalau, in the seven Districts of Rotuma and currently in Vanua Levu, including Tailevu. In the next few weeks, the public consultation will be in Kadava, Western Division, and the maritime islands. The consultations have been during the day and in the evening too and have gone to places where our people are - women, children, youths, the disadvantaged, marginalised, and of course, the vulnerable ones. The consultations have been held in open outdoor halls, civic auditoriums and school halls. As a Government that listens, we go to the people and we have done this systematically and will continue to do so. While this review of electoral laws may be complex and challenging, our Coalition Government have followed the process and have done so using the written law and the Constitution.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, may I respond to what was articulated by the former Attorney-General in his interview in the New Zealand News, which the Prime Minister has clarified. Section 56 (2)(g) of the 2013 Constitution outlines a specific disqualification for candidates in parliamentary elections. It stipulates that a person is ineligible and be a candidate if they have been convicted of an offence under any law and with a maximum penalty of imprisonment of 12 months or more within the eight years preceding their nomination. This means a person with a recent criminal conviction, specifically for offences carrying a potential prison sentence of a year or more, is barred from running for Parliament.

Now, these are the disqualifications. The core of Section 56(2)(g) is about disqualifying individuals with a specific type of criminal history from running for Parliament. The fact that the former AG has gone out to say that the former Prime Minister can stand, that is not correct. We all know there is a conviction record. Until that conviction is quashed, then only he can. It is not based on popularity. It is sad and irresponsible for the former AG to be interviewed in the New Zealand media without even having the opportunity to confront the local media and say so. Let me be clear, to the people of Fiji, to those listening in, the law as it is, prohibits a person who has been convicted for 12 months or more, from standing for eight years from his conviction.

On that note, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I acknowledge that there are substantive sections with regards to the Electoral Legislation Review that is in the Constitution. I remind honourable Mr. Koya and Members of the Opposition that the process for Constitutional Review is separate and will be undertaken separately. The public utterances made in the media that some convicted persons charged and imprisoned may contest the general elections is mischievous, inaccurate and designed only to create uncertainty and fear. Those utterances suggest that Section 56 (2)(g) is reviewed. For now, it is not, and again, that is a separate review process.

Mental Health Awareness and Support

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Prime Minister, honourable Deputy Prime Ministers, honourable Cabinet colleagues, honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Members of Parliament, members of the public viewing from various media platforms, *ni sa bula vinaka saka*. Mental health issue in this day and age lies on the spectrum, and this means we need a broad side of solution. We also need to meaningfully organise the service and the support available, so that young people have access to the help they need, when they need it.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to pay homage to the traditional owners of the land of which we stand on. *Ni tiko saka nai tikotiko vakaturaga o Nadonumai, vua saka na Turaga na Tui Suva*. Paying utmost respect for our chiefs as the community leaders and members of the *vanua* of Nadonumai in caring for the *vanua* of Fiji.

It is imperative that we address the matter of increasing importance to our students, educators and Fiji at large, and that is mental health awareness and support within our educational system. In recent years we have witnessed a significant increase in the need for comprehensive mental health services. Ongoing challenges posed by global events, social pressures and the digital age, stress, anxiety and other mental health issues amongst our youths of Fiji today. This has underscored the critical importance of inventing an effective mental health strategy in our schools.

Our students are facing unprecedented challenges. Reports indicate a rising number of students seeking support of depression and related disorders. The trend is not merely a statistic, it is a reflection of real experience of our young people navigating their educational journey under pressure. It is our duty, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that educators and leaders ensure that our schools are equipped to respond to these challenges efficiently. I am saying this because social stigma and discrimination against people with mental health are rife and serve as a barrier. Some of the people, to avoid getting the help they need because of fear or being stigmatised, this makes the problem worse and makes it harder for them to recover.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is why the Ministry of Education is committed to intensifying the Mental Health Awareness Campaign to empower the students, teachers and communities to reduce stigma associated with mental illness, promote health-seeking behaviour, and emotional wellbeing practices, and also prevent suicide.

The Ministry of Education is also prioritising mental health and wellbeing as an integrated component of the educational experience. We are taking proactive measures, steps to enhance mental health services, and develop supportive environments where students feel safe to express their concerns and seek help from the Ministry of Education. The Ministry has provided training on positive behaviour, intervention, and sports, which encourages a school-wide approach to encouraging a good behaviour to overcome the bad ones.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is a good approach, and it is done in tiers, depending on the issues, different interventions are applied. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the focus first and foremost is creating a safe

environment at our school level, based on values and the right behaviour that encourages public safety.

The Ministry of Education has been conducting awareness in schools in maintaining good mental health. These includes resilient skills and managing emotions. In student leaders' training, a topic on mental health is included to assist student leaders on how to cope when facing challenges from other students. The Ministry of Education conducts training for the 785 student leaders in all education districts earlier this term. These leaders represented 130 schools from all educational districts. Strengthening the teachers' mental health is an area that the Ministry of Education now prioritises as teachers are the main assets in the delivery of learning and teaching in our various classrooms.

With all the teaching training and professional development, a topic on mental health is included to assist the teachers to realise their potential and be able to cope with distressing events in their lifestyle. Teachers have accessed training and professional development sessions since 2024 was 1,005.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the provision of counselling service is an effective way forward to address the mental health issues. It is a confidential platform provided where they are given the opportunity to share their problems and challenges. The total number of students who accessed counselling since 2024 was 1,957.

Substance Abuse and Advisory Council also has 40 student mentors who provide mentoring support to students with behavioural and academic challenges. The mentors were stationed in eight educational districts and were able to support 3,983 students since 2024. Moreover, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Education has four Divisional Counsellors, that is school-based teachers' counsellors and four SAC Counsellors who provide counselling and mental health support to the students, parents and teachers from other organisations such as Medical Service, Empower Pacific, Lifeline Fiji, BIRTH Fiji, Mending Minds Foundation support the Ministry of Education in provide counselling support for students. For this, I acknowledge and commend them for assisting the children of Fiji and we are forever grateful for partnering with the Ministry of Education.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, all the schools in Fiji have Child Protection Officers who are also trained to provide psychosocial support to students in any crisis. The Child Protection Officer, Head of School, Divisional Officers, District Officers and SACs Officers work together in providing the needs and emotional support to students that face challenges in some way or the other. The psychosocial support service are also provided to students in schools whenever they face any crisis. The Ministry of Education provides PSS to students in four secondary schools, two primary schools since 2024.

For all these high-risk distress cases involving students, the Head of School will make referral to SAC or Divisional Counsellor, the student will accompany the parents to the counselling centre within the division to support. All cases for students will involve case management where other stakeholders are involved to find the best solution.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the world in which our young people live in today is a vast difference to generations ago. Technology has evolved rapidly and today the internet is second home for the teenagers. *Facebook*, *TikTok* and smartphone are now the medium many of them use to look for information, for help. For this vision, our government service needs to evolve rapidly too. There is a need to lift our game and keep up with our children. We are going to reach the one who needs help. There are platforms to promote EPA therapies. Globally it has been shown to be an effective treatment option. It offers the potential to reach isolated young people with mental health issues.

Emotional health of students and teachers are important to prioritising schools, having a good emotional health and having a positive impact on their daily lives and activities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, all schools must champion mental health, get behind the whole school to champion good behaviour as a collective group, as a result not allowing space for bad behaviour to grow. It is a great challenge but not impossible. The culture of silence is slowly disappearing as students have access to mental health curriculum resources which educate students about mental health issues, coping strategy and the importance of seeking help when they need it. Awareness and campaign, especially during this Mental Health Awareness Week disseminate the mental health discussion both in schools and communities. By fostering an open dialogue, we aim to encourage students to reach out without fear of judgement. Our teachers also face significant stress, and that is why we are implementing the Wellness Programmes in maintaining their own mental health.

We are also collaborating with mental health professionals to ensure that our staff are well-trained, recognising signs of mental distress and equipped to respond appropriately. Though we have made progress, we recognise there is still much work to be done. We must continue to advocate for adequate funding and resources to ensure that mental health support is readily available in every school across our nation. Parents, families and friends we have a big role to play in identifying mental health issues in our young people and helping them to do something about it. When parents, families and friends became concerned about someone, they need access to information which helps them to work out whether something is normal or not.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in all of these, the wellbeing of our students are paramount, and it is our responsibility to foster an environment where mental health is prioritised, discussed and I encourage to support its accessibility. Together we can cultivate a culture of understanding, resilience and hope. On that note, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank you for the commitment of this essential course, let us work together hand in hand to ensure that every student has an opportunity to thrive more academically and emotionally.

MR. SPEAKER.- I have been advised that pursuant to Standing Order 35(2), the Assistant Minister for Health and Medical Services has been delegated to speak on behalf of the Minister for Health and Medical Services.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to respond and fully support the statement delivered by my colleague and neighbour, honourable Iliesa Vanawalu on mental health awareness and support. There is no question that many challenges we face daily inflict heavy mental health burden on our population in Fiji. A study carried out in 2022 shows that suicide rate rose in Fiji by 50 percent between January to September, and that was well before the general elections.

The impact of natural disasters such as cyclones, *tsunami*, floods, which lead to large financial losses and widespread displacement, in fact, the socio-economic status of communities, families contributes to mental health issues in affected communities. The rise in the use of illicit drugs and the concomitant rise in HIV and AIDS in Fiji are contributing to an increase in mental health issues burdened in our country. The St. Giles Hospital continues to receive patients for consultation and admission from issues directly or indirectly related to illicit drug use in our country.

Fiji, like other Pacific Island nations, have significantly felt the impact of COVID-19, and younger people have reported the impact of COVID-19 increasingly seeking out medical help for insomnia, anxiety and suicidal thoughts. A recent study in 2022, 1,119 Fijian adults showed that a significant portion of individuals experience anxiety, disorder and depression. The prevalence of anxiety and depression was found to be 45 percent and 49 percent respectively.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Ministry of Health and Medical Services is pushing ahead in its effort to address the mental health disease burdening our country. The National Committee on Prevention and Suicide (NCOP) is the national committee chaired by the honourable Minister for Health and Medical

Services, with its membership from various Government and Non-Government Organisations and plays the lead role in spearheading suicide prevention initiatives and strategies in the country.

The NCOP has developed a comprehensive national framework to address suicide prevention, and these include implementation of national policy on suicide prevention, strengthening mental health services, especially in rural areas, community engagement, and building awareness to reduce stigma. Suicide prevention is incorporated into a broader public health initiative promoting mental health, wellbeing across all sectors.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry has also worked closely with our training institution on capacity building and the development of mental health professional workforce for Fiji. In 2019, the Postgraduate Certificate in mental health nurses, which has more than 50 graduates since its inception in 2007, was upgraded to Postgraduate Diploma in mental health nursing. The course equipped our nurses to be able to identify and provide appropriate and timely nursing care to individuals who present with mental health issues in our hospitals. More than 10 nurses from Fiji have graduated from this course and an additional five have joined the course at the start of this year.

Mr. Speaker, the Fiji National University has also started to offer Master of Medicine in Psychiatry in 2024 and two Fijian doctors have started in this four years programme. Graduates on the programme will become specialist doctors in the mental health field and will lead in addressing an increasing specialist inpatient and outpatient services, the need for our mental health patients. The Ministry also works closely with the training institutions and partners in delivering short capacity building courses such as the psychological first aid course for our practitioners to help them in identifying and addressing mental health issues that arise in situations such as national disasters. Mr. Speaker, the Ministry continues to engage in cross-sectional and multi-stakeholder initiatives to address mental health issues in targeted community.

Our mental health team has joined the Nasinu hand-on initiative with the Nasinu Town Council and other stakeholders and have targeted schools, community groups and faith-based organisations in spreading awareness and education on mental health. This has been effective so far, Mr. Speaker, and we intend to roll this out to other towns and cities with the support of their municipal councils in the near future.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry remain fully committed to addressing the mental health disease burden in the country and will work hand-in-hand with our partners and stakeholders, a faith-based organisation, the *vanua* and our communal structure to address the dilapidating impact of mental health diseases. The Ministry also invites our partners in the country to join us in helping to support and manage mental health issues in our villages and our communities. There is no health without mental health.

ADJOURNMENT

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

That Parliament adjourns until Monday, 2nd June, 2025 at 9.30 a.m.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, I second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, that concludes the end of our sitting, and I thank you all for your contributions throughout the week. But before we adjourn, I have a short story to tell and I thought I should reveal and explain the reason why I mostly travel by taxis in almost all of my life. This is because one of the honourable Members had questioned as to the reason.

Well, to put it very bluntly, I have never owned a car in my life, and neither have I attempted to get a driver's license. The reason goes a long way back to my school days, the last year at Queen Victoria School in 1968. As one of the senior boys in those days, you exercise some influence and power. One of my favourite morning duties at school was being a milk boy. Why? It requires you to go around early every morning carrying your milk can, distributing fresh milk from our milk shed to our teachers' residences. And I said, why is it that important? Because at the end of the round, the leftover milk is yours to keep. So, I did succeed in being selected for the job as a milk boy, and I delivered the milk and the leftover was a bargaining chip for me to get a nice t-shirt to swap with the milk from one of the boys, or a *qulaqula* or *rourou* that was brought in from Suva by parents of the rich students.

Anyway, I was helping the farmhand one morning and he was driving a Ferguson tractor, and I asked him if he could let me drive the tractor. So, I was sitting on the shoulder of the tractor (for those of you who are used to that) and was bending down to steer the wheels. The inevitable happened, I steered wildly in my excitement and the tractor took a tumble down the slope. Miraculously, no one was injured, but I did see stars.

(Laughter)

Those stars are the only ones I saw in rugby matches in a neighbouring RKS school or in the hard ground of Lelean Memorial School. But those stars I still dread as I get close to the steering wheel of a vehicle. So that explains my present status of getting near the wheel of a car.

Nowadays, even in my wife's small car, I am relegated to the back as I am not allowed to suggest anything to her to criticise her driving. So, taxis and taxi drivers are the most user-friendly environment for me, and I can formally reveal my situation to everyone here in the House today.

With that small story of my life, I now declare the Parliament adjourned until Monday, 2nd June, 2025 at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 4.07 p.m.

ANNEXURE I

Reply to Written Question No. 70/2025 tabled by the honourable Minister for Women, Children and Social Protection (Ref. Page 959)



MINISTER FOR WOMEN, CHILDREN AND SOCIAL PROTECTION
(Hon. S. Kiran)

Reply to Question No. 70/2025 asked by honourable P.D. Kumar is as follows:

(a)

No.	Programme	FY24/25 Budgetary Allocation (\$)	Total Budget Utilized
1	Child Protection Allowance	17,486,508.00	11,861,675.00 (68%)
2	Food Allowance for Rural Pregnant Mothers	400,000.00	245,450.00 (61%)
3	Family Assistance Scheme	44,252,030.00	25,937,960.00 (59%)
4	Allowance for Persons with Disability	17,662,592.00	7,577,263.00 (43%)
5	Social Pension Scheme	78,156,000.00	62,009,641.00 (79%)
6	Transport Assistance Scheme	13,368,200.00	13,230,573.00 (99%)
	Total	\$171,325,300.00 (\$171.3m)	120,862,562.00 (70.5%)

(b)

No.	Programme	No. of Recipients
1	Child Protection Allowance	11,900
2	Food Allowance for Rural Pregnant Mothers	737
3	Family Assistance Scheme	23,967
4	Allowance for Persons with Disability	13,905
5	Social Pension Scheme	56,811
6	Transport Assistance Scheme	TAS Top (SPS & DAS) up – 44,708 E-transport – 30,132
	Total	182,160