

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

TUESDAY, 30TH SEPTEMBER, 2025

[CORRECTED COPY]

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TUESDAY, 30TH SEPTEMBER, 2025

The Parliament met at 9.35 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 S. Kumar.

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Monday, 29th September, 2025, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to 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 come together in the service of our nation. A warm welcome as well to those joining us from the public gallery and to everyone watching the live broadcast, whether you are tuned in via television or streaming online. Thank you for tuning in to stay connected and also engage in our Parliamentary platforms as we all attempt to progress Fiji forward together.

Corpus Christi Teachers College Social Science Department

Lastly, honourable Members, please join me in welcoming the students of the Social Science Department at the Corpus Christi Teachers College. Welcome to your Parliament and thank you for joining us today. I trust that today's proceedings will give you a fair idea of how Parliament works.

Honourable Members, we will proceed to the next item on the Order Paper.

PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

Consolidated Review Report – Fiji Roads Authority 2019-2021 Annual Reports

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, I am pleased to present the Committee's Consolidated Review Report on the Fiji Roads Authority 2019-2021 Annual Reports.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as mandated under Standing Order 109(2)(b), the Committee is tasked with

deliberating issues related to health, education, social services, labour, aviation, culture and media.

The Fiji Roads Authority (FRA) is responsible for the planning, development and maintenance of Fiji's road infrastructure. The infrastructure primarily consists of approximately 6,360 kilometres of roads, 1,388 bridges, 21 jetties, 10 landings and 9,000 streetlights.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it should be noted that most of FRA's road assets are primarily managed through outsourced contracts with the private sector, which contributes to building the economy of Fiji.

The FRA's roles include the following:

- (1) Managing the land provision, network planning, designing and construction, maintaining, renewing, and generally managing the use of all roads here in our beloved country.
- (2) Management of traffic lights, including road design, traffic signs and markings.
- (3) Provision and management of our road safety.
- (4) Issuing of over-width, height and length limits.
- (5) Planning and management of road survey and designs.
- (6) Providing advice, programme management service, design and supervision services for all capital work programmes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to achieve its goals, the FRA adopts a sustainable procurement process. These procurement processes are done in a manner that the FRA is able to contribute meaningfully to economic development, while meeting its core responsibilities and achieving value for money.

However, in everything in life, there are always challenges. In the face of progress, the FRA is no exception. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the FRA faced the following challenges during the 2019-2021 period:

- Lack of resources.
- Accelerated deterioration of roads due to wet conditions.
- Heavy and overloaded vehicles on road.
- Lack of design and capacity from local contractors.
- Congestion of urban centres.
- COVID-19 restrictions.

Those are areas that the Committee noted that has contributed to the lack of action in certain areas of infrastructure development. However, we take note that the FRA is always trying to have alternative strategies and keep manoeuvring to get better in serving the people of Fiji.

In that regard, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I sincerely appreciate and wish to thank Mr. Apisai Ketenilagi, the Chief Executive Officer of FRA, and his executives for their valuable contributions when we did this review process.

I am thankful to the honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, namely, honourable Ratu Rakuita Vakalalabure, honourable Alipate Tuicolo, honourable Viam Pillay, honourable Alikia Bia and honourable Parveen Bala, for their invaluable contributions and support. I extend my sincere appreciation to honourable Jone Usamate for his contribution and support, being an Alternate Member.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move:

A motion, without notice, that a debate on the content of this Report is initiated at a future sitting.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

Consolidated Review Report – Land Transport Authority 2017-2020 Annual Reports

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to present the Standing Committee on Social Affairs' Consolidated Review Report on the Land Transport Authority 2017-2018, 2018-2019, and 2019-2020 Annual Reports. As mandated under Standing Order 109(2)(b), the Committee considers issues related to health, education, social services, labour, aviation, culture and media.

The Land Transport Authority (LTA) was established under the Land Transport Act 1998. The Authority's core functions are inclusive of the following:

- (1) Establishment of standards for registration and licensing of vehicles and drivers.
- (2) Develop and implement effective and efficient enforcement strategies consistent with road safety and protection of our environment.
- (3) Develop traffic management strategies in conjunction with relevant authorities.
- (4) Develop and improve customer service levels in all areas of their operations.
- (5) Ensure equitable and affordable fare schedule for all public service vehicles.

Some of the initiatives that the Authority undertook during 2017-2020 are as follows:

- (1) Enforcing compliance with traffic laws and fare collection system.
- (2) Improving customer service through digital access and que management system.
- (3) Strengthening complaints management and stakeholder engagement.
- (4) Enhancing road safety education and awareness.
- (5) Reforming taxi permit allocation to promote fairness and transparency.
- (6) Investing in infrastructure to protect roads and regulate vehicle weight.
- (7) Upgrading vehicle inspection processes.

These initiatives demonstrate LTA's unwavering commitment to delivering safe, efficient, and accountable transport services that respond to the evolving needs and concerns of all Fijians.

I sincerely thank Mr. Irimaia Rokosawa, the Chief Executive of LTA, and his management team, for their valuable contributions to this review process.

I am thankful to the honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, namely, honourable Rakuia Vakalalabure, honourable Alipate Tuicolo, honourable Viam Pillay,

honourable Alikhi Bia and honourable Parveen Bala, for their invaluable contributions and support. I would also like to thank honourable Jone Usamate for his assistance rendered on several occasions as an Alternate Member.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move:

A motion, without notice, that a debate on the content of the Report is initiated at a future sitting.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

Review Report on the Trademarks (Amendment) Bill 2025

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, good morning. The Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence hereby submits to Parliament its Review Report on the Trademarks (Amendment) Bill 2025 (Bill No. 28 of 2025), which was referred to the Committee on 6th August, 2025. The Bill seeks to strengthen Fiji's trademark laws by addressing gaps in the protection of cultural heritage and indigenous intellectual property.

Once commenced, the Trademark Act 2021 will replace the Trade-Marks Act 1933, modernising the legal framework and aligning it with Fiji's international obligations under the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) and the Paris Convention.

Key reforms include the adoption of the Nice Classification System, multi-class applications, a fair opposition process, and stronger measures against infringement and large-scale counterfeiting. While these enhancements significantly improve the registration, protection and enforcement of trademarks, the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) has highlighted the need for clearer procedures under the High Court Rules 1988 to fully safeguard trademark rights.

Any opposition to accepted application by the Commissioner must be in writing, outlining the grounds of opposition, and the Commissioner is empowered, under section 44 of the Trademarks Act 2021, to determine the opposition to all other sections of the Act.

On section 12(2), the Minister responsible for Trademarks (in this case the Attorney-General) has ultimate power to approve or reject any trademark application under this section. Under section 13 of the Trademarks Act 2021, no court, tribunal or commission, has the power to hear or determine any challenge to the decision of the Minister on a claim, complaint or application for registration under section 12(2). The Committee recommends that the Attorney-General will need to work closely with the honourable Minister for iTaukei Affairs and other indigenous groups, to ensure no conflict would arise.

To effectively review the Trademarks (Amendment) Bill 2025, the Committee received public submissions from relevant stakeholders to address specific provisions within the Bill that they consider most pertinent. This was livestreamed via Parliament's *Facebook* page and aired on the

Walesi Parliament channel. The submissions assisted the Committee in comprehending the practical implications of the proposed amendments and identifying potential challenges.

The Committee also visited the Fiji Intellectual Property Office (FIPO) under the Office of Solicitor-General's on 9th September, 2025, to gain a better understanding of the operations of FIPO. The FIPO submitted several requests to raise a budget so it can set up the Intellectual Property Office. At present, funding goes mainly towards overtime, allowances, and running expenses, and staffing remains managed by the Office of the Solicitor-General. The Committee, therefore, recommends creating an established structure to better support the Office's management and operations.

The Committee also observed that existing procedures within FIPO are predominantly manual, and we heard about this yesterday, Mr. Speaker, Sir, necessitating significant time and effort, particularly on the review of applications spanning 50 distinct classes and their sub-classes. To improve efficiency, FIPO has reached out to WIPO for technical support to assist with the digitisation process, and this support has recently been approved.

While full and proper digitisation has not yet been implemented, preparatory steps, including the scanning of documents have already commenced. It is hoped that WIPO will assist in providing access to the Industrial Property Automation System (IPAS), which will be instrumental in digitising records and streamlining operational processes.

Capacity building also remains a priority for the Office, with some minimal WIPO-led training sessions both, online and face-to-face for administrative staff and legal officers having taken place. Additional staffing for the proper operation of the office is sought but must be supported through an effectively structured business case model that would cover all intellectual property rights, patents, trademarks, copyrights, registered designs, geographical indications and traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions.

The Committee expresses its appreciation to the Office of the Solicitor-General and the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs for availing themselves on 20th August, 2025, to provide valuable insights and a brief overview of the Bill, which greatly assisted the Committee in its deliberations. The Committee would like to also thank the submitters, including those who provided written submissions, whose contributions greatly assisted in the compilation of this Review Report.

I thank the Members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence for their contribution in producing this bipartisan Report.

On behalf of the Standing Committee, I respectfully submit this Report to Parliament.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, pursuant to the resolution of Parliament on Wednesday, 6th August, 2025, the Standing Committee has now tabled its Report accordingly and the Bill will be debated and voted upon by Parliament on Wednesday, 1st October, 2025.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

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

- (1) Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Cooperatives, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications;

- (2) Minister for Defence and Veteran Affairs;
- (3) Minister for Fisheries and Forestry;
- (4) Minister for Agriculture and Waterways; and
- (5) Minister for Education.

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.

Strengthening Telecommunications and Online Safety Laws

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- The honourable Prime Minister, honourable Deputy Prime Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Cabinet Ministers, honourable Assistant Ministers, honourable Members of Parliament and the people of Fiji, who may be listening in or who are watching us on livestream on *walesi* this morning; *yadra vinaka* and a very good morning to you all.

Firstly, may I begin by congratulating the independent State of Papua New Guinea on their 50th Anniversary, Sir. I was honoured to represent the honourable Prime Minister at the celebrations, and we are joined in congratulating them on achieving such a milestone event.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, I would like to pay tribute to a son of Fiji who was called to rest recently. I talk about the late Permanent Secretary for Rural Development, my *mataki* and fellow Tailevu clansmen, Ratu Isoa Talemaibua.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, from the province of Tailevu, we had very high hopes for Mr. Talemaibua, not only as a Civil Servant but, perhaps, future leadership in our country. Without doubt, he was one of the highest performing Permanent Secretaries in our Government and his grounding in finance sets him up very well in his service to our country. The province of Tailevu will miss him and our nation is poorer for his passing. I know that the honourable Minister for Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management will miss him sorely as well. Our deepest condolences to the Talemaibua family and the *vanua vakaturaga o Naibati* on his untimely passing and may his soul rest in peace. Ratu Isoa Talemaibua, has served his country well.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to update this House and the people of Fiji on the work undertaken by the Ministry of Communications to ensure that the ICT and telecommunications environment will continue to be an enabling, business-conducive and secure environment. A monumental significant step was taken with the launching of the National Digital Strategy 2025-2030. This is a first for Fiji and acknowledges our journey as a nation and our vision for the next five years.

With this, we are taking steps to strengthen our laws and ensure that just as we have these new and emerging digital technologies, our laws need to be agile to address the challenges on the horizon. These include the review of the Telecommunications Act 2008, Online Safety Act 2018, Cybercrime Act 2021, developing our privacy and personal data protection law, and to ensure that these have the appropriate regulatory and enforcement provisions, including stronger penalties for non-compliance with these laws. In other words, we need laws with teeth.

Today, I will provide an update on the work undertaken for our Telecommunications Act 2008 and Online Safety Act 2018. I will also report on the progress made with two important national taskforces - the National Taskforce to Address Pornography and the Anti-Scam Taskforce.

On strengthening the Telecommunications Act 2008, Mr. Speaker, this is the principal law

governing our telecommunications sector. It provides licensing of service providers, the management of spectrum, interconnection between operators, universal service access, tariff regulation, infrastructure development, consumer protection, and the establishment of the Telecommunications Authority of Fiji (TAF) as the sector regulator.

The Telecommunications Act 2008 has provided a solid foundation for the development of our telecommunications sector. However, over the past 15 years, the global telecommunications environment has transformed dramatically. While this framework has served Fiji well, it was designed for a different era of telecommunications. It focused on traditional voice and data services, and since then, the breadth of technologies and challenges we face today has evolved.

As part of the law reform process, we intend to focus on several key areas arising rapidly from this evolving digital landscape. These include mitigating risks and putting in place appropriate regulatory measures regarding emerging technologies such as 5G, AI, Over-The-Top (OTT) service, satellite infrastructure and submarine cables. To address these would create further certainties for investors, enable regulators to respond effectively in these new and emerging areas, and provide consumers with sufficient safeguards in the digital age.

Mr. Speaker, we have partnered with the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), which is the United Nations specialised agency for ICT, and is only one of three global standard-setting organisations. This breadth of expertise ensures that Fiji's review will not only address key areas but also align it with global standards in areas such as emerging technologies, digital broadcasting and consumer protection.

We will embark on an extensive programme of activities that will continue throughout this financial year. This will include a comprehensive review of the Telecommunications Act 2008 and regulations and proposed amendments, to make it more modern. We will engage closely with stakeholders, service providers, consumer groups and industry associations, civil society and Government through structured consultations.

At the same time, we will consider other important areas of responsibilities of service providers in cross-border criminal investigations, as well as the blocking, filtering and takedown of illegal internet content. Finally, we will benchmark Fiji's revised framework against international standards and comparable jurisdictions to ensure it meets global best practice.

Mr. Speaker, the Online Safety Act was introduced in 2018. At that time, it was a landmark piece of legislation introduced in direct response to emerging issues such as cyberbullying and image-based abuse. Since then, we have witnessed rapid technological advancements, particularly in online platforms. These have brought social benefits, but also avenues for misuse, and reinforces the urgent need for a responsive, relevant and effective legislative framework.

Also, the Act enacted in 2018 requires a biannual review. None has occurred as yet, so in recognition of this gap, the Government has also prioritised the review of the Online Safety Act 2018. The Online Safety Commission is already working in close collaboration with the Fiji Law Reform Commission, the Attorney-General's Office and the Ministry, to prepare for this important process, which will include national comprehensive consultations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the areas that are being considered subject to the consultation outcomes include:

- strengthening definitions;
- new categories of offences;

- expanding regulatory powers and safeguards;
- stronger penalties for non-compliance with the law; and
- broadening the scope of online harm covered under the law.

The review and its amendments will ensure that the law continues to safeguard our citizens, especially the most vulnerable, against the evolving challenges of online activity. Government remains committed to ensuring that our laws keep pace with the realities of the digital age, including combating misinformation and disinformation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would now like to shift to the work being done by the National Taskforce to Address Pornography. From the early stages of our work, it became clear that the most urgent priority in this space is the protection of our children in online spaces. The three working groups have been meeting, and the members have been progressing in areas of their work. For example, the Police have formed an Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Unit, and we are working together to build the necessary capacity and tools. Also, through the support of the Australian Government, UNICEF has been undertaking a comprehensive mapping study on the efforts to combat online child sexual exploitation and abuse materials in Fiji.

Throughout the course of the mapping study, the UNICEF team has engaged extensively with stakeholders, many of whom are already members of the Taskforce, to ensure that the findings provide an accurate and comprehensive picture of the efforts.

The study is being reviewed, and the Taskforce will reconvene to carefully consider its findings and determine the most effective way forward in addressing this deeply concerning issue. There will also be a study mission to Australia to see how they are addressing this issue, as they have undertaken some significant legal reforms in these areas.

Disturbingly, materials depicting sexual abuse of children are on the rise. I wish to emphasise, Mr. Speaker, the internationally recognised term is Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Material (CSEAM), and not child pornography. I request that we adopt this terminology as the term ‘child pornography’ minimises the focus on its long-lasting impact on our children as it focusses on the use of pornographic material. This is also a key consideration in our law reform work.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are closely following Australia’s ban on social media use for children under the age of 16. Currently, most platforms require users to be 13. We acknowledge that having this implemented properly could be another effective layer in safeguarding our children from inappropriate content.

At the same time, we recognise the significant challenges which include the technology required to accurately verify a user’s age and its use on our children, and legal frameworks, including regulatory measures for non-compliance, amongst others.

Australia’s law requiring service providers not to register or maintain accounts of users under 16 begins in December, and a study mission to Australia tentatively next year will help us understand the framework before considering its application in Fiji.

On the Anti-Scam Taskforce, Mr. Speaker, Sir, regarding their work, with every potential scam that one of the Taskforce members comes across, this is very quickly sent to all members for their urgent action in providing awareness to their audiences. This prompt coordination method is to mitigate the impact of scams.

The Anti-Scam Taskforce has uncovered significant gaps in laws, which currently prevent

authorities from taking immediate action, unless a victim comes forward to report the crime. In response, a key part of the Taskforce's mandate is a review to progress to carefully examine these legislative gaps and challenges and provide a roadmap to address it.

Last year, we also held our first National Scam Awareness Week, which was attended by over 200 people. One of the highlights was the youth debate, which brought forward insightful and engaging perspectives. Building on that success, we are proud to host the National Scam Awareness Week again this year, under the theme "Digital Smarts for a Scam-Free Fiji".

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are also exploring Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with Australia and Malaysia, drawing on their expertise as we undertake the law reforms and other initiatives aimed at strengthening and modernising our ICT and communications sector.

Equally important, the partnerships that we are encouraging are between our Online Safety Commission and the e-Safety Commission of Australia, and between TAF and the Australian Communications Media Authority (ACMA).

On cyber security, Mr. Speaker, Sir, please, allow me to make some important updates in terms of our cyber security efforts. The Ministry that I am responsible for, holds this as a very critical area. October, being recognised as the Cyber Security Awareness Month, I believe it is timely to share the progress we are making. I will also be responding on a question today where I will share an update on important regional cyber security events that Fiji hosted, and another question on Friday regarding cybercrime.

As earlier updated, Fiji's Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT) has been established and is making significant progress. As the central coordination hub during nationally significant cyber events, Fiji's CERT's role will be to coordinate efforts in response and, thereby, ensuring swift action, providing cyber security advisory services, and liaising with CERTs of other countries globally.

Within two months of its establishment, Fiji's CERT has delivered comprehensive guidelines for organisations to handle cyber incidents, conducted proactive threat hunting, and successfully supported organisations in mitigating potential cyber threats, thereby, reinforcing our overall national cybersecurity posture.

We are also completing the final round of validation for the National Cyber Security and Resilience Strategy for the next five years, which we expect to table in Cabinet shortly. This Strategy will provide Fiji with a coordinated roadmap to strengthen our cybersecurity posture, and improve resilience against threats, and safeguard our digital future.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I conclude, I wish to reaffirm the Coalition Government's unwavering commitment to ensuring that our laws remain modern, responsive, and capable of addressing the key challenges faced by our people and businesses. We stand ready to continue the important work we are doing with renewed determination, greater collaboration, and strengthened resolve.

May God bless you, Mr. Speaker, this august House and the Republic of Fiji.

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

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Deputy Prime Ministers, and honourable Members of Parliament; this is quite a timely Ministerial Statement

because it is an area that requires us to deal with it in a very swift and strong manner. I think the Taskforce has a huge task at hand to deal with the problems that we face, and as the honourable Minister mentioned, especially in light of the fact that there is a lot going on around the world. One of the best examples of how it is being dealt with really well is currently in Australia.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the issues that the Taskforce needs to look at is that there are some laws that can be addressed immediately without it being required to go through the whole process before we attend to it, and I specifically refer to laws with respect to children. The honourable Minister mentioned that Australia had done it really well, so I think that is something we can look at. It is not something that we need to rehash, but it is something that we need to do for the protection of our children, with respect to cyberbullying, and what the honourable Minister referred to which is Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSEAM).

These things need to be dealt with immediately. If we need to, maybe the Taskforce needs to come back to Cabinet and say, "Look, these laws can be done immediately because they do not require research." I think a lot of it has been done, so the amendments can be done before we get the whole Taskforce reports back to do it.

There is quite a substantial amount of work that needs to be done. I am in total agreement with what the honourable Minister has mentioned today, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I think the whole of Fiji is looking forward to the report. Once it is out and what needs to be done. I can look forward to a whole lot of support from this side of the House with respect to the amendments that need to be done, especially in light of the fact that the entire platform for social media has changed, the world has changed, and how it is done.

There are several countries that have also found the right balance in terms of freedom. The freedom that is afforded to us is within our Constitution - the freedom of speech, but there are limitations to it, and I think there will probably be more limitations to it because of the opening up of social media.

There are several areas that need to be looked at, like basic online safety expectations that people will have. We also need to ensure, as Australia has done, whether we actually do it in terms of industry codes that need to be done. However, there are several areas that we are not experts in, and we need to engage with our development partners to see what can be done, not just through Australia, but there are several other countries that have very strong laws.

I think there is a huge job ahead for the Attorney-General's Office to actually draft all these up but from our perspective, Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, we are sometimes known as probably one of the most gullible nations in the world, and we smile at it. However, it is actually quite serious, but probably it is just our nature, and we also use that sometimes to tease or whatever it is at the end of the day. But it has now become a very nasty tool for people to use online for abuse or bullying, and one of the important things that we must remember is that artificial intelligence can now, and if I may use you as an example, create you without you even knowing, and conduct something or another. So, it is a phenomenal area that is being used.

I think our friendship with *Google* also is probably something that we could bank on in terms of trying to get some assistance, and finding the balance at the end of the day is an important thing, especially in light of the fact that our Bill of Rights and what is in our Constitution in terms of freedom. This is something that has been discussed many, many, moons ago in this very Parliament, Sir, regarding the freedom that is afforded to either the press or generally people and how you use it. The truth of the matter needs to come out rather than gossip and conjecture, and a lot of racial abuse, et cetera, needs to be dealt with.

Lastly, Sir, before the bell goes, one of the things that is very important is that our Commissioner and our Commission must be empowered, and the punishments that are meted out with respect to this particular area, need to be very strong, so as a deterrent, because as I have said, Sir, sometimes in our gullibility, we actually are looked at in terms of being able to abuse that particular position.

All in all, Sir, our complete support for the Taskforce and if we can be of any assistance to the honorable Minister with respect to what needs to come out, we are happy to do so. Thank you very much.

Vuvale Maritime Essential Services Centre

HON. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Deputy Prime Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Members of Parliament, ladies and gentlemen; and in a special way this morning, I would like to acknowledge the presence of the Trainee Teachers from Corpus Christi Teachers College.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, at the outset, I wish to acknowledge honourable Koroilavesau for the question he has tabled concerning the surveillance of Fiji's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and territorial waters, particularly in relation to maritime drug trafficking. His question is scheduled for a response tomorrow. I believe it is appropriate through this Ministerial Statement to provide a more comprehensive answer.

In doing so, I intend not only to address the specific concerns that he has raised in his question, but also to situate the issue within the broader security direction that Government is pursuing, especially in relation to maritime security and the protection of our national sovereignty. I also recognise the honourable Member's long service at sea, which gives way to his continuing interest in this matter, and I welcome his contribution to the National Dialogue on Safeguarding Fiji's Waters.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji is a maritime nation. Our EEZ covers 1.3 million square kilometres, while our search and rescue region spans 6.5 million square kilometres. These are vast areas of responsibility, but they are integral to Fiji's sovereignty, economy, and food security.

The National Security Strategy (NSS), Mr. Speaker, Sir, endorsed earlier this year, recognises maritime security as one of Fiji's highest priorities. It sets the framework for deterrence, detection, and disruption of threats to our maritime domain. To complement this, Government is finalising a Maritime Security Strategy, which will translate the vision of the NSS into operational guidance across all agencies.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Republic of Fiji Navy has, since 2017, modernised its approach to surveillance through a multi-layered system that includes:

- (1) space enabled detection systems to track vessels over vast ocean spaces;
- (2) regular surface and air patrols to maintain visible enforcement;
- (3) trial deployment of unmanned assets and platforms, pointing to the future of persistent surveillance; and;
- (4) advanced analytical training and inter-agency governance frameworks.

The future of maritime surveillance lies in uncrewed platforms and autonomous systems. These assets will allow Fiji to dominate its maritime space at lower cost, with reduced risks to personnel, and with greater reach across our EEZ. In fact, we are in talks with the Governments of Australia and New Zealand to acquire these capabilities full time.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the most significant enabler of these efforts is the Vuvale Maritime Essential Services Centre (MESC), which began operations in April of this year, supported under the Vuvale Partnership with Australia at a cost of FJ\$120 million. The Centre is the largest single investment in Fiji's maritime security in a generation. It is not simply a building, it is the institutional heart of our surveillance and enforcement system, designed to coordinate all national efforts at sea.

The Vuvale Maritime Essential Services Centre functions as Fiji's national coordination hub for maritime security. It hosts under one roof the Navy, the Fiji Police, Customs, Immigration, Fisheries, and other relevant stakeholders. This is a deliberate design. For two long agencies acted in parallel, sometimes duplicating work, sometimes leaving gaps that were exploited by criminal syndicates. The MES eliminates those silos and replaces them with unity of effort.

The Centre ensures that the following:

- (1) Intelligence is collected, analysed, and shared in real time. A suspicious vessel detected by satellite can be flagged, identified, and linked to partner intelligence within minutes and not days.
- (2) Responses within our EEZ are coordinated swiftly. Whether the response requires a Navy patrol boat, an aerial surveillance asset or a joint boarding team, the decision is taken collectively and executed without delay.
- (3) Resources are allocated with maximum efficiency. Instead of agencies competing for fuel, airtime or patrol assets, the Centre ensures every resource is directed where it is most needed.

This integration means that no agency is left to act in isolation. The MESC is the place where Fiji coordinates its maritime security efforts and transforms information into timely operational responses. It is where intelligence becomes action, where surveillance becomes enforcement, and where Fiji asserts its sovereignty across a vast and vital maritime space.

Looking to the future, the Centre is also designed to integrate unmanned platforms, autonomous surveillance technologies and new aerial capabilities that Fiji is developing with Australia. This adaptability ensures that MESC will not only meet today's challenges but will also evolve to counter the more complex threats of tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the MESC is also a reflection of Fiji's partnership. Australia has been instrumental in its establishment, but Fiji also draws strength from cooperation with New Zealand, the United States, France, India and China. These countries provide training, assets and technical support that collectively enhance our maritime security posture.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, through the Pacific Islands Forum, the Melanesian Spearhead Group, and the Pacific Fusion Centre in Vanuatu, Fiji contributes to regional security frameworks that depend on trust and collaboration. The MESC strengthens Fiji's role in these arrangements, allowing us to share information and coordinate operations with our partners.

I wish to also inform the House that the Government in partnership with Australia is developing a national air capability. This initiative is tied to the work of MESC as it will ensure that Fiji has a persistent aerial presence over its maritime domain. Surveillance aircraft operating in coordination with the Centre will provide Fiji with the ability to dominate our maritime space through combined air and sea monitoring. Furthermore, the honourable Prime Minister has announced that Fiji is exploring the possibility of a Treaty or Alliance with Australia that includes defence

cooperation. While this remains at a very early stage of negotiation, it represents a profound opportunity. Such an arrangement would give Fiji extraordinary capabilities that extend beyond what is currently available under the Defence Cooperation Programme. It would present a generational step in Fiji's ability to safeguard its sovereignty.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to inform Parliament that the Vuvale Maritime Essential Services Centre will be officially opened this Friday, 3rd October, at 11.00 a.m. This occasion will mark the formal commissioning of the Centre as Fiji's national hub for maritime coordination. At the ceremony, the Deputy Prime Minister of Australia, honourable Richard Marles, will formally hand over the facility to our honourable Prime Minister. This handover is not simply a transfer of infrastructure, but a demonstration of the confidence and trust that underpins the Vuvale Partnership. It represents Australia's commitment to stand with Fiji in protecting our shared Pacific Ocean, and it signifies Fiji's responsibility to use this capability in the service of our sovereignty and the security of our people in our region.

When I met with Minister Marles last week, we both agreed that the Centre should be known as the Vuvale Maritime Essential Services Centre or the Vuvale Maritime Essential Services Centre. This was not a casual decision. This name carries meaning. *Vuvale* speaks to the principles of family, solidarity and mutual trust that bind Fiji and Australia. It recognises that while the Centre will operate on Fijian soil and under Fijian command, it stands as a joint achievement, forged through partnership, shared resources and common purpose.

The naming also reflects our vision for the Centre – that will not be a closed institution but a hub that welcomes co-operation with other trusted partners and one that strengthens Fiji's role within the Pacific Islands Forum and regional maritime network. In this way, the Vuvale Maritime Essential Services Centre symbolises both national ownership and regional partnership.

Mr. Speaker, the Centre is already delivering tangible benefits across a range of national priorities. It is strengthening enforcement against drug trafficking, with agencies now able to track and intercept suspicious vessels with a level of coordination that was previously not possible. It is also supporting environmental protection by ensuring that surveillance data is shared to monitor illegal fishing, pollution and the encroachment of vessels in sensitive marine areas. It further enables fisheries monitoring, which is critical to safeguarding the livelihoods of our coastal communities and the food security of the nation. Finally, it is safeguarding sea lanes that are the arteries of Fiji's economy - sea lanes that carry tourists, goods and services in and out of our ports.

Most importantly, the Centre gives Fiji the ability to act on timely intelligence. Intelligence is the lifeblood of maritime security. A vessel detected by a satellite, or a suspicious communication intercepted by a partner agency, is only valuable if it is processed quickly and transformed into actionable decisions. In the past, intelligence often sat with one agency, and by the time it was shared or acted upon, the opportunities were lost already.

The MESC has changed this. It ensures that all relevant agencies are linked in real time. If a suspicious vessel is spotted entering our EEZ, the Centre can immediately:

- verify its identity through satellite and maritime databases;
- share the information with Customs, Police and Immigration simultaneously;
- alert the Navy for possible interception at sea;
- deploy air surveillance assets to track its movements; and
- coordinate with international partners if the vessel has regional or transnational links.

That means that threats are identified quickly and analysed effectively and met with a unified and

coordinated response.

Criminal syndicates rely on speed, concealment and gaps between agencies. The MESC closes those gaps. It takes away the advantages that traffickers once had and replaces them with a system where the State, acting collectively, is faster, smarter and better informed than the adversaries.

Mr. Speaker, I submit that Fiji is not only improving surveillance of its waters but also transforming its entire maritime security posture. The Vuvale Maritime Essential Services Centre is the cornerstone of that transformation. It operationalises the National Security Strategy, prepares the way for the Maritime Security Strategy, integrates national and international partnerships, and connects sea, air and unmanned assets into a single, coordinated framework.

Its official opening this week marks a milestone in Fiji's defence and security history. With the support of our Vuvale partners and others, Fiji has placed itself at the forefront of Pacific maritime security. The MESC will remain a symbol of Fiji's sovereignty, a hub of intelligence and timely response, and a commitment to protect our ocean for generations to come.

Mr. Speaker, before I sit, I also wish to inform the House that tomorrow morning I will be launching the Annual Poppy Appeal, and it will be launched in the morning, and at around midday, I will be stationed in the Parliament Lobby (out there in the front) with a collection tin at hand. I encourage all honourable Members to, please, give generously. Our veterans, as we all know, gave more than coins in their service to the nation, so it is only fair that honourable Members part with more than coins in recognition of that sacrifice by our forebearers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Members are, of course, free to disagree with one another during a debate inside this House, but on this matter that I have just mentioned, it is a matter of generosity, so I expect unanimous consent in this House. I will also note that when the honourable Members pass through the lobby tomorrow, I will be watching very carefully on how heavy or how light the tins become.

Those who contribute notes will find me smiling widely. Those who contribute coins will hear them rattle louder, for all to know that the coins are being contributed. If any honourable Member dares to walk past without contributing, I may be tempted, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to ask you to, please, call for a division in the House right there in the lobby.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, really, to set a proper example in this House, I will, of course, be looking to your high office to lead the House in being the very first to contribute. Of course, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and the honourable Members of this House and anyone who will be present here tomorrow, for your charity you will be given a poppy. This poppy reminds all of us about the sacrifices that our forebearers gave their lives for our peace today.

MR. SPEAKER.- We take due note of your poppy appeal tomorrow, and I hope you will have the response you require or want from honourable Members of Parliament.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for his detailed explanation on the subject on Maritime Essential Services Centre and the general security within our area of interest, especially in the Exclusive Economic Zone of Fiji.

I thank the honourable Minister as he has clearly articulated the details of the issue of surveillance in that respect, that Fiji's EEZ covering around about 6.5 million square kilometres. This, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is a huge challenge and responsibility for our agencies that look after the borders, especially in protection against illegal introduction of drugs, illegal fishing, as well as illegal

immigrants that may try to penetrate our borders and come into Fiji.

The honourable Minister has covered the importance of MESC that is established in Lami and the areas that it will cover, especially in surveillance, intelligence sharing, coordinated enforcement against drug trafficking and transnational crime. He has explicitly explained the role of the Centre in regard to environmental protection, food security and trade resilience. He has expressed the importance of our partnership between Fiji and Australia and Fiji and New Zealand.

I totally agree with him that these two partners are quite important as they are our very close neighbours, but they also operate in similar conditions as we in the South Pacific, not only in Fiji, but the South Pacific as a whole. I also agree on the highlight that surveillance is well covered. If we look at the Pacific, especially Fiji, Fiji's surveillance is well covered by the Navy, and then we have the Ministry of Fisheries which has almost a duplicate setup of covering our EEZ and our points of entries. Then we have the Forum Fisheries Agency that is based in Honiara, Solomon Islands, which again copies the exact. If we look at the overall picture, we are covered under three umbrellas of surveillance systems.

What I would like to ask the Government this morning is the actual presence on the ground. I seek that the Government look at the capability of the ship and the Navy, especially the ships that they have and the capabilities that they are able to portray in covering these areas. I remember that there has been a suggestion in diverting our military assets in peacekeeping overseas. I urge the honourable Prime Minister and the honourable Minister to re-look at the distribution of the RFMF engineers in carrying out their capabilities in development in the maritime and rural coastal areas in Fiji and to assist the Navy. In actual fact, their presence itself gives a bigger image of that, we are awake, and we are looking and gives that protection to intruders in our maritime zone.

I thank the honourable Minister for his presentation this morning and I wish the honourable Prime Minister and the honourable Minister well in the opening of MESC at Lami tomorrow.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, this is an appropriate time to suspend our proceedings for our morning break. Parliament will resume in half an hour.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.42 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.17 a.m.

Development of Non-Timber Forest Products

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Cabinet Ministers and Assistant Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Members of Parliament, viewers tuning in live on Parliament's *Facebook* channel, ladies and gentlemen; *ni sa yadra vinaka* and a very good morning to you all.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to deliver a statement on the development of and growing opportunities for non-timber forest products in Fiji. For too long, our forests have been valued only for timber. Yet, the world demand for non-timber forest products is generating billions of dollars each year, contributing to national economies, supporting community livelihoods, reducing poverty and strengthening resilience.

For that reason, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are currently looking at non-timber forest products to enhance forestry contribution to our national GDP in the future. Fiji, with over 60 percent of the landmass still covered by natural forests and with the rich biodiversity and rich customary land base, is well positioned to make good use of this opportunity.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, today, I would like to speak on non-timber forest products, specifically on what it is, the challenges faced, opportunities for Fiji, and the way forward. A non-timber forest product is any product obtained from forests or trees that is not timber, or in simple terms, all the useful materials from the forest other than timber.

A non-timber forest product can either be plant-based, animal-based or cultural-based. Plant-based includes fruits, nuts, seeds, bamboo, rattan, pandanus, medicinal plants, resins, essential oils, latex and gums. Animal-based includes honey, bushmeat, insects and wild game. Culturally based includes materials for handicrafts, traditional medicine, perfumes and ritual uses. To put this simply into the Fijian context, our non-timber forest products include sandalwood or *yasi*, bamboo, coconut, agarwood, candlenut or *sikeci*, *dilo*, and traditional weaving materials, like pandanus, *vau* and sago.

Mr. Speaker, non-timber forest products are an important part of daily livelihood in Fiji - from a farmer in a rural setting to someone residing in an urban centre. Non-timber forest products, like handicraft, food, traditional medicine, traditional mat and tapa, oil, building materials like bamboo and sago, to name a few, are important components in our local markets and some are even exported to markets outside Fiji.

Sandalwood or *yasi* remains our flagship non-timber forest product. Based on our records, over 2,000 hectares of land have been planted with sandalwood by the local communities and private landowners in the past. This number continues to grow every year, with the growing interest from members of the public. From 2010 to 2022, Fiji exported over 150,000 kilogrammes of sandalwood with earnings around FJ\$12 million.

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, bamboo, with its multiple uses and fast-growing traits, is also gaining popularity, with support from the Fiji Bamboo Association and local bamboo enthusiasts. Candlenut or locally known as *sikeci*, agarwood and *dilo* are also emerging as popular non-timber forest products with growing interest from the public and also with growing lucrative markets.

Mr. Speaker, non-timber forest products are already contributing to our local economy but one may ask, how well is it being regulated or monitored or is it being harvested in a sustainable manner or are we capturing its full potential or market value? Indeed, despite the progress to-date on

non-timber forest products, challenges remain and some of the issues that we need to address include:

- (1) Inadequate policy and legislative framework to ensure proper focus on non-timber forest products. As such, Fiji does not have a national inventory of non-timber forest products, and this makes planning and investment difficult.
- (2) A lack of proper processing facilities for oil extraction, treatment, and product development which results in reduced or low value of products.
- (3) Lack of quality standards and traceability systems in place to help us meet the export market demand.
- (4) As most of the non-timber forest products are from customary land, a strong public community engagement with benefit sharing arrangements are needed to drive this forward.

Mr. Speaker, despite all these challenges, opportunities for Fiji looks promising and we need to take the following into urgent consideration:

- (1) Sandalwood oil now can fetch up to US\$2,000 per kilogramme in the international market.
- (2) Agarwood resin, if properly developed and refined, is probably one of the world's expensive natural product which can fetch up to US\$10,000 per kilogramme.
- (3) Bamboo, with its short rotation of three to five years to reach maturity, is a solution to low cost, sustainable materials for housing, furniture and handicrafts. Because of its fast-growing nature, bamboo is a significant sequester or user of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, making it an important tool in the fight against climate change.
- (4) The natural oils from *sikeci* or candlenut and *dilo* are used in the cosmetic industry and these are two tree species which grow naturally in Fiji. The growing demand for wellness and cosmetic products both, in Fiji and overseas, opens up an opportunity for these products that can help elevate the livelihood of our rural communities.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Forestry is committed to expanding its focus on non-timber forest products, in addition to timber or wood products. In the current Forest Decree 1992, non-timber forest products is not specifically mentioned, although vaguely covered under the term, "other forest produce". This Act is currently being reviewed, and the Ministry of Forestry is working hard to table the Forest Bill 2025 by November of this year. In the current draft Bill, non-timber forest products is now covered and has its own section and is mentioned more than 10 times throughout the document.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would also like to share the concurrent work being undertaken by the Ministry to address the developments of non-timber forest products. Initially, the Ministry of Forestry had developed a Non-Timber Forest Products Strategy in 2020. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the consultation process was not carried out.

In the last financial year, the Ministry of Forestry continued this process by carrying out an internal consultation process within the Ministry and it plans to carry out a national consultation to present the NTFPS to the relevant stakeholders before the end of this calendar year. Through this process, the Ministry will also submit to Cabinet information papers, updating Cabinet on the current developments with non-timber forest products, like sandalwood, agarwood and bamboo. Through our current reforestation of degraded forest project of 13 million trees in 15 years, we are scaling up the community tree planting programmes for sandalwood and candlenut, and also looking at *dilo*, bamboo and other priority species.

The Ministry, through its research and development, continues to carry out research on sandalwood. This includes the establishment of a 60-hectare sandalwood plantation in Tailevu and Bua in the next three years. Sandalwood is the only non-timber forest product that the Ministry of Forestry continues to monitor and carry out inventories in the three Divisions.

The Ministry is also progressing agarwood through an agarwood plantation trial and performing inoculation tests which have been carried out in Ra. Agarwood was first introduced to Fiji in 2003, with over six species planted at Dama in Bua, and later expanded through voluntary community replanting initiatives.

The Ministry has since partnered with Mataqali Nacobicibici in Ra, allocating 121 hectares of their land as a new national research site. Recent inventories recorded over 4,800 trees in Nasavusavu, forming the foundation of a public-private partnership with Tokatoka Nacobicibici Investment Limited and Kava Corporation PTE Limited. This partnership aims to establish Fiji's first agarwood oil extraction and processing facility, supported by reforestation programmes, scientific trials and a national seeding traceability system.

Mr. Speaker, a feasibility study confirmed the commercial viability of agarwood in Fiji, projecting potential revenue of over US\$167 million from high-grade oil production, positioning the Nasavusavu hub as central to both, national and regional agarwood development.

Lastly, we are also working on the promotion of a sustainable bamboo industry in Fiji through New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) funded project with Global Green Growth Initiative (GGGI). This year, the Ministry of Forestry, together with GGGI, carried out for the first time a trial of bamboo inventory methodology in the province of Naitasiri. In addition to this, on 18th September, 2025, the Ministry, for the third year, celebrated World Bamboo Day with relevant stakeholders and the staff and students at the College of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry of the Fiji National University in Koronivia.

On that week also, Government through the Ministry of Forestry, signed an agreement with the Republic of Indonesia through the Indonesia Embassy in Fiji on the development of bamboo industry products in Fiji. This programme will see the training of up to 16 Fijian bamboo craftsmen in Indonesia, workshops for Fiji policy-makers on bamboo industry development and the provision of technical assistance from the Indonesian experts.

Mr. Speaker, the non-timber forest products development in Fiji is an opportunity for an inclusive and sustainable growth. This opportunity will empower our rural communities, create new industries and place Fiji as a regional leader in sustainable forest-based products.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for her Ministerial Statement on Non-Timber Forest Products. Timber and things that grow in the forest have always been important to life everywhere and one of the concerns that we have globally, is the amount of forest areas that are being cut down for various needs. I was looking at some of the statistics today, we are talking around 10 million hectares lost every year.

Of course, when you lose trees, it has all kinds of implications, has implications on carbon gas emissions and all of those other areas. To be able to develop forestry so that you can have naturally produced products without felling trees is something that is very positive for everyone. In this case, it also provides alternative incomes for people in our country and does not degrade the forest, which in itself, is a very important issue.

I listened to the honourable Minister talking about various things that she is looking at such as bamboo, agarwood, *sikeci*, *dilo* and a few others. I remember there has been a lot of work in the past in Fiji on bamboo, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I know I had a classmate of mine, Usa Korodrau, who used to be very involved in this, going back and forth to Indonesia a few times. And hearing today that there has been some progress on bamboo, I am glad to see that that is progressing. It will move to a stage where all those people that were going to Indonesia. I think we used to send a lot of people to Indonesia, going back and forth to plant it and grow it. I am glad to see that something is happening out of this.

I think the establishment of this non-timber forest products; it gives a lot of avenues for people that might not have access to ready income in the outer areas to be able to get various kinds of income. I can see the development possibility of cottage industries with people. I think the other thing that I was thinking about is the medicinal side of all of this. People go to the forest for barks, leaves, et cetera. I was reading earlier this morning in other countries of the world, this medicinal side of it is big business. However, one of the problems that they have is to have sustainable harvesting.

In order also for medicinal business, you need to also have the scientific research behind it to identify the critical ingredients in those forest products that lead to saving of lives. If you go to other countries in the world, whether it is India or China, you will see side by side, Western medicine and traditional medicine working hand in hand.

I think there is a great opportunity for us to be able to do that in this particular area. I know we have a lot of big forest areas in our country. We have the greater Tomanivi protected area, which is something that we need to maintain. All that area is a water catchment area. If we start cutting down those trees, obviously it is going to have an impact on the amount of water that we can have. Taveuni Forest Reserve, and all of these other areas that we have, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

I think all of us welcome this. If I am not mistaken, I think there has been some budget set aside for this. I read somewhere in the research that I took this morning that it was around \$500,000. I am not too sure whether that is for this year or for the future, but we look forward to the research and the opening up of economic opportunities, cottage industries, and the development perhaps of medicinal plants as a new revenue source for the people of our country. We wish the Ministry well, Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the development of this project as a way of maintaining our forests and at the same time generating livelihoods for people that live around them.

2025 National Agriculture Show

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Ministers and Assistant Ministers, honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Members of Parliament and viewers tuned in live broadcast in today's session, *ni sa bula vinaka*.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise today to inform this august House the significant initiative successfully undertaken by the Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways, that is the completion of the 2025 National Agriculture Show held at Koroivolu Park in Nadi from 16th-19th September, 2025. This event marked a milestone in our ongoing commitment to strengthening Fiji's agriculture sector. It brought together farmers, agribusiness, researchers, and the wider community to showcase innovations, share knowledge, and celebrate the vital role agriculture plays in our national development.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to begin by extending my heartfelt appreciation to the *Momo Na Tui Nawaka* and the *Momo Na Tui Nadi* for their gracious presence throughout the Agriculture Show. Their attendance, representing the *vanua* of Nadi was a powerful symbol of unity

and support. It meant a great deal to the Ministry and contributed significantly to the event's success.

I also sincerely acknowledge the Administrator of Nadi Town and his dedicated team for their generosity in allowing the Ministry to host the 2025 National Agriculture Show at Koroivolu Park in Nadi. The venue, right in the heart of Nadi, proved to be an ideal location, accessible to all - primary and secondary school students, teachers, youth, and elders of Nadi, to tourists, hoteliers, businesspeople, and visitors from across the Western Division of Viti Levu. One could simply step off the bus at the Nadi bus stand and walk straight into the vibrant atmosphere of the show. The choice of the venue not only enhanced public participation but also played a vital role in the successful completion of the event. *Vinaka vakalevu* to all who made this possible.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the National Agriculture Show is a significant annual event that celebrates the dedication, innovation, and achievement of farmers, agro producers, agrobusinesses, manufacturers and importers of agricultural machines across the country. The agriculture show serves as a vital platform to showcase agricultural excellence, raise awareness on sustainable farming practices and reinforce the role of agriculture in ensuring food nutrition is secure for all Fijians.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the 2025 National Agriculture Show drew a remarkable attendance of 26,834 individuals. The event showcased a vibrant mix of agriculture, innovation, and community engagement, with 75 booths in total. Of these, 89 were hosted by stakeholders, including education institutions and government Ministries, primarily displaying agricultural products and machinery.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways filled the remaining 36 booths with its operational divisions. Additionally, 17 stakeholders and five food vendors brought their own tents, adding to the diversity of the setup. A standout feature was the Farmers Village, housed in two large tents where farmers and florists sold their goods directly to the public throughout the four-day event. Notably, the Animal Health and Production Division's booth emerged as a major attraction, drawing considerable interest from visitors.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, agriculture plays a vital role in sustaining rural communities, and it is the heart of the Government's development strategy. By focusing on smarter, more efficient farming practices and enhancing infrastructure and expanding access to markets, the government aims to boost income opportunities, especially with those in rural and maritime areas. This is central to the vision of the Ministry and of the Coalition Government as a whole.

Investing in research climate smart funding systems, promoting value addition, improving infrastructure, and strengthening market access, the Government is committed to creating more income generating opportunities, particularly for rural and maritime communities. This inclusive approach not only strengthens food security and uplifts youth and women through empowerment but also lays the foundation of greater climate resilience and long-term economic growth across the nation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the theme of the 2025 National Agriculture Show, “*Be Resilient, Produce Smart, Go Local and Grow Agro-Tourism*” captures strategic vision for sustainable and inclusive agriculture future. This theme emphasises the importance of resilience in the face of climate change and global disruptions, encouraging farmers to adopt innovative climate-smart practices that boost productivity while preserving natural resources.

Grow local promotes self-reliance and food security by supporting local producers and reducing dependence on imported products. The inclusion of agro tourism reflects a growing synergy between agriculture and the tourism sector, showcasing how farms, traditional practises and local food system can become vibrant attractions that diversify incomes and celebrates Fiji's culture.

Altogether, the theme aligns with the national goals to strengthen rural economies, empower communities and position agriculture as a dynamic driver on both economic growth and cultural pride. Highlighted below are the related objectives of the show:

- (1) Improve awareness to the general public and stakeholders on the types of services available within the Ministry.
- (2) Promote smart and sustainable agriculture practices.
- (3) Encourage youth and women engagement in farming.
- (4) Provide farmers with access to new technologies and markets.
- (5) Strengthen partnership between the government, stakeholders and the private sector.

The overall execution of the show embodied the objectives through live representations, demonstrations and information, material and advertisement disseminated through mainstream media, as well as updated and communicated through the official social media channels of the Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways *Facebook* platform.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the standout achievement of the show was dynamic panel discussion held on day two. The panel of discussion spotlighted the vital connections between agriculture and tourism, emphasising the potential for local food systems to enrich the visitor experience and strengthen economic resilience.

Day three shifted focus to organic farming initiatives and policy frameworks, embarking through a dialogue on sustainable practises and regulatory support. The insights shared by the panellists laid a strong foundation of reviewing the agritourism task force, offering invaluable highlights in the static policy intervention needed from the Fiji Government.

These efforts encompass addressing the gap between local producers and the tourist sector, with the distinct aim to enhance food security, promote authentic Fijian culinary experiences, and empower rural communities through inclusive growth, reducing the national import bill for commodities that could be locally produced and sourced, and advocate for sustainable development through the supply chain, thereby minimising carbon footprints and aligning to Fiji's commitment to climate action.

The discussion on organic interest has spotlighted the urgent need to formalise the Fijian National Organic Policy, emphasising the importance of recognising and valuing organic farming practices. These initiatives align closely with the Ministry's broader development goals, particularly in enhancing the tourism sector through a resilient and sustainable food production system. By promoting organic agriculture, the policy not only supports environmental sustainability, but also contributes to public health and food security – the key pillars in building a robust economy that benefits both local and business.

Another notable success of the agriculture show was the hosting of the Commodity Farmers Award on Thursday, 18th September, followed by the special awards ceremony later that evening. These events celebrated the dedication and achievement of farmers across both crops and livestock sector, as well as honorary awards for the Ministry of Forestry. A total of 46 awards were presented – 24 during the day and 22 in the afternoon – highlighting the importance of recognising the tireless efforts of those who work in the land.

By honouring these individuals, the ceremonies have underscored the vital role farmers play in driving employment, ensuring food security, and continuing the economic growth of the nation. Their recognition not only validates their hard work but also inspires continued excellence and innovation in the agriculture sector.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry allocated a budget of \$230,000 for the 2025 National Agriculture Show. It successfully supported the event's core operations, including venue setups, booth construction, main stage arrangement and wire and piping. This funding also covers the hiring of personnel and procurement of essential items for the food issue, along with the Farmers Award, meals and accommodation. Booths were offered to stakeholders at \$500 each, generating \$6,000 in revenue. In addition, sponsorship requests yield \$33,000 in cash and \$26,787 in-kind contributions, which greatly enhanced the Farmers Award. Divisional allocation further supported accommodation, meals and display arrangements, contributing \$235,503 to the overall effort.

As the Ministry looks ahead to hosting future agriculture shows, it continues to rely on Government support to provide a budget that will deliver a bigger and better event. The Ministry extends its sincere gratitude to all donors and sponsors; their general contribution played a vital role in the success of both the award ceremony and the show as a whole.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to inform this august House that the Ministry will host the 2026 National Agriculture Show in Labasa. This strategic decision reflects our commitment to decentralising national events and recognising the vital contribution of Vanua Levu to Fiji's agriculture sector. I warmly encourage farmers, stakeholders, students, teachers and the wider communities of Macuata, Bua and Cakaudrove, to attend in great numbers and take full advantage of the opportunities this show presents.

The event will showcase innovations, best practices and market linkages while fostering learning and collaboration across the sector. Its impact will be far-reaching, stimulating economic activities, promoting agri-tourism and empowering our rural communities. This is more than a show. It is a celebration of Vanua Levu agricultural potential and a catalyst for growth.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to conclude, the 2025 National Agriculture National Agriculture Show has once again demonstrated the resilience, innovation and unity of the agriculture sector, from the vibrant displays of local produce to the groundbreaking technology showcased by our farmers and agri-business. This event has reaffirmed agriculture as the backbone of our economy and the solution to the high cost of living.

As we move forward, let us harness the momentum that we show to strengthen food security, empower rural communities, and embrace climate practices. Together, we will cultivate a future where agriculture thrives and every citizen benefits from its growth. With those words, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank you for the opportunity to deliver the Ministerial Statement.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to thank the honourable Minister for his Ministerial Statement this morning. I was listening very carefully to all the justifications that he made in having the Agriculture Show in Nadi. Beyond the reasons that he has stated, I was also hoping that he would also declare that he has a keen interest, Nadi has a special place in his heart, Mr. Speaker, Sir. But seriously, honourable Minister and all agriculture stakeholders, thank you and congratulations for the successful conduct of the National Agriculture Show. The National Agriculture Show is an event that almost all Fijians look forward to because of our connection to agriculture, and most importantly, the economic and social benefits as well. As far as food and nutrition security is concerned, I wish to again challenge all agriculture stakeholders.

It is good that we had the National Agriculture Show. We have seen the innovations, the new technology and the set of knowledge that is available, but what is important for us is to continue to challenge ourselves so that we can raise the bar in terms of production. Of course, as the honourable Minister has stated, the economic benefits, given that agriculture is the backbone of our economy.

Agriculture can still do more and contribute to a more food and nutrition secure Fiji, contribute to a stronger, resilient and diversified economy. I will focus on a few areas. I think the biggest challenge and the honourable Minister is well aware is how we graduate our subsistence farmers to subsistence market-oriented or semi-commercial or commercial farmers.

I know that the Members of the Natural Resources Committee know that this is one of the success indicators for the extension services. How many farmers are able to successfully graduate from a subsistence level to a market-oriented, semi-commercial and commercial farmer? With that, there are still some policies that probably need to be reviewed, particularly in the assistance that is provided to farmers. Farmers who are doing better deserve more assistance regardless of how many times they have been assisted. They need to be incubated over a period of time, with proper training and technology transfer is important for them as well.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with innovative technology and shared knowledge, we are to expedite the transfer of this knowledge to our farmers. I would suggest to the ministry that there are some services that probably could be outsourced to other relevant stakeholders so that they can concentrate on the core functions and do better in what they are doing.

I would suggest that the role of the Crop and Livestock Council is an area that we need to consider seriously. The agro-business role is very important. We need to come out of commodities and go into products. The policies that are in place as well need the environment to be created for them by the Government.

Lastly, on research, we need aggressive research, and research needs to be supported. One of the challenges Mr. Speaker, Sir, the ministry continues to face is the turnover in the ministry. They keep losing their top scientists. They keep losing their PhD graduates. What is the Government's plan to retain these people in the ministry so that we can elevate the production and of course, gain more out of the agriculture sector?

Congratulations, honourable Minister, and please convey our thanks to all the agriculture stakeholders. We will always be available to provide any assistance if needed.

Teacher Shortages and Over Supply

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- The honourable Prime Minister, honourable Deputy Prime Ministers, honourable Cabinet Ministers, the honourable Leader of the Opposition and fellow Members of Parliament; I rise to provide a brief in this august House on key policy reforms being undertaken by the Ministry of Education as we work to strengthen governance, accountability and service delivery across the education sector.

We often find or receive requests coming from schools and stakeholders, particularly parents and school management, that there is a lack of teachers in schools, and this results in certain teachers being overlaid with work on top of their own. As a result, Mr. Speaker, Sir, at times, non-maths teachers end up teaching maths and this results in difficulties for both the teacher and the school population.

In other instances, there is an oversupply of teachers in schools for specific subjects. As such, we need to adjust these anomalies and, therefore, schools' audit will continue to be part of these policy changes. As the Ministry continues to focus on improving access, quality and equity in education, it has become increasingly important to address longstanding gaps and inefficiencies through a clear and enforceable policy framework.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, today, I wish to highlight three critical areas in policy development in the Ministry of Education – the Ministry of Education Discipline Policy, Teacher Transfer Policy and Teacher Appointments and Acting Appointments Policy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Education is not excluded from the provisions of breaches and misconduct under Fiji's Public Service Regulations. Under the Civil Service Disciplinary Guidelines all staff in Government Ministries, including temporary, contract, wage earners and permanent employees, are subject to the discipline process.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Education is currently developing a comprehensive disciplinary policy that aims to address cases of misconduct by heads of schools and teachers, and also non-teaching staff. It is no secret that past practices have often resulted in teachers who commit serious misconduct being simply transferred to a new environment, to another school or moved to a headquarters rather than being held accountable. These practices only serve to transfer the problem from one location to another rather than resolving it, and in most cases, it put students, the school and the integrity of the education system at risk. The Ministry of Education is continuously working to address the anomalies raised to us regularly.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in developing the new Disciplinary Policy, the Ministry of Education is looking to anchor firmly with the existing Civil Service Disciplinary Guidelines and the Civil Service Discipline Regulations. This requires that any action taken must be prompt, transparent, fair, impartial and consistent with clear responsibilities and rights to response and confidentiality safeguarded.

In order to mitigate and resolve misconduct in the workplace from slipping through the system, the Ministry of Education will continue to develop and enhance policies to address misconduct that are usually handled by the Performance Disciplinary Unit of the Ministry, and this is to ensure that our employees are empowered to perform their roles and responsibilities diligently. The Ministry of Education is taking steps to restore public confidence and trust in our education system. We are also ensuring that our schools and our workplaces are safe and accountable institutions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Teacher Transfer Policy plays a crucial role in mitigating teacher shortages in Fiji schools by enabling greater flexibility, responsiveness and equity in our staffing. This policy allows teachers who have served in one school for two to three years to request or be considered for transfers. This policy will assist us to redistribute human resources where they are needed most. This will allow the Ministry of Education address surplus teachers in some locations, subdivisions, districts and shortages also for others. For example, when a teacher retires, resigns or when fewer teachers are available in certain subjects this policy will have a standard criteria to assist the Ministry of Education to address it in a timely manner. Regarding STEM subjects for remote schools, this policy will have a standard criteria to assist the Ministry of Education address the issue.

Moreover, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this policy also includes annual transfer windows and formal procedures so that teacher movements happen in a planned, systematic way, to reduce delays and gaps in school staffing. This means when schools in maritime and rural regions lose teachers, they are more likely to have replacements ready, reducing disruptions to learning.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this policy aligns directly with the Ministry of Education Strategic Plan and the 2023 Denarau Declaration, as well as the National Development Plan 2025-2029 and Vision 2050 and the Sustainable Development Goal 4, as this ensures quality, inclusive and equitable education for all children in Fiji. One of the strategic priorities in enhancing teacher welfare and improving teacher engagement, especially in remote and rural areas.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, by making transfer opportunities more predictable, more transparent and fairer, the policy helps retain teachers, reduce attrition, motivate staff members and ensure that all schools, no matter which location, can access qualified teachers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these policies on discipline, teacher management and staffing comprise a broader effort to build a professional, accountable and student-focused education system in Fiji. We are engaging with teachers, school leaders, teacher unions, community leaders and other stakeholders to ensure that these policies are inclusive, practical and effectively implemented.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Education is committed to delivering not only access to education, but also quality education built on strong values, professional integrity and equity for all. The previous policy framework for appointments and acting roles lack consistent processes across teaching and non-teaching sectors, and did not adequately capture accountability mechanisms. This led to unclear approval pathways and delays in processing, perceptions of favouritism and lack of merit-based decision, insufficient checks for disciplinary and performance issues prior to appointment. These gaps presented not only operational inefficiencies, Mr. Speaker, Sir, but also risks to the integrity of our workforce.

The appointment policy ensures that the right people are placed in the right roles, and not by chance or convenience, but by merit and necessity. Our teachers and education officers deserve nothing less, and our students depend on it. The revised policies for the Ministry will include key features that will set guiding principles and standardise principles in order that would further strengthen this policy as an effective administrative tool.

We will continue to undertake consultations with all relevant stakeholders, including the teacher unions, in the formulation and revision of the Ministry of Education policies. The overall objective is to provide a conducive, friendly and more efficient and effective learning and teaching environment. Therefore, these policies are crucial to eliminate long-standing gaps and discrepancies that affect everyone, and particularly disadvantaged schools in the rural and maritime islands.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the Honourable Minister for Education for providing an update on teacher shortage and policy changes within the Ministry of Education to address teacher shortages. Teacher shortage is no doubt a critical issue affecting our students, and teacher shortage in Fiji is a growing concern, with many schools experiencing challenges in primary and specific subject areas in secondary schools. Teacher shortage leads to large class sizes and negatively impacts educational quality and it also increases teacher load.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our aim is to ensure that no child is left behind and quality education is provided to our students at all levels, starting from early childhood education to tertiary education. The honourable Minister for Education has informed Parliament that there is shortage of teachers in schools. In secondary schools, there is a shortage of teachers in science, technology, engineering, mathematics and PMAC areas. Primary school vacant positions are being filled by secondary graduates. If we are serious about our children's education, the Ministry of Education should ensure that teachers with the right qualifications teach our students.

We are harping and preaching on quality education, but what is happening in reality? The honourable Minister for Education also confirmed yesterday that a large number of teachers have resigned to take up teaching positions overseas because of attractive salaries. If the current resignation trend continues and the issue is not prioritised and addressed with urgency, teaching and learning will be seriously compromised.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, some secondary school students raised concerns earlier this year, and I think the honourable Minister is fully aware of that, that they did not do well in external exams last year, in particular mathematics, because they were without mathematics teachers for most of the year last year.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. H. CHAND.- The Ministry of Education should do a proper staff audit and find out the areas where we have teacher shortage and come up with innovative strategies to address the critical teacher shortage issue.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have met some teachers who have resigned recently, and the reason given by them is that the salary is not enough to match the high cost of living. Yesterday, the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance boasted about more than \$4 billion revenue collection. Here, we have our teachers who are underpaid. Pay them well and they will not resign!

Recruiting final year students in specific subject areas and considering appointment of retired teachers as part of efforts to address the nationwide teacher shortage is not a bad option. While posting final year students to schools, Ministry should ensure that these final year students are well guided and supported by the Ministry of Education and Department Heads in the schools.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Education should come up with more innovative teacher retention strategies. One of the retention incentives should be salary upgrade for all the teachers. The 3 percent given to teachers recently is not enough.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. H. CHAND.- The other area of concern is the timely release of location allowance for teachers serving in remote and maritime areas. If teachers are not given what they rightfully deserve, it contributes and leads to frustration and resignations. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the opportunity.

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

Export Destinations for Turmeric, Ginger and Cassava
(Question No. 142/2025)

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

Given the tariff situation with the United States of America, can the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-operatives, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications inform Parliament if Government has explored other nations as export destinations, such as Singapore and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), for turmeric, ginger and cassava?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank honourable Koya for the question. Please, note that the United States of America is a significant export market for Fiji, but as the House is aware, the People's Coalition since coming into Government, has been looking at economic

diversification and, certainly, trade diversification.

Whilst the recent events in the US have created challenges, that has not been much of a concern because of the posture that we have taken on this side of the House. In terms of exploring opportunities or other markets. Certainly, Singapore and the United Arab Emirates continue to be attractive opportunities for export. Let me just say that whilst the effort is going into increase exports, not only in terms of ginger, turmeric and cassava, but other products, one of the key things that we are trying to develop on this side of the House is to create more commercial-based agriculture. When we deal with these large markets, generally you are talking even for niche products, you are talking about scale. Certainly, so far in our country that is something that we have not been able to achieve effectively, but there is work that is going in currently at several levels to try and get this going.

One of the biggest strategies that the honourable Minister for Agriculture and the honourable Assistant Minister have been involved in, has been mechanisation of some of the product areas. You will continue to see a lot of investment by the People's Coalition into mechanisation. It is starting to bear fruit in terms of production of taro, cassava, ginger as well, a bit of a resurgence, and turmeric, of course, has grown wild. That is one initiative that is currently underway.

The other one, and I talked about it in this side of the House now and again is the need to actually bring commercial players into the agricultural market. I have talked about Fiji Water, that has now begun looking at commercial agriculture. They are looking at citrus, mangoes and pawpaw as potential products. We are hopeful that once Fiji Water has worked out how to grow at scale, we will then reach out to areas in Fiji where these crops grow well, and then we can start producing more opportunities.

In terms of opportunities, we were just in Japan. They told us that in years past, Japan used to accept pawpaw from Fiji, so the opportunity, as is mentioned in the question, are immense. Right now, I am hopeful there will be a formal announcement soon on one other commercial agriculture company. They are already on the ground and have started buying up land for production. It is quite a substantial company that will also look at commercial agriculture, particularly in the West, so that if it comes to pass, it will assist a lot of our farmers who have certain produce.

Some of the other things that we are trying to do is just to explore other markets. I have spoken about ongoing discussions right now with the United Arab Emirates on economic partnership agreement, that is starting to grow some momentum. The preference for the UAE is to do it on a regional basis, so there are some discussions with some members in the region to proceed. I am hopeful that, that will be concluded by early next year.

With that agreement, I am expecting not only opportunities for trade, but there has also been discussions about potential goat supply into United Arab Emirates or the wider Saudi market, as well as some of our other unique products that we have. Fiji Water is very popular in UAE. We are also in discussion with several other governments in terms of formalising Preferential Trade Agreements at the very initial stages of discussions.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we are also in discussion with several other governments in terms of formalising preferential trade agreements. These are at the very initial stages. So, with these discussions in progress, I am talking about the likes of agreement with China and having some discussions with Japan on a strategic framework which will include trade. We will, sort of, explore some of them more in our endeavour to broaden out or diversify the market opportunities that we have.

Apart from looking at other markets which is of great interest, we also try to look at some of the existing agreements, and I am talking about PACER Plus. My recent visit to New Zealand has certainly confirmed in my mind that there is no lack of markets for our products in New Zealand, and this is from discussions with a lot of the importers of our products. What they need is quality and consistency.

There are a few elements in there, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that we need to work on, which includes the hot air treatment for products out of Nadi, which is a bit of an issue. We will be working hand in hand with the Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Primary Industries in New Zealand, to try and see whether we can unlock some of these bottlenecks and try to optimise on opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have 56 approved pathways for agricultural products into New Zealand. We are not even using half of them, so there are some opportunities in there as well in terms of trade opportunity and diversification.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, apart from those products that were mentioned in the question, of course, we are also focusing on cocoa, coffee and *kava* as products for expansion. There are ongoing discussions with the European Union (EU) to see whether we can open up the EU market for *kava*. We are hopeful that conversation can continue because we all know that the market for *kava* in Europe is quite significant and that will actually broaden out more opportunities that we have in terms of trade.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in a nutshell, a lot of work is going on to look at other opportunities. Certainly, in my mind, some of our large partners, and I mean in the likes of Australia, New Zealand, there are opportunities there to do more. Should we be able to get our commercial agriculture structures right, there may be more significant opportunities in countries, like Singapore, in terms of trying to lift the quality of production.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Honourable Minister, in your discussions on the actual exports, is there a content in there with respect our Fijian organic products, in terms of how much is going out? We actually have a very premium organic status with respect to our turmeric, et cetera.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, yes, there are ongoing discussions on organics. The honourable Minister for Agriculture is very committed in developing organic farming in Fiji. We are, of course, hoping to make a trip to India.

In India, there is a state called Sikkim that is fully organic. So, we are going on a joint mission to India to understand how they have managed to make one whole State organic. Perhaps, after that, we may be able to create clear strategies around how we develop Taveuni, perhaps, into an organic island, or Kadavu and other islands or locations in Fiji.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, I thought Taveuni but might be too far gone now. I am very interested to hear the developments that you have in commercial agriculture, and I think developing that core that can drive it for the rest of the country in relation to that development, to get the scale that we need to secure the markets. What are the plans then to involve those that are not part of the big and large commercial companies but the ones around them to be able to also cash in if that development comes to pass?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Thank you, honourable Usamate for that very good question. In fact, there are already pre-existing farmers who will be producing some of the products that these commercial entities will be producing. There will be an opportunity to actually elevate their level of production should we involve some of these commercial agricultural entities - private

sector entities. For example, the company that is going to be in Nadi is looking at pineapple. There are already pineapple farmers in Fiji, and I am hoping that they can work together to look at the methods of farming practices, et cetera, and then ramp up the yields. That is one example.

There are other benefits that will come, not only just for new a product but for other products, such as pineapple. In New Zealand, they are crying out for Fiji pineapple. When we went in to visit just recently, we actually had more discussions. I am aware that this Saturday, there is one local exporter that is going to start exporting pineapples to New Zealand. That is well before this private sector entity comes in, so these are signals of the potential that we have. If we are able to do it at scale, structure and quality, with very good standards as well, we will see a better and consistent production from the agricultural sector. I hope that answers your question, Sir.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, something has been going around that I want to put to you across the House in terms of voices of the people. The question is in terms of implications on economic trade. What I have been hearing is that recently, Fiji was seen standing next to a nation that has been involved in an ongoing war. Now, the question that people are asking is, would Fiji see economic implications, like sanctions, in regard to its trade in the future because of partnerships or foreign policies or bilateral partnerships that it is building with other nations? Geopolitics is at play Mr. Speaker, Sir. and people are picking sides.

HON. MEMBER.- Which country?

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Fiji and Israel.

(Chorus of interjections)

So, questions are being asked, will Fiji see economic implications with our trade? It is a simple question.

MR. SPEAKER.- Deputy Prime Minister, do you wish to answer?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Sir, probably, it should not warrant an answer because it is outside the spirit of the first question, but I am happy to sit down privately with honourable Sharma and explain my views personally.

MR. SPEAKER.- I accept that explanation. The question is outside the perimeters of your statement.

Honourable Members, at this point, we will suspend proceedings for lunch. Parliament will resume at 2.30 p.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.24 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.36 p.m.

Fiji's Digital Growth - Outcomes and Benefits
(Question No. 143/2025)

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 main outcomes and benefits for Fiji's digital growth and regional leadership on key ICT events hosted by Fiji this year?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank honourable Vanawalu for the question. The Ministry of Communications has been advancing Fiji's profile in regional and global ICT transformation over the last few years, which just culminated in several events that happened in August 2025, which involved a series of high-level meetings amongst senior officials, Ministers of the Pacific Island Governments, followed by two key meetings on cybersecurity and cables. The intent of this response is to update the House on what transpired and give some colour to what happened in the month of August.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in August, the 18th APT Regulation Forum for the Pacific was held in Suva on 5th and 6th of August. Fiji was the chair, and vice-chairs were Tonga and Kiribati. This Forum brought together over 100 participants, including APT member States, industry partners and international organisations.

The deliberations during the PRF FP18 addressed critical areas, such as the:

- rollout of 5G;
- licensing of satellite services;
- resilience of submarine cables; and
- universal digital access.

The Forum was also used as a forum to just share the stages at which each Pacific Island country was at in terms of their own digital transformation. Fiji also shared its National Digital Strategy in that Forum, Mr. Speaker, and a lot of learnings were shared between the countries in terms of how they were trying to progress their various priorities.

Immediately after the Senior Officials' Meeting, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Pacific Islands Ministerial Forum took place on 7th to 8th August, and in that forum we, once again, took the opportunity to share Fiji's progress, particularly in terms of the digitisation efforts.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Pacific ICT Ministerial Dialogue, as it is currently called, is a precursor to what will eventually be the PIFS ICT Ministers' Forum, which was endorsed at the Leaders' meeting in the Solomon Islands. From next year, we will have an official ICT Ministers' Meeting, as we do in the areas of finance and trade, for example.

This, of course, is a great step up for ICT issues in the Pacific and will ensure that as the 2050 Blue Pacific Strategy is rolled out, ICT will have a place in the discussions in the leadership forums.

Out of that Dialogue, there were three items that came out of the forum, as follows:

- (1) A Pacific ICT Governance Framework, which has endeavoured to provide the institutional arrangements, reporting mechanisms and accountability systems required to turn regional commitments into measurable outcomes.
- (2) A Pacific ICT Digital Transformation Strategic Action Plan which, again, translates the various ambitions at the Pacific ICT level into projects, including a keen focus on the last mile connectivity, and growing the ICT sectors in various Pacific countries.
- (3) A Ministerial Communiqué, which reaffirmed the collective political will to advance inclusive digitisation, secure cyberspace, ensure that the infrastructure remains resilient, and where innovation is encouraged. The Ministerial Communiqué also articulated that it wished to strengthen the Pacific's ability to speak as one voice in ICT negotiations.

A key part of the general consensus was the need for greater presence of the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) in the region, and there was a push for an area office for the region, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in terms of the Ministerial Dialogue, there were a couple of outcomes in terms of Pacific contributions to the World Development Conference of 2025, as follows:

- (1) The modification of Resolution 16, to ensure that the specific needs of Small Island Developing States, Least Developed Countries and landlocked developing countries were explicitly recognised in ITU's development agenda.
- (2) A new resolution on the implementation of the *Lagatoi Declaration*, which is the Pacific Islands Declaration, calling on ITU partners to provide technical assistance, funding and partnership to support the delivery of the Pacific Action Plan.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, what this means in terms of the Pacific is that the respective countries roll out their own digital transformation ambitions and that they are very much aligned to what the Pacific Islands Forum is endeavouring to do, and we will also ensure that there is cohesion when it comes to policy debate or advocacy on the global stage for the Pacific Islands.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in terms of communications across the Pacific, I think we should be rest assured that we are in a good place in terms of advocacy of ICT and digital transformation issues.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the balance of August had two particular conferences of importance. The first was to do with Pacific Cyber Week and it basically involved the discussions around cybersecurity issues across the Pacific and looking at how we can continue to have robust cybersecurity ecosystems across the Pacific Islands.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for Fiji, we are acceding to the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime - the second additional protocol we have acceded and the signing of the UN Convention on Cybercrime is happening next month, which is significant for Fiji. I had mentioned the development of Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT) for Fiji, which is now operational, and we have also established a 24x7 security operations centre. Those are sort of regional leading initiatives from Fiji, and we are also developing our National Data Protection Policy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the second Conference was on the Pacific Submarine Fiber Cable Conference. That, again, was very interesting, given the investments by Google into Fiji. There were discussions around the regulation of subsea cables, so that is something that we will continue to develop as we watch what is happening internationally.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, what I can say is, given the entry of Google, there is a heightened level of interest in Fiji when it comes to ICT developments, and I think the meetings that were held in Fiji in the month of August signalled that Fiji will continue to be a ICT hub for the region, and with that, will bring significant opportunities in the years to come. I just thought it would be fair to share some of these developments in the House.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- My question to the Minister is related to this regional body that currently exists to assist Pacific Island countries, which is the Pacific ICT Regional Regulatory Centre. I would like to understand how this institution is assisting the Pacific, or even when you had your Pacific meeting, what role are they playing?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- That is part of the Asia Pacific Regional Framework. Basically, Mr. Speaker, Sir, they are very strong when it comes to regulatory development. In fact, when we developed our National Digital Strategy, we relied on them quite heavily in terms providing guidance around how to sequence the Digital Strategy. They provided a lot of advice on 5G and how it is to be best rolled out, providing advice on cloud-based policies and management, AI, so there is quite a bit of interaction that happens at the regularity level and the Senior Officials level, providing guidance and advice. It is quite a valuable tool from that perspective, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- A supplementary question to the honourable Minister; what are some of the key challenges and learnings during the discussion period of those important events?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I guess the main challenge for the Government when we came in was providing the right resourcing to enable the execution of what we have been able to do. That did take some time. I have mentioned in this House the need to form a proper TAF because we had to get capable and knowledgeable people in the area of ICT and telecommunications involved. Once that was in place, we then started to create all the other building blocks required in terms of the ICT sector. The Ministry of Communications too had been shrunk a little bit. There was a bit of resourcing required there, so it took us a good 12 months to get that going. That was probably one of the key challenges.

As we all know, when Ministries are shrunk, the knowledge evaporates or moves elsewhere, so there has been a bit of investment in capacity building and training which is continuing to-date. Fortunately, the ITU is quite big on training. There is a lot of sponsored training for our members in that section and it is starting to pay dividends in terms of the work that they are producing at the moment.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to hear a bit more on this – the Emergency Response Team, and what is it? How does it operate? Who benefits? Is it at a national level or how does it operate and who benefits from it?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Basically, the Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT) is like a first responder to cybersecurity issues nationally. We have created a CERT team with about three to four people, and their primary responsibility is to monitor both, the Government networks and networks all around the country and if there are any issues, try and deal with them as the first responder to those issues, particularly hacking issues, and those kind of things.

Sir, CERT will be the primary entity of Government that goes in and tries to assist. It is an area that requires a lot of expertise, so there is a lot of training going in at the moment with the members of CERT. It requires an understanding of the issues regarding hacking and the technicalities around hacking and then trying to provide solutions.

One of the things we have done is, through the Vuvale Partnership Agreement, the honourable Prime Minister signed the MOU with Australian Cybersecurity. We have used that to actually lean on and provide additional guidance. There were some well-documented attacks that happened over the last 24 months and certainly for both of them, we leaned on Australia, because at that stage, we had not quite formed CERT Unit.

At the moment, through funding from Australia – the head of CERT is from Australia. We are trying to train our local team to then take over those roles eventually. It is a critical role in terms of trying to respond to attacks and trying to mitigate on what has actually happened in terms of damage control.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I would like to invite you to join me in extending a warm welcome to Mr. Kevin Deveau, the UNDP Consultant who is joining us. He will be supporting Parliament in its work in developing a Parliamentary Autonomy Bill. Welcome to Fiji Parliament and thank you for joining us this afternoon.

Inter-Island Shipping Services
(Question No. 144/2025)

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

Inter-island shipping is the lifeline between the centres and our people living in our rural isolated communities in the maritime islands. In that respect, can the honourable Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport update Parliament on how the services are faring, considering there is a government franchise in place to assist that service?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, I thank the honorable Member for the question. Inter-island shipping is the lifeline of our maritime communities, and the Government remains committed to ensuring reliable, safe and affordable services through the Government Shipping Franchise Scheme. This Scheme plays a critical role in strengthening connectivity and accessibility to markets, supporting economic activities and improving the livelihoods of Fijians who live in uneconomical routes.

At present, there are 10 routes operating under the Franchise Scheme. The routes to Rotuma, North East Vanualevu, Yasawa and Lower Southern Lau operate on a monthly basis. The routes to Kadavu, Lomaiviti, Upper Northern Lau and Yasayasa Moala operate on a fortnightly basis, while the Beqa-Yanuca-Vatulele route operates once every two months. Together with the Government Shipping Services, three private operators are contracted to deliver these services. They are Brighton Holdings Fiji Limited, Gounder Shipping Limited and Interlink Line Shipping Limited.

For the 2024-2025 financial year, the Ministry was allocated a budget of \$3.4 million to support the Scheme. By the end of July 2025, we had successfully utilised 92 percent of the allocation, amounting to \$3.13 million. That reflects the Ministry's commitment to prudent financial management and efficient service delivery.

During the same period, a total of 156 franchise trips were undertaken, ensuring continuity of services to our maritime communities. Those trips carried more than 22,000 passengers, representing a 49 percent increase, compared to the 2023-2024 financial year. The Scheme also transported more than 6,000 tonnes of cargo, including building materials, groceries, medical supplies and other essentials vital to daily life in the maritime islands.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to ensure that the services under the Franchise Scheme are delivered in accordance with the contractual obligations, the Ministry deploys Shipping Franchise Observers on board franchise vessels. These Observers travel with passengers and cargo in these trips to monitor performance and ensure compliance with service standards. Maritime travellers are strongly encouraged to approach our Shipping Franchise Observers directly, if they encounter any issues, or are not satisfied with the overall service. This mechanism not only strengthens transparency and accountability but also ensures that the concerns of our maritime citizens are heard and addressed in a timely manner.

Mr. Speaker, the impact of the Scheme extends beyond transport. It has allowed communities to participate in major events such as the Methodist Church Conference, various sporting events such as the Coca-Cola games, and regular school terms for end of term trips, enabling students, teachers and families to travel between the islands and Suva with ease.

The Scheme has also provided crucial support for Government outreach. For example, coordinated trips to support the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Public Works and RFMF Engineers for hospital upgrades and jetty maintenance. At the same time, the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs undertook awareness campaigns on chiefly title vacancies, while the Ministry of Youth and Sports, Fiji Navy, Fiji Police Force and the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development carried out official duties in the outer islands. It has also enabled vibrant and economic cultural exchanges. In many cases, routes such as the Beqa-Yanuca-Vatulele carried materials for schools and homes, while traders shipped commodities such as copra, seafood, *yaqona* and handicrafts.

Non-Government Organisations and church groups relied on the services to conduct awareness programmes, while communities used the trips to gather for traditional gatherings such as funerals or *Bose ni Tikina* and *Bose ni Yasana*. Infrastructure improvements were also facilitated through the Scheme, including maintenance of the Oinafa Jetty in Rotuma and ongoing lighthouse repairs, both of which enhance maritime safety and accessibility.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, at the heart of the Government Shipping Franchise Scheme is about people ensuring families remain connected, students pursue education, businesses thrive, and essential services reach every corner of our nation.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the challenges we face in the maritime areas is knowing the time the boats arrive. In major routes, boat arrival is not a problem and is consistent. However, this is not the case in the franchise routes, where there is a great deal of variability. At one time, there was talk about implementing route licensing in terms of service. My question to the honourable Minister is, does the Ministry have any plans in place to address this punctuality of boats arriving when it is supposed to arrive?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.-Mr. Speaker, Sir, yes, that is an ongoing challenge and the Ministry is currently looking at the licensing scheme. It is an ongoing review of the services, and we all know the challenges in terms of maritime services. Just recently in my visit to Vanua Levu attending the funeral of Tui Namuka, and may his soul rest in peace as he was one of our key members in the Opposition, the people of Cikobia highlighted the transport of their copra, which has been and is one of the issues that we are facing in terms of some of the franchise operators not delivering their services. So, it is an ongoing challenge for the Ministry, and it is something that we are working on.

Strategies to Improve OHS Compliance
(Question No. 145/2025)

HON. S. TUBUNA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity and Workplace Relations inform Parliament on the current strategies implemented to improve OHS compliance in Fiji's workplaces?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I would like to briefly respond to honourable Joseph Nand's supplementary question from yesterday. I have the answer with me. He had asked for the utilisation of the budget in terms of ACCF for the year 2024-2025. We were allocated \$7 million and utilised \$6,999,660. The balance was \$340, which means a 99.99 percent utilisation. In the 2025-2026 Budget, we were allocated \$7 million, and we have already utilised \$2,408,296.47, so the balance is \$4,591,203.53 with 34.4 percent utilisation in the last two months.

The other piece of information I wanted to share with the House, Sir, on that matter is that we inherited 13,176 forms that were received by ACCF, but the injured workers were not notified to apply for compensation. We are now trying to sort that out. Unfortunately, about 44 percent of them are missing out because of the three-year time bar. That is the performance of the previous ACCF and Veritas, for your information, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the core responsibilities of the Ministry of Employment, Productivity and Workplace Relations is to promote decent employment standards. This includes creating employment opportunities, ensuring a safe and healthy working environment, providing fair employment conditions, fostering good faith employment relations and promoting productive workplaces.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these responsibilities are achieved through a modern, structured, and enabling policy environment, supported by sound labour laws, institutions, international best practices and values underpinned by tripartite social dialogues and self-regulation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in line with this mandate, my Ministry together with the Ministry of Trade, Cooperatives, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications has launched an innovative digital platform called businessNOW FIJI. This platform simplifies business processes, attracts investment and drives Fiji's economic growth.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, following Fiji's ranking of 102nd in the World Bank's 2020 Doing Business Report, the Government took proactive measures to improve the business processes in Fiji. On 26th of September, 2024, businessNOW FIJI launched its first phase of integrated e-services for starting new businesses.

Mr. Speaker, there is a growing need to review and adopt existing health and safety regulations, and in consultation with the tripartite partners, working closely with the Office of the Solicitor-General, we have amended the General Workplace Conditions Regulations 2003 and the Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1997. These changes came into effect from 1st August and 26th September, respectively.

The key amendment introduces a risk-based workplace inspection and audit schedule, prioritising resources to focus on workplace sectors in accordance with their risk classification, as follows:

- Low risk workplaces - inspected and audited once every three years as these workplaces present minimum health and safety hazards.
- High risk workplaces - inspected annually as these workplaces are environments that have a higher potential for accident injuries and fatalities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, my Ministry, through the National Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Service has conducted 3,287 general workplace inspections and audit during the last financial year and targets to increase this to 6,000 inspections and audits this year. Workplace inspections are now classified into high risk and low risk categories, allowing inspectors to focus more on high-risk workplaces and provide quality and timely advice and assistance.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the National OHS Service has also reviewed its Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to align with the new online application systems. All applications and supporting documents are now submitted online. Once an employer provides all required information, inspectors can schedule inspections and audits. This online system empowers employers to submit accurate information promptly, streamlining the inspection process. Additionally, all reports, receipts and certificates are now delivered electronically, saving time, reducing paperwork, improving data management and eliminating the need for physical collection.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, similarly, the building permit approval system has been digitized, and employers, developers and business owners will be able to submit workplace and building plans online, improving efficiency reducing cost when launched. This will be launched later this month. This initiative supports environmental sustainability, reduces carbon footprint, and strengthens enforcement of workplace construction standards under health and safety legislation, the National Building Code, and approved standards.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other key benefits of the new system are:

- easy and convenient — with a single login, employers and customers can fill and track applications, make online payments and download fully approved e-certificates, simplifying and streamlining the entire process of starting a business in Fiji.
- efficient —the targeted turnaround time is seven days now, and all complete inspections aim to significantly reduce the turnaround time. Nationwide access, the initiative ensures all equitable access to mandatory OHS workplaces, inspections, and audits, improving the overall business climate across Fiji.

The workplace and building designs vetting system will allow digital submission of workplace plans for design vetting that will improve overall efficiency and reduce costs for applicants, who will no longer need to make physical visits to submit building plans and related documentation. The digital platform will strengthen enforcement by preventing the construction of workplaces that do not meet the requirements under the Health and Safety at Work Regulations and the National Building Code.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we continue to modernise our legislation and policies to support the growth of our economy, enhance workplace safety, and facilitate business development. I thank you, Sir.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker. I have a simple question to the honourable Minister. There was a tragedy at Lautoka School, one of those schools in Lautoka, where a child dies after a gate had collapsed on her. Can the Minister update Parliament on investigations that have been happening and what is the Ministry doing to improve the OHS compliance in schools around Fiji for the safety of teachers and children?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, that case is for the police to investigate, and the Ministry is conducting its own investigation as well. We are working together with the other authorities, including the Ministry of Education, and it will be addressed in due course.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, there was a ban on the ferries' wheels operators because

of these OHS issues. I just want to ask the honourable Minister if he can inform this honourable House whether that has been lifted or is still on.

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the ban is still in place, and there is ongoing work to determine whether these locally done machines are safe enough or not, and the age, et cetera of it. There is a lot of work involved in that, and it will take some time for us to finalise and then determine what is allowed and what is not going to be allowed. Safety is health and safety is of utmost importance to us.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Honourable Minister, I am raising this issue again. Our OHS focusses a lot on safety, but not on health. In your strategies, what is the plan in terms of improving food quality, ensuring that there are physical exercises, training, whatever, and health audits as well in all the departments, including government ministries. A lot of our people are dying of NCDs, et cetera. So, in these new strategies, what is the focus on health?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is a question, I believe, should be directed to the honourable Minister for Health.

Health and safety is our concern, and as far as our Ministry is concerned, we look after people's safety and health in terms of the work environment. The work environment has to be conducive, the conditions have to be conducive to health, and that is what we do. As far as looking after our individual health is concerned, it is the duty of each individual, including the honourable Members of this House.

Enhancement of Early Warning Systems (Question No. 146/2025)

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

Given Fiji's heightened vulnerability to natural disasters, can the honourable Minister for Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management update Parliament on measures currently being undertaken to enhance early warning system and strengthen overall disaster resilience?

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank honourable Vijay Nath for the question. As climate science continues to advance, so does the urgency of its message. Projections for Fiji indicate a marked increase in the intensity and frequency of these weather events, particularly floods, which we are already experiencing more frequently across the country. These events carry heavy economic implications due to disruptions to the business, essential services, and livelihoods.

Despite these growing risks, Fiji has made steady progress in reducing disaster-related fatalities. I take this opportunity to sincerely thank all those involved - government agencies, civil society organisations, development partners, and our communities for their tireless efforts in strengthening national preparedness.

At the core of disaster preparedness, Mr. Speaker, Sir, lies one of the most powerful tools available to us, which is the early warning system that the honourable Nath is asking about. Timely, accurate forecasting and rapid communication of warnings has been shown to reduce fatalities by a factor of six. It is one of the most cost-effective and life-saving investments we can make to protect our people and safeguard national development. Recognising this global priority, the United Nations launched the early warnings for all initiatives, aiming to ensure that by 2027, every person on earth is protected from hazardous weather, water, or climate-related events and Fiji is proud to be a part of

this global movement.

Through the support of the Green Climate Fund, we have secured US\$12 million for our own early warning for all projects. This project will:

- strengthen national data-sharing protocols and early warning procedures;
- re-establish river-level monitoring systems across the country;
- replace outdated manual weather stations with automatic weather stations to improve accuracy and coverage;
- enhance multi-hazard risk assessments, enabling better modelling of high-risk zones; and
- explore the development of a mobile phone application to ensure every Fijian can receive real-time alerts and weather updates at their fingertips.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are also deepening bilateral partnerships. The Ministry, in collaboration with the Government of Japan, is progressing work on the installation of tsunami sirens around Viti Levu, building on the foundation already laid in the Suva Peninsula. These sirens are crucial for giving early notice to our coastal communities in the event of a tsunami. We thank the Japanese Government for their continued commitment to resilience building in Fiji.

In addition, the Ministry recently received a donation of Starlink satellite units which will be installed in government stations in the Lau Group and other maritime communities. This will significantly boost communications during disasters, especially in black spot areas across Viti Levu and Vanua Levu. We are also installing tsunami evacuation signage along the Suva/Lami to better guide the public on safe zones and evacuation routes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are also partnering with the Ministry of Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport through the Weather Ready Nation Programme with funding support from the Government of the United States of America. This Programme aims to enhance the accuracy and accessibility of flood and cyclone forecasts, and ensure that warning messages are not only timely, but also understandable and actionable at the community level.

Importantly, we also acknowledge the strong support of NDMI Korea. They have contributed flood early warning instruments now installed in Naitasiri, Tailevu, Ba and Macuata. An MOU has been drafted with NDMI Korea as we speak to ensure that the system becomes a core component of the range of early warning systems available to the Ministry. This partnership reflects our commitment to building a robust, multi-layered early warning architecture across the country. As we prepare for the 2025-2026 tropical cyclone season, the Ministry is rolling out a series of awareness and preparedness initiatives.

Next month, we will launch the National Disaster Awareness Week with preparedness messages delivered through multimedia platforms. Community-based disaster risk management trainings will also be conducted in the Northern Division. Workshop and tabletop exercises will be held to test our systems, and our teams will conduct operational readiness checks on evacuation centres and emergency operation centres to ensure that they are ready to activate when needed.

The National Disaster Risk Management Act 2024 marks a clear policy shift from reactive response to proactive risk reduction and prevention. We are now working closely with other ministries to mainstream risk-informed development across planning and approval systems. This means, urban planning must now consider hazard exposure.

Development applications will require built-in risk safeguards, and resilience must be part of the DNA of national infrastructure projects. We also acknowledge the support of the Australian

Government in the drafting of key regulations under the Act. These include the Fiji Humanitarian Cluster System, Humanitarian Actors Registry, and the Single Window Facilitation Team (SWIFT) mechanism.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Humanitarian Actors Registry will require all humanitarian actors to register with the Ministry, ensuring proper coordination and eliminating the confusion caused by ad-hoc or unverified disaster responders. The SWIFT mechanism, meanwhile, will allow the Ministry to work with FRCS, the Ministry of Trade and Biosecurity Authority of Fiji to pre-clear trusted humanitarian organisations. This will accelerate customs clearance of emergency goods and personnel when disasters strike.

We are also establishing a National Asset Tracking System, a digital platform that will allow us to monitor the movement of relief goods from warehouses to distribution points and down to communities. This will ensure greater transparency, accountability and donor confidence in our relief operations.

In summary, the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Risk Management is making determined progress towards building an end-to-end, people-centred early warning system that is accessible, actionable, and rooted in the realities of our communities. We are also finalising our operational preparedness for the upcoming cyclone season, and I assure this House that we stand ready to act, protect and serve should the need arise.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have seen a number of times that communication gaps are still common, not only in the maritime, but also on our mainland. For early warning messages, it should reach our rural and maritime communities on time. The honourable Minister mentioned that they have received satellite devices. Have they been installed or just on paper?

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the satellite systems, I am not sure which one he is referring to, but there are a few that we are working with. One of them is a Japanese, the Koreans are also helping us with some. Just identify which one you are referring to honourable Nath?

MR. SPEAKER.- Would you like to clarify? Please bring some clarity to your question, honourable Nath.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Minister just mentioned in his response that global standard technologies will be installed. He also mentioned in the third or fourth paragraph of his speech that the Australian Government has given them some satellite device so that they can install in the maritime islands.

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, with the Australian assistance, they were working on the regulations. As far as technology is concerned, the Korean supplied the flood early warning systems which are in place. The Japanese have also put in a tsunami early warning device as well. These are the ones that are going to be activated by the satellites.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, in all the previous cyclones, the most vulnerable area has been the West. Has there been any equipment with respect to early warning systems in the last 12 months put in, right up to Rakiraki, Yasawa and all of that area. Any further equipment with respect to early warning systems?

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I mentioned, the Japanese assistance which is for the tsunami early warning systems is ongoing, and that is where we intend to extend it to. At the moment, it is still up to the Lami Peninsula, and it is going to be continued, but it depends on the

availability of the Japanese assistance that is going to be coming but it is ongoing and working. But at the moment, not yet.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think the disaster that most often affect Fiji is flooding and the early warning systems are in place. I think for the weather forecasting, for how much rain will come in, that is pretty clear but the challenge for all of us is always the water gauges. How well the information is passed on to the powers that be and the level of water saturation already in the soil? Are there now models in place, the collection of that information to make sure that the flood warning is as effective as it can be, taking into particular those two parameters - water level in the sources and the level of saturation of moisture in the soil?

HON. S.R. DITOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are working very closely with the Fiji Meteorology Office who are in charge of that part of our forecasting work. We have in place our procedures as well in getting that forecast where we can.

MR. SPEAKER.- The honourable Members are advised that the sixth Oral Question 147/2025 in today's Order Paper has been withdrawn.

(Oral Question No. 147/2025 withdrawn)

Non-Issuance of ID Cards by FTRA
(Question No. 148/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Education inform Parliament why some teachers have not been issued with ID cards by the Fiji Teachers Registration Authority (FTRA)?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the simple answer is they have not applied.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, according to the teachers, they have applied, they have been registered and they should be issued with ID cards. The teachers have not received the ID cards, that is my concern. Why have the teachers have not received ID cards?

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister, do you wish to answer that?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Member had asked a similar question in the Parliament Standing Committee, and he was given the answer by the executives from FTRA. Those that have registered and they apply for the card, they will get the card. They are registered but they have not applied for the card, they are not issued the card.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Point of Order. Standing Order 44(16), a question must not be asked seeking information that is readily accessible in public forums.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Very true.

MR. SPEAKER.- Explain, honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- The question is related to operational matters which is readily available at the counter or with the officers of the Ministry.

MR. SPEAKER.- My understanding of the honourable Leader of the Government's position is that the answer is readily available for teachers to find out whether they are eligible for ID cards or not, and if they have not applied as the Minister had said, they will not get it until they apply. Is that my reading, honourable Minister? Honourable Chand do you wish to comment on that?

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, my concern is that teachers are already registered and they should be issued with ID cards. The concern raised by the teachers is they are yet to receive the ID cards though they are registered as teachers.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Premila Kumar do you wish to clarify further the issue that has been raised by, honourable Hem Chand?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, ID cards are important. Teachers should receive their ID cards once they are registered so that it is an identification for them to operate in a school setting. That is where the importance of ID cards come in Sir. This is just a clarification.

MR. SPEAKER.- Can I go back to the, honourable Minister?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fiji Teachers Registration Authority is basically mandated to regulate teachers that are currently teaching in school. They usually given the registration license and registration letter or if they apply to have the registration card, they are given the ID cards by FTRA. The ID cards are given to those teachers who hold full registration - status and have submitted a formal application. The ID cards are usually given within 14 days from the date an application is received. If they have not applied, they will not be given an ID card.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, during the financial year, 24th August, 2024 and 31st July, 2025, FTRA received a total of 251 applications for IDs and they were all given to those who held full registration status. Over the same period, 973 teachers were granted full registration but only 251 applied and were given the identification card for FTRA.

MR. SPEAKER.- I will make a ruling first on the Point of Order raised by the honourable Leader of the Government, that is granted the provision under Standing Order 44(16). In fact, my understanding from honourable Chand that the matter is not available in the public domain. If it is not available, then I will rule against the Point of Order that you raised. Notwithstanding that, the issue that had been raised by honourable Chand is clearly answered by the Minister as to what should be done for one to get an ID card. I do not want to pursue that matter further, that is where the matter is.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, my understanding is, when teachers apply for registration, once they are registered, FTRA should issue cards; that is my concern. So once the registration is done, teachers should be issued cards as they also pay a certain amount.

MR. SPEAKER.- We will let the matter rest there. I think the Minister and honourable Chand need to sit and discuss this matter.

Update on Issuance of Lease Titles
(Question No. 149/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Housing and Local Government update Parliament on the Ministry's issuance of lease titles to the informal settlement upgrading projects?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I proceed with my response, I wish to take a moment to express my heartfelt condolences on the passing of the Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of Rural Maritime Development and Disaster Management, who is also a close friend of mine, Mr. Isoa Talemaibua. My thoughts and prayers are with his family during this difficult time, as well as the staff, management of the Ministry of Rural Maritime Development and Disaster Management.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry had acquired 48 development leases comprising of 44 leases through the iTaukei Land Trust Board and four state leases since 2014 as part of the informal settlement upgrading project. These leases span across 21 settlements in the Western Division, 14 in the Northern Division and 13 in the Central Division demonstrating the Government's approach to upgrading informal settlements.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, three informal settlements, namely Cuvu in Sigatoka, Waidamudamu in Nausori and Ledrusasa in Nadi were acquired nearly a decade ago. Despite years of planning and completion of infrastructure upgrades in early 2022, the previous Government failed to deliver on the critical step of issuing lease offer letters. As a result, Fijians living in these informal settlements were left without the long-term security and legal certainty that formal land tenure provides.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to inform this august House that in May this year (2025), the Ministry successfully issued a total of 113 lease offer letters to residents of Cuvu Settlement. This 99-year residential lease offer letters have benefited 108 families and five religious organisations who have long awaited tenure security since the formalisation process began in 2014. This milestone now enables households in Cuvu to have their leases formalised. Also, the Ministry, Mr. Speaker, is now actively working to issue these offer letters in Waidamudamu in Nausori and Ledrusasa in Nadi, which will collectively benefit over 340 families. These communities, having endured years of uncertainty are finally on the path to secure land tenure and improved living conditions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in this 2025-2026 financial year, a total of \$14.6 million has been allocated to support the informal settlement upgrading programme. This funding will support six ongoing upgrades in the following settlements:

- Tavela, Nadi - (68 households);
- Tore, Lautoka - (59 households);
- Field 4, Lautoka - (77 households);
- Sakoca, Nasinu - (74 households);
- Valewaquyaya, Ba (new site) - (35 households); and
- Vuniika, Labasa (new site) - (101 households).

Of these four settlements, namely Tavela, Tore, Field 4 and Sakoca in Nasinu are expected to be completed within this financial year and prepared for lot allocation for the lease offer issuance. The remaining two – Valewaquyaya and Vuniika are scheduled for completion in the 2026-2027 financial year. In total, more than 500 households will benefit from these upgrades and are going to receive registered lease titles once they are given lease offer letters.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to announce that four new projects will commence construction in this financial year. These are:

- Delaisaweni, Lautoka which have 126 households;
- Lovu Seaside, Lautoka which have 185 households;
- Nabare, Lautoka which have 71 families; and
- Caubati, Nasinu which have 309 households.

The settlements are expected to complete upgrades over the next two years, benefiting a total of 605 families. Upon completion, lease offer letters will be issued and providing long-term ownership empowering families to invest in their homes once they get their registered lease titles.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, an additional 17 settlements are currently in the planning phase. These include:

- Wakanisila, Veivauceva, River Road in Nasinu;
- Nadonumai, Osonabukete in Lami;
- Vunivau A, Vunivau B, Siberia, Vatia, Vunitivi, Qelewaqa in Labasa;
- Tukutora, Delainamasimasi, Tore II in Lautoka;
- Tauvegavega in Ba;
- Uluisila in Sigatoka;
- Vunarewa in Nadi; and
- Sasawaira in Nausori.

Upgrades in these settlements are expected to commence over the next two financial years, benefiting close to 3,000 households who will benefit from getting their lease offer letters and also their registered lease titles.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, while we acknowledge the progress made in 30 settlements, it is important to note that 18 informal settlements remain untouched by the Ministry's upgrading programme. I am pleased to inform this House that the Ministry intends to undertake incremental upgrading in selected settlements through a strategic partnership with Revitalising Informal Settlements and their Environment (RISE). This partnership will integrate environmental sustainability, public health and inclusive design into the upgrading process, ensuring that these communities evolve into safer, healthier, and more resilient environments over time. These investments reflect the Coalition Government's unwavering commitment to inclusive housing development and the transformation of informal settlements into thriving and secure communities.

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, a supplementary question. Can the honourable Minister update Parliament on the status of the 48 development leases? Are all the leases current?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the acquisition of these 48 development leases started in 2014 and very interesting to note that out of the 48 leases, four that are on State land are still valid or current, 21 native leases are still valid or current and 18 native or iTLTB leases have expired, and this is the process of getting the renewal from the iTaukei Land Trust Board. Also interesting to note that from the iTLTB leases that have expired, three land owning units have not consented to the renewal of these leases.

It is something that goes back to the planning of this programme because it was not properly planned from the beginning when the acquisition took place, there was no planning done to ensure that when leases were acquired, there was proper planning done to develop these leases on the ground. That is what we are trying to do now. When we came into office, from the 48 development leases, we are planning to do four at least (do four every year) then we can do that within the next 12 years to be practical when it comes to real work on the ground.

Review of General Orders 2011
(Question No. 150/2025)

HON V. LAL asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Civil Service and Public Enterprises update Parliament on the progress of the review of the General Orders 2011?

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for his question, which I could have simply answered by saying that it is progressing, now awaiting the final report of the consultation from the Office of the Solicitor-General. However, out of my respect for him and his keen interest in this subject, I will spend a little longer.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the civil servants are the heart of the Government machinery. Their commitment, dedication and purpose are the crucial link that translates policy decisions into tangible services and develops outcomes for our great nation. Despite the global downturn and the geopolitical tensions that continue to disproportionately affect developing nations like ours, the resilience of our people has demonstrated that we can persevere and progress despite of those challenges that lie ahead of us.

The General Orders is a living document, which means that it continues to grow and change, and it guides the roles and responsibilities of every civil servant. It is their working bible that binds the public service in matters of discipline, conduct and entitlement. The General Orders commonly referred to as GO is a vital document that outlines the terms and conditions of service for the civil servants, including appointments, discipline, leave entitlements, allowances and conduct.

Since the issuance of the Orders in 2011, the Civil Service has undergone significant reforms and the demands of modern governance, have also evolved considerably. The review of the 2011 General Orders is crucial, as well as required and timely. The necessary reform of this document ensures that the government policies, procedures and conditions of service for the public servants are kept abreast of current national legislations, global best practices in public administration, and to ensure that they remain relevant, equitable, and responsive to the current and future needs of the Public Service and the Fijian people.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the overarching objectives of the review are:

- (1) Modernisation
To align policies and practices with international best standards in public administration.
- (2) Simplification and Clarity
To remove ambiguity, ensure consistency, and make the orders more user-friendly for both, managers and civil servants.
- (3) Legal alignment
To ensure all provisions conform with the 2013 Constitution, relevant legislation, and human rights principles.
- (4) Gender and inclusion sensitivity
To reflect national commitment to gender equity and disability inclusion, and safe and respectable workplaces.
- (5) Digital transformation
To support the ongoing digitalisation of Civil Service operations and the introduction of e-government platforms.

The review, Mr. Speaker, Sir, reflects Government's commitment towards cultivating a fair, transparent and professional Civil Service that is capable of delivering high-quality and efficient services to all Fijians.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to effectively transform and modernise the Civil Service, it is imperative that we implement policies that accurately reflect the realities of the evolving public sector environment and establish robust mechanisms to safeguard and enhance public trust.

The review of the 2011 General Orders, the comprehensive framework which governs the terms and conditions of employment of civil servants, is nearing its final stages right now. I wish to inform this esteemed House that the Ministry of Civil Service, in close coordination with the Office of the Solicitor-General, has conducted extensive consultations with the relevant Ministries and trade unions. This process ensures that the revised provisions are fair, transparent, and responsive to the evolving needs of the workforce.

The review, Mr. Speaker, Sir, upholds the principles of good faith, eliminates discrimination at all levels, and guarantees a safe and healthy working environment for all civil servants. All relevant issues raised during these extensive consultations, will be incorporated into the revised draft.

I wish to reassure this august House and the honourable Member that all necessary due processes have been and will continue to be strictly adhered to in the compilation and review of this critical national framework. The Solicitor-General's review is critical to ensure that the document is legally sound and fully consistent with all relevant legislative frameworks. This essential step will guarantee that the revised General Orders are free from any legal deficiencies that could potentially undermine its enforceability.

Following peer review and legal backing, the revised General Orders will be forwarded to the Public Service Commission for formal endorsement. This crucial step will then enable the General Orders to be officially issued as an authoritative framework, governing the terms and conditions of service across the entire Civil Service. It is anticipated that this entire rigorous and final issuance process will be completed by December this year.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the review represents a critical step forward in strengthening the professionalism, accountability, and responsiveness of the Civil Service. Our aim is to rebuild the very foundation of our public institutions and strategically shaping a Civil Service that is both, efficient and genuinely prioritises the needs of every Fijian, whilst contributing meaningfully to the essential work of nation building and development.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this process underscores the Government's commitment to strengthening the Civil Service Framework, safeguarding the rights and welfare of its employees, and modernising employment conditions in accordance with contemporary standards and international best practices. I acknowledge the commitment of all those involved in this review process, and I assure this august House that the Government remains fully committed to building a stronger, fairer and more efficient public administration system for all Fijians. Thank you.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- A supplementary question; honourable Prime Minister, in light of the fact that there is an ever changing world with respect to governments and civil service, laws, AI, et cetera. We have a 14-year gap between the last one and the one now. Is there a periodical review provision being put into the new General Orders that we see round about in December?

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, whether it will be put in, in the General Orders or not, and just allow it to evolve with the times, I do not know at this stage.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I think this is an appropriate time to take our afternoon break. Before we do, I will, given the hour, entertain a suspension motion for the purpose of complying with the Standing Orders as to our sitting time.

I will 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.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move:

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

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

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have one Oral Question and three Written Questions, as well as Schedule 2 - Motions for Debate and there are three motions.

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

Since there is none, I now call on the Leader of the Government in Parliament to speak in reply.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will now suspend proceedings for a break. Parliament will resume and continue with the debate in half an hour.

The Parliament adjourned at 3.58 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 4.35 p.m.

Impacts of Tax Reduction to Cost of Living
(Question No. 151/2025)

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

Can the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics inform Parliament on how the 12.5 percent tax reduction impacts the cost of living for the average household?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Member for the question. Following on from the discussion yesterday, as I have said, the decision to reduce VAT from 15 percent to 12.5 percent was a very conscious decision by the Government. It was done in light of the three consecutive years of good growth, good revenue collection and the trends towards overall inflation in the country.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this tax, is expected to deliver savings of approximately \$250 million to the low and middle income households and, that is, again, a very conscious decision. This is on top of the maintenance of the 21 basic food items with zero VAT with the addition of another one, making it 22 - the prescribed medicine. So, we have observed, as a result of that, a decrease in the price of goods and services paid by families. For instance, people are now paying 2.5 percent less VAT for electricity tariff, fuel and all other food items that are not under zero-rated VAT. All Government fees/levies such as birth, marriage and death certificates, LTA levies, passport, police reports clearance, and many more are now being delivered at a lower cost.

As I highlighted again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, inflation has been in the negative territory for the last seven consecutive months, which means that since February this year, overall prices have been coming down, compared to the same period last year. The inflation rate was recorded at -3.5 percent in August 2025, compared to 3.8 percent in August last year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the declining inflation trend and the inflation rate of -3.5 percent in August this year reflects, the impact of VAT reduction on prices. Lower prices were recorded in the food and non-alcoholic beverages, transport, cooking gas and other fuel categories.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this timely reduction is significant, not only for low-income households, but also, more importantly, for middle income families who may not qualify for targeted subsidies such as water and electricity. All of them are now benefiting from the reduction but may still face a slightly higher cost. So, lowering the VAT, we are ensuring that it benefits all Fijians.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to ensure that the benefits of VAT reduction like other policies such as reduction in the duties, Government, for the first time, established a Price Monitoring and Enforcement Taskforce (PMET). This Taskforce is a standing inter-agency body established under the leadership of the Ministry of Finance, in collaboration with the Fiji Consumer Council of Fiji (FCCC) and the Fiji Revenue and Customs Service (FRCS). Its primary objective is to support the implementation of budget reforms and promote fair market practices that safeguard consumer welfare.

We have seen, Mr. Speaker, Sir, PMET monitors market prices to ensure that changes in VAT and customs duties are accurately reflected in retail pricing, helping to prevent unjustified price increases and protect household affordability. It investigates consumer complaints, enforces compliance, conducts public awareness and campaigns to ensure transparency in decision making.

The Taskforce, Mr. Speaker, Sir, also provides policy advice on regulatory reforms and market efficiency, and coordinates responses to supply chain disruptions that may affect product availability of affordability.

As we announced in the Budget, we are changing the way in which the quarantine was, for example, restricting import of products. For example, ghee was coming from India to Australia and New Zealand, but we were not allowed to import the same product that was ending up in Australia and New Zealand directly from India. So, from September this year, ghee is being directly imported from India, and I am told by those who are importing it that the prices will be lower than what they were when they were importing it from Australia and New Zealand.

In addition to the VAT reduction, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government has implemented other measures to support households. For example, the 10 percent bus fare subsidy and the continuation of the \$200 Back to School assistance that we introduced in 2023 will also be continued in 2026, and we talked about this, Mr. Speaker. As I have said, incomes have also been increasing and this is partly because of Government's deliberate policy from \$4 minimum wage, 1st January, 2023 to \$4.50.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Microwave!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- It is not microwave. We took a decisive action to make the minimum wage to \$5 in this country and all the Wages Councils are paying higher than \$5.

The increase in the salaries of Civil Servants. In one year, we have increased the salaries of the Civil Servants between 10 percent to 23 percent. We increased the Social Welfare Allowances between 15 percent to 28 percent. We have increased the price of sugarcane that farmers got highest ever. We increase the price of rice farmers. We increased the subsidies. So, that is why the official inflation figures are very clear. That is why, in the last seven months, inflation has been going down, cost of living has been going down - it is very clear. It is only the lies from the Opposition that is confusing the people.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, when they go and sit beside the grog bowl, when the butter prices went up, you see this buffoonery coming from the Opposition side in their post saying, "Butter prices have gone up". Honourable Maharaj, put a post, "This Government has increased the price of butter", when all the butter is imported from New Zealand.

When the price of butter went up in New Zealand, Mr. Speaker, Sir....

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Tell us something new.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I want to repeat this because these are the lies that they go and tell the people instead of telling them the truth.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government policy has worked well in terms of our finances and the inflation rate. That has been coming down and it is having a clear impact on the cost of living that people are now feeling and relieved. We are happy about the way we have managed these policies in the last three budgets, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and this will have a lasting, positive impact in the future.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, my question to the honourable Minister is whether any survey undertaken from the public to understand whether they were happy with whatever policies he had introduced plus what was their feel on the cost of living? Was any public-related survey undertaken?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- All I can say, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that all the post-budget consultations that we have had, all the community meetings we are having, everyone comes and says thank you very much to Government for reducing the VAT, for giving a 10 percent bus fare subsidy, for raising the price of sugarcane, for raising the price of rice, for giving subsidies....

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- They do not like good news from the people. They do not like good news, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The good news is that the people actually appreciate what the Government has done.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- People appreciated it when we removed the 9 percent VAT. They understood that we are getting additional \$400 million to \$500 million revenue.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the contradiction from honourable Kumar, this is a very good point. She put a post on her *Facebook* page. She said, “The Finance Minister is celebrating \$150 million revenue surplus.” Even that figure is wrong, in fact, the surplus is \$185 million. This is the contradiction, Mr. Speaker. First, they do not like that we are raising more revenue. Then they are saying, ““why are we borrowing more; why are you not putting this money into this; why are you not increasing the salaries of teachers, honourable Hem Chand? I do not know what they want. They do not want us to borrow, they do not want us to collect more revenue, they do not want us to put the right policies. This is what they post on *Facebook* just to confuse people.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- This is what they do.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the short answer to honourable Kumar, the survey is the people. When we go out, we get the good news. People out there know.

(Honourable Premila Kumar interjects)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- You can do your own survey, that is up to you. You can do as many surveys as you want and go and lie as much as you want, but the fact of the matter is, the official figures, honourable Kumar, the Bureau of Statistics, an independent body, unlike what it was under you people has come out, the Reserve Bank has validated that very clearly that inflation rate has been going down in the last seven consecutive months.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- If that is not enough for the Opposition to say, thank you, our policies are working, what else do they expect, Mr. Speaker, Sir? Let us have an honest debate. Look at the figures.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Give us the figures.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- You go and ask. All our institutions are free. When we were in Opposition, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is a fact, we could not even enter the door of Government Buildings.

(Laughter)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- We could not ask for any information. Now, the honourable Leader of the Opposition and every Opposition Member, we are telling them, please welcome them, give them the information. They have all the information. Yet, when they go, they get the information, they come out and lie. That is what they do, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Very poor, very poor!

HON. J. USAMATE.- Hogwash!

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I found the question to be a bit confusing, if I can read it again. Can the honourable Deputy Prime Minister inform Parliament on how the 12.5 percent tax reduction impact, the 12.5 percent tax it did not reduce, it went from 15 percent to 12.5 percent-reduction is 2.5 percent. It is a question from a government minister to another government minister. Consistencies of errors, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order! Now, the next one who intervenes, I will issue a yellow card. Let the honourable Member ask his question. I do not want any intervention to distract the essence of the question. Please proceed.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. With the statement from the honourable Minister for Finance, it is clear, it is a 12.5 percent VAT that he is talking about. Simple question to the honourable Minister for Finance, because he likes simple questions. Can the honourable Minister for Finance agree that the poverty level and the hardship level faced by ordinary Fijians to access goods and services has reduced under his fiscal policies from 15 percent for the two years and 12.5 percent for this year? Has it reduced? Yes and no answer.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is another one today with yes and no. It is like they are talking to primary school children. I am not a primary school kid. The question itself, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have said it repeatedly. It is difficult to respond to and I use the word “buffoonery” because it means ridiculous and amusing. That is exactly what the honourable Member has done.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Unparliamentary.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- It is not unparliamentary.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Do not call the people “buffoons”.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Buffoonery, I am not saying buffoons. Buffoonery language. You understand that, you have been to the university, honourable Usamate.

HON. J. USAMATE.- It is unparliamentary.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- It is not unparliamentary. All I am saying is, Mr. Speaker, Sir, from yesterday, I have explained very clearly, and I have listed a number of things that Government has done.

Now, let me ask the honourable Member, when we raise prices of sugarcane, when we raise prices of rice farmers, when we raise subsidies for electricity, water supply, when we provide 10 percent bus fare subsidy, when we raise minimum wages, when we raise salaries of civil servants, when we reduce VAT, when we reduce duties, what does that tell us?

HON. J. USAMATE.- That is your microwave.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- That means that this is a relief we are giving to households. For him to come out, confused and say, “ Oh, somehow this is not happening”. You go and ask the person who travels on the bus now. Ask him or her! Go and ask the sugarcane farmers. Go and ask the rice farmers. Go and ask the vegetable farmers in Naitasiri.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- You ask him.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I was in Baulevu the other night.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- You ask them.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- People, Mr. Speaker, Sir, were very happy with what we have done. Some of these people, like honourable Sharma, when they go and have grog, they say, “ Oh, butter prices have gone up because of this Government”. That is the kind of thing they say. So, the long and short is, yes, Government policies have been effective. It has led to the reduction in the cost of living. I am not saying that every price of every item in this country, you cannot expect prices to be at a lower level all the time. Prices have increased, and so the strategy is also to raise income. Simple economics, simple logic, but they do not understand.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you for giving me this time. My name was mentioned in the response by the honourable Deputy Prime Minister.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I never said that Government has actually increased the price. It was FCCC, and I was very clear. The question to the honourable Minister is, knowing that the price of butter has gone up, is the honourable Minister considering giving a subsidy to all the consumers to reduce the price of butter?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I deliberately took his name because I wanted him to ask a question. The simple answer, honourable Maharaj, you cannot talk about subsidies whenever a price of one item goes up. Tomorrow, you will ask us to give you more subsidies for your pharmacy, but that is not how it works.

The simple fact is that the policy that the Government has put in place, the decisions that we have made in terms of tax policies, income policies is actually working and helping our people. Our people understand that not everything is in the Government's hands in terms of the prices of certain items that may seem higher. We have taken some decisive actions on all fronts, whether it is price monitoring, duties, taxes, quarantine, or raising income. All that as a composite package is helping our people, our households and giving relief, and I think that is something that we all need to appreciate.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, there is only one written question, in view of the fact that the other two Written Questions have been withdrawn.

(Written Question Nos. 152/2025 and 154/2025 withdrawn)

Written Question

Revenue from Land Boundary Redefinition Surveys
(Question No. 153/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for iTaukei Affairs and Culture, Heritage and Arts inform Parliament of the total revenue collected by the iTaukei Land and Fisheries Commission from land boundary redefinition surveys over the past three financial years, with respect to the following –

- (a) the annual revenue amounts for each of the last three financial years and how these funds were utilised;
- (b) the number of land disputes resolved or narrowed following these surveys, and what indicators were used to measure their impact; and
- (c) the measures in place to ensure that survey services are affordable and delivered promptly to landowners?

¹ HON. I. VASU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as per the Standing Order, I now submit my response.

**CONSOLIDATED REVIEW REPORT ON THE MINISTRY OF
INFRASTRUCTURE AND TRANSPORT 2017–2019 ANNUAL REPORTS**

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move:

That Parliament debates the Consolidated Review Report on the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport's 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 Annual Reports, which were tabled on 18th July, 2025.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee noted that the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport faces challenges to manage, coordinate and implement Government development efforts in rural and maritime communities during the period under review. The Committee, in its deliberations, highlighted 17 key findings, the:

- (1) Sea Route Licensing consultation is still in progress.
- (2) The Ministry was unable to replace all Government shipping vessels that were damaged during *TC Winston* due to budgetary constraints. The National Transport Consultative Forum and National Transport Sector Plan are providing a better approach to address the congestion issues around the main cities, especially along the Lami-Suva-Nausori corridor.

¹ Editor's Note: Reply to Written Question No. 153/2025 tabled by the honourable Minister for iTaukei Affairs and Culture, Heritage and Arts, under Standing Order 45(3), is appended as Annexure I.

- (3) Some temporary houses have been built on areas that are earmarked for future development routes to ease congestion and open access.
- (4) Some temporary houses have been built on areas that are earmarked for future development routes to ease congestion and open access.
- (5) Overloading of vehicles has led to a lot of the damage on our roads around Fiji. The Committee has noted that the LTA has been enforcing penalties on overloaded vehicles.
- (6) A Singaporean consultant was engaged by the Government of Fiji to prepare a master plan for road upgrade between Lami-Suva-Nausori corridor.
- (7) Fiji Roads Authority is not aware of any Singaporean consultant engaged by the Government to prepare a master plan.
- (8) There is lack of proper supervision by qualified personnel overseeing the maintenance and building undertaken by private contractors. This is reflected in the poor workmanship and quality of work undertaken in many Government projects.
- (9) There is lack of experienced and qualified locals to undertake building projects. It is further noted that this was hampered by the system of short-term contracts used to secure project workers.
- (10) The Ministry believes that it will be able to perform its functions better if the fiscal year reverts to the calendar year, as the wet season generally runs from November to April.
- (11) The 2018-2019 fiscal year was a challenge for the Ministry due to the two natural disasters, namely *Tropical Cyclone Keni* and *Tropical Cyclone Sarai*.
- (12) The Ministry had an unqualified financial report for 2018-2019, after having had a qualified report on the 2017-2018 fiscal year.
- (13) Energy Fiji Limited encountered challenges, including skilled worker migration, supply chain issues, land acquisition and a shortage of electrical contractors.
- (14) The new Integrated Water Resources Management Implementation Plan is aligned with the National Development Plan 2024-2029. This Plan has presented a well-defined approach to managing the water sector, cutting across three different Ministries.
- (15) The Committee noted that the Fiji Meteorological Services has human resources issues that are affecting its performance. This includes non-payment of housing allowance, shift allowance, salary, meal allowance and lack of vehicle to operate on.
- (16) There is a need to maintain access and upkeep the hydrometric stations around Fiji. This is particularly critical, given that most damages in Fiji arises from floods.
- (17) The Committee noted with appreciation the commencement of the construction of the New Regional Training Centre and Regional Instrumental Centre in Nadi, which will provide service to all regional countries, such as New Zealand, USA and some Asian countries.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee then came up with 18 recommendations, as follows:

Recommendation No. 1

The Ministry must prioritise and complete the sea route licensing consultation to improve effective services in the maritime zone.

Recommendation No. 2

The Ministry should invest in new vessels to improve service in maritime zone and provide increased funding to repair the damaged vessels during *Tropical Cyclone Winston*.

Recommendation No. 3

The Ministry to work closely with private vessel owners and provide incentives to upgrade and buy new vessels.

Recommendation No. 4

The Ministry to conduct National Transport Consultative Forum where stakeholders should assist in developing a new National Transport Sector Plan within a given timeline.

Recommendation No. 5

The Ministry to work closely with all stakeholders, to relocate those residents who reside in the subject area which is earmarked for road development.

Recommendation No. 6

The Ministry should ensure that LTA has more weighbridges at strategic locations across the country to address overloading issues.

Recommendation No. 7

The Fiji Roads Authority should not duplicate the work carried out by the Singaporean consultant.

Recommendation No. 8

The Ministry, through its newly established Public Works Department, must monitor and supervise all maintenance and building projects undertaken by private contractors.

Recommendation No. 9

The Ministry should enhance its apprenticeship programme and liaise with tertiary institutions in Fiji to upskill and upgrade all knowledge of our local contractors.

Recommendation No. 10

The Ministry should consult with the Ministry of Finance on their difficulties in carrying out their work under the current financial year in terms of unfavourable weather here in Fiji.

Recommendation No. 11

The Ministry must align its strategic plan towards the effective use of its facilities and human resources to overcome the effects of natural disasters.

Recommendation No. 12

The Ministry must improve and rectify all its financial issues that were raised by the Auditor General in 2017-2018 Financial Report.

Recommendation No. 13

The Ministry ensures that Energy Fiji Limited must adopt a holistic approach by addressing its human resources issues, where skilled worker migration could be retained, while the procurement unit should be more proactive in managing the supply chain.

Recommendation No. 14

The Ministry should align all its water-related policies with the National Development Plan 2024-2029.

Recommendation No. 15

The Ministry must increase its budgetary allocation to accommodate human resources issues affecting Fiji Meteorological Services.

Recommendation No. 16

That the Ministry must provide Fiji Meteorological Services with adequate transport to run their operation effectively.

Recommendation No. 17

The Ministry must invest in hydrometric stations around Fiji with more technical advancements.

Recommendation No. 18

The Committee recommends that the Ministry must work closely with key development partners, namely JICA, to complete the Regional Training Centre which will become the regional hub of training here in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Standing Committee on Social Affairs noted that the Ministry's strategic priority areas are aligned with national government priorities and the relevant Sustainable Development Goals are met. As we discussed, the Ministry's Annual Report today, the Committee applauds the achievements of the Ministry under the period of review.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Social Affairs Committee looks forward to the implementation and commitment on the recommendations put forward by the Committee.

MR. SPEAKER.- I remind the movers of motions that they are entitled only to five minutes to move their motion. So, please pay heed to the time.

Honourable Members, I have a list of speakers with me. Each speaker is given seven minutes to speak on the motion. At the end of the debate, I will call upon the mover to speak in his right of reply.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute on the Review Report of the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport for the years 2017-2018 and 2018-2019. I wish to first turn to the issue of sea route licensing which was briefly discussed earlier on. The reason why I want to talk about this is because there is an urgent need to resolve this. The people of Fiji in particular, those who depend on maritime transport for their livelihoods and daily lives deserve to know when this critical process will be finalised to improve effective services in the maritime zone.

Currently, there is the interim timetable, we cannot continue with interim timetables because interim is interim and we need to have a substantive timetable so that the passengers and operators know what time they have to leave, and what time they will return. It has been an issue for quite

long and I ask the honourable Minister to seriously look into it, as he has mentioned earlier on that it is in the process.

Key Finding 3.17 reveals that the Fiji Roads Authority was not aware of any Singaporean Consultant engaged by the government to prepare a master plan, a shocking revelation. Honourable Members of this House will recall that in the last sitting, we were assured that all stakeholders including Fiji Roads Authority, were aware. However, the Report now confirms that in reality, it was something else. This is a serious lack of accountability in getting the truth across. Millions of dollars were being paid to this company, and a key implementing agency like Fiji Roads Authority was kept in the dark.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Key Finding 3.61 paints a poor picture of Fiji MET Services based in Nadi. The issue cited were non-payment of housing allowance, shift allowance, unresolved salary issues and lack of vehicles. We were told during our site visit that staff had to hire private vehicles to attend to official complaints. These are the very aspects, Mr. Speaker, upon whom our entire nation depends on for cyclone warnings and aviation safety. To treat them with such disregard, and the lack of good governance is to gamble with the national security.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a comment we heard, they resign today, there is a job for them the very next day, and I think this is very loud and clear to the Government to attend to this. We were also told that we might be on the verge of losing some of our most skilled and technical staff if their grievances are not addressed. I call upon the Minister responsible to act with urgency to resolve this matter before we face a brain drain that compromise the safety of every Fijian.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, regarding the transfer responsibilities from Fiji Roads Authority to municipal councils, we seek some clarity on this. If there is truth to this, then the public interest requires a clear plan and most importantly, will the councils be given the necessary funding to carry out such works? We have on many occasions were told that municipal councils have made a submission to Fiji Roads Authority to take over the maintenance of roads, streetlights. The question that I have to ask is whether such funds will be allocated to the municipal council.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I come to the issue of Vuniyasi and Navala No. 2 Bridges. In the last parliament sitting, I raised the damage to the Vuniyasi Bridge and was given assurance that it would be repaired. To-date, nothing has been done. The Navala Bridge has been damaged. This is not just about concrete and steel, it is about the daily lives of our people. It affects parents getting to work, farmers taking their produce to the market and school children getting to school.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with this brief contribution, I urge the honourable Minister responsible to look into these two bridges that I have mentioned earlier on, so that people can access those bridges.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to present the Ministry of Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport's response to the recommendations put forward by the Standing Committee. We thank the Committee for its thorough review and constructive proposals aimed at strengthening our national infrastructure and transport systems.

The Ministry remains committed to transparency, accountability and continuous improvement. The change in the Ministry's portfolio name from Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport to Ministry of Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport is a testimony that clearly shows the dedication and commitment made by this Coalition Government to reform and further strengthen the key roles in this department. In terms of the Report itself, there are various departments mentioned - Department of Building and Government Architects (DBGAs).

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Coalition Government and the Ministry is in full support to bring back the Public Works Department and to reactivate the Department of Building and Government Architecture to its mandatory original role in actively monitoring all maintenance and building projects undertaken by divisional officers and private contractors. Resource mobilisation was very critical in our Ministry to carry out our mandate effectively and efficiently. I am pleased to report that we have been granted a budget consideration for this financial year for the 15 approved technical positions which are currently undertaking a recruitment process, expected to be fully filled shortly.

On top of this, the Ministry has been allocated a total of \$11.4 million for government buildings upkeep, rural electrification upgrades, and rural roads construction and upgrades. The DBGA will continue to play its mandatory role of planning and design as well as monitoring and progress of those earmarked projects which will be implemented by our main divisional offices around the country. To effectively carry out this role, it is imperative that the department fills its positions, and this is a continuing process as we go through the budget process in the financial years.

We would also like to emphasise the need for all line Ministries to engage DBGA in the review and approval of terms of reference before these are released to bidders. Additionally, endorsement must be obtained prior to the release of any payments to the Ministry of Finance. This process will safeguard the integrity of procurement, ensure technical compliance and uphold value for money in all government-funded infrastructure projects.

In support of long-term skills retention, the Ministry is enhancing its Apprenticeship and Technical Training Programme in partnership with tertiary institutions such as FNU, USP, including onsite technical training, certification pathways and mentorship programmes. These efforts are designed to ensure that our infrastructure sector is supported by competent professionals who are equipped to meet the demands of modern development and climate resilience.

In terms of the Department of Finance and Administration, effective management of finance and administration is one of our ongoing efforts and addressing legacy audit issues, particularly considering the challenges posed by adverse weather conditions. The Ministry acknowledges the increasing impact of cyclones and flooding on our capital projects. These events have disrupted timelines and strained our financial resources.

The Ministry continues to hold discussions in terms of flexibility and budget utilisation as we continue to move forward during these challenging times. It is reviewing and updating its strategic plan to align with the National Disaster Risk Reduction and climate resilience objectives, including investing in climate resilient infrastructure, building staff capacity for emergency responses, establishing contingency funds for rapid deployment during natural disasters, and ensuring optimal use of facilities and human resources.

The Ministry remains steadfast in its commitment. This is clearly shown in our audits in the last two financial years (2022-2023 and 2023-2024) have been unqualified. We will continue to work collaboratively across government departments.

In terms of the Department of Energy, as mentioned, the recommendation made by the Committee regarding the need for a holistic approach in addressing Human Resource needs, we recognise the importance of retaining skilled workers. These are critical components, and we have faced challenges over the years.

I am pleased to highlight that a substantial number of major projects, including grid extensions and house wiring have been completed across the nation. The Ministry has been allocated

a total of \$5.3 million in this financial year (2024-2025) in such projects. The projects have a direct and positive impact. Most of these initiatives are funded through the government grants allocated in previous financial years and implemented by the Department of Energy.

For the Department of Water and Sanitation, the Department is currently working towards finalisation of four key documents - Water and Sewerage Services Bill, National Water Resources Management and Sanitation Policy, Fiji Integrated Water Resources Management Plan and Rural Water Supply Master Plan.

One of the key upcoming projects that the Department of Water and Sewerage is co-funding with the Government of France, is on the pilot project of upgrading and rehabilitation of rural water supply infrastructure at Navunimono and Ucunivanua. This is pilot and will be replicated to other communities.

The Report also mentioned the Fiji Meteorological Services and the critical role it plays in terms of monitoring our various elements of weather including flooding, atmospheric weather, et cetera. The Ministry has taken proactive steps to address, in particular, the human resource needs and addressing a lot of the HR needs which have been brought up. In the budget, four out of the 11 requested technical positions have been approved, and we continue to work closely with the Ministry of Finance in this regard. There is, of course, an urgent need to invest in more hydrometric stations across Fiji, as mentioned by the honourable Minister for Rural Development. We will continue to work closely on that with the development partners. The Report also mentioned, and I acknowledge the Government of Japan through JICA for their generous assistance of \$25 million towards the establishment of a regional training centre. The groundbreaking is scheduled for December 2025.

I commend the work of the Committee and before I sit, I always wonder what the Members of the Opposition are telling the public. I always wonder because in terms of what they are coming up with, what we are always hearing is that we are telling half-truths or untruths. Is it us or is it them? That is the fundamental question.

In addition, there is a continuing repetition of this phrase, “we were told as we go out in the field”, and I am very concerned, especially the Members of the Standing Committees. They are using the Committees’ field visits to campaign and gather information from their supporters. They need to work with the Committee, do not use the Committee to go and drink grog in the community and create and spread wild rumours.

For example, honourable Ketan Lal continues to say that there are potholes everywhere. When you say potholes everywhere, it is like 90 percent of the roads have potholes, that is not the reality of the situation. Honourable Parveen Bala on the sea route license, what were you doing in the last 16 years? We have just been here three years, but what were you doing? These tough issues, again, that is the question. What have they done to resolve it? We have worked towards budgeting and resolving it and the honourable Prime Minister has mentioned that we are currently reviewing the Civil Service Regulations to improve the terms and conditions of service.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister, I remind you that you have exhausted your time.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. RO. F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Sir, permission to say one more? The of strategic planning and pipeline of projects when we came in. Honourable Bala is raising the issue about rural bridges but there was no plan when we came in; there was nothing there.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. RO. F.Q. TUISAWAU.- He is talking about ad hoc repairs but here we think strategically. We do not think ad hoc.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. RO. F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Strategic documents, the funding, etc. That is what this Coalition Government is about - solving now and moving forward into the future.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise today to contribute to the debate on the Consolidated Review Report of the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 Annual Reports. The Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport and its corporate entities like the Fiji Roads Authority, Water Authority of Fiji and the Fiji Meteorological Services collectively form the backbone of our economy and public life. Their operations, from ensuring safe roads and reliable water supply to providing critical weather forecasts, directly impact every citizen of Fiji. Therefore, the thorough scrutiny applied by the Standing Committee to this two-year review is not merely an exercise in oversight, it is an essential function that defines our commitment to good governance, accountability and ultimately effective service delivery to the people we serve.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, without sound infrastructure and national aspirations, be they in tourism, agriculture, trade or social development, remains confined to paper. A broken road network translates directly into lost hours, higher commercial cost and reduces access to essential services, like healthcare and education.

The resilience of our transport network, in particular, is constantly tested by the increasing frequency and intensity of climate events. This Report, spanning the 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 financial years, provides a critical snapshot of the Ministry's performance during the period of intense development activity. It is a benchmark against which we must measure progress, systematic weaknesses, and formulate smarter, more resilient strategies moving forward.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee's deliberation articulated in the key findings of section 3.0 highlighted several areas that demand the Ministry's immediate attention and comprehensive action. Firstly, the Report implicitly points to the challenges in the strategic alignment and execution. The Committee needs to emphasise that the integrated process has to be clearly defined, and that everything will be aligned from what we want according to the benefit out there, which is the customer that we serve. It suggests that while various corporate entities within the Ministry are executing their mandates, the overarching unified vision of customer-centric public service may sometimes be lost in bureaucratic silos. We must move beyond fragmented service delivery to a truly integrated model where the user experience - the public, is the primary metric of success.

Secondly, and perhaps most critically for the Fiji Roads Authority (FRA), there were clear indications of challenges in contractor performance and contract management. While I am constrained by the specific details, the industry context of this period reveals significant issues, including instances of contractor non-performance and challenges related to defects, liability periods, and ensuring the quality and durability of new roadworks. When contracts are signed, they must guarantee value for money over assets' lifetime.

A failure in workmanship that sees a newly laid road degraded within two years, is not merely a technical failure, it is a financial loss to the Fijian taxpayers. It suggests weakness in the contract monitoring and quality assurance mechanisms that the FRA must urgently address. The public needs

assurance that the tens of millions of dollars invested in the road network are yielding resilient and long-lasting assets. We cannot afford the perpetual cycle of repair and renewal.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the value of this Report lies not only in identifying problems, but in using those findings to drive improvement. The recommendations in section 4.0 are a vital signpost for the Ministry. To address the strategic weaknesses, the Ministry must pursue a holistic approach to planning. This involves rigorous scenario planning that accounts for climate change resilience, not just basic maintenance. Every dollar spent on infrastructure must be a dollar spent on resilience. Furthermore, the accountability framework must be tightened. If a contractor fails to meet the quality standards during the defects liability period, that critical two-year window mentioned in the industry, the penalties must be swift and consequential, ensuring the full cost of gratification is borne by the contractor, not the State.

The Committee rightly stressed the need for responsive communication and information management. The Chairperson's closing remarks requesting prompt responses to further queries, underscore the need for the Ministry to be transparent, accessible and timely in its communication with Parliament and public. In a digital age, data on maintenance schedules, performance metrics and capital projects should be readily available to foster trust and allow for external scrutiny.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the motion before the House. At the outset, I wish to commend the honourable Minister for Public Works and Meteorological Services and Transport and his dedicated team for the remarkable progress achieved over the past year. Their commitment to delivering infrastructure that truly serves our people is evident in the stories behind statistics, stories of communities whose lives have been improved, whose connections have been strengthened and whose opportunities have expanded.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the achievements of the current Government stand in sharp contrast to the mismanagement and inefficiencies of the past. Take, for example, the Nadi four-lane project under the previous Administration. Originally budgeted for \$65 million, cost ballooned to nearly \$117 million, with questionable expenditures along the way. Similarly, the Queen Elizabeth Drive project went over budget and decisions were taken without consultation, which affected communities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have the jetty in my village in Nairai, I think honourable Koroilavesau and others may have accompanied the honourable Prime Minister, so it is 15 years now and the project is yet to be completed. This was not just numbers; these were failures that directly affected the daily lives of Fijians. By contrast, under this Coalition Government, we see a completely different approach - one of accountability, careful planning and a focus on results that genuinely touched the lives of Fijians.

In Rotuma, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the upgraded jetty and improved roads have transformed transport for residents and businesses. Vessels now dock smoothly, trucks arrive on time and the local economy thrives. One Rotuman resident said, "Now, our supplies arrive faster and life is easier for everyone". That is progress. People feel, not just read about in reports.

The Tamavua-i-Wai Bridge reconstruction to ease congestion in Suva, while the Vunisea jetty upgrade in Kadavu share the island connectivity and local trade. We can see road upgrading in Lakeba, Vanuabalavu, Matuku, Kadavu, Ovalau, Koro and in Gau for the first time, Mr. Speaker, Sir. In the last 20 years, for the first time, now road can go around Gau Island. Not only that, the fare used to be \$75 for those traveling to Nairai, Batiki and Gau closer, while those going to Koro pay a cheaper fare of \$50. This Government changed that in only one year, from \$75 to \$50.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, not only that, but there are also now three vessels going in a week. I remember the bad old times when the previous government was in operation. The franchise ship, after three days of leaving Suva, then arrive in Nairai. Mr. Speaker, Sir, with Venu Shipping, you leave Natovi at 6.00 a.m., you arrive in Levuka at 11.00 a.m. and by 1.00 p.m. you are in Gau. If you are from Nairai Island, you take a fiber boat, you arrive, you have lunch and dinner, you head back, get on the boat, 6 o'clock in the morning, you arrive back in Suva. Never before! So, when we talk about statistics, these are real things that affect the people. For the people in the Eastern Division, if I may say, this is the best government that really cares, that listens to them.

I am also aware of the successful projects delivered by the Water Authority of Fiji (WAF) under this Government. These include the water distribution in Lawai and Momi community extension requests, water distribution in Vunidawa Water Package Plant and the water distribution in Nabouwalu Package Plant.

These initiatives provide reliable water supply to communities that previously struggled to access clean water, improving health, hygiene and overall quality of life. Such achievements demonstrates that the Coalition Government is committed to service delivery that directly impacts Fijians' everyday lives.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a moment to acknowledge the men and women working in this Ministry, the related agencies, the people who are often unseen, yet whose work is absolutely vital. These are officers who work during odd hours, brave dangerous conditions to keep our communities safe and services running.

I have seen firsthand dedication of fixing roads after landslides during heavy downpour, restoring power lines when cyclone or hurricane warnings are in place, and ensuring water continues to flow during the extreme rainfall. These are the very services that we sometimes only notice when they fail.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also take note to acknowledge the role played by the Ministry of Rural Development in this area, particularly in acknowledging the late Permanent Secretary, Mr. Isoa Talemaibua, who was instrumental in most of these projects in the outer Islands. It is easy to complain when a road is blocked, when the lights go out, or when taps run dry. A few stopped to consider the effort, the courage and the long hours behind every service. These men and women put their safety on the line - often sacrifice sleep, family time and personal comfort so that communities can continue functioning safely and efficiently.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is also important to note the strong financial support this Ministry has received over the years, reflecting the Coalition Government's recognition of its critical work. For 2022-2023, it was \$85.4 million; 2023-2024, it increased to \$721.4 million; and 2024-2025 is \$800 million - an increase of 11 percent from the previous year.

These increases are more than numbers, they represent commitment to building a resilient infrastructure, strengthening communities and improving the daily lives of Fijians. They enable the Ministry to maintain the existing infrastructure, expand services, innovate solutions and address pressing challenges such as climate change, population growth and connectivity to outer islands. From bridges to jetties, from roads to water supply, and from local communities to global maritime standards, the Coalition Government has demonstrated leadership, vision and dedication to service delivery that sets a new benchmark.

I congratulate the honourable Minister, his staff, FRA Chairman and CEO, and all the officers we are working behind the scenes. I fully commend the findings and recommendations in the Report.

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I take this opportunity to thank all the honourable Members who have contributed positively to the debate, and who have taken note of all the points addressed in this august House.

On that note, Sir, I fully support the motion before the House and thank you for the opportunity.

MR. SPEAKER.- The Parliament will now vote to note the content of the Report.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

REVIEW REPORT ON THE FIJI AIRPORTS 2022 ANNUAL REPORT

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move:

That Parliament debates the Review Report on the Fiji Airports 2022 Annual Report, which was tabled on 18th July, 2025.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to present the findings and recommendations of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, following the review of the Fiji Airports 2022 Annual Report.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, firstly, we found that airport facilities such as aerobridges, belt systems and scanners were pretty old, and some were beyond their use by date. While capital works were delayed, a \$2.3 billion Nadi Airport upgrade is planned over 10 years with backing from the World Bank and the International Finance Corporation (IFC).

The Committee recommends the following:

Recommendation No.1

The Government of Fiji, in collaboration with Fiji Airports, prioritise the replacement of ageing Airport assets and accelerate delayed capital projects. This fund should leverage existing international support, and explore blended financing models, including Public Private Partnerships, to ensure the timely implementation of the Nadi Airport Modernisation Plan, and to also prevent further deterioration of critical infrastructure.

Recommendation No. 2

On gender equality in the workforce, Fiji Airports remains male dominated, although female representation had risen to over 20 percent.

The Committee recommends expanding a formal Gender Equality and Inclusion Strategy, setting measurable targets to increase female representation across all levels, particularly in technical and leadership roles. This should include sustained investment in leadership development programmes, mentorship, and workplace inclusivity measures, aligned with SDG 5 and the national gender equity commitments.

Recommendation No. 3

The Committee commends Fiji Airports for its proactive commitment to sustainability and climate action, notably achieving Level 4 of the ACI Carbon Accreditation, and for implementing forward-looking initiatives such as solar energy integration, mangrove planting and climate-resilient infrastructure planning.

The Committee recommends that Fiji Airports continue its trajectory towards Level 5 ACI Accreditation and net-zero emissions by 2050 by expanding renewable energy capacity, strengthening partnerships with airport ecosystem stakeholders and adopting international green building standards.

Recommendation No. 4

In the period under review, we heard and noticed staff shortages, particularly in technical areas, which has remained a challenge.

The Committee recommends that Fiji Airports prioritise the development of the Fiji Airports Aviation Academy into a fully accredited regional centre of excellence for aviation training, with a focus on addressing technical talent shortages both, locally and in the Pacific region.

Recommendation No. 5

Fiji Airports currently processes over 2 million passengers annually. Congestion, as all of us in this House and most travellers will know, is a significant during peak “morning and afternoon waves”, with the same infrastructure underutilised during off-peak hours. Up to 50 percent of passengers are transit travellers, showing potential for Nadi as a regional transit hub, and this is something that is not entirely in the control of Fiji Airports.

The Committee recommends that Fiji Airports adopt international best practices in slot and gate management, benchmarking against high-performing Australian airports, such as Brisbane and Sydney.

Recommendation No. 6

On security concerns and limitations, the Committee was informed that only Nadi and Nausori Airports are classified as secure under ICAO standards, with outlying airports lacking security screening, relying on airline-initiated questioning which is a weak link in countering drug trafficking and transnational crime.

We recommend the whole of Government approach to airport security, recognising these issues as national threats requiring integrated aviation and border control responses.

On that note, Mr. Speaker, I commend the motion before the House.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion. I have a list of speakers with me. Please, note that each speaker is given six minutes to deliver his or her contribution.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, I rise to contribute to the Consolidated Review Report of the Fiji Airports 2022 Annual Report. There are a few points I would like to highlight as we went through scrutinising the Annual Report.

First of all, the growth and congestion challenges as Fiji looks to expand its tourism sector. We have seen that over 2 million passengers do turn up annually, crossing our borders. In fact, it is forecasted up to 8 million in the coming years.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, congestion is, again, quite significant during peak morning hours and afternoon waves, and with infrastructure underutilised during off peak hours. Up to 50 percent of passengers are transit travellers, as stated in the Report, and showing growing potential for Nadi as a regional transit hub. Poor slot and gate management contribute to peak hour bottlenecks and underused capacity at times.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it was also noted with our visit that the Airport needs more stores selling Fijian made products that are produced or manufactured locally, not made somewhere in Thailand or some other Asian country but it is a Fijian product, or it has significance of Fiji.

The Committee recommends that Fiji Airports Limited prioritise the development of Fiji Airports Aviation Academy into a fully accredited Regional Centre of Excellence for Aviation Training with a focus on addressing technical talent shortages, both locally and in the Pacific region. This should include curriculum expansion, partnerships with regional and international aviation

bodies, and scholarship programmes to attract and retain skilled professionals which are critical in areas such as air traffic management, engineering, and the airport operations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, what has been going on social media, in fact, is about the Pacific Flying School which I would like to highlight in Parliament. It states that if the Suncoast overhaul engines are suddenly deemed unacceptable, CAAF must present the technical directive, airworthiness data, or risk findings that justify this decision. It has been stated that silence is not an option. When it comes under our Aviation Academy and in terms of having more graduates, it is alleged that the restrictions imposed by CAAF without any risk being identified by the regulator or any risk assessments being provided to justify the restrictions. Sir, ICAO requires effective regulators to be transparent and reasonable.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, while the honourable Prime Minister at the recent UN Summit spoke about the mental challenges, especially among our young people, we can only imagine what these students at the Pacific Flying School are going through. I am putting this forward to the attention of the honourable Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Ministers; we seek your immediate intervention to solve this matter as the future of more than 50 students is at stake.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would just like to respond to honourable Tuisawau. He stated that Opposition Members campaigned during Committee public submissions. That is baseless, false and misleading. When I travel, I do not travel in my vehicle. At the end of the day, I stay where we are all located. But they who have a vehicle and a driver have higher chances of going around and meeting people and I am not blaming anyone. We do not do that. The honourable Minister should consider putting GPS trackers in the government vehicles and then he would know who goes where.

In conclusion, I support the Committee's findings, and the urgent attention to look into the Pacific Flying School issue that has been raised by CAAF. I thank the staff at Fiji Airports Limited, the Committee Members and the Committee Secretariat. I support the motion before the House.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Members of Parliament, I rise as a Member of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence and also as an Assistant Minister for Health and Medical Services to speak on the motion before the House - the Review Report of the Fiji Airports 2022 Annual Report. This Report reflects the comprehensive and bipartisan review of Fiji Airports' performance, strategic direction, and its alignment with national development priorities.

I wish to commend the Chairperson of the Standing Committee and my fellow Committee Members for their diligence and collaborative spirit throughout this process. The Fiji Airports is a 100 percent government-owned commercial entity, and it manages 15 airports across our nation, including our two international gateways - Nadi and Nausori. It also provides air traffic management services within the Nadi Flight Information Region covering our sovereign airspace and also several Pacific Island nations. Despite the unprecedented challenge brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, Fiji Airports demonstrated resilience and adaptability. The organisation maintained essential operation, supported regional connectivity and continued to invest in infrastructure and innovation.

Mr. Speaker, allow me to highlight several key findings and recommendations from the Committee. First is on infrastructure modernisation. The Committee noted the critical airport infrastructure, as alluded to by Madam Chairperson, such as the aerobridges, baggage system and scanning of equipment are severely outdated, some extending 30 years in service. We thank Fiji Airports Fiji with a \$2.3 billion modernisation plan for Nadi International Airport which is underway and we urge Fiji Airports to expedite this process with blended financial model of public-private partnership.

On passenger growth and transit, Mr. Speaker, the Nadi International Airport currently processes over two million passengers annually, with projection as being mentioned reaching to about eight million in the coming years. Notably, up to 50 percent of those that are passing through the Nadi International Airport are transiting passengers. This underscores the urgent need to expand our terminal capacity with the inclusion of accommodation for transiting travellers within the airport facility. We must position Nadi as a competitive regional hub with world-class amenities and efficient slot and gate management.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on sustainable and climate action, Fiji Airports have achieved Level 4 Airports Council International Carbon Accreditation and is targeting net zero emission by 2050. Initiatives such as solar energy, mangrove planting, and climate resilient infrastructure are commendable.

On security and border protection, Mr. Speaker, the Committee has raised critical concerns regarding the security protocol at our outer islands and regional airports. Only Nadi and Nausori Airports currently meet the ICAO security standard. Outer island airports lack the proper screening, posing risk in the face of rising transnational threat such as illicit drug trafficking. Whole of government approach is needed to strengthen aviation security nationwide.

We recommend that the government in collaboration with Fiji Airports and the Civil Aviation Authority of Fiji and our border security agencies undertake a comprehensive review and upgrade of these protocols. This must include the progressive introduction of ICAO compliance screening procedures, enhanced staff training, and targeted investment in appropriate security infrastructure. Urgency of this recommendation cannot be overstated, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Given the alarming rise of drug trafficking, transnational crime, we must adopt a whole of government approach to airport security. These threats are no longer isolated incidents. They are national security concerns that demands integrated aviation and border control response.

As Assistant Minister for Health and Medical Services, I am particularly concerned about the social and health impact of illicit drug inflow through our porous borders. Strengthening airport security is not only a matter of aviation safety, but also a vital step in protecting our communities from the devastating consequences of narcotics and organised crime.

I am pleased to inform this House that Fiji Airports will be undertaking major renovation of the Namaka Health Centre, starting next week. This initiative reflects the commitment to community well-being and complements the border infrastructure development agenda to be ready for any major accident at the Nadi Airport, to stand ready for any massive casualties that overwhelm the available emergency response resources. It is a testament to the value of cross-sector collaboration in delivering essential services to our people.

In conclusion, I wish to extend my sincere appreciation to the CEO of Fiji Airports, Mr. Mesake Nawari, and his dedicated team for their cooperation and timely submission of their annual report, leadership and vision which is instrumental in shaping the future of aviation in Fiji. Let us continue to support Fiji Airports in its journey to become a world-class aviation hub for the Blue Pacific while ensuring that our infrastructure, workforce, and communities are prepared for the opportunities and challenges ahead. I support the motion before the House.

HON. V. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the motion on the Review Report of Fiji Airports 2022 Annual Report. I must first acknowledge the resilience demonstrated by Fiji Airports Limited in 2022 emerging from two years of unprecedented global disruption, the company recorded a commendable net profit of over \$32 million and successfully managed the arrival of 1.61 million international passengers. This recovery shows institutional strength, and the pivotal role Fiji

Airports plays as the primary gateway to our national economy.

However, the role of this Parliament and this Committee is not merely to applaud past successes. Our duty is to look forward and ensure that the vital arteries of our economy, our airports are future proofed against economic shocks and the accelerating threats of climate change. The 2022 Annual Report and the findings of our Committee paint a clear picture. The foundation of Fiji's tourism and trade, Nadi International Airport requires generational reinvestment. Our Report highlights that essential infrastructure, including aerobridges, baggage belt systems and scanning machines is critically outdated, exceeding typical lifespans by 25 years to 30 years. Age is not just an inconvenience, it is a serious risk to safety, efficiency, and Fiji's international reputation.

The proposed \$2.3 billion master plan for Nadi, especially the initial US\$250 million phase supported by strategic partners like World Bank and International Finance Corporation is, therefore, not a luxury, it is a national economic necessity. This House must insist on three key tenets as this master plan is implemented:

(1) Rigour and Transparency

Every dollar of this blended finance must be accounted for with forensic precision. We must avoid the bureaucratic bottlenecks and delays that plague capital projects during the pandemic era. The Committee has recommended the prioritisation and acceleration of asset replacement, and the Government must act on this immediately.

(2) National Engagement

We must ensure that Fijian workers, engineers and suppliers are given every opportunity to participate in this nation-building exercise. The master plan must empower our local workforce.

(3) Resilience Integration

The design must incorporate advanced climate resilient engineering to withstand projected sea level rise and extreme weather events. We cannot afford to build infrastructure today that we will have to rebuild tomorrow.

The second pillar of Fiji Airports' performance which deserves specific commendation is the pioneering role in climate leadership within the Blue Pacific. Fiji Airports achieved Level 4 Airport Carbon Accreditation in 2022, the first airport operator in the region to reach this benchmark. This is a powerful demonstration that climate action is not merely a diplomatic talking point, it is operational reality. Their commitment to achieving net zero by 2050 through the deployment of solar power and transitioning to electric vehicles is the kind of decisive action this Committee demands, and this nation needs. The achievement aligns directly with our nation's commitment to SDG13, and it sends a clear message to the world – Fiji is vulnerable, but we are also leaders.

We are actively decarbonising the very gateway that connects us to the global market. The 2022 Annual Report shows a company that successfully navigated the immediate turbulence of the pandemic, but the real work begins now. The Committee's six recommendations are fundamentally about accountability and ensuring that the generational assets we rely upon, with Fiji Airports that facilitates 70 percent of our economic activity are safe, efficient and resilient.

We urge all stakeholders, the honourable Minister, Board and the management of Fiji Airports to use the findings of Parliamentary Paper No. 78/2025 as a mandate for disciplined, transparent and accelerated action. The future prosperity of our nation lands and takes off from the runways we discussed today. Let us ensure those runways are fit for purpose. I support the motion before the House.

HON. I. VASU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to make a contribution on the motion, a debate on the Review Report of Fiji Airports Annual Report 2022. To begin with, Fiji Airports Limited played a vital role in driving tourism and economic growth in Fiji. Nadi International Airport handles 97 percent of international visitors to Fiji, and 80 percent of which are tourists.

In recent years, we have witnessed the upgrades at key ports of entries, such as the Nadi International Airport, so that it can attract more international flights, stimulating tourism growth and creating thousands of new jobs. Enhance airport facilities also improve the passengers' experience, making Fiji a more appealing destination for tourists.

Fiji Airports Limited invests in infrastructure development and commercial projects, creates numerous jobs opportunities, both directly and indirectly contributing to the country's economic resilience. A world class aviation hub like the Nadi International Airport can attract foreign investment in various industries including real estate, retail, communications and technology.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji Airports Limited supports regional development through projects like Na Vualiku Tourism Development Programme funded in partnership with the World Bank, promoting tourism and economic growth in surrounding areas. The capital expansion master plan focuses on upgrading assets and infrastructure, including a \$140 million investment in 2024, with \$100 million for assets replacement and \$40 million for infrastructure projects. By driving tourism economic growth, Fiji Airports Limited play a crucial role in shaping Fiji's economic future and strengthening its position in the global aviation industry.

As we debate the Review Report of Fiji Airports Limited Annual Report 2022, I would like to highlight the pivotal roles Fiji Airports played in our national economic recovery. The COVID-19 pandemic had a devastating impact on our economy, but Fiji Airports bold decision to open our borders in close consultations with the Ministry of Health and stakeholders was a game changer. The decision not only facilitated the return of tourists to our shores but also accelerated our economic recovery. It is a testament to the critical role Fiji Airports play in driving our economy forward. Any investment made by Fiji Airports to cater for passenger growth have a direct and immediate impact on our economy.

As a government, we recognise that it is critical to continue throwing our support behind Fiji Airports investment, particularly those that promote passenger growth and economic development. By doing so, we can ensure that Fiji Airports continue to drive our economic growth and development. Fiji Airport's success is crucial to our national prosperity, and I commend the company's effort in navigating the challenges posed by the pandemic. Let us continue to support Fiji Airports in an endeavour and let us work together to build a brighter future for our nation.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the Standing Committee for their work in reviewing and tabling the Report and I support the motion before the House.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, I will be very brief. Most of the stuff has actually been taken care of by the Committee Members. I take this time to say thank you to the Committee for doing such a wonderful job on this particular Report.

Mr. Speaker, I think Fiji Airports Limited needs to be recognised for what it is. It is actually probably one of our gold standard institutions. It has year-on-year produced quite a substantial amount of profit and it has been handed down to government previously and also now. However, the recommendations in the Report are quite correct. There are parts of it that really need some work despite the fact that they can produce a \$30 million profit with old equipment, can you imagine what they would do if the equipment was better.

Now, having said that, Sir, cautious investment into the necessary upgrades is probably required. I say that because we have approximately two million visitors that pass through the actual airport, a million of which actually stay in Fiji. Now, we also need to whilst doing all this, look at the infrastructure that we have that is going to be able to facilitate two million visitors that actually stay back in Fiji. The actual experience of Fiji Airports Limited for a million visitors needs to be also looked at because they pass through the duty-free experience and how it has actually all done.

I think one of the ways to manage this and the best way to look at it is, I want to say something, but I will not because I know the honourable Minister might want to mention some stuff afterwards. I am talking about the honourable Minister for Trade about discussions, et cetera that are ongoing, but a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) would probably be the best way forward with respect to the next stage of development for Fiji Airports Limited.

There are several recommendations in the Report and when I look at it, they are very well looked at and also mentioned with respect to carbon accreditation but there is one which has a question, and I am talking about the aviation academy. We have Fiji Airways which is our very own, which already has an aviation academy where the simulator training, et cetera, that goes on.

We need to be careful when we look at aviation training whether Fiji Airports Limited is actually going to look at simulator training, et cetera. I know the Fiji Airways one is doing extremely well but it is something that, whether it can run side by side or it is going to look at different areas. Now we have got people coming in from all parts of the world because we have got such a high-class service which is being delivered by Fiji Airways.

Having said that, I think the infrastructure will have to also look at the National Development Plan and how that has been done, in terms of the engagement with World Bank, et cetera. We do not want to put ourselves in a situation where we are beholden to the World Bank, et cetera and I think the PPP is the way to go most definitely with respect to it. I know for a fact that some of our development partners and quite institutions that are overseas that are hugely substantial, would be quite interested in Fiji Airports Limited and getting into a partnership agreement to actually develop it to the stage where we want to. If it is ascertained that we are going to look at about four million to eight million visitors at that particular time, it has to be a long term staged project and that will have to mean a two-point something billion dollars which is a lot of money to invest in an airport.

We also must remember that anything we do from hereon in has to be done sustainably and the sustainable use of sustainable products, et cetera, so we can actually turn it into a green airport. We may not realise this, Sir, but as a destination for tourism, there are quite a substantial amount of very high spending tourists who look at which plane am I going on, is it using sustainable aviation fuel, when I get to the airport, have they used sustainable products to make this airport work, the place that I am going to stay in, if the mattress actually floats out in the water is not going to ruin the ocean. There are tourists who actually pay top dollar to go through the whole sustainable experience.

I remember being in Madrid, Sir, at the UN World Tourism Convention and one of the companies that won the award for being one of the best was a company that was actually organising such tourism for people who wanted it. So, the top end, we have always been a kind of a niche market tourism destination, so all of those things make a big difference and the fact that we can hopefully one day turn around and say that we are a sustainable airport, we are using sustainable aviation fuels with respect to that is another thing that needs to be looked at. These are all added factors now because in this day and age, Sir, it is getting quite expensive to do that.

I agree with the recommendations that have been put by the Committee, and I commend their work. I also commend the entire leadership at Fiji Airports Limited, not just the CEO, who have

done a tremendous amount of work to actually bring us as a country back \$30 million in profit with the necessary equipment that is actually there. The planes are getting bigger, and the planes are carrying more and more passengers nowadays. We are a hub, we always have been a hub, and we need to make sure that we fully realise all that, regionally and also internationally. Just having seen how much development goes into airports around the world, it has to be a constant upgrade with respect to making sure that we are an attractive destination.

With those few words Sir, I support the recommendations that have been put in by the Committee and I thank them.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank all the Members who have spoken before me. I also speak on behalf of the honourable Prime Minister who is the Minister responsible for Fiji Airports. Fiji Airports is a 100 percent government-owned commercial company and a public enterprise. It operates about 15 of the country's airports including both, Nadi and Nausori, as well as 13 outer island airports in the country.

As we heard from the honourable Members, yes Fiji Airports recorded 1.6 million international arrival and departure passenger movements, but that Mr. Speaker, Sir, grew significantly. They went up by 9.3 percent from 2.65 million in 2023 to 2.9 million in 2024. The total aircraft movement showed an upward trend as well as increasing by about 3.9 percent from 95,480 in 2023 to 99,239 in 2024.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just very quickly, the Nadi Airport Terminal upgrade costs about \$130 million. Between 2015-2018, Fiji Airports paid about \$140 million dividend to Government. The recommendations by the Committee, Mr. Speaker, Sir, make a lot of sense, and I think Airports Fiji has taken those into consideration. I think the major accomplishments for Fiji Airports, notably its 25th anniversary celebration, this milestone allowed the company to honour and reflect its achievements, recognising the efforts as well as the dedication of its past and present leaders, employees and stakeholders in establishing Fiji Airports.

In 2024, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji Airports secured the support of the government of Japan for the improvement of aviation and safety facilities in Fiji. This \$15 million support enabled the procurement of aircraft surveillance system, fire trucks for outer islands, airports and rescue boats for Nadi International Airport. The company itself has completed significant projects such as the launching of the Nadi International Airport Master Plan 2024-2048. I think this is quite significant, and it is quite visionary to have a master plan of that nature. As alluded by other honourable Members, Fiji is the hub of the Pacific. It is going to be one of the most attractive destinations for tourists now and in the future.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, Sir, contrary to all the predictions in 2023 and 2024 about the number of visitor arrivals, in fact, what we are seeing now is, before people used to talk about peak and off-peak seasons. In fact, there is no more off-peak season. It will end up as all peak seasons which means that the upgrade of the Nadi International Airport and the upgrade of other airports, including Nausori Airport is going to be very, very important.

Airports Fiji, Mr. Speaker, Sir, notes the proposal and suggestions made by the Committee and has actually prioritised its work towards it. The honourable Koya talked about public-private partnership, that is correct. In fact, as part of its long-term infrastructure development plan, Airports Fiji is working on the International Financial Corporation to evaluate the public-private partnerships and the options, with the aim to enable private sector partnerships to deliver the planned airside and landside developments at the Nadi International Airport. This study, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is expected

to be completed in the next few weeks. Subsequently, the outcomes of the study will be presented to key stakeholders within Government.

Airports Fiji, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is also, along with IFC working with the Asian Development Bank, a specific private sector development initiative in assisting Government through a scoping study to explore divestment modalities in line with government's objectives. It should be noted that no divestment, honourable Koya and honourable Lal would be undertaken without the completion of proper due diligence processes and alignment of the action to government's objectives. We will be very carefully evaluating that.

Very quickly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Airports Fiji is currently investing in several infrastructure projects at the Nadi International Airport, replacement of aerobridge departure lounge expansion, improving luggage handling system, developing a solar farm to supply green energy, new fire station to be developed for the Nausori Airport, and a new terminal at the Labasa Airport is being done. There are a number of other planned projects that have already been started.

The urgency with which the Board, CEO and the management are working on some of these projects, Mr. Speaker, Sir, makes a lot of sense. It supports the strategic plan that the Airports Fiji has put in place to ensure that the airport does not become a bottleneck in any way to all the traffic that flows through the Nadi International Airport, including the tourists and the passengers. There is a lot more that I had wanted to say, Mr. Speaker, Sir, but I know I have run out of time.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I really have nothing further to add, except to say thank you very much to all the honourable Members for their contributions this evening toward the debate on the Review Report on Fiji Airports 2022 Annual Report, which was tabled earlier this year.

MR. SPEAKER.- The Parliament will now vote to note the content of the Report.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

CONSOLIDATED REVIEW REPORT ON THE FIJIAN COMPETITION AND CONSUMER COMMISSION'S 2019-2022 ANNUAL REPORTS

HON. L.S QEREQERETABUA. - Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move:

That Parliament debates the Consolidated Review Report on the Fijian Competition and Consumer Commission's 2019-2020, 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 Annual Reports, which were tabled on 18th July, 2025.

HON. R. R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

HON. L.S QEREQERETABUA.- The COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted global and domestic supply chains, necessitating immediate regulatory interventions to combat price gouging, hoarding, and also to ensure continuous supply and affordability of essential goods.

The Committee recommends that the Fijian Competition and Consumer Commission (FCCC) establish a permanent supply chain monitoring and rapid response framework to proactively address future disruptions, prevent price manipulation and ensure timely access to essential goods during crisis.

The FCCC uses a product-specific cost-plus pricing method for food and imported goods, guided by sections 39, 41 and 44 of the Fijian Competition and Consumer Commission Act 2010. Prices account for landing, clearance and distribution costs, with external factors, like global commodity prices, freight and exchange rates, influencing domestic pricing. While the methodology is consistent, perceived pricing imbalances often reflect offsetting costs. The FCCC plays a key role in balancing supplier returns with consumer protection, and improving public understanding of pricing dynamics is important.

The Committee, therefore, recommends that the FCCC enhances its public communication, including in the vernacular, and transparency around its pricing methodology by developing accessible educational materials, and regularly publicising explanatory updates, to improve consumer understanding of price setting in the context of global and domestic cost influences.

The FCCC, together with the Office of the Solicitor-General and Ministry of Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport drafted the Landlord and Tenancy Bill in 2018, and conducted extensive public consultations, but the Bill remains under review. In the absence of enacted legislation, the FCCC continues to monitor rent receipts, tenancy agreements, bond conditions, and enforce the existing rent freeze order.

The Committee also highlighted FCCC's consumer education efforts and the need to, again, strengthen outreach and promote uniform tenancy agreements, particularly for landlords, while acknowledging that the Bill is still awaiting progress through the relevant Ministries.

The Committee recommends that the relevant Ministries prioritise the finalisation and tabling of the Landlord and Tenancy Bill to provide a clear legal framework for rental market regulation.

The Committee commends FCCC as it continues to strengthen its public awareness campaigns, particularly targeting landlords, to promote compliance, and the adoption of uniform tenancy agreements.

The Committee noted that pharmacies face pricing disadvantages against supermarkets for zero-rated over-the-counter items due to bulk buying. While FCCC now licenses pharmacies and works with relevant bodies, a full market study on pharmacy viability is still pending. The Committee, therefore, encourages further assessment to ensure fair competition and sector support.

The Committee recommends that FCCC, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, undertakes a comprehensive market study on the pharmacy sector to assess viability, identify pricing disparities and develops targeted strategies that promote fair competition and protect local businesses from rising operational costs.

The Committee highlighted concerns over price discrepancies under the Free Medicine Scheme between retail pharmacies and FCCC-regulated pricing. The Committee recommends that FCCC proactively engages with stakeholders under the Free Medicine Scheme, to identify and address any pricing discrepancies, and also establish a clear mechanism for monitoring and synchronising prices to ensure transparency, as well as to protect members of the public.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do have a few more recommendations that I wanted to read out but in the interest of time, I just want to say that the Committee recommends FCCC to prioritise the recruitment and training of additional Enforcement Officers because they are short on the ground, and explore innovative enforcement strategies, such as regional partnerships and technology-enabled monitoring to enhance enforcement capacity and ensure effective coverage across Fiji's diverse geography. I commend the motion to the House.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion. There is a list of speakers with me, and each speaker is accorded seven minutes of speaking time.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- I thank the Committee for their very comprehensive Report. They have done a very thorough job on their work.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fiji Competition and Consumer Commission was established to keep the markets fair. At the outset, let me be very clear that consumer protection is not anti-business. In fact, it is the very opposite. Strong consumer protection ensures that honest businesses can thrive without being undercut by those who overcharge, mislead or take advantage of vulnerable families.

What FCCC does when it functions well, is protect both, the people and the integrity of a business environment. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the real problem arises when FCCC fails to act quickly or effectively to address unfair trade practices. The price of that failure is paid by ordinary families and by legitimate businesses that play by the rules.

Weak enforcement allows market malpractice to flourish, where traders continue to overprice goods, fail to display correct prices and in times of crisis, which we are all familiar with, during cyclones or during COVID-19, we had to pay higher prices for very basic essential items like torch, batteries, or even mask or sanitizer. We have all experienced that where the consumers were paying higher prices.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, every lapse in enforcement erodes public confidence. It creates the dangerous impression that cheating consumers have no consequences, and the impact is significant. Vulnerable families are left unprotected, and market fairness is undermined, punishing those businesses that trade ethically.

However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, evidence also shows us something very important - when FCCC acts firmly, everyone benefits. We have seen that when FCCC has prosecuted non-compliant traders or when they conduct market surveillance. We all know that strong enforcement works. It curbs exploitation, ensures compliance and keeps competition fair.

However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, year after year, FCCC is flooded with complaints. Too many of these remain unresolved either due to delays, complex disputes or a lack of cooperation. Investigation drag on, prosecutions take too long and, in the meantime, consumers and honest businesses suffer. Some offenders even escape accountability altogether, as we have seen in the case of Lagilagi Housing. That is unacceptable when the livelihoods of ordinary Fijians are on the line.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is why the Committee's recommendations are so important. If FCCC is to truly protect consumers and create fair conditions for businesses, then it must have stronger laws, sharper enforcement tools, and a modern approach that fits today's economy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will now address three key recommendations.

Recommendation 1

Regarding the Review of FCCC Act 2010, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that law was enacted 15 years ago in a very different world. Since then, digitization has completely changed the way markets operate. Today, we deal with e-commerce, online payments and digital price manipulation, but FCCC is still tied to rules from an earlier time. That cannot continue. The Committee's call to update this Act is justified, if we want FCCC to regulate effectively in real time, address risks in the digital space, and prevent traders from exploiting outdated laws.

Recommendation 2

Reinstating FCCC's Authority to Issue Spot Fines. We all know enforcement delayed is enforcement denied. When a trader fails to display the correct price or overcharge on a controlled item, consumer suffers. To drag that through long investigation and court processes makes no sense. Spot fines will allow us to act immediately. Businesses will know that violations have instant consequences, and FCCC can focus its resources on tackling bigger systemic abuses.

Recommendation 3

On the Pharmacy Sector, this is not merely a business issue - it is about health, life and death for our people. Medicine must be affordable and accessible. Without comprehensive market studies, we are only guessing. By engaging with stakeholders and gathering evidence, FCCC can identify gaps, pinpoint unfair practices and recommend reforms that keep medicine within reach of everyday families. This work cannot wait when the cost of living is already a heavy burden.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I had the pleasure of doing some work when I was with the Consumer Council and one sector that we touched was the Pharmacy Sector. We had people who went in and shopped the same medicine from different pharmacies. We found that there was a price difference of almost 450 percent. It was simply because the public had no idea what is generic and what is branded, and that is where they were fooled. In some cases, even the branded medicine, the price difference was huge.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I just wanted to point that out and I feel that the Committee's recommendation is a good one and one needs to pursue that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I said earlier on, each day of delay allows unscrupulous traders to profit at the expense of Fijian families. That is why strengthening the FCCC is not optional, but it is vital.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee's recommendations point us in one clear direction and, that is, to give FCCC the right laws or legislation, the right enforcement powers and the right strategic focus. If we do that, then we can very confidently say that consumers are protected, ethical businesses are protected, and we have created a fair marketplace.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you for this opportunity that you have given me to speak on this motion and I also support the motion.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the motion. May I also extend my gratitude to the Board, the CEO, Management and staff of FCCC, for their continuing commitment to consumer protection and protecting Fijians from exploitation, promoting fair competition and supporting market efficiency.

Mr. Speaker, the FCCC, as we all know, continues to serve as a cornerstone of our economic governance structure. During the reporting period, as alluded to by various speakers, we did experience the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in disruptions in terms of supply chain, fuel price and there was rapid digitization. Despite these pressures, the FCCC has clearly maintained a robust oversight over all essential sectors and continued to perform its role.

Some of the notable achievements, Mr. Speaker, Sir, during the period include its increased budgetary regulatory responsibilities including the Electricity Act 2017, Pharmacy Profession (Budget Amendment) Act 2022, Medicinal Products Act 2022 and Public Health (Amendment) Act 2021, significantly expanding their oversight capabilities in implementation. There is also implementation of electronic systems for pricing reviews and a comprehensive Case Management System to manage complaints, which has greatly improved the efficiency.

In 2021-2022 alone, Mr. Speaker, Sir, FCCC carried out more than 19,000 inspections across the country. By 2022, staff numbers had grown from 75 to 86, and these developments are promising or encouraging, given the need to resource FCCC better given its growing responsibilities and demands.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thought I would just focus on some of the notable achievements also. Firstly, the much discussed Fijian Competition and Consumer Commission Bill that is currently under review, taking into account the significant market shifts, as alluded to by honourable Premila Kumar, and the new draft incorporates new and emerging areas, including gender equality, the need to enhance consumer protection powers, incorporate e-commerce and digital transactions, regulation of dark patterns, renewable energy oversight, are some of the areas that will be looked at.

To further strengthen FCCC's commitment to gender equality principles, in August of this year, it became the first public institution in Fiji and the Pacific to pursue the gender equality shield for public institutions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, FCCC has continued the work on the legislation and recently met with ADB on 12th September, 2025, and has provided updates on progress regarding the Bill. We hope to bring the Bill before the House around November and upon its endorsement, we will continue the process from there.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the FCCC is also looking at a revised 2025-2030 Strategic Plan in keeping with its requirements, the need to keep the Commission agile, as agile as a regulator, and relevant for the new consumer demands and economic demands.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the progress of the Landlord and Tenancy Bill, that too we are hopeful to bring forward in the 2025-2026 legislative calendar year and, hopefully, that will address the two main issues that required some attention with regard to the operational efficacy of FCCC.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just more recently, in recognising the need of FCCC to skill up in terms of manpower, right now the number of officers is at 107, and we are targeting to elevate this to 135 in the 2025-2026 year. This is just to ensure that the monitoring and policing of compliance in terms of regulation, particularly in terms of pricing, compliance is maintained, particularly when we all agree that with cost of living pressures, the need to have officers out and about monitoring. This specific area remains quite important.

I would also like to just note that in keeping with the progressive role of the FCCC, one of the key areas that is under review and also mentioned by the honourable Kumar, is the reintroduction of 'on the spot fines'. We will be supportive of bringing that forward to the House because as we all agree, it is important that all our regulatory authorities, going forward, have the necessary teeth to be able to carry out their regulatory responsibilities.

Also, Mr. Speaker, there are MOUs now signed with the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs and Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji to try and just enhance compliance in terms of rural and maritime communities, particularly in terms of activities at our local wharfs and jetties.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we continue to be very supportive of FCCC's function in our economy and we will continue to support it as required. We will, as I mentioned, bring forward the Fijian Competition and Consumer Commission (Amendment) Bill and the Landlord and Tenancy Bill in the hope that, that will continue to enhance the work of FCCC.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, let me first thank the Committee for the tremendous work which they have done on FCCC and its Consolidated Review Report.

Just briefly, Mr. Speaker, I think we also need to say that the FCCC itself did a tremendous job during COVID-19 to be able to actually check on all that they necessarily had to do, to make sure that they were regulatory interventions to combat price gouging, et cetera, that was taking place during COVID. So, hats off to the entire team at FCCC. They did a fantastic job with all the constraints in place so, again, it is a very critical institution to Fiji, so we need to make sure that we support it.

There are several things that the Committee has come up with in terms of findings and the recommendations. Mr. Speaker, it is important that it has been aired by all who have spoken before me, and I agree with them and agree wholeheartedly with the findings of the Committee. One of the main ones that we need to realise is that the legislations are outdated, and it needs to be looked at. I know there is a tremendous amount of work that has been thrown the way of the Attorney-General's Chambers to try and get all these new legislations in place, but it is something that needs to be done to empower the FCCC going and working into the future, especially with a new digital future.

There is a lot that actually goes - the market conditions and the capacity building that needs to take place, the adopting of new regulations or adapting of existing regulatory frameworks is actually quite an exercise to actually do all of these, especially with all the resource constraints that they have. In effect, what I am saying is that I hope that they have enough resources to be able to deal with it this year and, hopefully, the honourable Minister for Finance will look at it next year and increase some budgetary stuff for them.

I also want to say congratulations to the Chairman, CEO and the former CEO, who have done such a fantastic job. They have a tremendous amount on their plate, and they run it with very little. It is simple as that. They do price mechanisms for LPG and petroleum, and I know that they are forever being bombarded by fuel companies to look at the template again and how it is being done. People do not realise it, but it is a massive task.

In terms of the Landlord and Tenancy Bill that they have been sitting with, that was a work in progress, and I think COVID contributed to a lot of that. I am happy to note that it is actually going to come through and eventually, that needs to happen. People must bear in mind that a lot of times these things happen because it needs to protect the consumer or the tenant. So, there are changing landscapes all over the place, so those things need to be done.

In terms of the Fair-Trade Policy also, I think that was also spoken about by honourable Premila Kumar in in terms of the pharmacies and pharmaceutical products, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker, one of the other important things that we need to also look at, and FCCC does, is the price disparity that exists between rural and maritime areas and the mainland. That is something they have continuously been addressing, which has been picked up by the Committee.

I am glad that they have, and this was mentioned by honourable Kumar with the enforcement capacity challenges that they have. It is something that seriously needs to be looked at to actually make sure that we have enough enforcement people on the ground. We see it all the time, as soon as there is a price rise or a VAT rise or whatever, it is at the end of the day. It is something that needs to be at full capacity with respect to that particular part of it.

There are many parts to the FCCC that people do not realise which needs to be supported. One of the things is the digitisation that is currently happening across the whole of Government. This

is an institution that needs to be fully digitised so that it can actually keep up with the time.

I see also that they have looked at the SDGs, et cetera, and I am happy to hear that they have actually looked at all of that and looked at some of the recommendations that need to be done.

All in all, I agree with the recommendations that have been handed to us, Mr. Speaker, and I am looking forward to the action and the necessary legislation that are going to come up. I know there is a tremendous job happening at the Ministry of Trade also to try and get all of these done. Thank you very much to the Committee and the Chairman for all the work that they have done.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, I will try to be very brief because I think the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and all the other speakers have covered the points very well.

I was listening very carefully to honourable Kumar, and for the first time, I think she made a lot of sense about what she was saying. She made some very important and very well thought-out points and contributions. I want to thank her because it did show the experience that she had as a CEO of Consumer Council, and I am sure she understood what was happening.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it actually disproves what she was saying earlier because she came out very clearly to say how there are some unscrupulous businesses and how price gouging and price manipulation take place. When you hear people actually complain to you about price increases, why one supermarket or one shop in the corner has a very different price, it is all about some unethical practices in terms of pricing.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, we do not want to level any kind of price increases. For example, once honourable Usamate came into Parliament and said the price of cassava went up, I reminded him that there was a lot of rain and flooding, and people were not able to harvest cassava. So, obviously, supply and demand, and these are very basic economics.

There is also, Mr. Speaker, Sir, price discrimination that takes place. If someone looks at a particular market, they look at a particular income, a particular demography of the people who live around there, and that is how those who sell items actually set the price. Honourable Usamate, you know this.

(Honourable J. Usamate interjects)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- You are an economist, you understand this.

However, coming back to the role of FCCC, Mr. Speaker, the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-operatives and Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications laid out very clearly that the Fijian Competition and Consumer Commission Act 2010 is being reviewed, and we agree that the circumstances are different. We need to empower FCCC in a much clearer and immediate way in terms of how they can enforce, and I think educate and work with our businesses and those who may engage in this. I must say, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we cannot brush everyone in the same way. There are some honest businesses, those who do pass on the prices that the Government policies intended to the consumers. There are also good practices, ethical practices that we see from the businesses.

In terms of the support to FCCC, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the budgetary allocation in the last 10 financial years amounted to about \$43.8 million. In the last three years, we provided an average of about \$5 million every year to FCCC. We understand that the allocations matter and FCCC does need resources in terms of not only putting out appropriate policies but also getting people out there to

enforce some of the policies and laws that they have.

Again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to support FCCC's work, Consumer Council's work and those who are responsible for looking at or trying to monitor how there are behaviours in the market that may lead to price changes in a way that may not be desirable for the consumers, we are also making sure that the policies that we put in place are, new as honourable Kumar said, the environment has changed, product mix has changed. If the Biosecurity Authority of Fiji (BAF) has, for example, a particular requirement, these may be really old requirements of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, but the product mix may have changed completely. The techniques of production have changed completely.

So, traditional suppliers may not be the best suppliers. I think what we are saying as a government is that we are asking the Biosecurity Authority of Fiji, the Customs to constantly review the pathways so that we can source products from outside of Fiji that we import to ensure that we get the right price, we get the right mix of products, so that the consumers also benefit from a reasonable pricing structure. Again, I just want to emphasise that the budget for FCCC has been adequate, on average of about \$5 million per year, and that we think is sufficient for FCCC to do a good job. I support the motion.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I just want to say thank you very much to all the honourable Members, in particular those of you who picked up some of the recommendations that I did not have time to pick up like honourable Premila Kumar did.

Just one thing that I do have time to say that I did not mention, no one else mentioned, was that the Committee had noted public concerns over the absence of a toll-free line for complaints to the FCCC, particularly at times of power fluctuations and retail pricing issues. While complaints are currently being received via digital platforms and through an MOU with the Consumer Council, the Committee encouraged the establishment of a dedicated toll-free line to improve responsiveness on consumer issues. The FCCC has acknowledged this and committed to pursuing its implementation within the current financial year. We just wanted to commend the FCCC and also thank all honourable Members for your contributions this evening.

MR. SPEAKER.- Parliament to vote to note the content of the Report.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, that brings us to the end of today's sitting. Thank you for your valued contribution to today's proceedings. Parliament is now adjourned until tomorrow at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 6.55 p.m.

ANNEXURE I

Reply to Written Question No. 153/2025 tabled by the honourable Minister for iTaukei Affairs and Culture, Heritage and Arts (Ref. Page No. 1855)



**MINISTER FOR ITAUKEI AFFAIRS AND CULTURE, HERITAGE AND ARTS
(Hon. I. Vasu)**

Reply to Question No. 153/2025 is as follows:

I thank the Honourable Member for the question regarding the revenue collected by the iTaukei Affairs Land and Fisheries Commission from land boundary redefinition surveys over the past three financial years.

Revenue Collected and Utilisation

The revenue collected from redefinition surveys for the last three financial years is as follows:

- 2023-2024: \$6,500;
- 2024-2025: \$77,707.50; and
- 2025-2026 (up to February 2025): \$15,500.

This brings the total collection over the period to \$99,707.50.

Disputes Resolved and Impact

In the past two financial years, the Commission successfully resolved or narrowed 40 land boundary disputes nationwide. Most disputes arose because landowning units lacked a clear understanding of customary boundaries first surveyed nearly 100 years ago. Redefinition surveys have:

- confirmed customary land boundaries, providing security of tenure;
- enabled landowning units to unlock land for economic activity and development projects; and
- helped schools and community institutions regularise their land status for long-term use.

The Commission measures impact through:

- the number of disputes resolved or narrowed;
- land developments and institutions progressing with confidence after surveys; and
- feedback from communities on improved understanding and certainty.

These indicators confirm that redefinition surveys not only settle disputes but also enable economic and social progress.

Affordability and Service Delivery

Recognising the sensitivity and complexity of land disputes, the Commission has ensured that redefinition services are both affordable and prompt:

Reduced Cost

The Commission has received an increase in survey requests primarily due to the high fees charged by private surveyors. The Commission delivers the same service at a significantly reduced cost, building trust and goodwill with landowning communities.

Dedicated Redefinition Unit

A specialised unit now responds quickly and efficiently to requests.

Annual Budgetary Support

Funding for equipment and resources ensures professional standards are maintained.

Awareness Programmes:

After surveys are completed, awareness sessions are conducted so landowners clearly understand their boundaries and can pass this knowledge to future generations.

Conclusion

Mr. Speaker, the redefinition of land boundaries is more than a technical exercise. It is about restoring certainty, building trust, and giving security of tenure to landowners. By making survey services affordable and professional. The Commission is helping iTaukei communities reduce disputes, strengthen unity, and utilise their land confidently for economic and social development.