

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

WEDNESDAY, 1ST OCTOBER, 2025

[CORRECTED COPY]

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WEDNESDAY, 1ST OCTOBER, 2025

The Parliament met at 9.45 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; honourable Minister for Defence and Veteran Affairs; honourable Assistant Minister for Health & Medical Services; and the honourable Assistant Minister for Information.

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Tuesday, 30th September, 2025, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE SPEAKER

Welcome

I welcome all honourable Members to today's sitting. A very warm welcome as well to those joining us in the public gallery and those tuning in via television or streaming online. Your keen interest in the democratic process gives new energy and renewed purpose into our debates and decisions. Thank you for staying connected and engaged.

Request for Extension – Standing Committee on Economic Affairs

For the information of honourable Members, I received correspondence from the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, which was subsequently tabled with the Business Committee. Correspondence requested for the extension of time pertaining to the following Bills:

- (a) Work Care Bill 2025 (Bill No. 07/2025); and
- (b) Accident Compensation (Amendment) Bill 2025 (Bill No. 08/2025).

The Standing Committee requests an extension pursuant to Standing Order 121(1)(a). Honourable Members, as there being no objections, extension is granted. The Standing Committee must, therefore, report back on the two Bills at the November/December sitting period.

PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

Consolidated Review Reports – Fiji Higher Education Commission 2018-2021 Annual Reports

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to present the Standing Committee on Social Affairs' Consolidated Review Reports on the 2018- 2019, 2019- 2020 and 2020-2021 Fiji Higher Education Commission Annual Reports.

As mandated under Standing Order 109(2)(b), the Committee considers the issues related to health, education, social services, labour, aviation, culture and media. The Fiji Higher Education Commission oversees the development and improvement of higher education in Fiji, with the aim of ensuring that learners have the best possible opportunity to gain relevant qualification required to support and sustain Fiji's economic and social prosperity.

The Commission's main functions are as follows:

- (1) Ensuring equitable access to quality post-secondary qualification certified through the national framework.
- (2) Setting and enforcing Government standards for universities, colleges and other providers.
- (3) Supporting economic and social development by aligning programmes with industry, government and community needs.
- (4) Establishing and maintaining the Fiji National Qualification Framework (FNQF) to standardise comparability across the sector.
- (5) Advising government and institutions on policy development, scholarship and strategic investments in tertiary education.

The Commission's core mandate is to regulate, register and accredit the Higher Education Institutions, uphold national quality standards and maintain the Fiji National Qualification Framework.

The Commission plays a pivotal role in ensuring that higher education in Fiji meets national and international standards that contribute to human resources development and national prosperity. Some of the initiatives the Commission undertook during 2018 to 2021 are as follows:

- (1) Reviewed the 51 national qualifications.
- (2) Dispensed the Government operating grant of FJ\$104.7 million in 2018 to 2019; FJ\$80.8 million in 2019 to 2020; and FJ\$81.3 million from 2020 to 2021 to 10 Fiji Higher Education Institutions.
- (3) Completed the graduate outcome survey report.
- (4) Review of the Fiji Higher Education Grants Management System.
- (5) Registered 442 qualifications on the Fiji National Qualifications Framework.

I sincerely thank Dr. Eci Naisele, the Director at Fiji Higher Education Commission, and his management team for their valuable contributions during this Review Report.

I am also thankful to the honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs; honourable Ratu Rakuita Vakalalabure, honourable Alipate Tuicolo, honourable Viam Pillay, honourable Alikia Bia and honourable Parveen Bala for their invaluable contribution and support. I also 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.

Consolidated Review Report - Fiji Teachers Registration Authority 2020-2023 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 2020-2021, 2021-2022 and 2022- 2023 Fiji Teachers Registration Authority 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 Fiji Teachers Registration Authority (FTRA) is a statutory body mandated to regulate entry into the teaching profession in Fiji. The Board is appointed by the Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts, to provide advice and guidance on policy developments and strategic issues regarding FTRA.

The following are the main functions of FTRA:

- (1) Registration of teachers to teach in kindergarten, primary and secondary schools in Fiji.
- (2) Registration of teacher educators in teacher training institutions.
- (3) Registration of teacher administrators at the Ministry of Education and private schools.
- (4) Registration of training institutions for undertaking practicum in schools.
- (5) Working with employing authorities, training institutions and other relevant stakeholders regarding the standards of teacher education programmes.
- (6) Undertaking appropriate review of activities and programmes for the improvement of teacher registration process at FTRA.
- (7) Conducting necessary professional standards development and induction programmes for teachers.

The major highlights of FTRA during the year under review were as follows:

- (1) 10,562 teacher registrations from 2020-2021, 5,253 teachers from 2021-2022 and 5,253 teachers from 2022-2023.
- (2) 53 awareness sessions throughout Fiji was done during this programme.
- (3) 44 orientation workshops were conducted for 3,362 students from 6 teacher training institutions.
- (4) 59 inductions were conducted for a total of 2,430 students from six teacher training institutions.

I am thankful to the honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, namely, honourable Ratu Rakuira Vakalalabure, honourable Alipate Tuicolo, honourable Viam Pillay, honourable Alikia Bia and honourable Parveen Bala for their invaluable contributions and support during the review period. 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 - Fijian Broadcasting Corporation Limited 2018-2023 Annual Reports

HON. S. TUBUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, I am pleased to present this Consolidated Review Report on the 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022 Fijian Broadcasting Corporation Limited Annual Reports.

Established in 1954 as a Public Service Broadcast Radio Station, the Fijian Broadcasting Corporation Pte Limited (FBCL) has grown significantly over the years. Today, it operates a network of six radio stations catering to Fiji's three major languages - *iTaukei*, Hindustani and English. The stations including Radio Fiji One and Bula FM (*iTaukei*), Radio Fiji Two and Mirchi FM (Hindustani) and Gold FM & 2Day FM (English). As a sole shareholder, the Government holds the responsibility of the Board of Directors.

The FBCL operates four commercial radio stations:

- (1) Mirchi FM (Hindustani);
- (2) Gold FM (English);
- (3) Bula FM (*iTaukei*); and
- (4) 2Day FM (English)

Each year, FBC introduces new radio programmes designed to meet the changing preferences and needs of listeners.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Studio 69 is FBC's in-house production unit established in November 2014. It serves both, private businesses and government departments with dedicated staff to ensuring that each production is carefully managed, and commercials are customized to meet the client's requirements.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, FBC TV launched in November 2011 is Fiji's only free-to-air service provided by a hybrid broadcaster. Despite being government owned, FBC uses a commercial approach to self-sustain its operational costs. The primary objective of FBC TV's public service

broadcasting is to promote local talent and produce diverse local content, offering a wide range of programming options to the public.

While FBC faces competition from other commercial entities, it has successfully maintained a strong market position through its hybrid programmes with an emphasis on local content. This approach has enabled FBC to retain loyal listeners and viewers across urban, rural and maritime areas. Notably, FBC operates the only AM radio service in Fiji, which has the technological reach to cover the entire country.

However, FBC faces challenges such as loss of potential market share due to strong competition from other commercial operators, which could impact advertising revenue. To remain competitive, FBC must continually seek innovative ways to create programmes that not only captivate and expand its viewership and listenership but also generate new revenue streams.

I extend sincere appreciation to the honourable Members of the Committee for their valuable contributions and commitment throughout the review process.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, I commend this Review Report to Parliament and request all honourable Members of this august House to take note of the Report.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. S. TUBUNA.- 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. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

Consolidated Review Report – Electoral Commission 2020-2022 Annual Reports

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE.- Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 38(2), the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights was referred the following Reports:

- (1) Electoral Commission Annual Reports for 2020 and 2021 on 29th July, 2022, and;
- (2) Electoral Commission Annual Report for 2022 on 11th November, 2023.

Mr. Speaker, as a result of the review, I will highlight some of the key findings that the Committee had noted and these include the following:

- (1) The ineffectiveness of the nationwide survey conducted by the Fijian Elections Office in 2020 purposely to improve voter participation in the 2022 General Elections.
- (2) Huge concern over the low voter turnout and the number of invalid votes casted during the three past elections from 2014 to 2018 to 2022. A number of registered voters were unable to cast their votes due to restrictions imposed by the existing electoral laws.

- (3) Absence of financial statements noted in all three annual reports that were referred to the Committee.

Mr. Speaker, at the conclusion of the review, the Committee recommends the:

- incorporation of ethnicity data into the Fiji Electoral Office system so that we better understand voter demographics;
- continuations and strengthening of education initiatives to improve public awareness and voter turnout;
- targeted voter registration initiatives be developed to support tertiary students residing outside their home and constituencies; and
- future annual reports of the Electoral Commission must include audited financial statements to enable standing committees to provide independent oversight during their review processes.

Mr. Speaker, these were some of the key findings and recommendations to be considered by Parliament. While the Committee acknowledges the efforts undertaken by the Commission over the reported years, it is our view the recommendations identified will contribute positively in strengthening the electoral process and improving service delivery in preparation for the next general election.

In that regard, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Members and Alternate Members of the Committee for their deliberations and input. I further thank the Chairperson of the Electoral Commission and the representatives of the Fijian Elections Office who accepted the invitation and provided submissions and assisted in our work.

On behalf of the Standing Committee, Mr. Speaker, I commend the Committee's Consolidated Review Report on the 2020, 2021 and 2022 Electoral Commission Annual Reports to Parliament.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE.- Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move:

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

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

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

- (1) Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Civil Service and Public Enterprises;
- (2) Minister for Policing;
- (3) Minister for Women, Children and Social Protection; and

(4) Minister for Education.

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

Overseas Official Trips and Strategic Engagements

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Good morning, honourable Ministers and honourable Members of Parliament. I also greet those who are watching or listening to the business here in the House.

Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to bring back to the House a report on the various overseas trips and engagements that I have been on in the past few weeks and update the House on the significance of these official trips. They were taken on behalf of the Government and the people of Fiji. These engagements reflect our continued commitment to advancing Fiji's national interests on the global stage. Also, deepening partnerships and promoting sustainable development are aligned with our national vision.

First of all, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the official visit to the Republic of India from the 27th to 29th August. I will also cover the Pacific Islands Leaders' Meeting in Honiara, Solomon Islands, from the 8th to 12th September. The establishment of Fiji's Embassy in Jerusalem, State of Israel on 17th September, and the 80th United Nations General Assembly High Level Week in New York from the 22nd to 26th September.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, since we resumed Office in 2022, our primary goal has been to reinforce our relationship with all our bilateral partners to restore Fiji's position in the global stage as friends to all, enemies to none. The core principles of sovereignty, security and prosperity has been the foundation of our foreign policy, which is embedded in our inaugural Foreign Policy White Paper.

In this spirit, I would like to update the House on the key outcomes of those official visits and international engagements mentioned earlier.

Official visit to India: Fiji and the Republic of India have enjoyed a very close and cordial relationship since the establishment of a formal diplomatic relationship in 1970, following Fiji's independence. I acknowledge the longstanding relations between Fiji and India with our shared colonial heritage and the historical ties which began when the first indentured labourers arrived on our shores in 1879 from India. Mr. Speaker, Sir, 100 years later, I was a beneficiary of an Indian Government Scholarship to undergo studies in the Defence Services Staff College (part of University of Madras).

The Coalition Government will continue to acknowledge the contribution of indentured labourers who have been a vital component of our society, contributing to the socioeconomic development of modern Fiji. It also provides a rich heritage that has made Fiji such a vibrant and robust hub in the Oceania region.

The key outcomes of the official visit to India include the establishment of the Jan Aushadhi Kendras (People's Pharmacies) in Fiji. On the margins of the official visit, Fiji and India signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on the establishment of the Jan Aushadhi Kendras (People's Pharmacies) in Fiji. That initiative will provide a low-cost generic medicine mechanism for Fiji. The MOU on recognition of the Indian pharmacopoeia was earlier signed in May of this year, and the initiative will strengthen collaboration in all pharmaceutical sectors and ensure improved access to quality and affordable healthcare products and services in the Republic of Fiji.

The Memorandum of Understanding on Tubalevu Village Ground Water Project: Both countries signed another MOU on the Village Ground Water Project. The implementation of the project will facilitate the provision of clean drinking water for local communities in Tubalevu. I am pleased to update the House that the officials from both countries are working closely on the coordination and implementation of the project, respectively.

The 100-bed Super Specialty Cardiology Hospital: Mr. Speaker, Sir, another undertaking was for the 100-bed Super Specialty Hospital between the two countries, which was also facilitated on the margins of the official visit and paved the way for the implementation of that landmark project. The construction of the 100-bed Super Specialty Hospital will be a significant elevation of Fiji's healthcare sector through the provision of specialised medical and cardiology services that will be accessed by ordinary Fijians and the Pacific region. The project will be another significant footprint in our bilateral relations, and one that would greatly support our broader health care plan.

Indian High Commission Chancery and Cultural Centre: Mr. Speaker, Sir, the registered lease title dedicating a parcel of land was also exchanged during the official visit to India. That paves the way for the landmark project to establish the Chancery and Cultural centre of the High Commission of India in Fiji. The significant outcomes of the official visit are anticipated to further advance the Fiji-India relations as we approach the 55th anniversary of the establishment of the Fiji-India diplomatic relations.

The 54th Pacific Island Forum Leaders Meeting: Mr. Speaker, Sir, the 54th Pacific Island Forum (PIF) Leaders Meeting which was held in the Solomon Islands from the 8th to 12th September was very successful and made significant progress in the collaboration of Pacific Islands Forum Member States. The Forum Leaders' Meeting as honourable Members would know is convened annually and serves as the premier platform where Heads of State and Government deliberate on the pressing challenges of our region and chart directions for progress and advancement of the Pacific for the Pacific.

Beyond its regional agenda, the Forum also provides an important opportunity to strengthen bilateral relations and formalise cooperation with our neighbours. At this year's gathering, a wide range of issues of significance to the Pacific were considered. In the margins of the meeting, I had the honour of signing, for the Fijian Government, two regional arrangements and three bilateral Memoranda of Understanding, each of which represents practical step towards deepening our cooperation and advancing our shared priorities with our Pacific community. This is directly in line with the family-first Pacific regionalism priority which we had committed to and undertake as outlined in Fiji's Foreign Policy White Paper.

Ocean of Peace Declaration: On the regional landscape, a key highlight was the signing of the Ocean of Peace Declaration, an initiative first proposed by Fiji in 2023. Its endorsement marks a milestone in defining the Pacific as an Ocean of Peace, reflecting our shared values of unity, stability and collective security. This Declaration is our sincerest expression of hope that all our partners will be able to respect our Pacific as an Ocean of Peace, behave responsibly and in good faith. Now the onus is on us to ensure that this is practised first locally and mainstreamed in our policies and strategies.

Pacific Resilience Facility Treaty: It is with great pleasure that I inform this honourable House that I joined other regional leaders in the signing of the Pacific Resilience Facility (PRF) Treaty. It was agreed to by the Cabinet a few weeks prior to the trip to the Solomon Islands. This Pacific-owned and led financing mechanism will directly support community-level climate and disaster resilience initiatives across our region. We have reaffirmed our commitment to the PRF, recognising it as a

practical solution to strengthen preparedness and reduce vulnerability faced by our people. In that regard, work will soon begin on its ratification.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the margins of the Forum, Fiji also advanced its bilateral cooperation through the MOUs signed with the Republic of the Marshall Islands on Development Cooperation; the Solomon Islands on the Deployment of Fijian Security Personnel; and with Vanuatu on a refreshed Development Cooperation. Collectively these agreements reaffirm Fiji's commitment to supporting national priorities of our fellow Pacific countries, while reinforcing our shared responsibility to safeguard peace, enhance security, and drive sustainable development across the region.

This work was not done in isolation. It reflects the collective effort of our Government machinery. I wish to acknowledge the valuable contributions of all Ministries and civil servants who ensured the readiness of these agreements for signing. I also extend my appreciation to those who guided and supported the consultation and processes at the national and regional levels, which laid the foundation for those outcomes.

In saying that, the challenge before us now lies in the faithful implementation of these commitments. It is here that the real measure of our success will be found. I trust that the spirit of cooperation, which brought us to this point, will continue to guide us so that these agreements deliver tangible benefits for our people and strengthen regionalism.

In addition, there were bilateral meetings with New Zealand and Australia for the refreshed Duavata Partnership with New Zealand, with the target of reaching the \$2 billion-mark and to deepen cooperation with us in critical areas such as the fight against HIV/AIDS, the combatting of transnational organised crimes, the scourge of drug trafficking and other shared priorities.

Similarly, with the Prime Minister of Australia, honourable Anthony Albanese, we reaffirmed the strength of the Fiji-Australia partnership, underpinned by shared priorities in climate resilience, regional security, economic cooperation, and people-to-people links. Importantly, both our engagements also committed to the negotiation of a security treaty, which we hope, will provide a strong foundation for ensuring a peaceful, stable, and prosperous Pacific region.

Establishment of Fiji's Embassy in Jerusalem: On the inauguration of Fiji's first resident Embassy in Israel – a move that reflects not only our deepening diplomatic ties, but also our shared commitment towards constructive engagement, mutual respect, and practical cooperation. This historic moment has made Fiji the seventh country in the world to have its Embassy in Jerusalem, and the 100th diplomatic mission is to be established in Israel.

This historic moment has made Fiji the seventh country in the world to have its embassy in Jerusalem and the 100th diplomatic mission to be established in Israel. I am certain that the opening of the Fiji Embassy in Jerusalem will open new possibilities and will be a beacon of friendship and a platform for peace. Fiji's presence in Jerusalem marks the dawn of a new era.

The people of Fiji share a very close cultural religious connection to the Holy Land. We deeply value the great nation of Israel, which is considered the birthplace of Christianity. Our similarities and common values continue to strengthen us together in unity and solidarity.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our shared commitment to peace and security in the Middle East region is the foundation of our common values with Israel. In this vein, the establishment of Fiji's Embassy reflects our strategic intent to broaden our global partnerships and elevate our presence in the Middle East. We seek to deepen our bilateral ties with the State of Israel in areas that matter most to our

people, climate resilience, agricultural innovation, border security and digital transformation.

Mr. Speaker, I say this with great confidence that this new chapter in Fiji/Israel diplomatic relations will be marked by mutual respect, shared prosperity and enduring peace.

The 80th United Nations General Assembly High Level Week: Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will now enlighten the House on the final significant engagement that was recently concluded, and that was the 80th United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) High Level Week from the 22nd to 26th September in New York, United States of America.

Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction Treaty: Mr. Speaker, Sir, following the ratification of the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Treaty by Fiji in July 2025, I am pleased to inform the House that the BBNJ Treaty has now entered into force. In that regard, I sincerely thank the tireless efforts of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and relevant stakeholders for this landmark achievement, which will provide the impetus for more coordinated conservation efforts and enhanced cooperation by coastal states.

Further, at the 80th UN General Assembly, Fiji delivered a strong message on the interconnectedness of peace, climate change, sustainable development and human dignity. Our delegation advocated for enhanced global collaboration to protect our oceans, emphasizing Fiji's leadership in promoting the Ocean of Peace Declaration - a vision that champions the equitable use of resources. Through this Declaration, we advocate for peace and security in our world, as we navigate the multitude of challenges confronting us.

Strategic Alignment to Fiji's National Priorities: Mr. Speaker, Sir, these overseas engagements are not isolated diplomatic events. They are strategically aligned with Fiji's broader goals to:

- advance the Ocean of Peace concept;
- promote sustainable development;
- secure climate finance and technology transfer to support our Nationally Determined Contribution under the Paris Agreement; and
- strengthen regional and international partnerships to amplify Pacific voice and influence in the multilateral forum.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the official visits and key engagements mentioned today are consistent with our Foreign Policy White Paper which promotes the strengthening of diplomatic relations with our development partners. I thank all for their contributions, and all those that went on the trip with us, that strengthened the preparation of all the documents that were prepared. It was a great honor to see that after our address, the President of the United States of America and the Prime Minister of Israel sat down to talk about peace in Gaza.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you for giving me the opportunity to respond to the Ministerial Statement by the honourable Prime Minister on the high level visits, official engagements undertaken in the recent months. There is so much to cover within the five minutes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will briefly comment on the key areas as highlighted by the honourable Prime Minister. With India, of course, we agree that we have very close and cordial relationships since 1970. I am glad that in the areas covered in the bilateral meetings, I know that the pharmaceutical aspect covered in the MoU particularly in regard to low cost medicine will bring a lot of benefit to Fiji, because we do not produce most of what we use in our medical services. This

hopefully in the long-term will lower costs and assist in having more access to health issues and related services as well and it will bring a lot of benefit to our people.

If I am correct, Tubalevu Village Project in Namara, Tailevu, again knowing *Tikina* Namara, I know that the honourable Minister for Lands is going to deploy his team to the area. This is one of the districts worst affected when it comes to water sources. Even their underground water sources are to the standards that are required for consumption. This has been a huge problem when it comes to providing water to *Tikina* Namara and one of the *tikina* in Fiji that utilises the emergency water allocation that is available in the Ministry of Rural Development.

I think if we look at the list every year, not only in the Central Division and Tailevu and perhaps the whole of Fiji, Namara is one of the districts that utilize the most in terms of the emergency water allocation. This project is most welcome, and of course, the other benefits from India as well in terms of technology, agriculture, that is very critical for us.

The Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting, this is again very critical for us. As I listened to the honourable Prime Minister's Address in the recent UNGA, we need to continue to be vocal and advocate on our issues, knowing for a fact that we are the most vulnerable and marginalised. I am referring to Small Island Developing States and we are always in the front lines of the climate crisis but additional to that, we can also say that we also have solutions to the climate crisis and our responsibility as responsible global climate citizen is very important for us.

In referring to Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS(ABAS) most recent agreement, I think the honourable Prime Minister has alluded to the benefits out of the Israel cooperation. Digital transformation is one of the key agendas in ABAS and, of course, the blue economy, climate action and leaving no one behind.

Listening to the honourable Prime Minister's speech in the recent UNGA as well, we have been offering refuge to our smaller island countries nearby. If they are threatened in the worst case scenario to come into Fiji, but I think that it is time now, honourable Prime Minister and Government that we move into the next step because we have the Pacific Regional Framework on Climate Mobility, given the sensitivity of the refugee issue and climate displacement, I think it is time now that we look into the details of how we can domesticate those commitments that we have made in the international forums.

MR. SPEAKER.- I will grant the honourable Leader of the Opposition an additional two minutes because it such an important statement from the honourable Prime Minister.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Sir.

While still on PIFS, I know that there are pressing challenges in the region, climate change, that is a known, but of course transnational crime, drug issues and these are the things that we need, this specific regionalism, this cooperation is so important for all of us. The honourable Minister for Defence talked about MESC yesterday and how we are cooperating not only domestically but within the region. These are all important because all these signings and bilateral cooperations are good but how does it trickle down to the day-to-day life of our citizens?

With that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do agree with the honourable Prime Minister, not only our responsibility to our Small Island Developing countries but of course the Duavata Partnership with New Zealand and the Vuvale Partnership with Australia is so important as well.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the UNGA and the Embassy in Jerusalem, Government has taken that bold decision. It is an abnormal time. The question that I would want to raise is aligned with the principles of the UN Charter, Fiji probably has not taken or made a decision on its position on what is being proposed, particularly for a peaceful resolution on the problem that we have between Israel and the Palestinians. Probably that is something that we would like to hear from Government as well. We do not condone terrorism but at the same time we have a responsibility. The brutal killings happening, these are the things that we need to consider and where is our position when it comes to the peaceful resolution of the problem that we have.

Lastly, to the honourable Prime Minister and Government, our international commitments are good but let us not forget our domestic commitments as well. We have made a resolution in this Parliament three months ago to convene a Special Committee on Sugar. November is just coming up where the Report is due, and I hope that we will also have a similar approach when it comes to the key domestic issues that we have as well. Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you for allowing me the extra two minutes.

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

The Parliament adjourned at 10.38 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.21 a.m.

The Way Forward for Counter Narcotics Bureau

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Members, I rise to update Parliament on the plan and efforts undertaken by the Ministry of Policing against drug abuse and illicit drugs trafficking, and to reassure our citizens, all Fijians, and our visitors too, that the security situation in Fiji remains safe, stable and manageable. Fiji is facing an evolving and complex narcotics challenge, underpinned by its geographic location, increasing regional connectivity and the growing influence of transnational criminal networks.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, at the outset, the challenge we face is formidable. Illicit drugs is now an existential threat, not only to Fiji but also in other Pacific islands and the world. The threat posed by illicit drugs is one of the most serious challenges, as it undermines the security of our people, the well-being of our families and the stability of our communities. Everyday, we see the damage; young lives loitering Suva City, bearing the symptoms of substance abuse. Every now and then, the media highlights corruption of Government officials, including law enforcement officers engaged in illicit drugs trafficking. Most troubling, indeed, is the fact that illicit drugs has found its way into schools, putting our children at risk, and the cultivation, trade and benefits is condoned by some senior members of some villages weakening, its communities.

In response, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government of Fiji (this Coalition Government), under the Ministry of Policing has established a Counter-Narcotics Bureau and adopted the nation's first-ever Fiji Counter Narcotics Strategy in 2023 to 2028. The Strategy recognises that enforcement alone is not sufficient; a multi-sectoral approach is required - one that strengthens community awareness, youth engagement and public resilience to drug-related harms. This Coalition Government is determined to act decisively, and under my Ministry, we are building the structures and the strategies necessary to defeat this problem. Our Fiji Police Force has been relentless in its fight against drugs. Recent police raids and arrests across the country have demonstrated both effectiveness and vigilance.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to report to this august House that since March 2025, the Fiji Police Force has seized a total of 19.337 tonnes of marijuana. Between March and September alone, Police confiscated more than 19 tonnes of marijuana with an estimated street value of FJ\$194.2 million or US\$85.9 million. These figures are a sobering reminder of the scale of illicit trade we are confronting. Our fight is not only confined to marijuana cultivation and trafficking. Between March and September 2025, Police also seized 4.1 kilogrammes of methamphetamine valued at approximately US\$1.3 million on the streets. This shows us clearly that, alongside traditional cultivation, synthetic drugs have been making inroads into our communities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, between January 2024 and August of this year, Police recorded 3,096 cases of unlawful possession and 225 cases of unlawful cultivation of illicit drugs. In that same period, 3,441 offenders were arrested, most of them young people aged 18 years to 35 years. By contrast, only 71 offenders were over the age of 56. These figures reveal a troubling truth. Fiji's drug problem is overwhelmingly a youth problem.

A substantial portion of our young people who should be shaping the future of our nation are instead, been drawn into the cycle of drugs, whether through possession, use or cultivation. This calls for urgent action, not only through strong enforcement, but also through prevention, education and opening of pathways that give our youths real alternatives to crime. Effective raids alone will not be enough to dismantle the entrenched networks of cultivation. Illicit drug trafficking and the surmounting social ills of drug addiction, outbreak of HIV and other drug abuse-based issues.

The Counter Narcotics Strategy and the establishment of the Counter Narcotics Bureau (CNB), endorsed by Cabinet in 2024, was specifically designed to confront the growing threats of drug abuse, illicit trafficking and their far-reaching social consequences. The Counter Narcotics Bureau is mandated to lead this fight in close partnership with relevant ministries, ensuring truly integrated whole-of-government responses.

Its work is guided by four strategic pillars:

- (1) Reducing and eliminating supply - ensuring a sustained reduction and ultimately the elimination of drugs entering and circulating in Fiji.
- (2) Reducing harm - meaningfully lowering the impact of drugs on individuals, families and communities, with particular focus on protecting our young people.
- (3) Recovery and rehabilitation - building comprehensive treatment and rehabilitation services that offer pathways of recovery, reintegration and renewed hope for those affected.
- (4) Strengthening the law - reviewing and reinforcing our legal and regulatory frameworks so they match the scale, sophistication and severity of the threat we face.

That is why, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Counter Narcotics Strategy and the Counter Narcotics Bureau are just not desirable, they are essential to our nation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, recent reports and speculation have created confusion regarding the Counter Narcotics Bureau, particularly following the arrest of four Police officers who were seconded to it. Let me state categorically, the Counter Narcotics Bureau is not being abolished or disbanded. Its purpose is too critical and its role too vital for the security of our nation. The arrests, while serious, should not overshadow the importance of the Counter Narcotics Bureau. In fact, they highlight the urgency of establishing this Bureau properly, professionally staffed, managed with integrity and operating on a strong legal and institutional foundation.

As of 23rd September, 2025, the police officers who had been seconded to the Ministry of Home Affairs then and Immigration, under the name of Counter Narcotics Bureau have been returned to their original units, that is basically to the police. This decision allows the Bureau to be rebuilt correctly, with proper governance, staffing, and proper oversight of the use of the \$1.9 billion budget, as well as its human and physical resources which was endorsed in this year's budget.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Policing has already set the following steps in motion:

- (1) Legislation – the Counter Narcotics Bureau draft Bill is with the Office of the Solicitor-General Office and SG has given assurance that they are working on the Bill and hopefully be ready before the end of this year.
- (2) Recruitment – an open merit-based recruitment process will soon be launched, guided by the approved Counter Narcotics Bureau organisational structure. Only ethic-solid officers and staff with the appropriate knowledge, skills, proven integrity and professionalism will be appointed.
- (3) Operations – administrative, logistic and operational mechanisms are being developed so that the Bureau can carry out its mandate effectively and independently.
- (4) Expertise – the Ministry of Policing has officers with the expertise, qualifications and experience to set up the Counter Narcotics Bureau, train its officers and ensure its effective and sufficient operations. The assistance of international partners will also be engaged.

With those measures, I assure this honourable House that the Counter Narcotics Bureau will be fully operational before the end of this fiscal year.

This fight cannot be won by the police or by the Counter Narcotics Bureau alone. It requires a whole-of-Fiji holistic security approach – an approach that combines both human security and national security in one unified front. Human security in practise means improving livelihoods, strengthening communities and offering alternative sources of income to those who are involved or may be tempted by the drug trade. National security practically means strong policing, effective intelligence, resilient borders and strong law enforcement.

Moving forward, the Ministry of Policing will work hand in hand with other ministries to align and complement development initiatives that strengthen human security while integrating them with national security enforcement efforts. On one hand, we will continue to carry out targeted raids, arrests and prosecutions. On the other hand, other ministries must address the social and economic drivers that allow drug cultivation and trafficking to flourish - poverty, lack of opportunity and limited access to services. This synergy is essential to generate maximum impact and ensure that peace and stability are not only achieved but also sustained. Such an approach will help maintain a true sphere of peace whenever it is applied.

As part of these plans, we intend to commence the application of this new model in a 20-year transformational plan for Kadavu as a model, changing the false perception of many from Kadavu, that “Kadavu is a land of drugs” to “Kadavu a land of security, economic stability and prosperity.” This holistic approach is one of the best impactful ways to create lasting security. When human security and national security work hand in hand, they reinforce each other. Together they build a sphere of peace that we all desire; a sphere where our communities are protected, our youths are given hope, and our nation stands resilient against crime and disorder.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our international partners have been playing a key role in enhancing and supporting the Ministry of Policing and the Fiji Police Force. These include the Governments of Australia, Japan, United Kingdom, Indonesia, China, New Zealand and other international organisations such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and other NGOs.

We wish to convey our deepest appreciation and gratitude for their assistance and look forward to our continuing partnership into the future, particularly in the setting up of the Counter Narcotics Bureau, in technical support and operational capacity building.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let us not be distracted by the actions of a few individuals. The bigger picture is clear - Fiji urgently needs a strong, professional and credible Counter Narcotics Bureau. That is what the Coalition Government is committed to do, and the Ministry of Policing shall deliver before the end of this fiscal year.

I wish to take this time to thank all, as well as calling on all - the Fiji Police Force, Police Officers' spouses and family members, Chiefs in all Provinces, Crime Prevention Committees, faith-based organisations and their leaders, youth and students, women and girls, and all willing citizens to take the security of our nation against drug abuse and illegal trafficking as a personal responsibility. Information is important to the Police to enable them to keep us safe and secure. Each member of our communities need to be an active participant in this regard.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to thank, again, all I have called upon - the Ministry of Policing Team and international partners, for the various respective efforts - great and small - each contributed to the maintenance of peace and the upholding of the rule of law in our beloved nation.

MR. SPEAKER.- I thank the honourable Minister for Policing for his Statement. Honourable Members will note that I have given some leeway as to the time for his delivery, but I think you will agree with me that the topic is of enormous importance to the future of our nation, that I would have given it some kind of priority.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, at the outset, let me reassure the honourable Minister that he has the wholehearted and full support of this side of the House with respect to the strategy that he is currently trying to get together, and also with respect to ensuring that our Counter Narcotics Bureau is independent and free of fear and favour, and is there to do the job that it is supposed to do. I wish him well, and we hope that this comes out successfully in terms of ridding our society of this scourge.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Minister mentioned that it is a formidable challenge and we 100 percent agree with him about this being a formidable challenge. But we are in a position, like he mentioned, to be able to garner the support of our development partners, and also those who are involved in this current fight against drugs in our society.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think one of the countries that is missing from the list that the honourable Minister mentioned, and I am not sure whether he has engaged with them, but Singapore does this really well. I urge him to engage with them and see what can be done. We all know about their punishment, and they had to do that because they had a huge problem many, many years ago with respect to that, they have actually stuck to their guns and there is a death sentence for breaking them. They remind you very much so when you get on the plane that anyone caught with it, there is no out clause.

Of course, we have commitments that we have made, we probably cannot go down that road but certainly, in terms of education, there needs to be a whole lot more done. I think their Counter Narcotics Bureau engages in preventive drug education, et cetera, and that happens.

For us, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that particular portion is hugely important because we have a young population and this needs to go out to the schools. The preventive drug education that the Narcotics Bureau can do is hugely important to our children. We can see that there are a lot of young people that are now engaged in all these activities, and it should not be like that. It also means that our parents need to play a very important part in how we move forward with respect to this education.

Of course, the honourable Minister spoke about the local and international engagement, which is extremely important, the UN assistance that can be garnered through all of these, but one of the most important tools that any judge or magistrate will have will be the laws that we put in place. I think we have to, and there is a wholehearted support from this side of the House to ensure that the laws are perfect so we can rid this scourge from our society. It is the judges and the magistrates who need to be empowered to be able to sentence in a manner that will be preventative to anyone that even remotely thinks about getting into that particular area.

Mr. Speaker, I have it on good authority also, and when you get these things, Government is lumbered with an aftercare issue and aftercare programme that needs to be put in place and structured rehabilitation also needs it. I know the honourable Minister is engaged in that. I know for a fact that St. Giles is actually flooded with people who have issues. They are actually bursting at the seams with people who have drug problems, et cetera, and they do not know how to deal with them. We do not necessarily have the personnel or the equipment to do it. These are the things that will accompany this particular scourge.

In a nutshell, Mr. Speaker, it is important that our Counter Narcotics Bureau is empowered to engage in all of those things that we are actually talking about and a preventive drug education with anything. If you want to be rid of something in a society, you ensure that you basically educate the young, educate the parents, educate everyone as to the ills of what it is, and it is important that the Narcotics Bureau is actually done.

I look at it in a very different perspective, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The fact that there were people who are in the Narcotics Bureau who got caught says that the Narcotics Bureau is working – they caught their own doing. It does not mean it is a bad thing. The Narcotics Bureau needs to operate, and if they found their own involved in it, then it is actually working - it just needs strengthening. It is not a new thing for Fiji but it is something that we all need to wholeheartedly support.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I have said, this is a matter in which there will be bipartisan approach on it but it is a plea to all - it is not just a Government problem, it is an Opposition problem, it is a family problem, it is every single Fijian citizen's problem, to ensure that we be rid of this, and I look forward to wholeheartedly support the honourable Minister in his quest to get it done.

International Day of Older Persons

HON. S. KIRAN.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Ministers, honourable Assistant Ministers, honourable Leader of Opposition, honourable Members of Parliament and dear Fiji; today, Fiji joins the rest of the world in commemorating the International Day of Older Persons. Established by the United Nations in 1990, this day reminds us of the immeasurable contributions of our senior citizens and the duty we all share to honour and protect them. This year's theme, "Older Persons Driving Local and Global Action: Our Aspirations, Our Well-Being and Our Rights" is both, timely and powerful.

I pay tribute to the septuagenarian leaders who lead us with their wisdom and grace. We honour His Excellency, the President, our Prime Minister, and our Speaker, who celebrates his birthday this week. Other septuagenarian leaders in this House include the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation, honourable Semi Koroilavesau and my colleague, honourable Agni Singh.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, your leadership attests to the theme of this year's celebration as you drive local action and global action for peace and development. Whether it is climate conversation or recent declaration of Ocean of Peace led by our honourable Prime Minister, we celebrate your leadership, we honour you, as you lead us and pave the path for others as role models.

Actually, above 60 is considered senior citizens. So those of you above 60 in the House, we celebrate you too. But there are too many of you to mention, so know that you are celebrated as well.

Elders are our foundation. They have seen history unfold, they have wealth of information, they are very important to ensuring continuity of values through our generations, preservation of our culture and heritage by serving as living libraries of ancestral knowledge, historical data, skills and knowledge, which they transmit to younger generations through oral histories, storytelling and participation in community events. They are keepers of our traditions and our faith, mentors of our children and our youth.

Mr. Speaker, our Ministry, together with the National Council of Older Persons, has organised commemorative activities across Fiji to mark this important day. These events bring together families, communities and leaders, to celebrate the lives and contributions of our elders. Various service providers are available at each of these venues, and I wish to thank them all, including the

Ministry of Health and Medical Services, who are always available to offer free health screenings in these events. The Ministry of Health, in particular, has been providing guidance on how to manage health with ageing, and to help our senior citizens adapt to changes in their mobility and related limitations.

I have just returned from a celebration being held at Albert Park, and it was such a joy to see our retired citizens come together - retired nurses, ex-servicemen, retired public servants and members from Spinal Injuries Association and elders from community, all sharing stories, benefiting from services available. These events are visible demonstration that our older citizens are not forgotten but remain a core part of our development.

Through these celebrations, we acknowledge that ageing is not a burden, it is a triumph. To grow old is to embody wisdom, resilience and perseverance. I have personally felt very privileged and blessed to have nonagenarians in our families, who continue to provide guidance till the end of their lives. As a nation, it is our duty to ensure that the twilight years of our elders are filled with honour, comfort and care.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, while the International Day of Older Persons gives us much to celebrate, it also compels us to reflect on the very real challenges our elders face today. Data from the Fiji Police Force paints a sobering picture. In 2024, 27 cases of suicide and attempted suicide were recorded among Fijians above age 60 and above.

While this year numbers have come down considerably, every loss is one too many. Behind every number is a story - someone who felt unseen, neglected or forgotten.

Crimes against older persons are rising. In 2024, we saw 1,945 cases reported as crime against our senior citizens. Mr. Speaker, 62 percent of these crimes were related to property theft, often committed by people known to the victims, including family members.

Domestic and family violence is on the rise, involving caregivers or family members themselves. It is not only abuse, but betrayal of trust. Psychological and sexual harassment cases have also been on the rise, stripping older persons of their dignity and peace of mind. Financial exploitation through scams, fraud and misuse of property contributes to robbing elders of the very resources they worked their lifetime to earn.

Mr. Speaker, these realities remind us that while our elders have given their lives in service to family and country, too many now face neglect, exploitation and abuse in their later lives. They are not just personal tragedies – these are national issues that demand national solutions.

This Government is determined to act. We are strengthening our systems of care and protection for older persons. To-date, the Ministry has 58,000 Social Pension Scheme recipients aged 65 years and above. In addition, an estimated 32,000 older persons receive transport assistance allowance once they reach 70 years of age.

When we came into the Government, Lautoka Golden Age Home was heavily damaged by Asian Subterranean Termites and structural decline made the facility unsafe. We have relocated all residents to the newly renovated Matanakilagi House. This relocation ensures their safety, while there are plans to scope building of a new facility that meets the current needs of time.

The Samabula Golden Age Home was built in the 1940s. This Home has served for generations, and we have found the building structurally declining and dilapidated. This facility needs to be replaced. In this financial year, we have budgeted to scope building of a modern, culturally

appropriate aged care facility, tailored to Fiji's tradition and needs. These investments demonstrate that the safety, dignity and wellbeing of our older persons remain a Government priority.

However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, infrastructure alone is not enough. That is why the Ministry, together with the National Council for Older Persons, is undertaking a review of the National Ageing Policy 2011-2015, a Policy that expired 10 years ago, and the review is long overdue. National Ageing Policy will be shaped by the voices of older persons themselves and consulted through the National Council of Older Persons across the country. We are also working towards the review of the National Council for Older Persons Act 2012 to take into account the emerging issues and make provisions for protection of older persons.

Beyond policy, our Ministry is also creating awareness and education, so families and communities understand their duty of care, awareness to combat financial exploitation by tightening safeguards against scams and fraud, and partnering with communities, faith groups and civil society for care and support because protecting older persons is not only the role of Government, it is the responsibility of every Fijian.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the data on suicide crimes and abuse against older persons is troubling, but it must not lead us to despair. It must strengthen our resolve to act. Our communities and families have been primary caregivers for our elders for generations, and we celebrate these family networks. While we must take every case of abuse seriously, we must celebrate that more than 100,000 elders are being looked after within their own families and in their communities. As leaders, families and communities, we must recommit ourselves to ensuring that Fiji becomes a country where elders are treated with dignity and respect.

Let us develop community of care in our communities, whether it is an old schoolboy, or OGs, or faith-based communities, or our villages. Our elders build this nation with their hands, their wisdom, and their sacrifices. Now, it is our responsibility to ensure that in their later years, their lives are filled with comfort, safety, and pride, and they feel included in family and community events.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we mark the International Day of Older Persons, let us commit and place our elders at the very heart of our care and compassion. May God bless our leaders, our senior citizens, and may God bless Fiji.

MR. SPEAKER.- I now call on the honourable Leader of the Opposition or his designate for their statement.

HON. V. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister for Women, Children and Social Protection for delivering her Ministerial Statement.

Today, on the occasion of the International Day of Older Persons, I want to wish everyone a joyful International Day of Older Persons. The theme for this year, "Older Persons Driving Local and Global Action: Our Aspirations, our Well-Being and our Rights" is a powerful one. We, on this side of the House, stand unequivocally with the core principle that our elderly must be honoured, protected, and recognised as valuable agents of change. Our senior citizens are our collective wisdom, and we owe them a debt of gratitude that must be repaid, not just with words, but with dignity and care.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me begin with the sentiment that unites all of us - it is a sacred covenant of humanity to look after our elderly with care and compassion. This is the moral foundation of our society. It is why we are all troubled when we learn of the rising number of older persons who end up in institutional care due to family neglect and lack of support, as the Ministry's own data reflects.

When the traditional family safety net breaks, it is the State's duty to provide a strong, high-quality, and humane safety net. This is where the Ministerial Statement, while well-intentioned, fails to connect with the underground reality. We hear constant talk, indeed, we hear constant bragging about the highest-ever revenue collections and the impressive balance sheets of this Government. Collecting money and bragging about this is one thing, translating that boasted wealth into meaningful, high-standard care is another entirely. The physical and operational state of the aged care homes in Fiji, which the Minister herself acknowledges, need work, is a clear sign of where our priorities truly lay.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the problem is not with the compassion of our people, but with the resourcing of our services. We have tireless dedicated nurses, carers and staff in our aged care facilities, who provide the compassion this House preaches. They are overworked, often underpaid and tasked with managing increasing needs with inadequate supplies and support. Where is the portion of that record revenue collection for better salaries, more staff and continuous professional training for those frontline heroes?

If the Government is acknowledging the need to build better aged care homes, it confirms that the current facilities are below acceptable standards. Our elders, particularly those with complex needs due to the NCDs crisis, deserve modern, well equipped and sanitary environments. They deserve the end of the poverty of dignity that comes with being housed in failing infrastructure.

While allowances may be increased on paper, the Government's failure to control the runaway cost of living and inflation means that the purchasing power of the elders' pension is constantly being eroded. You cannot boast about collecting billions while our senior citizens choose between food and buying lifesaving medication.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we urge the honourable Minister to move beyond the rhetoric of aspirations. We ask her to use the revenue her government proudly collects to finally and decisively resource our dedicated workers and upgrade our critical infrastructure. Our elders deserve a life of peace, security and true dignity, supported by an administration that backs its kind words with courageous funding.

MR. SPEAKER. - I thank the honourable Minister and honourable Lal for honouring the elderly – thank you. As the Minister has correctly identified, I belong to that career, and we remain grateful to the Almighty for giving us good health, to continue to enjoy our family and friends and continue to serve our people and our country. Thank you very much.

Technical and Vocational Education and Training Skills Fair and Careers Expo

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise in this august House to provide this information on the successful implementation of the first ever Technical Vocational Education Training Skills Fair and Careers Expo for the Central Division, which was held on 25th September to 26th September, 2025 at the FMF Gymnasium in Suva.

This landmark event, Mr. Speaker, Sir, which will be replicated in the Western and Northern Divisions, is set to culminate in a national expo that aspires to showcase the skills, learnings, abilities and activities our children are engaged in through TVET studies at secondary school level.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this historic event, supported by the Australian Government, the Higher Education Commission and the Ministry of Education, which was birthed after my visits around schools in Fiji, revealed the depth, knowledge and skills our children are already displaying through their TVET subject activities. The Expo was able to bring together hundreds of students from schools across the Central Division, and as far as Naitasiri and Namosi, alongside educators, industry leaders

and development partners.

The initiative of the Expo, Mr. Speaker, Sir, targets to bring to life the Coalition Government's unwavering commitment under the vision of empowering Fiji's future to transform education and ensure that every student has the opportunity to succeed.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for those of us who were able to visit the displays being held at the National Gymnasium, we were totally mesmerised by the obvious abundance of skills that are waiting to be tapped into and developed further by the job creators, job owners, employers, and those who can develop these skill sets further.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, through this Expo, Thematic Area 5 of the *Denarau Declaration* is being materialised, which emphasises on skills for life and sustainable livelihoods and the TVET component of the National Curriculum Framework of 2013, which ensures that our education system is responsive, inclusive and future focused.

I have personally visited schools around Fiji, those in the remote and rural maritime alike. These visits have been invaluable, allowing me to see firsthand the dedication of teachers, the energy of students and the aspirations of the communities. I have listened to the voices of our young people who are eager to learn, to develop new skills and to have meaningful pathways to employment and success. I have also observed the desires of school communities to see the real education changes that make learning relevant, practical and empowering.

The Central Division Fair brought together over 60 secondary schools and primary schools, with participation from industry partners, training providers and community organisations. A total of 1,803 students and teachers attended day one and 3,068 students and teachers attended day two, bringing a total of 4,871 students and teachers, who were part of this initiative.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, students displayed remarkable innovation in the fields such as –

- construction and woodworking;
- automotive and electrical technology;
- agriculture and food security;
- fashion, arts and design;
- hospitality, tourism and catering; and
- digital technology and robotics.

One of the most inspiring aspects was witnessing how students use local resources and indigenous knowledge to create practical solutions from renewable energy models to sustainable building designs. These innovations reflect the ingenuity and resilience of our young people.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, witnessing our young people confidently demonstrate their practical abilities, was a clear affirmation that they are calling for learning that is relevant, a learning that is practical and empowering. They are seeking pathways that extend beyond traditional academics into the realms of skills, entrepreneurship, and innovation. This Expo provided exactly that platform to unlock potential and give students a tangible vision for their future careers. The event was aptly described as an eye-opener for students, highlighting the diverse and rewarding careers available here in Fiji.

The opening ceremony, Mr. Speaker, Sir, marked by a spiritual grounding through prayer, a moving rendition of our National Anthem by the Levuka Public School Brass Band, and rich cultural presentation by the students of Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna Memorial School, set a dignified and truly Fijian

tone for the proceedings, reminding us that our journey towards development is rooted in our culture and values.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the displays at Central Division Skills Fair left a deep impression on all who attended. Walking through the exhibition, one could see the sense of creativity, determination and pride of our young people. Each booth told a story – a story of teamwork, innovation and the transformative power of practical learning.

Students demonstrated a remarkable level of craftsmanship and originality. In carpentry and construction, we saw miniature models of eco-friendly homes built with recycled materials. In agriculture, students showcased organic farming methods, hydroponic systems and climate-smart innovations that reflect their understanding of sustainability.

The automotive and electrical displays were equally impressive, with students confidently explaining how engines function, how wiring systems operate and how energy can be harnessed from solar technology. Their ability to apply technical theory into practice shows that our schools are nurturing competence and confidence.

The hospitality and tourism booths added colour and culture to the event, featuring traditional Fijian cuisine prepared with creativity and flair. Displays in fashion and design highlighted the fusion of modern trends with indigenous identity, giving voice to local culture through fabric, art and style.

Equally inspiring were the digital innovation and robotic projects, where students use coding and basic electronics to solve real life issues. From water level sensors to smart garden systems, these exhibits prove that TVET is not just about trades, but about innovation, problem solving and leadership.

What stood out most, Mr. Speaker, was the confidence of our students. They spoke passionately about their projects, proudly explaining how their skills could benefit their communities. This sense of ownership and purpose gave us confidence that Fiji's education system is moving in the right direction - one that not only imparts knowledge but also awakens potential.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fair also featured panel discussions and workshops involving employers, entrepreneurs and technical experts. Students had the opportunity to interact directly with some industry representatives, gaining valuable insights into career pathways and labour market demands.

Through this engagement, the Ministry gathered evidence that many students are eager for hands-on learning opportunities, particularly after major examinations in Term 3. Schools confirmed that such events motivate learners, reduce dropout risks, and open pathways for further training or self-employment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, building on the success of the Central Division event, the Ministry will be hosting a National Skills Fair in Week 13, from 1st December to 5th December, 2025, as part of the Viti Showcase and Skills Fair National Finals. This national event will –

- bring together the best student projects from all our four Divisions;
- create a national platform for school industry collaboration;
- promote micro-qualifications and recognition of prior learning;
- encourage innovation, aligned with Fiji's green and blue economy; and
- serve as a launchpad for skills competitions and career pathways across sectors.

The National Skills Fair will also form part of the Ministry's broader effort to institutionalize skills education through curriculum review, industry partnership and community-based learning.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this initiative complements the ongoing review of the Education Act 1966, which seeks to embed TVET and skills learning at every level of schooling. It also supports the goals of the Education Sector Strategic Plan 2025-2030, ensuring that students graduate with both, knowledge and employable skills.

As part of our forward plan, the Ministry will –

- expand Divisional Skills Fair to Northern, Western and Eastern Divisions;
- introduce micro-qualification pathways;
- strengthen school industry linkages;
- develop a National Skills Mapping Framework under the TVET Policy Implementation Plan.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I acknowledge the leadership of our TVET Officers, school heads and teachers, who worked tirelessly to mentor students. I also thank our industry partners, tertiary institutions and private sector sponsors, for their collaboration. Most importantly, Sir, I commend the students - the heart of this initiative - for showcasing that Fiji's future workforce is talented, capable and ready to serve.

The Skills Fair movement is more than an event - it is a national awakening of the importance of skills, service and self-reliance. It aligns with our Ministry's commitment to reimagining education, where every learner finds purpose, every talent is valued, and every skill becomes a pathway to progress.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, by empowering our young people to come down to serve through their skills and creativity, we are shaping a generation that will build a sustainable and a prosperous Fiji.

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

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the honorable Minister for Education for providing an update on the TVET Skills Fair and Careers Expo.

In today's fast evolving job market, practical skills are becoming more crucial than ever before. As industries transform and new technologies emerge, TVET is increasingly seen as a gateway to future-ready careers. However, despite many efforts to promote vocational pathways, many young people remain unaware of what TVET is and how it can pave the way for long term success. It is important to raise awareness about TVET and its role in shaping the workforce of tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, despite its vital role in preparing future workforces, TVET is still often overshadowed by traditional academic paths. To truly create a future-ready workforce, TVET must be at the core of national discussions on education and employment. Government, schools, businesses and communities need to unite in promoting TVET as an attractive and credible career option.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Careers Expo brings together key stakeholders from various sectors, providing students with a valuable opportunity to explore diverse career paths, engage with experts and make informed decisions about their future. It is good because it offers students opportunity to access a wealth of information in one place. We should empower Fiji's young generation to take charge of their educational journey.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, when organising events, like Careers Expo, many students from all locations and exhibitors should be invited so that our students can have the full benefit of all the experts in one place. This is an opportune time for students to identify their areas of interest, ask the right questions, and begin mapping out their future careers.

Careers Expo empowers students to pursue their passions and bridge existing and future skills gap. This provides an opportunity for students, tertiary institutions, government agencies, and employers, to interact in one central hub. During Expo, the higher education institutions are engaged directly with the students and teachers from various schools, answering questions and providing guidance on programmes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Expo's primary focus is to provide robust early career guidance for students when they come to the higher education institutions after finishing secondary education, they have already decided their career path. They have already decided their options, and then it is too late to change or do anything with them. They are already there; they had chosen the subject and it is hard to change them.

The Expo also gives potential students an opportunity to discuss the range, learning outcomes, duration, cost, and education pathways. Careers Expo will assist students learn how to actually earn a career and help in addressing labour shortage in the market.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, TVET Expo is a great thing, and it should be done nationwide, including maritime areas. Sixty percent to 70 percent TVET jobs exist in labour market. The private sector needs more TVET graduates than higher education. TVET qualifications have higher chances of starting up their own businesses.

Fiji is increasingly facing a shortage of skilled workers in industries, like construction, engineering and digital economy. These industries require a workforce equipped with a real-world skills that TVET provides. Without a national push to raise awareness, these sectors will continue to struggle to find the talent they need to thrive.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, parents play a powerful role in shaping how TVET is seen. Too often, it is dismissed as a second option. By engaging parents early through simple steps, like teacher-parent meetings, we can show them the real value and career opportunities that TVET offers.

Careers teachers also play a vital role in career pathways of students. I urge the Ministry of Education to have designated career teachers in all secondary schools and upskill them by providing training so that careers teachers are able to provide guidance to students on career pathways at an early stage, so that students choose the right career pathway and make informed decisions.

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

The Parliament adjourned at 12.15 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.38 p.m.

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

PIC's Agreement – Fish Supply to PAFCO (Question No. 155/2025)

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

In light of the EU relaxing the restrictions on rules of origin for our fish, can the honourable Minister for Fisheries and Forestry inform Parliament if Fiji has been able to swiftly agree with its Pacific Island neighbours on more supply of fish to PAFCO to process?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank honourable Koya for the question. I want to confirm that there has been significant progress in addressing the issue of fish supply to PAFCO. Sir, PAFCO have shared their intention with the Ministry of plans to establish a fishing fleet, both longliners and purse seiners. The Ministry is in discussion on issuing of offshore fishing licences to PAFCO so that they can fish in Fiji waters depending on the size of their vessel.

I would like to share that in the margins of the 24th Forum Fisheries Committee Ministerial Meeting held in Niue in July this year, we held some bilateral talks with the Minister of Fisheries for Kiribati and Tuvalu on the possibility of the PAFCO fleet fishing in their waters. We have also had a follow-up meeting with the head of fisheries from Tuvalu for the last few weeks, confirming the interest in having the PAFCO fishing fleet fish in their waters.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Kiribati and Tuvalu are countries that are members of the parties to the Nauru Agreement and are part of the eight countries that control 25 percent to 30 percent of the world's annual tuna supply, and approximately 60 percent of the western central Pacific tuna supply. The discussions are aimed to secure favourable access agreements for Fiji-flag vessels to fish within their EEZ, utilising their preferential Vessel Day Scheme (VDS) and fishing access into their fishing areas. In addition, also to formalise agreements for landing fish from their respective Exclusive Economic Zones for processing at the PAFCO Processing Plant in Levuka.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Fisheries is also working with the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency to reinforce Fiji as a regional processing hub. The tuna processing hub and spoke model is a partnership between Pacific Island countries to develop processing hubs in appropriate areas as Fiji is one of these. This allows neighbouring island countries to prioritise locations to have their catch processed and not transferred to competing foreign countries. Implementing this model will most definitely require the support structures of the PAFCO facility as well as a more efficient freight system and improved port facilities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are also hopeful that at the upcoming 9th Pacific Tuna Forum that will be held in Denarau in Nadi, we will discuss with the other Pacific Island Fisheries Ministers on how they can assist Fiji, in particular PAFCO in getting the fish supply that PAFCO needs.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Honourable Minister, in light of what we have just heard from you, I gather, that vessels that are flagged from other nations will also be permitted to offload at PAFCO. Does this will mean that once processed, the designation or designated area that it is being caught from will be on the labelling, or is that not something that is actually necessary?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- They will be processed under the country that they are caught from, especially for vessels that are flagged in other countries, but come to offload in Fiji. For example, if these PAFCO vessels from the PAFCO fleet of vessels, if they fish in other jurisdictions, possibly in Tuvalu and Kiribati, the fish that they land in our processing facilities or in PAFCO will be regarded as a Fiji catch.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- I would just like to ask a question on the clarity of origin. My understanding was that the tuna that was scanned in Levuka was basically being exported to Canada and the major markets in the US. Honourable Koya's question seemed to complicate or confuse me. I understand that there was no question of origin for being taken to Levuka under the European Union's regulations because the market that was earmarked for the tuna being canned in Levuka by Bumble Bee was basically for export to the Canadian and US markets. Can I just ask the honourable Minister to clarify on the origin as being highlighted here?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, just to clarify, for now, when we offload catches in PAFCO for processing, they will be regarded as Fiji's catch.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- If I may, Sir, I may need some clarity on it. The EU has relaxed the rules of origin. That is why it can be classified as Fiji, so I think that was what the question was and that was relative to my question about labelling. Will they be labelled as Fiji fish, or will they be labelled as fish caught somewhere else if the relaxing of the rules on origin being followed, and there is fish offloaded in PAFCO, anything coming out of PAFCO will have a label saying, caught in Fiji" or caught wherever. Consumers actually look at that, Mr. Speaker, Sir. That is my question, will that labelling carry "caught in Tuvalu" or wherever?

HON. A.V. B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do not think that the label will highlight or give some form of identification of where the fish is caught from. It will be processed as fish processed in Fiji, or canned tuna coming from Fiji.

MR. SPEAKER.- I have always assumed that when I buy tuna from PAFCO and it says Koro Sea, it means it is a fish from Koro Sea.

(Laughter)

Deployment of Fiji's Security Personnel - Solomon Islands
(Question No. 156/2025)

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

Can the honourable Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Civil Service and Public Enterprises update Parliament on the Memorandum of Understanding on the deployment of the Republic of Fiji security personnel to the Solomon Islands?

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I deliberately limited the details in my Ministerial Statement this morning on this aspect of the visit and the various Memoranda of Understanding which was signed at Honiara.

This one, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is about the deployment of security personnel between the Republic of Fiji and the Solomon Islands. On 9th September, on the margins of the PIFs Leaders meeting in Honiara, this MOU was signed to support the Government of the Solomon Islands in maintaining public safety and order, particularly during high-risk national events, including the conduct of their general elections and other national security operations. The signing was authorised

by a Cabinet memorandum that was brought up by the Minister for Defence and Veterans Affairs which gave us the freedom to go and sign the MOU.

As we understand, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and may I first of all thank all those honourable Members of Parliament who are wearing their poppies today, being 1st October and they will come off on 11th November. When I was in the Solomons, I visited the graves of those soldiers who fell in the Solomon Islands and whose remains are still there. There were five of them. It now includes another grave where the late Balekana rests. Panapasa Balekana was prominent in the independence of the Solomon Islands. He wrote the first national anthem of the Solomon Islands and its music. So, they lie together there, the six of them, and I visited them and that underlines the depth of our association and feelings that we have for one another. The deep and enduring bond is grounded in our Pacific identity and our history of regional cooperation.

The Solomon Islands, like many of our neighbours, has faced complex internal challenges over time, including periods of civil unrest and instability. Fortunately for all of us, we now have the Black Rock Training establishment in Nadi, where we can extend the opportunities for regional police forces and paramilitary forces to come and train with our own in anticipation of joint forces operating together in another place for interoperability training that can be carried out at the Black Rock Training establishment in Nadi

Fiji has previously contributed to regional peacekeeping in the Solomon Islands, through our participation in the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) from 2003 to 2017. I was fortunate to have been asked by yourself, Mr. Speaker, Sir, when you were our representative in the Courts of St. James, on the invitation of the then Secretary-General of the Commonwealth to be his Special Envoy to talk peace in the Solomons. That resulted in the deployment of the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands.

It has built great associations and friendships, and it supports and reaffirms our shared vision for a secure and stable Blue Pacific Continent. The training together or joint training in Fiji would also add to that. The purpose of the MOU is to provide a formal framework. In the past, it has always been on invitation. Now, there will be a formal framework for the deployment of Fijian security personnel, including officers and other ranks of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces and the Fiji Police Force to assist the Solomon Islands Government when requested.

The key provisions of the MOU include:

- Deployment Mechanism - establishing procedures for official requests, clearance and coordination between both Governments.
- Scope of Duties - Outlining the roles and responsibilities of Fijian personnel, which are strictly non-political, non-interventionist, and focused on law enforcement support and public order.
- Rules of Engagement - Ensuring all deployed personnel operate under clearly defined legal and operational parameters, with full respect for the sovereignty and laws of the Solomon Islands.
- Logistics and Welfare - Arrangements for accommodation, transportation, insurance, and medical support during deployment.
- Duration and Withdrawal - Flexibility for short-term or medium-term deployment based on the needs assessed jointly by both Governments.

Following the signing of the MOU, the Fiji Government has begun operational preparations to ensure our readiness for deployment if and when a formal request is made. That includes:

- Identifying and training a standby contingent of police and military personnel with expertise in community engagement and peacekeeping.
- Conducting joint planning sessions with the Solomon Islands counterparts.
- Ensuring legal compliance and international humanitarian standards are upheld during all phases of the deployment.
- Let me also stress that any deployment will be consensual, time-bound and fully transparent, with regular reporting mechanisms and oversight to ensure accountability.

This Agreement reinforces Fiji's commitment to regional solidarity, consistent with the objective of 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent. It is consistent with Fiji's foreign policy priorities and reflects our unwavering commitment to the principles of good neighbourliness and collective security under the *Biketawa Declaration* and *Boe Declaration*. It is also aligned with our own national interest; a stable and peaceful region directly contributes to Fiji's economic security, mobility of our people and strategic partnerships.

This agreement stands as a testament to the enduring and deep-rooted relationship between our two nations, one that transcends the bounds of formal diplomacy and is anchored in our shared Melanesian identity, our history, and our common destiny. It also reaffirms our shared understanding, as articulated in the Ocean of Peace Declaration, that regional security is a collective responsibility, one we shoulder not as isolated states, but as one *wansolwara* (one-salt-water, one people) bound by history, trust, and enduring mutual respect.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Prime Minister for his explanation of the MOU that we have with the Solomon Islands. I am given to understand that we also have a MSG security sort of a pact. Is this something that is embodied in the MSG security or is it something over and beyond that and much more detailed? I am just trying to get the relationship between this.

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is an understanding in MSG that MSG member countries can enter into bilateral arrangements and Memoranda of Understanding, such as the one we have just signed.

MR. SPEAKER.- The third Oral Question for today, Oral Question No. 157/2025 has dropped from the Order Paper, as the Question had been addressed fully through the Ministerial Statement on Tuesday.

(Oral Question No. 157/2025) dropped)

Country Liaison Officers - Australia and New Zealand
(Question No. 158/2025)

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity and Workplace Relations update Parliament on the progress of recruiting a fourth Country Liaison Officer (CLO) for Australia, and the appointment of the first CLO for New Zealand under the Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) Scheme?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, when we assumed office as Government, there was not a single Country Liaison Officer representing Fiji in Australia or New Zealand. On our first visit to Australia, I was advised by my counterpart that the Australian Government had approved a position funded by the Australian Government in 2021, but it had not been filled by us.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if we had filled that position at that point in time, we could have filled the other positions much earlier as well.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- You have failed.

HON. J. USAMATE.- It was during COVID-19

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Who failed?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Who failed? I am not going to allude to that.

(Laughter)

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it makes them angry because they failed.

We came back, advertised, processed the post and appointed our first Country Liaison Officer in 2023. And then I requested the honourable Minister for Finance because Australia being such a vast country with around 500 workplaces where our workers were located, we appointed one and then one more. So, we had three Country Liaison Officers in Australia; we have three right now. We kept on pressurizing Australia to balance it and give us one more so that we pay for two and they pay for two. So, the Australian Government finally approved one more.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, my Ministry has advertised and interviewed the fourth Country Liaison Officer early this month and it will be funded by the Australian Government. The appointment is ready to be made once the green light is given to us on the final listing.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for our first New Zealand Country Liaison Officer, my Ministry completed the interviews in Wellington at the end of last month and we are just awaiting the completion of some administrative matters before we announce the appointment. This eventuated through my request to my counterpart in New Zealand last year.

On this note, I must acknowledge the continued support that we get from both the Australian and New Zealand counterparts. Appreciation is also conveyed to the honourable Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and our missions in Canberra and Wellington for their support.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these Country Liaison Officers serve as the direct link between the Ministry, approved employers and our workers. Their responsibilities include:

(1) Worker Welfare and Wellbeing

The Country Liaison Officers ensure that our Fijian workers are provided with safe and fair working and living conditions. They provide on the ground support to address welfare concerns, workplace disputes or personal challenges that may arise during employment.

(2) Monitoring and Compliance

The Country Liaison Officers monitor employer compliance with the terms and conditions of employment contracts, ensuring that the rights of our workers are upheld in line with the laws and standards of the host country as well as Fiji's Bilateral Labour Mobility Agreement.

(3) Dispute resolution and Advocacy

The Country Liaison Officers act as mediators to resolve workplace issues in a timely

and constructive manner, reducing the risk of exploitation or misunderstanding between employers and workers.

(4) Safeguarding Fiji's Reputation

Ensure that our workers perform their duties responsibly and employers meet their obligations. The Country Liaison Officers help maintain the integrity of Fiji's participation in the PALM and RSE Schemes thereby strengthening trust with our international partners.

(5) Support and Reintegration

The Country Liaison Officers also assist workers with settlement support upon arrival in their new country where they go and work - orientation period and preparation for their safe return and reintegration into our Fijian communities.

These roles are vital because they provide our workers with a sense of security, knowing that their government is present and responsive to their needs while they are far from home. At the same time, the Country Liaison Officers help the Ministry to better monitor, report and improve the overall effectiveness of our labour mobility programmes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, under the previous administration, the welfare of our Fijian workers participating in overseas labour mobility schemes was not given the priority it deserved.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. A.D. SINGH.- I am talking about a fact. I just stated it.

Since the Coalition Government took Office, however, there has been a deliberate and sustained effort to recognise and address the needs of our workers on the ground. The recruitment of Country Liaison Officers is a tangible demonstration of this commitment to protecting and safeguarding the welfare of Fijian workers. I also wish to acknowledge the three Country Liaison Officers currently serving under the PALM scheme and commend them for the important work that they are doing in supporting our workers. I stated earlier that the fourth one will be appointed soon.

I thank our international partners, the Governments of Australia and New Zealand, approved employers and the families of our workers for their continued cooperation in making these schemes successful. Mr. Speaker, Sir, in summary, the introduction of these Country Liaison Officers marks a major step forward in protecting the rights and welfare of our workers, enhancing Fiji's international reputation and ensuring that our labour mobility schemes deliver fair and meaningful benefits for both our people and our nation.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me just remind the honourable Minister first that we have missions in both of these countries and they have always looked after the welfare of every single Fijian worker overseas. So please do not do the NFP thing about pouring scorn on, we did not appoint it, it is just absolute garbage. We have a mission that looked after all our workers all the time, just to put that to rest.

But here is a question, honourable Minister, all our workers in light of the fact that you are appointing these Country Liaison Officers, I understand also that our seasonal workers, as part of the PALM scheme are allowed to be a part of unions. Does that mean that our Liaison Officers will also be liaising with the unions that they may be part of? I specifically refer, there is a United Workers Union which is quite prominent in the agricultural sector. Can you tell us whether our workers are part of the union or if they are or will the liaison officers be engaging with the actual unions?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me answer the first part first. Our workers are in, as I speak in 496 locations all over Australia. Our mission does not have the manpower or capacity to visit these workers and attend to their problems. It is very clear.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, every labour sending country has Country Liaison Officers in Australia and New Zealand. We were the last ones to begin appointing.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the question about unions. In my first visit, I went and met with the head of the Australian Council of Trade Unions and then with the unions that looked after the agriculture sector and the caregiving sector. The unions are assisting us in ensuring that compliance is observed by the employers. Let me also add here that all countries have good employers and not so good employers, and some very bad employers and Australia is no exception. We have some of the worst experiences there as well and that is why it is important for us to make sure that our representatives are there to assist our workers.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, in 2021 we all know that there was a deadly virus by the name of Delta that led to the lockdown of countries, and it was impossible to do any work related to appointment of staff. My question is more related to, now the recruitment and appointment of new staff are specifically for that particular purpose. If you have staff for that particular purpose, are you still using the Missions to carry out some of the work or is it dedicated to this staff only?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I thank the honourable Member for the question. Obviously, the Country Liaison Officers work together with our Missions and with us here in Fiji. They send us monthly reports.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, with regards to the PALM scheme, New South Wales Parliament had recently carried out an investigation into modern day slavery with our Fijians working in Australia. I would like to ask the honourable Minister if he is aware of this and if the Ministry is going to be part of it as there are certain Fijians who are associated with this modern day slavery.

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is one of the reasons why we have appointed all these Country Liaison Officers and we are working with our Australian counterparts. I am going to meet with my counterpart in the next couple of weeks in Canberra and our Country Liaison Officers of course as well as....

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A.D. SINGH.- The workers in Fiji are well looked after, Mr. Speaker, Sir. We are the ones who have raised the minimum wage to \$5 and then the sectorial minimum wages are well above \$5.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Cost of living?

HON. A.D. SINGH.- They have failed, that is why they are complaining.

MR. SPEAKER.- I will entertain one more supplementary.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I hope that the honourable Minister does not appoint himself as the fifth Country Liaison Officer in Australia.

My question is, in terms of approved employers, how many approved employers are there in Australia and New Zealand, respectively? I am also interested in the process that is in place for the not-so-good employers, as you refer to it, if complaints are received.

HON. A.D. SINGH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is a new question in terms of the number of approved employers, which I will furnish with the honourable Leader of the Opposition tomorrow. The question of not-so-good employers, yes, there are those and there are numerous complaints that we have received that are resolved through the Department of Workplace Relations by our Country Liaison Officers, and through the Fair Work Commission, as well as the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

MR. SPEAKER.- The fifth Oral Question for today, honourable Members, please kindly note that Oral Question No. 159/2025 is deferred to a later sitting. The sixth Oral Question for today, note that Oral Question No. 160/2025 has been withdrawn.

(Oral Question No. 159/2025 deferred and Oral Question No. 160/2025 withdrawn)

Road Excavation for Underground Utilities
(Question No. 161/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport update Parliament on why certain entities like TFL and WAF are allowed to dig up perfectly good roads to carry out their projects or maintenance work?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the question, just to reiterate, can the honourable Minister update Parliament on why certain entities like TFL and WAF are allowed to dig up perfectly good roads to carry out their projects or maintenance work? I note Standing Order (45)(4) says, and I quote:

“The Minister must reply to a question, unless it would be inconsistent... A reply must be relevant, concise and confined...”

So, to the question itself, why certain entities like Telecommunications Fiji Limited (TFL) and Water Authority of Fiji (WAF) are allowed to dig up perfectly good roads? I would say the answer is to lay cables, lay pipes, to repair cables and pipes. I mean, that is the way the question is formulated.

HON. V. LAL.- So, what you were saying, honourable Minister, that we understand that there is less space, which is why the road is dug up. This may be due overcrowding or there are illegal structures on the Government reserve. Will Government enforce laws on properties encroaching the Government resources so that we are not able to dig up the roads?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU. - My point was the way the questions are formulated. I suppose going back to what was prepared, the FRA acknowledges the concerns raised. Yes, definitely, the utility providers - TFL and even the contractors who are laying cables, WAF, but as you know, these are necessary, as I have already mentioned, for pipe, cable or repairs. The FRA regulates such works through a permit system, so before they do it, they need to apply to do it and all designs and plans are submitted by the utility companies, carefully reviewed and approved by FRA.

After the works are completed, the utilities are required to reinstate the roads according to FRA specifications. I am not saying it happens, but at times, it does not happen. So, this non-conformance is an issue which FRA and those who are working on the roads, including the entities I have mentioned, are working closely to ensure that this is not prolonged.

Sir, FRA is in the process of developing a comprehensive Code of Practice for all utility operators to work with FRA regarding this issue. They are working on that in terms of the process to be followed. For example, if you are a contractor or WAF is digging up a pipe or someone is laying a cable, they need to get the sketches of the utilities which are already there, whether it is EFL, WAF, et cetera. However, the problem is some of those sketches are really old and have not been updated from the last Government. They have been there for 16 years, but that is an ongoing issue from the last Government and this Government, and we will work progressively to fix that.

One of the projects is on the non-revenue water, so that will also include ensuring that the sketches are updated because as you may have seen, one of the latest and biggest incidents was in front of the Vodafone Headquarters in Tamavua. It was just a wrong angle of drilling from the cable company which went into the water pipe. So, the Code of Practice will also include the process to be followed, the liability issues and who is responsible for which costs.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Honourable Minister, I understand the nuances of how you have to deal with this. I hope you understand how difficult it is with respect to all of these. Thank you, by the way, all the road humps seem to be of the same size now.

Is there somewhere that the FRA goes to, if Water Authority comes and says, “we want to dig a hole across here”, is there a new standard way that they are actually told that they have to put the new pipes in, so that the road does not have to be dug up all the time? I am talking about now when we are building roads, nowadays everything is done on the side, whether it is electricity, sewerage or water. If they do have to dig, I also understand what you said, but they have to put it back to what it was - the same thing. Are they being told to go further underground, so it does not have to be dug as there is cabling? Is there a standard that now exists with respect to future work?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, yes, from the last discussions, there is a certain depth which is prescribed for them to operate in – dig and lay cables. That is contained in the Code of Practice, in terms of ensuring that that is included, so that no one drills into a current utility, such as pipes.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the honourable Minister. I know that it is not an easy thing. When a lot of these roads were built, they were single-lane and they became double-lane, then they became four-lanes, and a lot of the services now are in the middle of the road. One of the problems, especially with tarsealed roads is that, as soon as you tinker with the service, the water gets in, and the whole road gets destroyed very easily when that veneer is missing. Is there a proactive approach when working with the other utilities to tell them, “If you have anything on this particular road, we are about to do the repairs of the road now, get all that work done now?” Is there any approach like that?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Yes, that is exactly what happened after that major incident. The various stakeholders, including WAF, TFL and EFL got together and discussed that issue in terms of the processes. That process is also in the agreed Code of Practice - the steps to be taken before you do anything on the road.

HON. RATU R.S.S. VAKALALABURE asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the honourable Minister for Housing and Local Government update Parliament on the status of the New Town Development Programme, particularly with the ongoing projects in Nabouwalu, Keiyasi and Seaqaqa?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I proceed, I wish to take this opportunity to wish our senior citizens a Happy International Day for Older Persons.

Mr. Speaker, Government is developing approximately 5.5 hectares of land into a new township in Nabouwalu, Bua. The approved subdivision scheme includes:

- 23 commercial lots;
- four civic lots, including a market and busstand;
- one Government lot for Government offices;
- four industrial lots; and
- recreational space.

Phase one of the project is currently underway. The focus is on seven commercial lots along the Nabouwalu Highway and \$1.3 million is budgeted in this financial year to cater for the civic works that will be undertaken.

The challenges for the project that the Ministry is actively working to address include securing a lease for the diversion of Vunivesi Creek, which necessitates close collaboration with the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources and the iTaukei Lands Trust Board.

To this end, the Ministry has initiated preliminary survey works for Vunivesi Creek to establish the alignment and extent of the proposed diversion and is working closely with the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources and the Department of Waterways to have the Creek area re-surveyed. What happened is that when there is a heavy downpour in Nabouwalu, because of that Creek that runs onto the new developed site, the water overflows and floods the whole area that is about to be developed.

The Ministry of Local Government is currently managing the relocation of three families from the township site, ensuring that land preparation, compensation, and essential services are provided in support of their smooth transition to an alternative site that has been identified through the assistance of the iTaukei Lands Trust Board, the Bua Provincial Office and we are also thankful to the *Tui Vuya* for his support.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry has expended a total of just over \$3.2 million to-date on the Nabouwalu Township Project. These funds have been directed towards consultancy services, survey and design works, Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and EIA Bond, procurement of essential civil works material and preliminary site preparation. The overall project cost amounts close to \$8.4 million. The project is expected to be completed in the 2027-2028 financial year.

On the Nabouwalu Passenger Services Terminal, Mr. Speaker, Sir, alongside the new township, the Ministry has developed a Passenger Services Terminal to cater for seafarers, as well as travelers, who travel through Nabouwalu. This includes:

- seating for 150 passengers;
- modern restrooms;

- offices for Biosecurity Authority of Fiji (BAF) and Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji (MSAF);
- ticketing booths, kiosks, and a coffee shop;
- police post for safety;
- disability friendly features and parking space.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, despite some delays that we have encountered, I am pleased to report that as of September 2025, the construction for the Nabouwalu Passenger Services Terminal has been successfully completed. The tentative commissioning of this Terminal will be before the end of this year, as the contractor is currently securing the Completion and Compliance Certificate from the Savusavu Town Council, National Fire Authority, the Occupational, Health and Safety (OHS), as well as Fiji Roads Authority. Furthermore, the Ministry has allocated a sum of \$200,000 for this financial year to support the operationalisation of this important facility.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in line with the vision of empowering the people of Nabouwalu and the wider province of Bua, Expressions of Interest (EOIs) for the kiosks at the Terminal will be given as first preference to the local operators. This ensures that the economic benefits of the facility directly support surrounding communities, while remaining open to wider participation, if required.

On the Keiyasi New Town Development, Mr. Speaker Sir, the Keiyasi development covers 9.3 hectares of iTaukei land into a modern town centre, complete with supporting infrastructure. The estimated cost of civil works for this project stands at \$10.8 million. The new township will provide:

- 27 commercial lots;
- 3 open space reserves;
- 1 civic centre;
- 1 market;
- 1 bus and carrier stand;
- 2 industrial sites;
- 1 service station; and
- 1 lot for the National Fire Authority.

Civil works began in February 2024 and are expected to finish by end of 2026. Mr. Speaker, \$2.2 million has been spent to-date, and a further \$1.6 million is budgeted for this financial year. The delays to works have been significantly attributed to bad weather, as well as supply of materials.

On the Seaqaqa New Town Development, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the Province of Macuata is progressing steadily as part of the Government's broader effort to strengthen secondary townships across Vanua Levu. The town boundary for Seaqaqa has been officially gazetted, with the transition of municipal functions now underway. This development is designed to bring essential urban services closer to rural population, stimulate economic activity, and enhance public infrastructure in the Northern Division.

One of the key component of this development is the construction of new market and bus stand, which will serve as the core facilities for the town. The market will provide safe and organised trading spaces for local vendors, while the bus stand will improve public transport access and connectivity for residents and surrounding communities.

Civil works for these facilities have already commenced, marking important milestone in the establishment of the town centre. The work on the market and bus stand site is well underway with

site excavation, clearing, levelling and building profiling already completed, as well as foundation works currently in progress.

For 2025-2026 financial year, the Ministry has been allocated \$1.7 million to continue with the civil works, drainage and project management. The Seaqaqa Town Development project is expected to be completed by the end of April 2026.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, these projects are not just about empowering landowners as well as local communities, but also create new opportunities for businesses, jobs and better services right where people live. By investing in Nabouwalu, as well as Keiyasi and Seaqaqa, Government is laying the foundation for vibrant and sustainable towns that will benefit our people for generations to come.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the New Town Development Project started way back during our time with Nabouwalu, Keiyasi, Seaqaqa. It takes a lot of time because of the land acquisition, relocation of sitting tenants, sometimes planning and flooding area. A lot of planning is required, and a lot of time is required, so while these four projects are under development, did your Ministry identified new areas where the development of new towns will be developed so that you can acquire land? It is not like immediate spending of the money, but it is putting it in the process.

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I respond to that question, let me first state in this august House that the honourable Member is seeking to understand the reason why the project is delayed. However, it is important that before moving on with any project, proper planning must be carried out before spending money on any project. This is something that was missing from this project. We were just talking about it, but there was no project – no proper engineering plan, or even a report done on this project.

When I visited the Nabouwalu site, I was told that that place was always flooded. There is a need to re-divert the creek to prevent water from overflowing into the current development site. For the Ministry, we have also explored other sites. Just recently, we visit the Naitasiri Provincial Council. They have asked us to come on board and also showing the possibility of expanding Vunidawa into a growth centre, something that we are working on right now. We are working on completing the works that the honourable Member had not done for Korovou but also going to Navua. Those are some of the new areas that we are looking at, even in Waimicia in Ra. Those are some of the small satellite towns that we are trying to do.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the two projects mentioned by the honourable Minister, Navua and Korovou, were already part of the programme that the last government had set. At that time, \$200,000 was allocated for the development of the Navua market and bus stand. This is the planning stage. What the honourable Minister and the Government did, they withdrew that money and used it for something else. So, stop coming here and blaming, you are still talking about the same project, nothing new. There were plans in place. I would like to ask the honourable Minister, what plans have you got? When are you going to start with Navua, because it was already there? Can you provide an update on the Navua project?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank honourable Bala for his presence here today, so he can also support me in understanding why the Navua was not declared a township way back in 2013. We have started work a year ago. We have met with all the agencies and stakeholders who are relevant and involved in the development of any town, Navua for that matter. We have started discussions. Now the team is actually going back and also redesigning the scheme plan for the whole town because we need to relocate the town and the market. There is no bus stand in Navua.

So, these are some of the works that we are working on right now. Hopefully that should be completed this year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, even for Vunidawa, we are also doing some design works. The team is currently working on this, which was never even taken into consideration. I do not know why. We are doing our very best to complete the scheme plan as well as to convert Navua into a town and, honourable Bala will vouch for that.

KOICA Hybrid Electricity System – Namara, Kadavu
(Question No. 163/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport inform Parliament what plans are in place to repair the hybrid electricity system in Namara, Kadavu that was originally put in place by KOICA?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to acknowledge and express our sincere appreciation to the Government and Republic of Korea for its generous support towards the installation of this specific system 30kW Namara Solar Hybrid System. This project was funded through the Korean Institute of Energy Technology Evaluation and Planning, with Woojin Industrial System Company Limited serving as the implementing agency.

The Namara Solar Hybrid System was successfully commissioned in December 2018, marking a significant milestone in our efforts to provide sustainable and clean energy solutions to remote communities. However, in February 2022, the system experienced a critical malfunction, which resulted in the failure of the battery component, thereby affecting its operational capacity.

In response to this, the Ministry, through the Department of Energy, have been actively engaging with the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) to facilitate the restoration of the battery system. Following a technical assessment conducted on site by KOICA engineers, the estimated cost for the restoration has been determined to be approximately FJ\$1 million.

The Ministry is currently awaiting formal confirmation of funding support from KOICA, and we remain optimistic that this will be secured soon. At the same time, the Ministry is working on a special submission to the Ministry of Finance in case the KOICA option is further delayed in the interim to ensure continuity of electricity supply to the village. The department has deployed the existing 44 kVA diesel generator to meet the energy needs of the community. While this is a temporary measure, we are committed to restoring the solar hybrid system as soon as possible to uphold our commitment to renewable energy and environmental sustainability.

HON. J. USAMATE.- I thank the honourable Minister for his reply. I hope that you will be able to get the funding so that the solar component can come back online. I know the programme in Kadavu, it is probably different, but in Vunisea, we used to have the same thing there. I am just wondering what work has progressed in getting the solar component back online for that hybrid system?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, the Vunisea is part of the LaKaro Project (Lakeba, Kadavu and Rotuma). I will issue an update on that, but briefly, the project has been rejuvenated, particularly on the solar component, and work is currently underway. I will provide the full details regarding the work on the three. We are grateful to the Government of United Arab

Emirates (UAE) and the New Zealand Government for contributing to the revitalisation of the three hybrids; Vunisea, Rotuma and Lakeba.

MOU for Development of Agriculture - Taveuni
(Question No. 164/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Agriculture update Parliament on the memorandum of understanding (MOU) recently signed to develop agriculture in Naselesele, Taveuni?

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also thank honourable Vanawalu for his question regarding the signing of the MOU between the Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways and the Yavusa o Wainikeli - trustee of the landowning unit of Naselesele Village, *Tikina o Wainikeli*, *Yasana Vakaturaga o Cakaudrove* on the island of Taveuni.

Before I highlight the content of this Memorandum of Understanding, I wish to pay tribute to the extraordinary contribution that Taveuni Island makes to Fiji's agriculture sector and to our national prosperity. Taveuni is the garden island of Fiji. It is not only the home of His Excellency the President of the Republic of Fiji Islands, but also a vital pillar of food production systems and contributes to the development of our economy. The island contributes to more than 50 percent of Fiji's taro exports. It is a major producer of *yaqona*, alongside a variety of fruits, vegetables, spices and livestock products that grace both local tables and foreign markets.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these achievements do not occur by chance. They reflect centuries of traditional knowledge, the stewardship of our rural communities, and the steadfast partnership between farmers and the Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways. When our farmers in Taveuni plant and harvest this crop, they secure livelihood for thousands of families, fuel our domestic food security, and uphold Fiji's reputation in overseas markets.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry is honoured to stand alongside Taveuni's growth. Among our key initiatives are the Research and Development Unit in Mua Research Station in Taveuni that pioneered a fruit-bearing hybrid coconut varieties, improving yield and broadening export potential. The station has developed many coconut value-added products and hosted a number of trainings. Farmer support programmes, financial aid, grants and land-clearing assistance to help bring new areas into production, and infrastructure investment, nurseries in Tutu Training Centre and supplying quality seedlings and training.

On mechanisation, the Government had also provided tractors and equipment to boost efficiency. On capacity building, workshops in floriculture, encouraging women to develop new agribusinesses alongside training in business planning and advisory skills for all our farmers. Market access and quality assurance, the Ministry facilitates linkages to the tourist sector, ensuring hotels and resorts enjoy stable, high-quality supply of Taveuni produce and assisting exporters in infrastructure and machinery.

To harness Taveuni's full potential, we need partnerships that go beyond ad hoc assistance. We need structured, sustainable collaboration agreements that respect local leadership, build village capacity and guarantee results. That is why in our collective pursuit of agricultural excellence, the Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways has entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the community of Naselesele Village, a model on how Government and communities can work hand in hand.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, allow me to outline the key provisions of this MOU. Under this MOU, the Ministry and Landowning Unit agreed to develop approximately 1,182 acres of trust land in four blocks located in Naselesele Village. These blocks lie close to the Taveuni Coconut Centre in Lagiloa, Narata and Sisila. The objectives are clear: to bring this land into productive agricultural use and to generate income for the landowning members and to set a replicable model for our communities to follow. This MOU is more than just a local agreement. It is woven into our national development fabric.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, under this MOU, the Ministry and the *Yavusa o Wainikeli* will work together across seven core areas to develop the development of a best use plan, the land use capability assessment, delivering regular on-farm visits, demonstrations at field and farmer's field schools, sharing research-backed technologies in crop nutrition, pest management and irrigation, improving farm-to-market roads to reduce transportation costs and post-harvest losses, farm development plan and facilitating access to quality tools, machineries and seedling and stock.

The Ministry will allocate funding through our approved capital programmes for the upcoming financial year, assisting Extension Officers and technical specialists to coordinate implementation on the ground, and to provide oversight to ensure best practices in land use, environmental protection, and farm management. The *Yavusa o Wainikeli*, in Naselesele Village pledged to make the trust land available exclusively for commercial agriculture under the term of the pilot programme and submit detailed applications to the Ministry.

Support in line with the Annual Agriculture Programme, to adapt the agriculture land use system, and adhere to the Buffer Zone Guideline to protect water catchment and biodiversity hotspots, and to collaborate openly in the spirit of partnership, maintaining clear communication, and acting in good faith. This MOU takes effect on signing on 9th September, 2025, and shall remain in force for three years, subject to review by mutual agreement of the partners.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, once the pilot phase demonstrates positive outcome, the model will be replicated in other parts of Taveuni communities, drawing on lessons learned from Naselesele. The Ministry will explore partnership with the private sector, *talanoa* or dialogue with exporters and processors to secure a long-term tick-off agreement. We will integrate climate adaptation measures, such as RIPEL trials for drought tolerance, into every stage of the project, safeguarding livelihoods against the uncertain future.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this MOU is more than a document. It embodies our shared belief that agriculture in Fiji must be inclusive and innovative, and by empowering Naselesele Village, we are investing not only in the taro farm and *yaqona* roots but also in the social capital and resilience of the people of Taveuni. We are sending a message that from island to island, no village is too remote to be linked to market technologies and the resources of the Government. Let us harness the spirit of the Garden Island and champion the spread of similar MOUs in other provinces, recognising that this model promotes self-reliance, job creation, and an increase in national resilience.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, Sir, let us embrace this MOU within the Naselesele Village as a beacon of what is possible when vision meets partnership. Let us ensure that Taveuni farmers continue to nurture the seeds of hope, prosperity, and pride for Fijian generations to come.

HON. I. S. VANAWALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, are there any other initiatives to replicate this project around Fiji in future plans to develop an agriculture setting on the same platform model to benchmark on best practices like in Naselesele?

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- As I mentioned in my presentation, once we see the benefits of this model, we will extend this model not only to the big islands, but also to the smaller islands in the maritime zone. We hope that this will be the model that we will adopt in the near future.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- One of the seven areas covered under the MOU is the land use capability assessment. You are aware of the problem of depleting soil fertility on Taveuni. Progresses have been made to address this, and who are the main stakeholders involved?

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- As also mentioned, Naselesele is right next to the research station in Mua, where agroforestry is part of the programme. This technology will be extended to the landowning units in Naselesele. This is to address the problems that we normally have.

HON. V. NATH.- I understand the farmers in Taveuni are challenged by the disease in their crops. What precautionary measures is the Ministry taking and how are we assisting the farmers?

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister, did you capture the question or can you repeat the question? I have a feeling the honourable Minister did not quite catch you?

HON. V. NATH.- I understand, I have been told that the grog farmers in Taveuni are facing difficulties. Their grog has some diseases. How is the Ministry assisting these farmers?

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- With the *kava* dieback, the Ministry has programmes to address *kava* dieback, both in terms of biosecurity measures and identifying areas that are free from *kava* dieback where they can source their planting material from.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, please take note, it is my intention to enforce, as far as the Written Questions are concerned, Standing Order 45(3), which says that Members rise and ask questions by referring only to its number on the Order Paper.

Written Questions

Statistics on FICAC Cases - 2023-2025 (Question No. 165/2025)

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

Can the honourable Minister for Justice and Acting Attorney-General provide up-to-date statistics on the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption (FICAC) caseload for the years 2023 to June 2025 for each year as follows:

- (a) The total number of complaints received,
- (b) The number of cases currently under investigation and those at the prosecution stage, and
- (c) The number of successful convictions recorded?

¹ HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have the prepared answer here with me.

Statistics on YES Programme – 2023-2025 (Question No. 166/2025)

HON. I. TUIWAILEVU asked the Government, upon notice:

¹ Editor's Note: Reply to Written Question No. 165/2025 tabled by the honourable Minister for Justice and Acting Attorney-General, under Standing Order 45(3), is appended as Annexure I.

Can the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-operatives, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications inform Parliament on the following, with respect to the Young Entrepreneurship Scheme (YES) for the financial years 2023-2024 and 2024-2025:

- (a) The total number of applications received;
- (b) The total number of applications approved, funded and declined; and
- (c) Provide the reasons for any applications that were declined?

MR. SPEAKER.- He is not here. The honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament will respond to the written question.

² HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, on behalf of the honourable Deputy Prime Minister, I hereby table the response to the question.

Cardiac Catheterization and Angiogram – Aspen Lautoka
(Question No. 167/2025)

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

Since the inception of Aspen Hospital, Lautoka, can the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services inform Parliament on the following:

- (a) How many cardiac procedures have been carried out to-date; and
- (b) How many angiograms have been carried out to date?

³ HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I hereby submit the response.

COMMUNICATION FROM THE SPEAKER

Withdrawal of the Standing Committee Report on the Trademarks (Amendment) Bill 2025

Honourable Members, after extensive consultation with the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, it has come to my attention that the Standing Committee's Report on the Trademarks (Amendment) Bill 2025 requires further scrutiny to ensure each recommendation is comprehensive, all embracing and reflective of the legislative objectives.

In the interest of upholding the integrity of our legislative process and ensuring that all proposed amendments are thoroughly examined, I have concluded and decided that in the circumstances to allow the Standing Committee to pursue much needed further examination of the Bill. Does any Member oppose?

Accordingly, I now inform the House that the Standing Committee's Report on the Trademarks (Amendment) Bill 2025 is hereby withdrawn.

² Editor's Note: Reply to Written Question No. 166/2025 tabled by the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-operatives and Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications, under Standing Order 45(3) is appended as Annexure II.

³ Reply to Written Question No. 167/2025 tabled by the honourable Minister for Justice and Acting Attorney-General, under Standing Order 45(3), is appended as Annexure III.

The Standing Committee is to undertake additional review and examination of the Bill and will present a Revised Report to Parliament at a later sitting. I thank the Standing Committee for its continued diligence and commitment to the working of Parliament.

**CONSOLIDATED REVIEW REPORT ON THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION,
HERITAGE AND ARTS 2021-2023 ANNUAL REPORTS**

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

That Parliament debates the Consolidated Review Report on the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts 2021-2023 Annual Reports, 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 will try in my five minutes outline some of the more pertinent recommendations coming from the Committee. I would like to just remind all honourable Members that the period under review for the periods 2021-2022 and 2022-2023, and things may well have changed.

- (1) The Committee noted with concern the increasing incidence of student behavioural issues including violence, drug use and possession of illicit content, particularly alarming is the rise in student on teacher violence requiring police involvement and mediation. The Ministry has responded with a five-tier Student Behavioural Management Programme, placing Heads of Schools as the initial point of intervention.

The Ministry further attributes many of these issues to poor home environments and highlighted the critical role of parental and community engagement, particularly in improving literacy.

The Committee recommends that the Ministry fully implement and strengthen the Parent-Teacher Partnership Framework across all schools to formalise parental involvement in both behavioral and academic matters.

- (2) Counselling and Support Services
The Committee observed a serious shortage of school counsellors with only 35 counsellors serving 917 schools during the reporting period. In most cases, teachers and Child Protection Officers are performing basic counselling duties beyond their training.

The Committee recommends the urgent recruitment and deployment of full-time, professionally trained counsellors in every school district to support students and teaching staff, and to relieve teachers from non-specialized welfare responsibilities.

- (3) English Proficiency and Literacy Development
Sir, the Committee noted a steep decline in English proficiency especially in some districts in particular highlighted were some districts in the Western Division where even Class 7 students struggled with basic reading skills. This affects both *iTaukei* and Indo-Fijian students driven by limited parental support, lack of reading resources and the absence of full-time librarians in primary schools.

The Committee, therefore, recommends:

- (a) A review of assessment structures, including reconsideration of the “best five subjects” criteria to prioritise English and Mathematics;
- (b) A nationwide literacy recovery programme targeting Years 5 to 8;
- (c) The reinstatement of school library services with fulltime librarians; and
- (d) The promotion of parental involvement in home reading.

(4) Curriculum and Legislative Reform

The Ministry is in the process of reviewing the outdated 2013 National Curriculum Framework and the Education Act with a focus on aligning education with labour market needs. The reforms aim to introduce vocational and entrepreneurial training from early childhood levels. However, the Committee is concerned about the lack of structured feedback mechanisms and the inadequate planning in teacher deployment particularly the use of secondary-trained teachers in primary schools.

The Committee recommends the acceleration of consultations on curriculum and legal reforms and calls for clear teacher deployment strategies aligned with teacher welfare.

(5) Teacher Workforce, Deployment and Welfare

Over 500 secondary teachers left the service between 2021 and 2023, primarily due to migration and more attractive opportunities abroad. While recruitment and incentives are ongoing, shortages particularly in rural areas persist. Teachers continue to be overburdened, often supervising from 6:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., which impacts their morale and job satisfaction.

The Committee recommends:

- (a) Improved retention incentives and recognition schemes;
- (b) Permanent appointments for over 3,000 acting teachers; and
- (c) Greater collaboration with tertiary institutions to prioritise training in high-need areas like Mathematics and Physics.

Sir, if you allow me, when I get my right of reply, I will also cover the other few recommendations that I have not been allowed to read out in this time that I have been given. With that, Mr. Speaker, I would love to commend this motion to the House.

MR. SPEAKER.- Before I open the floor for debate with the four speakers waiting in the wings, I intend to take our break now. However, before we do, I will entertain the Suspension Motion given the lateness of the hour.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

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

That 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 in today's Order Paper.

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

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have three motions for debate including the current one on the Ministry of Education and also Levuka Town Council and the Fiji Police Force 2020-2021 Annual Report.

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

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 in half an hour.

The Parliament adjourned at 4.06 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 4.42 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON THE CONSOLIDATED REVIEW REPORT ON THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, HERITAGE AND ARTS 2021-2023 ANNUAL REPORTS

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to make a very short contribution to the Consolidated Review Report of the Ministry of Education 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 Annual Report. The Committee likes to extend its appreciation to the Ministry of Education for its coordination and constructive participation during the submission and consultation processes.

There has been 15 recommendations. Mr. Speaker, Sir, two key things I would like to highlight is that the Committee recommends prioritising the urgent installation of electricity and reliable water supply to the rural schools including Thomas Baker Secondary School and Navatusila District School. On our visitation to Beqa, Kavala and Vunisea Secondary Schools face situations of urgent renovation of their dormitories which will really benefit our school students and teachers.

What was highlighted through the extensive public submission was student behaviour and discipline issue in schools with very limited number of counsellors throughout Fiji, and the burden on teachers is quite massive because teachers are not responsible for moulding and shaping the character of children. It is rather the parents' responsibility, and if a student is caught with bad behaviour, we have also noticed that the parents do not even attend the counselling sessions. I believe it should be made compulsory that the parents do attend the counselling sessions so that they are able to understand their child's behaviour that is reflected in school and at home as well.

Moving forward, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in some of the Committee findings, again what we have heard from the teachers throughout Fiji is the workload with the number of teachers resigning, as being alluded by the Minister, the media as well for the number of years. The burnout among teachers is growing and is compounded by a lack of qualified teachers especially in maths, physics and technical subjects. Resignations are frequent and tertiary institutions are not producing enough qualified teachers to meet the demand as per the Report.

While the Report is right after or during the pandemic and after the post-pandemic, I would just like to bring to the attention of the honourable Minister for Education two or three challenges that his Ministry can address. The first one that was raised with me was, "this is the fourth week of term three and we have not received our term two allocation allowance; this is under rural allowance." The second, one honourable Minister is, the drivers at the Ministry have not received their overtime for the last two months. There are also those who have upgraded their education but still have not received the new upgraded pay. I had these messages sent to me.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I assure the teachers that as your Opposition Members and alternative government, we know the workload, we know the student behaviour issue, the salary increase, the teacher taking the workload home and losing time with family, and also the outdated infrastructure. I hope, honourable Minister, that the Vatuwaqa Primary School will now be rebuilt under your leadership.

Again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, with the Finance Minister bragging about the \$4.4 billion revenue as per end of July 2025 and the \$185 million surplus, there is an urgent call to Government to increase the salary of teachers, allocate at least \$40 million to \$55 million aside, and increase the salary for the teachers for the work they do.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, coming back to the Report, I support the Committee's findings and the motion before the House.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I first thank the Members of the Standing

Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence for the work they have done on the Annual Report for the Ministry of Education for 2021 to 2023.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would just like to respond to some of the issues that have been raised in terms of Vatuwaqa. I think most of the issues that have been highlighted in this Report, I have also informed the House in terms of the progress of the work that we are doing, especially when we started. We initiated the National Education Summit, Denarau Declaration highlighting areas of improvement in our education system.

I thank the Committee for the very comprehensive findings and recommendations that come to 22 in total. Most of the findings, as I have already alluded to, have been addressed or are currently being addressed by the Ministry of Education.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would just like to comment on some of the findings, especially the recruitment and deployment of full-time, professionally trained counsellors. At the moment, we have four district counsellors for high-risk referrals, and an additional four counsellors from the Substance Abuse Advisory Council. We have 32 district-based counsellors, supplemented by 41 student mentors across 200 schools with non-government organisations also providing crucial support. The Australian government is working with the Ministry of Education to establish nine district counselling hubs, staffed by professional counsellors.

On the nationwide literacy recovery programme, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is something that the Ministry is looking at heightening. It is a priority in terms of the ability for students to be able to read and also write. We are working with the Curriculum Advisory Services in developing a reading framework to standardise effective literacy instructions and foster a love for reading through a clear systematic assessment pathway. This pathway guides students in early foundational skills to advance comprehension and critical thinking with progress monitored in multiple languages including *iTaukei*, Hindi and English.

For parents/teacher partnership framework, the Ministry is committed to formalising and strengthening parental engagement, especially with the idea that it takes a village to raise a child. We are communicating with parents and stakeholders of the school to engage them in school activities involving their children.

We are also, Mr. Speaker, Sir, formalising an active involvement of the school management committee which includes the School Substance Abuse Advisory Council and the mandate robust networking with relevant inter-agency.

On the targeted remediation programme on improving digital connectivity and infrastructure in rural and maritime schools, the Ministry of Education is developing a practical and sustainable strategy for targeted remediation to ensure that rural and maritime schools are significantly better prepared for any future pandemic or educational disruptions by focussing primarily on improving digital connectivity and infrastructure.

The Ministry of Education plans to set up more school-based community WiFi hubs, telecentres including negotiating subsidised bandwidth with Telecom partners. For content delivery, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Education will expand the use of offline compatible learning management system, moodle online development, distance-flexible learning and strengthen broadcast education as you see in the *Walesi* (radio and TV licence) as a key backup, which is already in operations three days a week.

On the installation of electricity and reliable water source to rural schools, including Navatusila District and Thomas Baker Secondary School, the Ministry of Education acknowledges the recommendations of the Committee to urgently address electricity and water supply challenges in rural schools. We remain committed to ensuring that every child in Fiji has access to safe, inclusive, and resilient learning environments.

In partnership with donor agencies such as the Its Time Foundation, the Ministry is actively rolling out solar power installations to remote schools that lack reliable electricity, and this will include the schools that have been mentioned.

To address assistant water supply issues, the Ministry is also coordinating the provision of high-capacity water tanks to schools facing water shortages.

The renovation and reconstruction of the dormitories at Beqa/Yanuca, Kavala and Vunisea Secondary School. For Beqa/Yanuca Secondary School, the school has been advised to use the free education grant to request building grant assistance for hostel renovation. The school is assisted with the construction of a new staff quarter and the provision of a new fibreglass boat with engine. For Vunisea Secondary School, the dormitory is currently being used as teachers' quarters, occupied by teachers. The way forward is to build new staff quarters so the dormitory can be used by students. For Kadavu Provincial Secondary School, the tender for the rehabilitation of the boys and girls dormitory is to be submitted to Fiji Procurement Office for tender advertisement with work to commence as soon as possible for completion by December 2025.

Priority for accommodation in university and secondary school dormitories will be given to rural and maritime students, ensuring equitable access to education. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Education is committed to ensuring equitable access to education to all students. The Ministry, again, supports the recommendation, noting that the first priority for accommodation in both university and secondary school dormitories will indeed be given to students who reside in rural and maritime locations.

Full-time review and digital overhaul of the student transport assistance scheme. Lastly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry is working towards a digital overhaul of the student transport assistance scheme.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry is working towards a digital overhaul of the Student Transport Assistance Scheme to improve top-up tracking, ensuring endorsement of an MOU with the Land Transport Authority, to allow data sharing that provides Rural Service Licence (RSL) and Public Service Vehicle (PSV) permits data and set up grievance redress system. This step will strengthen transparency, accountability and ensure that the Scheme better serves students and communities.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the Consolidated Review Report of the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 Annual Reports.

I would like to thank the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence for the comprehensive Report and also for the recommendations. The Committee has come up with several findings and recommendations. I will be speaking on a few recommendations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the recommendations of the Committee is on renovation and construction of dormitory in some rural maritime schools. The Ministry of Education should ensure that all schools, regardless of location, are closely monitored, to ensure that conducive teaching and

learning environment and also safe dormitories are provided to our students. If the Free Education Grant is well utilised and managed, I am sure all schools in Fiji will be in very good condition and students will have conducive environment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other recommendation of the Committee is the Ministry of Education's collaboration with the tertiary institutions to increase enrolment in high need subject areas. I fully support the Committee's recommendation.

Yesterday the honourable Minister for Education informed Parliament that there is a shortage of teachers in primary schools and in science, technology, engineering, mathematics and PMAC subject areas in secondary schools. There is also an oversupply of teachers in certain subjects in secondary schools. The subject areas where we have oversupply of teachers, many teachers are at home waiting to be posted there without jobs. The Ministry of Education, TSLS and Teacher Training Institutions should collaborate and come up with strategies to address teacher shortage and also oversupply.

Based on teacher exit trend there will be shortage of trained teachers in Fiji for some more years. The Ministry of Education should have discussions and meetings with teacher training institutions and increase intake in areas where there is shortage.

Currently, there are hundreds of secondary trained teachers teaching in primary schools. These teachers should be very well supported through well designed training programmes, so that these teachers can teach in primary schools effectively. If the issue is not prioritised and addressed, teaching and learning will be compromised.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee has also recommended that there should be improved benefits to reduce teacher attrition, which is very high, and this is due to many reasons. One main reason is the salary scale of teachers. The teacher salary in Fiji is low compared to the other sectors. Some private companies pay their sales reps above \$30,000, whereas our graduate teachers are on less than \$30,000.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government should seriously consider carrying out job evaluation exercise for teachers so that teachers are placed on right salary band and step. The last job evaluation exercise for teachers was in 2017 and that was a long time ago - eight years ago, and as a result of job evaluation exercise, teachers were given a huge salary increase.

If teacher's salary is not upgraded, more teachers will exit Ministry of Education and teacher shortage crisis will worsen. I thank the Committee for their comprehensive Report, and I support the motion.

HON. I. TUIWAILEVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to address the findings and recommendations presented in the Standing Committee of Foreign Affairs and Defence Consolidated Review Report on the Ministry of Education 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 Annual Reports.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, at the outset, the education in Fiji significantly impacts socio-economic development by boosting the economy through the skills workforce, reducing poverty and improving the overall system health. However, the system faces challenges such as uneven quality of education between urban and rural areas, ongoing difficulties in staffing in remote schools and learning gaps and performance.

To address these challenges, the Government is committed in addressing these issues through

increased investment reform in learning programmes and efforts to build climate resilient schools and a suitable environment for all students, improve academic standards and the recruitment of teachers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in 2021-2022 financial year, the Ministry was allocated a revised sum of \$447.1 million and around \$485.9 million in 2022-2023 financial year. This reflects the increase of around \$42.8 million in 2022 and 2023, compared to the 2021-2022 budget.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, following strategic restructuring in 2023, the Ministry is now solely focused on education, enhancing its capacity to deliver its mission to cultivate holistic, relevant, and inclusive learning experience, benchmarked to global practices that empower independent responsibility in critical learners, enabling them to effectively adapt and address the nation's challenging socio-economic needs and enrich the nation's future. The structure is aligned with Government's efforts to modernise education and prioritise digital literacy, curriculum reform in infrastructure areas, and require dedicated leadership and resources.

It was part of a broader Government initiative, improving sectoral focus and administrative efficiency, allowing specialised leadership in both education and cultural development, and aligned with the evolving national priorities in digital education and cultural preservation.

I wish to highlight the comparison of the budget allocations from 2021-2023 and 2023-2026. From 2021-2022, there was an allocation of \$447.9 million. The utilisation was 96.6 percent. In 2022-2023, an allocation of \$489.3 million, and the utilisation was 98.1 percent. For 2023-2024, there was an allocation of \$608.6 million and the utilisation was 98.9 percent. In 2024-2025, there was an allocation of \$159.3 million and the utilisation was 99.6 percent. For 2025-2026, the allocation is \$675.4 million, and the utilisation right now is 16.47 percent.

In response to the Committee recommendation, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to thank the Committee Chairperson and the honourable Members for this Report. We note that the issue and recommendation highlighted in the Review Report, and I would like to make some general comments.

On Free Education Grant, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the 2025-2026 financial year, the Coalition Government introduced a significant reform. The Free Education Grant which was removed by the previous restriction and that the school management and administration could utilise this fund. In the past, specific portions of the grant were earmarked for designated areas, such as building and maintenance, information technology, or administrative expenses. By lifting this restriction, the Government has empowered school management with the greater autonomy, allowing them to allocate grant resources based on the unique priorities and needs of the respective schools.

Furthermore, these new approaches are expected to enable schools more efficiently, address several of the Committee's recommendations, particularly, those concerned resource allocation in rural and maritime areas, which also enhance the ability of school management and respond promptly to essential renovation of minor works required at the school level.

Mr. Speaker, for the total funding of \$0.5 million also provided to the School Management Association of Fiji, the Association will assist the school leaders and managers in overseeing not only government issued funding, but also resources received from external partners and donors.

Back to School Assistance Programme, since the inception of this Programme, it has benefited more than 200,000 students annually. For the 2025-2026 period, a total of \$50 million has been

allocated to further support transport needed for students across the country.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on Teacher Retention Strategy, the Coalition Government has implemented a series of targeted strategies to address the Committee recommendation on teacher retention. For other key reforms in the 2025-2026 financial year, the Early Childhood teaching and Government Wage Earners to salary staff, this transition recognises the vital role of ECE teachers, which is lacking strong educational foundation and provided greater security and recognition of ECE teachers. A total of \$25.7 million is allocated to support the reform, benefiting approximately 1,400 ECE teachers across more than 800 ECE Centres nationwide.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in conclusion, I wish to thank the honourable Chairperson and Members of the Committee for their comprehensive Report tabled to Parliament, and I commend their Report in Parliament.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I just wanted to say thank you very much to all the honourable Members who spoke on this Report, and in particular, I want to thank the honourable Minister for having already actioned some of the recommendations, in particular, with transportation, and I know that I have had a couple of conversations with the honourable Minister regarding maritime transport. So, thank you for the boats and I also pray and hope that the transportation providers will be remunerated for the expenditure that they use or that they have when it comes to paying for fuel to take children to schools.

I also thank the honourable Minister for his assurances in regard to water and power supply, in particular, for those two schools that we mentioned - representatives that we met in Sigatoka, and on that note, Mr. Speaker, I commend the motion before the House.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

REVIEW REPORT ON THE LEVUKA TOWN COUNCIL 2018 ANNUAL REPORT

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

That Parliament debates the Review Report on the Levuka Town Council 2018 Annual Report which was tabled on 18th July, 2025.

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

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, despite its historical significance as Fiji's first capital and its recognition as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Levuka continues to face deep structural, financial and administrative challenges that demand urgent national attention and support. Some of the recommendations that I will outline this afternoon are in the time that I have been allowed is:

Recommendation 1 – Delay in Presentation of Report

The Committee acknowledges that the delay in submitting the 2018 Annual Report was primarily due to severe financial constraints and limited staffing at Levuka. As an island municipality, Levuka's geographical isolation and marginalisation have exacerbated these

challenges. Yet, it is worth noting that Levuka still progressed ahead of several better resourced municipal councils in its reporting obligations.

The Committee recommends that the Ministry of Local Government provide dedicated technical assistance to remote municipalities, like Levuka, and this would probably have been done since this Report is from 2018. This should include capacity building, digitization support and resourcing, to improve reporting timelines.

Recommendation 2 – Staffing Challenges

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as of 2025, Levuka Town Council continues to operate without a permanent Chief Executive Officer and operates with minimal staff. Special administrators, including Mr. Ben Naidu, have been voluntarily filling executive roles without compensation - a commendable act of public service.

The remoteness of Levuka makes it difficult to attract qualified applicants. However, there is potential to recruit from semi-rural towns, such as Labasa or Sigatoka, where individuals may be more inclined to adapt to island life.

The Committee recommends:

- (a) Accelerating recruitment for key council positions;
- (b) Offering strategic incentives such as relocation allowances and housing support;
- (c) Conducting targeted outreach in semi-rural towns; and
- (d) Commending the Special Administrators for their selfless service to the Levuka community.

Recommendation 3 – Budget Utilisation and Financial Standing

Again, I repeat, that this Report is from 2018. Levuka operates with a \$30,000 annual deficit, relying heavily on Government grants for capital works. The \$500,000 allocation by Cabinet in 2012, in recognition of its UNESCO heritage status, has now ended, leaving the Council to shoulder increasing responsibilities with dwindling resources.

The Committee recommends the introduction of a special financial grant, designed specifically to support Levuka's unique needs as a heritage town, alongside a financial sustainability strategy to boost local revenue generation and diversify income sources.

Recommendation 4 – Waste Management Efforts

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Levuka Town Council manages waste for the town and surrounding islands, including nine villages in the Lomaiviti and Lau Groups. Awareness campaigns, composting systems and communal collection points have been implemented to improve waste disposal.

The Committee recommends expanding waste collection and infrastructure, providing equipment and training support from central government, and promoting recycling and composting efforts, practices in rural and maritime areas.

In particular, I just wanted to also cover Tourism Development Constraints. Despite its UNESCO heritage status, Levuka lacks the infrastructure necessary to support a robust tourism industry. Town leaders express reluctance to promote tourism without first addressing roads, port safety, and public amenities. The absence of formal collaboration with Tourism Fiji further limits development potential.

The Committee recommends, therefore, that the Ministry of Tourism and Tourism Fiji partner with the Levuka Town Council to design a phased tourism revitalisation plan which should include:

- infrastructure upgrades;
- port safety improvements; and
- targeted marketing campaigns highlighting Levuka's heritage appeal.

With that said, Sir, Levuka may be small in size, but its historical, cultural and national significance is immense. I therefore commend this motion to the House.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion. I have a list of speakers with me, each is accorded seven minutes for their presentation. At the end of the debate, we will then return to the mover for her right of reply.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the debate on the Review Report of the Levuka Town Council 2018 Annual Report. We are not just debating a document, we are debating the future of a living piece of Fijian history. Established in 1877, almost 148 years ago, Levuka was Fiji's first capital, and we must acknowledge our very first municipality. It is a heritage listed Town that carries the weight of our nation's story on its shoulders, and it deserves more than to be left to struggle in such a manner. For this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, especially for this Report, I wish to thank the Standing Committee for highlighting the challenges faced by the Levuka Town Council. The special historical and logistical needs of our smaller councils must be recognised and addressed with tailored support.

Key finding 3.3.2 highlights a critical failure. Levuka Town Council does not have a permanent Chief Executive Officer. The fact that the Special Administrators are also carrying out the CEO's work is not a solution. It is a ticking time bomb for governance and a potential conflict of interest. Before the other side ask, especially the Minister for Transport, who has a habit of saying this, what we were doing, let me make it very clear.

During our term, the Levuka Town Council had a permanent, dedicated CEO. We understood that stability in leadership is the bedrock of service delivery. The absence of the technical and administrative staff further cripples the Council's ability to function. This is not just an administrative hiccup. It leads to non-compliance and the failure to serve the ratepayers of Levuka.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, therefore, I propose a practical interim solution rooted in collaboration and good governance. I call in the interest of the bipartisan approach that the Ministry of Local Government to immediately develop and implement a shared service plan. Under this plan, larger, well-resourced municipal councils can provide technical, administrative and professional support to smaller councils like the Levuka Town Council. This is a cost-effective way to ensure that every Fijian, regardless of whether they live in a large city or a small historical town, receives the basic services.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I fully endorse the Committee's recommendation for the clean-up campaign in partnership with the Ministry of Health involving schools and villages. This is a commendable community-based approach. However, for such initiatives to be sustainable, the Council needs funding.

In that spirit, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I strongly reiterate the call for the Government to reinstate the grant through the Ministry of Waterways for the maintenance and upkeep of the drainage works in the coastal town like Levuka. The Levuka story is a picture of the plight of all small municipalities

in Fiji. They are burdened with national responsibilities, but in search of the necessary resources. The people of Levuka and of all our small towns deserve more than just a history lesson. They deserve Government support to secure their future.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we were told that a few months ago, the workers were asked to work on reduced hours because the Council was facing financial difficulties in paying the workers. This is not 2018, this is 2025, Minister for Transport. I hope it is not repeated, and workers are looked after. With these few comments, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank you for this opportunity.

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, at the outset, I would like to commend the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence for its thorough review and frank recognition of Levuka town's unique challenges. Challenges shaped not only by geography and limited resources, but also by Levuka's special place as Fiji's first capital in the UNESCO World Heritage Site. I also thank the Committee for coming forward with 10 critical recommendations, even though the report is old, but I thank them for the practical recommendations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Levuka is not an ordinary town. It is a living museum of our nation's history, where commerce, governance, and cultural exchange first took root. Council therefore carries a dual responsibility to promote everyday services such as roads, waste management, and housing while safeguarding heritage that belongs to all Fijians.

The Committee's Report has highlighted six major areas where Levuka requires support, and I will be highlighting more or sharing more on what the Ministry has done regarding the six recommendations that were proposed by the Committee.

First is on modernisation and digitisation. Mr. Speaker, Sir, small councils like Levuka face real challenges in keeping up with modern systems. The Ministry, in partnership with the Ministry of Trade is rolling out a building permit application system that will be passed across all municipalities in Fiji. Levuka will benefit from this transparent online platform. Applicants will track and manage building approvals in real time. This will improve efficiency, record-keeping, accountability, and customer satisfaction.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry is undertaking a feasibility study for a new accounting software for all councils, including Levuka, to strengthen financial reporting and revenue collection.

Technical staff and recruitment — Levuka's request for critical technical staff, accountants, inspectors, as well as administrators is well-founded. Geographic location makes recruitment difficult. The Ministry is therefore keeping shared service pools so that smaller councils can access financial, legal, and technical expertise without bearing full-time costs.

At the same time, Mr. Speaker, Sir, a job evaluation exercise is underway to review salary structures for the CEOs of all municipal councils and make positions more attractive to qualified and right-skilled professionals.

The Ministry, in collaboration with Levuka Town Council, is in the process of advertising the CEO's position because they have not attracted the right person for the position. Now they will be re-advertising the position further, at the same time also making the position more attractive by reviewing the salary of the CEO for the Levuka Town Council.

On heritage-based grant support, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Levuka's heritage status brings with it obligations and opportunities. Preserving a World Heritage Site is not cost-neutral. The Ministry is

advocating for a dedicated Heritage Grant Scheme so that Councils like Levuka can maintain heritage assets while also delivering community services. We are working closely with the Department of Heritage and the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs to align heritage governance with municipal service deliveries.

On waste management and public health, Mr. Speaker, Sir, soil waste infrastructure is a pressing concern. I am pleased to inform this august House that discussions are underway with JICA to support waste solutions for the island council. This includes compact transfer stations, training for municipal workers and public awareness campaigns. The Ministry is further lobbying with JICA to provide the appropriate fit to the Council that will assist them in managing solid waste in our town.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Levuka will serve as a pilot site for dengue awareness and community clean-up campaigns in partnership with the Ministry of Health. This will build resilience against dengue and other health risks linked to waste, water and climate change.

To strengthen governance and audit compliance, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Levuka has made commendable progress in addressing audit concerns. The Council has tightened financial oversight and improved documentation, but compliance is an ongoing task. The Ministry continues to provide oversight, support capacity building and step in where lapses are identified.

In September this year, the Ministry of Local Government also undertook a refresher in governance workshop for all Municipal Chief Executive Officers and Special Administrators. The workshop focused on strengthening governance, compliance and leadership capacity within Councils, with particular emphasis on audit accountability, financial oversight and ethical decision-making. This needs to be part of our broader commitment to ensure that Councils including Levuka not only address past weaknesses but also build a culture of continuous improvement and professional governance.

We are also working with the Office of the Auditor-General to establish clear national guidelines for debt recovery and the write-off of irrecoverable rates, as well as to ensure financial realism while maintaining accountability.

In tourism water infrastructure, we are also working with the Ministry of Tourism to ensure that there is a tourism revitalisation plan, including safety infrastructure and marketing.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Levuka Town Council has not shied away from its obligations. It has acknowledged its challenges, accepted the Committee's recommendations and is taking proactive steps to strengthen governance. Levuka challenges are real, but they are not insurmountable. With stronger collaboration, targeted support and a commitment to heritage preservation, Levuka can both be a functioning municipality and a proud custodian of Fiji's national history.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise today to speak on the Review Report of the Levuka Town Council 2018 Annual Report. I would like to commend the Committee for its diligence. What concerns me, while the Committee has done a marvellous job, there seems to be a huge disconnect between the Department of Local Government and the Municipal Council. This is not with the Levuka Town Council, but with all other town councils. We have gone around having a discussion. The problem lies with the Local Government Act. It needs to be reviewed.

The Local Government Act still says that municipal councils are stand-alone bodies, and the Ministry cannot directly interfere in the operations. On the other hand, all the municipal councils, especially the small municipal councils, expect the department to fund them and fulfil the roles and responsibilities of all the staff who are not currently employed by the municipal councils.

This miscommunication between the Department of Local Government and the municipal councils is causing a lot of chaos, whereby the municipal councils are relying on the Department of Local Government, but on the other hand, the Local Government, while following the Act, says that they are independent, and they should be looking after their own affairs. Even with regard to the oversight, there is no clear demarcation as to where the role of the Department of Local Government ends and where the municipal councils start.

This is an issue even with the Special Administrators. At the end of the day, rather than giving direct policy directives and directions to the councils, they tend to fall on to the Department of Local Government, seeking advice and directions. According to the Local Government Act, that is not the role and responsibility of the Local Government itself.

This is something that needs to be identified and corrected in the Local Government Act before we can see some proper progress with regards to the municipal councils. This has been an issue. I have been in PAC for the past eight years to nine years, and we have been facing the same issue, but until we are able to change the Local Government Act or review the Local Government Act, I think this issue is going to continue.

With regards to the small municipal councils, such as Levuka Town Council, even Rakiraki and Tavua, I think the major issue is that the revenue source is not there. They need to be funded through a Government initiative or grant in order to facilitate department, the staff in the department, the resources, and I think the budget for this needs to be increased. We need to seriously look into how we can start assisting in terms of HR. Most of these are a systematic issue that we need to resolve. It is no use pointing a finger at the previous government or the current Government. If we do not rectify this issue now, it is going to continue. I think the honourable Members, who have been sitting in the Committee are well versed with what I am saying this afternoon.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, without a head it is very difficult for the organisation to run. Most of these small councils cannot get a CEO because their revenue source is not there. When they look for someone at a lower scale, that person does not have the qualifications to run the organisation. That is why I am saying it is very important for the Government to start giving adequate amounts of grants to small municipal councils so that they can resource.

The other thing is, municipal councils do not focus on their accounts department as well in terms of HR. They try to manage whatever resources they have. Some of the staff are playing dual roles and they do not even have the knowledge. For example, someone sitting as a secretary works as a clerk, although they do not have the knowledge. Still, they have to do it because it is required of them. These are some of the issues.

The other thing with regard to Levuka Town Council, I would like to mention, this is a World Heritage Site. I think last month or before last month, I was in Levuka. While we are saying it is a heritage site and all the structures should remain as it is, even if after the renovation, the structure in which it was built, it should remain. But to my surprise, there is now a supermarket with a modern structure in the middle of Levuka Town. I would like to ask, how was this approved? It is aluminium. The face of the building is totally gone.

(Honourable Government Members interject)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Listen, the face of the building is totally gone. It is aluminium and glass and is nothing like what the building was. I am requesting the honourable Minister to please send a team to investigate how this construction took place; it happened two months ago. I was not in Government two months ago. This is very serious. While we are actually stopping all other

builders to construct new buildings or change the face of the structure, how can one supermarket be allowed to do so?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I support all the recommendations and in terms of infrastructure and heritage, I would like to propose a policy whereby Government can give at least 75 percent government grant to the building owners and 25 percent to be given as a low interest loan to the business owners so that they can refurbish the buildings that are in a very deteriorating state. With those words, I would like to commend the Committee for the wonderful job they have done.

HON. J.R. VOCEA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the debate on the motion that is now in Parliament, that is, Review Report of the Levuka Town Council 2018 Annual Report, which was tabled on 18th July, 2025. I thank the Chairperson and Members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence for this Report.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as alluded to by speakers who have spoken before me, Levuka, Fiji's first capital and a UNESCO World Heritage town continues to progress with key municipal service delivery developments. The initiatives implemented in collaboration with government development partners and stakeholders are designed to strengthen local governance, infrastructure and economic opportunities for the people of Ovalau and the wider Lomaiviti Province.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to highlight the significant support that the Coalition Government has provided to the Levuka Municipal Council. Through our initiatives, we have strengthened municipal services, upgraded critical infrastructure and enhanced community well-being. Notably, we facilitated the provision of heavy machinery, including a nine-tonne tipper truck and an excavator to improve solid waste management and maintenance operations.

The Government has also partnered with development agencies to modernise the Levuka Municipal Market, ensuring better trading conditions for vendors and promoting local economic activities. In addition, we have supported the rehabilitation of key heritage structures, helping to preserve Levuka's UNESCO World Heritage status.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these interventions demonstrates our commitment to fostering sustainable growth, preserving our cultural heritage and improving the daily lives of Levuka residents. Some of the initiatives funded in the 2025 to 2026 Budget for the Levuka Town Council includes a sum of \$293,400 allocated in the 2025-2026 Budget for the upgrade of Nasau Park. Works will include ground perimeter, drainage, fencing and gates.

A sum of \$50,000 is allocated to Levuka Town Council for waste collection subsidy. This will assist the Council with solid waste management, particularly for areas outside of town where collection is more costly due to distance and infrastructure.

A sum of \$140,000 is allocated under Rural Local Authority for Levuka Town Council, which serves as an operating grant for solid waste management, market operations, building plan assessments and inspections. A sum of \$33,750 is allocated for the implementation of Levuka Management Plan through the Department of Heritage and Arts Occupational Building Programmes and workshops on vulnerability and climate change.

A sum of \$978,260 is allocated for the rehabilitation of Levuka Heritage structure through the Department of Heritage and Arts for the continuation of the restoration and strengthening of the Levuka Community Centre complex by ensuring that the World Heritage structure retain their historical integrity. Yet a sum of \$250,000 is allocated for the National Disaster Rehabilitation Fund for municipal councils to enhance disaster resilience and response capabilities at the local level.

Last but not the least, a sum of \$975,000 is allocated for the special administrators, which is an increase of \$211,000 to address the critical role played by the administrators in small councils. The increased funding will fund the allowances for new councillors and mayors for small councils.

Some of the key developments I wish to mention here for the Levuka Municipal Market, a new market facility, that was opened in November 2024 with 132 vendor stalls. The new market was funded by a partnership between the Government of Fiji and UN Women under Markets for Change (M4C) project. The total investment for this project was around \$3.1 million; UN women contributed \$0.4 million while the Fiji Government contributed \$2.7 million. Added onto that, heavy machinery and a nine-tonne truck donated by the Government of Japan in 2024 to assist in solid waste management, road maintenance, dump operations and reducing reliance on hired equipment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Levuka Fire Station operated facilities, dormitories, kitchen, offices and climate control to improve emergency response capacity in the heritage town. This was commissioned in August 2024.

The Ministry of Finance is working closely with the Ministry of Local Government to assist the municipal councils to improve its systems and processes. This will enhance their financial management systems including the implementation of digital tools and training programmes to improve reporting and compliance. I support motion before the House.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Speaker, I thank each and every honourable Member, including the Minister and Members of the Opposition for speaking to the motion before the House. Most of the speakers have covered the recommendations that I could not cover in my five minutes. So, I really just wanted to thank the honourable Minister for again the assurances that the recommendations that the Committee has put forward in its Review Report will be looked at or are being actioned as we speak.

Again, I just wanted to repeat what I had said in my opening remarks, that we should not allow Fiji's first capital, a living piece of our national story to fall behind in development while carrying the heavy burden of maintaining heritage for the entire country.

On that note, I would like to also say thank you to my friend (I know that he will not like me mentioning him) Anthony Sahai who updates me a lot on the need for potholes to be fixed and so forth and so on in Levuka. I also wanted to just say, Mr. Speaker, that we spoke at length today about acting CEO positions and I am sure that if municipal elections had been held as promised in this House by two consecutive local government ministers in the previous government, we would not be facing this dilemma. These will be held during this term of this Coalition Government.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed.

REVIEW REPORT – FIJI POLICE FORCE 2020- 2021 ANNUAL REPORT

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

That Parliament debates the Review Report of the Fiji Police Force 2020-2021 Annual Report which was tabled in Parliament 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 to this honourable House the findings and recommendations of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence following our review of the Fiji Police Force 2020-2021 Annual Report including our site visits and stakeholder consultations across the divisions in Fiji. These are some of the recommendations, Mr. Speaker, I know the other honourable Members who will add to this debate, will add other comments on the recommendations.

First of all, I want to thank the honourable Minister for Policing for the Ministerial Statement today, which clarified a lot of what the Committee's recommendations are. One is governance and integrity. The Fiji Police Force reaffirmed its commitment to political neutrality, integrity and accountability. Internal oversight is exercised through the Internal Affairs Division and Chaplaincy Office. While instances of misconduct have occurred, such as missing drug exhibits, and as the honourable Minister also pointed out today, some arrests from within the police force, officers were held accountable.

The Committee recommends strengthening internal oversight, ensuring full documentation of all public complaints, including those of animal cruelty, and we are seeing more of them each day on social media. The complaints mechanism is something we wanted to highlight as well, Mr. Speaker, where the Fiji Police Force operates a structured grievance system with three internal associations. Officers must follow proper channels, and the 917 helpline now operates 24/7. The Committee recommends enhanced public complaints tracking, transparency in disciplinary action, and better handling of whistle-blower protection.

The K9 Unit and border protection recommendation, Mr. Speaker, there are only 13 K9 Unit dogs nationwide, with limitations in handler accommodation, vehicle access and operational coverage. The Committee recommends expanded deployment to Lautoka, Northern Division, and in particular the ports of entry, along with parity in pay between Customs and Police dog handlers.

The Police Mobile Force and the diving unit, Mr. Speaker, is another place where we went and visited, and the Police Mobile Force in Nasinu faces critical shortages in manpower, uniforms, rescue equipment and vehicles. The Diving Unit lacks decompression chambers and basic safety gear. Officers perform high-risk duties without risk or dive allowances, and the Committee recommends, and I know that this has been looked at right now by the honourable Minister for Policing, establishing a dedicated budget for diving operations and upgrading the equipment and the review of the OHS compliance.

With drug operations, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have heard a lot this week about the drugs, and we have seen some arrests this week, in particular from Kadavu. Operations in areas like Kavala in Kadavu was severely constrained by terrain, outdated laws and limited logistics. Officers often use personal funds for transport and legal delays hinder drug destruction and we saw that ourselves.

The Committee recommends amending the Fiji Police Act 1965 to allow drone footage as evidence. We recommend allocating hardship allowances and personal protective equipment. We also recommend streamlining the legal processes for drug exhibit destruction and supporting alternative livelihoods in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture.

To cybercrime and technology, cybercrime as a growing threat, as we all know, while digital forensics have improved, the unit remains under-resourced. The Committee recommends, therefore, a greater investment in cybercrime capabilities, expansion of body camera use, modern surveillance tools and non-lethal equipment, and the acceleration of the Fiji Police Act review.

I will speak later about forensics and pathology, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and also about the Police posts and Police stations that we went and visited during our site visits, in particular in the West - Ra and Tavua. But in the meantime, I thank those who will be speaking to this Report, and I commend this motion before the House.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion, and as usual I have a list of speakers with me. Each speaker is given six minutes to deliver a contribution on the motion. At the end of the debate, we will give the right of reply to the mover.

HON. J.N. NAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the debate on the Review Report of the Fiji Police Force 2020-2021 Annual Report. This document is the evidence, the voices of our constituents, their testimony.

I want to begin by stating clearly, the men and women of the Fiji Police Force have my and the Opposition's utmost respect. Majority of our officers are hardworking, dedicated individuals and we salute them for their commitment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as an elected representative, I have a duty to bring the voices and legitimate concerns of our constituents from the ground onto this honourable House. The core issue I address today is a growing concern regarding Police posts where Police officers are deployed within their own locality and are reluctant to make arrests. Police officers from their own locality are well known to members of the public. Sir, in case of any crimes committed in the village, the officers find it difficult to arrest them. Members of the public know them very well, so I suggest that officers deployed at the Police posts be from different areas or districts so that they can carry out their work without any hindrance or hesitation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is strengthened by the Recommendation 1 and it states, "... calling on the Fiji Police Force to strengthen its internal oversight and integrity frameworks." This is merely not theoretical polling; I refer to the very disturbing case involving tourists at Naviti Resort. The initial delay in action is now forcing the victims to return to Fiji twice at their own expense. This incident perfectly illustrates how the lack of professionalism is amplified by systemic failures documented across the review report.

Failure of welfare, Recommendation 3 confirmed that the last Job Evaluation Exercise was conducted in 2003. We could not expect officers to resist local financial pressures when their own professional needs were chronically ignored.

Recommendation 4 is the failure of logistics. The Report states that officers in places like Lautoka and Rakiraki often pay out of their pockets duty-related travels. When the Force cannot fund basic transport, it cannot sustain a serious case.

The next is Recommendation 13 - Failure of Infrastructure. The Report confirmed that critical facilities are degraded. The new Nadi Police Station has severe infrastructure defects, including an overflowing sewer line, and the Sigatoka Police Post operates out of an unsuitable and unhealthy container. The poor image of the Police is a poor reflection of the deplorable and unsanitary conditions we force them to work under, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

The solution is uncompromising professional conduct which must be supported by the resources outlined in the Report. Every police officer must be able to honour their oath and, that is, to uphold the law, not the family code.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Review Report of the Fiji Police Force 2021 Annual Report is a roadmap for change. We must act on its findings immediately, such as:

- (1) implementing the Job Evaluation Exercise;
- (2) funding the necessary infrastructure upgrades;
- (3) fixing the overflowing sewer line at the Nadi Police Station; and
- (4) expanding transportation allowance to stop officers from bearing the costs at their duties.

The success of the Fiji Police Force depends on us, as a Parliament, honouring the Force with the resources it needs. Only then, can we ensure that every officer honours their oath, and the rule of law is applied equally to all. I fully support the motion before the House.

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute very briefly on the Review Report on the Fiji Police Force 2020–2021 Annual Report. At the outset, I just wanted to say thank you to the Chairperson and the Committee for a very comprehensive Report, sharp pointed, which basically highlights the reporting period which we all agree was a very difficult time for all of us here, including our frontline organisations and agencies, including the Police.

Secondly, it also highlighted, in a very smart way, the extensive site visits to the Western side, to the islands and here in Suva, concluding with a “*Talanoa*” session with the Commissioner of Police. I think it was very smart and good, and as such, Mr. Speaker, Sir, they have provided for us an excellent report, in my view, short and straight to the point.

They have highlighted the gaps and weakness at the various levels, from the strategic level to the Headquarters, at the operation level and also wonderful to hear, at the tactical level where police officers are able to speak freely and openly on issues they encounter or face at the frontline operations. This was the most difficult part of any organisation, such as the Police, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is our ability to equip and look after our men and women who are there at the frontline.

I just recently returned from Kadavu, and I honestly told the Commissioner of Police that I came back feeling very guilty. We stayed with the boots on the ground, where they were deployed, where they stayed, what they ate, and the equipment that they wore, and I felt that we could do more into this.

Similarly, the reports that have been produced in Parliament today, also highlights those areas in the various positions, from human resources aspect of it to the capabilities of the Force; from technology, communication, mobility and equipment to the specialist units who are very important to an organisation like the Police Force. There are things that need to be done and improved. We could term them as under-resourced areas or perhaps our inability to plan well, we could say that too.

However, I think at the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we all agree that we cannot deal with the one thousand and one things that need to be done, we will have to look at the 101. For the Police Force for this year, we will have to look at the 11 things to fix, whether it is at the headquarters, at the operational level, or at the tactical level. It is a whole list of things that needs to be fixed with the Fiji Police Force.

I would like to assure this august House that I, as the Minister responsible, is working very closely with the Commissioner of Police to deal with these issues. You are assured of our commitment to sort out a lot of these things. Since this was tabled, a lot of things has improved. I would like to highlight some of those things which the Coalition Government is committed to in this year's fiscal year.

The objective is to strengthen our law enforcement. In the budget for this year, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government has increased the budget for the Police by \$13.5 million from the previous years. That is good news for the Police Force. It includes an additional 1,000 boots on the ground, with two phases – phase one, we hope to see soon, and the second phase in the next fiscal year. That is a huge improvement.

Secondly, this Government has made a huge commitment to establish the Ministry of Policing, which I am the Minister responsible, to be able to guide, direct, and offer policy advice to the Government and to the Commissioner.

Thirdly, it is able to strengthen the border protection front on the construction of new containers, an examination facility, to name a few, and the expansion of the K9. Lastly, but not the least, is the Narcotics Bureau, which I spoke at length about in my Ministerial Statement this morning.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the Committee for the wonderful work they have done. We assure the House that we will work towards dealing with this. I also ask the support of my colleagues, honourable Members on this side, to ensure they fully support the Fiji Police Force and their work at the frontline.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to speak on the motion before the House.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence ensured that we head over to Kavala in Kadavu and live a day of a life of a police officer and see the struggles that they go through. Well, yet we do understand the Report is backdated to the COVID-19 period, but still that did not stop the Committee to understand what has been happening now.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, what the Committee noted was, we need to increase the allowances of the officers. One of the other suggestions was that, allocating the marijuana plantation was easy, but getting it back to the site was difficult. What I am personally recommending here are drone cargos that can carry 80 kilogrammes to 100 kilogrammes in a distance of 15 kilometres to 20 kilometres.

Also, for the border control, yes, a lot has been said about the K9 units. We need more K9 units for the protection of our borders, while we also urge the Government to instal scanners at some of the domestic ports to combat this issue.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, also moving to cybercrime and technology, network scams are more than ever as the network upgrades are happening. We would like to ask the Fiji Police Force if that exists or can there be an MOU with the network providers so that it is easier for the Force to trace numbers, get information, call logs, just within hours, days, or even less than a week.

The use of force and modernisation, Mr. Speaker, Sir, yes, the Police, we depend on to keep our streets, our homes and our nation safe, but we, as Parliament, Opposition and Government, also need to ensure that we keep our men and women in uniform safe as well. While the Police Mobile Force is authorised to carry firearms, what is being suggested is body cameras to enhance transparency and security, and not just for Police Officers, but for LTA as well.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, furthermore, I would like to move my attention to the Animal Protection and Enforcement. Yes, I thank the general public for coming out on social media about the issues and cases of where animals are being captured and taken in for various reasons. The lady who captured the video in Navua, I spoke to her for almost 40 minutes, and she said she had a difficult time with the police officers at Navua Police Station. So, I am putting it to the attention of the

honourable Minister for Policing as well, and also difficulty with the officers at the Rakiraki Police Station as well.

Police Complaints and Accessibility to the General Public - the 917 Helpline is now operational 24/7 at the National Command Centre.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, recently, during the Ganesh Pooja, I was called from Nausori, that there was a stoning incident. So, I ask, did you go to the police? They said, “When we went to the nearest Police Post, they told us they will look into it and they will send a patrolling team.” It did not happen, and the stoning happened. I ended up at the prayer. I called the police, and just because I am a Member of Parliament, three vehicles then showed up to patrol. I think it goes for all of us that we all have a responsibility towards the general public.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, lastly, what we also noted was that livestock theft remains a persistent issue and there are collaborations with the Ministry of Agriculture. I would like to raise with the honourable Minister for Agriculture something I got on social media. A farmer called Rajesh Prasad has about five or six horses in his farm. He has a massive farm. His farm was destroyed, and he was quite disheartened. So, if your Ministry can look into his plea.

There are a lot of comments there saying that the Ministry of Agriculture will not do anything, but I am putting it to you, if your Ministry can look into it, and I will send the details over to you.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, lastly, when I look at this Annual Report, what caught my attention was the suicide and attempted suicide. It is disheartening to note that in 2019-2020, the number of male suicides were 128 and female 88 - a total of 216. In 2020-2021, again, the male numbers were 134 and female 62. These numbers are not to be gloated about, Mr. Speaker, Sir, but I think it is a very worrying matter.

While there is a lot of talk about women protection rights, I think I would like to acknowledge a simple truth today, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that men are equally essential to the fabric of our community. They are fathers, sons, brothers, mentors, workers, caregivers and friends. Some make a living out of the gender equality debate, but men are as equally important and their mental health. Yet, around the world, many men face heavy burdens of pressure to appear strong, to lead without showing vulnerability and to bear stress alone.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is a reminder that suicide is a suicide, and it is a stark reminder that emotional pain does not respect the lines of age, gender, race or income. We must break the stigma that surrounds men and mental health. We must create spaces at home, in schools and workplaces, and to speak honestly about struggles and to receive support without judgment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on that note, I support the findings of the Committee. I thank the Chairperson, Committee Members, the Secretariat, the h1 Minister for Policing, the Deputy Commissioner, and all the hardworking men and women in uniform.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it was quite a life changing experience to visit all the stations and see the struggles and the day to day lives that our officers go through. I am quite emotional right now, but Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish him the best and we are with you. That is the message to the Force. *Vinaka*.

HON. RO. F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to address the findings and recommendations presented by the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence on the review of the Fiji Police Force 2020-2021 Annual Report. However, before that, I would like to ask the other side, why did you look at me when they mentioned the potholes in Levuka? Some of those

potholes developed from the last few years before we came in.

(Laughter)

The good result about that is that, in that communications, it was fixed. When you go there, it is resolved. It was done there. So, this is a Coalition Government which makes it happen.

Honourable Joseph Nand praised the Police, he commended them and then mentioned the systematic failure. You cannot be hypocritical in these kind of things. You say something and then say the opposite. Our major concern is the continuous phrase from that side of the House, “we were told”. This House is to debate factual information, not *yaqona* or kava bowl-type of discussion.

(Laughter)

It is not for this House. I mean, that this where you get, “we were told” kind of discussions.

However, I would like to commend the Police for the utilisation rate of their budget, which ranged from 95 percent to 99.9 percent from 2020 to 2025. That is commendable and this Government would like to re-emphasise what the honourable Minister for Policing said, that he is addressing on HR issues. Approved an increase of 1,000 personnel, \$19.5 million, as already mentioned, 538 additional officers and translates to over 800 officers added to their current strength and supported salary increments. Have you done that in the past or not?

One of the key challenges, as already been mentioned, is the missing drug exhibits. The Fiji Police Force, through the Commissioners’ Police Internal Affairs and Professional Standards has been investigating these officers and it underscores the Force's commitment. There is also a structured grievance redress mechanism, the Grievance Handling Policy and three internal Associations – the Subordinate Association, Inspectors Association and Gazetted Officers Association, who are now required to follow proper channels. The Fiji Police Force has strengthened its public complaints system with 917 helplines, operational 24/7 at the National Command Centre.

We also note the ongoing professional development of officers which is one of the issues raised in terms of the training and recruitment designed to promote accredited instructor qualification to uphold higher training standards, update curricula to reflect international standards, including forensic science, community policing, human rights and technology, and strengthening partnerships with educational institutions including the Fulton Adventist University College with their National Certificate in Teaching Technical and Vocational Education Training to 41 of its officers in the 2021 financial year.

Of course, on modernising the legislative reform, the Ministry of Policing, in partnership with the Fiji Police Force - a government agency, is currently reviewing the Fiji Police Act 1965 to modernise policing powers and operational tools, and other improvements include operational work. Thank you to the Committee for visiting some of our maritime rural areas and they have facilitated the use of drones for surveillance, and this has been proven available with drone footage being utilised in court proceedings.

The Police Force is also committed to modernising forensic capabilities with the updating of legal frameworks for DNA collection and retention. A budgetary allocation of \$150,000 has been provided for DNA quality assurance and \$250,000 for forensic chemistry equipment in the 2025/2026 financial year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the establishment of new police posts, Kavala in Kadavu and others are scheduled in various areas, including on Beqa Island, et cetera. The Fiji Police Force will collaborate with the Ministry of Rural, Maritime and Development, village elders and relevant Government agencies to provide the necessary logistic support.

There is also prioritisation of critical upgrades, Nadi and Tavua, focusing on issues which was raised in the Report, sanitation, air conditioning, barracks and seized evidence storage.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is also increased funding, as I mentioned, for forensics to strengthen drug interdiction, synthetic drug monitoring and border security. These are some of the issues I thought I had to highlight and finally, the Fiji Police Force supports increasing fleet capacity. As of 16th September, 2025, the Fiji Police Force has 396 leased vehicles, 81 police-owned and 146 motorcycles. Strategic allocation and maintenance of vehicles will maximise operational impact and service. In conclusion, I thank the Committee and its honourable Members and commend the motion to the House.

MR. SPEAKER.- Now and again, the Chamber needs some light relief and as long as it is within the bounds, I am always tempted to raise the threshold of unruly behaviour to allow smiles and laughter amongst colleagues.

HON. V. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to speak on a matter of fundamental importance to the security, integrity and future well-being of the Republic of Fiji, the state of our Fiji Police Force.

Our discussion is grounded on the thorough and bipartisan Review Report of the Fiji Police Force, 2020- 2021 Annual Report submitted by the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Report is not an exercise in political point scoring. It is a critical instrument of parliamentary oversight, a roadmap for necessary change and a mirror reflecting where we have succeeded and crucially, where the system has failed our officers and our people.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, before we delve into the necessary and sometimes difficult criticism, let us first pause to acknowledge the vast majority of men and women who serve in the Fiji Police Force. Mr. Speaker, Sir, these are the officers who stand between order and chaos, who answer the midnight call and who confront danger with selfless professionalism. They are mothers, fathers and siblings operating under the most challenging circumstances, often stretching inadequate resources to the absolute limit. We see them patrolling our communities, protecting our children and enforcing laws that are becoming increasingly complex. They do this under the constant scrutiny of the public eye and the harsh realities of our island geography.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to every officer who upholds the oath of service with honour, integrity and unwavering dedication, the Fijian people owe you a profound debt of gratitude. We see your sacrifice. We respect your commitment, and the efforts we discussed today are designed not to undermine your work, but to equip you with the resources and the structure you need to succeed.

The Standing Committee Report is unambiguous in its findings. The Fiji Police Force is a system at the breaking point due to severe under-resourcing. The Committee noted a clear nexus between resource deprivation and operational shortcomings. We cannot expect modern professional policing when the tools of the trade are outdated or non-existent. We have officers relying on infrastructure that is decades old and frequently battling the rising tide of sophisticated crime with antiquated technology.

The lack of adequate budgetary support is a direct obstacle to fulfilling the Forces' mandate. It impacts everything from the basic upkeep of police stations to the provision of essential training. We must heed the spirit of the Committee's recommendations and commit to a strategic phased increase in the Forces' capital expenditure and operating budget. This is not just spending; it is an investment in national security and public confidence.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the lack of sufficient specialised training is a critical bottleneck. Our officers need comprehensive training in critical areas in handling cybercrime, in managing complex financial investigations, and most importantly, in dealing with the escalating scourge of domestic and gender-based violence with the necessary sensitivity and legal rigour.

We must also invest in the mental and psychological health support of our officers, who are exposed daily to the trauma and darkness of human suffering. I now turn to the most disturbing trend currently facing our nation. One that threatens to rot the core of our security architecture. The intersection of the illicit drug trade and narco-corruption within law enforcement.

The sheer scale of the drug crisis in Fiji, marked by massive seizures of methamphetamine and a resulting public health emergency, including a heartbreaking rise in HIV cases linked to drug use, is staggering. The drug problem is infiltrating our schools and ravaging our youth, who cannot account for the majority of recent drug-related arrests. This is no longer merely a border control issue. It is a national existential crisis, creating what some have accurately termed as a nation of zombies.

However, the deepest betrayal, the greatest danger, lies in the recent news. The arrest of seven police officers, including those from the Counter-Narcotics Bureau, who allegedly attempted to smuggle four kilograms of methamphetamine into the country. This is not a mistake. It is a calculated act of treason against the Republic of Fiji. When the very hand tasked with guarding the sheep, turned out to be wolves, public trust dissolves. You must call this what it is, a cancer of the corruption, that we must surgically remove from the body of our Police Force.

To the criminal networks who think they can buy our border or compromise our institutions, let me be clear, this Government will hunt you down with every legal resource available. To the few officers who have chosen the quick profit over professionalism, know this, you will face the full force of the law and be publicly exposed to a betrayal of your uniform and your country.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the face of this crisis, we have seen the predictable response, the tendency to point fingers. Let me state clearly, this drug crisis is not a political problem. It is a national emergency. The moment we reduce this to a bipartisan debate and the moment the drug syndicates win, we must stop this blame game and embrace the truth. This is an everyone problem, a challenge for the Government, for the Opposition, for community leaders, for parents and the public.

Our hard-working, under-resourced police officers on the beat deserve more than public loyalty. They deserve our unified national support and a commitment from this House to finally give them the resources they need to win this fight for Fiji. The Committee's report clearly highlights the need for stronger governance and clear lines of accountability. We must ensure that the police force is transparent in its operations and responsive to public concerns. This means improving the public complaint mechanism to ensure citizens feel safe reporting misconduct without fear of reprisal.

The implementation of these reforms is paramount to restoring the credibility of the Force. Our criticism is aimed not at the hard-working beat officer, but at the inadequate system, the bureaucratic inertia and the dark elements of corruption that have held back our police officers for too long.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in conclusion, the Fiji Police Force holds the immense responsibility of maintaining a safe and secure environment for all our people. We owe it to the vast majority of honest, hard-working officers to reform the system that currently fails them. We must provide the resources, demand the integrity and deliver the oversight necessary to transform the Force into a truly modern, professional and incorruptible institution. Let us commit today to a future where every Fijian feels safe, where the uniform is a source of trust and where the rule of law is applied equally and justly. The work begins now, and I fully support this motion.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I join fellow speakers in thanking the Committee, the Chairperson, for their elaborative, very informed Report and also the speakers who have spoken earlier. From yesterday to today, we all want a secure Fiji. What we see in this Report is not numbers and tables.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, behind every number are real lives, the lives of our officers on duty, families affected by crime and communities striving for safety and justice. There are human stories that define our nation's security and our collective well-being. I want to begin by acknowledging the men and women of our Police Force for their commitment, courage and tireless service. I have seen their dedication up close, officers working up to 20 hours in a single stretch, putting duty before home, family and personal rest.

They stand at checkpoints in the sun, the rain and cyclones. They respond to emergencies, investigate serious crimes and follow-up cases long after most of us have gone to bed. Many of these sacrifices go unseen, birthdays missed, quiet worry from spouses, children who fall asleep waiting for parents who are still on duty, personal milestones that come and go without them. Behind every officer is a family who shares in that sacrifice. It is the spouses who manage households alone, often juggling work, childcare and the constant worry of knowing a loved one is on harm's way.

It is the children who grow up learning patience and resilience at an age far too young. It is the parents who quietly support their children and their daughters, offering strength when it may seem invisible. These families are the true pillars of our Police Force, the unsung heroes who enable officers to perform their duties with courage and dedication.

We cannot thank them enough for their patience, their understanding and their steadfast support. Their role is not secondary. It is central to the effectiveness and well-being of the Force. I also want to commend the Police Commissioner Rusiate Tudravu and his leadership team. Their guidance ensures that the Force continues to serve with professionalism, that our officers are equipped, trained, and the standards of service remain high.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we owe our officers more than words of praise. We owe them respect, proper care and practical support. Their well-being, their morale and their ability to serve safely and effectively must always be a top priority. To our international partners and donors, *vinaka vakalevu*, your assistance, whether through equipment, training or technical support, has strengthened our Force, improved our operational capacity and ensured that Police officers reach even the most remote and maritime areas in Fiji.

We often read on social media how people are quick to criticise and complain about the Police Force. Negative stories spread faster than the good ones, and too often the sacrifice of officers goes unnoticed. I want to place on record my commendation of the Fiji Police Force for the recent drug bust and the successful operation against criminal activities. Not all of us truly know what these officers go through during such raids. The long hours of surveillance, the risk to their own safety and the time spent away from their families. Behind every successful operation are weeks, sometimes months of intelligence gathering, coordination and courage to confront dangerous and unpredictable

situations. These are not easy tasks, Mr. Speaker, Sir, yet our officers are willingly putting themselves in harm's way so that our nation can be safer, and our children grow up free from the grip of drugs and crime.

The recent actions send a strong and clear message. No one is above the law, and those who threaten the safety of our people will be brought to justice. The review of the 1965 Police Act, Mr. Speaker, Sir, which has been pending for two decades, is one of the positive step that this Government has done.

I recall, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the review of the Police Act some years back under the former administration. Whilst the first consultation was underway in Levuka, the honourable prime minister made a press statement recalling that operation. It stopped. It just shows a lack of dedication and connectivity within the last administration. I commend the Office of the Solicitor-General, the Fiji Police Force, the Ministry of Policing and other key stakeholders who worked together to complete these consultations.

This important work strengthens accountability, clarifies operational procedures and better supports officers in the execution of their duties. We must all look beyond the force itself and recognise the importance of partnership with the communities they serve. Community policing remains a cornerstone of the Force's work, building trust, confidence and cooperation between officers and our people.

Law enforcement is not only part of the solution. While the officers work tirelessly to disrupt drug networks, investigate serious crimes and keep our streets safe, real and lasting change requires all of us. It requires families raising children with strong values. It requires schools and churches reinforcing discipline and responsibility. It requires communities taking ownership of their neighbourhood, speaking up when they see wrongdoing and standing shoulder to shoulder with the Force in the fight against crime.

We must be honest. Every drug bust, every arrest, every successful operation is important. But they are not enough on their own. Unless we address the root causes, be it poverty, unemployment, peer pressure and lack of guidance of our youth, we will continue to fight the same battle year after year. This is why a partnership between the Police, the *vanua*, the church and the wider community is so essential. Let me reiterate, everything starts from Jerusalem. When families, faith, community, civil society, and leadership work hand in hand with the Police, we create a Fiji where law, order and justice are not just ideals, but a living reality felt in every village, every town and every city.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if you are truly one of the men and women in uniform, then we must also honour their families. When the family of an officer is supported and cared for, the officer is stronger, the Force is stronger, and ultimately our nation is stronger. I support the motion.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank every single honourable Member who has spoken to this Report. I especially want to say thank you to the honourable Minister for Policing for his assurances. I also include in my thanks the honourable Minister for Public Works for his assurances of the improvements in the police post, in particular, Nalawa, Rukua in Beqa and Tavua Police Station. I also thank those who spoke about the importance of supporting our men and women of all ranks of the Fiji Police Force.

When the Committee went out for public consultations on this Report, it was not the only Report that we were scrutinising, we were also scrutinising the Fiji Airports and the FCCC Annual Reports. It was quite a journey for us, and I want to say thank you to all the civil servants and the

officials who helped us in compiling the three reports, all of which have been debated this week. In particular, I want to say thank you and congratulations to the Acting Deputy Commissioner of Police, who was then ACP Aporosa Lutunauga, who insisted that he support us during the scrutiny of the Police Annual Report.

I also want to say thank you and *bula vinaka* to the crew of the Water Police 01 Veiqaravi ship and to the members of the Water Police, in particular, their officer in charge. That leaves me just to say thank you very much, all honourable Members who have spoken to this Report. Thank you to the honourable Ministers for your assurances, and I commend this motion to the House.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, that brings us to the end of the sitting today. Again, I acknowledge the valuable contribution that has been made by everyone who has made it in our proceedings today. Parliament stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 6.34 p.m.

ANNEXURE I

Reply to Written Question No. 165/2025 tabled by the honourable Minister for Justice and Acting Attorney-General (Ref. Page 1921)



MINISTER FOR JUSTICE
(Hon. S.D. Turaga)

Reply to Question No. 165/2025 is as follows:

(a) Complaints received:

Year	No. of Complaints
2023	318
2024	681
2025 (Jan-Jun)	221

(b) Cases under investigation and at prosecution stage:

Year	No. of Cases under Investigation and those at Prosecution Stage
2023	173 Substantive cases pending in court 21 new cases filed 30 accused charged
2024	195 Substantive cases pending in court 33 new cases 48 accused charged
2025	170 substantive cases pending in court 10 new cases 16 accused charged As of 30 th June 2025 – 152 cases remain under active investigation

(c) Convictions recorded:

Year	No. of Convictions
2023	9
2024	13
2025 (Jan – June)	7

Supplementary Notes:

The increase in complaints during 2024 is attributed to intensified outreach and public awareness programmes. The decline in 2025 reflects the application of stricter filtering processes and referral of non-corruption matters to the Fiji Police Force.

The Commission notes that delays in the hearing of cases across all courts in Fiji are primarily the result of overloaded court diaries. Since the appointment of the new Acting Commissioner, counsel for the Commission have been directed to seek adjournments only in the range of 3 to 10 days. Longer adjournments are not to be sought unless the court is unable to accommodate shorter dates due to its diary being fully committed.

ANNEXURE II

Reply to Written Question No. 166/2025 tabled by the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Co-operatives, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications (Ref. Pages 1921-1922)



MINISTER FOR TRADE, CO-OPERATIVES, MICRO, SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES AND COMMUNICATIONS
(Hon. M.S.N. Kamikamica)

Reply to Question No. 166/2025 is as follows:

YOUNG ENTREPRENEURSHIP SCHEME PROGRAMME BACKGROUND

The Youth Entrepreneurship Scheme (YES) Programme is an initiative that simply invests in our youth who have unique and innovative business ideas. The vision is to promote and harness the entrepreneurial spirit of our young Fijians to become “Job Creators” rather than “Job Seekers”.

Innovation is paramount in a country, especially a developing one such as Fiji, as it drives economic growth, enhances competitiveness, fosters social progress, and addresses pressing challenges. By cultivating a culture of creativity, Fiji can improve their productivity, create jobs and improve the quality of life.

Furthermore, innovation enables countries to adapt to changing circumstances, such as technological advancements and environmental issues, ensuring long-term sustainability and resilience. In fact, innovation is increasingly viewed as a key strategy for economic diversification, essential for long-term growth.

Since inception of the YES programme, the Ministry of Trade, Co-operatives, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications (Ministry) has invested in 23 recipients with value of \$641,259 across wide range of sectors such as Health and Human Services, Agriculture, Traffic Management, Recreational Services and Information, Communication and Technology that cuts across the Tourism Sector, to name a few. Each proposal presents innovative solutions, whether enhancing existing products and services or introducing entirely new offerings to the Fijian market.

TOTAL NUMBER RECEIVED IN 2023-2024 & 2024-2025 FINANCIAL YEAR

The demand for the YES programme has grown significantly, underscoring the vital need for continued and increased government investment.

In the 2023-2024 financial year, the Ministry was allocated \$100,000 for the YES Programme. The Ministry had received 27 applications valued at \$706,913.

This demand grew substantially in the 2024-2025 financial year, when the allocation increased to \$200,000 but applications surged to 75, with a total value of \$3.7 million.

This reflects a 177 percent increase in the number of applications and a 420.82 percent increase in the value of applications received. This rapid growth in demand demonstrates that

Fiji's young entrepreneurs are eager to contribute to economic diversification, job creation and innovation.

However, the current level of government funding falls significantly short of the demand and potential impact. Increased investment in the YES programme is not just a response to high demand, it is a strategic investment in nurturing innovation, strengthening MSMEs and building a resilient economy for Fiji's future.

THE TOTAL NUMBER OF APPLICATIONS APPROVED, FUNDED AND DECLINED

The summary below outlines the breakdown of the applications approved, funded and declined:

Budget Year	Budget Allocation	Applications Received		Disbursed	
		No.	Value	No.	Value
2023/2024	\$100,000	27	\$706,913	5	\$136,157
2024/2025	\$200,000	75	\$3.7 million	6	\$149,461

1. 2023-2024 FINANCIAL YEAR

In the 2023-2024 financial year, a total of 27 applications were received under the YES Programme. Following a rigorous and transparent assessment process, 5 applications were approved and disbursed, with a combined funding value of \$136,957.

These successful applicants were carefully screened and advanced to the pitching stage, where they presented their business idea before a panel of selected judges from the YES Selection Panel. The Panel then deliberated thoroughly before arriving at their final decision, ensuring that only the most viable, innovative, and bankable business concepts were awarded support.

This outcome reflects the Programme's alignment to its policy standards and requirements, strong commitment to accountability, merit-based selection, and the prudent use of public funds to back projects with the highest potential for growth, sustainability and impact.

SUCCESSFUL PROJECT

One of the notable success stories of the 2023-2024 YES Programme is Mr. George Fong of **TicketMax**, a pioneering online ticketing service that has been transforming the nation's digital landscape. TicketMax has successfully managed online ticketing for major events such as the Homecoming Concert, school athletics competitions, art shows, and most recently, the Wan Fire Music Festival held over the weekend.

Through the support of the YES Programme, Mr. Fong has not only expanded the reach and services of his business but has also been able to provide employment opportunities, further contributing to economic growth and community development.

This, ladies and gentlemen, is a testament to how impactful the YES Programme has become. It demonstrates your Government's unwavering commitment to supporting innovative, unique and bankable ideas, while placing trust in the determination of budding entrepreneurs to turn their visions into reality.

2. 2024-2025 FINANCIAL YEAR

Much like the previous financial year, the 2024-2025 Financial Year recorded a significant increase in demand for the YES Programme. A total of 75 applications were received through the YES portal, out of which 6 were approved with a combined value of \$149,461. In addition, 2 applications were conditionally approved, valued at \$60,000, pending the submission of additional information identified during their mentorship sessions with panel-selected mentors.

Additionally, the applicants go through vigorous screening to ensure the most viable and innovative business ideas were selected for support after a thorough screening, pitching, and evaluation process by the YES panel.

SUCCESSFUL STORIES

Another shining example of success is Sweetsip, founded by Ms. Ashna and her husband in 2021, grew from selling juice and milkshakes to opening a permanent dessert shop at MHCC with YES Programme support. Their expansion into rolled ice-cream has created jobs, allowed participation in major events like the Hibiscus Festival.

Honourable Members of this august Houe, ladies and gentlemen, I encourage you, if time permits, do visit Sweetsip and witness firsthand how your Government's investment through the YES Programme is being put to good use, nurturing small ideas into thriving businesses.

REASONS FOR ANY APPLICATIONS THAT WERE DECLINED

Budget Year	Budget Allocation	Total Declined	
		No.	Value
2023-2024	\$100,000	22	\$571,756
2024-2025	\$200,000	69	\$3.6 million

Applicants may be declined under the YES Programme where business proposals are found not to be unique or innovative, particularly when there are already numerous existing businesses in Fiji operating in the same line of activity:

Othe common reasons for decline include, but not limited to:

- incomplete applications;
- proposals that are not commercially viable;
- funding requests that primarily cover operational costs;
- applicants lacking relevant start-up experience;
- requests exceeding the grant's funding capacity;
- applicants not meeting the age eligibility criteria; and
- business ideas that demonstrate limited economic impact.

It is important to note that while some applicants may not qualify for YES, the Ministry remains committed to supporting them by providing ongoing business advisory services. Through this guidance, potential applicants are assisted to refine their ideas and are encouraged to explore other MSME grant programmes available within the Ministry.

ANNEXURE III

Reply to Written Question No. 167/2025 tabled by the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services (Ref. Page 1922)

**MINISTER FOR HEALTH AND MEDICAL SERVICES**
(Hon. Dr. Ratu A.R. Lalabalavu)

Reply to Question No. 167/2025 is as follows:

- (a) As of Thursday, 25th September, 2025 there have been a total of 285 Open Heart Surgeries carried out at Lautoka Hospital since open cardiac surgery was first offered at the hospital in October 2022.
- (b) As of Friday, 26th September, 2025, there have been a total of 322 angiograms carried out since the inception of Cath Lab services on 21st May, 2025.

Cardiothoracic services are mandated under the Concession Agreement for the Public-Private Partnership between the Government of Fiji and Health Care Fiji Pte Ltd. These services are outsourced to MIOT Investment (Fiji) Pte Ltd, which collaborates with MIOT Hospital Pvt. Limited in India.