

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

THURSDAY, 2ND OCTOBER, 2025

[CORRECTED COPY]

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THURSDAY, 2ND OCTOBER, 2025

The Parliament met at 9.41 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

MR. SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Members were present, except the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation and honourable M.D. Bulitavu.

MINUTES

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

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

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE SPEAKER

Welcome

I welcome you all, honourable Members, to today's sitting as we continue in service of progressing our nation. A warm welcome as well to those joining us in the public gallery, and to everyone watching the live broadcast, whether you are tuned in via television or streaming online. Thank you for taking interest in the proceedings of your Parliament.

Pinktober Awareness Session

For the information of honourable Members, the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Fiji Group will hold a Pinktober Awareness Session today during the afternoon tea break. This initiative marks Pinktober, the international month dedicated to breast cancer awareness, which remains the most common cancer among women world-wide, and continues to affect many families here in Fiji.

The session is intended not only to raise awareness, but also to remind us, as leaders, of our collective duty to encourage prevention, early detection and better access to healthcare. Pinktober is much more than just a campaign, it is a commitment to the wellbeing of our citizens.

The CWP Fiji Group, therefore, invites honourable Members to participate fully in the session, and to support the voluntary collection for the Fiji Cancer Society Pinktober Campaign, which will be conducted during the afternoon tea break. I am mindful that I am yet to abide by the invitation by the Minister for Defence and Veteran Affairs; to contribute to his poppy appeal and I would do so at the recess.

Written Response - Question No.166/2025

For the information of honourable Members, the Secretariat has received the written response from the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Cooperatives, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications to Written Question No. 166 of 2025, asked by honourable Isikeli Tuiwailevu. The response has been conveyed to the honourable Member and a copy uploaded on the Parliament website.

Back to Office Report

Finally, for additional information of all honourable Members, the Back to Office Report from the Australian Study Visit, which included Melbourne, New South Wales and Canberra attended by the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights, is now available in the Library for your perusal and for your reference.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

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

- (1) Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport;
- (2) Minister for Youth and Sports;
- (3) Minister for Women, Children and Social Protection;
- (4) Minister for iTaukei Affairs, Heritage and Arts, in his capacity as the Acting Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation.

The Ministers may speak up to 20 minutes. After the Minister, I will then invite the Leader of the Opposition or his designate, to speak on the Statement for no more than five minutes. There will be no other debate.

Update on the Energy Sector

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Members of Parliament, ladies and gentlemen, to our members of the public listening in; good morning and *bula vinaka* to you all.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, allow me to provide an update on Fiji's energy sector, an area that continues to serve as a catalyst for our nation's progressive development. Our energy sector is seen, not only by the growth of our economy, but also by our natural environment, our tropical climate and, of course, climate change and our traditional practices.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government is committed to provide sustainable, reliable and affordable electricity to all Fijians to enhance its efforts in ensuring socio-economic development and improving the quality of life. These commitments are clearly communicated and articulated in our national planning documents, such as the National Development Plan 2025-2029, Vision 2050 and the National Energy Policy 2023-2030. The principal targets to be attained for the electricity sector are:

- (1) 100 percent of Fijians to get electricity access by 2029;
- (2) 100 percent of electricity generation by 2030 will be through renewable energy respectively; and
- (3) 30 percent reduction of GHG emissions by 2030, whereby 10 percent will be from energy efficiency initiatives while 20 percent is to be from renewable energy electricity generation.

On Electricity Grid Investment, Sir, historically, from the late 1970s, close to \$2 billion have been invested in our electricity grid infrastructure, of which \$840 million has been for electricity generation through renewable energy. To further increase our renewable energy penetration and modernizing grid infrastructure, an additional investment of around \$2 billion will be required.

On Increasing Energy Demand, the demand for electricity in Fiji is strongly influenced by developments in the tourism industry, commercial sector, domestic sector and other productive sectors. In 2024, our electricity mix was 57 percent renewable, an increase of 2 percent from 2023. This demand trend is already evident, as electricity demand increased by an unprecedented growth to approximately 9 percent in 2024, which is more than double the growth recorded in 2023.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, while a large proportion of our electricity production is generated from hydropower, the broad picture reveals that Fiji's economy remains highly dependent on imported fossil fuels. Our dependency exposes us to significant risks and externalities. The greatest threats to our energy security remain the impacts of climate change, the deterioration of aging infrastructure, volatility in global oil prices, uncertainties in international markets, reliance on fuel imports, limited capacity and access to modern technologies, and the urgent need for grid investment to meet rising demand.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, considering these challenges, the Government has placed energy security and resilience at the core of our national development plans and priorities. To this effect, the Government is advancing several key strategic initiatives and developments which will be critical in supporting large-scale clean energy transition projects. These include -

- (1) accelerating renewable energy deployment;
- (2) strengthening global partnership and strategic collaboration;
- (3) enhancing local capacity;
- (4) creating an enabling environment to encourage private sector investment; and
- (5) improving Fiji's access to climate finance.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, allow me to highlight a few key projects that the Ministry is currently undertaking.

LAKARO (Lakeba, Kadavu and Rotuma) Rural Government Station Project

Mr. Speaker Sir, the Rural Government Station was established to provide access to key essential services to the remote and maritime communities. It is essential that these centres and other similar centres are facilitated to be rural growth centres and economic centres for development in their specific areas and provinces.

In relation to this LAKARO Project, in 2015, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) provided the financial support for the installation of solar systems in Lakeba, Kadavu and Rotuma, to supplement the existing diesel generators at these stations under the last government. The stations, however, developed technical issues due to the integration of the solar system and the diesel generator around 2019.

Presently, the stations are completely reliant on diesel generators, incurring for the Government around \$200,000 per annum per each site in fuel costs. Additionally, the stations have limited operational hours of only 12 hours per day.

At the COP 28 meeting in Dubai, the Government signed an agreement with the Government of UAE and the Government of New Zealand, who is to co-fund the upgrading or enabling of the

three stations to resolve the issues from 2019 with a financial support of US\$2.5 million. All the technical specifications, tenders and contracts have been signed, and work is currently in progress.

One of the major components of the upgrading work is the Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS). The BESS will allow smooth integration of the solar PV and diesel generator and stabilise the grid supply.

Mr. Speaker Sir, for Vunisea in Kadavu, the installation will comprise of 209 kilowatts (kW) solar system and 420 kilowatt hour of battery storage. Similarly, for Lakeba and Rotuma, the systems will comprise of 143 kilowatts (kW) solar system and 280 kilowatt hour of battery storage each.

The completion of these projects will provide 24-hour uninterrupted electricity supply and, in turn, significantly reduce dependence on fossil fuel or diesel. The project is estimated to save Government around 45 percent to 50 percent in fuel costs per year for the three sites.

The project will benefit a substantial number of the population, approximately totalling close to 10,000 across the three islands. The project will be fully completed and operational by April. It is a critical project, given that Vunisea in Kadavu has a major hospital, wharves, schools, homestays, primary and secondary schools, et cetera. In Lakeba, similarly, hospitals, schools, and various Government facilities and so as for Rotuma. Once these are up and running, we as a government, envisage the continued growth of these centres into economic centres of development, with the support of various sectors of Government.

Solar Technology and Application Resource Centre

For this particular project, Fiji was one of the first countries to ratify the International Solar Alliance (ISA) Framework Agreement of which Fiji is a member of the ISA. The ISA's mandate is to support member countries to increase uptake of solar technologies to increase renewable energy transition targets.

Fiji's solar energy market faces key challenges including knowledge and skills gaps, financing barriers, limited affordability, quality control of solar equipment and components, and supply chain constraints. Notwithstanding this, the Government, together with the Fiji National University and ISA has signed an agreement to establish the Solar Technology and Application Resource Centre (STAR-C), which will be located at the FNU Campus in Samabula.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, STAR-C will be funded by ISA for its first two years of operation, with allocations of approximately FJ\$296,000 in the first year, and \$287,000 in the second year. From year three onwards, the STAR-C is expected to become self-sustaining and a fully-fledged training centre that will provide training tailored for solar researchers, technicians, communities, designers and project managers.

In addition, the STAR-C will provide equipment testing and entrepreneurial support, while ensuring all solar equipment in Fiji meets quality control and assurance that complies with local standards and specifications. Mr. Speaker, Sir, STARC is expected to be commissioned by the first quarter of 2026.

Legislative and Regulatory Gap Analysis for the Energy Sector

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government has also completed a Legislative and Regulatory Gap Analysis to facilitate a just and inclusive transition for the energy sector with the support of the International Renewable Agency (ARENA). This study responded to Fiji's slow transition to

renewable electricity generation and low private sector participation.

The study reviewed Fiji's policies, international commitments and legislation, including the Electricity Act 2017. It generally found that current laws and institutional arrangements do not adequately support renewable energy deployment. The Electricity Act 2017 lacks clear provisions that prioritise renewable energy, limits competition and investment, and constraints energy access.

As a way forward, the Ministry is undertaking consultations with various stakeholders regarding this report with the objective of making a submission to Cabinet on the way forward.

Fiji Rural Electrification Fund

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government has established the Fiji Rural Electrification Fund (FREF) which is a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) to attract private investment. It will assist Government accelerate its rural electrification initiative through the installation of solar PV-diesel hybrid system.

There are a total of around 300 communities that are being targeted through this programme. Mr. Speaker, Sir, FREF has managed to raise funds of approximately \$118 million through the funding support of the Governments of Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom, to name a few, and others are also under discussion and in the pipeline.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry is working with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Global Green Growth Institute (GGGI) and other key partners to put in a robust implementation framework to roll out the programme.

Fiji Rural Electrification Support Project

Mr. Speaker, Sir, another important initiative is the Fiji Rural Electrification Support Project, a US\$3 million grant-funded project by the Government of Japan. This project will directly benefit approximately 190 households in remote areas by improving access to renewable energy. There are two components, as follows -

- (1) the expansion and upgrading of the Buca mini-hydropower facility from 30kW to 100kW, which will provide low-cost, reliable renewable energy to 120 households, benefiting 720 villagers or occupants, and replacing diesel generation with clean hydropower.
- (2) installation of a 100 kW solar PV mini-grid with battery storage in Tiliva Village, Kadavu, which will electrify 70 households, benefiting around 350 Fijians who currently face limited or unstable access to electricity.

This project is presently at the standard stage and installation is expected to commence in the first quarter of 2026, with completion towards the end of the year or early 2027.

Petroleum Act Review

The Petroleum Act is also under review. Energy security and supply is a key priority for our nation's development aspirations. We cannot deny the fact that our small island nation continues to rely on fossil fuels, to some extent, during our energy transition phase. We need to ensure that our energy legislations are updated and relevant.

The Ministry is currently working on the review of the Petroleum Act 1938, which was last amended in 1978, and remains the principal legislation governing Fiji's petroleum sector. The

Government has engaged a consultant, with assistance from the New Zealand Government, to carry out a technical gap analysis of the existing legislation. Findings show that while many local suppliers have voluntarily adopted responsible operating standards, the absence of a clear regulatory mandate leaves Fiji exposed to substandard practices.

There is a pressing need to strengthen supplier responsibility across the entire fuel supply chain, improve infrastructure compliance, enhance regulatory oversight, reform institutional arrangements, build capacity, and ensure robust emergency response planning and processes are in place. The Ministry is working with the Asian Development Bank (ADB), to carry out the next phase of the review of the petroleum legislation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I conclude by reiterating that our vision is clear, which is to reduce reliance on imported fossil fuels, to harness the full potential of our renewable resources, and to ensure that every household, whether on our main islands or on other communities, have access to safe, reliable and affordable energy. The Government is determined to keep Fiji on the path of energy security and sustainability for today, the decade ahead, and for generations that will follow. Thank you and may God bless Fiji.

MR. SPEAKER.- I now invite the Leader of the Opposition or his designate, for his statement.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for giving us an update on the scenario that we currently have for the energy sector.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are all too familiar with the considerable challenges that we have, as well as the commitments that Fiji has made to a carbon zero by 2050, the targets that we have for 100 percent renewable electricity by the year 2030, and also for the targets that we have in relation to 2036. On our part, we are glad to see that the work on the National Energy Policy that was developed under the previous administration is now being actioned in terms of the various strategies that are in place.

First of all, to ensure that we always have energy security and because of the need for energy security, we will need to have some reliance, to some extent, on fossil fuel at some point in time in the future, but we will need to move closely towards the target that we have.

Also, the other three attributes that we have on the National Energy Policy that is now being seen in the work of the Ministry and the various agencies are:

- (1) sustainability of energy;
- (2) universal energy access, which is almost getting to 100 percent right now all across the country, I think it is in the late 90s; and
- (3) the need for efficiency and conservation.

I am glad to see that the honourable Minister has identified the work that has been undertaken to try to get the LAKARO projects online. The LAKARO project, as he has indicated, was something that was funded by the United Arab Emirates, and there was negotiations on getting all these underway in, I think, around 2020, and I am glad to see that it is coming to fruition now, that they are coming on board to build back that solar component of the hybrid energy systems that we have in Vunisea, Lakeba and Rotuma. We will be very glad to see that that process is in place to get that, and that will move us in that direction. Also, if you are able to get the 24-hour power in those areas, in particular Vunisea, it is a very vibrant place, I think there is a whole stretch along Namalata and there is a lot of business opportunities coming up there. We are glad to see that that is coming in, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

I am also glad to hear about the work on the STAR-C. The negotiations on that was taking place in 2022. I am glad to see that it is coming to place now, that that centre will be placed in FNU, and it will be a place for training, basically a knowledge hub that will be made available to people in the region.

I am glad also to hear the work has been undertaken in Buca to get that hydro system back up and running, and I think there is an opportunity for it to hook up with a hybrid system that we have in Tukavesi, so all along that stretch from Tukavesi to Buca and to Loa, they all have access to the joint. I am glad to see that Vunimatua in Lutu is also getting a microgrid up in Jiliva.

I think the changes that are also taking place, the review of the Electricity Act. I have noticed in Fiji now we are getting more rooftop solar. At one time, there was a problem with getting rooftop solar, excess energy being sold back into the EFL grid. I think that is now being massaged and manipulated into place...

(Honourable Government Member interjects)

HON. J. USAMATE.- ... because the issue was, despite the hullabaloo coming from that side, was the cost at which EFL was prepared to buy the excess power, and they did not want to be – I think the terminology that they used to say that we should not use the EFL grid as a backup for the solar system.

This is the way that we need to go. In other countries around the world, like in Australia, there was a great emphasis on rooftop solar. This is something that is now becoming more prevalent in Fiji. I think there are some new housing developments that are going up in Fiji now where there is more of an emphasis, and if I am not mistaken, the one in Emerald Bay is looking to use renewable power - so these are significant ways forward.

I congratulate also the Fiji Rural Electricity Support Fund in getting the private sector involved also in providing renewable power. There are some bad cases we have had back in the 1980s, we had the Bukuya microsystem and hydro system that did not really get fully underway. I think the challenge for us also, while we set up the system to get the process in place so that they become self-sustainable.

The solar home systems that we have used to belong to government. Now it has been given to people to own. The problem is then to make the system available so that they can keep those solar home systems still going. The system that people get now is a \$4,000 system. They pay 10 percent of it. But how to keep them maintaining those systems is going to be a challenge. Once again, thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Rotuma Youth Festival 2025

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Members of Parliament, and members of the public joining us virtually this morning; I rise today to update this august House on the successful delivery of the Rotuma Youth Festival 2025, held from 25th August to 28th August, 2025 at Ahau Government Station in Rotuma.

The festival's overarching purpose was to empower young people and unlock community potential through practical skills training, targeted awareness, cultural revitalisation and direct access to essential government and corporate services. It was conceptualised as a whole-of-government, whole-of-community initiative, anchored in our national commitment to inclusion,

equity and opportunity for all, including those in our most remote maritime communities.

On the genesis of the Festival, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this programme did not emerge in isolation. It was a direct response to consultations held during my official visit to Rotuma in April this year. Youths, families and community leaders voiced clear and consistent needs for improved access to Government services, genuine employment pathways, support for youth sports, and urgent attention to sexual and reproductive health issues. Our response – grounded in listening, partnership and delivery – was the Rotuma Youth Festival 2025.

On the programme structure, the festival unfolded in two strategic phases:

- Phase 1 – Pre-Festival Capacity Building on 11th August to 22nd August 2025
This phase offered targeted training to youth and women in small engine repair, basic solar maintenance, screen printing, tie and dye, jewellery making, financial literacy, sexual and reproductive health and rights. These were tailored to Rotuma's unique context, addressing transport, renewable energy reliance, and the potential for micro enterprise development.
- Phase 2 – Festival proper from 25th August to 28th August 2025
It was held at Ahau and supported by evening consultations in districts. The activities included a government and corporate services roadshow, sports tournament, cultural performances, and structured youth and community engagement.

On participation and reach, Mr. Speaker, Sir, complementing daytime services for the evening community consultations attracted 161 youth over three nights, excluding adults and the elderly. These *talanoa*-style sessions enabled frank and informed conversations on employment, training, sexual and reproductive health and rights, law and order, and youth safety. They provided a safe, inclusive space for young people, especially women and girls, to engage directly with decision-makers and service providers.

On achievements, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Festival was coordinated by the Ministry of Youth and Sports, in partnership with the Office of the Commissioner Eastern, line Ministries, corporate institutions and Civil Society Organisations. The breadth of services delivered on island, rather than requiring costly travel to Suva, demonstrates the value of a coordinated deployment model for maritime communities.

With financial inclusion and banking, there were the:

- (1) Bank of the South Pacific, which managed to open 50 new accounts for social welfare recipients. They redirected seven allowances to active accounts. They distributed 10 internet banking registration forms to schools and clubs and enrolled three customers in mobile banking.
- (2) Savings and Loans for Empowerment (SOLE), who deployed eight services, including installing SOLE services at Ahau Post Office for deposits and withdrawals, handling new registrations – 30 direct sign-ups and 50 supported overall – and conducting presentations at Ahau, Malhaha District, Malha'a High School, and during village visits. This created a permanent access point for transactions, and an essential legacy outcome for Rotuma.

On Social Protection and Women's Empowerment, the Ministry of Women, Children, and Social Protection provided on-the-spot services, such as registering available bank accounts for recipients, consultations on poverty benefits, child protection allowance, social pension, disability support, women's economic empowerment grants, and registration of women's groups.

Under Tax Compliance and Business Formalization, the Fiji Revenue and Customs Service delivered 79 joint card applications, 53 individual team registrations, nine sole trader registrations, and two tax compliance registrations, alongside *Talanoa* sessions on obligations and benefits.

Importantly, the Fiji Revenue and Customs Service conducted an initial assessment for permanent kiosk at the District Officer's Office, enabling ongoing access to tax services. The FRCS also collaborated with the Department of Co-operatives and the Rotuma Women's Association to support compliance for women's business groups.

On Employment Pathways, the National Employment Centre handled 31 inquiries, including application follow-ups and new registrations, connecting Rotuman youth to both, local and overseas job opportunities. While modest in absolute numbers, these interactions are sufficient and significant because they need continuity. Youth are now in the system and can be tracked, counselled and placed.

On Health and Sexual Reproductive Health Rights, the Reproductive and Family Health Association of Fiji (RFHA) provided sexual reproductive and health rights awareness and point of care testing for HIV and syphilis. This was a crucial response to community-raised concerns over teenage pregnancy. Sessions emphasised consent, healthy decision-making, youth-friendly services and access pathways for remote communities.

On agriculture and livelihoods, the Ministry of Agriculture provided crop extension advisories, field visits to farmer clusters and practical recommendations tailored to Rotuma's soil and climatic conditions, supporting food security and livelihood diversification.

On cooperative and MSME development, the Ministry of Trade, MSME and Cooperative facilitated 59 MSME grants, 95 percent under the Trade Enhancement Programme and 5 percent under IHRDP, underscoring strong demand for start-up and expansion support among small traders and women entrepreneurs.

One hundred youths participated in cooperative awareness and registration sessions, culminating in the registration of Juju Women's Cooperatives on handicraft and agriculture, the Rotuma Women's Cooperative on homestay and the Tuakoi Community Cooperative on consumer and agriculture, with advisory support for Malhaha, Feavai, Pepjei and Motusa.

On capacity building and skills development, the Ministry engaged trainers in sewing, jewellery making, small engine repair and solar maintenance training. The small engine programme facilitated the repair of five motorbikes, 36 brush cutters, 10 generators and 15 chainsaws, that have not been used for more than a year. Cost of the repairs amounted to approximately \$38,000 if they were taken to a garage, however, these were facilitated at no cost as part of the training programme.

Under sports, culture and youth voice, Mr. Speaker, Sir, sports were more than recreation, they were a strategic engagement tool. District teams competed in touch rugby, volleyball and netball, promoting discipline, teamwork, leadership and healthy lifestyles, while creating an inclusive platform for youth identity and pride. Teams were also recognised for winners and best attires. At the end of the event, Rotuma established its Community Sports Association and preliminary processes undertaken to register Rotuma Volleyball Association under the national parent body.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, cultural revitalisation was featured through traditional songs, dances and arts supported by the National Youth Band, which also served as a youth inspiration platform for performance, creativity and discipline. These elements rooted the Festival in Rotuman identity and strengthened intergenerational knowledge transfer. Crucially, the evening consultations amplified youth voice. The presence of the Fiji Police Sexual Offences Unit provided targeted

awareness on youth safety, reporting mechanisms and legal protections.

On Challenges and Lessons, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are candid about the challenges encountered and these included:

- (1) Geographical isolation increased costs and constrained flexibility in shipping schedules, placing a premium on early joint planning.
- (2) Connectivity limitations impacted digital service delivery for tax filings, business registrations and online banking enrolment.
- (3) Perception gaps persisted - some sole traders assumed ROC registration alone was sufficient and lacked awareness of FRCS obligations.
- (4) Cultural sensitivities initially limited Sexual Reproductive Health Rights uptake; privacy-assured spaces improved confidence and participation.
- (5) Overlapping services across agencies occasionally caused confusion; time constraints reduced availability for complex, one-to-one cases.

Mr. Speaker, these lessons have directly shaped our recommendations and next steps, ensuring iterative improvement as we scale this model across other maritime and rural settings.

Improvement measures have been developed and are aligned with our national development priorities for inclusive growth, youth employment, women's economic empowerment and service decentralisation. They deepen our delivery of the Government's commitment to reduce geographic inequities and to uphold the dignity and potential of every young person wherever they live.

Mr. Speaker, to ensure that these gains are not episodic but structural, the Ministry will implement a simple, outcome-oriented Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for all future maritime and rural service festivals, including Rotuma. These data will be compiled into a quarterly service outreach dashboard for the Eastern Division and shared with the Office of the Commissioner Eastern and relevant line Ministries to coordinate follow-ups and continuous improvement.

In short, Mr. Speaker, this approach represents value for money by substituting many small, fragmented trips with a single, integrated operation that produces measurable, multi-sector results and creates lasting service infrastructure on-island.

On the way forward, Mr. Speaker, in light of the outcomes and lessons learned, I wish to record the following commitments:

- (1) Institutionalise the Rotuma Model
We will adopt this integrated service festival approach as a template for other maritime and remote communities, with adaptations for local contexts.
- (2) Lock in Legacy Services
We will work with FRCS to commission the kiosk at the District Office and continue supporting the operation of SOLE services at Ahau Post Office, ensuring stable, year-round access.
- (3) Scale Youth Employment Pathways
The National Employment Centre to identify a named focal officer for maritime cases such as Rotuma, with quarterly reporting on placements and active job-matching for overseas and domestic opportunities.

(4) Support Cooperatives and MSMEs

The Ministry of Trade, MSME and Cooperatives will work with the Ministry of Youth and Sports to provide post-festival clinics (virtual or in-person) to strengthen governance, bookkeeping and compliance for newly registered and revived cooperatives. The Ministry of Youth and Sports is also working closely with the Rotuma Council of Chiefs in identifying a space for the establishment of Rotuma Youth Cooperative Association, a youth training facility and a standard sized rural sports ground.

(5) Sustain Health Literacy and Protection

In partnership with Health and the RFHAF, we will reschedule periodic Sexual Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) outreach with private consultation spaces, embedding youth-friendly protocols.

(6) Enhance Sports Pathways

We will map district sports talent, link promising athletes to training pathways, and use sports-for-development modules to reinforce life skills, teamwork and resilience with particular effort to increase girls' participation. Develop a multi-purpose hard court for Rotuma to ensure youth have access to modern sports facilities enjoyed by youths in the greater urban centres.

(7) Improve Connectivity

We will continue engagement with telecom providers and relevant ministries to upgrade connectivity at service nodes critical to tax, banking and employment services.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to acknowledge the Office of Commissioner Eastern, the District Officer Rotuma, the Australian Air Force for strategic airlift, Goundar Shipping Services and many agencies and partners whose service made a tangible difference:

- Bank of South Pacific, SOLE and FNPF for financial inclusion;
- Fiji Revenue Customs Service;
- National Employment Service;
- Reproductive & Family Health Association of Fiji;
- Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation;
- Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways;
- Ministry of Trade, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Co-operatives;
- Fiji Police Sexual Offences Unit; and
- National Youth Band.

Most importantly, I thank God and the people of Rotuma - the chiefs, elders, women, youth, community leaders and families, whose participation transformed a programme into a partnership, a festival into a platform for possibility.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Rotuma Youth Festival 2025 demonstrates the power of listening, partnership and delivery. By bringing services to the people, building skills that matter, strengthening health and safety, enabling employment and enterprise, and celebrating culture and sport, we have advanced a model of development that is practical, inclusive and dignifying.

With the continued support of this House, our partners and the communities we serve, the Ministry of Youth and Sports will carry this momentum forward, institutionalising the Rotuma Model, scaling it where it is most needed, and ensuring that our young people can learn, earn, lead and thrive - at home, on their island and in our nation.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday we were engaged in a critical discussion on the issue of substance abuse, a crisis that continues to plague our youths and tear at the fabric of our communities. Today, I just highlighted a model that holds real promise in addressing this concern. This model is conceived as a whole-of-government, whole-of-community initiative, firmly rooted in our national commitment to inclusion, equity and opportunity for all.

It presents a unified and collaborative approach, drawing together public institutions, civil society and community stakeholders to respond collectively and effectively to the challenges of our young people. If we are serious about protecting the future of our youth, then we must be equally serious about implementing comprehensive strategies like these strategies that break down silos and put people, especially our youth, at the centre of development and support. Mr. Speaker, I commend this statement to Parliament. *Faiak se'ea* (Thank you).

MR. SPEAKER.- Before I call on the response from the honourable Leader of the Opposition, I am informed that there are certain influencing personalities with us this morning in the gallery. Mr. Mika Loga and Mrs. Loga are in the gallery. I am told that they have social media following and posts are always very inspiring and educational, especially on important issues such as climate change and sustainability. They live, I understand, on Nagelelevu Island. To you, Mr. and Mrs. Loga, you are most welcome to your Parliament.

I will now call on the honourable Leader of the Opposition or his designate, for his response to the Statement by the honourable Minister.

HON. J.N. NAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to respond to the Ministerial Statement by the honourable Minister for Youth and Sports, and I wish to thank the Minister for a very comprehensive statement. As we are all aware that any youth festival's aim is to celebrate the power and the potential of youth, fostering national integration, promoting social harmony, and encouraging the youth in cultural, educational and creative activities.

Some takeaways from the youth festival is the announcement by the honourable Minister on the plans to develop a multi-purpose court, youth training centre, and with that the distribution of sewing machines, sports equipment, solar-powered tools, and solar system set was given to various youth groups in Rotuma. We do hope that this will provide and promote entrepreneurship, creativity, and well-being.

We anticipate that the Rotuma Council identifies suitable land soon, so that the construction of the multi-purpose court can begin. We are very positive that the youths of Rotuma would have used this festival to connect with each other, find inspiration, and dedicating themselves to creating positive change, not only for their own benefit, but also for the families, communities, and future generations.

The Rotuma Youth Festival 2025 marks the 7th Youth Festival organised around Fiji, and we do hope that this can be replicated around the country, especially in remote and maritime areas as well, as alluded to by the honourable Minister. We do hope that in the future, the festival will be held in the Rabi Island as well. With that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the Government for organising the Youth Festival in Rotuma, and I do hope that it will continue to be an annual event in the future.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will now suspend proceedings for our morning tea break. Parliament will resume in half an hour.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.32 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.10 a.m.

Gender-Based Violence

HON. S. KIRAN.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Ministers and Assistant Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition and honourable Members; every Thursday, the world comes together wearing black as a symbol of strength and courage, representing our solidarity with victims and survivors of violence and calling for a world without gender-based violence.

This year, we have lost nine lives in intimate partner violence in the last nine months. Fiji has some of the highest recorded rates of violence against women and girls in the world. Research shows that two out of every three women in Fiji experience physical or sexual violence in their lifetime. This alarming prevalence created an urgent need for a coordinated national response. Until recently, our national efforts were largely focused on response, helping survivors after violence had occurred. While response is critical, it is not enough.

In May 2023, Cabinet approved the Fiji National Action Plan (NAP) to Prevent Violence Against All Women and Girls which was formally launched on 2nd June, 2023. Over 2,188 Fijians – women, men, youth and community leaders – were consulted across all four Divisions, engaging education, faith, traditional, sports, health and workplace settings to develop this plan. Its implementation strategy, also endorsed by Cabinet, is led by the Ministry, supported by a Technical Working Group comprising government ministries and civil society.

The NAP was designed to shift the focus from reaction to prevention, to address the root causes of violence, gender inequality, harmful social norms and unequal power dynamics. This plan represents a landmark commitment by our Government to confront one of our country's most pressing social challenges with a long-term, whole-of-government prevention strategy, grounded in evidence, aligned with our international commitments and supported by both Government and development partners.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to share the very concrete activities being undertaken across various sectors to combat this very challenging concern. Violence against women and girls is not only a justice or social welfare issue, but it also touches on health, education, policing, sports, faith, the economy and community life. The NAP, therefore, establishes a whole-of-government and whole-of-society framework where ministries, civil society, traditional and faith institutions and development partners act together to end the crisis.

Our Government has ensured specific budget allocation to key Ministries – Ministry of Education, Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, Ministry of Youth and Sports, Ministry of Health and Medical Services and Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection. We are also deeply grateful to the Government of Australia, which has pledged \$6 million in funding support for its implementation.

The UN Women has provided technical expertise in financing during the development phase. This combined investment from Government and partners signals our shared resolve. Violence prevention is a national development priority and a generational challenge. In partnership with Ministry of Education and UNFPA, and with support from the Ministries of Youth and Sports and Health and Medical Services, we have progressed the review of family life education curriculum to strengthen knowledge of gender equality, respectful relationships and non-violence. In faith settings, engagements with the Methodist Church, the Catholic Women's League and the United Pentecostal Church have raised awareness of services and prevention methodologies using their pulpit and faith

spaces as platforms for change.

This year, Fiji launched the first-ever National Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Shelter Guidelines in the Pacific, setting survivor-centred standards of care. We are also reviewing the National Service Delivery Protocol, which coordinates the police, health, social services and justice agencies to strengthen responses, including new threats such as technology-facilitated violence.

Together with the Ministry of Civil Service, Fiji Police Force and Online Safety Commission, we have held awareness programmes embedding our culture of zero tolerance in our public service. Perhaps, most significantly, high level dialogue with the Great Council of Chiefs, Provincial Councils and traditional leaders have resulted in commitments from the *vanua* themselves to address the violence. A recent capacity workshop for gender focal points from all provincial councils has embedded prevention in traditional governance structures.

- Rural women's forums are being rolled out at district levels, creating a platform for dialogue, awareness and prevention at the grassroots.
- Capacity building of government officers being rolled out to ensure frontline workers are well equipped to provide consistent, survivor centered response.
- For children affected by violence, specialised services include safe accommodation, psychosocial support and continued access to education.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this month, our Ministry is mobilizing outreach to Namosi, Nadarivatu, Vanuabalavu, Gau and Bua, and we are developing community mobile clinics with our partners. These outreaches take programmes on violence against women and children and awareness and education on women's health to the most remote areas.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this NAP is not just a plan on paper, it has built-in mechanisms to ensure accountability and improvement.

- A mid-term review is currently underway, led by an independent consultant to rigorously assess progress, identify gaps and strengthen implementation. Findings will be published in March 2026.
- An attitude survey will be undertaken to monitor changes in community perceptions and social norms, ensuring prevention efforts are evidence-based.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, violence against women and girls is not only a social issue, but also an economic and governance imperative, costing Fiji an estimated \$300 million annually. The NAP represents our Government's recognition that prevention is both a human rights priority and a development necessity. Through coordinated action across ministries, communities, faith groups and traditional structures, we are laying the foundation for lasting change. We hope to continue to work across sectors to help shape a safer future for women and girls. I urge all honourable Members to continue to champion this cause in your respective ministries, constituencies and communities because the prevention of violence against women and girls is a shared responsibility.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you for highlighting the national call to action through Pinktober Awareness. If I may add to what you shared, according to the Global Cancer Observatory, the three leading cancers among women in Fiji are breast cancer, cervical cancer and thyroid cancer. Data from Ministry of Health and Medical Services shows that between 2013 and 2022, a total of 2,517 Fijian women were diagnosed with breast cancer. In 2022 alone, there were about 355 new cases, of which 98 percent were women and 2 percent were men. The youngest recorded patient was just 17 years old. Even more heartbreaking is that in the same year, 541 women lost their lives to the three leading cancers, with 182 of those deaths caused by breast cancer.

The Fiji Cancer Society registers 10 to 15 newly diagnosed breast cancer patients each month in the Central Division alone. These numbers remind us that breast cancer affects women and men of all ages, and the impact on families and communities can be profound. That is why we must act, because early detection saves lives and is only possible when our men and women are empowered with knowledge screening, treatment and counselling. So, I urge our leaders in this House and our communities to use Pinktober this month to create conversations and awareness, remove stigma and encourage screening and detection.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I take my seat, I know honourable Virendra Lal will stand to respond to my statement. Yesterday, when he stood to speak, he confused us all. It was obvious he did not listen to a word I said and probably spoke from some ChatGPT pre-written statement for point scoring, trying to take a dig at the Government. He told us to do what I had already explained in my statement we were doing. He told us to build facilities for older persons. I had already stated that in this year's budget, we have funds and are scoping for building of new facilities for older persons.

The previous government had left residents in Lautoka Golden Age Home that was termite infested and unsafe to be occupied.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Very poor.

HON. S. KIRAN.- We have shifted those elders to a renovated facility.

Suva Golden Age Home built in the 1940s, and has been left in structural decline. This Government is working towards building new facilities. We are putting resources towards senior citizens. We are reviewing the National Ageing Policy that expired a decade ago. Again, an issue neglected by the previous Government. We are committed to ensuring that we will look after our senior citizens, so I urge him to go back and read my statement.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I hope that honourable Lal has actually listened carefully that Government is taking action across all sectors to prevent gender-based violence, and there is an independent mid-term review coming up. So, if he says, "Evaluate the impact of your work", that has been done. I hope he can respond to the actual statement, and he understood what was shared, and not some preconceived point-scoring statement.

Once again, I urge all our leaders across all sectors to take responsibility. It is our shared responsibility to work with our families and communities to prevent violence from happening against our women, girls, senior citizens and people living with disabilities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I sit down, may I wish Adi Cakobau School a Happy 77th Anniversary - a school that has produced many women leaders for many decades. I wish the many graduates of ACS many well wishes. May God bless the women of our beloved nation, and may God bless Fiji.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, in response to the honourable Minister's Statement, the recent analysis showed alarming levels of sexual violence and a widespread sense that survivors are not believed or protected. We see policy announcements that vanish into small print while frontline services remain slow, at times underfunded, and inaccessible to those who are most in need.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is alleged that a fragile system remains where police responses are inconsistent, lacking trauma, enforce training, reporting mechanisms opaque and prevention programmes are under-resourced.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I agree with some of the statistics said by the honourable Minister, where multiple women have been killed over the years, dating back and nine lives lost this year, and the cost of domestic violence in Fiji is at a staggering \$300 million annually, or at least 7 percent of our GDP.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, while recent analysis show alarming levels of violence against women, they say that most perpetrators are men. Just because a man has committed an act of violence does not mean that all men of the society are bad or abusive.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, yesterday I highlighted the high suicide rates among men, according to the Fiji Police Annual Report, but the honourable Minister for Women has forgotten to share statistics about violence against men. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the point is violence and abuse do not respect lines of age, race, gender, ethnicity or income. I want to remind the honourable Minister that men, too, are victims of violence and acts of crime from their toxic partners.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to ask the honourable Minister for Women, Children and Social Protection one question, where is the ministry for men? Is this discrimination towards men as well?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, when this Government can come in and change the name of the Ministry of Economy to the Ministry of Finance, at least, they can change the name to Ministry of Women, Men, Children, Welfare and Social Protection. It sounds better, but slogans are not enough; your policies are not enough and funding is not enough to end domestic violence in Fiji.

Beyond policy and money lies a change in mindset. Has the honourable Minister for Women managed to get justice for those women and girls who have been exploited or blackmailed through social media? She talks about the increased rate of domestic violence. Nine lives lost this year, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Is the honourable Minister for Women implying that her Government's policies are ineffective? Has the honourable Minister been able to solve the thousands of women being targeted online? How many pending cases exist? How many cases have been reported? We need answers from you, honourable Minister for Women.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Minister for Women is seen giving out statistics on issues in the media. She speaks on a lot of issues, but I ask the honourable Minister for Women; where are the concrete, tangible actions to combat these issues? Do you even have the inner budget to fund these interventions? It is not about fancy speeches or slogans. It is important to uplift and empower men, women, youth, but let us do it without undermining or suppressing the other. This starts from every household, and especially on how we are brought up.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in conclusion, today let us confront a hard truth. Men, women, children, in fact, every Fijian, every human being, remain vulnerable in the face of violence, discrimination and neglect. This is not a problem that can be solved by slogans or half measures, it requires a holistic commitment that cuts across policy, budgets, political will, and the very mindset of our society.

An inclusive approach is necessary to combat domestic violence in Fiji. Policy and budget must align with the promise of safety. We need survivor-centred laws, robust funding for shelters, hotlines, and healthcare, and a justice system that treats violence as a priority.

I would like to repeat this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, a justice system that treats violence as a priority and not just domestic violence but any act of violence, violence against men, women, children, animals or even PSV or taxi drivers. Recently there was a video being circulated on social media of

a PSV driver who was beaten up by four or five individuals.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we need a strong justice system, and we must ensure to act on data-driven planning, transparent reporting and accountability that translates intention into tangible protection, honourable Minister for Women.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, lastly, to every parent, to end domestic violence, it starts with us. Let us talk to our children and ensure they grow up with compassion, love and respect for all. In this Pink October month, let us ensure and encourage screening and protection for all.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just to respond to the honourable Minister, you had three years in Government, go and fix the old people's homes and give out the termite grants to the pending thousands of applications that are there. You have a \$4 billion funding, \$185 million in surplus, go and do it!

Aviation Safety and Regulatory Compliance in Fiji's Flight Training Sector

HON. I. VASU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Deputy Prime Minister, the honourable Leader of Opposition, honourable Members of this august House, members of the public watching live from Fiji and abroad, members of the media, ladies and gentlemen; thank you for allowing me to deliver a Ministerial Statement to acknowledge and respond to a concern raised about the disruptions to students at Pacific Flying School.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, first and foremost, to the students and families affected, we hear you. Aviation training is a major investment of time, money and hope. The Government's priority is your safety and Fiji's reputation, which depend on an independent regulator making decisions on evidence, not on politics or social media.

On Tuesday, an honourable Member of the Opposition stated and alerted that the Civil Aviation Authority of Fiji has imposed unjustified restrictions on Pacific Flying School, including rejecting engines overhauled overseas without proper justification.

Mr. Speaker, allow me to state the fact, the law and the timeline of the events, so this august House is clear on where the delay has come from, and it was not from CAAF or the Government laws and standards.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, under Fiji Air Navigation Regulations, only an approved maintenance organisation may carry out aircraft maintenance. If maintenance or parts are not approved, a Certificate of Airworthiness can cease to be enforced. Airworthiness standards also require prior arrangement with CAAF before using a foreign organisation not approved by CAAF. These are long-standing protections to prevent incidents and accidents arising from non-compliance.

What actually happened? Mr. Speaker, Sir, Suncoast Aero Engines was not approved under Fiji's system when the operator installed three overhauled engines, namely DQ-SK1I, DQ-BAT, DQ-FTI, which were installed without prior CAAF's approval. Engaging the legal provisions I have just outlined, CAAF then did exactly what a responsible regulator must do. It opens a new process pathway to assess Suncoast's request, application and proposition audit dated in May, June, and July 2025.

Despite multiple fallouts, confirmation to proceed was not provided by the operator and provider. As the safety cases were required to consider any one-off acceptance, initial submissions were incomplete. After intricate work, a revised safety case was accepted, and on 16th

September 2025, CAAF issued a one-off approval with conditions, a practical step to keep students progressing while ensuring safety.

On chronology and key milestones, Mr. Speaker, Sir, allow me to indulge this august House on some key milestones on this issue. On 5th February, 2025, an audit notification was sent to the operator.

On 17th March to 2nd April, 2025, an aircraft maintenance organisation's audit, with an exit meeting on the 2nd April, 2025 was conducted, where a serious compliance issue, including unapproved engine overhaul, were discussed.

On 8th May, 2025, the AMO certificate was renewed with conditions. Certificates of Airworthiness for two aircrafts were suspended, pending compliance. On 9th May, 2025, a tripartite meeting between the Ministry, CAAF, and the operator took place, where a 30-day window was granted to ready the overseas provider for CAAF's audit, and a weekly reporting schedule was required.

On 30th July to 3rd September, 2025, a safety case cycle, where the initial submission was unacceptable, and on 3rd September, the revised case was accepted. On 16th September, 2025, a one-off approval was issued with conditions to facilitate training while safeguards are in place. Across this period, CAAF repeatedly sought confirmation to audit the overseas provider. None was received.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the root cause of delay has been the operator's non-compliance and incomplete approval and not regulatory inactions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, CAAF has assisted as far as it properly can, proposing audit dates outside of its original workplan, meeting repeatedly with the operator, and ultimately issuing a condition, one-off approval once a satisfactory safety case was put forward. An operator with over two decades of experience in Fiji's system knows these requirements well. Compliance is not optional.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Opposition demands that CAAF shows the risk to regulators worldwide, apply risk-based oversight, and operators present safety cases as an acceptable means of compliance. CAAF has communicated through a proper channel and will continue to do so. Some technical matters are confidential, while the reviews are active. That is a normal ICAO-aligned practice. What is not normal is to conduct safety certification by press release.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, Sir, allow me to speak to the students and families. We will keep supporting a safe, lawful and sustainable path to qualification. To all operators, bring complete documentation and safety cases early. CAAF will prioritise timely decisions.

To this august House, Fiji's reputation is strengthened, not weakened, when our independent regulators applied the rule fairly and consistently. Safety first, due process always, and never at the cost of an accident that we could have prevented. My office will support any good faith engagement that delivers safe, lawful and sustainable training outcomes.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, right at the outset, I think it is important that we all know this - what is at the forefront of Civil Aviation Authority of Fiji, is safety. That is something that we must never compromise. We are talking about airlines and air safety.

What is also important, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that if there are issues that any operator within the airline industry has, there are avenues available for you to address those issues. From what I understand, the issues that were raised by the independent operator were issues with respect to

corruption, undue influence, and abuse of power.

Again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think it has become habitual around Fiji that every Tom, Dick and Harry raises their issues on social media. If it is a proper legal complaint with the right amount of evidence that you have, take it to the authorities in the right course and in the right manner, because every single institution in Fiji has a particular grievance procedure.

We must remember, Sir, that we cannot compromise safety. We cannot. The Civil Aviation Authority of Fiji is one of our foremost institutions as our aviation regulator. Whether we sympathise with one person or another, there is no compromise when it comes to aviation safety. We should also remember that there is no compromise. If you raise an issue of corruption, if you raise an issue of undue influence, if you raise an issue of any kind of undue influence exerted by an operator, or even if you feel that you have been victimised, there is an avenue. If it is an exercise in corruption that you are talking about, if you have got the evidence, take it to the institutions that take it up instead of flaunting it through social media, so it becomes gossip mongering; that is not the way. You are actually talking about an institution that guards the safety of our aviation - you are talking about an institution that has to comply with laws, not just ours, but we are signatories to ICAO.

I know this for a fact, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I agree totally with the honourable Minister, and I know in his acting capacity, but thank you, honourable Minister for telling everyone what you did today. I urge the operator, we may sympathise with what his issues are, but there are avenues to do this. We must not compromise.

I remember, Mr. Speaker, Sir, when I was still practising as a lawyer, we had to seize a plane. I remember I had then was told that every single nut and bolt on a plane has a history. It has to have a history. It is a recorded history. I know the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-operatives, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications will remember this, and it was to do with one of our local airlines, I will not name the names, but we had to seize it. I was quite amazed that every single nut and bolt has to go through a particular safety standard before it is allowed to fly.

Of course, there are times when we will have issues with operators; we all understand that. But I totally, absolutely condemn the way that, and it is not just civil aviation, any institution, if you have a complaint, do not go to social media, go to the authorities that are there for them to do their job. These are independent authorities and even beyond that, it can be done. So, in a nutshell, we must remember that the people employed at CAAF are free of fear and favour in terms of the work that they have to do. It is about the safety of every single person that flies. Also, when you do such things, you are damaging the reputation of an institution in Fiji. So, if you have an issue, follow the right course and take it up with the right authorities to do this.

With those few words, I just want to assure the operator that if he follows the course, has the evidence, take it to the institution that take up these things, and I understand also that CAAF has actually given a very proper explanation. Again, now we have to resort to Parliament to make representations to tell the public what is actually going on. If they had followed the right course, it would not be something that we would have to discuss. Cannot compromise, must not compromise, should not compromise our safety standards just because someone aired something on *Facebook*.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, in the next agenda item, I have reorganised the order of Oral Questions in view of some reasons which I accept as reasonable. So, the first Oral Question this morning will go to Question No. 171/2025.

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

Co-operative Development Fund Grant (Question No. 171/2025)

HON. I.S. VANAWALU asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-operatives, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications update Parliament on the status and achievements of the Co-operative Development Fund Grant?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank honourable Vanawalu for the question. Firstly, let us call a spade a spade and I think we should acknowledge the People's Coalition for recognising the co-operative movement as a vital economic driver in terms of rural economic empowerment.

In some ways, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to discussions around poverty alleviation, my humble opinion is that co-operative movement holds much of the solution. Last year we received a grant of \$400,000 in the budget. This year it has been increased to \$600,000. I am confident that we will continue to increase the grant because of what is happening as we see the unlocking of potential in this sector.

Mr. Speaker, also, when looking around other economies or mature economies, for example, just talk about India - Anand Milk Union Limited (AMUL) which is the Gujarat's dairy producer in India, it is a co-operative. I believe from my recollection their revenue at the moment stands at US\$4 billion. Even just one farmer supplying one milk from one cattle gets paid his money on the same day of supply.

Mr. Speaker, there is another cooperative in India called Indian Farmers Fertiliser Co-operative Limited (IFFCO). Again, owned by the farmers and we are actually discussing whether they can come and have a look at South Pacific Fertilizers Pte Limited in Fiji.

We were in Japan recently with the honourable Minister, we visited Japanese Agricultural (JA) Co-operatives which is an agricultural co-operative for all Japanese farmers. Actually, what that co-operative does is they create the satellite supermarkets that are virtually run by the co-operatives. That is where this Government will take the co-operative movement.

Of course, in New Zealand we have the kiwi fruit - Zespri, a multibillion-dollar company run as a co-operative as well. What I am saying, Mr. Speaker, is the potential in the co-operative movement is very significant. Last year, in terms of funding, we received up to about 21 applications and 17 were approved at around \$486,000. We already exceeded the budget for last year.

The interest is growing. I think the honourable Ministers for iTaukei Affairs, Rural and Maritime Development and Youth and Sports can tell you that the interest in forming co-operatives continues to increase and likewise we will continue to support the funding through relevant funding.

Mr. Speaker, just before I sit, I thought I just share just a couple of examples of co-operatives that have been assisted just to give you a flavour of the type of potential that exists in the co-operative movement. The first one is, if you go to Nausori and you have lunch at Nausori Market, there is a ladies' co-operative there called Lakoyanivou Co-operative. They do nice rourou and *ika vakamiti*

and they do *kaikoso* too. They represent 13 villages from the *Tikina o Bau* and they operate this restaurant in Nausori. We met them two years ago and I have to say there are a group of very resilient women who have been operating a business there for over five years.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the significant issues that they had faced was the transportation of their products. They have to get up in the morning, look for taxi or whatever form of transport then take the goods to market, et cetera. What we decided to do, Sir, was to provide them a three-tonne truck on a one-third, two-thirds basis which is the structure of the grant. This asset has actually transformed the business operations, allowing them to travel with all their pots and catering supplies efficiently and also improve their logistics.

Apart from that, Mr. Speaker, because it is a three-tonne truck, it is also for hire, so whilst they are serving in the restaurant, the truck is on hire around Nausori area. They are currently securing contracts for fresh produce delivery from other locations. The ripple effect from that investment continues to grow. The plan at the moment is to find a proper restaurant location in the Nausori for them. If we do, we will provide some support in trying to get them to establish there.

The second example is Kabara Yavusa Ono Co-operative, they call themselves KY6. This was an initiative by the people of Kabara to sell handicrafts. As we know, they are prowess in handicrafts, particularly *tanoa*. Sir, I am sure you are acutely aware. Through the initiative, what we decided to do was assist them with a vehicle, again for delivery of the artefacts. They have now expanded into coffin boxes. I hear recently, with the coffins, the hearse, if you like, or the vehicle is used as well for transportation, and it significantly lowered their transportation costs, allowing them to operate more efficiently. I now hear that because of their doing so well, they are now venturing into furniture and will be supplying beds very shortly to Courts.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, those are just two examples. I can sit and stand here and talk about another hundred more, but what it is demonstrating is that through serious concerted effort with the co-operative movement, we can do significant things to the rural economy to our people.

Finally, just another point that I thought I would make, this is the approach that we are taking on this side of the House. We believe that if, particularly using co-operatives, if we look at every single village in Fiji, there is something that they are competent at, or they have an inherent resource. What we have to do is try and find a way of unlocking that resource. So, for the people of Kabara, it is their prowess in *tanoa*. Now potentially, I just organised a meeting with KY6 and Jack's Handicraft today. So, this is how we continue to get things to grow.

In terms of approaches, whilst we talk about co-operatives, what we are also trying to do is connect the capability or the resource of every single *vanua*, every single province to certain markets and then see how we can sort of build it up.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank honourable Vanawalu for the question. Just watch this space with co-operatives. There are some transformative opportunities ahead of us if we continue to work together.

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, what are some of the key focus points encouraging more innovative ideas to be proposed by various co-operatives aiming to boost growth and sustainability in the sector?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think what I just mentioned before was trying to link the co-operative to what is actually available in terms of resource. I had mentioned Kabara. There is another young man in Lovoni - Sowani. He actually started a business that now

includes about 100 farmers, and we are going to turn them into a co-operative very soon. Basically, Mr. Speaker, they are now with Sowani, processing *yaqona* in the middle of Lovoni, using solar power, packaging it, and exporting it on Amazon. One of the key things that has to be done is the matching of the resource to the market potential, providing market access.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, Sir, apart from that, the key things, governance for co-operatives is quite important, having good financial management. We do have a Training Unit within the Ministry. It will grow because of the demand. We also have Business Assistance Fiji and the other financial sectors that are helping. So, these are the types of elements that we will continue to build into the co-operative movement, but I think we have made a good start, and we are looking at the legislation as well now to see how to tidy that up, but there are some good things ahead.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Honourable Minister, quick question regarding the Development Fund grant. Does the Development Fund have the ability also to receive funds from our development partners, so that that can be used? Does it also have a programme where...

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the first question, we are thinking about some approaches to development partners. There is one currently underway. From a personal perspective, I am treating that with a bit of circumspect, because under the one-third and two-thirds, at least we put our applicants on the hook in terms of accountability. If things are given FOC, generally the danger is that they do not treat it with the same accountability and respect. Sir, it is something that we have to manage, I guess. But there is already one request out for that kind of development assistance at the moment. We will not say which development partner until after they provide assistance.

On the issue with partnering, yes, that is something that we are keenly looking at, particularly the international governments have really focused on co-operatives over so many years. You are talking about 30 years to 60 years. A lot of the co-operatives are quite substantial but certainly in terms of just looking at advisory on structures and models, for example, the Zespri Co-operative is just dedicated to kiwifruit.

The question that we are sort of talking about is, can we start developing co-operatives that look at product by product? So, one for *yaqona*, one for ginger, that kind of idea. That is something that is in the process. We have reached out to New Zealand and Australia around some of the thinking, and we will see how that goes, but certainly there are great opportunities. I mentioned a bit about the co-operative in Japan. We are certainly going to look at signing some sort of MOU with the Japanese JA Co-operative because they have a very good way of assisting the members to grow their produce.

MR. SPEAKER.- Before we leave this question, I think I can speak for my people of Kabara. Thank you, honourable Deputy Prime Minister and your Ministry for the assistance in helping harness our skills for the betterment of our people.

New Initiatives to Retain Professionals
(Question No. 168/2025)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ asked the Government, upon notice:

With ongoing skilled labour shortages affecting investment, can the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics inform Parliament on the new incentives or scholarship programmes that Government will introduce to retain professionals in key sectors like

healthcare and engineering?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, another very good question this week from the honourable Member. We, as a government, and as a country, all recognise that skilled labour shortages, particularly in critical sectors, such as healthcare engineering, can pose a serious challenge to our economic, public service delivery and national competitiveness.

The issue of skilled labour shortages is not something new to Fiji. In fact, for more than a decade, we have seen a steady flow of our skilled workers drawn abroad by better salaries, educational opportunities, healthcare access and a lucrative lifestyle.

The so-called lucrative lifestyle may not be that lucrative anymore. The outflow of labour has significantly increased. From January 2018 until August 2025, around 114,000 Fijian residents have travelled out of the country for better employment opportunities, supposedly, and immigration, education and other opportunities, representing about 12 percent of Fiji's population. If this trend continues, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we will face further shortages.

While migration may be one factor, we need to admit that Fiji is also facing demographic challenges with its population growth. This is because of several factors – a significant decline, for example, in fertility and birth rates over the past decades. According to the World Bank Estimates, the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) in 2023 stands at approximately 2.3 births per woman. This marks a dramatic drop from about four births per woman in the 1980s. We have almost half - representing almost a 50 percent decrease in fertility rate over a span of four decades.

The other, as we have seen in the last few decades, at least, in the last 20 years, NCDs have become a major concern. That puts a lot of pressure on our health system, reducing our working-age population and productivity. Compounding these issues, as the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services has pointed out, we see a rise in HIV cases. All these constraints Fiji's labour force participation. These public health issues not only affect individual wellbeing, but they also reduce productivity.

The World Bank report that we have, to review our health sector points out that on average, people who reach 50 years, their productivity is halved. This is a result of persistent underinvestment in workforce development and inadequate alignment between training and industry needs, which has added to the issue of skilled labour shortages.

What we face today, we have to admit this, it is not a product of a single year, or two years, or three years that this Government has been in power, this is a result of decades of policy neglect and poor administration, especially in the last 15 years to 20 years.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Hogwash!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- He is talking about hogwash, but this is the reality. The previous government had closed down technical colleges throughout Fiji - close to \$40 million went down the drain. This created a huge vacuum in trade and applied skills training. Of course, people will leave for better employment opportunities abroad, but we failed to train our young Fijians to replace the technical expertise that left our shores as the training institutions were shut down.

This Government is committed to restoring balance in our human capital ecosystem and ensure to build a sustainable labour market that serves current and future needs of the labour market. We recognise the urgency of labour market challenges, so our first step as a government was to provide relief to graduates. We wrote off that \$650 million in debt, a major barrier to youth

participation in the workforce, and at the same time, we strengthened bond requirements to ensure graduates contribute to national development.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, nearly 70 percent of our people are below the age of 40 years and about 32 percent of our people fall within the working age bracket of 15 years to 35 years. Therefore, we are putting a lot of priority in investing in these people and making sure that they are equipped with the right skills, knowledge and opportunities which leverage Fiji's development vision. So, we have expanded scholarships support for medical, nursing, engineering and technical fields, and we will continue to incentivize the critical areas of labour and skill shortage.

We have reopened 29 vocational schools and expanded apprenticeship programmes. These reforms are designed to address longstanding skills shortage in critical sectors in Government. The new scholarship merit-based scholarship scheme is funding studies for 24,653 students, which includes 11,593 continuing students and 13,000 new students.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have increased the number of TVET scholarships from 2,780 to 4,500. We have extended micro qualification grant schemes to new areas, increasing the total number of awards to 3,000.

On overseas scholarships, we are also looking at providing scholarships and we have provided already to undertake TVET qualifications in Australia and New Zealand that are not available in areas such as water and sewerage, manufacturing, nautical science, hydrology and aviation management. These are, Mr. Speaker, Sir, concerted efforts by the Coalition Government to increase the supply of skills.

This is how we have supported 300 students to be trained in qualifications ranging from Certificate III, Certificate and IV or Diploma programmes through industry employer providers. These graduates will be directly absorbed into the workforce upon completion.

We have also introduced, Mr. Speaker, Sir, a graduate business startup grant scheme, allocating \$10,000 per graduate for 30 TSLs sponsored graduates - final semester graduating students to undergo training and start a business.

We are also undertaking immigration reforms, Mr. Speaker, Sir, because we recognise that while we are building the skills locally, we will need to address the gaps that we continue to face. So, the immigration reform is designed not to replace Fijian workers, but to complement our local workforce until such time as local capacity is built through the scholarships and training.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have a number of programmes that the honourable Prime Minister pointed out to retain public service workers. The ill-conceived decision by the previous government to reduce the retirement age from 60 years to 50 years, we have restored that. We are also increasing it to 62 years for those in scarce technical areas.

Together with that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the civil service pay rise in the last two years, all these is designed to increase the number of skills that are required in critical areas, in addition to all the other policy interventions that we have taken to support labour force participation and labour market growth in the economy.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ. - I thank the honourable Minister for that comprehensive answer. I hear from honourable Minister that they are, again, increasing scholarships to the doctors and the nurses. The issue is with allied health workers. Even with the increase in the number of scholarships, the issue lies with FNU. They cannot increase the number of intakes. All they can do is 12 or 15 per

year, and if you go to Health Centres and Nursing Stations, pharmacies are operating without a pharmacist, radiology departments are without radiologists, most of the Health Centres are even operating with Nurse Practitioners, not with Medical Officers. What is the honourable Minister or the Government doing in terms of increasing the number of intakes at FNU, which is very critical in the healthcare sector?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think that is a good question. In some of these medical training skills, you need to look at the infrastructure. You cannot just take more MBBS students or technical training in areas where the facilities are not available. For nursing, we are able to provide additional grant to Sangam School of Nursing, to University of Fiji, and we are saying to them that more scholarships would be available so that they can train more nurses who are needed in other areas. Yes, we are taking steps to ensure that we increase funding, we increase scholarships in those areas, and we have also asked FNU to look at how they can increase the capacity.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is a very important skill area where we are also getting people from other sources, because the need for these kinds of skills in Australia and New Zealand is just huge. New Zealand itself, last year in 2024, lost 72,000 people who migrated or went for employment in other countries. For us, if you look at the statistics and, again, I want to use this opportunity to put this record straight in Parliament because there is a lot of misinformation, there is a lot of ill-conceived statements made, including by the honourable Leader of the Opposition in his recent post.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Only from you!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Let me let me get this to honourable Usamate, because this will wash some of the hogwash from him.

The honourable Leader of the Opposition in one of his recent statements, pointed out all these attacks, what is happening, and he referred to Indo-Fijians and said, “instead, a growing number of Indo-Fijians are migrating overseas”.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Point of Order.

MR. SPEAKER.- There is a Point of Order.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Standing Order 45(4), the Minister must reply to a Question and it must be relevant and concise. We are talking here about training for health professionals, he has completely deviated from the topic. He needs to stick to the point as outlined by the requirements of the Standing Order.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister, I do not agree with that. I think it is in the general nature of your question, you will address those other issues.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is important for the country and for our people to understand and to dispel this myth, this misinformation that is being created in this country.

If you look at the migration, people who emigrate, plus employment, plus education, the total and I want to give these figures.

Year	No. Migrate
2010	19,000
2011	24,800
2012	23,573

Year	No. Migrate
2016	26,426
2017	27,000
2018	26,000
2019, 2020 & 2021	COVID-19 – 8,500
2022	28,504
2023	29,719

In 2022, Australia and New Zealand opened up the market. Students could go for 30. In 2024, 22,433. So, who were in government when 26,000 people left in 2016? Who were in government in 2017 when 27,000 people left? Was the Bainimarama Government chasing away people at that time? This is what the honourable Leader of the Opposition said in his statement because he is worried about his political fortune, which is dwindling everyday, and is trying to play the race card; “Indo-Fijians are leaving since this government came in.”

In 2025, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as of September, numbers have gone down - 15,584 in total. He is saying it is a lot. He is not looking at the numbers. This is the statistics from Fiji Bureau of Statistics. Mr. Speaker, Sir, to use these statistics and come out in this Parliament and say, the labour shortage is there. Since this Government came in, Indo-Fijians are leaving. This is what they go and tell the people when they go and drink grog with them. This is what they do.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Answer the question.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Very poor.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- In fact, what the honourable Leader of the Opposition has posted, Mr. Speaker, is not only seditious, it is designed to create ill-will and hostility in this country. This is what he has done. In fact, if he is honest enough, if he looks at these statistics, he will withdraw and remove that statement from his *Facebook*.

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- This is how, Mr. Speaker, Sir, when you come into Parliament, when you are the Leader of the Opposition, when you are a Member of Opposition, you go and post something on your *Facebook*, you must be sure of what you are saying.

That statement, Mr. Speaker, Sir, from the honourable Leader of the Opposition is in bad faith, is based on a desperate attempt to bring some kind of political mileage.

I will be responding to the honourable Leader of the Opposition’s statement in full at a press conference tomorrow and he is welcome to join.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

I will go back to the question. The question was, what is the Government doing to arrest the people leaving for greener pastures? My understanding of the response was that it included the statistics of those who have left over the years and then explained the opening of new vocational training centres, et cetera. That is why I did not take your point of order, honourable Usamate. So, in that respect, your Point of Order was not necessary because he was continuing with the explanation

of the background to the question that was asked.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, the second statement that he made there, 75 percent of that, and I am sorry about this, was a direct attack on the honourable Leader of the Opposition. The question is asking about what we are doing about health professional engineering? That is what the focus should be. Sir, 75 percent of that was an attack on the honourable Leader of the Opposition's freedom of speech to express his opinion.

Freedom of speech is a fundamental right. In this House, we have the right to tell the people of this country what is going on. He may interpret things in a particular way, but he should not use the answer to a supplementary question to attack the honourable Leader of the Opposition. He should just answer the question. If you cannot answer this question, do not answer it. Do not use the opportunity just to attack willy-nilly.

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

MR. SPEAKER.- Alright, we will leave the matter there.

I am giving you the floor, Leader of the Opposition, to ask your supplementary question.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I just wish to remind the honourable Deputy Prime Minister that when I joined the Civil Service in 2007, there was an article by him, and I am not sure whether it was a journal or even a book, where he talked about skill shortages, economic trend, and training. This is one thing that I wanted to highlight as well in the ministerial statement that I was preparing. That was done way back in 2007, so nothing to do with the previous government, because this problem exists.

My question to the honourable Deputy Prime Minister is, was there a proper skills audit conducted? Given the skills shortages that we have, the economic trend and the development plan that you already have in place, because this was there in the central planning office during the previous development plans that we had. There is a connection between skills, economic trend and development plans. Was there a proper audit conducted?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Leader of the Opposition for remembering about the 2007 study. In fact, it was done by me and one other colleague from the University of the South Pacific on the labour demand in the country.

However, let me inform the honourable Leader of the Opposition, that there was a technical report by an expert, and the honourable Minister for Education talked about it. When we re-did the TELS and replaced it with a merit-based scholarship because under the TELS, Mr. Speaker, Sir, what was happening was any student with marks eligible to get into the university would get a loan and get into the university or a tertiary institution. So, students who just had, for example, 200 marks, who perhaps were not designed to go and get an academic degree, would end up in the university, and we lost about \$160 million on students who we sent to these tertiary institutions and never completed their qualification or degree or diploma.

Based on that report, honourable Leader of the Opposition, we have categorised - we are saying, "if you have marks up to this level, this is what you are going to get. If you do not meet that, if you fall in this category, you go and do this". In that way, we have been able to plan students into areas where skills are needed, where there is skill shortage. There has been work done and the Bureau of Statistics, with the Ministry of Trade, is doing another skills shortage survey. We are hoping to

get a more recent assessment of where we are, how many people we need to get from overseas, and all these is constantly being done now, honourable Leader of the Opposition.

HON. H. CHAND.- A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker; staff retention is a major issue and outflow of labour has increased. This also includes civil servants. Job evaluation can be one of the retention strategies because it enhances staff retention by linking pay to the job responsibilities. My question to the honourable Minister is, are there plans for job evaluation for civil servants, maybe anytime soon, or before the end of December 2026 because the last job evaluation exercise for the civil servants was carried out more than eight years ago? That was way back in 2017.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, I thank the honourable Member. I think that is an important point but let me remind the House and remind the Opposition, because they keep harping about salary. They keep harping about wages. We have to be honest and say that we are not going to be able to match the nominal salaries that our people may get for the same kind of job, whether you are a Maths teacher, or a plumber, or a mechanic in Australia and New Zealand.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we also have to be honest because people go from here. If you look at Fiji's per capita of GDP in terms of the measurement, it is \$6,000, but if you look at that same amount in terms of purchasing power parity, in terms of price adjustment, you will find that it is almost up to \$16,000. We have to be honest, and I think our people who are trying to leave for better jobs are not necessarily just leaving government and going overseas, some of them, in fact, are in huge demand. We have so many international organisations in Fiji. We have so many other private sector demand for jobs.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for Ministries like ours, we find it very difficult to actually get even first-time graduates to come and work for the Ministry of Finance or the Economic Planning Unit because they get absorbed by the private sector. Accounting firms offer them higher salaries, banks, as graduate trainees, offer them higher salaries, but we have to admit that it is not possible for us to keep increasing the salaries of the civil servants. We have precisely done that in the last two Budgets to ensure that we keep that momentum and keep that trend, but there is a limit to how far we can go in terms of raising the salaries.

The honourable Member is right, we will consistently continue to look at how we can make the adjustments, how we can look at different Ministries and different skill areas where we can design our salary structure that will allow our people to stay on or to be retained from the point of view of salaries and wages.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Honourable Minister, yesterday, I had mentioned about St. Giles not having enough medical staff or highly trained staff to deal with the scourge that we have with respect to drugs, et cetera. My question relates to the actual healthcare sector.

I also understand what you are saying about our professionals, that we cannot match what is being given overseas. That may be one of the reasons why there is high migratory numbers because we have a highly educated young workforce. It is not because of politics; it is not because of any other reason but it is because our education system is good enough so that they are educated enough to go overseas. That also is a big factor when you look at that.

My question really is, with respect to the healthcare specifically, when you are categorising, is that an area that we put that as a top of the category with respect to incentivising and retaining professionals or educating to that particular sector because it is something that will be in the future and it currently is sorely needed?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think that is a good question and a good suggestion. As I have said, the new scholarship scheme actually categorises, we look at areas where we need to get the students, incentivise them to continue their studies in that area. In the last Budget, honourable Koya, we also increased the allowances for students, so we are saying that there is better opportunity. We are also trying to ensure that there is more information, and I am sure the honourable Minister for Education is doing a better job in having career counselling in schools by School Heads and teachers.

What we saw in the last couple of years and more, that students missed out on that counselling, missed out on knowing where the opportunities are, where the demand for skills are much higher, where they can get slightly higher salaries and wages. I think part of the effort through this scholarship scheme, and TELS is doing a good job in terms of providing those services, making sure that the information is available more readily at the school level, so that students can make good and deliberate choices in areas where they can find jobs very, very easily and also be paid a higher salary or wages.

MR. SPEAKER.- I think this is a convenient time to take a break and cool our heels, so this proceedings is suspended for lunch. Parliament will resume at 2.30 p.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.30 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.35 p.m.

(Madam Deputy Speaker resumed her seat in the Speaker's Chamber)

Rural Road Development - Central Division
(Question No. 169/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport update Parliament on the progress of the rural road development in the Central Division?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, through the Public Works Department, the Ministry continues to implement the Rural Roads Development Programme in the various Divisions, including the Central Division. From 2023 to-date, a total of 11 road projects and two crossing infrastructure projects are being undertaken in the Central Division, specifically in Naitasiri and Serua. These works include pilot cuts and gravelling of new roads, upgrading and maintenance of existing roads and construction of Irish crossings.

The total road length developed in the Central Division stands at 29.5 kilometres, with additional six metres of crossing infrastructure constructed or under development. The total investment in the Central Division amounts to around \$2.49 million. Projects completed include Nakorovou, Matawailevu and Naisogo. Currently, the Ministry of Public Works is working on Nakida, Wairuarua, and in the procurement phase is Sabata Road project and Waidradra Phase 2 Irish Crossing.

Some of the communities that benefitted, as I have already mentioned in Naitasiri include Nakida, Nokorovou, Matawailevu, Wairuarua, Naisogo and Waidradra, and in Serua, Sabata. These communities have experienced improved access to essential services such as health, education and markets, and in terms of enhanced mobility, safety, and economic opportunities specifically in agriculture and access to markets.

The Ministry remains committed in completing the remaining works. Specifically, the works delivered by the Public Works Department does not include what is covered by Fiji Roads Authority, and I will deliver a more comprehensive update in the next Parliament session.

HON. V. NATH.- Madam Deputy Speaker, in many areas after road works or service project, we often see open trenches are left unattended for weeks. When vehicles are damaged or an accident happens because of this unsafe work, what mechanisms are in place for ordinary Fijians to seek compensation, or who foots this bill, honourable Minister?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Just recollecting the question, it is on the rural road development in the Central Division, and now it has moved to compensation, which are two totally different subjects.

Firstly, the vehicle owner should claim insurance from the vehicle insurance itself. The second step, I will need to check on that in terms of liability issues. It depends on the specifics, but the court process is there and for them to follow.

In terms of the trenches, I am not sure which area is that. If you can specify, but roadworks should be completed thoroughly and carefully so that such hazards are not left around, as we have

explained yesterday about the digging of trenches by Telecom and other entities. As I had mentioned, there is a process and procedure to follow in terms of those who are doing that and for FRA, that is definitely something we could look into in terms of the liability.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank the honourable Minister for the update. I am glad to hear the work on Wairuarua to Nakida Road is working. I actually walked up that route, crossing that river 23 times when we did the pilot cut. My question is on that road that goes up from Nakorovou to Sawanikula, are there any plans to extend it up to Namosi? Also, the road access to Roma, is there any plan, perhaps from the Ra side, to do any sort of work or that sort of connectivity?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Yes, that is part of the discussion right now and also the plan in terms of that.

The other development that you may have probably read is about the announcement regarding the Millennium Development Fund Corporation. That is a significant development from the Government of the United States who have funded infrastructure developments in the Pacific, including Kiribati and Vanuatu. They have included Fiji in that, which would include aspects of development such as rural roads development.

I have asked the team to scope by specific areas or sectors, the works which needed to be done in terms of bridges and upgrading of rural roads, and if we can document that into one specific document, then we will include all of that into one package for funding. However, for the Government initiative in terms of the regular funding, that is definitely in the plans and will be continued.

HON. V. NATH.- Madam Speaker, the honourable Minister has opened the floor for me because I know it was a question for the Central Division, but he himself had asked what areas. Many people just laughed, probably they do not have a vehicle, or they are moving in a government vehicle, but for those taxi drivers who have their own vehicle, you will find in many places on the Kings Road big potholes.

(Honourable Government Members interject)

HON. V. NATH.- Listen!

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Address the Chair, honourable Members.

HON. V. NATH.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I am asking the questions to the honourable Minister because he has highlighted that, so I have to tell him which area I am talking about.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Carry on, please.

HON. V. NATH.- I have experienced myself, and I have seen plenty potholes. There is a process in place, Madam Deputy Speaker, that if anything goes wrong, we have to address this....

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Nath, please, ask your question.

HON. V. NATH.- Honourable Minister, what is the process if someone damages the tyre of a vehicle caused by a pothole? What is the process of getting this compensation?

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable, I believe that question was already asked. Carry on, if

you wish to, honourable Minister.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- So, the process when you damage a tyre. Motor vehicles have spare tyres and jerks. So, the process is the process to replace a tyre, that is it. I mean, you just replace your tyre and move on.

Pharmacopeia Agreement with Government of India
(Question No. 170/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services update Parliament on the details of the Pharmacopeia Agreement with the Government of India with respect to the procurement and supply of medical drugs?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, the signing of the MOU on the India Pharmacopoeia (IP) between the Ministry of Health and Medical Services and the Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission (IPC) is a significant milestone in the Government's effort to improve timely access to quality medicines for the people of Fiji.

Madam Deputy Speaker, India is often referred to as the pharmacy of the world and it is one of the top nations in the world in manufacturing and exporting pharmaceutical products to more than 200 countries across the globe. Hence, the signing of the MOU is a significant step in increasing Fiji's access to quality medicine manufactured in India.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the MOU acknowledges India Pharmacopeia and is recognised as one of the global standards for the manufacture of medicines and medicinal products. Fiji is anticipated to benefit from the range and quality of medicinal products that are produced by Indian manufacturing companies. Fiji already imports India manufactured medicine and the MOU will increase the range and type of medicinal products that we can access at reasonable and low cost from India.

The MOU also acknowledges that Fiji undertakes quality assurance for all medicinal products that are imported and distributed in-country for use by our people. The Fiji Medicine Regulatory Authority undertakes the assessment of quality, safety and efficacy of medicine to ensure protection of public health and safety. In this way, the public health safety is protected and promoted by the use of high-quality medicine in Fiji.

The procurement and supply of medicine is covered in another separate MOU between the Ministry of Health and Medical Services and a government enterprise of the Government of India. For any procurement under that MOU will follow existing government procurement laws and regulations.

Madam Deputy Speaker, through this MOU, the Ministry will promote access to quality medicine for our population at a reasonably low cost, leading to savings for our families and the Government. This is the first time ever that the Ministry is engaged in an agreement, and we hope to maximise its positive impact for the benefit of our people.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, a quick question, of the 60 odd different pharmacopoeia that exist around the world, how many does Fiji actually recognise?

HON. RATU DR. A.R. LALABALAVU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, off the top of my head

if I can recall, the US, Japan, WHO, Australia, the UK - British Pharmacopoeia, India Pharmacopoeia and a few others - not 60 but a wide range that we do recognise their standards.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I appreciate the various things that you have mentioned about the agreement but I am particularly interested in the public safety. In your statement you have said that quality medications will come in and that will protect public safety. My question to you is, what provisions or what mechanisms are in place to ensure that counterfeit drugs or fake medicine do not come into the country?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank the honourable Member for the question. In terms of the idea of fake medicine coming in, that is always an issue but, nevertheless, in terms of this agreement on the India Pharmacopoeia, especially with people's medicine, I forgot the Indian name of it, we have gone over to India and inspected the outlets, especially have been shown and visited some of the facilities that produce the medicine. The first step is visiting facilities and see firsthand their quality assurance, how clean it is, things that they manufacture and how medication that we do order and are sourced from India come over to Fiji.

In terms of the availability of quality assurance here, we have our own team here in Fiji. I have mentioned what is available in Fiji and how they look after that, that quality is, again, maintained and it is not substituted for quantity in terms of the better price. The agreement just stipulates that we will source from the facility, which is the People's Pharmacy, for use in the public space.

Nevertheless, it will still have to go through our quality assurance here to ensure that we are getting what we pay for in terms of the right drug and the right efficacy of drug so that it is used within our population.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- As there are no more follow-up questions, honourable Members, we have already had Question No. 171 asked by honourable Iliesa Vanawalu to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Co-operatives and Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications earlier today.

Honourable Members, kindly note that Oral Question No. 172 has been withdrawn, as well as Question Nos. 173 and 174.

(Question Nos. 172/2025, 173/2025 and 174/2025 withdrawn)

Transportation of Building Materials - Maritime Islands
(Question No. 175/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport update Parliament on the Government assistance programme aimed at supporting the transport of building materials to communities in the maritime zone?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- I thank honourable Tuicolo for the question. Madam Deputy Speaker and honourable Members of Parliament, the Government recognises the critical need of our maritime communities to access building materials at affordable transport cost, particularly given the high freight charges and limited shipping options to remote islands.

It is precisely for that reason and something that the Ministry had pursued with Government support that an assistance programme be accommodated in the 2025-2026 National Budget with an

allocation of \$300,000. This initiative directly subsidises the transportation of building materials to the maritime zone.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the cost of transporting building materials has long been a barrier for families, schools and communities in our outer islands. The Coalition Government is determined to ensure that all Fijians are treated equally, leaving no one behind. In this case, we are ensuring that the rural and remote maritime communities have the same opportunities for purchase and access of building materials as their counterparts on the main islands.

The programme is governed by a policy directive issued by the Ministry, which sets out the eligibility criteria, administration and accountability mechanisms. Assistance is strictly limited to the cost of transporting materials on Government Shipping Services (GSS) vessels and does not cover the purchase of materials or labour costs.

Eligible applicants include:

- first homeowners who are constructing their primary residence in the maritime zone, including repairs and renovations;
- schools undertaking new constructions, extension, major repairs, particularly for community funded projects; and
- community funded projects endorsed by village, provincial or communities.

Applications are verified through the Divisional Commissioners or relevant Ministries, assessed by the Department of Transport, in consultation with GSS and approved by the Permanent Secretary. No funds are paid directly to applicants, instead assistance is directly applied to the operation of Government vessels carrying the approved shipments.

To ensure transparency, the Department of Transport maintains full records and submits quarterly reports on beneficiaries, projects and expenditure. The programme is, therefore, just not a transport subsidy, it is a targeted intervention to reduce the cost burden and enable development in the maritime zone.

HON. A.T. NAGATA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I understand that this new initiative is targeting first-time homeowners, schools and community groups in the maritime zone. How will the Ministry of Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport ensure that this budgetary allocation is distributed equally amongst all the districts in the maritime zone?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- At the moment, it has already been announced and applications are coming in, so it will be on a need basis, especially for the remote maritime zones, for example, Lau, Lomaiviti, et cetera, but we will deal with it on a case-by-case basis.

Monitoring of Drug Trafficking in Schools (Question No. 176/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Education inform Parliament on the steps taken by the Ministry to monitor the trafficking of drugs in schools?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank the honourable Member for keeping me busy during this Parliament week. Definitely, there is more than one undertaken at the Ministry level, given the phenomenon that has been created by these drug issues that are the

currently involving school children.

I would like to also state, Madam Deputy Speaker, that this concern is not only related to the concern of the Ministry of Education, it is also a concern of the *vanua*, the concern of each and every one in this august House, and as fathers, mothers and grandparents of our children in school, that we should all take responsibilities in trying to monitor and address drug trafficking in school.

The Ministry of Education is working very closely with the National Substance Abuse and Advisory Council (NSAAC) to ensure our schools are a safe haven for our children. As you might recall, we are exploring options in terms of putting stringent measures in school and anything involving children, parental consent is usually requested.

There are school policies in place, as the honourable Member is fully aware of, to address this which are as follows, the:

- School Drug and Substance Abuse Policy;
- School Behaviour Management Policy;
- School Child Protection Policy; and
- School Counselling Policy.

The Ministry of Education is working in partnership with NSAAC to conduct training and awareness to schools and communities. They have the Standard Operating Procedures in place, in which teachers and Heads of schools have been trained by the NSAAC Unit in terms of identifying symptoms and signs, including physical indicators of substance abuse and drug trafficking in school. The training was also facilitated in partnership with the Fiji Police Force through the Narcotics Unit.

Madam Deputy Speaker, some schools have also taken the initiative by the school management, taking proactive measures in the monitoring of unauthorised activities in schools, including the safety and the security of the students, to install CCTVs to monitor student activities and movements, according to the data of NSAAC. With the assistance of our Ministry of Education's ICT Unit, a total of 46 primary schools and 30 secondary schools have installed CCTV cameras to monitor student activities and movements.

Madam Deputy Speaker, training of teachers on drug-related issues is also conducted. Through NSAAC, we conducted a Drug Training of Trainers to Assistant Principals, Assistant Headteachers, and child protection officers for secondary and large primary schools. The training is basically focused on how to address drug problems in schools.

Part of this training focusses on the monitoring of students in schools and steps to take if students are involved in any drug-related activities. The training was conducted in 162 secondary schools and 46 primary schools in the last fiscal year. Student leaders are also trained on how to identify the signs of students using drugs during their leadership training. A total of 928 students participated during this leadership training.

On counselling and mentoring support, the Ministry of Education, through the NSAAC unit, provides counselling support to students with drug-related issues after referral from schools. The honourable Member is fully aware of this process. Mentoring support is provided to the students with drug-related issues on a weekly basis by the retired teachers who are engaged on a part-time basis with the NSAAC Unit. Parents are always part of the counselling and mentoring programmes, guiding them on how they can help their children at home.

On drug awareness, the Ministry through the NSAAC Unit, also provides posters, booklets, and brochures for drug awareness purposes to students in schools and communities. This is extended during a week-long awareness week in all our schools during the International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking (IDAIT) every year in July.

Teachers share their knowledge about drugs with parents and guardians, when they conduct a community awareness programme or CAPS meeting. The strategies are to assist teachers to comply with the existing procedures in place regarding drug cases, or reporting lines to Head of Schools, parents, and the Police.

I wish to reassure this House, Madam Deputy Speaker, that the MOU through the NSAAC will continue to work in partnership with the Fiji Police Force, also with the Child Welfare Department of the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection, the Ministry of Health, faith-based organisations, and NGOs to ensure proper support is provided to the students so they do not become victims of drug-related activities.

HON. H. CHAND.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to thank the honourable Minister for informing the House on the strategies that the Ministry of Education is taking in tackling drugs in schools. Drug cases in schools are increasing according to the figures. In 2021, it was 2,400; in 2022, it increased to 2,800; in 2023, it increased to 3,500, and out of that 3,500, 2,500 cases were from secondary and 1,000 cases from primary schools. I am glad to hear from the honourable Minister that now, they have got the counsellors but looking at the number of schools that we have in Fiji, I think there is a need for more trained counsellors. I hope the Ministry is working on that.

My question to the honourable Minister for Education is, are there plans to have counsellors in clusters so that these counsellors can provide assistance to schools in a cluster where we will have a smaller number of schools per counsellor so that the counsellors can provide counselling to students and also train the teachers?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO. - I think the honourable Member already knows the answer to that question. We will work with the other Government agencies, especially the Fiji Police, in identifying areas that need counselling, especially red zone schools, to assist us in identifying places where we need to put in these counsellors.

HON. P.D. KUMAR. - I thank the honourable Minister, again, for his response. My question is related to the increase in number of cases. It is just unfortunate that the drug matter has entered into primary school. My question is whether there is any plan to do drug test in schools and it is purely done so that that particular child can be pulled out, counselled better with the parents, et cetera, before that child influences many others into drugs? It is purely from that perspective.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Probably, the honourable Member would have known that you need parental consent to undertake such activities and this is something that is currently a work in progress before we implement this in the school vicinity.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- I would like to ask the honourable Minister about the proportion of drug trafficking in relation to actual drug taking by students. Is it proportionate to drug trafficking within the schools?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I request the honourable Member if could allow me to come back with such data as he has requested.

ADB Loan and Grant Agreement
(Question No. 177/2025)

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

Can the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics update Parliament on the loan and grant agreement with the Asian Development Bank on the Healthy oceans and water supply improvement projects?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.— Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank the honourable Member for his question. I think this is a very important question because we signed the Loan and Grant Agreement with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) last week.

Madam Deputy Speaker, before I elaborate on the specifics of this project, I want to highlight to this House about the current wastewater situation in Fiji and the critical needs in the water and wastewater sector.

Madam Deputy Speaker, it is imperative to understand what exactly wastewater is. Wastewater is water that has become polluted from domestic, industrial and commercial activities. It contains dirty and harmful things, like germs, chemicals and waste is not suitable for direct use or release into the environment. Where does the wastewater go? It goes into the Water Authority of Fiji's reticulation system, gets treated and after treatment, it is released to the oceans.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in Fiji, around 82 percent of people have access to water supply, but the critical matter is that only 28 percent of the population is connected to the central sewerage system. That means that 75 percent of the households in Fiji are not connected to wastewater networks and rely on septic systems. Where do the wastewater go then? Again, it ends up in our rivers, oceans and environment. So, the wastewater infrastructure has been operating beyond capacity for many, many years, posing a major threat to our environment and our oceans.

In fact, we have major capacity challenges with the current sewerage infrastructure, which is not able to support any major economic development in the country and we hear this complaint from the investors all the time.

Madam Deputy Speaker, none of the 11 water treatment plants in Fiji are fully 100 percent environmentally compliant. Many are either operating over capacity or facing mechanical issues, and we seem to have kind of forgotten about this. This problem has not obviously come overnight. This is a result of years of underinvestment and lack of proper asset maintenance, resulting in old, aged and dying infrastructure.

Because of the neglect in aging infrastructure, Madam Deputy Speaker, 48 percent of the water produced in our dams and reservoirs are lost through what we call non-revenue water leakage. In simple terms, that means that treated water that is supposed to flow into the taps does not reach the taps, it gets leaked out.

There are also human resource challenges in the water and wastewater sector, demanding an urgent need for long-term capacity building, not only for Fiji but for the whole region. So, to address these challenges, as I had highlighted, in partnership with the ADB, we have embarked on a major water and wastewater development project for Fiji.

The Healthy Oceans and Water Supply Improvement Project is worth FJ\$385 million. The Project which will double the treatment capacity of the Kinoya Water Treatment Plant and support financing of a performance-based contract for non-revenue water reduction and improve regional capacity in training in the water and wastewater sector.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this is a five-year project between 2026 to 2030. Of the full project cost of \$385 million, the ADB is providing a concessional loan of \$304 million, loan term is 40 years, inclusive of a 10-year grace period at an interest rate of 1 percent. The ADB is also providing a 100 percent grant of FJ\$23 million for regional training and capacity development. Government's contribution is about \$59 million.

The Project has three major outputs:

Output 1 - Focusing on efficiency and reliability of supply services

The project will provide financing for the ongoing performance of what we call the Non-revenue Water Contract, awarded to a Spanish company in December 2024, so the work has already started. The five-year contract aims to reduce the non-revenue water levels in the greater Suva area down to an average of 20 percent. What that means is that at the moment, close to 50 percent of water that is supposed to end up in households and the taps is actually leaking out. So, if we are able to reduce it down to 20 percent, which means that 30 percent more water is actually available, and we would be addressing some of these intermittent supplies, non-supply at certain points in time. That is a very important and significant non-revenue water project output.

Output 2 - Finance the upgrading of the Kinoya Water Treatment Plant

Finance the project up to a capacity of 180,000 equivalent population which is expected to meet demand until 2035, in the Kinoya Catchment Area, and has the scope of expansion to meet future demands. In simple terms, we are doubling the capacity of the Kinoya Waste Treatment Plant and Water Authority of Fiji is working on preparing the tender documents for the upgrade. Bidding and contract awards for Kinoya Waste Treatment Plant will be completed in 2027 and construction work is expected to start in 2028.

Output 3 - Regional Water and Wastewater Operators Training Programme

That will also be established. The project will finance the development and roll out of a regionally accredited water and wastewater training programme to meet Water Authority of Fiji's workforce skills needs and those of other water utilities in the region.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this project has been in preparation for the last two years and it is actually now ready for implementation. I take this opportunity to thank the ADB, Water Authority of Fiji, Ministry of Finance Officials and all other stakeholders that supported in getting this project ready for implementation. I wish to also clarify that this borrowing is within our fiscal targets and investment priority and is in line with the National Development Plan and the Water Sector Strategy 2050.

Before I conclude, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would also like to reiterate that through the last few Budgets, we have continued to increase funding resources to the Water Authority of Fiji to fix the challenges in the water and wastewater sector. The completion of the Viria Water Project added an additional capacity of 40,000m³ of water per day for the greater Suva area and this, no doubt, has been a major investment in the water sector.

We will continue as a Government to ensure that we provide appropriate water, wastewater infrastructure, as well as other programmes that we have to provide clean drinking water to our people in Fiji.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I am glad to see that this work has progressed. It was planned originally as part of the phases from the Viria Water Project, combining that innovative financing package of climate funds, ADB, and also government funding. So, I am glad to see that it is moving on.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I was just noticing that healthy options, probably going to affect the sewerage. I am just wondering is there any component there of burning up the methane or making use of the methane that comes out of Kinoya, or is it entirely this project is just increasing the capacity to clean up the stuff that gets into the ocean? Is there anything about the methane burning or usage there?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, no, it is basically to build capacity.

Written Question

Number and Types of Development Approvals (Question No. 178/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Housing and Local Government inform Parliament on the number and types of development approvals granted by the Department of Town and Country Planning over the past year, including building approvals, subdivision applications and rezoning requests?

¹ HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I hereby submit my response to the question.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, there will be three Bills for consideration today.

FIJI LEARNING INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC SERVICE BILL 2025

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 51, I move:

That the -

- (a) Fiji Learning Institute for Public Service Bill 2025 (Bill No. 32/2025), be considered by Parliament without delay;
- (b) Bill must pass through one stage at a single sitting of Parliament;
- (c) Bill must be immediately referred to the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights;
- (d) Standing Committee must report on the Bill at a later sitting of Parliament; and
- (e) Upon presentation of the report on the Bill by the Standing Committee, the Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament, with the right of reply given to me as the Member moving this motion.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- I beg to second the motion.

¹ Editor's Note: Reply to Written Question No. 178/2025 tabled by the honourable Minister for Housing and Local Government, under Standing Order 45(3), is appended as Annexure I.

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, this Bill has been debated a lot in the Civil Service and in Cabinet, and we have decided to approve it and bring it to this august House. It is a very important Bill, in the improvement of the standard and quality of service that the people of Fiji get out of the civil servants, that is, by establishing for them a learning institute.

I got the idea, Madam Deputy Speaker, while listening to a presentation, the first week after being sworn-in, I told the then Permanent Secretary, Mr. Yogesh Karan, that this is a very good thing to take up, and we should re-establish the Fiji Learning Institute for Public Service – I do not know what it used to be called before, but I went through it a long time ago.

I commend this Bill to the House and for us to give it the proper attention it needs, in Committee stage, et cetera, before it is brought back into the House.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion. Members can speak for up to 20 minutes. At the end of the debate, we will have the right of reply from the honourable Prime Minister.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I think whenever when we talk about Standing Order 51, we always get a bit edgy, but I am glad in this particular case it is being referred to the Committee to look at. For all of us, we have been talking a lot about the training in the Institute for the Public Service. The Committee will have time to go through it, to be able to look at the way in which it will be set up, the change in the stature or the way the organisation is – a private company into a statutory body, and all of those changes. We are glad that it is being given to the Committee to be able to review, and that it will be able to deliver the right kind of training and skillsets in the Civil Service of our country.

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- I thank the honourable Usamate for his input. There will be time, and there will be a lot of time given to us and the public to consult and to give our views forward.

I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put.

Motion agreed.

[Fiji Learning Institute for Public Service Bill 2025 referred to the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights under Standing Order 51]

BURIAL AND CREMATION (AMENDMENT) BILL 2025

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 51, I move:

That the -

- (a) Burial and Cremation (Amendment) Bill 2025 (Bill No. 30/2025), be considered by Parliament without delay;
- (b) Bill must pass through one stage at a single seating of Parliament;
- (c) Bill must be immediately referred to the Standing Committee of Justice, Law and Human Rights;
- (d) Standing Committee must report on the Bill at the November-December sitting of Parliament; and

- (e) Upon presentation of the report on the Bill by the Standing Committee, the Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament, with the right of reply given to me as the Member moving this motion.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- I beg to second the motion, Madam Deputy Speaker.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, the honourable Prime Minister, the honourable Leader of the Opposition and honourable Members of Parliament; I rise to introduce the Burial and Cremation (Amendment) Bill 2025. This Bill seeks to modernise a law, among the oldest in the country, that has guided Fiji's burial and cremation practices for more than a century.

The amendments reflect Government's commitment to ensuring that our legislation is relevant, responsive, and protective of public health, while also respecting Fiji's rich cultural and religious diversity.

Madam Deputy Speaker, by way of background, the Burial and Cremations Act was first enacted in 1911, at a time when Fiji's population was small, urban centres were few, and land pressures were minimal. Its purpose was to establish a legal framework for the orderly licensing, management and operation of burial grounds and crematoria, thereby, protecting public health.

Over the decades, the Act has guided municipal authorities, provincial administrations and health inspectors in ensuring that cemeteries and crematoria were established and operated safely. However, more than 100 years later, many provisions of this law have not kept pace with Fiji's demographic and urban growth. Provisions on measurements remain in imperial units, fines are outdated, and the division of responsibility between different authorities is not always clear.

The Act has provided the legal basis for:

- licensing burial grounds and crematoria;
- enforcing minimum distance requirements between cemeteries and residential areas;
- regulating the disinterment and reburial of human remains; and
- ensuring public health standards during burials and cremations.

However, in practice, there have been challenges, as follows:

- Enforcement has been inconsistent due to outdated penalties.
- Urban centres such as Suva and Lautoka are now facing land shortages and cemetery space has become a pressing issue.
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, temporary emergency measures had to be introduced to manage fatalities from new infectious diseases safely, measures which the current Act does not adequately provide for.

Madam Deputy Speaker, recent consultations have also highlighted the following concerns from the public, communities, and the Fiji Corrections Service, which manages State-owned burial grounds:

- Public concerns have focused on inconsistent processes for the re-opening of graves and the growing difficulties in enforcing standards.
- Authorities' concerns exist in differentiating between cemeteries maintained by the Fiji Corrections Service and those administered by the provincial or faith-based authorities.

The law must make these responsibilities clear.

- Cost concerns are becoming more urgent. The Fiji Corrections Service has raised repeated concerns about the escalating costs of maintaining cemeteries. Opening and re-opening graves has become increasingly expensive, particularly in cases where families have cemented graves, requiring the use of excavators and specialised equipment.
- Fee structures have remained unchanged since 1911. Today, adult burials are charged at \$6 while children's burial at \$4. These fees are vastly out of step with modern costs of maintenance and operations, creating an unsustainable situation both for Fiji Corrections Service and the community-based managers of cemeteries. Even faith-based organisations that manage licensed burial grounds, such as the Raralevu Cemetery Committee, have echoed similar concerns. They face the same financial burden of maintaining burial sites, under a fee regime that does not reflect present-day realities.

Madam Deputy Speaker, please, allow me to illustrate the current challenges further, as follows:

- In Suva and Lautoka, land shortages for cemeteries have caused public anxiety, with families struggling to find burial space. There is ongoing need to acquire more land in urban centres for cemeteries, which continue to be filled up at a rapid rate.
- The Fiji Corrections Service, as managers of the State burial grounds, has reported the financial strain of cemetery upkeep, especially where cemented graves complicate the re-use of plots.
- Faith-based organisations have raised similar concerns, and their participation in consultations reflect a shared understanding that change is necessary.
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, the need to implement COVID-safe burial practices required temporary and significant adjustments to burial and cremation practices, underscoring the need for a modernised legal framework that is responsive to future crises. I am certain that many families experienced farewelling their loved ones in those difficult COVID-19 years under significant alteration in traditional and religious practices that impacted those families mentally and emotionally.

The Burial and Cremation (Amendment) Bill 2025 addresses the following challenges:

- (1) modernising definitions;
- (2) aligning standards;
- (3) strengthening enforcement;
- (4) clarifying authority; and
- (5) protecting public health and dignity.

While the Act provides the legislative framework, much of the operational detail will be addressed through regulations, which include:

- (1) licensing and operational procedures for burial grounds;
- (2) health and safety standards for interment, disinterment and cremation; and
- (3) updated burial and cremation fees to be developed in consultation with stakeholders, such as Fiji Corrections Service, provincial and municipal authorities, faith-based organisations and the general public.

- (4) A necessary review of the existing schedule of fees will ensure fairness, sustainability and consistency across Fiji cemeteries and crematoria. That will also provide resources for long-term maintenance and preserve dignity of these very important sites.

The Bill prioritises the amendments of the following Clauses of the Bill to ensure it reflects current standards of practice:

- (1) Clause 2 – updates definitions.
- (2) Clause 3 – increases fines for unlawful burials.
- (3) Clause 4 – converts imperial measurements into metres.
- (4) Clause 7 – strengthens safeguards for handling and disposal of human remains.
- (5) Clauses 8 and 9 – transfers certain notification responsibilities to the Minister and updates penalties.

I wish to conclude by restating that the Burial and Cremation (Amendment) Bill 2025 seeks to modernise a century-old law to meet Fiji's current realities. It addresses public concerns, clarifies administrative authority, strengthens enforcement, and ensures that burial and cremation services remain safe, respectful and sustainable.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this Bill balances the need for public health protection with respect for cultural and religious traditions. It is a necessary step to ensure that Fiji's laws remain relevant and effective for generations to come.

I commend the Burial and Cremation (Amendment) Bill 2025 to this august House.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion. At the end of the debate, we will have the right of reply from the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services.

However, since no Member wishes to speak, we will now have the right of reply.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I have nothing further to add.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

[Burial and Cremation (Amendment) Bill 2025 referred to the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights under Standing Order 51]

QUARANTINE (AMENDMENT) BILL 2025

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 51, I move:

That the:

- (a) Quarantine (Amendment) Bill 2025 (Bill No. 31/2025), be considered by Parliament without delay;
- (b) Bill must pass through one stage at a single sitting of Parliament;
- (c) Bill must be immediately referred to the Standing Committee of Justice, Law and

- Human Rights;
- (d) Standing Committee must report on the Bill at the November -December Sitting of Parliament;
 - (e) Upon presentation of the Report on the Bill by the Standing Committee, the Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament with the right of reply given to me as the Member moving this motion.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, the honourable Prime Minister, the honourable Leader of the Opposition and honourable Members of Parliament; I rise to introduce the Quarantine (Amendment) Bill 2025. This Bill updates the Quarantine Act of 1964, which is an important Act for the Ministry of Health and Medical Services' roles and functions in safeguarding Fiji's international border for more than six decades now.

The purpose of these amendments is clear, to strengthen our ability to prevent the introduction and spread of infectious diseases, modernise penalties and enforcement, and align Fiji's laws with contemporary international standards, including International Health Regulations of 2005.

Madam Deputy Speaker, when the Quarantine Act was first passed in 1964, it provided the legal foundation for inspecting and regulating ships, aircrafts, cargo and passengers entering Fiji. It empowered Quarantine Officers in carrying out their sacred duty of protecting our borders against transmissible infectious diseases. The Act also established penalties for breaches of provisions and requirements for quarantine purposes.

For decades, this Act has protected Fiji and minimised the impact of infectious diseases in our population, such as influenza, measles, malaria and dengue. In practice, the law has enabled us to inspect incoming vessels and aircrafts; impose quarantine on persons, goods or vessels suspected of carrying infectious diseases; and enforce compliance through penalties. However, times have changed and the world has become increasingly accessible with the advances and development in transportation and information technology. New challenges have emerged. Private yachts, superyachts, cruise liners and international yacht races now arrive in our waters in greater numbers, bringing huge numbers of global travellers to our shores.

The increase in the number and frequency of airplanes arriving at our ports means that greater vigilance at our borders are necessary. Large ships that regularly berth at our seaports, traverse large oceans and berth at many international ports, more than that we used to have before, which requires our close monitoring of disease patterns in these nations and their ports of entry.

The penalties in the Act are also outdated and no longer serve as a deterrent. Some administrative powers lack clarity, creating challenges at the very point where vigilance matters most - our borders.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Bill is necessary because Fiji must remain vigilant against the introduction of deadly diseases. Our greatest concern in the Pacific region is the spread of malaria by the Anopheles mosquito. Several of our neighbouring countries in the South Pacific have malaria as an endemic disease. If malaria is introduced here, it would not go away. It would remain in Fiji, causing debilitating illness, suffering and death for generations.

We must be clear that no level of foreign investment or economic gain can ever compensate for the cost of malaria in our communities. Prevention is not optional – it is a matter of national survival. That is why we require vessels and aircrafts from malaria-infected ports to enter only

through designated ports of entry, where strict checks are enforced. This Bill strengthens that safeguard.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we have also learned lessons from our recent experience with COVID-19. The Quarantine Act provided the legal foundation of many of our response measures, from recognising and legalising COVID-19 as a quarantinable infectious disease to restrictions on entry and on quarantine isolation requirements.

However, gaps in enforcement and outdated penalties created challenges. In our response, we, the Ministry, established the Border Health Protection Unit at Namaka, Nadi, with the support of Civil Aviation Authority of Fiji, to strengthen our roles and functions at international borders. This Bill draws on those lessons, ensuring that we are better prepared for the next pandemic.

The Bill proposes a number of very important amendments, such as modernising definitions, strengthening enforcement and introducing six penalty notices of \$500 to \$1,000 for timely enforcement, improving preparedness and enhancing legal clarity.

During COVID-19, unclear penalties and enforcement procedures created delays at our international ports and airports. Increased maritime traffic now require explicit legal authority for the inspection of yachts, superyachts and cruise liners.

Currently, a uniform clearance fee of \$1,000 applies to all vessel types - from private jets to cruise liners. This structure is not sustainable. A tiered fee structure, as provided under this Bill, is fairer, more practical and ensures cost recovery for the level of inspection required. These changes recognise the cost of containing an imported outbreak, whether malaria, measles or another pandemic pathogen, would be far greater than the cost of prevention.

The Bill also provides flexibility by leaving detailed operational matters to regulations. This will cover quarantine protocols, inspection requirements and enforcement procedures. This ensures that Fiji can adjust quickly to emerging health threats, aided by a robust and responsive legal framework, and guided by international best practice.

Madam Deputy Speaker, to conclude, the Quarantine (Amendment) Bill 2025 is not just about updating an old law, it is about protecting Fiji's future. It modernises our border health framework, enhances enforcement, strengthens preparedness, and ensures that our borders remain strong against the introduction of deadly diseases, like malaria, as well as future pandemics. This is a Bill that safeguards lives, safeguards our economy and our nation.

I commend the Bill to this august House.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion. At the end of the debate, we will have the right of reply from the honourable Minister. Members who wish to speak can speak up to 20 minutes and the floor is now open for any Member who wishes to contribute. I see you have it easy today, honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services. No one is getting up.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I might as well take the floor. This is an important Bill.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I can recall what we went through during the COVID-19 pandemic. The National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) had to provide its sealeg boats for the superyachts and yachts in Denarau so that they can provide this very much needed help and, of

course, the difficulties that we had in the isolation facilities. It is time that we modernise our role so that we can prepare for the next one. That is all about resilience, how we can prepare better for the next one.

I thank the honourable Minister and the Ministry, and we look forward to further dialogue and engagement when the Bill is further processed.

HON. J. USAMATE.- I thought I would accompany the honourable Leader of the Opposition. One of the important things that I have noticed during quarantine is that, sometimes there can be a conflict between what the Ministry of Health wants to do and what the owners of the airlines, et cetera, want to do. As the former Minister for Health, I have had that problem. I hope that those sorts of issues are addressed here, to make it very clear that at the end of the day, it is the health that matters.

As I am in the Committee, I am looking forward to addressing that situation, so we do not get into arguments on whether business is more important than health. Hopefully, this Bill will address that.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank the honourable Leader of the Opposition and honourable Usamate for their comments. Rightly so in terms of the Quarantine Act, I do believe that we have lessons learnt in terms of what has to be reprioritised in health and the business part of doing things. Nevertheless, that is something that is included in the amendments.

I look forward to the Committee's return on the amendments as stipulated in the Bill today. Without further ado, I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

[Quarantine (Amendment) Bill 2025 referred to the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights under Standing Order 51]

GOVERNMENT GUARANTEE – FIJI SUGAR CORPORATION LIMITED

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Deputy Speaker, for the purpose of Section 145(1) of the Constitution and pursuant to Standing Order 131, I move:

That Parliament:

- (a) approves the increase in Government guarantee for the Fiji Sugar Corporation Limited domestic borrowings by \$100 million to \$300 million for the period 1st August, 2022 to 31st May, 2028 (guarantee period); and
- (b) that the Fiji Sugar Corporation be exempted from paying any guarantee fee.

HON. RO. F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Deputy Speaker, as we all know, the Fiji Sugar Corporation (FSC) is not, in many ways, an ordinary entity. It was always considered to be the backbone of the sugar industry, an industry that -

- still has over 10,500 sugarcane farmers;
- supports thousands of rural households, landowners and many others who are associated with the industry; and
- remains a key contributor to the economy and livelihoods.

I will skip the history, but FSC, as you know, was established in 1972 through an Act of Parliament with three sugar mills - Lautoka, Rarawai on Viti Levu, and Labasa on Vanua Levu

Most recently, Madam Deputy Speaker, in May 2024, Parliament approved an additional \$95 million in Government guarantee. This guarantee has enabled FSC to keep our mills running, pay our farmers on time, and maintain thousands of jobs. Today, FSC has nearly exhausted the \$200 million guarantee limit with only \$35 million remaining. As of 31st July, 2025, FSC's outstanding borrowings guaranteed by Government stood at \$323.6 million, of which \$262.5 million is covered by domestic Government guarantee, and \$61.1 million is covered by offshore Government guarantee.

The sugar industry, as we all know, is at a pivotal point. It faces the combined pressures of declining cane supply, fluctuating global sugar prices, climate challenges and operational disruptions. FSC, Madam Deputy Speaker, however, remains a high-risk entity, amongst all other guaranteed entities, given its insolvent status, and incurring significant losses during the last 10 years. Honourable Members who are on the other side, who were in government at that time, would remember that we quite rightly said that FSC was insolvent - we said that in Opposition and I am saying that in Government.

In July 2024, Government had to approve the write-off of Government debt owed by FSC to Government, amounting to \$200 million. This debt write-off by the Government is expected to significantly enhance FSC's liquidity and financial position, which is reflected in FSC's 2025 financial year. Madam Deputy Speaker, FSC continues to rely heavily on Government's financial support to ensure business continuity.

Over the past two decades, cane production has dropped by more than 40 percent - from \$2 million in 2011 to just \$1.33 million in 2024, largely due to prolonged drought and many other operational productivity issues. While production is expected to increase to \$1.56 million tonnes in 2025, which is largely through some very good initiatives put forward by the Government, as well as industry stakeholders, but we are still well below our potential.

Madam Deputy Speaker, compounding these challenges, the devastating fire at the Rarawai Mill, which halted operations, caused serious damage. As the honourable Minister explained the other day, Government has immediately put in place strategies to ensure that all cane is harvested and FSC's already stretched resources are not stretched any further.

Land under sugarcane has reduced from a previously high of 74,000 hectares to just under 50,000 hectares in 2025, and many of our crops are old ratoons with low productivity. Grower numbers have fallen, but FSC is now focused on strengthening the most productive farmers, while encouraging new entrants to targeted programmes.

Madam Deputy Speaker, despite the setbacks, we must acknowledge the important intervention made by FSC, with Government support, in the last two-and-a-half-years:

- We now have 900 farmers who have been brought back into farming through the share-farming arrangements.
- Online soil testing and fertilizer prescription systems have been rolled out.
- New cane varieties with high yields and resilience have been introduced.

- 162 tractor service providers as new mechanical implements are supporting farmers to overcome labour shortages.
- Cage bins and mechanised harvesting solutions have been introduced to strengthen rail operations.
- Recently in the news, the honourable Minister was explaining that a hilly terrain harvester has been introduced, which is under trial, but showing promising signs of cutting cane in the hilly areas.

Those are some of the building blocks of a modernised industry and FSC needs financing to sustain and expand those initiatives.

Madam Deputy Speaker, FSC urgently requires an additional \$100 million in guarantee cover to:

- Stabilise working capital.
- Access cheaper local financing instead of costly borrowings. That makes sense because unless we have a Government guarantee, the lenders are not going to look at FSC kindly and, perhaps, not provide the cheaper local financing that is required.
- Ensure timely payments to cane farmers.
- Protect mill jobs.
- Maintain uninterrupted milling operations.

Without this additional guarantee, FSC's financing options will shrink, interest costs will rise, and the pressure on farmers and mill workers will become unbearable.

Madam Deputy Speaker, FSC is not just asking for financing. In some ways, we are saying that with this guarantee, FSC will have to chart a strategic path forward. As we have said before, we are working on that. The strategic path forward would involve:

- (1) Planning for a new state-of-the-art 10,000 TCD fully automated sugar mill. Investing in talent acquisition, training and digitalisation of mill operations.
- (2) Expanding cane cultivation from 31,700 hectares to 38,000 hectares by 2030.
- (3) Restoring 3,000 hectares of old ratoons annually, which is a big problem that the sugar industry is plagued with.
- (4) Increasing productivity from 47 tonnes to 55 tonnes per hectare. That has been an ongoing issue of why we are not that productive, compared to some of the other sugar producers around the world.
- (5) Scaling up mechanisation and drone technology for cane management.
- (6) Reducing burnt cane and extraneous matter, while introducing a cane quality payment system.

In terms of financial implications, Madam Deputy Speaker, the total Government guaranteed debt stood at \$1,016.9 million, or 7.3 percent of GDP at the end of July 2025. With FSC accessing an additional \$100 million, guaranteed borrowings will increase the total Government guarantee exposure to \$1.1 billion, or 8 percent of GDP.

Again, Madam Deputy Speaker, when we talk about Government guarantee, in most cases, these guarantees are not called, but as I have said earlier, the risk of guarantees being called for FSC is much higher than other entities. In the event of a default, Government will be liable for the guaranteed borrowings of FSC. FSC has defaulted in the past, for example, it had already defaulted on \$25 million worth of bonds in 2019 with the Fiji National Provident Fund, where there was a call on the guarantee, and the Government paid the FSC's outstanding debt of \$26.7 million, inclusive of

accrued interest rates, to the FNPF. That was in 2019.

The Ministry of Finance, Madam Deputy Speaker, will work with FSC to monitor the restructuring efforts of the Board and management of FSC, and we are sending a very clear signal to the honourable Minister, the Board and management of FSC, that we need to undertake some of these restructuring efforts and ensure that we add operational efficiency within the FSC.

Also, as we have announced and when we were in the Opposition, we always used to call for a Special Parliamentary Committee on Sugar, and that will be chaired by the honourable Prime Minister, who has the experience as Prime Minister before, in dealing with crises in the sugar industry. We hope that a bipartisan committee will look at some of these strategic issues that we can undertake.

With those words, Madam Deputy Speaker, I respectfully commend this motion to the House and request honourable Members to support the motion.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, with the purposes of complying with the Standing Orders with respect to sitting times, I now call upon the Leader of the Government in Parliament, to move a suspension motion.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

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

That under Standing Order 6, so much of Standing Order 23(1) is suspended so as to allow the House to sit beyond 4.30 p.m. to complete the remaining items listed in today's Order Paper.

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

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Madam Deputy Speaker, in addition to the current motion on FSC, we have to discuss the review report on the Reserve Bank of Fiji and the Investment Fiji Annual Report.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion, if any.

(No contribution from honourable Members)

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I am noting a lack of energy in the room, so with that, we will now suspend proceedings for a tea break. Parliament will resume in half an hour, and we will begin with honourable Parveen Bala in the debate.

The Parliament adjourned at 4.01 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON THE GOVERNMENT GUARANTEE – FIJI SUGAR CORPORTION

The Parliament resumed at 4.40 p.m.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- It is good to see that energy levels have gone up and I hope we will keep it that way until we adjourn this evening.

Honourable Members the floor is now open for debate on the motion before the House - the motion from the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics. I have a list with me and at the end of the debate, we will have a right of reply from the honourable Deputy Prime Minister. You have 20 minutes each.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to briefly contribute to the debate on this motion for a Government guarantee to the Fiji Sugar Corporation (FSC). We are, once again, in this Chamber asked to approve millions in public funds to prop up an industry that under the Minister's watch, is in a state of acute crisis.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. P.K. BALA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, it is almost bankrupt.

The honourable Minister for Sugar assured us all the time that the industry is progressing. However, I must clearly state that real progress is measured by decreasing our national risks and not demanding more. This motion is not a sign of recovery, it is a sign of desperation and systemic failure.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we must question, not just this guarantee, but the one approved on 5th September, 2024, where is the development? Where is the return on investment? Millions have been spent with the promise of repair works, yet the result is the same. The money is absorbed, the mills continue to flatter, and the farmers are left poorer.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the taxpayer bill; this is not free money, it is a liability, it is the ordinary Fijians who will be left with the bill when the Corporation cannot repay.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the most compelling evidence of the Ministry's failure in planning oversight is the recent disaster at the Rarawai Mill. The recent fire at the Rarawai Mill in Ba is a perfect and tragic example of FSC and the Ministry of Sugar's failure. That single incident has completely stopped all milling operations for the entire Rakiraki, Ba and Tavua corridor for, at least, two to three months.

Madam Deputy Speaker, at this juncture, let me clarify the misconception of the \$15 cane transfer allowance. This \$15 has always been there. What farmers were asking if that can be topped up and I remember raising this earlier in the week, but we were told that this is a new allocation. It is not a new allocation, let me make it very clear. They know very well, but if they can increase that \$15, let me stand here and say that, at least, you people have done something for the lorry operators.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the farmers in Viti Levu now face real financial issues because they cannot sell their harvest. Our cane lorry operators are facing crippling weight two to three days at the Lautoka Mill. This is a fact. We can yes and no here, one just has to go out from here and spend some time at Lautoka Mill, then you will see the reality. Drivers come all the way from Rakiraki and Ba, and they have to stay overnight. Our cane lorry operators are facing crippling weights, as I

mentioned for two to three days at Lautoka Mill.

The wider industry is paralysed because the entire sugar economy of Viti Levu is dependent on the functioning of the Mill. Madam Deputy Speaker, let us not forget, Rakiraki, Tavua and Ba are all dependent on FSC. It is an agro-based town. For Tavua, we may say because of Fiji Water, but Rakiraki, Tavua and Ba are all dependent on FSC.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the promise of a new mill for Rakiraki, where is it? Its continued absence is a betrayal. Therefore, our support for the guarantee is a conditional acceptance of a green reality, surely for the people caught in this disaster.

We support this guarantee, Madam Deputy Speaker, only in the interest of farmers, who are facing financial issues and must be paid for their cane. We support this guarantee only for the interest of the mill workers, whose livelihoods hang in the balance.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. P.K. BALA.- This is the problem with him. He says he is the Minister for Transport and Leader of the Government in Parliament, but day before yesterday he said that Standing Committees go out and have grog. You are implying that to your own Members? Who all are the Members of the Committee, only Opposition Members? Please, stop all the nonsense!

Madam Deputy Speaker, we support this guarantee, only for the cane lorry operators and drivers, whose jobs are threatened by the waiting time at Lautoka Mill. Let us not forget, we are all voted here by the people are we are here for the people, and we will always say that we have been told.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the time for excuses is over. It is time for the honourable Minister to take decisive actions, it is time to fix the mill, not just fund the failures. Just last night, we were told that FSC is now in the process of transferring sugar from Labasa to Lautoka using the barge because there is no space at the Labasa Bulk. Only 9,000 tonnes of sugar have been shipped, and the next shipment is due at the end of October. Looks like, it is very difficult to sell our sugar, but I leave it to the honourable Minister for Sugar to confirm this.

Madam Deputy Speaker, before I take my seat, there is a cane payment before Diwali. Considering the hardship the farmers and their families are going through, we urge the Government, because this is talk on the ground, the farmers are expecting \$15 per tonne and if that can be confirmed by the Government or the honourable Minister responsible.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to support the motion moved by the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister Finance, Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics on the proposed increase in the Government's Guarantee for the Fiji Sugar Corporation from \$200 million to \$300 million. Before I go on my speech proper, the mill issues are not something new. Again, I am not going to blame specifically anyone but had we not removed the Rakiraki Mill, this is when all the Members who are now complaining, you should have stopped and got that mill repaired, we would not have this problem today. At least we would have another as a backup. Then again, if we are looking at why the FSC has not turnaround, history will tell you that the problem started after 2006. Until Qarase's Government was there, the sugar industry was thriving. Everything started dismantling after that. Then again, just outside I was told that FSC had made some profit in 2015. They did not make profit, they sold FSC land to FNPF to bail out

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Land issue.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Not land issue.

They tried to balance the books. Do not fool yourself and do not fool us.

(Laughter)

(Honourable Members interject)

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Order, honourable Members.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- When honourable Bala said that it is my fault, we have been there only for two years.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Three years now.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Alright, give us another year. But having that, the rust that you have left there, we had to clean it; 16 years of rust.

I was left in an ocean, and I had to swim back. I love people like that to swim with me and let us see who can float and who can swim back.

(Laughter)

This increase in guarantee is not just about financing. It is about giving our industry the lifeline and the confidence it needs to put the bold plans into motion that have been designed to transform and modernise this industry. The reality is that over the past few years, the cane production declined to a worrying level, hitting a low of \$1.3 million tonnes in 2024. But through the initiatives and the programme of this Coalition Government that has introduced and strengthened, we are already seeing signs of revival.

For the current season, we are confident of achieving a production of 1.56 million tonnes of cane from 1.2 million. This is not a coincidence; it is a direct result of the deliberate intervention by the Government and the confidence being restored among the growers. The industry target is to increase production by at least 200,000 tonnes per year and we will not sit back. We will work tirelessly with the growers, FSC and all stakeholders to ensure that the trajectory of the growth continues.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this Coalition Government is absolute clear that our farmers must receive a fair and just return for their labour, unlike in the past when the support often lacked direction, we have now introduced manual harvesting support, provide assistance to the new farmers to access land and renew leases and establish targets, result-based incentives to drive production, et cetera. These interventions are not on a piecemeal, they are restoring hope for our growers and laying a stronger and more sustainable foundation for the future of our sugar industry.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the recent fire at Rarawai Mill has only exacerbated the need to support this motion. On 19th September, just two days after the fire, I joined the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance at Rarawai to witness first-hand the devastating damage of the powerhouse and the critical control systems. We were standing with the farmers and gave them our promise that this Coalition Government will not abandon them in this time of crisis. To give effect to that commitment, the Government has already stepped in to cover the \$15 per tonne transport cost for the lorry drivers hauling cane from Rarawai to Lautoka Mill. This is not a token gesture; it is a deliberate intervention to ensure farmers are not penalised for the circumstances beyond their

control.

Behind the scenes, FSC has moved quickly to assess the damage and commence recovery efforts. However, the repairs required are expensive and time sensitive. Cables, transformers and critical control panels must all be sourced and installed before the operation can resume. Following a meeting with FSC on Tuesday, my Permanent Secretary, Dr. Vinesh Kumar was informed that the revised preliminary target for resuming the mill operation is 10th December. While this date remains tentative, I have already instructed FSC to accelerate their efforts. The assurance I can give is this, if the necessary supplies arrive in Fiji within a reasonable timeframe, will have the mill operating before 10th December.

As of 30th September, it was estimated over \$355,000 tonnes of cane was still awaiting crushing in Lautoka, Rarawai and Penang Mill. In August, a total of approximately 19,000 tonnes remained in the Lautoka Mill area while a further 265,000 tonnes allocated within the Rarawai and Penang zones. At present, the Lautoka Mill is processing between 4,500 tonnes to 5,500 tonnes of cane per day. Should the Rarawai Mill unable to start operations this season, projections indicate that the crushing for 2025 crop should be completed until sometime between mid-December and the first week of January 2026.

Madam Deputy Speaker, these are not easy days for the industry, but they reinforce exactly why FSC must have financial stability and support to withstand the crisis, modernise operations and plan for the future, including the establishment of a new modern mill for Viti Levu. The guarantee will enable FSC to stabilise its finance, ensure timely payments for farmers and safeguard thousands of jobs and deliver Government's vision of a stronger and more resilient sugar industry.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I strongly support this motion. It is about sustaining over 10,000 cane growers in the rural communities and reaffirming our commitment to this industry will have to be supported. The sugar industry has faced storms before and with unity, resilience and commitment, we will emerge stronger. I support the motion.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, this is the motion that continuously comes to the House with respect to the Fiji Sugar Corporation. I think everyone is touched on the fact that we are talking about the livelihood of 10,500 odd people, and every government has done what it can to ensure that it somehow stays afloat. We are talking about rural households. We are talking about landowners. We are talking about grassroots people who still are in survival mode.

Madam Deputy Speaker, what needs to be realised and what needs to stop is the pontificating that goes on, "When you were there, you did not do this and that", because we could have done the same thing when we were in government about the previous government. It is not a singular government's fault. It is something that each successive government has inherited.

Get on with the job, honourable Minister! It has been three years now where certain promises have been made about making sure that the industry moves on, and I want to remind the honourable Minister for Sugar that on the Ministry of Finance's Government website, there is a particular page which deals with sugar - it is a fact sheet. On that fact sheet, Madam Deputy Speaker, there are considerable number of things that are said that need to happen. I will just run through a few of them so that we are reminded of what the thoughts are and what has been done.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we have no choice but, yes, we will support the motion because it is not my industry, it is not their industry, it is the people's industry. It is also a part of our economy, and we must support it. However, let me remind the honourable Minister that on that particular Ministry of Finance's page, it refers to our future policies and strategies with respect to the sugar

industry.

The first one talks about implementation of cogeneration. Have we heard something about that from the honourable Minister in the last three years? I do not think so, Madam Deputy Speaker. It says something about improving industry governance through the introduction of relevant legislation to support reform and reorganisation for growth of the industry, but I am not sure if we have literally heard anything about that either.

Madam Deputy Speaker, it states about negotiating trade agreements and exploring new export opportunities. Have we heard something about that? We have not. Have we heard something about promoting programmes to entice young and active farmers into sugarcane farming? No, we have not, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The fact that they needed to establish FSC-owned farms to support production, yes, I agree a bit of work has gone on in that specific area. They also spoke about establishing training programmes to educate farmers on modern agricultural practices, technology adoption and business management. Very little has been heard in the last three years about that. =On implementing and promoting quality standards for Fijian sugar to meet international requirements, very little has been heard, except for the blame game going on.

Madam Deputy Speaker, on encouraging value-added sugar products, we have been crying here for almost two years now with respect to sustainable aviation fuels and where it could take our industry. That is one of the most expensive things that you can purchase now, and all we need to do is get it off the ground and start thinking about it. But have we heard anything, apart from this side of the House and honourable Minister for Tourism? Have we heard anything from the Minister for Sugar? No, we have not!

Madam Deputy Speaker, establishing refining processing centres between locations and improving cane access roads, yes, perhaps, there are some cane access roads that were done, to the kindness of the Ministry of Transport.

On enhancing farming in unutilised arable land, how much of that has taken place, Madam Deputy Speaker? Absolutely none! On increasing cane production to 2 million tonnes per annum? Now, correct me if I am wrong, how much are we producing now? Have you gotten anywhere near that? No, we have not!

On encouraging intercropping in sugarcane fields, that was actually happening from a long time ago. Have we heard anything from the honourable Minister on the development of climate-resilient cane varieties? No, we have not!

Madam Deputy Speaker, the value chain addition that needs to happen is probably the way to go, to get this industry out of this loop. We have year-on-year looked at adding to the guarantee, \$200 million, add another \$100 million, so all the money that FSC owes, how is it going to be ever paid back? I can tell you this much, it is an industry that must survive. It cannot just be wiped off the face of the earth, because that many people are involved in it.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we must face cold, hard facts. It is no use standing here and blaming anyone with respect to what has transpired in the industry - it is time to move on. I have sat here and heard the same thing for the last three years, "When you were there, you did not do this". Let me tell the honourable Minister for Sugar, you just spoke about rust - *murcha mircha se nahi nikli*. It will not come out with chilli, is the saying in Hindustani. Basically, I am saying, you want to talk about it, it is a rust, you people never did anything about it. He has had three years to do it, but he has not.

The point here is, Madam Deputy Speaker, that it is our industry. You have to start thinking that this is our industry. You will get all the encouragement that you can from this side of the House, if you are going forward thinking and actually looking at what the Ministry of Finance has put on its website with respect to the fact sheet that exists with respect to the industry. That is literally a good paper. It is perfect, it tells you how to do things.

We have got tremendous development partners who are involved in the same industry who can help us get the FSC out of its mess. We have trade agreements that can be done with countries that I know for a fact want our sugar, but we cannot because we just do not supply enough. Where is the problem? I am looking forward to the actual Committee that has been put together for sugar to sit down and knock heads in order to get to a solution that is best for Fiji.

Madam Deputy Speaker, let me remind this House of a little bit of history and how sugar was looked after many moons ago. I remember this because the late Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, who was the President at that time told me this story. He said that whenever there was something for sugar, and because my late father was also the Leader of the Opposition then, he would literally ring him up and said, "Sid, let's go." Then they would go. He said, "We sat at the same table, next to each other, decided for the sake of Fiji what the industry needed, and it was done."

Madam Deputy Speaker, can we do that now? I do not think so because of the way people think and because of how it is actually done at the moment, there is too much animosity with respect to an industry that requires nurturing again. It requires us to be one. It requires all of us to be Fijian with respect to the industry.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- No, honourable Minister!

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Order, order!

Honourable Members, please, address the Chair.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, to me, that lesson says a lot.

The honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics will appreciate that if we start thinking like that, we can do a lot. This is an industry that requires assistance. Of course, we will say 'yes' to the guarantee, we increase it, but the mindset needs to change. Stop blaming people!

When you produce documents like this and put them up on your website, remember, it is going to be scrutinised, it is going to be looked at, it is going to be looked at in Parliament as to how much of it have you actually done.

He spoke about the land that was sold off to pay the debts, but guess what? It went to FNPF, it did not go overseas. It is actually designated for a good area. They have got money for it.

(Chorus of interjections)

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Members!

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I think he really needs to probably be a bit more eloquent. I did not take it, but do not say it is my land now. It went to FNPF, it was a necessary

action at the time and just so you do know, it was going to be designated for an economic free zone. It is not something that is going to waste, honourable Minister. You need to do your research.

Madam Deputy Speaker, that is what I meant – the attitude with respect to the person responsible for that particular industry needs to front up. We are far too gone to start arguing about whose fault. The sugarcane farmers need us. Those people in the rural households need us. The landowners who give up their precious land with respect to that, they need us. If we just started there, we would probably come up with a better solution or even the solutions that are currently offered by the Ministry of Finance on its website.

With those few words, Madam Deputy Speaker, I hope and pray for the sake of the industry that people's attitude changes with respect to this issue and we learn how to live together in something, and we learn how to back each other up and we learn how to just shoulder the responsibility and get it done.

With those few words, Madam Deputy Speaker, I support the motion.

HON. S. TUBUNA.- Madam Deputy Speaker. I rise to speak on the motion that Parliament to approve the increase in government guarantee of the Fiji Sugar Corporation's domestic borrowings by \$100 million to \$300 million for the period 1st August, 2022 to 31st May, 2028.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Fiji sugar sector plays an important role in the growth of our economy. It contributes to the well-being of approximately 11,000 farmers who depend on it for their livelihood. They account for about 1.1 percent of the GDP and contribute to 4.5 percent of export earnings.

There has been quite a lot of issues that have been raised on the cyclical downward swing of the industry. I think there are a lot of issues that has been raised, but there are a lot of factors that has continuously caused the problem that we have. One of them was the EU prices that was withdrawn a few years back. I still remember 20 years back, we were told that the prices will be withdrawn. Of course, for government to take an active step in trying to restructure the industry. Unfortunately, that has not been done. What we are having now is the consequences of not taking the action 30 years back, I presume.

There has been a lot of efforts by past governments to address this. I remember I saw one Sugar Action Plan set in 2013 which tried to come up with a number of policy issues to address the declining industry. We had the National Sugar Industry Programme (NSIP) 2019-2023. This was implemented by the previous government in 2019, but has not succeeded, because most of them are remedial actions which focus on treating the symptoms rather than addressing the root cause of the underlying problem that we are facing.

One of the things that we need to look at is how much land is currently being devoted to sugarcane farming. With approximately 50,000 hectares of land allocated with contracts to supply mills, only about 24,000 hectares are actually utilised for sugarcane farming. There is a drastic decline in the areas devoted to sugarcane. When the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs was touring Lomawai, we noted the substantial thousands of acres. Nothing was being done. Those farmers have left. Honourable Koroilavesau, will attest this because we were there. Someone was planting cassava, but thousands of acres in Lomawai are not being utilised.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Office of the Prime Minister, a few months back, went to the Ra Province where we initiated with the private sector, Near Valley Co-operative in Sabeto, an initiative to plant cowpea in most of the land around Rakiraki. We noted that quite a substantial portion of the

land there is not being utilised. We went around the *Tikina* of Nalawa, the Tui Nalawa is here, he will attest to this – Tokaimalo, Saivou, Nakorotubu and Rakiraki.

We calculated, over 2,000 acres of land there is not being used. So, we said, “Okay, we start this project from here.” We started from where the demand is in terms of the private sector, Near Valley Co-operative based in Nadi. We started from there and they were demanding 5,000 tonnes of cowpea or *bora*. So, from there, then we walked backwards and tried to look at the farmers that we are trying to develop. We are targeting about 10,000 farmers and currently we are currently looking at 10,000 farmers are being supported through the sugarcane.

One of the issues that we face, when we are supporting a particular crop, we are also forfeiting the support that is going to other alternative crops. It is common sense because we are providing funds of \$100 million for this one, but on the other side, you have other crops such as coconut, ginger, *yaqona*, et cetera, where we are forfeiting the farmers of the support that they need but they are quite economically viable. We see that the same approach could be done maybe to a new sugar industry. The problem now that we see, we are just looking at short-term issues without addressing the whole of the industry in terms of trying to restructure it, in order for the industry to be profitable.

The honourable Koya has raised an important point on Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF). There was a study by ADB last year on this, and of course, Government has to come up with its policy on SAF and how SAF is going to be developed. I think the Committee has to address that. When we look at SAF and the demand for Fiji, even Fiji Airways with its demand of approximately \$1 billion of sustainable aviation fuel. Those are the sort of things that we need to be mindful of, the market is there. We need to work backwards. What is the right structure needed? We have to do an economic analysis and value chain to ensure that we have a profitable industry, and ten years down the line, we do not need to come and ask Parliament for this guarantee. I think that is all from my side and I thank all the Members who have contributed to the motion. I fully support the motion before the House.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I also rise to contribute to the motion that is on the floor of this august House. I will try not to repeat most of what has been said, but if I do repeat some, it just confirms the fact that they are so significant, relevant and needs attention.

I do agree with honourable Koya, enough of the pontification. Let us take this industry forward because all the finger pointing and blaming will not take us anywhere. Madam Deputy Speaker, this is a very important motion concerning the future of Fiji Sugar Corporation and by extension, the sugar industry and the thousands of Fijians who rely on it.

Sugar is more than just an economic sector to Fiji. It is part of our history, our identity and our communities. Generations of families depended on it for their livelihood, and towns and regions are built around this industry. As such, the decisions like the one before us today must be taken with the utmost seriousness. They carry consequences not only for the financial health of the Fiji Sugar Corporation, but for the wellbeing of farmers, mill workers, transport operators and the rural economy as a whole again.

Again, Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish to make it clear from the outset that we in the Opposition support the measures aimed at sustaining and revitalising the sugar industry. We understand that government guarantees, when used responsibly, can provide essential breathing space and financial support to key sectors. However, support for the industry does not mean unconditional support for everything that is brought to this House. It is our responsibility as leaders, as legislators to scrutinise, to question and to ensure that public money and public risk are being carefully looked

at and used wisely as well. A government guarantee is not free money, and the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance has stated it very clearly. He loves talking about contingent liabilities in the past. Those contingent liabilities will always be there, and we hope that these guarantees will not be called if FSC defaults.

Let us hope for the best and remain optimistic, Madam Deputy Speaker. Therefore, we must treat this motion not as a routine administrative matter, but as a significant decision that deserves thorough debate and careful considerations. Enough has been shared about the FSC's continued struggles. I remember in the debate last year, the honourable Minister shared with us that he was asked by the honourable Prime Minister, are we milking the wrong cow? His response was, "No, we have the right cow, but we have the wrong people doing the milking". Then he went on to share that the cows were feeding on dry grass. What else is wrong this time that the honourable Minister will come up with? Let us get it fixed. Enough of the excuses. Let us get serious with it. We all know about the decline in the production for various reasons, and I thank the honourable Faiyaz Koya for highlighting some of the key contributing factors to the downward spiral of production in all the sugar-growing sectors both on Viti Levu and Vanua Levu.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the financial performance has been poor as well, and here we are with another request for an increase in the Government guarantee. Back in 2022, the Government guarantee was around \$95 million. In 2024, we increased the Government guarantee by another \$105 million to bring the government guarantee to \$200 million. Now, we are asking for an additional \$100 million to take the Government guarantee to \$300 million, from \$95 million to \$300 million.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I recall the honourable Deputy Prime Minister's article in October 2019 claiming that the FijiFirst Government has made the FSC bankrupt. Again, we can go on with the blame game, but the Government guarantee has increased from \$95 million to \$300 million. Are we improving, or is it getting worse? Again, we support the Government guarantee.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I am thankful that the honourable Minister has admitted that this is not an ordinary entity. Now, that you are in the wheelhouse, you better understand how difficult it is. Again, our responsibility is to salvage the industry because of so many people depend on it. It is an ordinary entity, and now they are going through extraordinary situations. I am thankful that in his initial delivery on the motion, the honourable Deputy Prime Minister has assured us about FSC having to chart a strategic way forward. *Me vala*, it has to be done. Enough of the plans. Honourable Tubuna was praised by the honourable Koroilavesau, here last year about the FAO Report.

We still have not seen the light of the FAO Report. We agreed about having that Special Committee under Section 109 of the Standing Orders, we are still waiting for the convening of the first meeting. I ask the honourable Minister in the last sitting of Parliament, what is the progress? He asked me to ask the honourable Deputy Prime Minister.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Too much talk.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- The honourable Deputy Prime Minister, we are still working on the terms of reference. When will we have the terms of reference completed? Let us get forward to help perhaps with the strategic development path that has already been charted by the FSC through the board and the management as well, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Just a few suggestions while we await with much anticipation a convening of the special committee. We need transparency and proper reporting, because as all the speakers have agreed, we need to fix the problem. For us, we need transparency, FSC, through its audit reports, the annual reports and what is important is the utilisation of these Government guarantees. It must be utilised

with responsibility. I, for one, and am sure most honourable Members of this House will agree.

Again, this is not grandstanding. Honourable Minister for Sugar, if part of this guarantee will help in alleviating the concerns, the worries that our farmers have because of the extraordinary situation that they are going through, because of the loss, or the temporary loss of the Rarawai Mill, if it means that it will bring some relief and some further assistance provided to the farmers, then this is well utilisation of this Government guarantee or this loan that we are going to endorse today, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Again, I emphasise clear reporting and transparency in everything that we do. We all know about the history of the industry. Let us be transparent, and I hope that we, as patriotic sons of Fiji, take this responsibility seriously and move forward with bipartisan spirit from both sides of the floor.

Clear performance benchmarks —we leave it in the good hands of the honourable Minister, but this is something that we will have to demand from those who are responsible at all levels - at the board level, operational level, and all the sectors. There must be clear performance benchmarks and measurable outcomes, because otherwise we will just be dreaming and hoping, but nothing is actually happening.

The honourable Minister, again, the Deputy Prime Minister has talked about the strategic way forward. I thought of talking about the comprehensive restructure plan, but I do not want to say much at this stage because, again, in anticipation of the convening of the special committee, I am sure most of this will be taken care of.

I also agree with the honourable Tubuna and a few others, some of these key major decisions, strategic decisions, should have been taken long ago. It is our time now, that will be our legacy, that we take the bulls by the horn and get this fixed.

While we are forming this special committee, I was also thinking of suggesting a continuation of a parliamentary oversight, above the ordinary, whether it is through the Public Accounts Committee or through the Economic Affairs Committee. When we are giving this guarantee, the Fiji Sugar Corporation should know that we cannot wait for the annual report. Perhaps, quarterly reporting to a committee of Parliament, so that this Parliament can be updated on the progress, particularly when it comes to this equalisation, because I think, that will give us a lot of satisfaction rather than having reactive decision-making at the end when it is all too late. That is one of my suggestions, although a Parliamentary Special Committee is going to be formed, why cannot FSC be reporting to a Committee of Parliament, as I have suggested, Public Accounts Committee or Economic Affairs Committee or whatever Committee, to ensure what they are doing is consistent with the strategic path forward as outlined and, of course, consistent with good governance and financial principles.

In conclusion, Madam Deputy Speaker, we, on this side of the House, will always stand with the canefarmers, the mill workers, the transport providers and the many Fijians whose lives depend on the sugar industry. Once again, I urge Government, as I did on the Urgent Oral Question on Monday. Again, I am making that call today - the farmers are really concerned about the allocation of quotas, about the gangs who are there without jobs and what will happen to the standing cane.

The honourable Minister has answered that hopefully by 10th December the mill will be back in action. There are the lorry drivers in Ba who I visited last Friday. I know that FSC mill workers have been deployed to the sectors, so that they are occupied, but most of them are without jobs because they just sit in the sector office because the quotas are not coming and so forth. This is the reality happening on the ground. Again, I assure you, Madam Deputy Speaker, that we will

always stand with the canefarmers, the mill workers, the transport providers and the many Fijians whose lives depend on the sugar industry.

We understand that Government support is sometimes necessary to preserve critical industries and protect livelihoods. Before I conclude, Madam Deputy Speaker, support must go hand in hand with responsibility. Guarantees must not become a substitute for reform. Public money must not be risked without responsibility.

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise today to speak in support of the motion on the Government's loan guarantee for the Fiji Sugar Corporation.

Before I do that, Madam Deputy Speaker, I do not understand the kind of response coming from the Opposition. For me, if I was them, I would do a gentlemanly reply, shut my mouth and sit down, because they know very well, they were here for the last 16 years. Why they did not bring in those ideas, those concepts that they are telling us now to do? They were scared. I do not understand what kind of personality they have. It lacks respect.

In doing so, I wish to highlight that at the heart of our decision is not simply a line item in our budget, but the livelihood and inspiration and future of thousands of Fijian farmers, their labourers and their families. According to the report, it is 200,000 families, which represent 25 percent of our population.

Madam Deputy Speaker, behind every tonne of sugar is a family hoping to send a child to school, to repair a home roof or to buy a vital seed for the next season. Most sugarcane growers are already diversified farmers - raising poultry, planting root crops and growing vegetables while waiting for the 12-month crop to be harvested. Our sugar and non-sugar sector are two threads of the same fabric. On a typical mixed farm, intercropping brings diversified income.

On optimal resource use, waste to health is waste to wealth, meaning that cane trash and livestock manure become compost or salads, cutting fertiliser costs and improving soil health, natural pest control, climate resilience, and a multi-crop system method in one crop failure, protects family income across the board.

On soil and water conservation, according to the Report by the Committee, we can do it. We can revive the sugar industry. According to the data that was provided, the desired level of sugar needed for crushing is 2.5 million tonnes. The current production that we did is 1.57 million, meaning a shortfall of 0.93 million. But the current production average yield per hectare of 1.57 million tonnes was produced from 1,671 hectares. Meaning, we are only producing 47 tonnes per hectare, which is well below the recommended rate.

During my time, when I was still in the bank, I used to be a loan officer for the canefarmers. The condition of the loan was that every cane farmer, if you are producing less than 30 tonnes per acre, you are not eligible for a loan. During that time, farmers were producing 35 tonnes, 45 tonnes, 50 tonnes and 55 tonnes. Today, we are supposed to be producing more than 100 tonnes, considering the level of technology that we have, the new breed of cane and the infrastructure. Those are some of the things that will be provided in this additional grant.

I really want to say thank you to the honourable Minister for Sugar to commend him. His current cane production, most of the farmers are producing more than 100 tonnes per hectare, 110 tonnes, 120 tonnes, and he has 160 tonnes per hectare. All the things we do, he is just telling us what he is doing that we are not doing, what he has that we do not have, and that is those gaps that needed to be addressed in this additional guarantee.

Madam Deputy Speaker, sugar is the largest foreign exchange earner. Every tonne exported pays for essential imports, fuel, medicine, machinery and helps fund schools and hospitals. A collapse of the sugar sector would trigger unemployment, shatter agro-processing plants, disrupt transport networks and erode rural demand for goods and services. In short, an unchecked sugar crisis would slash export revenues, widen our trade deficit and send shockwaves through the corners of Fiji.

I want to say again in this House to remind the Opposition side, that they made a very poor decision in 2022 by combining sectors. It was a baseless decision. Today, in every sector, there are around 800 to 900 farmers. That was what they did, but they did not provide the supporting infrastructure and the technology that is supposed to go with it, and yet they just combined the farmers, making it hard for the FSC to do monitoring. They know it very well. They did that and now they are quiet.

They are trying to pinpoint us, telling us what to do, but it was what they did – combining the sectors. I would like to ask the honourable Minister if that can be revised. They did not even tell us about the right ratio of each farmer per Field Officer. They did not tell us, they just combined it, and that is why I am saying that it is one of the poorest and stupid ideas that they did. They did not give us the basis of the ratio.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the ratio of a farmer to an officer is 1:65, which is 1:800 or 1:900 farmers. They now know where the failure is. This is like a chronic disease. They were the cause, and we were unfortunate to receive it. This is the prize for their actions in the last 16 years.

(Honourable Members interject)

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. I. KURIDRANI. - That is it, give us time. We have to give the honourable Minister time to look at that and to consider all those. Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Deputy Speaker, let me, first of all, start by addressing the issue of fire in the Rarawai Mill and the steps that the Ministry of Sugar, FSC, the honourable Minister for Sugar and the Government has taken to address that issue. Of course, the fire has occurred, it is an incident, and the report from the Fire Authority of Fiji will come, and then we will know exactly the cause of the fire.

However, it is important, Madam Deputy Speaker, to take a position in this Parliament, which is correct. Instead of going out there conjecturing, saying that Government should do this and that, we were very clear when the honourable Minister for Sugar and I visited the Mill.

We said three things, and this is for the interest of the farmers who are listening, because the farmers out there from Tavua, Rakiraki, Ba and Sigatoka understand what the Government has clearly laid out. The first thing we said was, based on the assessment, based on the report from the Rarawa Mill Management and based on what they have already started planning, in other words, recruitment of the equipment that would be needed, it has already been done. We said very clearly that whatever the report is, the Mill would be repaired in two months. In the meantime, we are saying that all cane right from Sigatoka, Tavua and Rarawai will end up in Lautoka.

We were very clear about the timeline and the workers. We said that no worker was going to lose out anything. Technical staff may be deployed to Lautoka to help maintain the Mill and ensure

that there was no disruption to the Lautoka Mill, others who will take leave, et cetera, but no one was going to lose out on wages or salaries.

The other thing that we were very clear about is that farmers from Rakiraki, because of the disaster that they left without fixing the Mill, we decided that they will get an additional \$15 top-up to the \$33 that they are getting to transport their cane from Rakiraki to Rarawai, because they will now have to take that to Lautoka. That is what we are saying, and we made that very clear. Those from Tavua and Rarawai who will now take it to Lautoka will also get an additional \$15.

Madam Deputy Speaker, honourable Bala knows this. There is a concession rate being paid by FSC from rail to lorry, supply also from Sigatoka and the same in Seaqaqa, between \$4 to \$8, depending on the distance per tonne. These are the things that the Government has very clearly laid out in our response to what happened at the Rarawai Mill.

Let me first respond to honourable Koya and then last to honourable Bala. One of the reasons, Madam Deputy Speaker, that they do not want us to talk about them and what they did is because they know that we will expose their mess. As I have said before, four years is not enough to complete talking about all the mess they did in 16 years, we will probably need more. I can understand the sentiments when we talk about what they did, they do get hurt, but I would request them to bear some of those because it is also a learning experience. It is also reminding ourselves about history and not to repeat the same thing, so it is important for us not to repeat the mistakes of the past.

Let me just respond to honourable Koya, I think he is right in what he read on the Ministry of Finance's website. However, honourable Koya, there are things that have been done - not everything in the way that it is stated there, but those are targets.

Madam Deputy Speaker, 900 more farmers have been brought back into farming through share-farming. I have talked about online soil testing. Nineteen new cane varieties with higher yields and resilience have been introduced. 162 tractor service providers, cage bins, hilly terrain harvesters, amongst other things, we have done in the last two and a half years.

Madam Deputy Speaker, two and a half years is not a long time, it is a very short period of time to address some of these historical, fundamental and structural infrastructure issues in any industry. I agree with honourable Koya, he has the benefit of history. He talked about the relationship, the Joint Committee on Sugar, and he is right. All Prime Ministers in Parliament in the past had a Joint Parliamentary Committee on Sugar.

However, honourable Koya has forgotten that in 2019, honourable Pio Tikoduadua, on behalf of the Opposition, moved a motion, and we pleaded with them to set up a Joint Parliamentary Committee.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- And then?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Then what they did was, 26 of them, including honourable Koya, voted against it because their godfathers did not want it. They were afraid of their godfathers.

(Laughter)

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- They were scared!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- They did not want it, and that is a fact.

Not long ago - six years ago, it was very interesting. I liked what honourable Bala said. He said, "FSC is bankrupt." I said it then in Opposition, and I say it today in my motion. However, when their godfathers were attacking me for calling FSC bankrupt, he was the one who was also yelling from this side, cheering them. Today, he is saying the same thing that I said six years ago.

(Laughter)

Madam Deputy Speaker, that is the problem with my colleague, honourable Bala, he is got a big issue. The honourable Member is quite likeable when he goes and drinks grog, but someone told me that something is wrong there. Similarly, someone must have told him, "Hey, they are getting sugar from Labasa in ships to transport to Lautoka". He did not seek clarification, but he said, "This is what is happening".

HON. P.K. BALA.- No, no, no!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I tell you what is happening.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Point of Order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Just a matter of clarification, I said that we were told.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- This is precisely what I am saying. We were told, he was told in a grog setting, someone heard somewhere.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the fact is, there is a ship that is on its way, that will load 30,000 tonnes of sugar from Malau, then load another 8,500 tonnes from Lautoka, and will take it for export. Then we also have sugar for bagging - locally and regional supply. That sugar also comes via a ship from Labasa to Suva, gets packed in the West and gets distributed here.

Madam Deputy Speaker, those are simple facts that honourable Bala knows, but he could have checked with the honourable Minister for Sugar, he could have called someone, but he thinks he will get some traction and moment of love somewhere. That is what he does.

Madam Deputy Speaker, he talks about cane payment. He was part of a government that actually shortchanged the farmers by \$14 million. We proposed a minimum guaranteed price of \$85. It was us, in the Opposition, who proposed \$85. Then before the 2018 Election, they announced \$85 and then paid \$85. As soon as they got into government, after spending two nights at Level 9 in Suvavou House, they shortchanged the farmers and did not pay them \$85, so \$14 million was short-changed.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Hogwash!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- It is this Government that came in and wanted to incentivise the farmers. We gave the highest cane price of \$91, and we said that the price would be more than \$100, and it is. The farmers literally know. I know he is trying to suggest a figure for cane payment because tomorrow he will go and say, "Look, you got \$15 because I suggested it".

(Laughter)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- That is what he is doing.

HON. P.K. BALA.- You are the Deputy Prime Minister.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Of course, the Deputy Prime Minister has to correct the nonsense that is coming from the other side.

(Laughter)

It is my job to correct the nonsense, Madam Deputy Speaker. That is the important point that honourable Bala forgets. I think he should humble himself a little bit and admit that we are doing the right thing for the sugarcane farmers. The sugarcane farmers know that this Government is actually committed to uplifting the standard of life for our farmers, and we have done that.

Honourable Koya also talked about cogeneration, sustainable aviation fuel, again, we need to raise the cane production first. In fact, for sustainable aviation fuel, we probably need about 2 million tonnes of cane to make it sustainable. Financially, it is not just the FSC, it is also linked to cane production. We are heading to 1.5 million tonnes this season, Madam Deputy Speaker, but if we reach 1.7 million tonnes, then that could give a breakeven for FSC in terms of its financial sustainability. It is not just FSC, it is also about generating enough sugarcane.

The other important point that honourable Opposition Members have talked about before is the mill in Rarawai and the honourable Minister has been at pains, and I give credit to him because since he came in, he has been talking about it. He is saying every instant that we need to build a mill. They should give him the credit because it is not easy to bring everything together so quickly in two and a half years.

I think the tender has already been called. It closed yesterday and the new mill, Madam Deputy Speaker, may not necessarily be where the old mill was, but it could be anywhere between Rakiraki and Tavua, which will allow not only sugar production, but also help other products, like ethanol and other value-added products that we are looking at. I think the Opposition should understand that the Government has done a lot.

I had talked about land leases in 2019, when we were debating the parliamentary motion on setting up a parliamentary select committee and we have done that. I know the honourable Leader of the Opposition was asking, "When are you going to have this meeting?" He was part of the brigade that did not support the setting up of that committee, but we are happy

HON. J. USAMATE.- Because you haven't done anything. Too much talk.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- This is the problem with honourable Usamate. This is exactly his problem. He just does not want to admit. If they had had the vision, the foresight, the boldness and courage to tell their godfathers that it was important, we would not be in the situation that we are in today.

(Laughter)

It is the courage of the honourable Prime Minister and the courage of people on this side to set up the committee and we are setting the agenda. This is your problem, honourable Usamate. You just cannot digest the fact that we are doing the right thing, which you did not do. For once, honourable Usamate should admit that we are doing the things that they did not do. We have set up a committee, the agenda is there, and we will have the meeting. We will not be dictated by the likes of honourable Usamate to tell us when we should have the meeting.

Madam Deputy Speaker, let me finish by saying that this motion is an important one. We all understand, and I understand what we need to do. The Joint Parliamentary Select Committee on

Sugar is going to bring this bipartisan discussion, and I think it will provide an opportunity for us to look at some of the strategic issues that the honourable Leader of the Opposition pointed out, and we are happy that we will be able to work with them. Therefore, this guarantee is important, and I thank the honourable Opposition Members who have spoken and begrudgingly supported the guarantee motion.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

CONSOLIDATED REVIEW REPORT ON THE RESERVE BANK OF FIJI 2021–2024 ANNUAL REPORTS

HON. S. TUBUNA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I move :

That Parliament debates the Consolidated Review Report on the Reserve Bank of Fiji August 2021-July 2024 Annual Reports, which was tabled on 6th August, 2025.

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I second the motion.

HON. S. TUBUNA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, the Committee recognises the integral role of the Reserve Bank of Fiji (RBF) in maintaining monetary stability, fostering sound financial institutions and supporting sustainable economic growth. Over the review period, Fiji's economy experienced significant challenges and transitions, particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and during the broader efforts towards economic recovery and resilience.

The RBF has maintained strong and steadily increasing profits over the past three reporting periods, driven by prudent reserve management, sound investment strategies and favourable global interest rates, supporting its financial independence and credibility.

The RBF's net profit rose significantly over the three consecutive years, reaching a record of \$135 million in 2023-2024. This growth was primarily due to strong returns from the foreign reserve portfolio, as follows:

- In 2021, the RBF adopted an accommodative monetary policy stance, maintaining the Oversight Policy Rate (OPR) at historical lows to stimulate economic activity.
- In 2022, RBF continued its supportive monetary stance while monitoring inflationary pressures driven by global fuel and food prices.
- In 2023, initiatives to promote green finance and climate-related risk management were integrated into the Bank's policy agenda.
- In 2024, RBF's continued progress in financial inclusion was reported, with increased uptake of digital financial services. It intensified collaboration with regional and global institutions to address cross-border financial risks and climate vulnerability.

The Committee concludes that from 2021-2024, RBF played a stabilising role in the economy through prudent monetary policy, effective crisis response and coordinated financial measures, contributing to Fiji's post-pandemic recovery and long-term economic resilience.

To support technology-driven financial services, the RBF should modernise outdated regulations, clearly separating supervisory and regulatory rules to avoid conflicts of interest and erosion of consumer trust. The RBF needs to strengthen its cybersecurity infrastructure to better protect customers, consumers and business entities. There is a need to promote climate-resilient finance and focus on sectors, such as agriculture, to grow the economy.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on this motion. Each Member who will speak will be given six minutes each, and the list is as follows:

- (1) Honourable Premila Kumar;
- (2) Honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Cooperatives, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications;
- (3) Honourable Semi Koroilavesau;
- (4) Honourable Minister for Justice;
- (5) Honourable Faiyaz Koya; and
- (6) Honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to support the recommendations that were made by the Standing Committee after a thorough review of their Annual Reports that were presented to them.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Reserve Bank of Fiji (RBF) deserves recognition for several key achievements during this period under review. Let me highlight a few, as follows:

- (1) RBF kept the Overnight Policy Rate (OPR) at a historic low of 0.25 percent from 2020. The reason why it was done that way was to stimulate economic activity during and after COVID-19, despite IMF's advice. Today, if we are enjoying the low interest rate, it is all because of RBF's firm decision to keep the OPR as low as 0.25 percent. We have seen in other countries where their interest rate went up after COVID-19, but that was a good oversight by RBF, to ensure that we do not go into financial difficulties.
- (2) RBF exceeded its financial inclusion targets, achieving 86.4 percent adult participation in 2023. This milestone even gained international recognition.
- (3) On gender finance, RBF supported women-led MSME under the WE-Fi Code.
- (4) Over the past three years, RBF has transferred more than \$272 million to the Government. This demonstrates its commitment to national development, even though much of this has yet to result in visible improvements in the daily lives of ordinary Fijians.
- (5) RBF modernised our financial infrastructure. The National Payment System Act came into existence in 2021, upgraded Real Time Gross Settlement payment, launched Central Securities Depository and created a Fintech Sandbox. These steps have made our system safer, more efficient and more accessible.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Committee commended RBF's leadership, but also pointed out areas for reform, and I will speak on three of those:

- (1) Financial Literacy
For years, RBF, NGOs and even more commercial banks have been running financial literacy programmes, but here is the hard question. What real impact did this programme

have? Ordinary Fijians are still struggling with the basics of managing money and they keep running to moneylenders and other financial institutions because they cannot understand the basics of money. Too many continued to fall prey to the exploitative lending. That tells us these programmes are not changing behaviour in any meaningful way.

What we need are impact studies, clear evidence that these programmes are literally helping Fijians make better financial decisions. Without that, financial literacy risks becoming more of a ceremonial event than a tool of empowerment.

(2) Separation of Functions

Right now, RBF sets the rules for financial institutions and supervises compliance with those rules. It is both, a regulatory and supervisory authority. That is like being both, the referee and the player in the same game.

International best practices show us a better model. In New Zealand, the Reserve Bank looks after prudential regulation, but supervision and enforcement are handled by the independent Financial Markets Authority. This ensures proper checks and balances. Fiji must move in that direction.

(3) Sound Policy

The Reserve Bank should focus on sound policy, while an independent body provides oversight. Only then can we guarantee accountability, transparency and public trust. Otherwise, RBF risks being seen as a judge, jury and executioner in its own case.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I would just like to highlight a point here. When we were reviewing the insurance industry sector, we realised that the function of the RBF was to make sure that the insurance sector remains solvent. When it came to the consumer complaints, we also realised, and it is noted in that report, that FCCC were of the opinion that they are not responsible for consumer complaints. Actually, there was no major scrutiny in ensuring that the products that were sold to the consumers were fit and proper from that point of view.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in conclusion, the RBF deserves praise for its valuable contribution during a very challenging economic period and for positioning Fiji's financial system after the pandemic. Its accomplishment from 2021 to 2024 has strengthened our financial sector and set Fiji on a path towards a more sustainable and resilient future.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to thank and congratulate the Governor and his whole team for keeping that oversight on our financial services sector, knowing very well that most Fijians have difficulty in understanding money. By keeping that oversight, at least, to some extent, consumers and the general public are protected. We appreciate that, and we thank them wholeheartedly for the work they have done over the years.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise today to give my support for the motion before the House and commend the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs for their comprehensive and insightful Report on the performance of the Reserve Bank of Fiji (RBF) from 2021 to 2024. The diligent work of the Committee, combined with prudent stewardship of the RBF, exemplifies our Government's commitment to sound economic governance, resilience and inclusive growth.

Madam Deputy Speaker, RBF, under the capable leadership of the Governor of the Reserve Bank and his team, have shown over these past years that they have been the cornerstone of stability and confidence in our nation's economy. Throughout the period that was being reviewed, we all

accept and know that this was a period that was brought with pandemic aftershocks, geopolitical uncertainties and, of course, the volatility of global markets. Through all these, RBF has remained steadfast as the guardian of our financial system and its economic wellbeing.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Report before us highlights the remarkable achievements of RBF during this challenging environment. Central to their success, as mentioned by honourable Kumar, was the adept management of monetary policy, particularly in maintaining the accommodative stance with the overnight policy rate held at a steadfast low of 0.25 percent. This measure has allowed the economy to access much-needed liquidity across households and businesses in Fiji and ensured that our credit continued to flow seamlessly in the economy. The Bank's actions have directly supported the resumption of tourism, bolstered agricultural productivity and sustained service industries that provided livelihoods to thousands of Fijians.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the financial stability over the review period is quite impressive. The financial system has expanded by 26.1 percent from \$24.1 billion to \$30.9 billion, reflecting the broad-based uplift across all productive sectors and, of course, sets the economy well in years to come.

I acknowledge the good work that has gone into the national payment system, the upgrading of the Real Time Gross Settlement system and the introduction of the Central Securities Depository, which are landmark improvements for transaction security, speed and transparency. Also, we acknowledge the support by the RBF in terms of supporting Fintech Regulatory Sandboxes to encourage innovation in our financial technologies.

Madam Deputy Speaker, one of the things that I have come to appreciate quite deeply about RBF is its ability to be proactive in the way it deals with the economy, and by that I mean, it is a long-term commitment to financial inclusion and financial literacy - the fact that it has been leading in terms of climate finance, sustainability and introducing the Blue Bond in 2023.

Madam Deputy Speaker, also, in taking part in our current endeavour to create the first national ID for Fiji, this initiative, in itself, is central to the country's overall national agenda because if we are to get the national ID right, there are major benefits that will flow in the years to come in terms of easier services, access to e-government services and even opening of bank accounts will become quite simple.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in the interest of time, once again, I would just like to congratulate RBF on their prudence and management of the economy. Last year's record profit of \$135.5 million continue to be a testament to how well managed they are.

Once again, on behalf of all of us, I commend the Governor and his staff members who are continuing to plot a safe and prudent path for Fiji.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank you for allowing me to contribute to this debate. I will basically summarise some of the performances and achievements by the Reserve Bank of Fiji (RBF) which are as follows:

- (1) In 2021, Fiji's economy remained under pressure due to COVID-19. The RBF maintained an accommodative monetary policy, keeping the overseas policy rate at historic lows.
- (2) In 2022, signs of recovery emerged with the reopening of borders and tourism revival. The RBF continued its supportive stance while monitoring inflation driven by global fuel and food prices. Foreign reserves reached \$3.6 million in July.

- (3) In 2023, Fiji recorded a strong economic rebound, supported by tourism, remittances and investment. RBF cautiously approached monetary tightening amid persistent inflation.
- (4) By 2024, the economy's transition towards sustainable growth with robust performance in tourism, agriculture and services. The RBF adjusted its policy rate to maintain microeconomic stability.

There are some findings, some have been alluded to by honourable Premila Kumar, but I would just like to highlight a few:

- (1) The RBF co-held \$3 billion in liquidity, yielding no interest.
- (2) A conflict of interest exists between regulatory and supervisory roles.
- (3) Oversight in financial literacy remains inadequate.
- (4) No evidence of student-focused banking services, which the Committee had highlighted to RBF.
- (5) Housing provisions for low-income individuals are insufficient.
- (6) Elevated Non-Performing Loans (NPLs) linked to Debt Resolution and Capital Framework (DRCF) still persist.
- (7) Financial activities surged, with \$3 billion in mobile and \$2 billion in person-to-person transactions annually.

There were recommendations made to RBF, and I must thank the Governor, the management and his staff, whom we held meetings with. They were very open to discussions and promised to come right and deal with the issues that we have raised.

Madam Speaker, I would now highlight the observation of the RBF's Fiji Alliance to Sustainable Development Goals. The Report highlighted the RBF's Annual Reports from 2021 to 2024, but we were quite happy that the RBF had developed their own sustainable goals, which I will highlight below.

- (1) Quality Education
The RBF has implemented financial literacy and inclusive programmes that are improving individuals' financial capabilities across Fiji.
- (2) Decent Work and Economic Growth
The RBF has actively promoted financial inclusion through initiatives, such as the MSME Credit Guarantee Scheme and Housing Facility for Low Income. In 2022, the RBF implemented the National Payment System, and I think the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-operatives, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications has alluded to this - the Act of 2021 and regulations strengthening payment infrastructure and ensure secure, efficient and inclusive services.
- (3) Climate Action
The RBF has collaborated with the Government's Climate Change Division to improve awareness of climate-related risks, aligning its operations with the proposed Climate Change Act 2021. Through the Import Substitution and Export Finance Facility, the Bank supported businesses in the renewable energy sector, contributing to low-carbon transition.

To conclude, Madam Deputy Speaker, the Committee concluded from that the 2021-2024 Report that RBF played a stabilising role in the economy through prudent monetary policy, effective crisis response and coordinated financial measures, which the honourable Deputy Prime Minister has

also highlighted. These actions supported Fiji's post-pandemic recovery and long-term resilience.

To further strengthen its role, the RBF should:

- modernise outdated regulations;
- clearly separate its supervisory and regulatory functions to avoid conflict of interest; and
- enhance cybersecurity infrastructure to protect consumers and businesses.

There is also a pressing need to promote climate-resilient finance and prioritise sectors such as agriculture, to drive inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, before I speak on the subject, I wish to take this moment to pay tribute to Unaisi Digaco Sevaia Biumaiwai, the elder sister of Waisale Serevi, who will be buried tomorrow. A tribute to the Tui Qarani, the Rauluni and Serevi families, *Turaga na Ratu Navukailagi* and the *Turaga na Takala*, on the occasion of farewelling one of their family members.

Madam Deputy Speaker, it takes a village to raise a child. The Serevi family with Una being the eldest sister, the last few days for the family has been tough, especially with the passing of their parents - all the sisters and brothers, including Waisale Serevi, were in Nasole. *Gole ena vakacegu ganequ.*

I rise to contribute to the debate on the Reserve Bank of Fiji 2021-2022 and 2023-2024 Annual Reports. At the outset, I wish to commend the Reserve Bank of Fiji (RBF) for its professionalism and dedication in fulfilling its role as our central bank. These Reports remind us of the Bank's important role, not only in safeguarding monetary and financial stability, but also in maintaining public confidence in our economy, as alluded to by previous speakers.

Madam Deputy Speaker, under the Reserve Bank of Fiji Act, the RBF is entrusted with a wide range of responsibilities - promoting monetary stability, ensuring financial stability, managing currency issuance and supporting financial system and development. Its work includes licensing and supervising banks, insurance, superannuation and capital market institutions, overseeing foreign reserves and exchange controls, combating money laundering and terrorist financing, and safeguarding our national payment systems, as shared by honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-operatives, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications

However, Madam Deputy Speaker, none of this can be done effectively without a strong, legal and regulatory framework. This is where the Office of the Attorney-General comes in. Our work is to ensure that RBF has the legal authority and clarity to act decisively, protect consumers and uphold the confidence of both, investors and the public.

On that note, let me highlight a few examples that illustrate this partnership between law and financial governance. I read last week that the RBF presented its audited financial statements for 2025, announcing a record profit of \$146.2 million, the highest in its history. This success reflects sound governance, prudent management of foreign reserves and the support of a strong legislative framework.

On 30th August this year, the RBF officially prohibited all cryptocurrency and virtual assets related services in Fiji through an amendment to the Reserve Bank of Fiji Act. The law makes it an offence with penalties of up to \$1 million or 14 years imprisonment for anyone to provide, market or facilitate services such as cryptocurrency exchanges, Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs), stable coins or digital wallets. This is a clear example of how our legal framework works with the RBF to protect

consumers, reduce risk and maintain stability.

According to the RBF's September economic review, the Fijian economy is projected to grow by 3.2 percent in 2025, despite mixed performance across key sectors. This follows a 3.5 percent growth in 2024, and a strong 9.4 percent rebound in 2023. While some sectors face challenges, the Bank's prudent management or monetary policy, foreign reserves and financial oversight continues to support steady growth. This illustrates how legal and institutional frameworks work together to sustain confidence and resilience in our economy.

This scenario shows that financial stability, economic growth and public trust are inseparable from legal certainty. Laws on anti-money laundering, credit reporting, capital market, fintech and digital platform empowers the RBF to operate effectively, manage risks and foster confidence in our financial system.

We also acknowledge RBF's role in supporting SMEs, inclusive finance and green finance. In these areas, law and policy must evolve together to encourage innovation, manage risks and ensures that the growth benefits all Fijians.

This Report demonstrates not only the operational success of the RBF, but also the strength of the legal framework that supports it. The Office of the Attorney-General remains committed to working hand in hand with RBF, to ensure that Fiji's financial system rests on a solid, transparent and resilient legal foundation for the benefit of all Fijians and for generations to come.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I support the motion before the House.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I will be very brief. Most of the other speakers have actually covered what needs to be covered, but as a matter of commendation, what needs to be said is that the Reserve Bank of Fiji (RBF) is an institution that has done extremely well for Fiji and also for its only shareholder - the Government. If I am incorrect, the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance can correct me, in the last five years, they have returned close to \$0.5 billion in profits – a tremendous achievement to all those who actually are part of the RBF.

The recommendations that have been handed down by the Committee are good. One of the aspects of the RBF or any Reserve Bank is oversight, and that is something that they have taken on really well with respect to oversight of financial institutions that exist around the country and the digital landscape that has now changed the financial foundations that exist all around the world. All of that, I think the RBF has kept itself in line with making sure that our institutions and financial platforms are safe, the banks are doing what they are supposed to be doing and coming down hard on them if they are not.

I urge the Governor and the team at the RBF to continue the very hard and tedious work that they have to do so that we have a safe and secure financial environment that we live in. All of these come on the back of a lot of bad things that have happened to the Fijian economy. I am talking about COVID-19, disasters and cyclones, and sometimes the political uncertainty, as mentioned by the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-operatives, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications. These are the things that affect economies.

The RBF has done a phenomenal job in making sure that we have done extremely well. They always come up with the right reports, the reports are always good, their predictions are always good, and it is a testament to the kind of people and the intelligence that we have in Fiji, in terms of our young people who are employed there also, that this kind of job is done.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I was talking about safety and soundness in terms of the focus of oversight and how banks operate in a safe and sound manner, it is very well looked after. They have also done risk management really well at RBF in order to ensure that the practices of financial institutions are up to par and good. The stability area, we can see from all the reports that come out, we have had a great amount of financial stability and the approaches they have made with respect to all the different sectors.

I know there was a lot of assistance given to SMEs to the different programmes they had, and they did it really well with the Ministries. One thing that we must look at also, just recently, there was an announcement about banning bitcoin. I think it was done because we do not have a regulatory framework around that kind of thing. It is something that we will one day eventually have to look at.

That is how the world turns, that is how a lot of money is made, and that is how a lot of people who are in the private sector will say, “Hang on, why are we banning it?” However, it is being done in order to be protective. There is a lot of bad things that come with it but if we can establish a good regulatory framework, it is an area where we could benefit out of.

The Office of the Attorney-General will have a lot of work in order to get us to that stage. It is not something that we should fob off, we should look at it. I have had a discussion with the RBF Governor on this particular issue at one stage. At the moment, Fiji is still a bit green with respect to that particular area, but it is something that we ought to, and we should look at.

We need to move with the time, and we can see economies around the world that flourish with those things. It is an extremely new financial landscape that exists around the world. We have been very savvy until now, and we must maintain that savviness and maintain the laws and the regulatory framework that exists to protect our economy and all Fijian citizens. I think they have also done a phenomenal job in making sure that all the financial institutions that exist in Fiji are always kept in check.

With those few words, Madam Deputy Speaker, again, hats off and a commendable achievement by the RBF Governor and his team. Congratulations to them. They have done extremely well. As I have said, \$0.5 billion in the last five years is not an easy feat, but it is a phenomenal feat. Thank you to all of those who were there, and we support the Report.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to thank all honourable Members who have spoken before me and many areas have been covered very well.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Reserve Bank of Fiji (RBF), as everyone has alluded to, is a very important institution. The main tools that the RBF has is the interest rate policy, exchange rate management, liquidity management and the objectives of RBF in maintaining price stability, safeguarding foreign reserves and ensuring that financial stability is very well understood in a small import-dependent economy, to some extent, such as ours.

Honourable Members talked about RBF giving back to Government over the last five years close to \$500 million and, more recently, from 2024 to 2025, \$146 million. Although the RBF is not a profit-making entity, it invests its foreign reserves and, fortunately, for us, the interest rate was very good. The RBF may not always have that, but when our reserves are very high and the interest rate is very good in the international market, obviously, RBF’s profit will be better.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I know that honourable Kumar talked about conflict in terms of the regulatory and supervisory role. I am not sure whether that is a really fair observation or criticism of

the RBF, but RBF is the regulator of financial services, which also allows RBF to undertake its supervisory role. The terms “regulator” and “supervisor” are used sometimes interchangeably when referring to the oversight role undertaken by any regulatory agency, like the RBF. I really do not think there is a conflict of interest as such.

We should also remember that we are a small economy in the bigger scheme of things. I know honourable Kumar will understand this better because of the monetary policy tools that the RBF has, especially when our exchange rate is pegged to a basket of currencies, there is not always that much room to manoeuvre, so being a regulator and a supervisor in a small economic environment may not necessarily be conflict of interest.

The other point that I want to make, Madam Deputy Speaker, is that RBF now has a Banking Insurance Ombudsman based at the RBF under the supervision of RBF. I think it does play an important role. At some point, we may have to look at whether the ombudsman is totally independent.

I can also assure this House that the RBF and the Ministry of Finance are independent institutions, but we have a very important relationship in terms of monetary and fiscal policy. The RBF’s monetary policy cannot operate in isolation of the fiscal policy that the Government puts out.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we understand the point raised by honourable Kumar about financial inclusion. Today, RBF has done a good job. Overall, it has played its role in terms of providing that stability and confidence in the economy.

I also want to take this opportunity to thank the Governor, the Board and the Senior Management for the very good job that they have done - the consistent approach towards providing that morale and building confidence in the economy amongst the investors and the consumers about the state of the economy, and periodically bringing out independent assessment of the economy, the various sectors, which gives information to the investors, the consumers and the public as a whole. That itself, Madam Deputy Speaker, creates confidence.

With those few words, I support the Report.

HON. S. TUBUNA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I think the honourable Members have raised quite a lot of issues relating to the Report. Just on the supervisory and regulatory roles, I think more work is needed on that to ensure that RBF does not have a conflict of roles, which we have found out during our study.

In terms of flexibility, I would like to thank RBF for maintaining that flexibility, to come up with a lot of products that will assist the financial sector and, of course, the support from other institutions. We have heard today from the Ministry of Finance and the Office of the Attorney-General in assisting in maintaining monetary stability and supporting sustainable economic growth.

We would like to thank all honourable Members for their contribution. Also, we would like to thank the Governor of the RBF and staff for their support in the preparation of the Reports.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- The Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

REVIEW REPORT - INVESTMENT FIJI 2020-2021 ANNUAL REPORT

HON. S.TUBUNA.-Madam Deputy Speaker, I move:

That Parliament debates the Review Report on the Investment Fiji 2020-2021 Annual Report, which was tabled in Parliament on 6th August, 2025.

HON. K.V. RAVU.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I second the motion.

HON. S. TUBUNA.- The period of 2020-2021 has been a defining period for both the organisation and the Fijian economy, marked by unprecedented challenges and significant adaptation in response to the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Despite the global economic slowdown, Investment Fiji remained resilient and proactive in its mandate to attract foreign direct investment and support domestic exporters. The organisation swiftly adapted to the changing economic landscape by leveraging digital engagement, strengthening partnerships and enhancing service delivery to investors and businesses.

During the reporting period, Investment Fiji facilitated numerous investment inquiries, supported exporters in accessing new markets and played a critical role in policy advocacy. Notably, several investment projects progressed despite the prevailing uncertainties, reflecting the continued confidence in Fiji as an investment destination.

During this period, Investment Fiji focused on:

- (1) Facilitating Investment Projects
Despite constraints, the agency continued to register new investment proposals, primarily in sectors like agriculture, manufacturing, services, and renewable energy.
- (2) Export Promotion
Investment Fiji supported Fijian exporters in accessing new markets, particularly through virtual trade expos and digital platforms.
- (3) Aftercare Services
Enhanced engagement with existing investors to provide policy clarity, logistical support, and guidance during the crisis.
- (4) Digital Transition
Accelerated adoption of digital tools to manage investment registration, client servicing and stakeholder engagement remotely.
- (5) Policy Advocacy
Worked closely with relevant ministries to streamline processes and advocate for reforms to improve the ease of doing business.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Committee recommended that Investment Fiji include the performance matrix aligned with the KPIs in all future annual reports to justify budgetary allocations and to demonstrate accountability of public funds. This will also allow for a thorough and transparent assessment of its performance.

The Committee recommended providing detailed information on the outcomes of trade missions and investment promotions, including data on the level of interest generated and the

translation of this interest into actual investments. This will help in evaluating the effectiveness of these activities and allow close monitoring of the growth of businesses.

The Committee then recommended that Investment Fiji should report on the relevant SDGs in its annual reports as required by the Parliament, to demonstrate its support for Fiji's commitment towards international goals.

The Committee also highlighted some key areas for potential improvement in its performance and expressed its expectation that Investment Fiji will address these moving forward.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion. Each speaker will speak for six minutes, and we will begin with honourable Premila Kumar.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I will speak on the recommendations outlined in the Committee's Report after a thorough review of the Investment Fiji 2020-2021 Annual Report.

Madam Deputy Speaker, during that financial year, Investment Fiji showed resilience and adaptability, despite the challenges posed by COVID-19. We are very familiar with that. During that year there was a lockdown, border closures, and Investment Fiji transitioned many of its services online. This ensured that investors and exporters continued to receive support. That was a crucial move, to sustain our economy during a time of great uncertainty.

Madam Deputy Speaker, it is important to remind the House that it was during our time that the Investment Act 2021 was passed in this Parliament. Its purpose was to modernise Fiji's investment framework, align it with international best practice and make Fiji a more attractive destination for investment. We recognise that if Fiji was to compete globally, we had to protect national interests while also opening the door to new opportunities.

I would like to inform the House that there was a time when Investment Fiji had reserved a restricted list for foreign investors. That was one of the reasons why we did not see the development of the shipping sector, because anyone who wants to go into that business, you had to partner with a foreign investor, but the local investor must have 51 percent, and shipping sector is costly. How many of us will have that kind of money to put across? However, by removing that reserve and restricted list, we have opened up, and we can see how the economy is growing now.

(Honourable Government Member interjects)

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- You will get a chance if you want to speak.

From that legislative foundation, Madam Deputy Speaker, Investment Fiji was transformed into a combined investment and trade promoting agency. All those enforcement work was taken away, and the enforcement work was left to the enforcement agencies. It now treats all investors equally, whether foreign or local. It also plays a critical role in facilitation and aftercare services.

Madam Deputy Speaker, one of the important reforms under the new Act was the introduction of a proper dispute resolution mechanism, which was missing in the past laws. This was designed to provide both, the Government and investors, with a clear, transparent and fair process in the event of disagreements. This is an area Investment Fiji needs to put into effect and provide assistance to foreign investors, who end up in disputes with other Government agencies.

Madam Deputy Speaker, to guide this new direction, Investment Fiji also worked with international consultants, including OCO Global from the United Kingdom, to develop the

investment and trade promotion strategy and the Fiji market and sector analysis. This became the basis for their 2022-2025 Strategic Plan.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Committee highlighted clear weaknesses in reporting and accountability. Investment Fiji must now put in place a strong performance framework with clear key performance indicators, which the Chair has already highlighted. Without proper data, Parliament and the public cannot properly assess the agency's real impact and understand how taxpayers' money is being used effectively. Targets and benchmarks are essential. Without them, we cannot measure performance and without them, annual reports become meaningless, they become more of an activity report, rather than really showcasing how they have fared during the year.

Madam Deputy Speaker, they are not new recommendations. Past reports have raised the same issues, yet Investment Fiji has made little progress to fix the particular problem that was highlighted earlier on.

The Committee also rightly called for regular updates on the implementation of Investment Fiji's Strategic Plan. Too often, agencies launch these plans with pomp and show, but when we hear nothing about their progress, it is concerning. Without continuous updates, we will not know whether Investment Fiji is adapting to changing economic conditions or simply standing still.

The Committee also raised serious concerns about the disclaimers used in the Investment Fiji's Annual Report. Madam Deputy Speaker, these reports are public documents funded by taxpayers. Reporting under a disclaimer casts doubt on the reliability of the information. The Committee has made a recommendation that the report should not carry a disclaimer, and this is based on the international global practice.

In conclusion, in 2021, our Government set in motion a major legislative and institutional shift. The challenge for the Coalition Government today is to prove whether they are building on these reforms. Are they strengthening Investment Fiji's role as a driver of growth and exports, or are they simply riding on the successes and structures created without delivering anything new? Continuous improvement is always needed and with the changing world environment, we need the organisation to be really effective to deal with the economic conditions as it changes.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, again, I will be very brief because I think honourable Kumar has covered most. This is another institution that we should value, and they have done a tremendous amount of work to bring a lot of good investment into Fiji. I just wanted to point out one matter that I know the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-operatives, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications is quite excited about, and I was when we actually managed to bring them here during COVID-19 to do the inspections.

We are getting a massive “seven-star” outfit that is actually going to build a resort in Nacula, Yasawa. Again, this is a testament to all the hard work that has been done during COVID-19 by Investment Fiji - the staff members putting the hours and we managed to facilitate whatever is needed to be done. Now, it has all come to fruition and the honourable Deputy Prime Minister will testify to the fact that they are all full-on hands-on ready to go, and it is worth a couple of hundred million dollars in terms of what they are literally going to do. The resort is called One & Only. It is just a marker for everyone to see the kind of work that Investment Fiji does, for Fiji as an investment promotion agency which is phenomenal.

The recommendations that have come through from the Committee, and I thank the Committee for the work that they have done, there are a couple of issues there that they have pointed out, but they just, sort of, really look like administrative things that need to be done. However, as an

agency, I think they have done extremely well. There are hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of investments that have been generated because of the good work of the Investment Promotion Agency (IPA).

I want to say this at this time, that the Ministry of Trade has actually done a lot of work, together with Investment Fiji, to ensure that this is happening with business forums in Australia, New Zealand, and a few other countries around the world, and even our Pacific Island neighbours in PNG. At the forefront, Investment Fiji is always there, and it is important that they are because it is our premier promotion agency.

All in all, Madam Deputy Speaker, I agree with what is in the Report. These are administrative things that need to be done. This Report is based on the 2020-2021 period, and again, this is on the back of COVID-19. Congratulations to the CEO, Kamal Chetty, and his team, for the hard work that they do and to the Ministry for the work that they do jointly to promote Fiji as an investment destination.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to provide my contribution to the Consolidated Review Report on the Investment Fiji 2020–2021 Annual Report. Once again, I express my appreciation to the honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs for their review and constructive recommendations.

Seeing that the Report is somewhat outdated, Madam Deputy Speaker, I will spend a little bit of time on the Report, but then, perhaps, focus on what we are currently doing, even the question that was raised by honourable Kumar. I think the Committee has quite rightly identified a few areas for improvement around KPI reporting and ensuring that we can measure what is being done. I am sure that in the reports to come, there will be adequate information provided.

Interesting to note as well, Madam Deputy Speaker, that in 2020-2021, which were some of the most difficult years of the pandemic, the agency was still able to generate investment projects of around \$152 million. It is a testament to the young and vibrant team that is there, and their desire to continue to be proactive and contribute to the expansion of the economy.

Madam Deputy Speaker, focussing more on what is happening now, honourable Kumar asked, “what has the Government done?” I can assure her that we have done quite a bit. One of the good decisions that was made by the previous government was to transition the Investment Fiji from a regulatory investment body to an investment promotion body because that immediately shifted the attention from being a fixed box-ticking entity to one that literally tried to facilitate investment. That has resulted in quite a bit of what we are seeing today.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the pipeline was floating at around about FJ\$5.9 billion up until a few months ago. Right now, it has shifted up to \$6.3 billion. Out of this pipeline, under construction is about FJ\$1.6 billion, predevelopment is around \$2.3 billion, and about another \$2.3 billion in conceptual state.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I know that the other side used to joke about our pipeline, but I can tell you in confidence that this pipeline is a very serious pipeline, and in this \$1.6 billion are some major projects that are going to transform Fiji, as follows:

- (1) Google investing US\$200 million in Fiji.
- (2) Sofitel Vatu Talei that is under construction, which is about \$200 million.
- (3) Nacula ultra luxury resort. That, in itself, is around \$0.5 billion in terms of investment in total.

- (4) Kalabu Business Park. The groundbreaking happened just recently, and that is another almost \$0.5 billion project, rolled out over eight years, and expected to contribute about 15,000 in terms of employment should it be fully operational.

Madam Deputy Speaker, even businesses are now telling us that the pipeline is no longer just a theoretical pipeline, it is a very real pipeline, and you will start seeing it translate into the growth in the GDP. We are nudging 4 percent and probably going to hit 5 percent very, very soon.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the other point I would like to mention, if I can, is that this \$6.3 billion excludes any capital investment that actually happens from Government and other related entities. In Investment Fiji's estimates, if you talk about municipal councils, Energy Fiji investment, you are already looking at around about \$1 billion extra of investment already happening, apart from the potential of six. If you add up what is happening with EFL, who are now talking about solar green transition of about \$2 billion, you rapidly will see the pipeline moving up to \$6 billion, \$7 billion or \$8 billion in the course of the next 24 months.

Madam Deputy Speaker, a lot of it is credited to Investment Fiji. They do a wonderful job in now proactively trying to assist in investments. We do have the Investment Facilitation Committee that monitors all investments happening in the country. It has all our agencies in that Committee, and we meet about every two months, so those are the types of things that are happening which kind of answers honourable Kumar's question that things are moving and moving quite seriously.

Certainly, the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics and I sincerely believe that there are massive opportunities ahead for the country, given the type of investments that we are seeing. I have not even started talking about commercial agriculture and commercial aquaculture initiatives that is happening. So, we are in a good place.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank the Committee for their contributions and clearly, in this instance, the decision made by the previous government to transition to a facilitation body, investment promotion body, is starting to pay dividends quite significantly.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Madam Deputy Speaker, the agency that we are talking about appeared before the Public Accounts Committee about a month ago, and we had a series of discussions about a lot of things that can be done. However, to our surprise, one of the major issues that is faced by Investment Fiji is budgetary allocation. I do not want to say the amount that was requested by Investment Fiji but there was shortfall of close to around \$3 million to \$4 million to what was requested and what was given.

(Honourable Government Members interject)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Yes, we have a surplus of \$185 million. I do not think the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics would mind giving them a bit extra to do their job because Investment Fiji plays a very pivotal role in bringing investments into the country.

Madam Deputy Speaker, one of the things that we need to realise now is, we have exceeded one million visitors coming into Fiji. We give Tourism Fiji close to around \$35 million to promote Fiji as a tourist destination. We are at our capacity whereby we cannot cater more because we do not have the infrastructure in terms of hotel rooms and beds to accommodate these visitors.

What we need to do is give a chunk of money, at least, from Tourism Fiji to Investment Fiji,

so that they can start bringing in developments or investments so we can get more five star to seven star resorts into the country. That is very important, and it needs to be done now because it is no use advertising Fiji as a tourist destination when we cannot accommodate the tourists itself. We had a good 30 to 45 minutes discussion on the budgetary allocation to Investment Fiji.

Madam Deputy Speaker, to note, if we can share the funding between the two organisations because they are very close to each other and that was one of the requests that came from Investment Fiji - not my words. I would not say that “we heard” or someone “told us”, it was the Chairperson of Investment Fiji who actually told us that the funding is not enough. That was on record because it was discussed during the Public Accounts Committee meeting.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we have been hearing a lot of investments coming into the country. When we left government, it was \$4.5 billion to \$5 billion. Now, we hear the honourable Minister boasting about \$6 billion to \$6.5 billion, which is just \$1.5 billion more. It is not about increasing the amount, it needs to decrease so that it reflects that investment is taking place on the ground. If we keep bulking it up and say that we brought in \$10 billion of investments, where is the infrastructure development? It is not happening; it is piling up. Do not boast about taking it from \$4.5 billion to \$6.5 million. If you convert that \$4.5 billion into infrastructure development, \$1.5 billion could have been your baby to boast about.

Madam Deputy Speaker, coming back to the Report, these recommendations are merely bureaucratic suggestions. They are crucial steps towards ensuring that this vital organisation is transparent, effective and fully accountable to the people of Fiji for every dollar of public fund it receives.

The Committee findings reflect the need for greater disclosure of Investments Fiji’s Annual Report, and I wholeheartedly support their recommendations. Madam Deputy Speaker, the Committee calls for Investment Fiji to include below:

- (1) A performance matrix aligned with Key Performance Indicators in all future annual reports, which is fundamental.
- (2) They must move beyond general statements.
- (3) We need hard data to justify budgetary allocations and allow for a thorough and transparent assessment of performance.
- (4) Along this, endorse the demand that Investment Fiji cease its disclaimers in its Annual Report and take full responsibility of its content.
- (5) If the organisation seeks public funding, it must stand by the information it provides.
- (6) For true transparency, we expect Investment Fiji to include clear targets with corresponding figures.
- (7) This simple addition provides the necessary benchmark for us to measure success and ensure consistency year after year.

Madam Deputy Speaker, to conclude, we have a collective duty to uphold national and international commitment. I urge Investment Fiji to immediately and fully implement recommendation six from the previous Committee regarding complete disclosure of data and key information. This repeated non-compliance is unacceptable and erodes public trust.

In closing, these recommendations collectively forge a pathway towards our accountable, transparent and result driven Investment Fiji. I urge the honourable Minister and the organisation to take immediate and decisive actions to implement all seven points that have been raised. Our investment, our business and the Fijian public deserve nothing less.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Deputy Speaker, let me start with the budget for the organisation, and I seem to agree with a lot of things that honourable Maharaj says these days. He is asking good questions and making some very good suggestions.

I think the point about budget, just for his information, the budget from 2022-2023 was \$2.7 million, 2023-2024, it was \$2.7 million, then increased to \$2.8 million and then \$3.7 million, so in the last three budgets, we gave \$6.2 million. However, I do take your point - I think there could be a better coordination between Tourism Fiji and Investment Fiji in terms of maximizing their resources and promotional activities because they go together.

On the issue of investment, I think one very important critical point about investment anywhere is confidence. This is not boasting, this is fact and when you talk to the business community now, to the international development partners and international investors, they all say to us that they feel very confident. So, confidence comes from certainty, consistency, reliability and predictability of policies which we have provided in the last three Budgets. We said that there will be no surprises, and we have kept that. That, itself, is creating a lot of confidence.

The Reserve Bank of Fiji is playing its role and Investment Fiji is playing its role. When we came into government in 2023, everyone was telling me that tourism numbers were going to go down because we had shortage of accommodation. That was the feedback we were getting from the industry.

Madam Deputy Speaker, normally in economics, we say supply creates its own demand. In the case of tourism numbers to Fiji, it is actually the demand from the tourists themselves, from our source destinations, about Fiji as a very, very important destination that has also created this supply of accommodation. You look at the number of Airbnbs, you look at the number of hotel rooms that have been built, or in the process of being built, in just two and a half years, it is actually quite significant.

If you talk to some of the hotels now which were charging very, very high rates around 2023-2024, they are telling us that Airbnbs are now very competitive. They are offering some very good accommodation. Now, we are saying that there will be no such thing as off-peak and peak seasons in Fiji. In fact, we will have all peak seasons in the country in terms of the number of tourists that are coming in.

In terms of policies, Madam Deputy Speaker, we are supporting, as I have said, as part of our policy. In the last Budget, we extended enhanced tax deductions as follows –

- 150 percent deduction for donations to accredited startup support programmes.
- 300 percent for wages and salaries tied to apprenticeships, work placements or part-time employment.
- 400 percent for hiring persons with disabilities.
- tax-free incentives with a 25 percent investment allowance will be available for new investments made by businesses involved in two activities. These are like taking tourists away from resort-based allocations to more community and other types of tourism activities so that a larger percentage of the tourist dollar can be retained in the country. These are like policy interventions for new investment.
- Green investments are also incentivised.
- Income from new renewable energy cogeneration projects will now enjoy a 10-year tax exemption up to five years.
- Tax-free region incentive is being expanded to include the Wainadoi region for waste management, recycling and renewable energy businesses.

My last point before I finish, Madam Deputy Speaker, it is very important for us to understand that private sector investment also relies on public sector investment. When I talk about public sector investment, that is, public sector investment in energy, water, roads and bridges, because these are critical investments to support private sector investment.

We are very pleased that in the last two and a half years, as I have pointed out earlier today, we have the –

- Kinoya Wastewater Project;
- Non-Revenue Water Project worth \$385 million;
- critical bridges already starting which is a project worth about \$400 million;
- health project which is about \$500 million; and
- Nadi River Flood Alleviation Project which is one of the largest climate change projects worth \$400 million.

If we add all that, we are literally putting about \$1.6 billion worth of public sector projects. These are projects that are going to complement the investments in the private sector. As the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-operatives, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications said, we are heading towards much bigger and better rates of growth in the years ahead, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I want to thank the CEO, the Chairman, and everyone involved in Investment Fiji in terms of the work that they have done, the advocacy and promotional activities that they have undertaken, to attract as much investments as possible.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we have also provided incentives for diaspora investment into the country, by doing simple things like reducing the cost of passports. We are looking at how we can streamline the decisions we made earlier about the descendants of diaspora not needing Fiji passport. They can basically come with proof that they are part of the diaspora in terms of their descendants and the documentation that they can provide.

We can look at overseas citizens of Fiji, similar to overseas citizens of India - the Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI) card. We could have a Fiji overseas citizen card or something as such, so that we can facilitate diaspora movement and entry and, therefore, investment.

HON. S. TUBUNA.- Madam Deputy Speaker, I have no other comments, except what has been raised by the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics, the complementing of the private sector and government. That is why in the Report we emphasised that Investment Fiji puts a lot of attention into KPIs, on what are they producing in terms of putting some figures. However, there are some important figures that are coming out from there.

Apart from that, I would like to thank all honourable Members for their contributions, and we thank you for your support.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote to note the content of the Report.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, thank you very much for your energy today. That brings us to the end of the sitting today. Parliament is now adjourned until 9.30 tomorrow morning.

The Parliament adjourned at 7.21 p.m.

ANNEXURE I

Reply to Written Question No. 178/2025 tabled by the honourable Minister for Housing and Local Government (Ref. Page 1988)



**MINISTER FOR HOUSING AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT
(Hon. M.K. Nalumisa)**

Reply to Question No. 178/2025 is as follows:

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Department of Town and Country Planning (DTCP), under the Ministry of Local Government, operates under the Town Planning Act 1946 and the Subdivision of Lands Act 1937. Its role is to guide Fiji's land use and development so that it is well-planned, sustainable, and aligned with our national interest. In doing so, the Department supports Fiji's 5-Year and 20-Year National Development Plans, while enabling investment, housing, and jobs for our people.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the 2024 calendar year, DTCP's data reflects a strong year of development activity, with consistent investor confidence, delivery of new housing and services, and growing demand for both, residential and commercial development, across Fiji. These outcomes are further supported by municipal councils, which issue building completion certificates confirming projects that have been physically delivered on the ground.

Building Applications and Completions

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in 2024, DTCP received 835 building applications, of which 759 were processed. A total of 635 approvals were granted, with an estimated investment value of \$701.3 million.

- Central Division: 402 applications received, 269 approvals worth \$268.6 million;
- Western Division: 231 applications received, 195 approvals worth \$319.6 million; and
- Northern Division: 202 applications received; 171 approvals worth \$113.2 million.

There were 83 applications that were received late in 2024 and carried forward to 2025.

Alongside these, municipal councils issued 338 certificates valued at \$131 million, meaning many approved projects have already been built and are benefitting communities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these are not just numbers, but there are impacts on the ground. The impacts include:

- Strong levels of investment, especially in tourism, commercial, and industrial projects, show confidence in Fiji's economy.
- Completed projects translate approvals into real jobs, homes, and services.
- These developments directly stimulate local economies and contribute to GDP growth.

Subdivision Applications

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the DTCP received 1,947 subdivision applications in 2024, of which 1,708 were processed, creating 1,546 new lots, as follows:

- Residential: 1,195 lots (meeting housing demand);
- Commercial: 54 lots;
- Industrial: 16 lots;
- Tourism: 10 lots; and
- Rural and other categories: 271 lots.

Mr. Speaker Sir, these translate to:

- More residential lots increase the supply of land for housing;
- Commercial, industrial, and tourism lots enable business expansion and job creation; and
- Rural lots support balanced development across the country, not only in urban centres.

Rezoning and Scheme Amendments

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in 2024, the DTCP received 374 rezoning applications, processed 345, and approved 252. Breakdown of approvals by use is as follows:

- Residential - 93
- Commercial - 96
- Industrial - 24
- Civic - 10
- Tourism - 20
- Others - 9

Rezoning is done for the following reasons:

- residential rezonings accommodate population growth and housing demand;
- commercial and tourism rezonings encourage private sector investment; and
- industrial rezonings expand opportunities for manufacturing and logistics.

Applications Received but Carried Forward

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the difference between applications received and processed in 2024 was largely due to late submissions in December, which were then carried forward for processing in early 2025. These have been reflected in the 2025 statistics rather than in the 2024 processed figures.

Conclusion

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Department's 2024 statistics reflect a robust year of development activities, as follows:

- \$701.4 million in building approvals;
- 1,546 new lots created through subdivision approvals;
- 252 rezonings supporting housing, jobs, and urban growth; and
- \$131 million worth of construction works completed.

These achievements demonstrate that Fiji is not only attracting new investment but is also seeing projects through to completion. This means more housing for our families, more spaces for businesses, and more opportunities for communities across the country.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank you for the opportunity to provide a written response to the question.